

Monarchy in South-East Asia

The faces of tradition in transition

Roger Kershaw

POLITICS IN ASIA



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Monarchy in South-East Asia

Monarchy was the only type of polity in the South-East Asian region before the rise of Western colonialism. And the impact of the distant past on contemporary political values is felt even where monarchy was abolished by a colonial power. This book surveys the historical contours of that monarchical tradition.

Roger Kershaw argues, however, that it was not ancient values which allowed four monarchies to survive until now, but typically the interest of colonial powers in stability. Even Thailand, for example, never colonized, can be analysed in terms of an oblique 'indirect rule'. More recently, Cambodia's two Communist regimes have seen the monarchy as a useful stabilizing factor. At the same time, the Thai King's authority reflects his personal longevity and merit; the absolutism of the Sultan of Brunei rests on oil; only Malaysian monarchy is purely ceremonial.

Designed as an introduction to the region's monarchies, this book also supplies a vital historical background, and political context, for five contemporary case studies, and includes ample bibliographical reference, which will be ideal for anyone interested in the dynamics of the South-East Asian region, besides the idea of monarchy in our time. The more specialized reader will find stimulating and original insights on the royal politics of Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia and Brunei over the past decade.

Roger Kershaw's association with South-East Asia began in 1962, teaching in Malaya. After graduate studies in London at SOAS, he became a lecturer in South-East Asian Studies in two British universities – Hull and Kent – followed by ten years in Brunei. He is now an independent writer and has written extensively on South-East Asian societies.

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**This book is dedicated to my mother, born
Molly Brownlow, at Lambeth, 18 May 1906**

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Series editor's preface

It is a conventional wisdom that monarchy has become a political anomaly. In the case of South-East Asia, this axiom is valid only up to a point. Despite the institutional upheavals caused by colonialism and its dismantling, the region contains one ruling monarchy (in Brunei), and three varieties of constitutional monarchy (in Cambodia, Malaysia and Thailand) of some political import. In addition, the legacy of monarchy obtains to a degree in Laos where the institution was only abolished in 1975. Moreover, in its absence, the tradition of monarchy infuses political culture in Indonesia, especially in Java. It is with the political significance of monarchy in mind that Dr Roger Kershaw has written a scholarly comprehensive study of its relevance and impact within post-colonial South-East Asia.

This unique volume provides a wealth of material about the historical and contemporary experience of South-East Asian monarchy, with particular attention to Brunei, Cambodia, Malaysia and Thailand. In so doing, Dr Kershaw places before both the general and the specialist reader, the intellectual fruits of a lifetime's immersion in the study of the politics of the region. He does more than provide a record of monarchical experience. He also assesses the relevance of ancient ideas about power as well as the utility of invented pasts for the legitimacy of modern governments. Indeed, he demonstrates how 'the legacy of the past is available to be manipulated' in modern versions of a model of indirect rule, which served the colonial interest well. This volume stands on its own as a study of the political significance of surviving exceptional institutions at the turn of the century. It is important also as a study in comparative politics with a wider ambit, including the relationship between monarchy and democracy, that will inform and enrich students with an interest in the subject that extends beyond the bounds of South-East Asia.

Michael Leifer

Preface

This book sets out to be an introduction to South-East Asian monarchy for the general reader who may already have an interest in the region but is not familiar with this particular subject. At the same time, Chapter 11 offers further discussion of monarchy in early South-East Asia, and some theory in that connection, in the form of citations from leading secondary texts and some commentaries. This may be of interest to a slightly more specialized audience, such as undergraduates starting out in South-East Asian Studies or the social sciences.

The author's own background is academic, and about as specialized as possible for the purpose. He has worked in Malaysia and Brunei as a teacher and lecturer in South-East Asian history for an aggregate of twelve years, and between 1968–83 held lecturing posts in modern South-East Asian Studies in two British universities, with a sabbatical year spent in Bangkok, 1977–78. He has published a short monograph on both Brunei (1992, under pseudonym) and Malaysia (1997), and a number of articles on these countries as well as on Thailand and Cambodia, including a series on South-East Asian monarchy (1979). His working South-East Asian languages are, however, limited to two (Malay and Thai). He holds a PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London (1969), gained after research in Kelantan.

Acknowledgements are due to countless kind informants and South-East Asian academic colleagues across the author's nearly thirty-eight years in South-East Asian Studies (counting from his first employment in the Federation of Malaya, 1962) and roughly thirty years of conscious academic interest in monarchy. But three Thai mentors must receive a personal mention: M.R.W. Prudhisian Jumbala (*Chumphon*), Dr Somchai Rakwijit, and Dr Manas Chitakasem, although, of course, the author takes full responsibility for all judgements on the Thai monarchy expressed in this book.

With regard to the present text specifically, the structure of the presentation owes a great debt to the perceptive advice of Professor Michael Leifer. Moreover, but for his kind initiative, this book might well have remained 'a gleam in the author's eye' for a few more years to come.

In the Bibliography, Malay authors are cited with given name first, followed by 'bin' plus patronymic. But because of the invariable practice of Western

books on Thailand, the writer has decided, with utmost reluctance, to cite Thai authors with surname first – even though the Westernizing decree of Rama VI which created surnames in Siam has never yet succeeded in changing cultural usage, which continues to identify and address all individuals by their given name, and to place them alphabetically according to the given name in Thai bibliographies. Thus in a Thai bibliography, Kukrit Pramoj would appear under aspirated ‘K’, whereas in the present book’s Bibliography he appears under ‘P’. In the body of the text, however, all Thais will be referred to in Thai style. If this creates momentary confusion or even a more lasting annoyance, readers will have to take up the matter with the spirit of Rama VI! (Yet another irritant is the fact that very few romanizations of Thai names conform to any of the conventional phonetic transcriptions, including the one used by the present writer, and some have departed completely from the names as pronounced, in the process of reflecting their Sanskritic root.) In principle, Cambodian names will also be cited with surname first, but this is normal Khmer practice – only corrupted by some Cambodians who have started placing their surname in second position when writing academic articles in English (like some Japanese do) and who may have misled the present writer in so doing.

In one way the Bibliography departs from conventional practice, i.e. in being divided by country (Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Malaya/Malaysia, Thailand), with a preceding General Section (South-East Asian History, Theory of History, International Relations, Sociology and Political Science). The use of country sections may be of assistance to anyone wanting to start his or her own bibliography on a particular country, and generally should not hinder access to a reference cited in the text. If, exceptionally, a reference does not come up in the expected country section, it will probably be found under ‘South-East Asia’. To avoid confusion, some references are included in two sections.

In order not to clutter the text with references, these have all been placed in the notes at the end of the book. But so also have a number of short, supplementary commentaries on points in the text. Thus the notes fulfil two purposes, which cannot be signalled in advance by the note numbers in the text. The general reader may be best advised to ignore the notes when first reading a chapter, but then dip into them for more specialized discussion if curiosity has been aroused.

The book was completed in the closing months of 1999, but a final updating note has been added to Chapters 5, 7, 8 and 9.

R.K.
Lochinver
March 2000

Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BIA	Brunei Investment Agency
CDA	Constitution Drafting Assembly
CDNI	Committee for the Defence of National Interests
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
CSP	Communauté Socialiste Populaire
DAP	Democratic Action Party
DDC	Democratic Development Committee
FMS	Federated Malay States
FUNCINPEC	Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif
FUNK	Front Uni National du Kampuchea
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JPM	Jabatan Perdana Menteri
JSRK	Jeunesse Socialiste Royale Khmère
KPNLF	Khmer People's National Liberation Front
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MIB	Melayu Islam Beraja
NLF	National Liberation Front (of South Vietnam)
NPCC	National Political Consultative Council
NPKC	National Peace-keeping Council
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PAS	Parti Islam se-Malaysia
PGNU	Provisional Government of National Union
PKI	Partai Komunis Indonesia
PL	Pathet Lao
PRB	Partai Rakyat Brunei
PRC	Political Reform Committee
RCTI	Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia
RLG	Royal Lao Government
SOC	State of Cambodia
SPC	Supreme People's Council

TVRI	Televisi Republik Indonesia
UFMS	Unfederated Malay States
UMNO	United Malays National Organization
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia

A chronological key to principal events, 1840–2000, by country

Brunei

- 1846 Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin II (reigned 1828–52) confirms the first cession of Sarawak territory (Kuching district) to James Brooke, and cedes the Island of Labuan to the British Government.
- 1847 Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with Britain.
- 1872 Sultan Momin (or Abdul Mumin) (descendant of previous royalty, reigned 1852–85), cedes the Baram district of Sarawak to the Brookes.
- 1877 Cession of Sabah to Austrian investor, Baron von Overbeck, and his British partner, Alfred Dent.
- 1881 Foundation of British North Borneo Company by Dent.
- 1888 Sultan Hashim (previously Temenggong Hashim; son of Omar Ali Saifuddin II, reigned 1885–1906) signs Treaty of Protection with Britain.
- 1890 Charles Brooke annexes the Limbang.
- 1905–6 Supplementary Agreement establishes a British Residency (first Resident, M.S.H. McArthur).
- 1906 Accession of Sultan Muhammad Jamalul Alam II (son of Hashim, reigned, including Regency, 1906–24).
- 1924 Accession of Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin (son of Muhammad Jamalul Alam II, reigned, including Regency, 1924–50).
- 1941–45 Japanese occupation of Brunei and Sarawak.
- 1950 Accession of Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin III (brother of Ahmad Tajuddin, reigned 1950–67).
- 1959 Transfer of the Resident's executive powers to the Sultan under a Constitution.
- 1962 Elections won by PRB (Partai Rakyat Brunei, i.e. Brunei People's Party). Rebellion, following the non-convening of Legislative Council, is suppressed by British forces.
- 1963 Sultan negotiates seriously for entry to the Malaysia Federation, but pulls out at the last minute.

- 1965 The last elections for a Legislative Council.
- 1967 Accession of Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah (son of Omar Ali Saifuddin III, on the throne 1967–present), following his father's abdication.
- 1979 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Britain, pointing to Independence five years ahead.
- 1984 'Full Independence' from Britain; rise of 'cabinet government' with the Sultan as Prime Minister, and no Legislative Council.
- 1997 Resignation of Prince Jefri as Finance Minister.
- 1998 Dismissal of Prince Jefri as Chairman of the Brunei Investment Agency (BIA).
- 2000 Civil suit against Prince Jefri.

Cambodia

- 1841 Cambodian revolt against Vietnamese rule, in favour of Siamese protection. Accession of King Ang Duong (reigned 1841–59).
- 1864 King Norodom (son of Ang Duong, reigned 1859–1904) accepts French suzerainty.
- 1867 Siam surrenders its claim of suzerainty to France.
- 1884 Establishment of French rule, behind a façade of monarchy.
- 1885–86 Anti-French revolt.
- 1904 Accession of King Sisowath (brother of Norodom, reigned 1904–27).
- 1927 Accession of King Monivong (son of Sisowath, reigned 1927–41).
- 1941 Accession of King Norodom Sihanouk (great-grandson of Norodom, reigned 1941–55, and again 1993–present).
- 1940–45 Japanese quasi-occupation, by arrangement with Vichy France.
- 1945 Sihanouk declares Independence from France, under Japanese auspices.
- 1953 Sihanouk again declares Independence, with French indulgence, following his 'Crusade for Independence'.
- 1955 Sihanouk abdicates, to form his own political party, the Sangkum. Accession of King Norodom Suramarit (father of Sihanouk, reigned 1955–60).
- 1960 On death of his father, Sihanouk becomes Head of State in 'a monarchy without a King'.
- 1960 Purported formation of Pol Pot's Communist Party (clandestine wing of the existing Pracheachon).
- 1966 General Lon Nol's first cabinet.
- 1969 General Lon Nol's second cabinet.
- 1970 Sihanouk deposed by Parliament; becomes co-sponsor of the Indochinese Peoples' Conference, and announces a Cambodian popular front, the FUNK (Front Uni National du Kam-

- puchea). Creation of the Khmer Republic under leadership of Lon Nol, with US backing.
- 1975 Victory of the Khmer Rouge; Phnom Penh population driven to the countryside.
- 1976 Sihanouk returns from Peking, into Khmer Rouge custody.
- 1979 Vietnamese invasion drives Khmer Rouge government and army westwards to the Thai border. Famine.
- 1981 Formation of FUNCINPEC (Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif), the Sihanoukist resistance to the Vietnamese and their puppet government (People's Republic of Kampuchea).
- 1989 Vietnamese withdrawal.
- 1991 International accord on Cambodia at Paris Conference.
- 1993 Elections, under a UN plan of national reconciliation (predicated on the Vietnamese withdrawal). Sihanouk becomes King in a restored monarchy. Coalition of Hun Sen's (re-named) Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and FUNCINPEC.
- 1997 FUNCINPEC's military units driven from Phnom Penh in bloody clashes with Hun Sen's (official government) forces.
- 1998 Second elections result in revival of coalition but on terms of even greater CPP dominance. Death of Pol Pot.

Indonesia

- 1942–45 Japanese occupation and promotion of (anti-Dutch) nationalist movements and leaders.
- 1945 Sukarno declares Independence from The Netherlands, shortly after Japan's capitulation becomes known.
- 1946–49 War of Independence against the Dutch 'Police Actions'.
- 1949 The Netherlands grant independence.
- 1950 Indonesia becomes a unitary republic.
- 1959 Sukarno replaces constitutional democracy with Guided Democracy.
- 1965 The Communists (Partai Komunis Indonesia, or PKI) attempt to shift the balance of power within the Guided Democracy system away from the army, by murdering the leading generals. General Suharto, not included on the hit list, saves the day for the army. Widespread massacres follow, of Communists or suspected Communists at the hands of Muslim militias.
- 1966 Sukarno, suspected of complicity in the PKI plot, is removed from the Presidency.
- 1968 Suharto becomes President; ushers in the 'New Order', a general reversal of Sukarnoism.
- 1988 Death of Sultan Hamengkubowono IX of Yogyakarta (first Minister of War of the independent Republic of Indonesia; Vice-President during the 1970s).

- 1998 Fall of Suharto, the most prominent victim of the Asian financial crisis of 1997–98.

Laos (kingdom of Luang Prabang)

- 1851 Accession of King Tiantha (reigned 1851–72).
 1872 Accession of King Oun Kham (brother of Tiantha, reigned 1872–87, followed by a seven-year Interregnum).
 1893 France takes control of ‘Laos’ (all territory previously under Siamese suzerainty on the left bank of the Mekong, and some on the right – west – bank).
 1894 Accession of King Zakharine (son of Oun Kham, reigned 1894–1904, after appointment by the French).
 1904 Accession of King Sisavang Vong (son of Zakharine, reigned 1904–59).
 1940–45 Laos remains under French administration during Japanese hegemony in Indochina, with minimal Japanese interference until 1945.
 1941 King Sisavang prevails on the French to add northern Laos (previously Vietnamese-dominated territory) to the kingdom, in compensation for the surrender of Sayaboury to Thailand under Japanese pressure.
 1945 King Sisavang declares a brief Independence from France, under Japanese pressure. Prince Pethsarat declares Independence seven months later, hoping to forestall the return of French authority.
 1950 Creation of Pathet Lao (PL – the Communist movement) by Prince Souphanouvong with Communist Vietnamese assistance.
 1951 The first of Prince Souvannaphouma’s many appointments as Prime Minister.
 1953 France grants an almost complete transfer of sovereignty, within the French Union.
 1954 Laos receives international recognition as an independent and neutral state at the Geneva Conference.
 1955 Foundation of Lao Patriotic Front (a front for the Pathet Lao).
 1959 Accession of King Savang Vatthana (reigned 1959–75).
 1961 Geneva Conference reconvened, in view of civil war; no solution.
 1963 Coalition government finally breaks up, Pathet Lao representatives leave Vientiane in fear of assassination.
 1973 Paris Conference; agreement on revival of coalition government, on terms favourable to Pathet Lao, in line with US withdrawal from the war in Vietnam.

- 1975 PL takes over full power, in the months after the collapse of the pro-American regime in South Vietnam. King Savang abdicates on Communist instructions.

Malaysia

- 1874 Pangkor Engagement between Britain and Sultan Abdullah of Perak (reigned 1873–76) establishes the first Residency in a Malay State.
- 1896 Perak and three other States come under the centralizing Federation of Malay States.
- 1909 Four northern States transferred by Siam to British suzerainty.
- 1914 The last Malay State, Johor, accepts a British Adviser, making a total of five ‘Unfederated Malay States’.
- 1941–42 Japanese invasion through Kelantan, followed by fall of Singapore.
- 1942–45 Japanese administration.
- 1946 Malayan Union plan provokes formation of United Malays National Organization (UMNO).
- 1948 British compromise: the Federation of Malaya leaves royal sovereignty intact, and gives only very limited citizenship rights to immigrant races.
- 1948–60 ‘The Emergency’ – insurrection by the MCP (Malayan Communist Party).
- 1952 Beginnings of Malay–Chinese cooperation in local elections.
- 1955 The multi-racial Alliance Party sweeps the board in the first general elections, resulting in calls for an early Independence.
- 1957 Independence ushered in by Prime Minister Tengku Abdul Rahman al-Haj (a prince of Kedah, and UMNO leader). Tuanku Abdul Rahman ibni Al-marhum Tuanku Muhammad, ruler of the State of Negri Sembilan, becomes first Yang di-Pertuan Agong (Supreme Ruler) of the Federation of Malaya.
- 1963 Formation of the Federation of Malaysia by the addition of Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak (but not Brunei) – the British formula for their Independence.
- 1969 The May 13th riots – the collapse of ‘multi-racial consensus’.
- 1971 Constitutional changes reinforce Malay rights, and strengthen the position of monarchy.
- 1981 Dr Mahathir Mohamed becomes UMNO President and Prime Minister.
- 1982 Mahathir coopts Anwar Ibrahim, Islamic youth leader, into UMNO and the government.
- 1983 Constitutional crisis, arising from Mahathir’s attempt to define the royal power of ‘assent’.
- 1984 Sultan Iskandar Shah of Johor becomes eighth Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

- 1987 Challenge to Mahathir's leadership of UMNO by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.
- 1988 Lord Chief Justice sacked.
- 1992–93 Second constitutional crisis over the royal powers of assent, and immunity from prosecution.
- 1998 Mahathir's solution to pressure on the exchange rate in the Asian financial crisis is to impose exchange controls, contrary to IMF orthodoxy and the views of Anwar Ibrahim as Finance Minister. Anwar is sacked and put on trial for corruption, etc.

Thailand (Siam)

- 1851 Accession of Phra' Côm Klaaw (Rama IV, known in the West as 'Mongkut'; reigned 1851–68).
- 1855 Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with Britain.
- 1868 Accession of Phra' Cunlacôm Klaaw (Rama V, known in the West as 'Chulalongkorn'; son of Rama IV, reigned 1868–1910), the greatest modernizer of Siamese administration.
- 1893 Siam surrenders the left bank of the Mekong (Laos) to France.
- 1909 Siam surrenders suzerainty over four Malay States to Britain.
- 1910 Accession of Phra Mongkut Klaaw (Rama VI, known in the West as 'Vajiravudh'; son of Rama V, reigned 1910–25), 'The father of Thai nationalism'.
- 1917 Siam enters World War I on the side of Britain and its allies.
- 1925 Accession of Phra Pok Klaaw (Rama VII, known in the West as 'Prajadhipok'; brother of Rama VI, reigned 1925–35), the last absolute monarch of Siam.
- 1932 The Thai Revolution ends absolute monarchy.
- 1933 Abdication of Prajadhipok in face of the dictatorial tendencies of the new regime, especially the military clique led by Phibun Songkram. Accession of a boy-king, Anantha Mahidon (Rama VIII; English rendering, Ananda; nephew of Rama Prajadhipok, reigned 1935–46).
- 1941 Japanese army enters Thailand to use it as a base, with no resistance from Phibun.
- 1946 Accession of Phumiphon Adunlayadeed (Rama IX; in English rendering, Bhumiphol; brother of Ananda, on the throne 1946–present).
- 1947 Revival of the power of Field Marshal Phibun Songkram, partly thanks to 'The King's death case'.
- 1958 Rise of a new dictator, Sarit Thanarat.
- 1973 The student uprising and intervention of the King to command the current dictatorial clique to leave the country. Restoration of democracy under royal sponsorship.
- 1976 New military coup brings democracy to an end.
- 1978 Slow return to democracy under General Kriangsak.

- 1991 New military coup.
- 1992 Massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators brings King back into the arena to urge reconciliation. The King again sponsors a return to democracy.
- 1997 New democratic Constitution, partly hastened into law by the financial crisis.

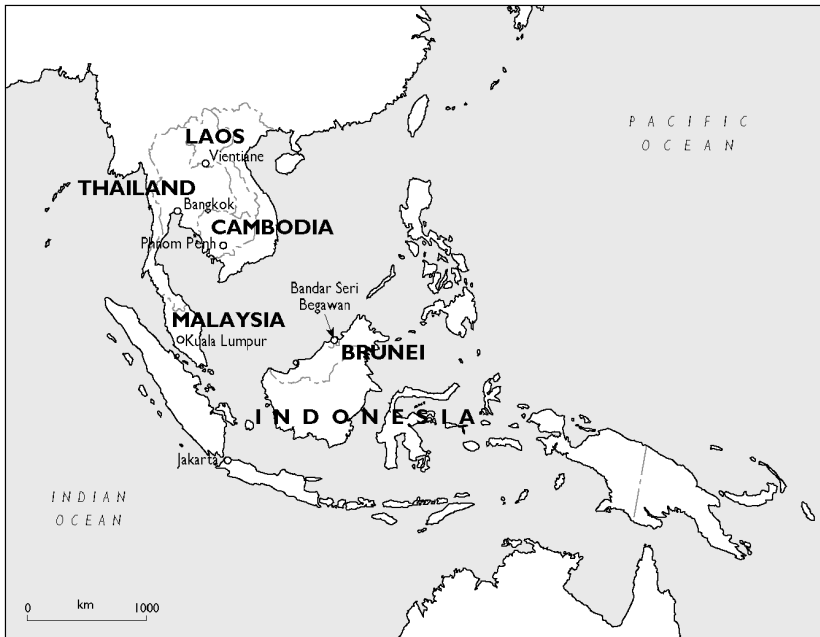


Figure 1 Map of South-East Asia

Source: Cartography by Gary Haley, PCS Mapping and DTP

Part I

Opening thoughts

1 Introduction

1.1 Introducing the study

Surveying the scene in the year 1511, a strategic analyst – if such a profession had existed in those days – would probably not have placed any bets on the long-term survival of monarchy in South-East Asia. That was the year in which the Portuguese conquered Malacca, and its Sultan fled in search of allies or an alternative territorial base. His heirs eventually settled in Johor, but Malacca was never again recovered for monarchy. After passing into Dutch hands in 1641 and British in 1795 (or at any rate, 1824), it finally became a constituent state of Malaysia – which it remains today, still without a Sultan.

It was a similar story of ‘Western colonial depredation’ in the Philippines – although there was no monarchy of any substance in Manila when the Spanish took control in 1571, only a Raja who was a dependant or viceroy of the Sultan of Brunei. For another upheaval on the scale of Malacca, we have to look to Burma in 1886, when the British completely abolished the monarchy (the most powerful in the area in the previous century) at the last stage of their colonization of the country. However, the process of territorial attrition had begun with the take-over of Lower Burma in 1826. Or take the case of the French in Vietnam: their ‘forward movement’ began under Emperor Napoleon III, with the annexation of Cochinchina (six provinces of the delta region around Saigon) from the Empire of Annam in 1863–66. Never again would this part of Vietnam know monarchy except indirectly, under France’s contrived association of the three parts of Vietnam, headed by the briefly resuscitated puppet Emperor, Bao Dai, between 1949–55.

As for the ‘Dutch East Indies’ (today, Indonesia): the historical pride of Mataram – successor to Majapahit and hence standard-bearer for one of the great ‘Hinduized’ civilizations of South-East Asia – made it an almost inevitable centre of resistance to Dutch economic objectives. Consequently, the Dutch had to pour a large proportion of their economic gains, in the eighteenth century, into managing local wars of succession and keeping the kingdom in a state of uneasy subjection as their vassal. Following the Raffles interregnum of the Napoleonic Wars period, the problem reappeared in the 1820s with the ‘War of

Dipo Negoro'. After Dutch victory in that conflict, Javanese monarchy was at an end in all but name, with much of the territory of Mataram annexed to colonial direct rule, and only the most pliant of royalty allowed to sit on the thrones at Yogyakarta and Surakarta, as 'Sultans'.

These examples, selected fairly arbitrarily from different eras and areas of the South-East Asian region, are intended to illustrate how monarchies could succumb completely to the onward march of Western colonialism, or if surviving, then only as mere shadows of former glory, and typically in reduced territorial circumstances. However, for balance we should note that not only Western states have destroyed South-East Asian monarchies. Powerful states within the region traditionally showed little mercy to recalcitrant vassals. The kingdom of Vientiane – one of two monarchies of lowland Laos in the early nineteenth century – was wiped off the map in 1827–28, as its restlessly provocative ruler was driven into exile and the whole population deported to the west side of the Mekong by the region's rising power, Siam. In this way, the greatness and future resilience of one monarchy were secured at the cost of a lesser neighbour.

A third way in which monarchies have been forced 'off the stage of history' is by the pressure of nationalism. It was partly because the Dutch had kept a number of Indonesian monarchies half-alive as ceremonial camouflage for the far-reaching economic and administrative changes of colonialism, and more immediately because the rulers were lukewarm towards the Independence movement, that they became a target of nationalist hatred in the revolution at the end of World War II. There were particularly bloody scenes in Sumatra. However, a more subtle style of nationalist succession was to obtain a 'voluntary' transmission of traditional authority from a monarch, as Ho Chi Minh did from Bao Dai when declaring Vietnam's independence after the Japanese surrender. This legitimizing act in 1945 vitally helped the Vietminh in projecting themselves as 'nationalists', not 'Communists', and was a far greater asset than anything the post-war, French-sponsored state of Vietnam would enjoy, after Bao Dai graced it by stepping back *out of retirement* as an imperial Head of State in 1949!

This leads us on to yet a fourth way of 'seeing off' a monarchy'. The technique is one that has appealed to revolutionary movements during a period of anti-Western struggle – that is, to collaborate with monarchy, or at least pay it honour, in order to preserve an image of virtue with the more traditionally-minded strata, especially among the peasantry. But after victory, and as soon as the consolidation of political power seems assured, a transmission of authority can be effected and the king sent into a more or less secluded retirement. Laos in the two-and-a-half decades up to 1975 offers a perfect example.

In this context, an oblique comparison may be possible with the colonial 'Indirect Rule' of which some examples were glimpsed in the passages above. Under 'Indirect Rule', a colonial government does not abolish monarchy as such, but conceals political reality behind a façade of royal legitimacy – most effectively in the least direct versions (the British in Johor, 1885–1914), least effectively in the most direct (the Dutch in Java after Dipo Negoro). At first sight,

the political structure of Laos post-World War II may not seem to have anything in common with this phenomenon, least of all as far as a revolutionary Communist movement waiting in the wings is concerned. Nevertheless, it was in that country that a French late-colonial regime worked through a constitutional monarchy from 1947–54, while the USA, in giving heavy backing to the independent Royal Lao Government from 1954–75, rendered it some sort of ‘neo-colony’ or ‘puppet regime’, at least in Marxist terms. Meanwhile, the Communist-led Pathet Lao were co-opted into the governmental arrangements from time to time, being too weak to seize power yet too strong (thanks to their North Vietnamese backing) to be defeated. So in a sense they were ‘siphoning off’ some of the royal legitimacy which was intended to benefit the constitutional government and its foreign backers. Apart from joining coalitions, the Pathet Lao even paid lip service to the monarchy in their propaganda. It may be suggested that operating behind a royal façade in this fashion, on the road to power, is not so fundamentally different from what colonial regimes did in their day when they held power.

Still, the upshot in Laos was that the monarchy did indeed leave the scene, in 1975. So we have glanced superficially at four broad patterns of monarchical ‘decline and fall’: colonial abolition (or more or less), often preceded by annexation of chunks of territory; absorption by a powerful neighbour in an intra-regional war; nationalist overthrow (but with the possibility of obtaining a transmission of authority into the bargain); and an opportunistic Communist ‘front’ with monarchy on the slow road to power (with abolition of the throne the inevitable result if the ploy succeeds). While allowing for the somewhat extended nature of the period between the flight of the Sultan of Malacca and the abdication of the last King of Laos, can we say that the ‘gloomy prognostication’ that might have been made in 1511 has now been fulfilled?

Not completely – as the title of this book has already announced. The ‘story of monarchy’ in South-East Asia continues – although our title also hedges its bets about the future, with its reference to traditions ‘in tension’. Against all the historical odds, after passing through the upheavals of colonialism, world war, nationalism, and Communist revolution, South-East Asia still counts four polities with some system of monarchy. The polities in question have been kept out of the discussion so far, in order to develop a background which will be more in keeping with the ‘natural expectation’ of many readers. This will serve to suggest a certain uniqueness in the fact that four structures of monarchy have in fact survived, and will thus send us in search of historical, if not sociological and cultural, explanation. There is quite a lot of interpretation to be done in any case, given that the four do not share a single set of characteristics. (However, at least three of them do turn out to owe quite a lot to the practice of colonial Indirect Rule, which tided them over into the era of Independence.) After a survey of the modern historical background, covering Chapters 2–4, Part III will explore in detail the dynamics of the contemporary monarchy in Cambodia, Malaysia (which has a plurality of rulers), Brunei (the only example of royal absolutism) and Thailand. But because the demise of monarchy in Laos

happened within the last twenty-five years, and the path to that outcome illustrates several important themes in South-East Asia's modern development, Laos will be granted a short chapter first.

Meanwhile, this introductory chapter itself contains two more sections: a brief sketch of the contours of South-East Asia in earlier epochs with special reference to monarchy and its associated beliefs; and a reflection in theoretical vein on the relevance of that more distant past. It was felt inappropriate, in a book on politics, to hold up the narrative with an extensive exploration of early history, or a lengthy excursion into related theory. However, readers who are sufficiently interested in these dimensions may like to consult the series of short readings and commentaries in Chapter 11 (Part V), which augment sections 1.2 and 1.3 of this chapter.

It is hoped that the study, both in its general and its particular aspects, will communicate a sense of the exciting variety of political phenomena in the region, but also certain common historical, sociological and cultural themes. Clearly, after the decade in which the existence (or doctrine) of 'Asian values' was introduced to the world, we cannot ignore the question whether the 'anomaly' of monarchies surviving is due to the persistence and natural workings of traditional political values, or whether their existence, besides being partly fortuitous, is now manipulated by elites (even by monarchs themselves) in order to pre-empt the destructive or destabilizing effects of modernization – the very modernization which seems to make the survival of monarchy rather unpredictable. As well as the legacy and workings of 'traditional values' as 'authentic reality', considered in this chapter, the function of 'traditional values' as 'doctrine' will be visited particularly in Chapter 3, section 3.5, and Chapter 9 (dealing with Thailand); as also in Chapter 8 (dealing with modern Brunei). If there is a serious element of manipulation, then monarchy should figure as one of the 'Asian values', seen as a synthetic doctrine designed to preserve power. In other words, it is conceivable that many of the people of South-East Asia did not 'need' a monarchy at their head until they were told that they did! But as in Britain, tradition which is synthetic or 'invented' does not lose any of its political potency for all that.¹ Indeed, it may take strength from being methodically structured and projected. Thus a valid account of monarchy in South-East Asia should try to incorporate the dimension of 'synthetic institutional asset' as well as 'authentic traditional values'.

However, it is difficult to stray far from the consensus of academic and journalistic writing that sees paternalistic authority and dependency as features which typically distinguish Asian cultures from their contemporary counterparts in the West. These values should favour the persistence of monarchy at least as much as any other established structure of paternalism. We only need to beware of the simplistic assertion that the cultural factor alone, or even mainly, is what keeps monarchies in being today, for a subjective popular need still has to be mediated and given concrete effect by committed elites (or by the monarch himself!), facilitated by various non-cultural factors and modalities. In the future, much might depend on the personality of particular elected, or bureaucratic,

leaders and the personality of the current incumbent of the throne. Much could depend also on the impact of economic crisis on political stability, and whether in a situation of flux leaders perceive monarchy as serving, or hindering, their imperatives. Chapter 10 will ruminate about possible patterns of interplay of all these factors in the near future. The four surviving monarchies of South-East Asia are not approaching a single crossroads, but each in its own way prompts a query about its further staying power. In the event of early demise, this book hopes to have anticipated some of the factors relevant to such outcomes. But no less interesting, obviously, are the factors which have kept royalty in existence for the time being.

1.2 Contours of an ancient tradition

It is a commonplace that the region of South-East Asia is divided between a 'Sinicized' zone east of the Annamitic Chain, and the 'Hinduized' (or 'Indianized') zone to the west and south, including the Indonesian Archipelago. The 'Chinese' features of Vietnamese culture can be explained both from physical proximity (or even ancient migration from China) and from the almost one thousand years of Chinese political domination during the first Christian millennium. It needs to be emphasized, however, that the basic exclusion of Vietnam from this study is due to the fact that monarchy there has been defunct for nearly half a century, not to any preferred cultural definition of what constitutes 'South-East Asia'.²

Apart from Vietnam, Chinese trade was not followed by the metaphorical 'flag' of cultural, let alone, political penetration – even though China claimed overlordship of the region at most periods. By contrast, Indian trade did act as a channel for the widespread adoption of Indian religious and political ideas by local kingdoms – even in the absence of imperial pretensions on the part of any Indian great power most of the time. Not only did merchants marry into local ruling families, but Indian priests (brahmans) were employed to supervise the royal cults established in imitation of India. The leading brahmanical families intermarried with royalty and even formed some hereditary 'dynasties' in their own right. At times, however, the kings turned to Buddhism instead, or gave it a place side by side with Hinduism. Eventually, Buddhism proved more durable because it was able to put down roots in non-elite society, albeit brahmans have continued to be employed in the supervision of Hindu rites at the courts of Thailand and Cambodia. But from the thirteenth century onwards we see yet another incoming wave of religious influence with profound political implications, in the form of Islam. The Muslim merchants and missionaries came from India, like their Hindu and Buddhist forerunners, but also from the Arabian Peninsula.

Yet whereas Hindu religion and statecraft gave the region a striking cultural unity westwards from Tonkin and Annam (today's Vietnam) as far as Burma, Islam's penetration was not nearly so complete, and thus became a factor for a new division in the region: between the Muslim societies dominant in the Malay

Peninsula and Indonesian Archipelago, and the Buddhist societies of the mainland (plus a Hindu survival in Bali). Certainly it will seem difficult to detect any commonality between, on the one hand, the Sultanates of modern Malaysia and Brunei, propagating Islam as their official religion in ever more revivalist forms, and on the other hand (if not the other extreme) the Buddhist kingship and societies of Laos, Cambodia and Thailand in the past half-century. Islamic intelligentsias easily take offence at any suggestion of affinities with their Buddhist neighbours, as they are intent on rooting out traces of a Hindu/Buddhist past in their native religious culture, precisely in the name of Islam. Interestingly, this sensitivity is at its most acute in Indonesia, where the penetration of Islam from the coastal ports into the royal courts and rural society of inland Java was relatively superficial, resulting in 'syncretic' cultural tendencies which have infuriated Muslim purists in the twentieth century.

At any rate, the traces of 'Indianization' are still visible – and audible – even in the politics which have made Islam the official religion. The Malaysian national anthem begins with the evocation of *negara* (the Sanskrit word for 'State'), while the Brunei national anthem ends with it. Court ceremonial is still infused with language and ritual of Hindu origin. Moreover, in tracing their political descent and legitimacy back to Malacca, both the Malaysian and Bruneian *negara* are not only claiming an Islamic pedigree but tapping into the vanished glory of Srivijaya on Sumatra, which was not Muslim at the time a fugitive prince crossed the Straits of Malacca, around 1391. Nor, for that matter, had the eighth- to ninth-century realm of the Sailendras on Sumatra and Java, from which the rulers of Srivijaya derived *their* ultimate legitimacy in turn, been Muslim (the Sailendras were Buddhist).

Of course, there was a vital economic foundation to cultural penetration and hegemony. Initially, it was the harbour states that drew upon their hinterland for part of their trade resources and, in Cambodia at least, established a form of overlordship. By the eighth century, however, in both Cambodia and Java, inland states had developed which became more powerful than their coastal predecessors. In contrast to the harbour states, these inland states based their power more on the control of their population's manpower than upon control of the sea trade. Economic power came from the agricultural production of a dense population by means of intensive irrigated farming. Military power came more from a large land army than control of seaways. Control of manpower also enabled these states to create architectural wonders such as the Angkor temple complex in Cambodia and the tiered stupa of Borobudur on Java.

Meanwhile, monarchy had found theological support for its authority in the core of a system of philosophy that combined Buddhist, Brahmanical, and indigenous religious elements syncretically. Cambodia is particularly famous for the elaboration of the doctrine of the God-king, that is, a monarch who was at the very least the representative of the god Vishnu on earth, if not sharing elements of that divinity in himself. Not only kings but senior officials erected funerary statuary to indicate that they had achieved some kind of apotheosis after death. Of complementary significance to these ideas was the way in which

architecture was used to signify that the capital city was the earthly equivalent of the central mountain of the cosmos (Mount Meru), standing in 'correct' relationship to its subordinate princes and satellite states, which were seen as counterparts to celestial bodies at the cardinal points. Nor are the architecture and the underlying doctrines purely of interest to archeologists and ancient historians – or modern-day tourists! Modern historians and social scientists have presumed that the 'God-kingship' idea (the *devaraja*) has remained a latent but dynamic reference point for absolutist authority-building in Khmer society ever since. Even while denying his divinity to Western interlocutors, neither King Norodom Sihanouk (1941–55), nor his subsequent reincarnation as populist 'Prince Sihanouk', discouraged the revival of the myth in his self-presentation and propaganda to the peasantry; and Western observers even detected a degree of suggestibility or self-persuasion in his highly autocratic dominance of government.

It is generally agreed that beliefs about royal divinity must have played some part in the successful mobilization of mass labour to construct the near-miraculous stone edifices and irrigation systems of Cambodia and Java. And after the event, the edifices would provide visual 'proof' of the transcendental power of the kings responsible, while the prosperity arising from irrigation confirmed the blessing of the deity upon the correctly ruled kingdom, at least, or even the divine or semi-divine attributes of the king. But at the same time there is a 'pragmatic' dimension to prosperity, in providing a purely rationalistic basis for legitimacy (always a useful supplement to the transcendental!) and a source of patronage with which to satisfy the aristocracy and royal rivals. And then, there is also the moral dimension of politico-religious ideology, whereby the king is 'obliged' (rather than 'empowered') by his unique status to perform good works for the people. 'Correctness' in this sense is likewise highly legitimizing, but we can see here how power was also ideologically circumscribed. The idea of power being actually derived from righteousness goes back to the Hindu tradition but reached its high point in Cambodia with the Buddhist King Jayavarman VII (1181–c.1219), who built a system of hospitals for the people. This is not to say that there was no potentially 'absolutist' legacy from medieval God-kingship to modern South-East Asian political ideology, but expectations of both 'performance' and 'morality' are crucial parts of the complex. The moral dimension is perhaps even more powerfully symbolized in the late eighth- and early ninth-century architectural wonder of Java, Borobudur, than in the monuments of Cambodia.

If one would go just a little deeper into the brahmanical theory of society and kingship – in other words, the more formal political theory which was the Hindu intellectual legacy to South-East Asia, or at least underlay it – the point that should be highlighted is that the king's activities and functions were not set forth as a separate subject but as an intrinsic part of a comprehensive scheme of the duties and codes of conduct of all social units. This is explained by Professor S.J. Tambiah in his epic work, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*.³ The king's duty is primarily that of protection and is elaborated as a branch of the social ethics

under the label *rajadharma*. In this matter of protection, his activity consists in the wielding of *danda*, the infliction of punishment and the exercise of force, whenever a violation of *dharma* (morality) occurs. The ruler's most important duty is to uphold and preserve the social order, particularly the order of *varna* (and *jati*) as ordained in the canon, and to punish actions which lead to confusion and disorder. But although the king exercises *danda* as punisher, and although force resides in him, he is not the sole or the most important wielder of power and possessor of authority. Authority is dual: the guarantors of the social order are the brahman as *archaya* (teacher) and the ruler together. While the king may enforce the law, it is the brahman who has the best knowledge of the canon and, additionally, by virtue of his own code of conduct and place in the social order, is the creative interpreter, codifier, teacher and adviser on *dharma*. At the same time, there occurs a transfer of a share of the brahman's good *karma* to the king.

But in case we were beginning to assume that Hinduism is the typical source of ideas of political absolutism in South-East Asia, an extraordinary and exciting paradox awaits us. As Tambiah argues concerning the political thought of Buddhism, Hinduism's reformed breakaway, this was more, not less, conducive to monarchical absolutism. Given the dependence of *artha* (political economy) on *dharma* (morality) in the dharmashastric view of things, it was perhaps difficult for a full-blown monarchical system to emerge. By contrast, the Buddhist scheme raised up the magnificent *cakkavatti* world ruler as the sovereign regulator and the foundation of society, by seeing the universal cosmic law (*dhamma*) as the root and fountainhead of kingship. This grand imperial conception opened the way for Buddhist monarchs actually to found 'world empires' on a scale hitherto unknown in India. Or at least, given the practical, logistical impossibility of realizing them in practice, claims to empire could be staked rhetorically.

Yet the paradox of greatest interest is that whereas a school of *artha* emerged within the brahmanical regime of thought which systematized the foundations of political economy and statecraft, the Buddhist writers did not produce any such differentiated 'science' of administration. Thus, for want of pragmatic rules and constraints relating to the conduct of *artha*, these grandly conceived, virtue-endowed rulers may have been able to turn themselves into 'absolute' monarchs practising a degree of both liberality and tyranny unknown in India; but at the same time they may have been exposed to instability and disorder in their domestic and external relations! At any rate, we still meet, in the grandiosely conceived palaces and capitals of South-East Asian Buddhist monarchs, brahman and not Buddhist monks serving as court functionaries, royal diviners, scribes, judges and interpreters of law (still named in modern Thai and Burmese with a nomenclature derived from the concept *dharmashastra*). The ideology of kingship reached new heights precisely where the Buddhist and brahmanical notions of *dhammaraja* and *rajadharma* met and where the pragmatic style of brahmanical statecraft fused with the Buddhist doctrine of righteous kingship. Nor is there any basic contradiction if the brahman serve under the firm authority of a *devaraja*, which he derives from his implementation of *dharma*.⁴

Perhaps we could add that, as far as geographical ‘pragmatics’ are concerned – the ‘logistical realities’, as Tambiah calls them – imperial dreams would be unrealizable in practice for ancient kingdoms lacking modern communications. In fact the major, distinctive concept of Tambiah’s book is that of ‘the galactic polity’ (or ‘radial polity’), which rationalizes the weakness of central power in terms of Buddhist political theory, namely in bestowing on peripheral principalities or provinces a legitimized, obedient or adulatory, relationship to the morally superior centre. Tambiah’s aim is to apply the concept to the evidence from many South-East Asian polities wherein the kingdom is found to be conceptually structured as a macrocosm of the capital city. The paradigm for such a polity is found in the empire of the Indian emperor Asoka, of the third century BC. An important example of a South-East Asian polity which named itself after the capital city but which conceptualized its territory as a variable sphere of influence that diminishes as royal power radiates from a centre, was Ayut’ia.

However, from our contemporary perspective Ayut’ia is probably of greater interest because of its centralizing and absolutist pretensions and reputation. Again, Tambiah is germane, where he remarks that in the Sukhot’ai era the Siamese attempted to take a deliberate posture of contrast to the dominant Khmer civilization especially in matters related to political organization and art, but Ayut’ia openly imitated Khmer customs and practices, despite their geopolitical rivalry. Apart from features of Khmer political institutions, art forms, system of writing, and vocabulary (especially honorific court language), the Siamese borrowed most importantly the major features of the Khmer royal cult and imported Cambodian brahman priests to conduct its rites. This is how Siam from the Ayut’ian era onward came to have Theravada Buddhism as the religion of its king and people, but also a traditional royal cult: thus, not only notions derived from India via Sinhalese Buddhism but also a dominant doctrine from Cambodia, that of *devaraja*. Strange to relate, Ayut’ia comes to look like the true heir of Khmer civilization. At least this is how it tends to be perceived by modern Thai scholars – and by propagandists for the reformist, and ‘truly Thai’, Chakri dynasty, founded in 1782 and still continuing today. It remains a lively issue, far from merely ‘academic’, because the authoritarian traits in Thai political culture which seem so persistent are traced to the baleful influence of that ‘Khmerized’ polity further up the great river.⁵

Few of the other states of South-East Asia enjoyed Siam’s (Thailand’s) experience of institutional continuity spanning centuries and thus transmitting ‘Indianized’ forms, with their accompanying political culture, in a very direct way down to the twentieth century. In some ways Bali has enjoyed it to a greater degree, but it has lost its monarchy and is not an independent state. Yet it is not impossible to find examples of similar institutions and political culture persisting, even if weakened, amidst the inroads of Islam. For a surviving phenomenon, though diluted, of ‘Hindu-type’ divinization, and also elements of autonomy at the periphery in relation to the sanctified (but by that very token, indispensable) centre, we can look to the Malay Muslim world on the eve of British intervention (1874). Even today there are surviving, or reviving, symptoms in Brunei

Darussalam, not always distinguishable from the mystical and structural workings of Islamic revival.

Meanwhile, the dynamism of the Thai polity brought the Thais, from at least the Ayut'ia period onwards, into contact and conflict with the Malays of the Peninsula. On the threshold of the modern era we meet Malay Muslim States, on the moving southern frontier of Thai power and culture, accepting Siamese suzerainty in the classical way – albeit not without some reservations as the emergent Chakri state revealed its newly centralizing imperatives and more ethnic agenda. Whether the Thai Buddhist culture and polity might have made even greater inroads into the 'Malay world' in the twentieth century than happened in the nineteenth is an interesting 'historical if'. Anyway, British colonialism drew a line against the Thai advance southwards, and nine Malay Sultanates on the Peninsula were consolidated thereafter.

While most of the South-East Asian region found itself in the grip of accelerating change from the first decades of the nineteenth century, directly or indirectly due to world trade and Western colonialism, Bali had remained a comparative backwater which even up to the end of that century remained exempt from the impact of either of these factors of change, but above all from Islamization. In such a situation the persistence of quite pristine Indic forms will not be surprising – but offers a topic of special appeal because it has proved possible for an American anthropologist to reconstruct those late nineteenth-century relationships, which in turn seem so redolent of a more distant past.⁶ Among Bali's notable features was its 'foundation myth' as a subject of colonization by the greatest of the Javanese kingdoms, Majapahit, in the mid-fourteenth century. The function of monarchy, indeed the state, in the nineteenth century, Geertz has argued, was as a performer of politico-religious ritual – a sort of theatrical role. The state existed to perform ritual, which had become, in other words, the very rationale of the state's existence, rather than the ritual being performed in order to add a gloss of legitimacy to the usual administrative and economic functions of a state. We may perhaps intuit from this intriguing construction – paradoxically – that the beliefs associated with royal ritual could evince considerable staying power in other situations, where political change or even upheaval has destroyed or transformed the structures which one might have assumed to be served by the ritual: that is to say, situations where the disappearance of both the structures and the associated rituals makes it impossible to prove either the conventional or the Geertzian assumption about the role of ritual (i.e. as subordinate or superordinate, respectively, to the state). In fact, in Bali itself the disappearance of the structures has not led to the rapid disappearance of ritual – now the island's great asset in an age of tourism! More of this in Chapter 4 – with reference to Indonesia outside of Bali, where there are ample signs of residual belief in the absence not only of ancient structure but also of ancient royal ritual.

The ultimate disappearance of monarchy in Bali was not a case of gradual fading but of virtually suicidal confrontation with Dutch guns. In other parts of South-East Asia in the period of the Western 'forward movements' the term

'fading' is probably appropriate, except in Burma where there was outright abolition by the British in 1886. The next two chapters focus, in a more or less methodical way, on the fortunes of monarchy in Laos, Cambodia, the peninsular Malay States, Brunei, and Siam (Thailand) from the mid-nineteenth to the early 1970s. This is by way of providing a basic bridge into the present, for five polities which offer contemporary interest, i.e. those in which monarchy has survived at least until recently.

Incidentally, however – in case the point be overlooked or denied – we shall find that Western colonialism played an important part in preserving and consolidating monarchy in certain places. It is not a tale of unmitigated destruction of ancient institutions. Deliberate preservation, though with modification, is the essence of 'Indirect Rule'. Of course, such decisions bespeak the perceived strength (and thus political advantages) of 'ancient tradition', but it would be wrong to attribute the survival of monarchy, into the 'Independence era', exclusively or directly to the strength of tradition, unaided by foreign intervention. Monarchies could have collapsed or been destroyed – and not necessarily at the hands of colonial powers, either. If they show any strength today, this may prove to owe something to consolidation by a colonial power as well as a later government.

A reflection in theoretical vein on 'ancient values' and their possible, general significance for the present follows in the next section of this chapter. References to the importance of the ritually legitimized, and legitimizing, centre – with its connotations of highly *concentrated* power – will not be missing from the account. But how are such values transmitted? For instance, are notions of charisma 'embedded' in an authentic culture or do they have to be at least partly 're-invented', by modern leaders in search of legitimacy in the eyes of peoples in search of national identity? An act of 'consolidation' by Indirect Rule never happened without some adaptation of the institution and its values. The most positive legacy of colonialism in exchange may have been the less inspiring (or less easily realizable) concepts of 'modernization' and the 'nation-state'. If, then, there is a yearning for ancient values precisely because they were overlaid or diluted – yet not lost – the act of reinvention would be more like a revival, and more likely to be blessed with success. Needless to say, however, the survival of a formal framework of monarchy into the present (also, possibly, thanks to colonialism) will be more than helpful to the enterprise – although this is not to say that monarchical values cannot be resuscitated for the consolidation of a non-royal leader.

1.3 What the past transmits: a theoretical reflection

1.3.1 *Thinking about causation*

There may not be any need to justify the study of the past as a way of elucidating the present. It is a feature of many times and places that people have

expected the past to serve something more than pure nostalgia. To say 'that is where I came from' is already to make a statement about something that, in some sense and degree, 'caused' me to be who I am and where. But it is not purely because of spontaneous, popular interest in origins that the 'invention' of national histories in South-East Asia, as a purported foundation of present – likewise idealized – structures and national identity has become 'big business'. This development challenges academic analysts to get in on the act, if only to correct the multitude of false facts and questionable connections that are being generated. Here we have an important justification for writing about South-East Asian political history.

Yet one is also stimulated to reflect carefully on questions of causation and continuity. For instance, at how great a chronological range can we legitimately talk about past events as being a 'cause' of present reality? If structural continuities seem to correlate with cultural continuities, can we in any sense say that transmitted culture is playing a 'causal' role in the phenomenon? Is it just a tautological matter of definition that cultural continuity will be found side by side with structural continuity? And even if we postulate that cultural values are 'transmitted' separately down to the present, to form now a sustaining basis for certain institutions which reveal historical parallels, what do we assume to be the mechanisms whereby values and memories are indeed 'transmitted'?

The discipline of history has been largely impervious to these questions, sometimes downright hostile to them, but with excellent reasons. Although increasingly influenced by the new structuralist fashion to see their craft as cognate with that of a story-teller, most historians remain fundamentally attached to the explanation of particular events and situations, with modestly scientific pretensions. The existence of differing interpretations, even controversy, concerning the explanation of almost every event and situation does not seem to discourage historians from continuing to strive to explain. The complexity of the relevant data; the potentially deterrent conception of different 'layers' of explanation as we reach further back in time from the event in question; the subjectivity involved in choosing relevant contexts within which to seek out causes;⁷ the plethora of methodologies or 'approaches' from which today's historian may choose;⁸ and last but not least, perhaps, the very controversies arising,⁹ seem merely to add to their enthusiasm for the problematic task. It is all grist to the professional mill!¹⁰

Meanwhile ... it may indeed be symptomatic of the mood of professional historiography that one of the seven new chapters inserted in D.G.E. Hall's monumental and indispensable history of South-East Asia between its first edition¹¹ and the fourth, entitled 'Monarchy and the State in South-East Asia',¹² goes no further than to describe Indianized monarchy as it was – its functions in ancient society, the statecraft of the *Arthashastra* (from Kautilya) – with no hint of any traces of those early forms in modern South-East Asia. Nor is there any reference anywhere to modern theorizing about the past, even in the mould of Weber (on leadership as a factor in transition between broad phases, or 'types', of rule), let alone the radical Wittfogel (on 'the hydraulic system', a refinement of

Marx's 'Asiatic Mode of Production' with the aim of explaining 'Oriental Despotism').¹³ Yet Hall does insist on the 'special character' of the area: that it should not be treated as a dependency of other areas, or its history as an extension of their history.¹⁴

Indeed, the reservations of historians regarding long-range causation have to be taken seriously. But again, as has been remarked, the 'invention' of national histories is big ideological business in modern South-East Asia. Even academics in South-East Asian universities have become involved. One feature of the process is the tacit assumption that the past is in a quite intimate sense the foundation of the present. Most functionally of all, national ideologues claim that values are transmitted, and that the best virtues of the past lie at the root of anything good that survives in the modern society. This is apparently a concept or doctrine of 'causation' as much as 'continuity'. We would surely be wrong to ignore it – but should keep our detachment and seek to generate some not totally irrational, less prescriptively charged, perspectives for the purpose of counterbalancing nationalist historiography. One would hope to draft a valid proposition or two in a political science idiom, concerning contemporary operative values – propositions based on observation of the present but which involve a probing of historical depths for possible origins, with no predisposition to say that the heritage of the past is necessarily 'good'. It might be possible to say that the special 'resonances' of certain values (and institutions) are due to their extended history, even if there were interruptions in more modern times. The concept of charisma is invariably stimulating.

However, one must beware of a certain definition of charisma which has a prestigious pedigree yet is fundamentally unproductive. And in trying to understand the prestige of power in the real world, one should adopt a spirit of scepticism towards the claims of modern South-East Asian ideologues that such prestige is either due to the transmitted values all being necessarily 'good' (as mentioned), or due to the fact that particular office-holders have inherited virtue from august ancestors genealogically (albeit with enhancement, no doubt, by the 'good values' aforesaid). Certainly this virtue is held to be distinct from any inherent, culturally defined and popularly perceived virtue ('merit' in the Thai Theravada context) of any persons exercising power.¹⁵ In other words, there is a place for a sociological analysis of the culture of power, as an antidote to the often ideological presentation of power.

Of course, to speak of 'culture' immediately establishes a sociological discourse. This alone may be off-putting to historians on account of the prevalence of 'models' – those artefacts of the sociologist's trade which (allegedly) provide him with pre-packaged conclusions.¹⁶ The odd thing, though, about the trade of 'Early History' (not to be confused with 'early trade') is the extent to which, in the absence of solid data, historians themselves deal in hypothetical models of political structure. This is what appears to emerge from one highly versatile review of changing and competing fashions in the field of 'Early Java' studies.¹⁷ It appears that some scholars have gone beyond hypothesis and adopted quite categorical convictions about the nature of early Javanese polities.¹⁸

1.3.2 *Towards a more focused framework*

At any rate, if historians are becoming more willing to construct models to guide their research and interpretation, it should not be necessary to apologize for the line of speculative construction which now follows. First of all, it is proposed to elicit a general framework for the linking of past and present from passages by an American doyen of Asian Studies, Lucien Pye.¹⁹ Although Pye tends to work at a level somewhat 'above' the more precise detail of his subject, there is no doubting the corresponding clarity, and hence the heuristic value, of his broad outlines. In the chapter headed 'South-East Asia: from God-kings to the power of personal connections', Pye has no hesitation in postulating the relevance of ancient ideas about power for the legitimacy of modern government, while also stressing the importance of colonial rule – not as a total break with the ancient past but as a bridge between the ancient and the modern, because of certain affinities with traditional political doctrine and structure.

As we focus now on the evolution of concepts of power in South-East Asia, our starting-point will be the heritage of a bifurcated image of authority: one part informed by the models of authority and power introduced by Western colonial rule, and the other rooted in the traditional cultures that have been kept alive by the vitality of religious beliefs in the region. The notions about the nature of power associated with most of the nationalist movements were, paradoxically, quite Westernized because their inspiration was the anticolonialism of the more Westernized elites. Yet the day-to-day politics of the post-independence period has seen a revival of the more traditional concepts of power ...²⁰

The problem [of understanding political power] was profoundly complex in South-East Asia because of the profusion of historic memories of what power should be. Power could be part of the cosmic order, could rest in God-kings who ruled essentially as theatre, or could be synonymous with status – thus leading to the general conclusion that power should never be applied to mundane matters. All of these ideas combined to make it far from clear to South-East Asians just what their governments should be doing.

In the colonial era these historic images of power had been incorporated with surprising ease into patterns of rule which were premised upon the legitimacy of rulers and subjects as parts of the natural order though with completely separate ways of life. Western colonial rule had generally meant little direct governmental involvement in people's daily lives, especially in Indonesia and the unfederated Malay states, where indirect rule was practised, allowing traditional sultans and local potentates to preserve their prerogatives ... [despite extensive economic changes] colonial authority, with its stress on law and order and on constitutional development, reinforced images of power as status, not of power as utility.²¹

Paradoxically, in spite of their unpopularity, colonial officials could seem well attuned to traditional concepts of power as they manifested the fearful wrath associated with the personalized power of their predecessors, or implemented strict regulations which could seem not unlike the sumptuary laws of ancient South-East Asian kings. Colonial rule also reinforced the idea that power should be hierarchically arranged and that order required avoidance of competition among contenders. Power was also a monopoly of a distinct elite, born to rule, not diffused in society.

Despite such similarities, however, some more fundamental questions remained unresolved by Independence: what should be the basis of legitimacy, and the objectives, of the new governments? Two contradictory approaches emerged: there were either attempts to humanize the idea of power by identifying it with the father figures of Independence and their 'charismatic' appeal; or there were attempts to work from or through the impersonal institutionalization of hierarchies, typically colonially created bureaucracies, but also armies and in some cases the political parties. However, bureaucracies came to stand for immobilism, maintaining hierarchical power by sheer inaction. As it happens, the concepts of power associated with both approaches already had a place in local cultural traditions.²² Yet in this situation of compatibility with traditional concepts, and some degree of complementarity between the two new ones, these two leadership types constituted a dual block to the requirements of economic development and modernity generally, such as a core of governmental authority with strong executive power and the capacity for flexibility in response to changing needs.²³

Although working at the very highest level of generalization about the differential capacity for development of given South-East Asian societies (e.g. Thailand, Burma),²⁴ at least Pye relates modern political performance to the effects of historic political structures and political culture. This seems better than the approach from childhood socialization seen elsewhere in his book.²⁵ Even if the latter is taken to refer to just one of the mechanisms of transmission of authoritarian values (which could be valuable if it were spelt out as an explicit theory of transmission), one might still wish to see the major emphasis placed on historic structures as the primary source of political values, and on continuity of structures as a major factor in (though not a necessary condition of) transmission of such values to the modern era, where they have emerged from latency to be exploited as a basis of legitimacy by more modern types of government. (In Chapter 4 Pye is clear about the source, and one can read about the political mechanisms of transmission between the lines of his passages on how colonial rule avoided any complete break with the past.) One might add that folktale and chronicle, many kinds of ritual object including sacred statuary, and the whole of politico-religious architecture, also seem likely vehicles of transmission. In Thailand there is scarcely a historian who disputes the importance of the bureaucracy as a repository and conveyor of values of patrimonialism, hierarchy and monarchism.²⁶ Similar importance is attached to the Buddhist Sangha through its own distinctive organization and doctrines. Language itself is both a reflection and a reinforcer of past patterns of behaviour, partly through the use

of status-loaded pronouns and terms of address (which are redolent of a social hierarchy with an implied pinnacle), partly through prescription-loaded concepts of order and disorder (which resound with the same resonances).²⁷ The present writer would only enter a reminder, once again, of the importance of continuity of monarchy itself: it would be naïve if not narcissistic to allow a fascination with ‘culture’ to distract one’s attention from the real, concrete continuities attributable to colonial Indirect Rule in the Malay Peninsula, Brunei, Cambodia and (as far as it went) Laos, or to the imperialist indulgence enjoyed by Siamese monarchy in return for the economic and diplomatic amenability of the State. Note that such continuity of structures goes beyond the mere affinities between ancient South-East Asian structures and modern-era colonial structures (even if divorced from monarchy), which Pye invokes. Not least among the significant features of Indirect Rule were the preservation of regalia and ritual, as well as the ‘legitimized centre’. These assets of monarchy were then consolidated by monarchs themselves as they took over the reins of power at, or just before, Independence (Cambodia, Brunei); or by political elites who saw advantages for their own legitimacy in a pact with monarchy (Malaysia, Laos, Thailand). Monarchs came to symbolize, if not personify, the potentially less tangible ‘nation–state’, and later benefited, in turn, from its consolidation.

In order to make the durable influence of much older political structures more vivid by referring again to the persistence of relevant values, separately from the structures themselves, we could turn to Pye’s observation about the vitality of religion in the region.²⁸ When he refers to ‘religion’ he partly has in mind the resilience of religious beliefs acting as a block to modernization in some ways, and competing with secular nationalism, or becoming an issue dividing communities of differing religion. But he also clearly conceives ‘religion’ in a far broader sense, as a cultural complex enshrining traditional concepts of power: an ideological system in which kings were viewed as possessing divine or semi-divine attributes, being if not ‘participants’ in godship then at least conduits of cosmic power or counterparts on earth to the lords of heaven. In general support of this conception of religion as a cultural system – with axiomatic implications for the transmission of beliefs about power down to present-day societies, even if they are not spelt out – we could also summon the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, with his definition of religion as:

(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.²⁹

1.3.3 Charisma and the legacy of the past

The moment is ripe to address the concept of charisma more self-consciously. Despite its own quite ‘other-worldly’ connotations, it may help us towards a

slightly firmer comprehension and more focused conception of the dynamics of ancient rule, and, not unconnectedly, of the resilience of the accompanying values across many centuries down to the present. It has been a highly controversial concept, but with more careful definition it may proffer some value.³⁰

In brief essence, the definition that is proposed comprises an 'innate transcendence', found not only – indeed not typically – in the deviant leadership type identified by Max Weber, but also in institutions and leadership defined by him as 'traditional' and even those defined as 'legal-rational'. Certain objects and actions which have symbolic meaning in their local context may be even more infused with this quality, as perceived by significant strata of a population. (As political science would have it, the cognitive and evaluative components of their 'political culture' are here engaged.) Such a 'religious quality' or 'divine status' in an office or institution, if we can plausibly identify it, may lead us to predict its resilience (or the persistence of the once associated values, at least), and help us towards a partial explanation of continuity or revival where these occur. This applies to kingship more than anything else that one can imagine, and hardly at all to revolutionary leaders. For those who see only their own present-day religion, or the great religions, as 'religion', and anything less organized or more ancient as mere 'cults' or 'superstition', the term 'magical' will probably express more comfortably what we are talking about. But labels are not important. What is important is to capture a sense of the vibrant aura of power in contemporary South-East Asia, especially power with specifically traditional, cosmic connotations.

Now all power has a self-fulfilling aura, but logically, monarchical power itself is likely to be more apt for such fulfilment or confirmation, and thus to have somewhat superior survival chances over other political forms, once it has survived down to the present. In this connection, colonial Indirect Rule constitutes the most proximate cause of continuity, but at the same time ancient events and values are relevant to the strength of monarchy where it survives, having already influenced the colonial powers to let monarchy survive in their day. Also relevant will be the opportunity to demonstrate moral excellence where a monarchy is given explicit custodianship of religion.

Of course, we must allow that some monarchies have the added advantage of giving symbiotic support to, and being upheld by, a more modern type of regime in which the concrete exercise of power is concentrated. Thus in a literal sense the monarchy may fulfil its traditional ceremonial function without possessing much of the practical power which it may once have had: other forces may be the greater beneficiaries. (It is like Indirect Rule all over again.) But whatever the balance of advantage, as between monarchs and power-holders who work within or behind a panoply of monarchy, everywhere the preponderant and most invoked strand in the heritage is the magical charisma of the regalia, if surviving, or otherwise the memories of royal divinity or semi-divinity which recommend themselves as props for the authority of modern States. This is not necessarily the same as reviving 'despotism'. But one feature of the ancient

politics that will almost certainly not re-emerge is 'devolution' or 'diffusion' of power in a territorial sense.³¹

Yet it remains that as soon as we try to invoke charisma in some sort of 'historical explanation' – even if we handle the concept in a revisionist, non-Weberian (in fact, pre-Weberian) way so as to link it to ancient State-forms – we come up against the objection of orthodox historians that to postulate such 'living links' between present and past is effectively meaningless. Moreover, apart from such a 'matter of principle' for a prestigious discipline, a political scientist could add from his own disciplinary corner the practical problem that the 'legacy of the past' may be obscured and overlaid by its self-conscious re-invention as an 'asset of the nation' (read: 'of the leader'?). All such 'creative' leaders or their intellectual hacks are as greatly aided by the scarcity of good evidence as academic researchers are thereby hindered. And while the academics wait for their breakthrough, the nationalist ideologues proceed to implant their myths ever more deeply in the nation's consciousness. The idea of 'living links' is thus even more deeply compromised, for it is a modern consciousness that is creating them – not a social-science consciousness but a bureaucratic goal-oriented consciousness! Can there be any question of calling this 'historical causation'? It is a case of invocation of the past – and very likely an 'invented' past in some degree – for present political purposes. Clearly, even the promise to emulate a plausibly provable 'heritage' is itself part of a process of building up consciousness of that past, and hence a branch of the activity of 'invention', not a case of a present spontaneously moulded by past values and precedents. In countries where talk of 'national heritage' merges with the diffuse discourse of 'Asian values', indifference to the need for historical proof is even more conspicuous.

Nonetheless and at the same time, it is still tempting to say that the 'availability', for political exploitation, of certain traditional values and symbolic objects, whatever the form of their transmission, bespeaks a significant 'impact' of the past. The cultural values have to exist at some level in order for the leader to be prompted to affect to emulate them. The symbols of a monarchical tradition have to hold some place in the national consciousness in order to be mobilized as a focus of national identity. Thus, in a highly attenuated sense, past events, through the intermediary of transmitted culture, surviving symbol, and even opportunistic revivalism, may be said to have some 'causative' relationship to new events in the present. Indeed, in countries which still have a monarchy, the institution itself serves as a vehicle for transmission or 'recollection', even if monarchical power is no longer substantive but only symbolic. Here, the connection is much less attenuated. Paradoxically, this is demonstrated most convincingly in situations where a non-royal leader develops neo-monarchical pretensions alongside an existing king. While there is a potential for non-royal leaders to benefit from genuine cultural memory or popular 'recollections' of the past in building their own power, they do so at the risk of being challenged by the monarch, who sees his 'rightful position' – as also 'recollected' by himself – as being usurped. If we would believe Thai progressive intellectuals, the heritage of patrimonial values is so deeply embedded in bureaucratic and popular culture

that it would uphold authoritarian government even without being actively revived. What is most unique about the Thai case, though, is the fact that the heritage supports monarchy specifically as well as authoritarianism more diffusely, and this has created a need for bureaucratic and military interests to 'capture' the monarchy, under pretence of protecting it from its 'enemies' but in fact in order to forestall a competitive challenge from that quarter.

In fact, all 'recollection' is probably more or less selective, reflecting the political interest of the individual or group contemplating the past. Thus, a leader who comes to power by military putsch may 'discover' constitutionalist tendencies in the national monarchical tradition; and a constitutional monarch may discover the same but try to revive some of his prerogatives within that framework, as a means of limiting the encroachment of non-royal power, recalling that his ancestors were committed to the people's welfare as part of the duties laid upon them by the *dharma* (Thailand illustrates both possibilities). Or again, even an absolute monarch who does not have to submit to a constitution may 'discover' that his remote predecessors sealed 'contracts' with their subjects to rule them justly, and were bound by the commands of Allah to uphold morality in governance – at least the morality comprised in the protection and advancement of Islam itself, which includes caring for the social and economic well-being of the faithful (here one thinks of Brunei). These moral themes from the past may provide a valuable enhancement to 'magical' charisma, or a partial alternative to it in attracting citizens who have been touched by modern ideas, including modernist or reformist ideas in religion and the idea of 'the nation-state'.

'Magic' or 'moral', the legacy of the past is available to be manipulated. And such manipulation may be seen as a distinct feature of modern politics. At the same time, readers have been invited by this theoretical excursion to also see the past as a 'dynamic', if not quite strictly 'causal', factor in its own right, mainly on account of the mystical or magical aura of South-East Asian kingship of yore, and yielding benefit more especially to today's monarchs than to other power-holders. Whatever the proximate causes of their survival until now, monarchies can draw advantage from the fact that the cultural ambience that is available to foster their continuance into the future was generated historically by forerunner institutions of the same name (though not entirely of the same content) and by individuals who in some cases are the actual ancestors of the present incumbents of thrones. Axiomatically, the office of King provides the ideal institutional environment in which to practise the 'royal virtues' which history has both led people to expect and left them yearning for.³²

Part II

Modern history

2 The colonial era

Varieties of Indirect Rule

It is a matter of definition that any monarchy surviving under Western colonial rule will have been an example of ‘Indirect Rule’. That is, the Western colonial power had seen the advantage of operating behind a façade of traditional legitimacy, rather than exposing the radical new reality of administration to the gaze of the masses, or indeed removing the cornerstone of social cohesion and stability. The British learned too late – but not at any great interval – the folly of abolishing the Burmese monarchy, when the Buddhist monkhood, deprived of its supreme authority, became a hotbed of unrest and political subversion.

2.1 French Indochina: Laos and Cambodia

In Indochina, however, the French had been more circumspect. After annexing Cochin China to their direct rule in two operations (1863, 1866), they claimed to be the heirs of the Hué court’s right to tribute from Cambodia. In the event, there was more resistance to this usurpation of entitlement in Siam, which also regarded Cambodia as its vassal. At any rate, French power and determination prevailed, and King Norodom yielded to French Protectorate status in 1864. Annam and Tonkin were absorbed under rather direct forms of Indirect Rule between the years 1874–84. This has to be mentioned, even though Vietnam is outside the scope of the study, since control of Vietnam then made it easier for France to assert a claim to Laos ‘on behalf of Vietnam’, which had a plausible claim of suzerainty from times past although nothing as convincing as Siam’s. A potent mixture of legal invention, military force and imperial determination duly brought Laos under French control in 1893. This was during a monarchical interregnum at Luang Prabang, as it happens, but the French opted to rule behind a façade of monarchy, as in Cambodia. A similar fate could well have visited Siam, but for British determination to draw the line against French expansion at the Mekong, leaving Siam as an independent buffer state between the British and French empires of the East.¹ But in the hypothetical case of Siam being absorbed into the French empire, it is even more unlikely that King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) himself would have consented to stay on the throne as a puppet: the French would probably have had to seek a replacement.²

It was certainly a feature, indeed precondition, of Indirect Rule in all countries, that the incumbent of the throne should be amenable to colonial imperatives – be, in other words, of mild and malleable disposition, or reputedly ‘pro-Western’ in the light of education and lifestyle. The French, strikingly more than the British, took an active part in selecting candidates for the job (the British, attached to primogeniture, tended to wait until trouble occurred, and then threatened deposition). In Laos, after the death of King Zakharine (1894–1904) the French seriously debated whether to retain the monarchy³ but did opt for doing so, and chose the late King’s young son, Prince Sisavang Vong, a student in Paris at the time, in preference to an elder son. They also passed over the ‘Second King’ or Viceroy, Boun Khong (who had much more experience of government, as this office had by tradition been less ceremonial than that of the king), but they retained this institution within the structure of monarchy.⁴

Although the monarchy would play quite a key role in events after World War II (Sisavang Vong reigned 1904–59), for the long-term future of Laos the retention of monarchy at the beginning of the twentieth century was not as significant as the fact that the centre of gravity of the French Indochinese empire was in Vietnam. The expansionist ambitions of Vietnam were encouraged, Cambodian and Laotian interests subordinated. Siam thus found itself facing a European incarnation of the ancient Vietnamese enemy, based across the Mekong in territory which was formerly subject to Siam or at least a buffer zone.⁵ But in the end it was to be Vietnamese Communism, through the Indochina Communist Party and its national branches, that most of all benefited from the assimilation of the three states of Indochina under a single European aegis. However, in that process, as suggested in Chapter 1, the Pathet Lao would find it politically prudent to pay lip service to the monarchy which Indirect Rule had preserved.

In Cambodia, meanwhile, King Norodom I (1859–1904) had only accepted French suzerainty in 1864, and that was all that Siam formally transferred to France in 1867. In compensation, France had renounced to Siam all Cambodian claims on the provinces of Battambang and Siemreap.⁶ It was not until 1884 that Cambodia came seriously under French rule, by a Convention which allowed the King to retain his court ceremonies but transferred the real government to the *Résident Supérieur* (of Cambodia), who could ignore the assembly of the King’s ministers. In each province a French *Résident* was appointed to supervise the native administration. The immediate result of this usurpation of powers by the French, coming after some previous attrition of tax powers,⁷ was a royalist revolt, 1885–86. The King was not an overt accomplice and the deposition of such an august figure would anyway have dragged the French into a much more disastrous war. But as it was clear from these events that the charisma of the king could be a force for disruption of the French administration if the French played their cards badly, French administrators began to take questions of succession to the Cambodian throne very seriously indeed.⁸ The importance of finding a pliable heir increased when, in the 1930s, a nationalist clique began to put a ‘nationalist’ gloss on Norodom I’s role in

retrospect. Not that the 18-year-old Prince Norodom Sihanouk disagreed with that assessment of his great-grandfather, at the time when a vacancy for the throne arose in 1941.⁹ But to the *Gouverneur-Général* of Indochina, Admiral Decoux, Sihanouk seemed ideally suited because of his sweet nature and good manners. Madame Decoux found him quite a darling, too, and supported her husband's view.¹⁰ Besides, as a mere secondary school student at that time, he could hardly be seen as a likely 'troublemaker'. This was one vital consideration in the difficult circumstances of the Vichy State, which was only exercising its power in France under Hitler's sanction and its power in Indochina with the indulgence of the Japanese.¹¹

The transformation of Sihanouk into one of the twentieth-century's best-known nationalist leaders after World War II is a more than ironic twist to this story of manipulative Indirect Rule. That story will be continued in Chapter 3. For the moment, French dynastic policy between the death of Norodom I in 1904 and the appointment of Norodom II (Sihanouk) in 1941 is of intriguing interest in its own right and merits a few words of summary, which are made possible by the work of a leading Australian scholar.¹² If irony is a stimulating theme, one will be attracted by the fact that the French in 1904 passed over the sons of Norodom in favour of his half-brother Sisowath (1904–27) – at the age of 64. Not only did the quite advanced age of the new incumbent make planning for the *next* reign immediately pressing, but the French had effectively created a parallel and rival dynasty to the Norodoms – and thus a new factor for instability, though without detracting from the existing priority of malleability! None of the sons of Sisowath seemed suitable to the French, but some at least of Norodom's were believed to be anti-French.¹³ After years of discussion, when Sisowath eventually died, the French did opt for the eldest surviving son of Sisowath, Monivong (1927–41). But in 1941 a significant consideration in favour of Sihanouk, apart from his perceived or predicted malleability, was very probably that his appointment could remove the factor of dynastic rivalry from the Cambodian scene, for his mother (Kossamak) was a grand-daughter of Sisowath, as his father (Suramarit) was a grandson of Norodom.¹⁴

2.2 British Protected States: the Malay Peninsula and Brunei

Ignoring tentative actions further back, we may say that the origins of the British empire in South-East Asia lie in the acquisition of the island of Penang from the Sultan of Kedah in 1786, the taking of Malacca into 'safe keeping' for (or from) the Dutch in 1798 (during the Napoleonic Wars – temporarily at first), and the purchase of Singapore by Stamford Raffles from a Sultan of Johor (one whose title was not entirely undisputed!) in 1819. After the Treaty of London in 1824, whereby the Dutch recognized the area north of the Strait of Malacca as a British sphere of influence, these three 'Straits Settlements' acted, willy-nilly, as centres for the economic penetration of the Malay States by British and Chinese capital – and hordes of Chinese tin miners. Cumulative disorder finally led to

British intervention in the Malay States, starting with Perak in 1874. Thus began the British 'Residential System', whereby the Sultans agreed to 'accept advice' in all matters except Malay custom and Muslim religion.¹⁵

There was a rebellion in Perak in 1875, attributable either to the undiplomatic reforming zeal of the first British Resident, or the sheer incomprehension of Sultan Abdullah and the aristocracy as to what they had signed away. The Resident, Birch, was assassinated. The Sultan, found guilty of complicity, was deposed, exiled, and replaced by his principal rival. There was a more extended rebellion in Pahang after a Resident was accepted in 1888, but the Sultan himself was not compromised. Selangor and Negri Sembilan proved easier to manage. All four Malay States were brought together in a centralizing Federation in 1896, partly with the rationale of using some of the wealth of Perak and Selangor to help the development of Negri Sembilan and Pahang, partly with the promise that the Sultans would be given more say at the federal level than they had enjoyed in local administration *vis-à-vis* the individual British Residents in the first twenty years.

However, it was not to be, and royal complaints revived. Owing to the bad reputation of this Kuala Lumpur-centred Federation of Malay States (FMS) from the point of view of Malay royal prerogative and aristocratic power, the British could only attract the remaining Malay States (Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Trengganu, Johor) into association on the basis of non-federal arrangements, involving a British 'Adviser' (not 'Resident'). These officers communicated with the Colonial Office through the High Commissioner in Singapore, not through the Resident General (soon renamed Chief Secretary) at Kuala Lumpur. This less coordinated 'system', known as the 'Unfederated Malay States' (UFMS), approximated more closely to an ideal model of Indirect Rule for the ruled. Johor, especially, became a focus of envy and aspiration for Malays in the Federated Malay States as political consciousness developed between the World Wars.¹⁶

Still, the British had made several vital contributions to the viability of Malay monarchy all over the Malay Peninsula: its authority in Malay society within each individual State was strengthened and consolidated by the regularization of succession in a single line, and by recognition of the Sultan's authority, untrammelled by Residential interference, in the twin spheres of Malay custom and Muslim religion. Moreover, in the context of a zone of mass Chinese immigration, British recognition of the sovereignty of the Sultans turned them into living symbols of the status of all Malays as the true 'sons of the soil'. But at the elite level the position of the aristocratic elites was consolidated by a system of preferential education, designed to prepare the sons of royalty and minor royalty for positions in the bureaucracy. With this monopoly, more or less, of modern education (among their race, but not in relation to the developing 'plural society' of multiracial Malaya) the upper-class elites were in a position, in the Malaya of the 1930s, to take a tentative part in fashioning and focusing Malay political consciousness through Malay Associations. This was not the only expression of Malay political consciousness, to be sure, but it was a significant

one.¹⁷ The combination of upper-class leadership in the guise of administrators as well as spokesmen for Malay interests, with a monarchical prestige that was tangibly intact into the 1940s, goes some way towards explaining the form which political development took in Malaya after World War II. But this 'British legacy' also included, let us be clear, the existence of no less than nine thrones: hardly a basis for a centralized monarchy with serious political power, even if democracy had turned out to be unworkable immediately after Malaya's Independence in 1957.¹⁸

The history of Brunei in the same period shows superficial similarities with the States of the Peninsula, but also significant differences. The Bruneian polity was both less, and more, centralized than its peninsular counterparts. The tributary provinces along the coast of northern Borneo, on the river systems to east (today's Sabah) and west (today's Sarawak), were further flung than the coastal or upriver chiefdoms of the peninsular States, and thus able to exist with a greater degree of autonomy. On the other hand, they were not ruled by independent lines of local royalty, but typically by Brunei aristocrats armed with administrative powers and tax rights granted under royal seal, with of course an obligation to forward a proportion of the revenue back to the Sultan. However, the fatal or near-fatal weakness of the Brunei imperium in the nineteenth century was that these appointees could be tempted into selling these tax rights (and, in effect, administrative power), to European adventurers and speculators. Indeed, as the revenue flow back to Brunei decreased, it proved ever easier to obtain the requisite confirmation of a transfer from the Sultan himself. This would be done by means of a consideration which, in the short term, improved the royal revenues above the level to which the personal needs of Bruneian satraps had already depressed them.

This is no doubt a slightly sweeping way of characterizing six decades of complex Brunei history, from the first foothold of James Brooke, founder of the 'White Rajah' dynasty of Sarawak, at Kuching in 1841, to the intervention of the British Government to save what remained of Brunei in 1905–6. But several cases of the 'syndrome' could be cited. One of the most significant, because it touches on the problem of Sarawak and simultaneously the future of Sabah, is the concession of effectively the whole of Sabah to an Austrian–British partnership (Baron von Overbeck and Alfred Dent) in 1877. The Sultanate was in worsening financial straits since the constantly expanding domain of Sarawak had absorbed *de facto* the huge territory of the Baram in and after 1870.¹⁹ But the Sultanate could not negotiate a cession payment for that territory since under an 1847 Treaty with Britain Brunei could not actually cede territory to any interest other than the British Government, except with Britain's permission, and the British Governor of Labuan-cum-Commissioner to the Sultan was using his influence to block further Sarawak expansion. This gave rise to the urgent need to generate cash by ceding Sabah to the Overbeck–Dent partnership, for an annual payment of \$12,000 to the Sultan and \$3,000 to the existing Bruneian title-holder, Temenggong Hashim. This transfer did not meet opposition in London, which had a developing strategic interest in seeing the Sabah region

under some form of British presence. However, after the British Government had granted a Charter to Dent's British North Borneo Company in 1881, it sanctioned the transfer of the Baram to the Brookes in 1882, on the principle of even-handedness (now, pressure had to be put on the Sultan to agree), for \$3,000 p.a. to the Sultan and \$2,000 p.a. to the Temenggong.²⁰

Brunei's decline can in fact be traced back to internal political divisions, and the rise of the powerful Sultanate of Sulu (in the southern Philippine archipelago), in the seventeenth century. It is interesting that Brunei's rights over Sabah, which Sultan Abdul Momin and Temenggong Hashim 'cashed in' in 1877, were also claimed by the Sultanate of Sulu, which up to that point had not yet been brought under Spanish control. Overbeck therefore took the precaution of purchasing sovereignty from the Sultan of Sulu as well, for an annual payment of \$5,000! At any rate, from this moment onward slow attrition turned to landslide as pressures on Brunei mounted on all sides. After the Temenggong succeeded to Momin as Sultan in 1885,²¹ he became a stout defender of what little was left of Brunei's 'estate'. He tried briefly to cling on to the Trusan, on the east side of Temburong, and never recognized Sarawak's annexation of the Limbang, immediately to the east of Brunei Town but west of Temburong, which took place in 1890. But ironically it was he who, in his capacity as Temenggong, had apparently transferred both territories to Charles Brooke shortly before the death of Sultan Momin. Another bitter irony lay in the fact that a Protectorate Agreement with Britain in 1888 worked *against* Brunei's interests because it handed over control of Brunei's external relations – including relations with hegemonistic Sarawak and North Borneo (i.e. Sabah, newly under Company rule) – and the British interpreted this power to mean that Sarawak's claim to the Limbang should be handled and adjudged by the British alone, denying Brunei any say in this matter of 'external relations'.²²

Finally Britain took a less cynical view of its obligations to Brunei, and established a Residency, under a 'Supplementary Agreement' to the 1888 Protectorate Agreement. This marked the fulfilment, in the last year of his life, of Sultan Hashim's diplomacy on behalf of dynasty (the throne was guaranteed to his heirs) and state. For the territory, the intervention came not a moment too soon, for there were only four small districts left, one of these (the capital district itself) already partly penetrated by and alienated to Charles Brooke, and another (Temburong) cut off from the capital district by the great wedge of the Limbang (Sarawak thus did not merely surround Brunei but divided it into two parts). The new administrative system was declared to be 'similar' to that existing in the other Malay States under British Protection.

Similar it certainly was, but not quite the same. Instead of Malay custom as well as Muslim religion being reserved to the authority of the Sultan, the first Resident, McArthur, insisted that he should have full authority over 'Malay custom' so that he could dismantle the traditional structure of aristocratic control of territorial tax rights, which had amounted to a delegated sovereignty, alienable to third parties. Comparing McArthur's arrangement with the two variations of Residential System on the Peninsula, it is difficult to conclude

otherwise than that Brunei had come under a more direct form of 'Indirect Rule' than the UFMS, though, all things considered, not perhaps as direct as the FMS. This is no mere nuance of historical interpretation, since the ideologues of the Brunei dynasty today set special store by the claim that Brunei was never under any kind of 'British rule' at all, merely 'protected', and thus did not need to seize an 'Independence' which had never been lost in the first place. This is demonstrated by reference to the fact that the Sultan never surrendered 'sovereignty' to the British. But it is not admitted, let alone pointed out in official communication, that the Sultans of the Malay Peninsula did not surrender sovereignty either. That is precisely the point about Indirect Rule – which is surely a variety of colonialism, nonetheless.²³

Admittedly, the establishment of the Federation of Malaya, 1948, to which all the Peninsular States adhered (including the former UFMS), represented at least a 'pooling' of sovereignty. But the Sultans remained supreme in matters of religion and have exercised considerable patronage within each domain as 'Heads of State'. The main erosion of Malay States' sovereignty has been effected by the powerful, centralizing and democratically-based nation-state of 'Federation of Malaya', latterly 'Federation of Malaysia'. And to an important degree it is because such democratic development was frustrated in Brunei that the modern Sultanate is moved to claim continuity from the pre-colonial past. It is not so much the uninterrupted sovereignty of a territorial entity *vis-à-vis* foreign encroachment that is being exalted, as the continuity of the sovereignty of the *monarchy vis-à-vis* rivals for power within the territory itself. (This is why 'Independence' was thought redundant or dangerous.) Correspondingly, the Sultanate wishes *negara*, in Brunei, to be understood fundamentally in terms of its traditional meaning, 'the monarchical State', not 'nation-state'. To these important ends some historiographical licence has been practised here and there. But yet another point germane to the understanding of present-day Brunei, whatever its ideologues may say, is that it was precisely the colonial intervention behind a façade of monarchy that enabled the dynasty to consolidate itself behind its façade of British bureaucracy and unfragmented power over the revenues, the better to be able to inherit the mantle of British power some eighty years after the Supplementary Agreement. Indirect Rule need not be functional exclusively for the colonial power.

Official, or officially sponsored, historiography in Brunei accuses the British of neglecting the economic and social development of Brunei between the World Wars, even though the Resident reputedly 'usurped' supreme power without legal authority. The second type of accusation either bases itself on the word 'advice' in the Supplementary Agreement, disingenuously ignoring the well-known 'binding' nature of 'advice' in the Anglo-Malay Treaties of the Peninsula, and the fact that in the Brunei Agreement itself the Sultan's obligation to accept the advice is clearly stated; or it deliberately overlooks the fact that the Resident was only excluded from 'giving advice' in the area of Muslim religion.²⁴ On the point of sluggish economic and social development, it would be fair to the memory of early British administrators to say that up to

1906 Brunei had remained substantially untouched by the economic changes which had swept the Malay States of West Malaya long before 1874; indeed, Brunei was not only a 'backwater' but a State in the grip of terminal economic decline, which had been suffering a drastic haemorrhage of population on the eve of British administration. An important factor in the flight was the depredations of an extravagant upper class on a population and economy no longer large enough to support it.²⁵ Financially, the state budget in the early years of the Residency was burdened by the need to redeem the aristocratic revenue rights (in order to avoid unrest or revolt in 'influential quarters'), and indeed it was not until the late 1930s that the discovery and production of oil enabled the state to pay off the loan from the FMS without which no modern administration and system of revenue collection could have been created in the first place. In terms of any hopes of rapid educational development, the social foundation was uncondusive, to say the least, even had the revenues been buoyant. Nevertheless, historians of modern Brunei may like to reflect on the fact that the Residency started sending Bruneian trainee teachers to the Training College in Perak (Tanjong Malim) as early as 1929, a mere seven years after its foundation in 1922 and twenty-three years after Brunei's Supplementary Agreement of 1906; whereas peninsular Malays had had to wait forty-eight years from the Pangkor Engagement of 1874 until they got their Training College.²⁶

As it happens, a significant obstacle to educational development was a lack of commitment, if not a positive antipathy, at the pinnacle. After the youthful Sultan Muhammad Jamalul Alam II (1906–24) had been weaned from the influence of his conservative (and hence anti-British) uncles and had developed into a 'model ruler' from the British point of view, his premature death was viewed with considerable dismay. A regency followed, during the minority of Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin (1924–50). By the time this young Sultan acceded to his powers in 1931, he had been blocked from travelling to England for an education, by his mother, and resistance was mounted to the Residency's wish that the Sultan's younger brother, Omar, should receive a modern education in Malaya. In 1934 there was a further crisis, involving a British threat of deposition, over whether Omar should be allowed to continue. On this occasion it would appear that the Sultan himself, not only the dowager, was blocking the move. Both could see that a cosmopolitan young prince, returning from a few years abroad, could prove to be very independent of their authority, if not a rival for it.²⁷

Paradoxically, the British aspiration to work with rulers who could understand and share their administrative perspectives after experiencing a few years of English education was realized all too well in Brunei. The uneducated and dissolute Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin died from a disease attributed to his rampant alcoholism. Following the re-establishment of British administration after World War II he had spent increasing periods of time at a private residence in Kuching, leaving administration to the Resident and his brother, the Bendahara Omar. This proved an invaluable induction into the ins-and-outs of administration for

the younger brother – who in any case was a government official, specializing in forestry matters. British Resident Prettie groaned whenever the Sultan returned to Brunei and put in an appearance at the State Council, but rejoiced when the lucid and positive Omar was standing in for him.²⁸ However, after his own accession and coronation, Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin III (1950–67) quickly developed, or revealed, an agenda for royal leadership which brought him into conflict with the now more ‘progressive’, constitutionalist plans of the British for their protectorates and colonies. It was, not least, his exposure to British education and British principles of administration and statecraft that made him more than a match for his British mentors.²⁹ A certain parallel with Cambodia is discernible.

2.3 Siam (Thailand)

We turn finally to Siam, a country never colonized by any other state, and unique in South-East Asia in this regard. Yet, apart from the virtually vassal status of Thailand (thus renamed since 1939) under its Japanese ‘allies’ in World War II, the requirement of legal reforms, the reorganization and guidance of ministries by European or American advisers, and decision-making about Siam’s territorial extent in European capitals as a matter of inter-imperialist diplomacy, bespoke a highly ‘responsive’ if not compromised independence. It has been suggested that in politico-economic terms the more valid historical parallels are between Siam and the indirectly ruled principalities of South-East Asia than with the emergent independent states after World War II, such as Indonesia.³⁰ The preservation of monarchy, even after the rise of a nationalist government, is one telling feature.³¹ We could add that even the apparent ‘balance’ between rival foreign interests in the overall scenario, which the Thais were proud of maintaining, belies the dominant influence of one colonial power, Britain, exercised behind a screen of not-always-effective ‘solicitude’ for Siam’s survival and well-being.

No doubt, the ‘penetration’ of Siam by Western influence and interest was an essential precondition of immunity from outright colonization. The Chakri dynasty was founded in 1782 – and by early 2000 AD looks back on eight completed reigns, the present one being the ninth.³² The first Chakri (1782–1809) was a national hero in war who turned his genius to legal codification and administrative reorganization in peace. The dynasty thus saw itself as progressive and reformist from the start. However, the third monarch in the line (1824–51) was slow to conceptualize the dangers posed by British demands for trading access, following the development of the Straits Settlements, if those demands were refused. Siam was thus highly fortunate in the succession of ‘King Mongkut’ or Rama IV (1851–68).³³ He was already a man of mature years and great depth of education, by virtue of his previous career as a monk, and astute enough to admit the British to trading rights and begin the process of modernizing law and administration, in 1855, which Western interests so typically demanded. The point is, not that the British behaved untypically, as an

imperialist power, in putting these preliminary demands, but that the King was untrue to South-East Asian form in acceding to them. He thereby forestalled the more typical progression from Western commercial demands to political annexation, which was already gnawing at Burma and far advanced in China, as but two examples.³⁴ But there was substantial, explicit derogation from native sovereignty in the institution of 'extra-territorial rights': the right of Western powers to try their own nationals in consular courts if anyone was accused of a crime in Siam. This aspect alone may give reason to apply the epithet 'under Indirect Rule' to Siam, a country that was never 'formally' colonized.³⁵

Some fascinating documents of the turn of the twentieth century, illustrating the phenomena of integration into world markets and the dominant position of British investment in Siam, have been collected and republished by two Thai academic specialists in political economy.³⁶ Their Introduction does not use the term 'Indirect Rule' as such, but emphasizes (a) the colonial-type 3 per cent ceiling for import duties, favouring European manufactures; (b) the role of Siam as provider of rice and other commodities to the developing colonial territories of the region, even though not a colony itself – a role which was superficially beneficial to Siam but did not result in the rise of an autonomous bourgeoisie, because (c) by virtue of non-colonization, land ownership, control of labour, and tax revenue remained concentrated in the Crown, with negative effects for surplus accumulation. However, one is struck by the way this emphasis on an unchanging structure is contradicted by another Thai scholar, who points out that the Fifth Reign saw a substitution of the old patrimonial political economy, inherited from Ayut'ia, by at least the beginnings of a modern centralized revenue system which benefited the King as opposed to the aristocracy.³⁷ This was fundamentally novel.³⁸

It must be instructive in some way that Thai scholars concerned to reform the archaic residues in the contemporary system, and hoping to do so with the help of an analysis of historical origins, could be distracted from the perhaps most crucial feature of late nineteenth-century change by a fixation on broad 'formations', an intellectual borrowing from the West. Moreover, if we examine the origins of nationalism, it is rather conspicuous that economic 'dependency' – or whatever one may call it – was not a stimulus to nationalism or political unrest while Siam continued to develop and prosper. It was loss of territory, and in due course the extreme concentration of power in the hands of the King as a result of administrative modernization, that were far more clearly understood and keenly felt.

On the international side, King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910) famously or reputedly 'preserved the country's independence' in face of the aggressive imperialism of France. But by the end of his reign the Thai realm had shrunk considerably. The Shan States of northern Burma, of slightly ambiguous inter-zonal status, came definitively under British (Government of India) control by virtue of the annexation of Upper Burma in 1886.³⁹ The whole of Laos east of the Mekong was lost to France in 1893, as we have seen, with British indulgence. By negotiation, two west-bank provinces of Laos were prudently handed to

France in 1904, the two western provinces of Cambodia in 1907; and four Malay vassal states were transferred to British protection in 1909. Clearly, there are two possible ways of looking at this record. The cult of *Phra' Cunlacôôm Klaww*, observed each 23rd October at the Equestrian Statue in Bangkok, resounds convincingly to the greatness of 'the Fifth Reign'. Yet the sense that the monarchy had failed the country accounts in part for the rise of an anti-monarchical nationalism among Thai military officers around the beginning of the Sixth (1910–25).

For his part, King Vajiravudh developed his own 'royal nationalism', similarly inspired by the aim of preserving Siam and if possible recovering former glories, but using as his methods not only administrative modernization but the promotion of popular nationalism and social development within a framework of absolute monarchy, by extension and elaboration of his father's and his grandfather's 'Chakri Reformation'.⁴⁰ He even declared war against Germany in World War I, with the aim, not least, of moving the other Western powers to recognize Siam as an equal and surrender their 'extra-territorial rights'.⁴¹ The great irony was that in his efforts to goad or gird the Thai people to face up to 'international challenges' and be 'a respected nation', King Vajiravudh also unintentionally sensitized the educated classes to foreign constitutionalist norms for judging progress and 'political maturity'. These ideas, combined with alienation from the personal idiosyncrasies and appalling extravagance of the King himself, had the effect that Vajiravudh – being still an absolute monarch, and indeed a declared opponent of democratic reform in a society 'not yet sufficiently educated' for it – became a focus of discontent or anxiety in various ways.⁴² His successor, Prajadhipok (1925–35), then added to growing apprehension about the capacity of the institution of absolute monarchy to achieve national goals, and to doubts about its legitimacy as such, by his personal diffidence combined with a conscientious consideration of plans for a Constitution!⁴³ But the immediate cause of the overthrow of absolute monarchy in 1932 was the fact that Siam's integration into world markets exposed her to the full force of the Depression. It was the consequent cuts in the military budget that brought military opposition to the boil.

In short, the oblique regime of 'Western Indirect Rule' in Siam had not produced a nationalism directed against a colonial power, but against the monarchy. So absolute monarchy came to an end, exactly as it had done in colonized territories under real Indirect Rule. But just as in the colonized territories aforesaid, the monarchy was allowed, indeed required, to retain its traditional charisma, as a legitimizing cover for the machinery of government and the men controlling it. The King was first deposed and then quickly reinstated as a constitutional monarch, with appeals for 'forgiveness' from the coup leaders, who realized that the masses would not readily grasp the 'importance' of destroying their monarchy, nor why they should transfer their allegiance to the triumphant twin cliques of nationalist army officers and Western-educated technocrats. This looks much more like 'Indirect Rule', as 'democracy' and 'constitutionalism' were as far from the real hearts of the

military leaders as they were central to the propaganda of their 'Revolution'; and since the masses did not understand these concepts, the military would be under no popular pressure to fulfil them. Not that King Prajadhipok could accommodate himself to the indignity for long. His behaviour during and after a royalist revolt in 1933 made him seem like an accomplice or at least sympathizer of the rebel prince, Boworadet (note the parallels with other states in the first stage of colonization behind a façade of monarchy). He abdicated after his demands for democratization combined with a mild revival for his own role in political life were rejected by the military.

With a boy king, Ananda (1935–46), taking his place – merely a half-nephew of Prajadhipok (who had no son) and the child of a commoner mother, thus lacking dynastic prestige – the field was left open for the self-aggrandizement of military dictator Phibun Songkram. Having managed to portray himself as a national hero in the defence of Bangkok against the forces of Prince Boworadet, he was able to consolidate his power over the next few years and then use that power to propagate a radical state-nationalism, based on fascist models and replete with bizarre, Western symbols of 'modernity'.⁴⁴ But the country he most admired was Japan, which was already occupying the eastern regions of China down to the borders of Indochina (and from 1940 occupied Indochina too, by arrangement with Vichy France). Our tale of 'Indirect Rule' in Thailand, in its evolving or succeeding forms up to and including World War II, ends with the Thai alliance with Japan, which turned Thailand into a Japanese military base as soon as the Pacific War began (December 1941), and a political vassal of the Sun Emperor, more or less – though with the consolation of a Japanese-sanctioned annexation of two western provinces of Cambodia and two from Laos on the eve of World War II, and the recovery of former Malay and Shan dependencies from the British Empire during the war.

However, the disgracing of Phibun through the defeat of his 'overlord' in 1945 did not lead to an early recovery of the prestige of the Thai monarchy, for on 9 June 1946 the young king was shot dead in mysterious circumstances on the threshold of maturity, before any political potential had been revealed, let alone fulfilled. Not many weeks after this terrible event, the new King's mother was urged by Lord Mountbatten (who laid on air transport), and allowed by the government, to take her remaining son back to Switzerland for further education.⁴⁵ And in the next two decades the military were able to reconsolidate their political power, with not a little moral and material support from the USA, which saw Thailand as the front line in the defence against Communism, by now victorious in China and rampant in Vietnam.⁴⁶

3 On the threshold of the present

Post-war developments

The present chapter is more self-consciously geared than the last towards the explication of the present, being concerned with relevant developments in the five countries of primary interest from the defeat of Japan to around 1970–71. In a sense, we are dealing with ‘the present’ already, for either the institutions of monarchy had assumed, by the early 1970s, the shape which they have today, or *dramatis personae* had emerged who are still alive and incumbent today, only different in terms of 25–30 years’ added experience and authority. Certainly the beginning of the eighth decade of the twentieth century can be seen in retrospect as a turning point of consolidation in general. The present power of the Thai monarchy was manifest in – or indeed took the essence of its new shape from – the student revolution in October 1973. The modest, new muscle of Malaysian monarchy was adumbrated at least between the lines of new legislation to protect the Malays in 1971. The British handed over control of internal security to the monarchical government of Brunei in 1971, after the latter had abolished elections the previous year. Even the monarchy which was formally abolished in 1970 (Cambodia) has since enjoyed a revival of sorts from 1993. On the other hand, however, its Laotian neighbour, which was still flourishing quite well in a constitutional guise in 1970 and incorporated into the structure of the Peace Agreement between conservatives and Communists in February 1973, lasted less than three more years. The post-war story is taken up with Laos.

3.1 Laos

Royalty, in a broader sense than just the King, played a formative part in events at the end of World War II. In March 1945 the Japanese had seized power from the French and pressed King Sisavang Vong to declare Independence – which he did, on 8 April, for the area recognized by a Treaty with Vichy France in 1941.¹ After the Japanese defeat in August, Republic of China forces were to take the surrender down to the sixteenth parallel of latitude, sanctioned under the Potsdam Agreement, but were slow to arrive, so the French were able to take control quickly in the south, and parachuted officials into Vientiane. But in Vientiane the Viceroy, Prince Phetsarath, forestalled both the arrival of Chinese

forces and the re-establishment of a French administration by declaring Independence again, at Luang Prabang, on 1 September. However, this time, the King had strong reservations: in view of the presence of a French group, and fearful of pressure from the Chinese, he declared loyalty to France. But the dismissal of Phetsarath from his offices merely confirmed the prince in his opposition to a French restoration. Based at Vientiane and protected by the Chinese presence, he set up a provisional government, giving important posts to his brother Prince Souvannaphouma and half-brother Prince Souphanouvong.² The three were scions of a cadet branch which had supplied the vicereignty of Luang Prabang since the early nineteenth century (since a time even before the demise of the royal house of Vientiane) but had never occupied the throne.³

Lao troops loyal to the provisional government placed the King under house arrest in October, and the deposition of both the crown prince (Savang Vatthana) and the King was announced shortly. However, instead of Prince Phetsarath assuming royal power, as he was probably urged to do by his more extreme advisers, he reached a compromise with the King whereby a constitutional monarchy was inaugurated and the provisional government legitimized. But then the 'Free Lao' (*Lao Issara*) forces were severely defeated by French forces in March 1946, and the leaders of the provisional government took refuge in Bangkok for a while. The upshot of these events, after further successes by the French army, was that a moderate faction eventually returned from Bangkok (in 1949) to participate in a Royal (but constitutional) Government under French rule. The French for their part accepted constitutional monarchy as the optimum framework for their post-war administration, for it seemed well adapted to the spirit of 'self-determination' of the times, while promising moderation and stability as well. After elections of a sort were held in May 1947, and a Legislative Assembly established, France worked for the next two years on its plan for 'independence within the French Union': an ambiguous status which did not prevent Laos eventually being accepted into the United Nations,⁴ though by the time that happened (in 1955) the revised Constitution of 1949 had been further amended to omit any reference to the Union.⁵ In fact, Laos did continue to send Deputies to Paris but, in terms of geo-political realities after the Geneva Conference on Indochina and the Manila Pact in 1954, the key point is that the government became mainly dependent on the USA for plugging its budget deficits and building up its armed forces, even if it was in theory a neutral state under the terms of the Geneva Agreement and not a signatory to the Manila Treaty.

Simply stated, Laos was drawn into the American orbit because Geneva did not put an end to the struggle of the Vietminh to bring the whole of Vietnam under their control; for both sides, Laos had great strategic potential (for instance, as a transit route into South Vietnam, and as a bulwark against Communist expansion into Thailand, respectively); and in terms of internal politics, both the Vietminh and the Americans had access by virtue of splits among the former Lao Issara. Prince Souphanouvong, who held the position of foreign minister as well as commander of the resistance force of the government-

in-exile, was removed from those positions in 1949 (shortly before the moderates returned to Vientiane), on account of his left-wing orientation and 'pro-Vietnamese' sympathies. This pushed him into greater dependence on the Vietminh for his political survival. Moreover, the Vietminh invaded northern Laos in April 1953. Meanwhile, Prince Souvannaphouma, having become Prime Minister for the first time in 1951, negotiated the final Independence conventions with France (in October 1953). He expected to preside over a neutral state in which his half-brother would prove easy enough to separate from his hard-core Communist colleagues in the name of national reconciliation.⁶ John Foster Dulles, the US Secretary of State, took a less sanguine view, however, and thereby hangs the tale of the partial incorporation of Laos into the US sphere of influence – always allowing for the fact, also, that for the Vietminh, Souphanouvong and his movement were 'simply the agents through whom Vietnam would inherit French power over Laos'.⁷ Significantly, Souphanouvong had turned his splinter group of the dissolved Lao Issara into a politico-military organization known as the Pathet Lao (PL)⁸ just following the Vietminh invasion.

At any rate, up to 1961, various means of dealing with the Hanoi-backed resistance were tried: some not very whole-hearted attempts to reach a settlement with PL on government terms, while hoping for a military victory (September 1954–December 1955); an attempted reconciliation through democratic coalition government under Souvannaphouma, at one point during which Souphanouvong became Minister of Planning (April 1956–July 1958); then a swing to the right (from mid-1958 to mid-1960); and finally civil war, triggered off by the coup of ostensibly isolationist but objectively leftist Captain Kong Lé (August 1960) – which also brought Souvannaphouma back as Prime Minister, for a few months initially, and led on to negotiations which produced the 'second coalition'.⁹

The effect of civil war was to bring the Geneva Conference together again in May 1961, specifically for the purpose of settling both the internal conflict and the international status of the country. With both sides in the internal conflict vitally dependent on foreign backing (and Laos being a poor, land-locked country whose fate has always been subject to the interplay and intervention of external powers), an international conference was an obvious way of seeking a settlement in either dimension. However, as neither Left (plus Neutralists) nor Right within Laos were ready for serious compromise – and indeed the hotting-up of the Vietnam War made Laos more, not less, important for the external parties concerned – a neutral solution was hard to find. To their credit, the Americans (the State Department) appear to have worked sincerely for a neutral solution, built around Prince Souvannaphouma whom they had come to trust, but Thailand was always nervous, and fundamentally the USA could not stop the right-wing leader, General Phoumi Nosovan, from engaging in disastrous military actions which were more or less calculated to force the Americans to bail him out (perhaps with encouragement from the CIA).¹⁰ Nevertheless, a tripartite coalition was brought into being in mid-1962. But it only lasted a few months.

The overall consequence of diplomatic failure for Laos in the early 1960s was a continuation of civil war. Or it could be said that the continuation of civil war, especially around the end of 1962, and the increasing movement of Vietnamese supplies through Laotian territory instead of cessation thereof, marked the failure of Geneva diplomacy. The coalition government finally broke up in March 1963, when the Pathet Lao took the hint from a series of assassinations, and left Vientiane. There were coups within the right-wing faction in 1964 and 1965 which removed General Phoumi from the scene and led in due course to the integration of the Neutralists (no longer supplied by the USSR) as well as the Right, under Prince Souvannaphouma as Prime Minister yet again. All efforts to revive the coalition were in vain, and the country remained effectively 'partitioned by altitude', with the highland peoples increasingly controlled by the Pathet Lao in the interests of North Vietnam,¹¹ the lowland Lao by the Royal Lao Government (RLG) under an umbrella of US air power. But at least, so long as the war in Vietnam remained unresolved, the now more or less 'right-wing' RLG could enjoy a respite for political consolidation and internationally funded economic development among its population.

That is, provided that the war in Laos itself followed the rather formalistic pattern of each side only nibbling at the other's territory – minor advances by the insurgents during the dry season (October–May for most of the country) being reversed by RLG gains during the rains, when superior equipment, especially aircraft, bestowed mobility on the government side.¹² But the unusually powerful PL/North Vietnamese thrust in the first half of 1968 foreshadowed an end to equilibrium, especially when it extended into the rainy season of 1969,¹³ as if the Communists were thinking ahead to negotiations in Vietnam.¹⁴ Such negotiations would form a prelude to inevitable change in the balance of international forces in Laos, because negotiations would follow there too (most likely running in parallel with Vietnam's), to anticipate which, each side would be best advised to augment the territory on which it could stake a claim prior to a settlement. It was certainly tangible that a new tone of vituperation began to mark Pathet Lao statements about the RLG, branding Souvannaphouma as a traitor and US puppet unworthy of national leadership. Such language effectively raised the price of any PL return to coalition. Indeed, demands were voiced for a PL veto on the ministerial candidates of other factions in any future coalition, with a clear preference for so-called 'genuine neutralists'. This previously unknown group of pro-PL neutralists had partly the function of denying legitimacy to Souvannaphouma's own neutralist party, and to Souvannaphouma himself as premier of a nominally 'neutralist' government. It also had the function of providing a second left-wing group to occupy seats around the negotiating table or in a future coalition cabinet, ideally replacing the Vientiane-based neutralists and giving the PL and partners a double voice against RLG's one;¹⁵ or, as a second best, giving them parity with the Vientiane side if this were still to consist of Souvannaphouma's neutralists and the right-wing faction.¹⁶

If negotiations were partly anticipated as a consequence of the foreseeable negotiations in Vietnam, they were also needed by Hanoi as a means of releasing its forces from their commitment in Laos for redeployment in South Vietnam, where territorial advances were requisite in advance of negotiations over that theatre. Even more valuable for Hanoi, however, would be a 're-neutralization' of Laos in the sense of a reduction or termination of US involvement, especially the bombing of the 'Ho Chi Minh Trail' through the eastern mountains of the country, vital for channelling North Vietnamese materiel for the war in South Vietnam.¹⁷ But in this respect a bizarre divergence of Pathet Lao from Communist Vietnamese interests emerged. Whereas the Vietnamese saw an end to the bombing of the Trail as a primary benefit from a Laotian political settlement, the PL were prepared to separate at least the issue of the Trail from the internal negotiations,¹⁸ since (a) the war in that zone caused no harm to the PL forces; (b) the PL understood well that Souvannaphouma had no means of stopping the Americans from bombing the Trail (no more than the PL could stop the North Vietnamese from using it); and, above all, (c) a political settlement offered a far better prospect of progress for a movement whose political organization was superior to that of the right-wing clan-type groupings and likely to yield success in national elections. In fact, a negotiated settlement alone would probably give the Communists and their associates half the ministries in the government, even without elections.

At all events, negotiations got seriously under way in 1972¹⁹ after tentative contacts begun in 1970. An Agreement was signed in Vientiane in February 1973, the month after the Paris Peace Agreements concerning Vietnam.²⁰ In the end, the inseparability of the Laotian conflict from the larger Indochina conflict was manifest in the timing of the Laotian ceasefire: i.e. just after the United States in Paris had agreed to wind down its commitment in South Vietnam, holding out an excellent prospect of victory for the Communist forces and rendering the Ho Chi Minh Trail less strategic for both sides. Given the advantage gained by the Communists in Vietnam – not to mention PL's own control of three-quarters of the territory of Laos (though only one-third of the population) following the final, bitter phases of the civil war²¹ – it should not be surprising to find that in Laos the Communists entered the new coalition (the Provisional Government of National Union) with significant advantages. These included half the ministerial appointments (while each side had a deputy minister in the other's ministries); decision-making by unanimity; an equally-balanced National Coalition Political Council (a quasi-legislature of forty-two members, pending elections), chaired by the PL and also functioning on unanimity (under the chairmanship, as it transpired, of Prince Souphanouvong); and joint policing of the administrative capital (Vientiane) and the royal capital (Luang Prabang). Psychologically, the policing arrangements were the most important for the PL, which in this way really 'came in from the cold' and was given a lever against any attempt at right-wing resurgence using violence against PL representatives. Still, in its way it was a quite bloodless and only partial revolution, which did not forebode an early Communist takeover, unless, again,

events in Vietnam set the tone or called the tune. The binding or at least bridging nature of family ties between members of both elites, not least between Prince Souvannaphouma and his half-brother Prince Souphanouvong, were much emphasized in foreign analysis.

Having reviewed these post-World War II developments as concisely as possible – and yet in some detail – we may now at last turn our attention to the role of the monarchy up to 1973. The Lao royal family had provided two Heads of State since 1945: Sisavang Vong till his death in 1959, and his son Savang Vatthana from 1959 onwards.²² Hence the formal description of the government, until the end of 1975, as ‘royal’. Although King Sisavang Vong was a constitutional monarch under the terms of the post-World War II settlement, he was not without a view about individuals who had stood up against himself or the throne. It was because of the anti-royal stand of Prince Phetsarath in 1945 that this prince was unable to return from exile until 1957, not long before his death.²³ And why should a king not stand on his honour, who had cajoled the French into increasing the size of the kingdom by some 25 per cent in 1941?²⁴

The formal position of the monarch in the Constitution allowed him little freedom of action. He signed all laws and senior civil and military appointments, but in the event of refusing his signature to a law, the Chairman of the National Assembly was empowered to promulgate the law under his own signature. The King nominated the Prime Minister, but this had to be someone who was likely to secure a vote of confidence from the Assembly. Although he opened and closed the annual session of the Assembly, the King could not dispense with it. It was to be summoned to meet on 11 May each year, and the King had to follow the wishes of its members in deciding on a dissolution. Under a Constitutional Amendment of July 1961 the King could take over the government himself or choose an administration in the case of a national emergency. But again this was subject to ‘advice’ and did not substantially increase the authority of the King (by this time, Savang Vatthana).²⁵

King Sisavang Vong died in 1959. Since his return from studies in France in 1933 Savang was believed to exercise considerable influence over his father. To him was attributed his father’s intermittent hostility to the Issara government. Events in 1945–46 generally confirmed the belief, widespread among the elite, that Savang was not only strongly pro-French but ambitious and not a little autocratic. The Constitution was originally drafted by French advisers working with Lao associates. The limits on monarchical power probably reflected the anti-monarchical traditions of the French as well as distrust of Savang, whose abilities the French did not rate highly – while Lao commoners suspected his ambitions, not to mention the ‘haughtiness’ perceived in any prince of Luang Prabang. Certainly Prince Savang did not play an impartial role, either between Independence and the death of his father (for whom he often deputized because of the latter’s failing health) or immediately after his succession. He demonstrated his support for the Committee for the Defence of National Interests (CDNI)²⁶ and, after Phoui Sananikone had dropped the CDNI from his cabinet (December 1959) and provoked a *coup d’état*, the King helped to force Phoui from

office. In 1960, despite manipulation of the elections by the military and General Phoumi's subsequent rebellion against the properly constituted government of Souvannaphouma (formed after the Kong Lé coup), the King showed sympathy to this new government (i.e. of Boun Oum and Phoumi Nosovan, formed in December 1960 after Phoumi's successful offensive against the capital).²⁷ The King's brother Tiao Khampan, was in fact named foreign minister in this cabinet, though he held the position for less than a month, and no other member of the royal family ever held a cabinet post. At the same time, however, senior members of the ruling branch of the royal family of Luang Prabang did hold important posts in the civil administration, army and diplomatic service during the years 1947–75. Meanwhile, during the prolonged negotiations and manoeuvring leading up to the 'second coalition' the King conspicuously failed to give any support to Souvannaphouma – a posture which effectively complemented Phoumi's delaying tactics.²⁸ On the other hand, after the formation of the 1962 coalition the King acted more impartially, in a proper constitutional spirit. No doubt he realized that the balance of power had changed with the development of closer ties between Souvannaphouma, the Army and the Americans, creating a greater sense of security for right-wing interests.²⁹

Turning now to the attitude of the Pathet Lao, we find that during their campaigns against the RLG the Front did not openly attack the King. Indeed, the PL even included loyalty to the monarchy as part of its political programme. Pretty certainly, the PL regarded the King as a symbol of the hated class structure. Yet it also realized that he was a symbol of the Lao state and the continuity of historical traditions, apart from being widely respected in many sections of Lao society. Ironically for the Communists, his standing was due in no small part to the efforts of RLG in the 1960s to publicize both the role of monarchy and the person of the current King, who had previously been little known to most of his subjects. But there was a more 'objective' reason for his standing: the austere way of life which he adopted as King, so much in contrast to the lives of many leading RLG figures. In such a situation a PL attack on the monarchy might well have alienated the moderate support so vital to the ultimate success of the Front.³⁰

3.2 Cambodia

Developments in Cambodia at the end of World War II ran in parallel, and showed some parallels, with Laos at first, but soon diverged, partly because of the more active leadership of the King. As in Laos, subsequent to a Japanese-sponsored 'Declaration of Independence' in March 1945, the King was in favour of cooperating with the French when they returned, after August, but he was not rivalled, let alone overshadowed, by any more activist member of the royal family pushing the pace of nationalism or even challenging the King for the throne (cf. Prince Pethsarath of Laos). Indeed, it might be improbable that any royal family could produce a second personality of Sihanouk's intellectual

and physical energy at exactly the same time! Thus whereas in Laos the outline of a constitutional monarchy emerged quickly because a princely-led nationalist movement insisted on this as part of a compromise package with the King, in Cambodia no element of the old elite close to the monarch had embraced constitutionalist ideas; consequently, the King was able to pursue an agenda for a monarchy with, at least, the final power of decision in any political structure involving a parliament. But concomitantly this meant that (a) the conventional nationalist movement, being committed to democracy, was bound to take on an anti-monarchist complexion, whereas in Laos even the left-wing faction of the Issara never had reason to say that it was 'against the King'; (b) inevitably, in order to realize his agenda against a determined nationalist/democratic opposition, the King would himself have to become a leader of nationalism during the contest with the French. Of course, kings in such a situation will always claim that 'it's in the blood' – that they should lead their people because their ancestors enjoyed a comparable 'communion' with the folk and sacrificed themselves to the national interest. Sihanouk had a model forbear in the person of his great grandfather, Norodom I. But let us not overlook the sheer 'mechanics' of the post-war situation, which more or less dictated Sihanouk's role as 'a nationalist leader' in any case.

However, the above, short narrative leaves out some important, if subordinate, strands in the complex tapestry of post-war developments. In fact it was not until 1952 that Sihanouk seized the initiative in a personal way. Before that, he was much guided by his conservative older kinsmen, and sometimes intimidated by the turmoil of events. Also, a glance at the list of Prime Ministers between March 1945 and January 1955 (that is, until just before King Norodom Sihanouk's abdication in March 1955) shows no less than four princes of the Sisowath branch heading cabinets (five in the period),³¹ and it will come as no surprise that one or more of these 'dispossessed' royalty had espoused the constitutional doctrine of the monarchy's role which the French took as their starting-point for political development, as in Laos. In other words, there *was* a division among the upper class, though it was partly consequential upon the rise of an activist monarch or dynamic doctrine of monarchy, rather than anticipating and frustrating it as in Laos.

The events of March 1945 can be seen as part of a drama of non-royalist, or at least constitutionalist, nationalism. As described by one leading authority on modern Cambodia, the Japanese coup of the 9th swept away the uneasy *modus vivendi* that had allowed the French to retain administrative control over the Indochinese states since the beginning of the Pacific War. French troops all over Indochina were disarmed and French officials placed under arrest. The Japanese move was a desperate throw in the much larger game of the war, being part of moves to set up South-East Asian governments friendly towards Japan and prone to afford Japan favourable access in future, in the event that Japan could avoid total defeat and assuming that the indigenous governments proved strong enough to resist the return of the Western colonial powers. Certainly, the local results in the French Indochinese states ensured that the position of the French

would never again go unchallenged. Guided by the Japanese, King Sihanouk on 12 March proclaimed Independence and abrogated the various treaties and conventions which regulated the French Protectorate. French-inspired 'reforms' dating from 1943 and 1944 (including the Western calendar and romanized script) were revoked. The King was invested with all the powers previously held by the French *Résident Supérieur*. But these assertions of national independence rang a little hollow, since no decision could be taken or implemented if it ran counter to Japanese priorities.

The situation was disturbing for Sihanouk's senior Cambodian advisers. Men such as Prince Monireth (his uncle) and Penn Nouth (who was closely associated with Sihanouk from this point onwards) were not opposed to the concept of eventual independence. But seeing the extent to which the Japanese were in control of affairs after March 1945, they were ready to contemplate a return of the French in the interim. A few months later, King Sihanouk himself showed readiness to negotiate with rather than confront the French. This meant that there would be a continuing conflict between those who had been ready to temporize in 1945 and those who sought immediate Independence. The bitterness of the debate over this issue was exacerbated by the accompanying division between those who aspired to a system of parliamentary supremacy and those who were prepared to give the King powers of arbitration and final decision in affairs of State.³²

The outline of this fundamental conflict of philosophies was not clear as of March 1945, Osborne goes on, but had become very clear seven months later. The principal role in efforts at this stage to secure Independence was played by one Son Ngoc Thanh, a pre-war nationalist agitator, newly returned from exile in Japan. After the events of March, King Sihanouk held office both as monarch and Prime Minister, with a 'cabinet' of essentially conservative ministers. There was no parliament. At the behest of the Japanese, Son Ngoc Thanh was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs at the beginning of June. Possibly as a concession to the conservative interests, this was followed almost immediately by the appointment of Sihanouk's uncle, Prince Monireth, as a Councillor of the Government. But this did nothing to hinder Son Ngoc Thanh's determination to gain power with the assistance of the Japanese, capitalizing on his pre-war reputation. He was supported by an early associate, Pach Chhoeun, and by members of the Cambodian Youth Corps. And, to his advantage, the Japanese remained the final arbiters right up to the end of the war on 15 August 1945.

One day before the Japanese surrendered, Son Ngoc Thanh staged a coup of sorts, arresting those ministers whom he regarded as being pro-French and appointing himself head of government as King Sihanouk resigned. But in the next few weeks of confusion he was not able to make much headway in organizing his movement for resisting the restoration of French colonial rule. Basically, the time was too short, but not too long for conservative Cambodian opponents to perceive this upstart as a threat and to act to block his efforts. One of his liabilities was the support he was receiving from left-wing Vietnamese residents in Phnom Penh. When French intentions to reassert their position

throughout the whole of Indochina became clear, Thanh's opponents established contacts with the British occupying forces in Saigon, and French officers backed by troops from the British Indian Army arrested Son Ngoc Thanh. Subsequently he was brought to trial in France on a charge of treason.³³

Osborne goes on to point out the difficulty of establishing whether Thanh's 'popularity' was as great as he himself claimed, or just a figment of his propaganda as Sihanouk always insisted later. Indeed, it is manifest that for each of the two rival leaders of nationalism it would be vital in retrospect to denigrate the claims of the other. Wherever the balance of truth may lie, Thanh's overthrow was a victory for the conservative forces. But the period was also one of personal crisis for King Sihanouk. Between August and October 1945, still a young man and daunted by the responsibility of his office and the surrounding turbulence, he considered abdicating. It was his uncle and – curiously, Son Ngoc Thanh – who urged him not to. Certainly he continued to rely heavily upon advice, and it was not until the next period but one that he began to exercise the full authority associated with the kingship. But by then his position had been subtly reinforced by the doctrine of all power flowing from the King, which the French found it convenient to manipulate as a façade for their otherwise-oriented constitutional planning, that is, in the direction of democracy for an autonomous state within the French Union.

The ambivalence of the French position now found its counterpart in a division in political circles in Phnom Penh. The issue of Independence was momentarily subordinated to the question of the future, internal political structure. Those associated with Prince Monireth wanted a strong monarchy, while a group led by a number of young, elite Cambodians newly returned from their wartime studies in France aspired to a more democratic development.³⁴ In this atmosphere of deep political division, Sihanouk initially sided with the democratic current by proclaiming freedom of association and freedom of the press, and an elected Consultative Assembly which would decide on the content of the future Constitution. Of course he could not have made these proclamations without the connivance of the 'two-faced' French, who were taking the chance that a splash of political activity would not obstruct the consolidation of their control. But there is little doubt that Sihanouk himself was torn between the conservative arguments of his kinsmen and the progressive views of the elite of his own age. In other words, his 'flirtation', as it were, with the more progressive position of the time, was as sincere as the countervailing conservative instincts which were to coexist in tension with the various expressions of progressivism throughout his later political career. But because of this tension and because the French were not committed to more than the forms of constitutionalism, Cambodian politics became marked by a certain sterility.³⁵

Later in this section there will be reference, of course, to the 'Socialism' of Sihanouk's dominant political party, after Independence. For the late 1940s the parameters of politics were set by (a) the absence of Son Ngoc Thanh – and the putative populist mass movement that he would have been likely to lead; (b) the early death of Prince Sisowath Youtevong – who seemed the most apt, with his

Democrat Party, to succeed in achieving a coherent political programme joined with some basic elements of party organization (rather than a grouping amounting to the personal clientele of a notable); (c) the apparent absence of any French commitment to real democratization as opposed to the formalities of 'constitutional development'; but simultaneously (d) the establishment of a Constitution modelled purely on the Constitution of the French Fourth Republic, giving the Head of State the power to appoint the Prime Minister, who in turn appointed a cabinet whose members did not need to be drawn from the legislature yet needed to be confirmed in office, and could be voted out, by that Assembly. The vital concordance of sentiment between the 'three parts of the Constitution' that was a precondition of the system working was not a feature of Cambodia in the years up to Independence. Such dysfunctionality was reinforced by the fact (e) that the conservative faction was strong enough, in the midst of the making of the 'democratic Constitution' of 1947, to give the Head of State a power which the President of the Fourth Republic did not have, namely that of dissolving the Legislative Assembly himself, on the advice of the Prime Minister. Even more pointedly, (f) Article 21 declared that 'All powers emanate from the King'. Thus a modern legal foundation was created for Sihanouk to exploit the exalted symbolism or 'ancient charisma' of his position as monarch, if ever he decided to seize the reins of power from 'the squabbling politicians'.³⁶

Another obstacle to making the Constitution work – or is this just another way of expressing (c)? – was the fact that basic political power was still held by the French, through their exercise of financial and military control in the French Union. This is a matter of no mere academic curiosity, for the frustrations arising for the Khmer elite resulted in the King being drawn increasingly into the political arena, as a self-motivated rallying point of the aspiration for parliamentary supremacy-cum-Independence. It is of great interest that Sihanouk initially rejected Yem Sambaur's idea that he should lead without the Assembly, except in an advisory role. Even after he had become his own Prime Minister in May 1950, he appears to have given serious consideration, once again, to abdication. But certainly, from September 1949 until this point successive ministries did rule without the Assembly. And finally, after another two years, a fundamental change in Sihanouk's 'political personality' became tangible, and he did step forward as a self-possessed and determined leader in his own right. Although the death of a beloved daughter may have played a part in turning him towards a much more serious conception of himself and of his obligations and prerogatives as King, the return of Son Ngoc Thanh in October 1951, and his immediate call for Independence, clearly posed an intolerable challenge to Sihanouk, from whom Thanh had grabbed the premiership in August 1945.³⁷ That event was still close enough to be keenly remembered and resented, but Sihanouk had also had six years in which to mature, and especially to accumulate experience in exercising power as Head of State. This was a rivalry which could not be settled by compromise.

Without the intervention of Son Ngoc Thanh, the Independence issue would have found its way to the top of the Cambodian agenda by 1953 anyway, as the Vietminh edged closer to forcing the French to sue for peace in Vietnam and negotiate its Independence. In anticipation of victory, and hopeful of absorbing all three states of French Indochina under Vietnamese Communist sway, the Vietminh went through the motions of hiving off the Cambodian branch of the Indochina Communist Party, as an ostensibly 'home-grown' movement, on 30 September 1951. This would have presented the Royal Government with a challenge to its security and integrity before very long and would have pushed Sihanouk into staking his claim to a distinct Independence for Cambodia, free of any Vietnamese influence or domination. However, in view of speculation down the years³⁸ as to links between Son Ngoc Thanh's guerrilla movement, the Khmer Issarak, and the 'Khmer Vietminh' (perhaps best defined as 'the Cambodian Communist Party, and other elements, if any, put into business by the Vietnamese Communists'), it is intriguing that Son Ngoc Thanh appeared in Phnom Penh only days later. Thus, although on the surface it was Son Ngoc Thanh's challenge to Sihanouk that brought forward the Independence agenda – and in the event launched Sihanouk into his serious and successful role as a national leader – it seems not inconceivable that, obliquely, it was in fact events in Vietnam that were at the root of the Cambodian Independence process. On the other hand, it must be admitted that the month of September had seen a sweeping Democrat Party victory in the third general elections, which in itself was a challenge to Sihanouk's policies, whether in governing without the Assembly or in showing restraint on the issue of Independence. And, indeed, it was Huy Kanthoul's Democrat Party government that appealed, through the King, for Son Ngoc Thanh's return.

At all events – and to telescope the chain of events from here on – following the banning of his newspaper in February 1952, Son Ngoc Thanh took to the maquis, in northern Cambodia, declaring his commitment not only to immediate Independence from France but also to republican government! In June Sihanouk's response became clear. He dismissed the Democrat Party government, took emergency powers (not in order to fight the French but to deal with the security threat from the Khmer Issara) and promised to win Independence within three years. (Sihanouk's assumption of full powers invoked the clause in the Constitution which described all authority as emanating from the King.) In January 1953 he dissolved the Assembly, declared martial law, and set off 'on his international 'Crusade for Independence' – a diplomatic excursion which marked, effectively, Sihanouk's international debut and first experience of the limelight at this level.³⁹ The world did not rally at once to his cause, but could hardly do so, as the question of Vietnam's future was not quite ripe for deliberation and settlement – though by March 1953 it was evident that the Hanoi high command was turning major attention to the Mekong delta region. At any rate, forced to return to Cambodia empty-handed, Sihanouk showed his political flair by not conceding the initiative for one moment to his opponents. So far from behaving as if he had been worsted, he went into self-imposed exile at

Bangkok, followed by Battambang in the west of Cambodia, and called a general mobilization of the whole population to help the army against the Issara. This was in June 1953.

The effect of this dramatic move was that there was no Head of State to conduct political business. 'Indirect Rule' was crumbling, as the King became a *de facto* rebel in the jungle! The French faced an excruciating dilemma, as the position of their forces in Vietnam worsened. Security on their western flank (Cambodia) was crucial to any hope of warding off defeat in Vietnam, but was looking increasingly elusive. Thus the French finally conceded all Sihanouk's demands. Sihanouk returned to Phnom Penh to proclaim Independence from France on 9 November 1953. Already on 17 October the army had been transferred to Cambodian control.⁴⁰

It was of the highest significance for Cambodia that, although the approaching climax of the war in Vietnam put more pressure on the French than Sihanouk's unpolished force of irregulars (defectors from the Issara, plus the mobilized general population) could ever do, he brilliantly exploited the context of the wider war for his own national ends. Above all, by achieving independence nine months in advance of the Geneva Conference and the Vietnam settlement, and having under royal Khmer command a patriotic army in a state of high morale, he was able to pre-empt the Vietnamese plan for a Khmer Communist military force,⁴¹ through which or whereby a demand for some kind of association with a Communist Vietnam was to have been orchestrated – i.e. within the framework of an Independence for which the Vietminh would have claimed the credit eventually. The only Communist force fighting on Cambodian soil at the time of the Geneva Conference was the Vietminh, sent in significant numbers as late as the Geneva Conference itself (mid-1954) with a view to influencing the Geneva outcome.⁴² Prior to that, there had been other Vietminh infiltration, for several years, but the Vietminh had never succeeded in creating a 'home-bred' military counterpart, hence the need for the invasion proper in mid-1954. Its Vietnamese nature was all too manifest to the Geneva parties. In fact the Vietnamese delegation was constrained to admit that the forces in question were Vietnamese, and so they were directed to be withdrawn under the Indochina settlement, which divided Vietnam itself into two independent states, while recognizing the independence of Cambodia and Laos. This dazzling achievement for Cambodia was gained, not least, by the skill of the Cambodian delegation at Geneva in playing on Soviet and Chinese Communist anxiety for a settlement in Indochina (whose postponement might result in the USA no longer being willing to compromise on Vietnam by accepting the division of the country). Since Cambodia's signature was essential to the general accords, Sihanouk was able to hold out for the withdrawal of the Vietminh from his territory, through Soviet and Chinese pressure on Hanoi.⁴³

If so much of this achievement was attributable to an activist King, it is psychologically inconceivable that such a person would hereafter withdraw from the political scene or even lower his profile. A pressing task of national consolidation would have been perceived by any national leader at this turning-point. But

Sihanouk, additionally, had reason to feel that he possessed special personal assets for tackling the task. However, they were not assets which could serve purposes of national consolidation without being consolidated themselves. Sihanouk's first important step in this direction – while his reputation was still riding high – was to hold a referendum to gain retrospective support for his assumption of full powers in 1953. He also proposed a new Constitution, under which the cabinet should be responsible to the King – who in turn would be the final arbiter of that Constitution. The Assembly should not even be directly elected, but should be composed of the elected mayors of administrative districts. However, this bold initiative was blocked by the Democrat Party, which would have had to pass the amendments, and by some members of the International Control Commission, posted to Cambodia to monitor the post-Geneva ceasefire and withdrawal of foreign forces.

Thwarted by his old enemies in the Democrat Party, King Sihanouk set about forming his own political party, in March 1955, in order to contest elections and advance his goals.⁴⁴ It was called *Sangkum Riester Niyum* (official French version: *Communauté Socialiste Populaire* or CSP), usually dubbed 'Sangkum'.⁴⁵ In order to organize the party and be free to fight the elections, Sihanouk abdicated and passed the throne to his father, Sumarit. At the fourth general elections in September 1955, Sangkum won 83 per cent of the vote and all 91 seats in the Assembly. Thus, for the first time in the experience of Cambodian democracy, both Assembly and government were under single control – except that the chief executive (Sihanouk, as Prime Minister for the first four months after the elections) was not identical with the Head of State (his father), though they were not likely to be at odds. Perhaps to avoid any risk of conflict between these two offices, Sihanouk modified his constitutional proposals to leave the powers of the Head of State unstrengthened, e.g. the cabinet would remain responsible to the Assembly. At the same time, conventional direct elections to the Assembly would continue. The main innovation was to create elective Provincial Assemblies, with some budgetary powers and the right of consultation on national economic and foreign policy issues. The new, uncontroversial Constitution was approved by the first Khmer National Congress just after the elections and adopted into law by the Assembly in December.

By the middle of 1957 if not earlier, Sihanouk was distinctly restless about the quality of his creation. Although his kingly charisma, plus the charisma of epic achievement, guaranteed plebiscitary support for Sihanouk's Sangkum at any time, the workings of popular participation through the Provincial Assemblies were none too edifying, nor did Sihanouk find that his effervescent enthusiasm for national development through voluntary cooperative labour was greatly infecting the masses. With a view to mobilizing the youth, through a more purpose-built structure than Sangkum, he launched the Royal Khmer Socialist Youth in September 1957. Sangkum was afflicted by three chronic disabilities. First, it had quickly gone beyond its function as an electoral machine and taken on characteristics of a parallel (if not rival) structure to the formal bureaucracy, bringing services to the people which Sihanouk wanted to take special credit for

(yet at the same time tapping civil service resources and making individual membership a test of civil servants' loyalty). But, second, the provision of rural development services involved mobilizing the people themselves for collective, would-be 'voluntary' labour, which tended to reduce its popularity.⁴⁶ (The Youth Movement also quickly acquired the first two characteristics – becoming, that is, an extension of the will of prince and party.) Third, seen as an electoral machine Sangkum was only too successful in the short term, because it became a *sine qua non* of a political career to have membership of it and gain a candidacy under its banner, by declaring 'loyalty to *Samdec*'.⁴⁷ But this meant that the party embraced all the factions of the previous political order, including the Democrat grouping. Consequently, politics in the National Assembly were marked by all the old conflicts of personality and ideology, resulting in the instability of cabinets and tension between the executive and the Assembly, just as before. To break out of this pattern of deadlock, Sihanouk now bestowed on the National Congress (already functioning, since 1955, as a bi-annual forum of popular grievance and discussion) a superordinate function in relation to the Assembly, namely to initiate policies which the National Assembly should translate into laws, and to mediate authoritatively in any conflicts between Assembly and cabinet. If such mediation failed, a referendum would decide. The Congress was also given the function – non-officially – of making ministers lose face by being called to answer critical questions from the delegates.

It is not difficult to see that Sihanouk was groping for the elusive formula for a successful, permanent mobilization of the people without the liabilities of democratic division and conflict. In his own mind, his leadership itself should have unified everybody, as it had done in the struggle for Independence. It was because his party had 'captured' the Assembly, but he could not dominate it (even when serving as Head of Government, which he did seven times between October 1955 and April 1960), and because the Provincial Assemblies likewise had not delivered the wanted results, that Sihanouk looked to the National Congress. Appropriately, he used the eighth session of the Congress in July 1959 to push through the suspension of the Provincial Assemblies. The Congress was a body much more in the mould of direct democracy *à la* Rousseau and thus susceptible to orchestration. Yet even so, it never lived up to Sihanouk's hope of being able to solve the problem of Assembly-cabinet relations. It could not prevail in a prolonged bout of tension between legislature and executive in the months leading up to March 1958, and in the end Sihanouk resorted to new general elections – the fifth.

The notable feature of Sangkum arrangements on this occasion was that Sihanouk personally selected all candidates, with a heavy bias towards young men with higher education, whereby not only many of the 'old-style politicians' were eliminated but the first sprinkling of men of left-wing persuasion were up for election. Again Sangkum won all seats. In the cabinet formed immediately after the election, two left-wing faces appeared in the cabinet itself: those of Hou Yuon and Hu Nim.⁴⁸ But Sihanouk found control as elusive as ever, for the left-wing segment not only held socialist ideas about economic development, but

were hostile to American aid, and of course detested the monopoly of political power by an ex-King who was still behaving like a king and exploiting his traditional assets to maintain his position. For a while it was not the 'old liberals' but 'new leftists' who seemed able or likely to circumscribe Sihanouk's dominance, or at least insinuate their ideas into national policy-making. Their voices inside the National Assembly (and indeed in the Cabinet) were reinforced by the 'anti-imperialist' propaganda of Cambodia's *de facto* Communist Party (*Praciecun* or Pracheachon – 'The Citizens') outside it, including a presence in the People's Congress.⁴⁹

Interestingly enough, Sihanouk allowed Pracheachon just enough public existence – a state of 'open proscription'⁵⁰ – to enable him to ridicule it at the People's Congress. Indeed, a special congress was staged in August 1961 for that very purpose.⁵¹ Although the Pracheachon leader, Non Suon, whom Sihanouk confronted at the congress, was put on trial the next year for espionage, it is believed that Sihanouk was much more concerned about the potential or actual alienation of the moderately 'progressive' among the young intelligentsia. This explains not only why he offered them opportunity for advancement through the National Assembly or civil service, but also why he felt such chagrin when he perceived that they did not appreciate his action on their behalf.⁵² The high points of this policy of 'opening to the left' (or, better expressed, 'opening for the Left') were the candidatures of Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan in the sixth general elections, 1962, followed by their appointment as Secretaries of State for Planning, and for Commerce, respectively;⁵³ and the creation of a so-called 'Counter-Government' to criticize and balance the Twenty-second Sangkum Government of 1966, headed by General Lon Nol. In fact, Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan did not last long in their 1962 posts, faced with right-wing hostility and the bureaucratic restraints on the implementation of their ideas about planning and import-substitution; nor did the Counter-Government last long, since the cabinet which it was supposed to oppose reflected the right-wing successes in the elections of September 1966 (which were partly the result of Sihanouk himself abstaining from nominating candidates of his choice – though the 'left-wing trinity' had all managed to get elected) and it was easy enough for Lon Nol to force Sihanouk to dilute the membership of the Counter-Government by threatening to resign. But the truly amazing development in the period was that although Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan had fairly quickly lost the cabinet positions handed out in 1962, Sihanouk himself honoured their ideas by nationalizing imports and exports, and renouncing US aid in November 1963. This had had such a damaging effect on incomes at all economic levels⁵⁴ that by the seventh general elections, 1966, a reactionary tide was flowing strongly. It was stirred up not only by the conviction on the Right that Sihanouk had sold out to the Left, at home and internationally, but also by rebellious stirrings in the countryside (however much these may have been in reaction to the depredations of the army itself).⁵⁵ During 1967, as portents of violent State action against the Left were gathering, Khieu Samphan, Hou Yuon and Hu Nim departed one by one for the countryside. So manifest was the possibility of

assassination by the security agencies that when 'the three left-wing deputies' disappeared, there was a widespread public assumption that they had indeed been murdered.⁵⁶

The fact that the more serious threat to Sihanouk's regime lurked on the Right had been pretty manifest since early 1959, when there was a right-wing plot, with assumed foreign backing. At least in retrospect this was where the more serious danger lay, for the Right controlled the organs of the State. Yet Sihanouk was too much of a royalist, perhaps still too much of a king, to admit the Left into genuine partnership and initiate fundamental social reform. On the other hand, he was so filled with gall at the suspected ambitions of his old enemies that he was prone to alienate them further by making cosmetic gestures to the Left, which could turn into something very substantial. To be fair, the highly dramatic – and domestically damaging – renunciation of US aid was motivated by more than a domestic 'game plan', for Sihanouk was angling for Vietnamese Communist recognition of his country's neutrality. But all he ever gained from Hanoi and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF) was formal nominal recognition of Cambodia's borders, in 1967. This did not prevent the Vietnamese from using Cambodian territory as a refuge and transit area in the context of intensified warfare in South Vietnam. Once the failure, even 'fraudulence', of Sihanouk's one-man foreign policy was perceived, it was perhaps only a matter of time before the Cambodian Right would overthrow Sihanouk in a coup. This came to pass during the second Cabinet of General Lon Nol, in March 1970.⁵⁷

Truly, by alienating both Left and Right Sihanouk had finished up with the worst of all possible worlds. There is more than a touch of classical tragedy about this tale of an ex-King who believed himself, and himself alone, to be indispensable to Cambodia's political cohesion and territorial integrity.⁵⁸ His domestic political formula was strikingly akin to a courtly intrigue, in which two 'factions' were balanced off against each other.⁵⁹ But the formula was ill-matched to the objective situation, at least in terms of Cambodia's international vulnerability. No leader of Cambodia could hope for success, domestically or internationally, if refusing to take even a single ideological tendency into partnership, or (better still), work with a coalition of forces of the Centre, and steer a consistent course on one basis or the other. No one should underestimate, either, the damage that he did to his credibility in the eyes of the whole educated class by his retreat from leadership into the dilettantism of film-making from mid-1966 – film-making in the mould of heavy historical romanticism which was not merely designed for mass consumption and edification but was made compulsory viewing for the Phnom Penh elite and diplomatic corps. A streak of irrationality, possibly reflecting royal conceit, had been particularly apparent in the renunciation of US aid in 1963: not because he was trying unrealistically to cajole Hanoi into recognizing Cambodia's neutrality but because he was also, apparently, expressing pique at the USA for its unwillingness to afford such recognition!⁶⁰

When Sihanouk did begin to adopt a friendlier posture towards the USA at the end of the 1960s, it was too late to carry conviction with the Cambodian Right.⁶¹ Symptomatically, Sihanouk's first-ever political coalition would be with the Khmer Communists after his overthrow: an invidious relationship of almost total subordination, yet psychologically satisfying because it enabled the ex-King and recent Head of State to pursue revenge for the act of *lèse-majesté* by the Right.⁶²

In condensing a momentous decade into a few lines, we have omitted a number of significant events. For instance, after King Sumarit died in April 1960, Sihanouk had confirmed his unyielding attachment to his monopoly of power (thus strengthening the enmity of both Left and Right) by refusing to contemplate a royal succession. Instead, he arranged for the Assembly to appoint him as 'Head of State', while his mother, Queen Kosamak, simply 'represented' the empty throne, symbolically. The Assembly itself had been directed so to act, not by the National Congress, but by a referendum, which Sihanouk stage-managed to gain popular acclaim for both his handling of foreign affairs (which had already been taking an apparently 'leftish' turn) and the proposal to leave the throne vacant. The use of a referendum in this connection is not only evidence of his anxiety to go on controlling the office and powers of Head of State, which would ensure sundry opportunities for orchestrating popular feeling, but is also in itself an example of such orchestration, so symptomatic of Sihanoukism. The premium on an effective 'communion' with the masses could only increase as both of Sihanouk's rivals for supreme power (the Left faction and interests on the Right) became increasingly self-assured and determined to act, some day, to remove him. However, all this is not to say that the National Congress was simply superseded by an institution of referendums for the purpose of that 'communion' and its manipulation: on the contrary, as the Congress still offered the same advantages, the eleventh in the series was used to disgrace the Communist critics of Sihanouk's policies (in August 1961), as we have seen.

It is all too easy, and perhaps unfair, to mock Sihanouk for his seeming lack of any principle except that of maintaining at all costs the personal ascendancy which birth owed him, and his determination to take revenge on the 'traitors' who had presumed to resist the former King to whom they owed their careers. It is possible to argue that Sihanouk was far from being the crypto-leftist 'neutral' in foreign policy which his opponents alleged (or which certain Western admirers praised him for being). Part of the tragedy of his foreign policy in the late 1960s was that it was not understood by the Cambodian elite, whose support Sihanouk so badly needed. But apart from the necessary secrecy and evasion which surrounded his shift towards the US camp as the Vietcong occupation became more extensive and provocative, it was simply not in the nature of a former King, who had never surrendered that identity subjectively, to communicate with his educated subjects on the basis of equality which a genuine intellectual dialogue implied. This explains also why he could never develop a general politics of the intelligent Centre, which would have denied progress to either

extreme. Instead, he practised his courtly balancing act, which at best succeeded in keeping his rivals off-balance. Neither of the extremes could ever be reconciled to his rule. But the Centre, too, found itself leaderless and faced with an agonizing choice between three equally unattractive alternatives: extreme Left, extreme Right, or a monarchical-style, personalized absolutism.⁶³

No doubt, there was a connection between Sihanouk's egotistical personality and the stimulation he found in the pseudo-socialist slogans of Sangkum, which were better attuned for one-way communication with the masses by a populist leader who craves adulation, with never a contrary word from below. Now these slogans provided a conducive ambience in which Marxist intelligentsia could gain credibility and come to prominence – especially if the vaunted egalitarianism of 'Royal Buddhist Socialism' operated more in the form of symbolic (and thus 'hypocritical') postures and gestures by civil servants and by Sihanouk. More fundamentally, the blatant philosophical inconsistency of the doctrine was an easy target for any detractors. For his part, Sihanouk understood perfectly well that real socialism and even a diluted monarchism could never mix. Nevertheless, to all appearances he felt less challenged, personally, by the foreign-inspired theorizing of the young leftists of humble background than by the culturally ingrained or bureaucratically fortified antipathy of some of the leading families. It is striking that after he had taken the side of the Communists as their figurehead in 1970, it seemed to come very naturally to him to deny their 'Communism' and stress their 'patriotism'. As he cannot have thought that the Khmer Rouge were more anti-Vietnamese than the leaders of the Khmer Republic, one surmises that the Khmer Rouge were patriots by definition because they had never overthrown the Head of State and ex-King of Cambodia, whose fate and interest were synonymous with those of the nation as far as he was concerned.⁶⁴

But let this section end on as positive a note as possible, with the observations of two sympathetic Frenchmen, and from Sihanouk himself, on his kind of socialism before he was swept along by the Communist revolution. First, a historian who, using Sihanouk's own self-description, called him first and foremost 'a craftsman of state'. Sihanouk denoted the regime which he had undertaken to create as 'socialist'. But it was a socialism as far removed from the 'scientific socialism' of Marx and Lenin as from the 'welfare socialism' of the 'Anglo-Saxon' type: more like the translation of the teachings of Buddhism into political, economic and social terms. Essentially pragmatic, it drew its inspiration directly from religious principles, preaching mutual self-help and social action as the means for man to surpass himself in the struggle against evil and social injustice. It implied a great respect for the individual human being. The implementation of this doctrine of action was basically the task of the Sangkum – a national grouping with nothing of the political party about it, and certainly no pretensions to be a monolithic organization. In this capacity it had presided over the emergence and flowering of an original form of direct democracy. Without weakening the legislative power delegated to the National Assembly, it enabled the citizens to control the administration of the country. Meeting

regularly every six months at Phnom Penh, under the presidency of Sihanouk, the National Congress of the Sangkum saw each Minister give a public account of his work in reply to the questions of any citizen. All the proceedings were carried on the radio for the enlightenment of the public on the progress of public affairs. This 'Khmer Socialism', in short, inspired positive legislation, gave purpose to government action, and infused the life of the Khmer people. The Prince himself wrote:

In concrete terms it finds expression in the coexistence of State, private or mixed enterprises; in our big voluntary collective-labour projects ...; in the distribution of land to peasants who ask for it; in the setting up of co-operatives ...; in the extension of education to all; and in the adoption of social legislation which benefits the workers ... We are building our own socialism, without jolts, without revolutions, and in the conviction that this road is the best that we could adopt.⁶⁵

And here is an account based on observations in the very earliest days of the Sangkum, by a political scientist. Politically, Khmer Socialism had two objectives: democratization and political control. The democratic objective found its expression, first, in the voting rights accorded to women, the right of popular recall (of Deputies, etc.), the institution of people's audiences and National Congresses, the reintroduction of elections to the *Khum* (township) councils, the institution of the referendum, and the concern for constant contact with the people. But there was also a concern for equality. Thus, ministers no longer had the right to the title 'Excellency', the citizens no longer had to kneel when talking to Ministers or to a civil servant. And the Sangkum imposed on the members of the government certain rules of discipline, known as *vinaya*, comprising:

- 1 Do not use government offices for carrying on private activities.
- 2 Do not make private use of government cars.
- 3 Do not frequent places of pleasure.
- 4 Treat the most humble as equals and remain in touch with the people, the better to serve.

In this respect the Prince often raised his voice against excessive escorts, the concern for decorum, the love of parades, the large entourages which accompanied journeys abroad. As the pre-eminent figure of the royal family, he had made an effort to democratize the institution of the monarchy too, in the style of the royal families of Scandinavia. Such efforts – symbolized by the Prince riding a bicycle – reinforced even more the popularity of the former King.

As for the objective of political control, the analyst stressed that this was a 'national' socialism by contrast with Communism. Thus it did not destroy the idea of nationalism to the benefit of internationalism. The formula was as follows: 'Our administrators, soldiers, students, men of politics, will be *socialists* for the well-being of the people and *royalists* for the prestige and cohesion of the

nation.' Nor was the effort at political control limited to the Sangkum. Although at first the Prince had said that he would make it 'the scout movement of the government', he found that the youth were being dangerously aroused by the opposition. He thus decided, in 1957, to bring them under tighter control by regrouping them within a national movement whose aim would be to inculcate the ideal of national socialism, under the supreme authority of the Crown... *Jeunesse Socialiste Royale Khmère* (JSRK).⁶⁶

Preschez's seemingly laudatory account continues by describing Khmer Socialism as a kind of 'pragmatism', unwilling to fit into any internationalist mould. In fact its roots were to be sought, according to its promoters, in certain historic, religious and traditional phenomena, which showed that certain forms of socialism had infused the life of the Khmers since time immemorial. Not only that, but the founders of this socialism were said to be the Khmer kings themselves. Although in principle all the land belonged to the Crown, in practice the royal lands were communal lands of which the people had had free use. Also, the Khmer kings had been responsible for great works of economic and social import – as, for instance the gigantic irrigation projects of Angkor and the 102 hospitals set up by Jayavarman VII.

Khmer Socialism was also traced, by its theorists, to the imperative of the Buddha to fight against injustice and all forms of alienation. In practical terms, its spirit was expressed in communal agricultural labour. But this was totally at variance with Marxism and collectivization. There was no agrarian problem to justify land reform or collectivization (the rural masses being comprised of peasant owners), while the industrial working class was insignificant. There was, however, national planning for agriculture, and state intervention to build irrigation works with the help of voluntary communal labour, while at the level of industry there was certainly deemed to be a place for state control as the colonial regime had fostered only Chinese and Vietnamese entrepreneurship, leaving Cambodia without a native middle class. Nevertheless the Sangkum reckoned that it would be harmful to nationalize the totality of existing private (and mainly foreign) firms, nor did state planning represent a desire to enter into competition with anyone, or to establish the hegemony of Khmer Socialism. The essential goal of planning was the harmonization of development efforts in the spheres of production, social facilities and infrastructure. Certainly it was 'socialist' to the extent that it strengthened state control over the national economy and aimed to ensure the prosperity of all, but mobilization of the people was based on rational argument, with the national leader making a point of personally *convincing* the rural populations to dig wells and canals, or the landless peasants to go and settle on land in the new provinces. The Prince was just as much campaigning to restore the dignity of manual labour and he expected all his civil servants, military officers and members of the JSRK to devote a part of their time to it. In this sense, the Sangkum was a truly living ideology. It brought community development to Cambodia through a combination of expert guidance and gentle persuasion.⁶⁷

The great orchestrator or master craftsman himself, looking back from his place of exile in 1972, mused in answer to a question about the part that Buddhism had played in his socialism and in his principles of government generally:

You are aware – and this is what your question seems to be getting at – that I used to speak less of ‘my’ socialism than of ‘Buddhist Socialism’. In the ‘Third World’, at the moment when history took cognizance of it, around the mid-1950s, at the time of the Bandung Conference, socialism was, one may say, in fashion – if only because it was opposed to capitalism which one tended to identify more or less with colonialism from which we had just freed ourselves with so much suffering. This vague inclination on our part coincided with a strategy of the socialist camp, which launched a veritable offensive of charm in our direction.

So we all began to talk of socialism, a little bit wide of the mark maybe: Sukarno, N’krumah, U Nu, myself, we felt in our rather confused way that here was an instrument of national development and a weapon against colonialism and imperialism. Our attitude towards various powers was not always very coherent, and our internal policies didn’t always measure up with our eloquence and our diplomacy.

Take Nasser. He was a man whom I really admired and respected, a pure patriot. But while he leaned on the Soviet Union so as to resist the Americans, what was he doing with his Communists? He was throwing them into prison. Nehru fitted in better with Communism in his country but it only led to conflict with China! As for Sukarno, even if he went through a long honeymoon with the Indonesian and Chinese Communists, it ended up in the terrible massacres of 1965 in which one of his comrades-in-arms, Aidit the red leader, perished. Each one of us had ‘his’ socialism, which we related to a powerful current of history – more, or less, correctly comprehended or emulated. Our posture was not without some shady corners and a good dose of demagoguery.

Socialism? Communism? I’m afraid I get more and more bewildered. The problems are so complex, the changes of partners so misleading. At the moment when Yugoslav Communism (previously anathemized by our Chinese friends) seems more acceptable to Peking, the Soviets revert to their denunciations and threaten Belgrade. And Ceausescu: is he more Communist than nationalist? And at home, Thiounn Mumm, a solid Marxist, now tells me that the Pracheachon is not Communist.⁶⁸

There follow three paragraphs of lyrical commentary on the egalitarian message of the Buddha, typified by his polemics against the *Kcātya* (the nobles) whom he denounced as the real ‘untouchables’ if their merit was not equal to their duties as princes and rulers. Sihanouk speaks of Nirvana – not to be confused with nothingness, but comprising rather the end of suffering, spiritual detachment, final liberation – achieved through the lightening of the burden of karma, i.e.

our desires and passions. The best means to this end is obviously altruism, giving to the poor what you take from the rich, practising a spirit of mutual assistance. This was the basis of Sihanouk's 'Buddhist Socialism' which he continued to believe to be admirably adapted to the temperament and aspirations of the Cambodian people, not least because of their fanatical individualism. Hence the unsuitability of Marxist–Leninist coercion. Yet this home-grown, 'nationalist' version of socialism had succeeded in turning the capitalists towards constructive tasks and bringing Cambodians from different strata together in shared manual labour.⁶⁹

It might be mean or disrespectful on the present writer's part to give himself the last word, but for all the undoubted egalitarianism of Theravada Buddhism (expressed at a practical level partly by social mobility through the monkhood), and the resulting appeal and vitality of the religion in the societies which it penetrated, we should never forget that it was introduced by kings as an ideology of pacification.⁷⁰ Moreover, in commentaries on Buddhist doctrine in the context of modern Thai society we are occasionally reminded that merit is not simply a function of some spontaneous capacity for good works in an individual, but will often reflect, at the same time, the social rank and hence economic or political capacity of an individual to perform good works. This is not seen as 'an unfair advantage due to the coincidence of birth'. On the contrary, most conspicuously at the pinnacle of the social structure, it is an endowment due to the accumulation of great merit in previous lives.⁷¹ Indeed, a king, whose position enables him to acquire enormous merit simply by virtue of protecting the Sangha, and who owes the largest part of his legitimacy to these virtuous actions in the present, is seen as a *Boddhisatva* (angel) if not Buddha by virtue of those presumed, meritorious actions on an earlier stage.⁷² Thus this is not at all the same as saying that kings in a system of hereditary kingship are descended from kings and may thus have inherited virtuous qualities 'in the blood'. And yet, possibly in the popular imagination no great distinction is made between the two conceptions. It is certainly the case that Sihanouk's propagandists never let anyone forget the glorious achievements of his forefathers – no more than the modern Chakris have done.⁷³ At any rate, all these features of South-East Asian political thought, supporting hierarchy rather than subverting it, should perhaps be kept in mind when we read a text which baldly equates Buddhism with Socialism.⁷⁴ A rather similar caution is in order when we read a text which blithely dismisses every political grouping that pretends to represent the people, by advancing the contrary claim that only a Khmer monarch (by definition devoid of self-interest, again partly due to a Buddhist upbringing) can offer and experience true communion with 'the little people'.⁷⁵

3.3 Federation of Malaya

The nine monarchies of the Malay Peninsula were cast in an entirely unpredictable historical role, indirectly, by the Japanese occupation. One or two of the Sultans were found – by the returning British, after the war – to have entered

into relationships with the Japanese which went beyond the ineluctable necessities of survival, and which could be branded as 'collaboration'. This was held against them by a celebrated agent of British plans for a more centralized and racially egalitarian post-war Malaya, which had been hatched in Whitehall while the British officers of the Malayan Civil Service were mainly 'guests of the Japanese'. The 'agent' was Sir Harold MacMichael. He browbeat the offending royalty into signing away their sovereignty to the so-called 'Malayan Union', under threat of trial and losing their thrones altogether.

This high-handed move was utterly contrary to the spirit of the original British treaties with the Malay States, which had served as a bulwark not only of the Sultans' sovereignty but also of the status of the Malays as the legitimate, indigenous people amidst massive Chinese and Indian immigration. A nationalist party sprang into existence to fight this 'Malayan Union' – the United Malays National Organization (UMNO). Unlike the typical nationalist activity across the water in Indonesia, the struggle of UMNO was led by aristocracy and elite civil servants, and set monarchy at the centre of its vision for constitutional development. At the same time, UMNO was nothing if not a highly democratic organization, whose grass-roots activists and mass following were every bit as important as the more 'ceremonial' Sultans. Some rulers felt that their prestige was being manipulated in a cause which did not bode well for their own political future in the long run. The leader of UMNO, Onn Jaafar, indeed already had to threaten some of them with the 'wrath of the masses' if they did not cooperate with him to force the British to abandon their plan. This, presumably, 'confirmed their worst fears'. But anyway, they bowed to browbeating yet again. Thus were the British forced to abandon Malayan Union and negotiate with a joint committee of UMNO and the rulers, which led to the establishment of the 'Federation of Malaya' in January 1948. It was as if the Malay elite had combined their energies to force the British to continue with 'Indirect Rule', but with a nationalist mass party (or its elite leaders) now the main beneficiary of the Sultans' prestige, not the colonial power.

The Federation of Malaya had many features of an embryonic unitary nation-state but its components were given authority in a number of spheres, for instance land and religion. The Sultans continued to be head of religion in their respective States but control of land would be devolved to the elected State politicians and become their foremost asset within a few years – indeed, rather fewer years than was expected in 1947, since the process of democratization was speeded up in the early 1950s in order to pre-empt the militant Independence campaign of the Malayan Communist Party. The accelerated advent of democracy once again put the Sultans, or at least the more conservative of their number, on the spot. There were some notable tensions between rulers and elected Chief Ministers (*Mentri Besar*), whose appointment was no longer in the gift of the Sultan, except purely formally, under the democratic State Constitutions.⁷⁶ The royal assent to laws passed in the new legislatures was also, of course, a pure formality. This was part of the background to certain cases of

rulers showing opposition to Malayan Independence, which, like democracy, came about much quicker than was originally anticipated, in 1957.⁷⁷

Between 1948–57 the *de facto* ‘Head of State’ (and First Minister until 1955) was the British High Commissioner. But under the Independence Constitution a novel institution was inaugurated, whereby the rulers would elect one of their number to act as ‘*Yang Di-Pertuan Agong*’ (‘Supreme Lord’) of the Federation for periods of five years each, subject to mortality. By this means, ‘Malay supremacy’ was symbolized for the Malayan Federation as a whole, including the former Straits Settlements of Penang and Malacca.⁷⁸ In the Federal Constitution, the Agong was in fact accorded some powers which appeared to go beyond symbolism. Thus, apart from upholding Islam as the official religion – a counterpart role to that of the Sultans in their own States – he was required and empowered to give effect to special provisions for protecting ‘the Malay position’, such as racial quotas for civil service appointments and the status of Malay as the official language. But in practice such powers were exercised on the advice of the Prime Minister.⁷⁹ The Conference of Rulers – their collective conclave – was given a veto over any legislative derogation from ‘the Malay position’ (including their own general rights and privileges as royalty!), but how could any such derogation occur, given that a two-thirds majority of the Lower House was requisite for any Constitutional Amendment in the first place? It is also striking that in this federal structure, unlike some others in the world where the protection of ethnic rights was an essential part of the exercise, the individual States were not represented in a powerful Upper House endowed with responsibilities in this regard. Thus in place of effective (or imaginable) mechanisms involving royalty, it was the dominant Malay party, UMNO, that guaranteed the perpetuation of Malay rights – working through the Alliance Party, which harnessed the support of compliant Chinese and Indian partners to the Malay interest in return for economic accommodations. ‘Royal politics’ was practically dead in the 1960s.

The most that anyone might find to write about⁸⁰ was the system of rotation in the top office, which was scarcely elective at all. That is, it went strictly by the precedence of each Sultan’s succession to his State throne, though with two provisos in practice: (a) a lifestyle which went beyond the bounds of propriety even in the eyes of his peers could cause a Sultan who had manifest precedence to be passed over; (b) a Sultan might indicate that he himself did not wish to be considered – and when this did happen, again lifestyle seems to have been a consideration on the part of one manifest candidate unwilling to change his ways and submit to the discipline of high national office. Nevertheless, by the time seven States had taken their turn, in the early 1980s, it became clear that it would not be possible to pass over the two remaining and let the series start all over again, before they had all had their turn. This conviction was held, whether the candidate this time round was the same man as the last time, who had not tangibly reformed himself, or the son of the candidate previously passed over, but tangibly a chip off the old block.⁸¹ Clearly, also, by this time, precedence in terms of succession date was no longer relevant, for two States were being given

their turn because they had missed it before. Subsequently, the original sequence has begun to be replicated, without reference to dates of State succession.

However, this account anticipates the 1980s and 1990s. The point that has to be emphasized in relation to 'racial politics' in the 1960s is that the monarchs were essentially above the fray. And nearly all of them acted perfectly constitutionally all the time, in the context of democracy. But that decade was not politically placid. Democracy also brought the turbulent Lee Kuan Yew on to the scene, and this left racial tensions in the air, and a deepening polarization, even after Singapore was expelled from the Malaysian Federation in 1965. Malay nationalists felt a growing sense that 'Special Rights' had left the Malays deprived of any economic foundation for their constitutional supremacy: the 'immigrant races' (plus – less visibly – foreign capital) still 'owned' the economy. A stinging slap in the face came from the 'Father of Independence', Tunku Abdul Rahman himself, when Malay was not given recognition as the sole National Language where this would have really counted – in the law courts, and especially in education – when the original time limit for English expired in 1967. Then the general elections in May 1969 saw the desertion of UMNO's client party, the Malaysian Chinese Association, by part of a generation of more assertive Chinese voters, with the possibility of a non-Alliance government and Chinese Chief Minister taking over in Selangor State. This sparked off Malay attacks on Chinese, followed by widespread mayhem, with hundreds of deaths in Kuala Lumpur: the incident known ever since as 'May 13'. Malaysia's vaunted system of racial harmony under democracy was at an end – at least on the terms established between 1955–57.

As for the rulers, they were passive spectators to these events. However, in the aftermath, their position was strengthened in the Constitution. The Conference of Rulers' formal veto on any reduction in the rights of the Malays was extended to a broader range of provision than before.⁸² Previously, apart from having the right to be consulted about any change of administrative action concerning the Malays, the Conference had had the power of veto over any derogation from a constitutional privilege of the Malay race (as was mentioned above). But now (1971), the veto itself became 'entrenched', namely, as a Malay privilege which could not be retracted without the consent of the Conference; besides, under amendments both to the Constitution and the Sedition Act, it became illegal to even raise such a question in Parliament. The embarrassed contortions of a UMNO General Assembly later in the decade (1978), when it humbly petitioned the Conference of Rulers to consider the coordination of the religious affairs administration of the States, were suggestive of a shifting balance of power. In the State of Kelantan the Sultan demanded and was granted a new palace in return for his indulgence towards certain questionable dealings in timber and other concessions, by which the Chief Minister (Mohamed Asri of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party) had attempted to generate funds for the State budget, party coffers and private pockets simultaneously.⁸³

3.4 Brunei

As we saw in Chapter 2, section 2.2, events in Brunei after 1950 were significantly shaped by the new Sultan, Omar Ali Saifuddin. There had been an embryonic nationalist movement in the late 1940s, called *Barisan Pemuda* ('Youth Front'), but it was dedicated to a repossession of Bruneian sovereign rights by the ruler, not a usurpation of monarchical prerogatives by non-royalty, as was happening on the Malay Peninsula. If one looks to Malaya for comparisons, one will be most of all struck by the fact that Brunei experienced no challenge to the position of the Malays of the type represented by Malayan Union. There was a lurking danger in the fact that the Governor of Sarawak (a Colonial Office appointee since the abdication of the Brooke dynasty) became the British High Commissioner for Brunei from 1 May 1948. But the royal circle were extremely alert to any signs of 'Sarawak expansionism' under the new guise of colonial bureaucracy. Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin in the 1950s doggedly resisted most moves tending towards the propagation of federalism in British Borneo, even under his own 'leadership' as Sultan. Thus there was no issue on which the Brunei educated elite could feel that the monarchy was being browbeaten, or 'bought', into accepting an antithetical British perspective. Consequently, in turn, the social 'fault line' in Brunei politics in the 1950s, after the rise of the radical Brunei People's Party (*Partai Rakyat Brunei* – PRB), followed old class divisions in an almost pure form, i.e. on one side the aristocracy-cum-educated elite, grouped round the Sultan, resisting on the other side a challenge from socialist-minded spokesmen of the non-elite strata. The fundamentally contrasted situation in Malaya was that the aristocracy-cum-educated elite there had mobilized a mass following, in the name of the Sultans ostensibly but in fact autonomously from the Sultans, whose old position was not secure against democratic inroads, and whose future ceremonial position could only be sustained if UMNO was content with the balance of mutual advantage in their symbiotic relationship.⁸⁴ No doubt, even in the absence of a threat to Brunei Malay priorities, the unity of elite and Sultan could have become extremely strained if the unedifying and self-centred Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin had remained on the throne. But that is hypothetical and academic. In the event, Brunei in 1950 got itself an activist Sultan, who was able to seize the initiative and start setting domestic agendas before the rise of any mass political party, let alone an elite-led party. This head-start, and the accompanying unity of monarchy and elite, have conditioned Brunei's characteristically non-democratic political development ever since.

In 1959, thanks mainly to the strong will and dynastic vision of this royal activist, but in part because of British fears of the Indonesian-style radical nationalism of PRB, executive power was yielded to the monarchy by the Colonial Office – under a 'Constitution' perhaps misleadingly thus called. This was contrary to original intention and totally in contrast, obviously, to the democratic development sponsored in the Federation of Malaya and Singapore. But it was in keeping with another piece of British legal drafting, the one probably closer to the Sultan's heart: the Law of Succession, which spelled out

the right of his line alone to occupy the throne after his death. In point of fact, the Constitution included a Legislative Council, and provision was made for elections two years later. But when these were eventually held (three years later), the victory of PRB was so overwhelming that it placed the party in a position – even in a Legislative Council only partly elected – to be able to stall the merger of Brunei with the other territories of ‘British South-East Asia’ as the ‘Federation of Malaysia’, on which the Sultan had fairly clearly, at that point, set his heart.⁸⁵ Indeed, the party had won the elections essentially on an anti-Malaysia platform. The Council remained unconvened for over three months, as if to forestall the passing of an anti-Malaysia resolution.

The PRB’s military wing rose in revolt (December 1962) – but thereby played into the hands of conservative interests, as it soon transpired. British forces from Singapore crushed the revolt. After this, a Gurkha battalion of the British Army was stationed in the Sultanate – more precisely, in the middle of the oilfield – and this has become a permanent security fixture, extending even beyond Independence in 1984 down to the present day, and paid for by Brunei. Democracy has remained in suspension until now, apart from the tentative restoration of a partly elected Legislative Assembly between 1965–70. The consolidation of royal power has been constantly facilitated by a rolled-over ‘State of Emergency’, under which, for instance, even the fully appointed Legislative Council was removed from the Constitution in 1984.

As the backward-gazing eye will so easily pick out the key events and turning points which brought this situation to pass, we must beware the temptation to regard the whole progression as ‘inevitable’. Bruneian ideologues have a version of ‘inevitability’ – the manifest destiny of monarchical absolute rule in the light of supposed ancient precedents, which left the present little choice but to emulate the past. However, the personal historic role of Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin cannot be too much stressed, even when he could not have foreseen the consequences of his actions, or lacked a very clear direction. In 1962 he often seemed adrift. But in 1965–66 he set a self-consciously anti-democratic course, resisting by hook or crook British pressure to allow a cabinet to be formed from the elected group in the legislature (still a minority of the members, as in 1962, but in 1965 directly elected). It is widely believed that the Sultan’s abdication in favour of his son, Hassanal Bolkiah, in 1967, was a diversionary manoeuvre to take the steam out of pressures for democracy – from Brunei politicians as well as the protecting power. Once the local democratic activists had become demoralized by lack of popular support, the government quietly amended the Constitution to abolish elections to the Legislative Council. This was in April 1970, even before the British Labour Government had been replaced by the ‘Brunei-friendly’ Administration of Edward Heath.

It may be wondered whether British governments could bring any leverage to bear whatsoever, to cajole the Sultan of Brunei in the direction of democracy. After all, was Brunei not self-governing and the Sultan sovereign under the Constitution negotiated with the Colonial Office in 1959? The fact is that practically the only threat that London could wield was the threat to withdraw its

protection before Brunei was ready to defend itself. (In contrast, British withdrawal from Malaya was conditional on local leaders establishing a working democracy. In Brunei the British had to *threaten* to withdraw in order to pressure the government into establishing a working democracy – and eventually, in the 1980s, would admit ‘defeat’ and leave behind a Brunei that was neither undefended nor demonarchized!) When the Wilson Government, unmoved by the 1967 abdication, threatened a unilateral renunciation of the Treaty of Protection the ex-Sultan does not seem to have been deterred. Was he so inured to British pressure, or so perceptive of fundamental British strategic interest, that he could dismiss all such threats as bluff? He may well have been fortified in his icy sang-froid and brinkmanship by private British advisers close to Shell, the Conservative Party or the ‘Gurkha lobby’. At any rate, his luck held and the Conservatives were re-elected. In 1971 Britain handed over control of internal security, previously a joint responsibility, to the Brunei Government. External defence and foreign relations remained the responsibility of Britain, however, until 1984.⁸⁶ Under this protective umbrella externally, and working ‘behind the throne’ internally (not to speak of the invisible Police Special Branch, which worked ‘behind’ him in every sense), the ex-Sultan was able to pursue his programme of royal consolidation throughout the 1970s. In place of democracy and ministerial posts, the ambitious were charmed or entrapped by bureaucratic careers, and a plethora of appointments to traditional ranks, each of which entails a solemn, ancient oath of loyalty to the monarch.

Of all this, Hassanal Bolkiah, today’s Sultan, must probably be counted the pre-eminent beneficiary – aside from the fact that the oaths of loyalty just referred to were to himself, not his father.⁸⁷ The late Sultan passed away in 1986, towards the end of the third year of the ‘Full Independence’ for which the ideologues give him credit retrospectively, but which he would dearly have put off for ever if Britain had not in the end washed its hands of the affair. And yet, there was an element of ritualism or ‘demonstration effect’ in Britain’s act. As we have seen, ‘withdrawal’ did not extend to the Gurkha Battalion. As a matter of fact, the ‘retreat from empire’ was forced upon Britain – and on Brunei – in no small measure by Malaysian taunts at the United Nations about this ‘colonial left-over’ in island South-East Asia.⁸⁸ ‘Bruneian Independence’ was very much a requirement of international etiquette or ‘correctness’. At heart, there was no divorce. As a formally independent state recognized by, and represented at, the United Nations, the Sultanate has subsequently been able to maintain the essence of its old links with Britain. And while Britain no longer presses Brunei to become democratic – not even at a time (1998) of ‘ethical foreign policy’ under a new Labour Government – nor does the United Nations Organization, where non-democracies have a sizeable presence.⁸⁹

The missing factor in this account of dynastic consolidation through royal statecraft is of course oil, and the depoliticizing effect of welfare. It is proposed to incorporate these factors into the substantive chapter on modern Brunei, Chapter 8.

3.5 Thailand

If King Ananda was a boy-king when he inherited the throne in 1935, his brother Bhumibol was only just a man at the time of Ananda's death in a mystery shooting inside the palace, on 9 June 1946. In the years immediately after both successions the situation was similar to an interregnum, in which the military had ample room to consolidate its political power, embarrassed neither by the need to admit that Thailand was no longer ruled by monarchy, nor by an active monarch unwilling to be ruled by the military. Moreover, the death of Ananda resulted in two unexpected developments of special benefit for Field Marshal Phibun. Phibun was currently languishing in bad odour because his clique had put Thailand on the losing side in the Pacific War, while the non-militarists, led by Pridi Phanomyong (the civilian leader in the original 1932 coup) and Seni Pramoj (who had established a 'Free Thai' government in the USA during the war), were now in the ascendant under a democratic Constitution. The death of the King enabled the militarist clique to circulate rumours implicating Pridi in the event. The only witness – presumed – to the late King's death had become King in his place, and for that reason alone (but not only for that reason) could not testify at the show trials, which resulted in the execution of – presumably – innocent men allegedly linked to Pridi, as late as 1955.⁹⁰ This was of course during the period of military ascendancy which had begun when Phibun rode back to power on the back of a military coup in November 1947, partly benefiting from the King's Death Case itself (Pridi had in fact already had to resign as Premier in August 1946).⁹¹ At any rate, it might be said in defence of King Bhumibol in relation to the execution of innocent men that the situation had become very difficult for him because he had already begun to pit his prerogative against the ruling military clique over the coup-legitimizing Constitution of 1951–52.⁹²

The reversion to militarist dominance in Thai politics was not purely a function of domestic issues, including the opportunity presented by King Ananda's death. There was a new shift in the international constellation, namely the rise of the 'Cold War'. Thus whereas during World War II the United States had been happy to play host to the democratic movement of Seni Pramoj – Thailand's alternative to fascism, and incidentally a vital argument in blocking British reprisals after the war – by the late 1940s US interests had become more sympathetic to governments of the Right which were hostile to Communism and willing to act on that attitude. Thailand held special interest for US strategic planners because of its proximity to Indochina. Not that the 1947 coup received aid or blessing from any outside source.⁹³ But US patronage was to be the dominant feature of Thailand's foreign relations until 1975, with almost indescribably vast consequences also for the economy, society and politics. After Phibun's last government ended in 1957, he was succeeded by the even more lordly, military strong-man, Sarit (died 1963), and he by his protégé in turn, Thanom Kittikachorn (ousted by a student revolt and the intervention of the King in 1973).

For our present purposes, the more interesting aspect of militarist rule is not the US nexus but the ways in which men such as Sarit related to the monarchical tradition of their society. Sarit was notable for his deep sense that the Thai people yearned for a father-figure: a *phôô khun* in the mould of great monarchs of yore. Not quite surprisingly, for a military dictator, he aspired to fulfil that yearning in his own person first and foremost. And yet, awkwardly, the monarchy itself still existed and could not be ignored, let alone overshadowed. Maybe it could be mobilized in support? Let us remind ourselves, first of all, of the basic historical legacy.

As analysed by Thai political scientist Thak Chaloemtiarana, the historical development of the concept of power, authority and legitimacy took two forms. First, there was the 'traditionally' Thai patriarchal system, enshrined in the now famous stone inscription attributed to King Ramakhamhaeng of Sukhot'ai. Here, the ruler was idealized as the father-figure (*phôô khun*) who ruled over his domain in a paternalistic, yet autocratic manner. But this basis for power and authority was replaced during the Ayut'ia period by the *devaraja* cult, influenced by the court Brahmins adopted from Cambodia. Through this process of 'Khmerization' or Hinduization, the king laid claim to being the personification of cosmic values, deriving power and legitimacy from that extra-terrestrial sphere, directly or by replication. This framework of royal authority was transferred to the early Ratanakosin (Bangkok) period. Under the Chakri Reformation of Rama IV, however, and particularly in Rama V's reign, changes were made. As *devaraja*, the king had become increasingly isolated from the public and deviated from the *phôô khun* ideal type. But under Rama IV several measures were instigated to bring the position of the king closer to his subjects. Taboos against beholding or touching the king were removed, and his subjects were allowed to petition him directly – in a way reminiscent of the practices described in the Ramkhamhaeng inscription. Rama V went one step further by releasing his subjects from the obligation of prostration. Nevertheless, the aura of the absolutist God-king persisted.

The revolution of 1932 effectively deprived the royalty of its centrality in the process of politics, yet there was no revolution in the modern political sense. What seems significant is the emphasis on the concept of power and legitimacy heretofore invested in the personage of the monarch. The new leaders had to present an alternative legitimizing source for this. However, the idea of constitutionalism was weak because of the fact that it was foreign and not thoroughly appreciated by the general public. Although at first there were attempts to disregard the historical and traditional position of the throne as a legitimizing institution, and there were even suggestions of a republican form of government, in the end, as in 1911, the coup leaders backed down. They retained the monarchy, asking it to both forgive the coup and provide its sanctioning prerogatives of legitimization. Thus the new, 'democratic' Constitution became a gift from a benevolent King. This enabled the throne to maintain a moral superiority over the leaders of the People's Party, retaining a foothold in the Thai constitutional adventure, indeed a clear image as patriarchal

patron to constitutionalism, translating ancient monarchical obligations towards the people into a more modern guise. In contrast to other countries, the constitutional monarchy was not just 'the object' of politics, but in fact the 'subject' of politics, in other words, an active factor or potentially autonomous actor. This reality is a vital key to understanding the modern political system.⁹⁴

Surveying the period since the 1932 Revolution from a standpoint in 1999, one notices a lower incidence of military coups and suspensions of democracy in recent years than in the early ones. In Chapter 9 we may be able to guess how far this is attributable to the great length of the reign of King Bhumibol, with all the experience and influence that he has accumulated. But in terms of the exercise of that influence on behalf of democracy, it is certainly a 'mixed record'. Sometimes military coups have the support of public opinion, swayed by the same disgust for the selfish antics of the elected politicians as some military men are swayed by in snatching power away from them. The King must always tread carefully, in order not to compromise the good name of his office as 'representing the nation' or 'being above politics', even when he is intervening in politics! Another paradox, difficult for outsiders to grasp, is that at these times the military's self-perception and high self-regard as *guardians* of democracy – whose existence goes back to their Revolution in 1932 – are heightened, and constitute a potent factor in the conflict, which the King cannot ignore. Thus, even if from one perspective he is a 'subject' (or 'independent variable'), not 'object', of the political process as suggested by the commentary paraphrased above, a certain protocol has operated across the years, requiring a commitment of the monarch to 'stability', which at the moment of a coup usually means that he gives his legitimizing imprimatur to an illegal act. The typical pattern has been that when a military leader or clique stages a coup, the King grants his consent for a junta (euphemistically or self-flatteringly called 'Revolutionary Committee' – *Khana Padthiwad* – or some such title) to form a government, under a royal decree which retroactively sanctions the closure of parliament and suspends the Constitution. Everyone's commitment to democracy in principle is then evinced by the dialogue which will shortly commence, concerning the shape of the next Constitution, with the military typically aiming to retain some leverage over the executive through an appointed Senate in which they will dominate.

Reverting now to the analysis by Dr Thak Chaloemtiarana, but reading partly between its lines or augmenting its perspectives: not only was there much ambivalence and tension in the relationship of the military elite to the monarchy between 1932 and the rise of the 'Sarit patrimony', but Sarit's particular pretensions as a neo-traditional patrimonial leader had overtones of a usurpation of charisma from the very institution which was the source of these values or agent of their transmission from the past. At least this is how it appears to an outside analyst, and would surely have been perceived by a King who by that time was entering upon his political maturity (Bhumibol had his thirtieth birthday in 1957).⁹⁵ Very much to the point is the fact that Phibun, towards the end of his ascendancy, had been so shocked by the manifestations of the people's

love for the King when the government sent him on a tour of the northeast that he refused to finance further trips. To indicate his displeasure at this, in turn, the King boycotted the government-organized Twenty-fifth Buddhist Centennial celebrations.⁹⁶ Here was a latent potential for competition between two centres of authority – though it seems to be suggested⁹⁷ that the new strongman was at first more intent on, or conscious of, exploiting the ‘charisma’ of his own expansive, rather swashbuckling personality: a populist rather than in any way mystical patrimonialist. In Thai culture this kind of gangster personality – known as the *nagleeng* – enjoys a certain affection, even the status of ‘culture hero’.⁹⁸ If this was an important basis of his subjective appeal, Sarit need not have been conscious of ‘challenging’ the monarchy. Even as a neo-patrimonial, paternalist despot he could tell himself that there was no competition with the monarch’s role, for the monarch no longer had the command of State resources to dispense as largesse to the people – thus the Leader, by virtue of control of weapons (which likewise the King no longer had), could legitimately play this part. However, after a second coup in October 1958 (against Thanom, his own ineffective nominee as Prime Minister), he set out to consolidate his regime, working through a newly devised philosophy of Thai leadership that was unashamedly inspired by the image of Sukhot’ai in modern Thai imagination.⁹⁹ To this extent – and it is a big extent – Sarit was setting himself up as a pseudo-monarch.

Yet one may still wonder whether even from this moment he was quite conscious of ‘competing’ with monarchy. His primary, declared objective was to create a political system based on ‘Thai principles’, and in his ideal, modernized or modernizing, Thai society the three cardinal ideals were to be ‘King, Religion and Nation’. Right from the start (in 1957) Sarit had kept the King informed of all his moves, conscious of the standing of the monarchy among the people and the importance of having the King on his side. He invoked the King’s commission at his first press conference after the September 1957 coup. By actively promoting the idea of monarchy as a primary value of Thai society and the role of the King as a supplementary source of legitimacy for his regime Sarit may surely have conceived the relationship as one of partnership.¹⁰⁰ He would certainly be unlikely to see any sign of displeasure on the King’s part, at the developing role that he was given. But in the long run, if Sarit had lived, there would inevitably have been tensions between the conceit of the dictator after years in power and the prestige of the King after years of promotion. At least, the programme of royal promotion was storing up problems of relative legitimacy for Sarit’s successors, even if the King remained passive politically. The King’s charisma had the strength that it did not have to be mobilized anyway, nor his ‘following’ organized: these phenomena were simply present, immanent, in the culture. Precisely for this reason, Sarit’s legitimacy from other sources would always feel incomplete. At any rate, during the five years left to him, Sarit’s own legitimacy did benefit by tapping into this potentially ‘rival’ source, as we see from further analysis by Dr Thak.

The basic argument is that the monarchy as a political institution saw rapid development after 1957, as the Sarit regime made conscious efforts to give the King more exposure domestically and internationally. The government's popularity grew in step with the prestige of the King. Not only were elaborate tours of the country and foreign countries arranged, but traditional ceremonies were revived, and the National Day was brought in line with the King's Birthday. Also, the royal family was encouraged to participate in military affairs. While first and foremost giving legitimacy to both the seizure of power by Sarit and a wide range of regime policies, the King helped to increase the regime's prestige abroad, and also cemented regime/elite solidarity through sponsorship of ceremonial and social affairs. In connection with the paternalistic programmes of the regime in particular, the throne served as a channel for private contributions for 'charity', which the King redirected towards projects of social and economic improvement, at his discretion but with the government's acquiescence. This enhanced the popularity of both parties for the time being.¹⁰¹

Initially, the King was sent on foreign tours more than domestic ones, which were handled by Sarit himself. But by 1971 – when Sarit's successor, Thanom, staged a coup on behalf of his own executive, against the 'recalcitrant' parliament elected in 1969 (he himself being the non-elected Premier under this Constitution, as also between 1963–69) – Thailand had seen ten more years of a quiet, but profound, revolution in the relationship of the King to Thai society and polity.

Particularly after 1961, the King granted audiences to private citizens and groups on an unprecedented scale. Essentially, the throne was developing links with the rising (private) middle-class sector. Whereas, clearly, the government encouraged this at first, apprehensions arose as the position of the throne and its contacts with the public were strengthened and began to slip out of the government's control. Moreover, towards the end of the Sarit regime and even more after Sarit's death, the King increased his interaction with university students, by expanding his visits to campuses beyond the annual, ceremonial Convocations in the direction of an attention to student affairs and greater accessibility (of the King to the students). In 1966, the King also began to visit the people more frequently. But his newly powerful position was seen even more tangibly in the increasing number of scheduled audiences with the Prime Minister and other cabinet members. This trend was enhanced, not cut back, by the Thanom government, which apparently stood in special need of royal support in order to weather the Sarit corruption scandal.¹⁰² At the same time, the throne also appeared to move closer to the military, as seen in the number of military affairs attended by the King after 1963.¹⁰³

But even as the King was moulding, with some degree of conscious purpose and direction, a new role for the monarchy, the explosive expansion of higher education under Sarit's US-funded, developmental patrimony was giving birth to a potential, modern political force in the form of student organizations. On the assumption of youthful idealism, university students might prove to be optimal partners in the King's quest for political reform – provided they were not

captured by the Left (the Communist Party of Thailand) and taught to see the monarch as a 'reactionary' and a 'feudalist'. As seen by the present writer (who first visited Bangkok in 1967) the King abhorred his exploitation by a self-interested and self-appointed power group. While he saw it as his duty to preserve Thailand from revolution, a monarchy which was identified with corrupt regimes would simply have guaranteed its own early extinction. Bhumibol therefore set out to foster respect for religion and love for a monarchy which, while relying on its traditional assets in relation to the peasantry, would be forward-looking like that of his august grandfather (Rama V) and earlier Chakris. However, after three decades in obscurity the monarchy could hardly seize the initiative in a dramatic way. Nor was there an inclination for 'political dramatization' in Bhumibol's character. Rather, he appealed to the patriotism and social responsibility of the university students. He hoped to see this future elite applying its dedication to the improvement of the quality of public life and bureaucratic performance, while their good example might foster social responsibility and political restraint among less privileged Thais, as popular horizons and aspirations expanded. At the same time, one could perhaps see the university students and those recently graduated as a 'constituency' if not exactly a 'political base' for the King up to about 1974, as he sought to assert his autonomy from the military and free himself for a more effective contribution to national unity. Clearly, in relation to the military dictatorship the King can be judged to constitute a relatively 'progressive', not conservative, influence.¹⁰⁴

In the event, the students were almost thrust into the political forefront by the ineptitude of the military and a wave of public anger. For the first time, a military clique (the successors to Sarit) lost power to violence from below, and reform was ushered in much earlier and more substantially than the King may have anticipated. Even less anticipated must have been the fact that the breakdown of order left the King himself as the only person endowed with the authority to restore it. By his intervention in this conducive situation, and by not withdrawing from the scene until he had appointed a great National Convention, the King activated and established a royal power which – like the power of the students – had been merely a 'power in waiting' until that point. To retrace a few of the steps leading up to this profound transformation:

On 10 February 1969 Thailand held its first elections for over eleven years – a gesture but hardly a surrender to democracy by the heir to the Sarit hegemony, Field-Marshal Thanom. Under the 1968 Constitution the power of 219 elected M.P.s was balanced by a military-dominated Senate of 164. These Senators were appointed by outgoing Premier Thanom before his reappointment to the same office. The 'new' Premier was not allowed to be a Member of Parliament, and his appointment by the King was countersigned by the President of the Senate. Votes of no-confidence could only be passed by an absolute majority of both Houses in a joint sitting. The Senate had the power to delay legislation by one year, while the government secured its control of the Lower House by floating a

government party, the *Sahaprachathai* (United Thai People's Party), and recruiting support from among the many successful Independents whom the Constitution had allowed to stand in the election. The principal opposition party, *Prachathipat* or Democratic Party of lawyer Seni Pramoj, won 57 seats, the *Sahaprachathai* 75.

Despite the appearance of firm control the new Thanom government found the House of Representatives difficult to handle and, with the foreign situation increasingly uncertain following the Nixon *démarche* to China, the government staged a 'coup against itself' (and against parliament) in November 1971. In December 1972 a 299-member provisional Legislative Assembly was appointed as a token of the regime's intention to return to some form of democracy, but progress in that direction was too slow to forestall a wave of popular pressure which culminated in the famous student revolt and collapse of the regime on 14 October 1973. Field-Marshal Thanom, his partner General Praphat, and Colonel Narong (son and son-in-law of the former and the latter respectively) left the country at the request of the King. His Majesty then appointed a Convention which elected a new Legislative Assembly of 298 members from its own ranks. The celebrated intellectual and patriot, Kukrit Pramoj, Seni Pramoj's younger brother, topped the poll and won further political prominence as President of this Assembly and as a member of the Constitution Drafting Committee. A new era – perhaps a 'Kukrit era'? – seemed to have dawned.¹⁰⁵

But much more clearly it was an era in which the power of the King – latent or active, depending on the circumstances – could not be ignored. Considering that the Brunei monarchy in late 1973 was still tied into a protective relationship with Britain; that the Hydra-headed royalty of Malaysia was still more interested, broadly, in personal self-indulgence (or at best, ceremony) than politics; that Sihanouk was a pathetic, squawking puppet of the Communists in Peking; and that, to the North-East of Bangkok, the Communists were on the threshold of taking up their places in a reconstituted (though still nominally 'Royal') Government of Laos ... the Thai monarchy had gained an autonomy of action and influence which might be seen as superior, on balance, to that of any of its counterparts in South-East Asia at the time.¹⁰⁶

4 Indonesia

The exception that proves the rule?

This chapter is a little out of step with the previous two. Their purpose was to lay the groundwork of modern history for the countries which feature in Part III, that is, countries where monarchy has survived into the present, or at least was extant until recent decades. The present chapter, by contrast, looks at a republic. In chronological terms it overlaps with the periods covered not only in Chapters 2 and 3 but also by the five chapters in Part III. The purpose of the exercise is connected with the salient methodological concern articulated in Chapter 1, section 1.3: the question of causation from the more remote past.

One of the major obstacles to demonstrating any impact of ancient monarchical institutions and values on the existence of monarchies today is the intervention of colonialism. That is to say, even if long-range ‘transmission’ could be demonstrated in principle, it is colonial *Realpolitik* that was manifestly the proximate cause of perpetuation. This in a sense overlays or brushes out the traces of long-term cause and effect. While it is of course unlikely that colonial modernization will have wiped out traditional values as such, one can no longer with any confidence speak of them as the primary cause of continuity.

However – without wanting to take methodological ingenuity to ridiculous lengths – let us suppose that we could find a ‘control case’: a country where colonialism (a) duly intervened and achieved massive social penetration; but (b) did not leave a monarchy behind as its legacy. In such a situation, if (c) there were ample evidence of the persistence of monarchical values, expressed in non-monarchical institutions and behaviour, we could with more confidence assume that such values are a factor both present and causal in other states where monarchy subsists. Javanese society was subject to European colonization for a longer period than any other South-East Asian society. But, as we noted in Chapter 1, the Sultanates of Jogjakarta and Surabaya were reduced to a pathetic shadow of their former power – in other words were forced into the most extreme mould of Indirect Rule, hardly distinguishable from direct colonization. Furthermore, as a consequence of this ‘capitulation’ to the Dutch before World War II, they were branded as colonial puppets by the nationalists and allowed no role as constitutional monarchs in independent Indonesia after the war. In fact, when certain principalities outside Java became associated with the federalist (non-unitary) idea for the new Indonesian state, it was the final

death-knell for any royal institutions.¹ Yet if, in precisely such a situation of political failure or total 'discontinuity', evidence could be found of continuity of monarchical values, as reflected in certain aspects of socio-political behaviour, the paradox would strongly justify a presumption of continuity in situations of political success elsewhere.

The exercise would involve exploring the royal or aristocratic legacy in Javanese culture, as a possible or probable root of twentieth-century manifestations of social leadership and political power. We would identify, importantly, the historic alignment of the Javanese aristocracy and bureaucracy with the syncretic form of Islam, showing a latent antipathy towards those aligned locally with a relatively orthodox form. Apart from such cultural identity, we would also note features such as personal commitment to the Mataram ruler and the state apparatus, and the fact that this intense sense of hierarchy has a philosophical counterpart in the Javanese definition of personal spiritual power. And then we would note the continuity of this bureaucratic culture-with-royal-antecedents after Indonesian Independence, typified by, or enshrined in, values and patterns of the centre-periphery relationship – precisely those which were implied by the rejection of federalism as Indonesia's State structure by 1950, and which harked back to ancient conceptions of power and the health of the realm.²

Now in the absence of a King, how far did the first President of Indonesia represent or personify any of these values? The following passage is taken from a major biography of Sukarno. It points to a possible emulation or replication of old Javanese styles of leadership, in a vacuum of administrative and psychological certainties. Although Sukarno failed to appreciate how resistant the *santri* (the orthodox Muslims) were to philosophical 'compromise' – i.e. that blending of elements which is so characteristic of the *priyayi-abangan* (upper/lower class syncretist) spectrum – nevertheless ...

A part of his special power (*kesaktian*) was his ability to project himself as the blender of opposing views. Leadership in Javanese terms involves the capacity of an exceptional person to hold opposites in balance. This capacity was particularly important in view of the times with which he was dealing. Sukarno's era was genuinely a period of turmoil and his ideology of revolution was born of that sense of instability and uncertainty. He did not create the confusion but in that setting he could appear to Indonesia's 'little people' as the focal point of stability, as the man who could interpret the confusion and lead them to safety.

Finally, in so far as Sukarno was consciously or unconsciously reviving something of the Javanese *kraton*³ in his presidency, he was not only fulfilling the messianic expectations of his Javanese peasant subjects, but was also expressing the Javanese aristocratic idea of the parallelism of the cosmic and the terrestrial orders – the view that the job of the State was to mirror the cosmos in its hierarchy and its harmony, the spiritual superiority of the ruler in his capital serving as the analogue of the superiority of God in the universe. In Geertz's terms this was the function of the Theatre State. The

Indonesian identity which Sukarno was concerned to establish was, it would seem, a Javanese aristocratic identity; Sukarno's ideology, for all its apparent radicalism, was a means of securing that end, even though the aristocracy was no longer an aristocracy of blood but an elite forged in the struggle against the Dutch.⁴

If there was a vacuum of authority urgently needing to be filled as the Dutch withdrew, it is also true that the collapse of the Indonesian monarchies, not least under nationalist pressure, had left Sukarno felicitously without any rival to his leadership from that quarter. Not only that, the most prestigious would-be monarch in Java had thrown his weight behind the Republic. Here is a Dutch retrospect on the revolution, with special reference to the role of the Sultan of Jogjakarta in making it viable. The passage takes off from the rise of nationalist leaders, stimulated by the rather Netherlands-centric administrative development of the 1920s–1930s.

Everywhere in the towns and along the major interconnecting highways, the names of the nationalist leaders, especially the most active amongst them, began to be mentioned in conversations. Meanwhile, among the Europeans the myth still persisted that the Javanese peasant was 'loyal'. This went with a notable underestimation, on the one hand, of the level of awareness that 'loyalty' requires, and on the other hand a confusion of loyalty with the natural antipathy of a rural population towards social unrest, and the acceptance of traditional authority which just as naturally goes with this.

But as soon as the existing order was really destroyed, the new leaders began to take the place of the traditional authority. Only where the traditional holders of authority lined up with the new leaders, because they themselves aspired to a new order, could they exercise any real authority.

One of the best known examples of this is the Sultan of Jogya, who before the war was greatly admired by the Dutch government for the way he performed his princely role. It was he who, when the Indies government suggested on the eve of the Japanese invasion that he should join up with government for a better chance of safety, rejected the offer because he believed it was precisely at that moment that he should be with his people. And he it was whom the Japanese never dared to handle roughly, notwithstanding the independence of his posture, because of his unmistakable personal authority. Then, in the period of increasing lawlessness after the Japanese capitulation he helped a large number of Dutch people to escape to safer districts, having himself already rallied with full commitment behind the Republic of Indonesia. The Dutch tried in vain to sway him towards cooperation after the occupation of Jogya in the second 'police action'. At the time of the transfer of power, he was accepted as commander by all groups of the republican army, even though they were often mutually hostile and mostly operating at their own discretion.⁵

Idenburg gives the Sultan of Jogya special mention also for the reason that his upbringing (from his earliest youth) in the Netherlands and thorough assimilation to the Dutch milieu did not stand in the way of his embracing the traditional Javanese sphere with perfect dedication and tranquillity when he returned to Java to succeed to his father. Because he had applied his education to raising the Sultanate to the highest possible level of administrative excellence, leading by a personal example infused with virtuous simplicity – in short, the best values of Javanese princedom – he had won the undivided respect of the European administration too. But this harmonized and harmonizing personality, bestriding two worlds, had no doubt after the war that the time for a colonial relationship had passed. Thus he associated himself with the new leadership group. That decision implied, also, that he saw the era of traditional Javanese authority as belonging to the past as well. But this perception (if in any way valid) points to the probability of a process of social change thoroughly under way even before the war, including a shift of attachment, among the most dynamic members of the Javanese aristocracy themselves, from their traditional position of authority towards a new order of things.⁶

But the legacy of Sultan Hamengkubowono IX himself was to prove ambivalent. He had become the first Minister of War and Internal Security of the independent Republic, but relinquished these posts as incompatibilities emerged between his style and that of Sukarno. Having given such a lead in self-effacing altruism, both before and after the war, he might come to constitute a standard of virtue by which to measure a 'neo-monarchical' posture among republican leaders. But both the presence of an authentic monarchical standard and the posture of neo-monarchism will tend to suggest the existence of a relevant cultural substrate of much earlier origin. We look first at the behaviour of Sukarno's successor, President Suharto, whose 'New Order' regime turned its back on the 'affective' Javanese style of Sukarno's leadership but revived certain prerogatives of Javanese, bureaucracy-based monarchy.

Suharto's perception of Indonesia is conceivably that of a kingdom modelled closely on the independent polities of pre-colonial Java. Critics say the style of his rule is feudal. While observing the 1945 Constitution and the notionally sovereign representative institutions enshrined within it, Suharto brooks no dissent from below. The loyalty and obedience he demands from his ministers and officials is absolute and uncompromising. One of his homespun proverbs states: 'Whoever forgets the favours of others is like an animal'. To be made a minister in the New Order must be considered a potentially lucrative favour. Paid a minimal basic salary, an Indonesian minister none the less has the potential to accumulate wealth through a plethora of allowances, donations and power of patronage. The principle, if not the precise model, is almost identical to the parcelling and allotment of revenues and authority whereby the Sultans of Java controlled their feudal retainers.⁷

The writer (a British journalist based in Jakarta) noted the distinctly regal aura of the President. But the carefully cultivated image of a working president living a humble lifestyle and appearing for work in a drab safari suit, not to mention his penchant for homespun traditional Javanese customs, fooled few citizens, in the urban areas at least. Not that they necessarily disapproved. Javanese cultural philosophy preaches that wealth must be veiled by humility. Unfortunately, the acquisitive proclivities of Suharto's wife and children were hardly a secret. Indeed, by 1990 the offspring were solidifying their hold over the most lucrative areas of the economy, thanks to the government's programme of deregulation. Private airlines, television stations, radio, newspapers were brazenly set up: it was a case of new, private monopolies replacing those cast off by the government. And once established, these companies bent the rules shamelessly. In May 1991, *Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia* (RCTI), a private television station owned by Suharto's second eldest son, Bambang Trihadmodjo, was refused a licence to broadcast test transmissions via the nation's Palapa satellite, but it continued with its test transmissions regardless, and not long afterwards obtained the right to broadcast nation-wide using the satellite. It also announced its intention to seek a permit for land-based transmitters. The state television, *Televisi Republik Indonesia* (TVRI), was powerless to defend its monopoly.⁸

In 1998 the Suharto 'dynasty' was forced to bow out, as we know. Of course, the Asian financial crisis was the precipitating cause. But in assessing the manifold factors weakening its legitimacy over the longer term, let us not overlook the more authentic, challenging monarchical example of the Sultan of Yogyakarta. In his analysis written some five years before Suharto's downfall, Vatikiotis raised a tentative doubt about his staying power and a tacit question about a rival locus of legitimacy. Since Independence, Indonesia had tried almost the whole gamut of political systems: first, constitutional democracy, then Sukarno's 'Guided Democracy', followed by a brief flirtation with Communism, and latterly something resembling a throwback to the patrimonial rule of the Hindu-Buddhist kings of the pre-colonial period. But was neo-traditionalism a stable basis for perpetuation of the 'New Order', in all the circumstances? The funeral of Java's last feudal king, Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX, in October 1988, somehow suggested otherwise.

News of his death in a Washington hospital had stunned the nation. His staunch defence and generous financing of the infant republic had made him a national hero. President Suharto and almost the entire cabinet attended the funeral, which had all the trappings of a state occasion, on a scale of pomp rarely seen in independent Indonesia. For over sixteen hours, 150,000 people entered the palace gates to honour the Sultan. The people of Yogyakarta, and to a considerable degree the whole nation of Indonesia, revered the Sultan for his symbolism of a dim and distant sovereign past as well as his stout defence of democratic principles. Even though Indonesia was a republic, people still referred to him as *raja kita*, 'our King'. The Sultan had in fact possessed a talent for preserving the sacred image of the wise king with all the feudal trappings,

while using the modern language of Indonesia and espousing western principles of democracy.⁹

The writer goes on to note the awareness, among the upper reaches of society, of the Sultan's unexpressed distaste for Suharto and his methods, while the masses saw in the Sultan the values of the good and just king, or *ratu adil*. He was a rich businessman yet lived in comparative modesty and gave generously. This was contrasted with the perceived, shameless greed of Suharto's family and inner circle. Actually, Indonesians could not easily explain their grief. After all the Sultan was surely an anachronistic figurehead. Yet the Yogyakarta daily, *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, duly reported the succession of supernatural acts which were said to have accompanied the royal decease. Clearly, Javanese society was still quite steeped in mysticism, even while aspiring to, and indeed widely practising, the values of 'modernity'. The Javanese tradition, very much integrated with the modern state with its neo-feudal, anti-democratic orientation, had come back to haunt its incumbent ruler at the funeral of a would-be ruler of more authentic, traditional attributes. A traditional feudal king was being compared favourably with the modern republican president, whose kingly qualities seemed wanting. It was surely an uncomfortable day for Suharto, ignored as he was by the mourning masses, as they reached out to touch the sacred objects in the hope of capturing even the smallest fraction of a share of their inherent, protective or fortune-enhancing, charismatic power by that contagion.¹⁰

If speaking of Javanese paradoxes, we should certainly also remark that if the Sultan had ever attempted to put his wisdom to effect as a political leader, his charisma would have become burnished in some degree by the exercise of real power. It is only too easy for a ritual leader to become a repository of idealized hopes: it is precisely the function of ritual and symbol to express a 'higher' truth, free from imperatives of reification and risks of debasement in the world of mundane affairs. Be this as it may, the world of mundane reality in late Suhartoist Indonesia was one that was taunted by the purity of a Sultan-without-power, not one that was in a position to taunt the Sultan's purity with accusations of pollution by association with itself. This was one element in the ideological or ideational climate in which the Suharto regime sought, in the end unsuccessfully, to perpetuate its 'neo-monarchical' tenure.

To conclude this chapter, let us take a glance at one of the 'Outer Islands', Kalimantan (Borneo), where again a Javanese past has had an impact on the 'nation-building' present, with an ambivalent significance. As described in a recent anthropological study, a ritual leader of the traditionally forest-gathering Meratus Dusuns has invoked the legend of conquest by Majapahit to express, on the one hand, the perceived legitimacy of Javanese power. But on the other hand, the ideological legacy that is claimed is characterized by a principle of religious pluralism and tolerance, which is expected to protect Meratus shamanistic religion against the threats of Islam. Given Suharto's increasing indulgence towards Islamization in his later period – as if conscious of problems of legitimacy as a 'King without a crown', but at any rate estranged from the tolerant eclecticism of Sukarno's *Panca Sila* – memories of a more

authentic Javanese past, whether of 1950 or of 1350,¹¹ could be a mixed blessing for Javanese hegemony in the 1990s.

Through Majapahit, Uma Adang¹² enters the national discourse on history and the state. In Indonesia, Majapahit is virtually a code word for the beginning of civilization. The contemporary state continues to identify just enough with this Javanese kingdom of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries to make the resonances of the name worth contemplating for citizens. Majapahit is empire – once, now and forever. Majapahit extended its reach to south-eastern Kalimantan in the fourteenth century. In the Banjar chronicles, the story is told that a group from the land of Kaling (variously interpreted in the twentieth century as India or Java) settled in south-east Kalimantan and imported a King from Majapahit. As in other Indo-Malay royal-origin tales, the imported King marries the local water nymph and establishes a prosperous realm. The King sires a royal line, which goes on to rule the Banjar kingdoms, as well as smaller kingdoms of the south and east coast. Every regional history begins with this tale. Majapahit authorizes the beginning of civilized history and State rule in Kalimantan: so, too, in Uma Adang's account.

Before Majapahit, according to the shaman, was the Stone Age, when people worshipped stones and made fire from friction stones and palm-hair tinder. Iron was unknown. Everyone followed the same Hindu religion.¹³ But upon contact with Majapahit, everything changed: 'Water becomes stone. Stone becomes iron.'¹⁴ Thus Majapahit is the imagined state that protects all its subjects through religious and ethnic pluralism. 'Garagu 7' is a term used primarily by Dusuns when referring to various shamanic styles of south-eastern Kalimantan. According to Uma Adang, the legitimate diversity of the Garagu 7 was actually the original project of Majapahit.¹⁵

Indeed, the stakes are high for religious recognition, the anthropologist continues, because religion is key to Indonesian politics and ethnic status *vis-à-vis* the State. As Islam has had an important role in the nationalist revolution, some of its recognized religious counterparts (including Christianity and Hindu-Bali) have continued to have a political role too. Furthermore, since the attempted Communist coup of 1965 and its bloody suppression, the authorities have been prone to interpret lack of an official religion as affiliation with communism and, thus, subversion. Religion is required on identification cards, which citizens must carry even for local travel. In this context, the shamanic leader's reference to local Meratus custom as 'Kaharingan' and/or 'Buddhism' proclaims an imaginary State protection for local rights. She may be right in pointing to a connection between Indic kingdoms and adat¹⁶ – the unity of law, ritual, and cosmology, although it was Dutch colonialism that codified adat as a system of local administration and thus made it a symbol of pluralism and community autonomy. At any rate, it is Majapahit, not the Dutch, that is invoked in support of the claim for State protection. Majapahit makes it possible to imagine local

rights held in respect. If only the State would recognize adat, e.g. the traditional laws governing the use of forest land, rather than encouraging Banjar immigration, Javanese transmigration, and transnational timber-cutting, things would be as they should be.¹⁷

Enough said, now, of the great state of Indonesia: a polity without a monarchy yet still infused with values of monarchical origin – even at local, non-Javanese levels – and yearning for the golden age of a Just King. If Indonesian culture is thus infused, it will not be too controversial to assume the same of the five polities to be discussed in Part III, which kept their monarchies for a period of years, if not permanently, after World War II.

Part III

The latest phase

5 Laos

Bowing off the stage of history

We left Laos in Chapter 3 at the point when the coalition had been reconstituted, but on terms unusually favourable to the Pathet Lao, in the shadow of a pending US withdrawal from South Vietnam. Under the agreement signed at Vientiane on 21 February 1973 the ministries of the Provisional Government of National Union (PGNU) were distributed 50:50 between the two sides (and whatever side a minister belonged to, his deputy would be from the other). Prince Souvanna-phouma was to remain Premier. There was to be a forty-two member National Political Consultative Council (NPCC), also divided equally between the two sides, and empowered to make proposals for legislation (though not to insist on their acceptance if PGNU gave sufficient reasons for not accepting). PGNU and NPCC were described as two 'independent and equal' organs cooperating under the King. The two capitals – the administrative (Vientiane) and the royal (Luang Prabang) – were to be jointly policed.¹ The prediction of one academic observer² that Prince Souphanouvong (Chairman of the Lao Patriotic Front) would become head of NPCC, not a Vice-Premier in the cabinet, was borne out when finally, over a year later, after barracks had been built for the PL police and army units and a balance of forces established in the capitals, the 'Red Prince' arrived at Vientiane to an emotional airport reunion with his half-brother.³

From this point, events began to take a series of unexpected turns. Souphanouvong established his Council in Luang Prabang, his native town, at a secure psychological distance from the centre of 'the Vientiane side'. Here, capitalizing on his high status at the royal capital and by sheer force of applied intellect, he was able to manoeuvre the Council (including the bewildered, disorganized and out-faced Vientiane representatives) into making clear proposals for development to the cabinet 'down-river'. Only six weeks after its first session in May 1974, the Council adopted unanimously (as required by the Protocol) an 'Eighteen-Point Programme for the Current Construction of the Fatherland' and 'Ten Provisional Regulations on Guaranteeing Democratic Freedoms'. There was scarcely a hint of socialism, and the cabinet in Vientiane found little that they could object to. The Council then adjourned for six months and dispatched mixed membership teams to 'consult' (i.e. proselytize) the population of the two capitals.

Meanwhile the National Assembly, which was also supposed to convene in May, remained closed because the PL group in the cabinet (which did not recognize the Assembly, as constituted under pre-1973 elections) refused to agree to the forwarding of a letter from the Assembly President to the King requesting his presence at the re-opening. After the Assembly chamber had been used by the rightists to circulate a petition against the continuing North Vietnamese presence in the country, the Prime Minister proposed to break the deadlock by recommending dissolution to the King (which would have led to fresh elections). But the cabinet discussion was stormy, with a less than unanimous vote (the opposition to dissolution came basically from the Vientiane side). Souvanna-phouma declared 'unanimity' but in the tension of the meeting suffered a heart attack. So the initiative was frozen until his recovery. In fact, it appears that the King, a strict constitutionalist, would not have agreed to act anyway (the PL being opposed to elections being held within ninety days of a dissolution, as the existing Constitution stipulated).

During this time, Souphanouvong had been assiduously using the Standing Committee of his Council to prepare detailed plans for each ministry of the government! Again his capacity for moulding events was well in evidence. However, distance from Vientiane also held its disadvantages: such detailed plans could never be adopted and implemented without the consensus, clear command and follow-up of the cabinet. A way forward for the PL would have been for the Council to move to Vientiane, perhaps quasi-constitutionally enlarged to take the place of the National Assembly (if the King would cooperate). On the other hand, the atmosphere at Vientiane would have been far less accommodating to the PL.⁴

At any rate, the most significant impetus for a shift in power came not from the Pathet Lao but from the unexpectedly rapid Communist victories in Cambodia and South Vietnam (April–May 1975). The right-wing elite were naturally demoralized by these developments to south and east. Clearly there was no more hope that the USA would intervene to help them. Conversely, the Laotian Communists were jubilant. They deftly orchestrated events in Laos, including the mounting of 'struggle movements' for 'seizing power step by step' from the 'feudal reactionaries' (the established ministries of the Royal Lao Government) and replacing the old structures with 'popular democratic administrations'. Their task was not difficult, given the disillusionment of the urban political public with the corruption and self-seeking of the powerful right-wing families across the past twenty years. The latter were also vulnerable to the PL's nationalist-style taunt – very effective among students – that the old elite were 'American puppets'.⁵

In fact, the morale of the Vientiane side had already begun to be sapped in December 1974, with mutinies by their own troops. The assassination of Prince Boun Oum na Champassak, though not clearly politically motivated, enhanced anxiety. Political tensions mounted in early May 1975, as workers staged protests and walk-outs in the two capitals, and students demonstrated against 'the US presence' (mainly USAID). The May Day rallies in Vientiane set a new and 'un-

Lao' tone of abuse of right-wing ministers, backed by a stream of vituperation from PL Radio. Cadets at the Military Academy mutinied against their right-wing commanders. Days later, the three most harassed ministers resigned and departed for Thailand, along with two deputy ministers and three right-wing generals (including the celebrated Meo/Hmong general, Vang Pao). Their departure set off the flight of thousands of middle- and upper-class Lao, as well as the Chinese and Vietnamese commercial middle class of Vientiane. The USA withdrew the USAID mission and reduced its diplomatic representation to twenty-two, while outside the embassy all American property, official or personal, was effectively confiscated. In the absence of the right-wing Minister of Defence (the departed Sisouk na Champassak) it did not take long to bring the Royal Lao Army under PL control, by threatening military action against any recalcitrant commander. As PL troops moved into southern towns, 'people's revolutionary committees' replaced the 'reactionary puppet authorities'. In August the same process was completed in the administration of the two capitals, and the People's Liberation Army marched in without regard to the troop limits set by the Vientiane Agreements. Under this 'protective umbrella' undesirable bureaucrats were removed by 'people's courts' or workers' strikes, and 're-education seminars' were arranged for large segments of the population – combined with hard labour for senior army officers, police and civil servants who had not fled. Indeed, this 'reactionary group' was shipped off to Sam Neua in the northern, PL zone, for a re-education programme.⁶

Having all instruments of political control in its hands by October, the PL announced that general elections would be held in April 1976, while Souvanna-phouma announced his intention to step down thereafter. On 12 October the PL's Independence Day (commemorating the Provisional Independent Government of 1945) was celebrated in the RLG zone for the first time. In November, People's Assemblies were elected to take over the functions of the RLG-appointed district governors and RLG-manipulated cantonal chiefs. The stage seemed set for the general elections to come. Perhaps a period of calm and consolidation could now be expected.⁷

However, in late November revolutionary pressure was stepped up again, and both the PGNU and NPCC were convened at Vieng Sai in the PL zone. Two hundred more senior civil servants were ordered to prepare to leave Vientiane for 'seminars'. A new flow of exiles began, headed by the son of Souvanna-phouma (manager of the national airline), who swam across the Mekong to Thailand. At a rally in Vientiane to celebrate the local elections, the crowds denounced the 'feudalist, imperialist regime' and called for 'a new, popular and democratic one'. On 28 November crowds marched to the Prime Minister's house bearing placards with the same message. For the first time, the monarchy was denounced (only the previous month, the PL had paid customary obeisance to King Savang at their Independence Day celebration). On 29 November, the NPCC President, Souphanouvong, flew to the royal capital in order to join with Prime Minister Souvannaphouma and Vice-Premier Phoumi Vongvichit (a PL veteran) in conveying to the King the decisions made at Vieng Sai to 'complete

the revolution'. The King duly supplied a letter of abdication and 'voluntary renunciation' of the royal wealth. Then on 1–2 December the Communist Party held a secret two-day Congress – in Vientiane for the first time – and prepared the announcement of a 'Lao People's Democratic Republic' to the public, which was made on 4 December. On 5 December, Party Secretary General and Premier-to-be, Kaysone Phomvihān, 'descended' from the caves of Sam Neua. The Communists, now in the open as the 'Lao People's Revolutionary Party', extolled their 'brilliant and far-sighted leadership' across the years of struggle to ultimate victory. The PGNU and NPCC were dissolved by Souvannaphouma and Souphanouvong respectively. The Party Congress created a new government, as well as a Supreme People's Council (SPC) charged with drafting a Constitution and promulgating laws. Souphanouvong was made President of the new Council, and thus retained much the same function as before, but now augmented by the position of Head of State (President) in place of the King.⁸

As for Souvannaphouma, who had devoted so much of his life both to national reconciliation and to the defence of Laotian neutrality, he became an 'Adviser' to the new government.⁹ The King and Crown Prince, however, did not enjoy such indulgent treatment – notwithstanding a promising beginning. Although the abdicated King was at first appointed 'Supreme Adviser to the President' and the Crown Prince named a member of SPC, the latter only attended its first meeting, and neither he nor the ex-King attended subsequent meetings to which they were invited as guests. They were arrested in March 1977. There is speculation that the Party leadership were offended by their non-attendance at meetings of the Council, but it is also possible that in view of right-wing guerrilla activity against the new regime there was apprehension lest the royalty might become a rallying point for the resistance.¹⁰ At any rate, they were thereafter held incommunicado – 'to insure their safety', as the Communist authorities put it. In 1979 Prince Souvannaphouma stated in an interview that the ex-King was in Vieng Say, cultivating his garden, although the former Queen remained in Luang Prabang.¹¹ There were several rumours of the ex-King's execution or death from 1977 onwards. The authorities consistently denied this, until finally Kaysone Phomvihān, during an official visit to France in December 1989, disclosed that the ex-King had died in 1984, reputedly from malaria contracted at his detention centre.¹²

Such was the pitiful passing of the last monarch of a continuous line stretching back to the great unifier, Fa Ngum (1353), founder of the Lang Xang dynasty. The line can even be traced back through twenty-four reigns of the left-bank Kingdom of Muong Swa to the semi-mythical Khoun Borom, a Tai prince who led his people out of China in the late ninth century. We will recall¹³ that after the reign of the great King Souligna Vongsa (1637–94), wars of succession ensued and the realm was split in 1707 into two independent states, Vien Xang (Vientiane) and Luang Prabang. It was the latter that survived early nineteenth-century upheavals; King Savang Vatthana (1959–75) was its thirteenth incumbent.¹⁴ But an august lineage will never be immune to the later vagaries of regional geo-politics, least of all in a small, landlocked state that is economically

in pawn to powerful neighbours and militarily much weaker than they. Just as the Kingdom of Vientiane owed its emergence in 1707 to Vietnamese arms, so in turn its existence was snuffed out by an enraged Siam in 1829. In the twentieth century the survivor, Luang Prabang, eventually re-absorbed many of the ancient territories of Lang Xang under its 'sway', but only as a vassal in the system of French Indirect Rule. And these gains were exclusively on the left bank of the Mekong, the right bank having been mainly allocated to Siam by agreement among Western imperialists. In fact, even the recovery of these significant areas east of the Mekong only happened after France herself had yielded to *force majeure* (the power of Japan) in returning parts of the right bank which France had (inconsistently) taken back from Siam in 1904 (such as Sayaboury) – a retrocession which gave rise to the need to compensate an aggrieved King Sisavang Vong.¹⁵ Then, although 'Laos' entered the post-World War II period as an essentially 'reunited' kingdom (even including Sayaboury again and part of Champassak, also on the right bank), the monarchy as such remained subordinate to French political priorities, fulfilling a 'constitutional' role in accordance with French thinking on democracy in the framework of *l'Union française*, in substitution of its more purely 'ceremonial' role under Indirect Rule. Subsequently, in the first two decades of so-called 'Independence', the Royal Government was entirely dependent on American money and weapons for its security in face of Vietnamese Communist infiltration and subversion. Once American aims had been defeated in Vietnam, Laos would inevitably conform to the ascendant Vietnamese ideology, assiduously insinuated and implanted through a fraternal Party, the Pathet Lao. At least, the attrition of constant warfare was mercifully at an end.

But geo-political 'inevitability' was not what the Pathet Lao had in mind in their exultant propaganda of late 1975. Their meaning related more basically to Marxism–Leninism – i.e. the inevitable historic progression, helped along by an elite party, from feudalism to people's democracy (presumably the Royal Lao Government and American-funded development during that interlude would count as the 'national-bourgeois' phase in the dialectic!). Yet the lack of support for Communism among the masses is clear from the Pathet Lao's cultivation of a 'nationalist' image, and even more from the respect that it showed to the institution of monarchy, lasting as late as October 1975. Even in the urban context, Prince Souphanouvong capitalized partly on his royal status in developing the National Political Consultative Council as a moral battering ram against the Vientiane elite. Did the Communists not, to a modest extent, conceal the dynamics of their intentions behind a screen of traditional institutional legitimacy, not totally unlike the dynamics of colonial Indirect Rule? It rather follows from all this that in 'stepping off' the stage of history – as the title of this chapter has expressed it – the Lao monarchy was not playing a part in some spontaneous social evolution or revolutionary dialectic either. If 'its time had come', this could only be true in the sense that, not for the first time in the history of the upper Mekong, the international constellation had facilitated or empowered a restructuring of the local political relationships. The extraordinary

political rapprochement and economic integration of the Lao People's Democratic Republic with the Kingdom of Thailand, in the 1990s, as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has proved less and less able to provide economic support, let alone impose its will, confirms how important the forces of the international environment always are for Laos.¹⁶

This is not to say that the Lao People's Revolutionary Party is about to relinquish power to a restored monarchy – a full twenty-five years after its demise! Even the case of Cambodia, where a shell of monarchy has been revived in the 1990s, does not offer a persuasive precedent for imitation. The active manipulation of Prince Sihanouk's prestige by the Khmer Rouge both before and after their revolution, and the revival of monarchy after the expulsion of the Khmer Rouge, have had a great deal to do with the personality, prestige and peculiar gifts of the still living, and highly persistent, ex-monarch himself.¹⁷ Superficially there might seem to be a potential for Laos to imitate Cambodia as regards the involvement of international forces in the search for a settlement, which favoured Sihanouk as an element in it. But there is no civil war in Laos. Alternatively, one might imagine that the cultural factor favouring the restoration of monarchy in Cambodia is present in Laos too. Yet what the Laotian monarchy always lacked was a significant ethnic base beyond the ethnic Lao of the plain. This was a significant reason, indeed, for the Pathet Lao to abolish the monarchy without serious hesitation, as far as we know, once they controlled the levers of power in 1975. The demise of this monarchy, culturally Thai and linguistically at least 'Tai', arguably had the more traumatic impact in Thailand, where the 'democratic experiment' of the day came under pressure from an increasingly last-ditch anti-democratic militancy on the Right during 1976.¹⁸

6 Cambodia

The King with nine lives

Sihanouk, the great survivor, has seen a number of political incarnations in the sixty years since his original appointment to the throne of Cambodia. Nine seems a reasonable classification. In Chapters 2 and 3 we met the young protégé of the French (1941–45); the absolute monarch of a nominally independent state under Japanese tutelage (1945); a semi-constitutional monarch, again under French tutelage in the early days of Cambodian democracy (1946–52); the King who won Independence from the French (1952–54); the frustrated absolutist who resorted to abdication when denied a ‘Royal Constitution’, and founded his own mass party to fight elections instead (1954–55); and the populist/autocratic leader of a non-aligned nation–state (1955–70), including ten more years as Head of State (but not monarch) after his father died in 1960 and the throne became vacant once more. It was this sixth ‘life’ that was Sihanouk’s undoing, for his autocratic and mercurial ways were unsuited to the solution of Cambodia’s increasingly complex problems. Arguably these problems could not have been surmounted by any leader or combination of leaders, in whatever political system. But a search for consensus and coalition-building was the least the situation required. Sihanouk, on the contrary, was the least able to seek it. His personalized regime seemed almost calculated to alienate every group and make solutions even more elusive. Sihanouk himself was ‘part of the problem’.

Furthermore, this was the kind of regime which, almost by definition, could only be changed by overthrow. But since, again by definition, no succession had been institutionalized, the successor would probably find himself seriously short of a popular base or sources of legitimacy to rival Sihanouk. However, the hapless General Lon Nol faced a far more serious problem, in the event, than elusive legitimization: regular, long-range Vietnamese incursions and local political domination tantamount to an invasion. Sihanouk’s diplomatic twists and turns had kept the Vietnamese forces at a discreet distance from most populated areas, but not off Cambodian territory altogether: hence, indeed, Sihanouk’s eventual overthrow by the bureaucratic and military elites. But with the rise of the Khmer Republic discretion no longer served any purpose for North Vietnam: hence the rapid growth of a *Front Uni National du Kampuchea* (FUNK) under Sihanouk’s nominal leadership as soon as he was overthrown.¹

6.1 Political re-inventions

Yet the proclamation of **FUNK** was only the beginning of Sihanouk's political 're-invention'. A month after his overthrow Sihanouk was placing his legitimacy at the service not just of the Khmer revolutionaries but of Indochina revolution generally. This occurred at the Indochinese Peoples' Conference of 24–25 April 1970, where a combined struggle of the Vietnamese, the Laotian and the Cambodian fronts was proclaimed. Therefore not only did the Vietnamese invasion pose more than simply a military challenge to Lon Nol, by putting the local Communist movement under royal sponsorship, but the sequel to all this quickly complicated Lon Nol's problem of legitimacy even further: i.e. Sihanouk's new alignment with Communist Vietnam somewhat deflated the patriotic pretensions of the Khmer Republic, by giving royal sanction to an active Vietnamese–Communist presence on Cambodian soil (which in turn helped the local resistance to develop its serious military capacity). In vain might the Khmer Republic go on branding Sihanouk himself as 'the arch-traitor'! After a couple of years the Vietnamese presence, so vital as a protective shield for the embryonic Khmer revolutionary movement (the 'Khmer Rouge'), even began to be superseded and sometimes challenged by these 'home-grown' Cambodian Communists. Moreover, Sihanouk was based in Peking, not Hanoi. Thus by the end of his fifth year of exile, as the Khmer Rouge noose tightened round Phnom Penh in early 1975, Sihanouk's claim to be sponsoring a Cambodian 'patriotic' struggle against the United States and its local puppets, rather than a Vietnamese Communist strategy for pan-Indochina dominance, had a ring of truth in some ears.²

For their part, the Khmer Rouge leadership never doubted that they needed Sihanouk's name and the cover of a 'patriotic front' in order to recruit followers among those who would have been deterred by an openly Communist appeal. Even after victory, and with all the evidence of totally collectivist intent as the urban population was expelled from the towns and cities and set to work on the land (April 1975), the Khmer Rouge continued to vaunt their partnership with Sihanouk. After his return from Peking to Phnom Penh on New Year's Day 1976 he became Head of State again, in newly proclaimed 'Democratic Kampuchea' – though only for four months. Thereafter, he was kept in seclusion with his wife Monique, as a 'captive guest' of the revolution – but always on hand as an asset for future 'employment', should the need arise. At least this is how it must seem with hindsight. There was nothing erratic or irrational about Pol Pot's decision to send Sihanouk back to Peking in January 1979 to serve as international spokesman for Democratic Kampuchea, as the Vietnamese army approached the gates of Phnom Penh in its latest and most overt invasion. This invasion – aimed primarily at the removal of Peking's ultra-xenophobic client and perceived stalking-horse on Vietnam's south-western flank – marked the high point (but also the redundancy, within the year) of Sihanouk's 'seventh life' (1970–79): that of a Khmer Rouge puppet.³ In this incarnation he had been playing out a personal revenge for offences which seemed thoroughly 'anti-national' to him because he had so completely identified his own destiny with the

fate of State and nation. Within months of his release from Phnom Penh, however, his mission became (a) the salvation of the Khmer people from extinction by famine; (b) preventing the genocidal Khmer Rouge from returning to power; and (c) the liberation of the country from the Vietnamese.

The first objective was paramount, for without it the other two were meaningless. In the medium term, both the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese enemy would destroy the Khmer nation also, in one way or another, if they prevailed. But in the short term, a Vietnamese administration was necessary to both block the Khmer Rouge and restore the economy. On the other hand, the Khmer Rouge, as a guerrilla force, might be an essential tool in expelling the Vietnamese eventually, despite the agonizing risks of a full Khmer Rouge revival. Thus Sihanouk's 'eighth life' was more than usually complex. Efforts to bring an end to the Vietnamese occupation may have seemed salient, because more public, between 1979–89. But they were clearly superseded by Sihanouk's participation in frantic international efforts, between 1989–91, to broker and implement a peace deal between the four principal Khmer factions, including the Khmer Rouge ensconced in bases along the border with Thailand, in order to forestall a return to power of these same Khmer Rouge in the vacuum left behind by the departure of the Vietnamese army (1989). This, however, was at the cost of offering them 'reconciliation' and 'respectability' as participants in a new democratic order.⁴

6.2 The new Communist regime, its opponents and partners

Meanwhile, during the decade of Vietnamese occupation a Cambodian administration had been operating, headed by Heng Samrin and other turncoat Khmer Rouge cadres, and widely dismissed as a 'puppet of Vietnam'.⁵ By the time the Vietnamese forces ostentatiously (if somewhat deceptively) effected their 'complete withdrawal', the Cambodian Communist administration had effected a pretty complete consolidation of its own at every level. This vested interest, led in the 1990s by strongman Hun Sen, was to prove a much more formidable adversary than the Khmer Rouge, *vis-à-vis* the two non-Communist factions which 'came in from the cold' under United Nations protection in 1993: the republican Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) of the venerable, veteran politician Son Sann;⁶ and the royalist *Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif* (FUNCINPEC) of Sihanouk and his son, Prince Norodom Ranariddh.⁷

If Sihanouk had not divided the surviving elements of Cambodian 'bourgeois' society by setting up his own movement, a more robust defence against the violent machinations of Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP), after 1993, would surely have been possible.⁸ However, this is futile speculation. The historical reality has been that Sihanouk was no passive spectator to the events of the years 1979–93, but very much a 'mover and shaker' (and quite a disruptive one) in his own right. Sihanouk understood well the need to have his own private

army in order to claim his place at any future conference table, at home or abroad. While he clearly saw Son Sann's emergent leadership as a slap in the royal face, for the ex-King who had 'suffered with his people' as a prisoner of the Khmer Rouge, earlier episodes during his own career would have taught him how essential an armed movement on the ground can be. In particular, he would have learnt from the Vietminh around 1953–54 that a small guerrilla capacity creates an international credibility far out of proportion to its objective strength. But since every initiative by Sihanouk is interpreted as a selfish act by his one-time collaborators or government officials, each initiative creates its own antithesis, which then calls for armed strength on the royalist side in any case, almost as a means of self-defence and ignoring, of course, the element of self-fulfilling prophecy in the hostile responses of the non-royalists. In other words, as Sihanouk's own character traits (and his well-established reputation from the 1960s) make it impossible for him to carry conviction purely as an altruistic leader defending national independence or any particular vision of the good society, he is constrained to act as a factional leader in his own right; but this again confirms his reputation as an incurable egoist.

At all events, if there is a fitting epithet for the 'eighth life' of this irrepressible royal, we might try 'the divisive unifier'. He did not scruple to talk or act unity with the Khmer Rouge during the 1980s, for the succour of his military units on the ground and for the strengthening of his international legitimacy by association with the 'Democratic Kampuchea' recognized at the United Nations. In principle, FUNCINPEC's military units were in the noble game of 'driving out the Vietnamese'. This was the diplomatic posture of ASEAN, above all,⁹ pursued in more logistical forms on the ground by Thailand and the People's Republic of China. But naturally this logistical support went overwhelmingly to the militant and battle-hardened Khmer Rouge, who could make the best use of it. The KPNLF and FUNCINPEC operations were mere side-shows, constantly confirmed and confined in their niche-like existence by international assessments of their capacity. But in the end, they were still credible enough to be incorporated into negotiations for an overall settlement (which culminated in the Paris Accord of 23 October 1991), once the Vietnamese had withdrawn (as early as August or September 1989) in response to signals of pacific intent from China. The particular value of the right-wing factions was, in fact, to provide a putatively liberal-democratic counterbalance or block to the Khmer Rouge after the ending of civil war, so that the international community could not be accused of delivering the people of Cambodia out of the frying pan of Hanoi-style 'Stalinism' into the fire of Khmer Rouge 'Maoism' once again. But as has been hinted above, this role could surely have been fulfilled more effectively by a single movement of the Right. The opposition to the government in Phnom Penh (known during the negotiations as 'State of Cambodia') scarcely gained strength *vis-à-vis* the incumbent regime by being comprised of three factions instead of two.¹⁰

On the other hand, in the light of the FUNCINPEC majority in the UN-supervised elections of May 1993 (58 seats, to CPP's 51), it must be admitted on

behalf of the royalist party that it was Son Sann's grouping (by now itself split into two factions) that was objectively 'splitting the vote' by this time.¹¹ Whatever other factors may have helped Prince Ranariddh to his victory, the 'traditional charisma' and 'epic reputation' of his father, which were assiduously invoked, clearly still had potency and may seem to vindicate, in retrospect, Sihanouk's re-engagement in politics after 1979. It would also have to be acknowledged that Son Sann could never have pursued the diplomatic agenda of Vietnamese expulsion with the tenacity and flair which Sihanouk summoned up in the 1980s. Apart from anything else, it required the apparently cynical balancing act of keeping a certain distance from the Khmer Rouge 'butchers' while both advancing behind their military shield and working for a negotiated transfer of their legitimacy as occupants of the United Nations seat! The saintly Buddhist, Son Sann, was probably not devious enough to rise to this tortuous challenge.¹²

But nor, predictably, was Son Sann anything less than devoted to public duty when, as President of the Constituent Assembly and chairman of the Constitutional Commission, he delivered a report which recommended the revival of the monarchy – to the benefit of Norodom Sihanouk initially, and subsequently of any line descended from his great-grandfathers King Norodom and King Sisowath, or his great great-grandfather King Ang Duong.¹³ This decision was reached after extensive discussion with Sihanouk in Pyongyang. The alternative option would also have favoured Sihanouk, but as a non-royal Head of State (his virtual status already, being Chairman of the interim Supreme National Council). Not that the actual formula arrived at restored monarchy in anything like its traditional form: it was made explicitly elective, in other words, quite 'Presidential' and perhaps not totally intolerable to republicans, despite the stipulation of future recruitment from descendants of royalty. (In particular, because the field is large, Prince Ranariddh had no good reason to see himself as an heir apparent.) Whether the Head of State was described as 'King' or 'President', the crucial fact is that Sihanouk was being rewarded and re-invoked as a striver for national unity and symbol of continuity. Alternative perspectives on his past conduct were held in abeyance, or at any rate failed to prevail at the moment of decision, even with Sihanouk's arch-rival and venerable champion of republicanism in the chair. Prince Norodom Sihanouk resumed his old title of King on 24 September 1993.

Nevertheless, what was now ushered in was distinctly not a final period of tranquillity and undisputed honour for the restored monarch. And the scenario was very far from one in which a dynasty would occupy the throne and control the government simultaneously, for the 'verdict' of the electorate had not been allowed, by the incumbent interest (the CPP), to be translated into a government dominated by FUNCINPEC. The achievement of the United Nations in its largest-ever exercise in interventionist political restructuring had been distinctly ambiguous. On the one hand, the Khmer Rouge boycotted the elections but failed to terrorize the vast majority of the population into staying away from the polls, so the field was left clear for the other three major parties to win almost all the seats, with a convincing voter turnout of 90 per cent. But on the other hand

UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) had failed to take control of the key ministries of the State of Cambodia, such as Interior, in the run-up to the elections; thus the CPP was able to manipulate the voters to some extent, and finish a close second to FUNCINPEC (with all his assets, Hun Sen had even expected to win). Worse still, UNTAC did not enforce the disarming of the bulk of the armies, as the Peace Accord had stipulated pending integration into a unified force after the elections. Not only did the Khmer Rouge absolutely refuse to comply, but this refusal became a pretext for the State of Cambodia (SOC) being allowed to keep most of its forces intact, in the name of national security and self-defence – though the other two factions had substantially complied with the Accord and thus forfeited the modest military leverage that they had prior to regroupment.¹⁴ In this situation of imbalance Hun Sen was able, as soon as the election results were known, to demand a ‘power-sharing arrangement’, under the threat of force to maintain the CPP in power if the others did not concede. Hun Sen spoke of a looming secession of several Provinces, led by ‘CPP hardliners’ under the nominal leadership of Sihanouk’s son, Prince Chakrapong (a vice-premier in SOC). Both Yashushi Akashi (the UN Special Representative) and Prince Sihanouk (still Chairman of the Supreme National Council, not yet King), opted for further ‘national reconciliation’ in this crisis rather than see a return to armed conflict.¹⁵ Thus Prince Ranariddh became ‘First Prime Minister’ but with Hun Sen as ‘Second Prime Minister’. The effective power remained with the CPP at all levels, in spite of the nominal balance of ministerial appointments as between CPP and FUNCINPEC.¹⁶

In the course of the next four years a process of further political attrition of Ranariddh’s tenuous position ensued (not without some help from his own illiberal attitudes towards liberal ministers of his own party)¹⁷ and pushed him into close contact with the remnants of the Khmer Rouge in western Cambodia. It seemed that he had an eye not only on the prestige that would accrue if he could take the credit for their final surrender, but possibly on the benefits for his faction of bringing Khmer Rouge units under the control of royalist Generals. The perception that this was Ranariddh’s aim may have pushed Hun Sen into his July 1997 coup, as a pre-emptive action against an alleged coup being prepared by *Samdec Krom Preah*. But it is probably more reasonable to see Ranariddh as motivated by the desperate urge to pre-empt Hun Sen’s imminent, total hegemony.¹⁸ At any rate, in a series of street battles in the capital the royalists were quickly routed, and the survivors chased to the northern border of the country. A number of captured senior officers and soldiers were murdered in cold blood.¹⁹ Four FUNCINPEC ministers fled the country. Ranariddh, who was in Bangkok at the time of the coup, dared not return. He was replaced as First Prime Minister by his more ‘flexible’ FUNCINPEC colleague Ung Huot (the Foreign Minister), and stripped of his parliamentary immunity. In March 1998 he was finally tried *in absentia* by a military court on charges of illegal arms imports and clandestine negotiations with the Khmer Rouge. The sentence was thirty-five years in prison and a fine of more than US\$50 million.

This, then, was the undignified 'inheritance' over which the 'reborn' King Sihanouk presided, often at a distance from the country owing to ill-health and critical surgery.²⁰ He tried on occasion to restrain or modify authoritarian actions of the CPP-dominated government (which he himself had helped to keep in power in 1993!), but usually failed, or soon did the opposite. For instance, his request to the National Assembly to review an Immigration Law which looked likely to be open to abuse to the detriment of long-time resident minorities, in 1994: in one of his famous reversals he consented to sign it without modifications.²¹ Or his opposition to a Draconian press law in 1995: the regime side-stepped the requirement of the royal signature by using that of the Acting Head of State (Chea Sim, President of the National Assembly), which was legal in the absence of the King abroad.²² Or his thoughts, in the same year, about setting up a new *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* to rekindle national unity under his own leadership, in place of Ranariddh as well as Hun Sen: even if such a party would have offered a role to Hun Sen as well as Ranariddh, it was a predictable non-starter for a King who was an almost permanent absentee, and not intending to abdicate (unlike 1955) even if he had been at home.²³ Or his expressed repugnance at the appointment of Ung Huot as First Prime Minister in place of Ranariddh after the July 1997 coup, his award of one of Cambodia's oldest royal orders to eight UN human rights monitors whom Hun Sen wanted to expel, and his condemnation of the Great Powers which went on dealing with Hun Sen within weeks of the coup and its accompanying atrocities:²⁴ by contrast, Sihanouk soon became involved in political negotiation and compromise himself where, having been rebuffed by Hun Sen as a mediator between the two factions, he proceeded to sign accreditation letters for Hun Sen and Ung Huot as Cambodia's representatives to the Fifty-second meeting of the UN General Assembly.²⁵ This tendency to accommodate the coercive power of the ex-Communist dictatorship, rather than take a stand and a risk on behalf of democracy, is consistent with the priority given to Sihanouk's personal position and survival at other times in his career. Personal conceit was conspicuous, even in the latest period, in the secretive grooming of a new heir to the throne, Sihamoni (a son by Queen Monique).²⁶ Given that the throne was now subject to election and that the election process was very likely to be manipulated by the dominant interest when the time came, Sihanouk's fantasy could only strengthen the conviction of this interest that he was a man who could be manipulated during his tenure.²⁷

6.3 'King of dreams'

Shall we therefore call Sihanouk in his ninth incarnation the 'King of dreams'? The slight difficulty about this epithet is that he has been constantly active as a political player who could not be ignored, even if to some extent he is malleable. When he returned from Peking in late August 1997 it was not to take up residence in Phnom Penh but at Siem Reap, close to Angkor. In a muted snub to the ruling interest, he spoke of his wish to be 'far away from the politicians in

Phnom Penh'.²⁸ Subsequently, after the international aid donors had brought pressure to bear on the ruling interest by stopping funds, and ASEAN by postponing Cambodia's membership of the regional grouping, Hun Sen allowed preparations to go ahead for elections open to a plurality of competing parties. The King then played his part in reactivating democracy by granting an unconditional amnesty to Ranariddh for the 'crimes' for which he had been tried and sentenced. Ranariddh was thus able to return to Cambodia on 31 March 1998 and take charge of his party's election campaign.²⁹ And in this campaign, FUNCINPEC's programme was characteristically distinguished from the other two main contenders (Hun Sen's CPP and Sam Rainsy's Khmer Nation Party) in terms of its slogan 'Nation, Religion, King'.³⁰ In spite of an unpublicized change in the system of proportional representation to favour the CPP, and this party's heavy dominance over the media and all government agencies (including the National Election Committee which was supposed to investigate complaints of fraud and intimidation after the event, but never did), FUNCINPEC finished in second place (with forty-three seats to CPP's sixty-four).³¹ Some foreign observers judged the elections (held on 26 July 1998) to be 'free and fair' – though the term is clearly a relative one, adapted to the circumstances of an endemically lawless and corrupted society in which even a modicum of procedural regularity comes as an agreeable surprise.³² If ever there is development towards a civil society from these minimal beginnings, Sihanouk may come to be praised for having maintained the vital shell of legality during the transition, however distasteful the short-term compromises.

But in the shorter term there can be no clear and agreed perspective. In the prolonged hiatus following the 1998 elections,³³ both Prince Ranariddh and Sam Rangsì refused to talk coalition politics with CPP until accusations of widespread electoral fraud had been investigated. The opposition staged prolonged demonstrations on the streets of Phnom Penh and in front of the parliament building. At the height of the tension the two opposition leaders 'fled' abroad, or sought refuge (Sam Rangsì) in UN premises in Phnom Penh, 'for their safety'. Whether or not their fears were genuine, it brought pressure to bear on the interest (CPP) controlling the organs of the State – not by shaming the thick-skinned Hun Sen into guaranteeing security to the opposition, but by making international aid donors withhold their aid, and the UN continue to keep the Cambodia seat vacant, and ASEAN refuse membership, until at least a semblance of 'democracy' was restored. It was a remarkably hard-nosed and intransigent power play on Hun Sen's part, considering that constitutionally, he needed a two-thirds majority in the Assembly in order to confirm the next Cabinet in office – which would seem to necessitate a coalition with FUNCINPEC in any case. At all events, it finally transpired that Prince Ranariddh was prepared to 'compromise' on the basis of a similar power-sharing arrangement as before, but letting Hun Sen be sole Prime Minister (and not insisting on investigation of alleged electoral fraud), provided that Ranariddh himself could be Chairman of the National Assembly. Under the existing Constitution, the holder of this office would serve, of course, as Acting Head of

State in the absence of the King. And this is what indeed occurred for several weeks after King Sihanouk left Cambodia for medical treatment in Beijing, in late November 1998, as soon as the crisis was over. Sam Rangsî had been left out in the cold by the final, horse-trading 'summit', conducted under King Sihanouk's chairmanship at his Palace in Phnom Penh.³⁴

This outline of the post-elections crisis forms a necessary background for considering the role of Sihanouk. At first he seemed to be playing the national mediator *par excellence*, standing above party. He urged a tri-partite coalition, to include Sam Rangsî. But the decisive 'summit', to which Sam Rangsî was not invited, manifestly went ahead because a deal had been crystallizing between the two main parties. Not long before the first 'summit', of all three parties, held in September 1998 in Siem Reap, the caretaker government was proposing a Constitutional Amendment which would involve the King in forming governments without the need for a two-thirds vote in the Assembly, while also making some new arrangement for choosing Sihanouk's successor after his death. Already on the eve of this summit government sources expressed the opinion that the King had been letting the crisis grind on so that he could break the paralysis by forming a government himself. Any observer who recalls Sihanouk's withdrawal to Battambang during his campaign for Independence might be tempted to see a parallel in his self-imposed rustication to Siem Reap. Was he not possibly manoeuvring to restore some of his diminished leverage, on behalf of the monarchy as an interest in its own right? Two events are germane. First, the breakthrough came immediately after the caretaker government had failed to organize crowds to honour the King and the occasion when he lit the flame at the Independence Monument in Phnom Penh on the Forty-fifth Anniversary of Independence. And, second, just after the ending of the crisis, and after Sihanouk had left on his delayed trip to Beijing for a medical check-up, there was news of the drafting of yet another Constitutional Amendment, drawn up by 'constitutional experts of CPP and FUNCINPEC', to allow the King to abdicate. This mechanism would activate the Throne Council to select a successor within seven days in the same way as his death would do (but while Sihanouk was still alive and putatively able to influence the decision).³⁵ Do we detect, in this shadow play, a pattern of veiled warning not to rate his national influence too high, combined with indulgence towards Sihanouk's own interest and whims whenever he lowered his sights and yielded to the minimum demands of the party wielding power?

Of course, it is also tempting to speculate whether Sihanouk was himself part of the FUNCINPEC power-play, but either did not wish to appear blatantly partial, or hoped that by prolonging the crisis he could increase his leverage as King into the bargain. Yet, just because FUNCINPEC is the 'royalist party' it does not follow that Sihanouk is Ranariddh's man. There were contrary straws in the wind in early 1999. For instance, in February the King denied that he wanted his wife or his son Sihamoni to succeed him – a sure sign that well-informed observers thought this was indeed what was on his mind and close to his heart, as in 1995.³⁶ Much more significantly, in April the King appointed his

son Prince Chakrapong as his 'senior adviser'. Chakrapong had re-emerged at the FUNCINPEC Congress in March – but not as an office-holder. We will recall that it was he who played the part of would-be secessionist leader in 1993, with Sihanouk's suspected connivance, in order to force the elections victor, FUNCINPEC, into a 'shotgun marriage' with CPP. On being appointed to his father's staff, he stated that he would 'try to restore the image of the party' (FUNCINPEC)!

That Sihanouk has consistently played Hun Sen's game, not Ranariddh's, since 1995, is asserted unequivocally from at least one quarter among the anti-royalist liberal opposition.³⁷ Further, a wide-ranging essay of modern political history sees Cambodia as run by two contrasted but symbiotically matched groups: 'the royalists, cynical, irresponsible, anti-democratic', and 'the barbaric and criminal Khmer Rouge'.³⁸ It is not stated that Sihanouk, as King, is actively identified with his own political creation, FUNCINPEC. But it is implied that he is favourable towards it on condition of its cynical collaboration with the ruling interest, the 'Khmer Rouge', with which he allied at the time of his overthrow in 1970. Noticeably, the essayist makes no distinction between the Khmer Rouge led till early 1998 by Pol Pot, and the branch originally under Vietnamese sponsorship, led by Hun Sen. But this is precisely why, in this way of thinking, it is possible to see Sihanouk as formally detached from FUNCINPEC, yet simultaneously its objective supporter: he supports anyone who is 'a friend of his old friend'! While we might disagree that Sihanouk has stayed literally loyal to 'the Khmer Rouge' across all these years, the powerful thread of truth in the analysis relates to his consistency as a schemer in his own interest – a reliable compass, at all times since his deposition, to the locus of power.

It is surely only a King with a keen instinct for his own survival who could have played the improbable part of constitutional monarch to an ex-Communist 'mafia regime', and with such success. Hun Sen, too, has played the part of a deferential Premier with finesse, travelling all the way to Beijing to deliver governmental reports and pay homage, even though under the Constitution the King formally ceases to be Head of State when absent from Cambodia. Each knows what he most basically needs from the other. Hun Sen sustains the monarchy, contrary to his more youthful, Communist principles; Sihanouk delivers neo-traditional legitimacy to the Cambodian People's Party, contrary to the monarchism he fought for until 1970. Arguably, this symbiosis has become a central dynamic of the current political system. The power of the monarchy has gone, but the 'ex-Communist mafia' is not confident enough to rule purely by force. Thus it is constrained to tap the legitimizing resource of a neo-traditional institution,³⁹ as well as building a coalition with the party that is more explicitly identified with it. This gives to Sihanouk, at least for what remains of his mortal life, a new lease of life in a political sense.⁴⁰

Indeed, by playing his cards very carefully whenever there is a political hiatus and opportunity for mediation, he actually generates a little more power for his office than he was able to exercise during the dark days of his exile, as a Khmer Rouge puppet. Nevertheless we should probably conclude, tentatively, that the

Cambodian monarchy has little chance of a prolonged existence after Sihanouk. The traumatic upheaval of the Khmer Rouge revolution and Vietnamese occupation are facts. The successor society is a warlord society, with scant law and order. The restoration of the monarchy in this situation was a case of grasping at a straw of continuity. The element of cunning in Sihanouk's political make-up that has made him, in the past, alternately a great achiever for the nation and a tragic disaster, enables him to contribute something in his ninth and last incarnation as a 'pseudo-constitutional monarch'. His pursuit of self-interest has not prevented him from developing a fruitful and functional relationship with the ex-Communist Premier: on the contrary, the two seem to have discovered a mutual affinity.⁴¹ But no successor will be able to offer the same combination of legitimizing personal prestige and lubricating political finesse (infused and informed by self-interest!) to Hun Sen or his successors. The Cambodian throne is 'a space to watch' – with the brooding expectation of a permanent vacancy before very long.

7 Malaysia

Monarchy overawed

7.1 A shaky symbiosis

At the end of the discussion of monarchy in Malaysia, in Chapter 3, we met cases of increasing assertiveness on the part of some of the Sultans (the rulers of the nine Malay States of the Peninsula). This was in the period following the passing of special laws to strengthen Malay rights, from which the Sultans benefited, as 'protectors' of the Malays who themselves needed protection. Part of the special interest of the monarchical politics of Malaysia lies in the fact that a traditional institution, kept in being essentially for passive legitimization, has shown a capacity for strengthening its role and even posing challenges to the more modern political sector which it is supposed to serve. This has occurred despite the federalistic fragmentation of the institution, the absence of any significant, special powers vested in the Supreme Ruler (Yang di-Pertuan Agong), and the rotating incumbency of this central office. The capacity for challenge, like the legal strengthening which preceded it, is closely connected with the fact that the legitimization which the Malay monarchy has served relates to a system of 'universal corporate ranking' in a plural society. This function enables the monarchy to appeal to a powerful, ethnic vested interest in support of its own perpetuation.

Of course, it is a sociological commonplace that racial appeals and ethnic incorporation provide a basis for solidarity in any plural society across would-be class lines, to the benefit of economically privileged strata. But in the case of Malaysia the Malay middle-class and property-owning interests which benefit from such phenomena do not depend solely on the actions and words of their political party to keep ethnic solidarity alive and themselves 'in business': they may be said to have tapped the resources of monarchy for the same purpose too, and might be argued to benefit from this to a greater degree than the masses whom they lead or govern. The role of monarchy in delivering a more traditional kind of legitimacy to the modern Malay elite by proxy, in return for secure wealth and status, may be characterized as one important but unwritten 'social contract' and 'sociological symbiosis' of contemporary Malaysia.

And yet at the same time – within this symbiosis have lurked potential tensions, ready to emerge if ever the Sultans developed ambitions of autonomy in keeping with ‘favours rendered’ to the elective elite, or if an elected national leader, reassured by a populist mandate, developed his own ambition to be independent of their ‘archaic institution’. This is the second dimension of special interest in the monarchical politics of Malaysia. The present chapter will tell a tale of ‘symbiosis shattered’ – shattered in a great tremor which has shaken up the old political landscape and left the nine rulers in disarray. The concentrated rays of a single, uncrowned *Roi Soleil* now illuminate and dominate the scene.¹

By way of initial background, it is relevant not only that a political party has carried the main burden of defending the Malay position but that even when the Constitution of Malaya was drafted in 1957, the Sultans in their individual domains – the nine Malay States – were to symbolize, rather than sustain, Malay supremacy.² Thus the custodial role seemed to be located, as we saw in Chapter 3, with the Conference of Rulers. But this function of the Conference was never used, for it was never needed. Thus it seems ironical that Tunku Abdul Rahman’s immediate successors (led by Tun Razak, after the 1969 riots) felt a need to add reassurance to assurance by reinforcing the rulers’ position – despite their patent lack of relevance and effectiveness in the eyes of Malay radicals (led by Dr Mahathir).³ Once Mahathir became Prime Minister in 1981, having already experienced royal deviousness and obduracy (as he saw it) in Kelantan and Pahang during his tenure as Malaysia’s Deputy Premier, an attempt to assert the supremacy of the elective, federal power was in the logic of the situation. Besides, the Malay middle class had grown considerably in size and self-confidence with the help of the post-1969 New Economic Policy. This was a natural constituency for Dr Mahathir in any clash with ‘ancient wealth’ or ‘hereditary office’.

The new political activism of the Malay royalty, which made its appearance in the mid-to-late 1970s, is well illustrated by the intervention in a constitutional crisis in Kelantan in 1977. The Sultan of that State persuaded the Regent (his son and Crown Prince) to postpone a dissolution of the State Assembly, which the Chief Minister (Datuk Muhammad Nasir) had requested following a vote of no-confidence by his own Parti Islam (PAS). The Sultan’s aim was to find a replacement from the same party without the need for elections, which would almost certainly favour UMNO, for which he had scant regard. (As the minority coalition partner of PAS, UMNO had contrived to bring Datuk Muhammad more under its own influence – hence the vote of no-confidence – but was now in a position to exploit popular sympathy for him.) In the hiatus, public disorder quickly took over and played into the hands of centralizing elements which saw a State of Emergency as their best way forward. The upshot was an even more crushing defeat for PAS, in the elections which followed the emergency and four months of efficient federal rule.

At the same period, relations between UMNO and the Sultan of Pahang had deteriorated to the point at which State money bills were not being signed. This

crisis dragged on from the Premiership of Tun Hussein Onn into that of Dr Mahathir, and UMNO's nominee as Chief Minister was forced to step down. The Pahang case illustrates, in an extreme form, the growing economic nexus in ruler-executive relations in virtually every Malay State (an ironical, early by-product of the New Economic Policy): for this Sultan in his private capacity had developed an eager taste for timber concessions. In other words, the principle from which the crisis had seemed to spring – of being 'genuinely' consulted (with the implication of a possible veto) over the appointment of Chief Ministers – had a solid economic foundation, in that a malleable Chief Minister was essential for the rapid or rule-bending processing of land alienation at preferential rates.⁴

The role of the Chief Minister is so critical in relation to land as land is a major, if not the leading, subject on the list of administrative responsibilities allocated to the member states in the Federal Constitution. It does not seem unnatural that precisely the concentration of power and most vital functions at Federal Government level will push a Sultan, if nostalgic for absolutism, towards self-assertion in that narrow sphere of action still remaining to him: his own State. Another example of the trend towards 'activism' at State level, up to 1983, was the behaviour of the 'most likely next Agong' himself: Sultan Idris Shah of Perak. He had forced the Chief Minister of his State to resign in 1977 through an assiduous campaign of complaints and public ostracism. Nor had he been slow to step into the limelight when a group of six opposition State Assemblymen of the predominantly Chinese Democratic Action Party declined to swear an oath of allegiance after the 1978 general election. The Sultan vied with the elected politicians of UMNO to fly the standard of Malay communal solidarity, and declared the six recalcitrants no longer his subjects. As if this were not enough, in 1982 both the Sultan of Perak and the Sultan of Johor, next in line for the office of Agong after Perak, began to assert themselves in their capacities as Head of Religion in their States, by determining the timing of the fasting month locally and by astronomical calculation (i.e. independently of the Council of Rulers), with the effect of achieving a twenty-nine-day instead of thirty-day Ramadhan.

It may be worth noting, at this point, that although the Sultan of Perak had declined to be nominated as Deputy Agong both in 1975 and 1979, his precedence in relation to the supreme office was not affected. Meanwhile, if there had been any doubts among his fellow rulers as to his suitability to become Agong, it is very possible that the prospect of a 'Johorean succession' was sufficiently alarming to some Sultans for a more tolerant view of Perak to have become prevalent by 1983. In this case, of course, it was not the Sultan of Perak's 'reluctance' that had been overcome, but the reluctance of his peers and the politicians. In the event, however, His Highness passed away on the eve of the electoral conclave.

In this situation, the vote favoured Johor after all, upholding precedence. Yet the Sultan of Johor had a record of criminal behaviour stretching back many years. With the spate of belated revelations appearing in the Malaysian press in

the course of the 1992–93 crisis, it is hardly necessary to go into great detail, but the major incidents were all well known to the other royalty at the time of Sultan Mahmood Iskander's election as Agong. This is more significant – because it shows the overriding importance of precedence in spite of such a record – than the actual fact that the record existed. The author's check-list, based on information which was still in some cases highly confidential at the time, comprised the incarceration of a policeman in a dog kennel, in about 1961; the strip-search of a Trengganu princess at the Johor-Singapore border check-point in about 1969 or 1970 (during her father's tenure as Agong), arising from a misapprehension that she was a commoner claiming immunity from customs duty as a member of the Johor royal house;⁵ an assault on two Malaysian Indian motorists, and infliction of 'third degree practices' on certain smugglers (1971 or 1972);⁶ and the shooting to death of a Chinese suspect in an anti-smuggling operation four or five years later.⁷ Also relevant to the new Agong's reputation was the mysterious way in which he had been restored, in May 1981, to the Johor succession by a dying father – alleged by some to have been already in a coma at the hour of the purported change.⁸

7.2 Mahathir on guard

Dr Mahathir, for his part, had not sat passively by as the prospect of a wilful and politicized Agong crystallized into certainty. The first major national crisis of the Mahathir premiership began with his attempt in 1983 to spell out the obligation of royal consent to legislation, by way of an amendment to the Federal Constitution. (The bitter experience with the Sultan of Pahang in particular would sufficiently explain Mahathir's motivation in this respect.) He also sought to vest the emergency power in himself as Prime Minister, presumably in view of the boastful talk of one, if not both, of the two Sultans next-in-line, about declaring an emergency and usurping the power of the elected politicians. But owing mainly to disunity in UMNO, the crisis ended in compromise. The Agong's duty of legislative consent was spelt out but also a new, explicit power of delay by at least sixty days.⁹ As a consequence of resistance, no change was achieved regarding the state rulers' power of assent, nor in the emergency power.¹⁰

Thus it may seem that the reign of the Eighth Agong commenced, in February 1984, under the shadow of 'unfinished business' from the Prime Minister's point of view. Of particularly enduring interest, however, is the fact that Dr Mahathir denied throughout the Constitutional Amendments crisis that there existed any obligation to obtain the consent of the Conference of Rulers to the proposed derogation from their powers. In the event, because the Agong changed his mind (reputedly over this principle first and foremost) and refused to sign the original Amendment Bill into law, a process of negotiation did ensue, but it was carried out informally and the compromise solution does not appear to have been ratified by any formal session of the Conference.¹¹ Yet it might be argued that the rulers' custodial function under the Constitution implies a duty

to defend and uphold their collective right to proper consultation, even more rigorously than their merely implied (and highly questionable) individual power to refuse legislative assent which was the overt target of the principal Amendment. It can be argued that the status of the Conference was significantly weakened by the 1983 crisis.¹²

If the Premier was capable of ignoring the Conference of Rulers, at least in an issue concerning the powers of monarchy itself, and reluctant to seek judicial support by way of a reference to the Federal Court, events during the incumbency of Johor were to reveal a capacity for manipulating that royal individual and his prerogatives in order to weaken the judiciary as an object of policy. It was as if the judiciary had taken the place of monarchy as the chief obstacle to executive goals in the Prime Minister's mental scenario. But it might be wrong to assume that such a scenario had taken shape by 1984. There could be sufficient cause in the subsequent internal crisis of UMNO, which stemmed from a 'disputed succession' among the politicians.

Mahathir's arch-rival was Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah of Kelantan. Although conspicuously groomed for the succession by Tun Razak in the mid-1970s, the death of the latter in 1976 left Razaleigh without a patron. The succession passed then through Tun Hussein Onn to Dr Mahathir (after his period as Deputy Prime Minister) by 1981. The UMNO General Assembly in that year also withheld support from Razaleigh in the contest for the party's Deputy Presidency, preferring Mahathir's tacit nominee, Datuk Musa Hitam.

When Tengku Razaleigh contested the Deputy Presidency for the second time, in May 1984, it was superfluous to speculate whether Dr Mahathir had become more favourable towards him. This could hardly have happened, in view of the fact that the young Sultan of Kelantan (Ismail Petra) was known greatly to respect Tengku Razaleigh as his uncle and political confidant, and had been among the more easily identifiable opponents of the 1983 Constitutional Amendments.¹³ Nevertheless, a new and more promising opportunity was to arise by the time of the party's next triennial elections, owing to the bizarre case of Musa Hitam's alienation from Mahathir and resignation as Deputy Prime Minister (February 1986).¹⁴ Thus in April 1987 Musa defended his Deputy Presidency – unsuccessfully – against the new Deputy Premier, Ghafar Baba, while Dr Mahathir defended his Presidency – successfully – against the challenge of Tengku Razaleigh. It was an extremely narrow victory for the incumbents, and thus seemed somewhat pyrrhic at the time.¹⁵

It might be expected that the worsening of Musa, now on good terms with the Agong, no less than the challenge to Mahathir by a Kelantan Prince, would have found the Agong's sympathies veering firmly to the side of the so-called 'B'-team (i.e., the UMNO out-group, led by Razaleigh and Musa). From the beginning, the Agong had made no secret of his contempt for Mahathir on the grounds of mixed blood, calling him, to his face, 'Mamak' (a derogatory nickname for those of Indian Muslim ancestry). During the early part of his tenure as Agong he had defied protocol by failing to give full and proper effect to the transmission of State powers to a Regency. Apart from residing at the Johor Palace in Kuala

Lumpur instead of the official residence of the Agong (Istana Negara), he regularly spent his weekends in Johor. He had interfered improperly in public administration by encouraging one of his state subjects, Datuk Rahmat, the Malaysian Ambassador to Jakarta, to neglect his official duties in Indonesia in order to be with him in Johor on these occasions. But Dr Mahathir had proved more than a match for this difficult sovereign. Having got the measure of the King's essential vanity and exhibitionism, he prudently pandered to it, even to the extent of placing a more convenient Royal Malaysian Airforce helicopter at his permanent disposal to fly him down to, and around in, Johor, instead of the government's executive jet. After Musa had been narrowly defeated as party Deputy President – with the help of a vital, small block of Johor votes swung to Mahathir by Datuk Rahmat – and Dr Mahathir then created a number of Cabinet vacancies by sacking 'B'-team Ministers, it was possible to both repay a debt and build a new 'bridge to Johor' by appointing Rahmat as Minister of Information.¹⁶

Still, although Dr Mahathir had a totally loyal Cabinet, he now enjoyed much less public credibility, on account of the extremely narrow victory in the party elections. And since Dr Mahathir's team had been planning to challenge an adverse decision in the courts, it is not surprising that Tengku Razaleigh's faction decided to do the same after their defeat. It was events in the courts, threatening the very existence of UMNO or at least Dr Mahathir's control of it, that were to provide Dr Mahathir with a solid reason for acting against the Lord President of the judiciary in 1988 – though it was obvious to all his associates that his existing authoritarian and autocratic leanings (with a strong dash of Anglophobic animosity towards the Common Law tradition) already disposed him towards it.¹⁷

7.3 Subduing the judiciary

The enabling pretext for Lord President Tun Salleh's suspension on 26 May 1988 was his umbrage – expressed especially in a letter to the Agong – at a series of threatening public statements by the Prime Minister. One such statement was made in the parliamentary debate on the Constitutional Amendment of 18 March 1988, which removed from the courts their powers of legislative review. But the most critical, forthcoming event in the courts (with *no* connection with judicial review, but a strong connection with Common Law principles) was the appeal by the UMNO dissidents against the February 1988 decision dismissing their petition for new elections. The outcome of that petition had been far more dramatic than a decision in favour of the appellants: not just the party elections were declared invalid, but UMNO as such was found to be an illegal organization on the grounds of long-standing breaches of the terms of registration! Once Dr Mahathir had brilliantly turned this disaster to good account by starting to reconstitute the party without the dissidents, it became Tengku Razaleigh's urgent need to overturn the decision and have UMNO revalidated – with its membership, but also its office-holders, restored to the pre-April 1987 *status quo ante*. It became Dr Mahathir's priority, in turn, to change the composition of the

High Court which was to hear the appeal on 13 June. This was the more immediate objective behind the suspension of the Lord President, but in the longer term the achievement of a 'responsive' High Court under an 'accommodative' Lord President was a gain equal to the control of the emergency power which had eluded Dr Mahathir in 1983. The suspension of Tun Salleh Abbas was effected under a prerogative of the Agong.¹⁸

The political reasons for suspending and later dismissing the Head of the Malaysian judiciary, and the means employed, excited world-wide commentary at the time. But the possibility that the Agong was acting out a personal grudge due to previous encounters in court, was generally handled with delicacy.¹⁹ Such speculation defies proof as persistently as it springs to mind. Yet it will be even more difficult to substantiate the suspicion that an alleged physical attack on a golf caddy, a few months prior to the moves against the judiciary, had a bearing on the Agong's willingness to help enhance Dr Mahathir's power in such a dramatic way. Unless and until the lid is lifted on discussion in the Malaysian media, and in the absence of eye-witness testimony, one even hesitates to describe the event in detail. Nevertheless, the accounts of Kuala Lumpur taxi drivers did not differ in substance from what was circulating in political circles and University Senior Common Rooms around October 1987; and one non-Malaysian writer had the courage to record the event, since it was spoken about openly by Tunku Abdul Rahman at the Aliran constitutional conference and prompted the Tunku to propose a Court of Peers to try royal crimes. The writer in question did not, however, infer any connection between some black deed and the removal of the Lord President.²⁰

In order to reinforce the inference that the Agong felt himself beholden in some way to the Prime Minister and allowed the Prime Minister to divert royal activism to his own good account, it is necessary to look back again to the middle months of 1987. At that time the continuing challenge to the Prime Minister was stimulating the democratic aspirations of an intelligentsia exasperated and sickened by a series of high-level financial scandals, so that there was already a tangible mood for change, not least among non-Malays, and an expectation that it could be achieved. This is the kind of atmosphere in which the more nationalistic kind of UMNO politician, and assorted opportunists, invariably sound warnings of a 'threat to Malay rights'. An irregular and misdated (and thus gratuitously provocative) forty-first UMNO anniversary rally was called for 1 November. The Special Branch of the Police was fully alert to 'scenarios of insecurity' as racial tension increased, but with special reference to the intentions of critics of the regime. Pessimistic appraisals began to reach the Prime Minister's Office, confirming Mahathir's existing conspiratorial perception of all manifestations of opposition to himself. Nothing could have better suited the needs of a party leader on the defensive, or the party itself, since the advice to defuse the situation 'in the interests of the nation' pointed precisely to the kind of preventive action against individuals and the independent press which would facilitate the subsequent (but already envisaged) moves against the judiciary. Thus, on 27 October a series of arrests began, which placed a cross-section of

opposition activists, including writers, in preventive detention. More importantly, three leading independent newspapers were closed next day and remained closed for many weeks, until their owners had accepted new 'guidelines' as a condition of renewal of licence under the Printing Presses and Publications Act, amended before the end of the year.

What was completely 'unprogrammed' and unforeseeable, prior to the pre-emptive strike of late October, was a gratuitous, double-value bonus for Mahathir in the form of an incident of amok on Sunday afternoon, 18 October, in Chow Kit, a northern section of Kuala Lumpur, where a Malay soldier shot dead a stall-holder with an M-16 rifle. This would-be augury of worse violence to come – which most citizens in the capital city were apt to read as such – was actually, and by almost incredible coincidence, a 'cry of despair' on the part of a young man whose brother had fallen foul of an infamous event. But since the latter could not be publicized, neither could the real nature of the amok in Chow Kit. Thus it was allowed to serve the popular presumption that turbulence was brewing and that only firm action could avert bloodshed.²¹

But this was only the first part of the 'bonus'. Far more crucial, arguably, for Dr Mahathir's purposes would be the fact that the Chow Kit incident demonstrated to the Agong the acute potential for public exposure of any misdeed, and thus his continuing dependence on the executive for discretion. Even the fact that he was already totally beholden to the Prime Minister for the original cover up, including generous compensation from government coffers for the family of the ill-fated citizen in question, was now in danger of being exposed if Private Adam failed to hold his peace in return for the kid-gloves prosecution in his trial.

At all events, and for whatever combination of reasons, Dr Mahathir seems to have found an eager enough accomplice at the Istana Negara when his campaign against the judiciary reached a climax the following year. A strong spirit of bonhomie between Dr Mahathir's faction and the Sultan of Johor was even manifest after he had stepped down as Agong (with reluctance!) in 1989, for, two weeks later in the grounds of his Palace at Johor, he hosted a lavish celebration of the (true) Forty-third Anniversary of the foundation of UMNO, and in this way lent his support to the party in its contest for Malay loyalty against Spirit of '46.²²

In the light of these events it was already apparent that in modern Malaysia, even those who were legally above the law were not immune from political constraints on behaviour which was grossly illegal, as well as deeply abhorrent, for their subjects. At least a serious breach of legal or moral norms could be politically erosive, in the sense of forcing the perpetrator into a relationship of dependence on those who were in a position to protect his 'good name'. At the same time, there might be a price to pay on the part of the institutions willing to deliver such protection: the loss of *their* good name and credibility as upholders of probity in public life. Although intellectuals nurtured in a certain legal culture may regard a calculated onslaught on judicial independence as a more serious matter, the majority of the Malaysian public might be more outraged (or at best, cynical, like the intelligentsia) about the immunity from prosecution of the

traditional rulers, and the appearance of connivance by the supposedly 'democratic' political elite: in sociological terms, a case of all too conspicuous 'symbiosis'! This was a problem for Dr Mahathir to ponder as he faced the need to discredit another Sultan: one whose moral and constitutional virtues were uncontested, but whose political emotions favoured Spirit of '46 and PAS, as well as states' autonomy. But Dr Mahathir's situation was not without potential. In retrospect the 1988 judiciary crisis may be seen as the high point of the revival of royal prerogative, since this crisis enhanced the power of the Prime Minister, not that of monarchy; it rendered the monarchy both a more vulnerable prey (likely to lack the collective will to fight for institutional pluralism single-handed) but also a more provocative target (being the last bastion of such pluralism), after the judiciary was bloodied; but at the same time it created no obligation on Dr Mahathir's part, merely the need to cover up the collusion and take his distance from royalty as a whole, the better to tackle any ruler rash enough to fight!

7.4 The Kelantan dimension – again

At this point, we revert to the politics of Kelantan. There has been a special feature of the politics of monarchy in this State: the more salient tension between UMNO's centralizing imperative and 'federalism', i.e. the autonomous prerogatives and integrity of Malaysia's member states. In the five years up to the 1992–93 constitutional crisis, Dr Mahathir and his party faced a challenge to their vision and pretensions in Kelantan which recalled the period of Parti Islam dominance in Kelantan in the 1960s. The important difference, in the 1980s, was that the present Sultan of Kelantan seemed to be more actively engaged in defence of states rights than his late father was. Thus the confrontation with the Kelantan State Government became absorbed or overlaid by the conflict with monarchy. This could not be without advantage to the Prime Minister, if royal misbehaviour diverted attention from – or became an alibi for – the heightened concentration of power at the federal centre, especially in the hands of one man. But it also showed that while (if not because) the states as such had never had a role in sustaining Malay supremacy, an idealistic ruler was free to play a part, with the help of the post-1970 immunities, as a defender of other kinds of rights – those of the states – against Prime Ministerial power. (And this was a power that could less and less justify its increase by reference to a centralized struggle for Malay supremacy already crowned with success.) Alternatively expressed, the Sultan of Kelantan may have had little relevance for Malay supremacy, but he was not an embarrassment to non-royal leaders because of misbehaviour which taints them by association. Rather, he had become a taunter of centralized power and the decline of constitutional democracy, on the strength of a modest personal activism and impeccable personal reputation as Sultan of a State under opposition control. This was a challenge far more serious than where Sultans have withheld cooperation from UMNO State Governments in order to extract personal pecuniary benefit. In fact, it created a need for incidents of the latter

type in order to justify reduction of the monarchs' powers by Constitutional Amendment.

At any rate, in December 1988 relations between the Sultan and his UMNO Chief Minister (in office since 1978, the central government's appointee) reached breaking point. This crisis was not due to the dissidence of Tengku Razaleigh; nor was the conflict of prerogative over State Civil Service appointments anything more than a symptom of an already deteriorated relationship. At the root of everything was the Sultan's concern about the Chief Minister's close association with logging interests, and a gratuitous attack on the Sultan by a young Kelantanese politician at the October 1988 UMNO General Assembly. Matters came to a head in a fateful meeting at the palace, where the Chief Minister claimed that the Sultan was plotting his overthrow, while His Highness asserted that the reason for certain UMNO Divisions in Kelantan making an issue out of the Civil Service transfers (after an official list had been agreed between Sultan and Chief Minister) was that Tan Sri Mohamed Yaacob was lacking the respect of his party on account of being '*bapa rasuah*' (the corruption kingpin). Tan Sri then offered to swear the contrary on the Holy Book, and (according to one account) actually did so. The Sultan, firm in his conviction of impropriety, saw this as an act of perjury and employed a porcine epithet.

The split in Kelantan UMNO finally became irrevocable with the registration of Tengku Razaleigh's new party, Spirit of '46, in June 1989. And by allying with PAS, Spirit of '46 helped the Islamic party to victory in the October 1990 general elections for the State Assembly. Dispassionate Kelantanese observers attribute UMNO's disaster principally to the fact that the party was led into the election by a Chief Minister discredited not only by the taint of corruption but by his heavy dependence on Dr Mahathir. Sympathy for the Sultan may have influenced a few votes, but obviously the ruler lacks the power to determine electoral outcomes on any significant scale, and nor did he try. However, Dr Mahathir and his supporters blamed the defeat on 'political interference by the Sultan'. In December the UMNO General Assembly staged a hostile debate on monarchy. Out of a second, similar debate a year later grew an initiative for a 'code of conduct': the extra-constitutional 'Proclamation of Constitutional Principles' which was eventually promulgated by the Agong on 4 July 1992 after being signed by six of the nine Sultans.²³

It is certainly questionable whether UMNO gained much from the Proclamation. First, Johor, Kedah and Kelantan withheld consent. Second, although the agreement specified that the majority party in a State Assembly would nominate the Chief Minister and that the Sultan would act on the 'advice' of the latter and the State Executive Council (while avoiding involvement in 'politics' and business), the cumulative effect of a number of modest privileges would be to allow any activist Sultan to 'stay in the game'. Third, there was no reference even to a 'conventional' obligation to sign laws passed in the State Assembly, let alone a legal obligation – the requirement which Dr Mahathir had been forced to drop from his 1983 Constitutional Amendment. Finally, and above all, the Proclamation lacked any constitutional force. Yet, on the contrary,

Dr Mahathir would have felt a need to gain a clear psychological advantage and also limit royal power by legal action at that juncture, seeing the Sultan of Kelantan's unshaken sympathy for his State Government as PAS began to talk seriously about introducing Islamic punishments into Kelantan (possibly even for non-Muslims) and mounted a campaign of obstruction to the central government's hydro-electric scheme at Pergau. In the short term, the stakes were actually higher than binding Sultans to sign democratically enacted laws.

But it was to be the streak of violence in the House of Johor that enabled shadow boxing to give way to a serious, and historic, confrontation which played substantially, though not completely, into the hands of Dr Mahathir. Not the least of Dr Mahathir's assets as the crisis gathered pace was that he was quickly liberated from the stigma of his role as accessory to Johor's previous excess. It stretches credulity, yet is true, that the very same Sultan of Johor played into his hands again, but this time from the position of an overt adversary.

7.5 The turning point to victory

This crisis had its 'humble origins' in an assault on the goalkeeper of a Perak hockey team on 10 July 1992, by one Tengku Majid – Tengku Bendahara of Johor and a son of the Sultan. The affair began to have the makings of a 'national' issue when it was discussed by the Malaysian cabinet on 12 September. A warning was issued that royalty could not expect criminal behaviour to be covered up. As a report had already been lodged with the police on 30 July (and there had been many prosecutions of non-reigning royalty in Malaysia, including Tengku Majid's father before his succession), the statement had a seemingly superfluous air. On the other hand, it is clear that the police did not complete their investigation and report on the case till shortly after the cabinet statement; in fact, the involvement of Federal Police Headquarters may have been quite belated. One may speculate whether the Malaysian Hockey Federation would have proceeded to ban the prince from the sport for five years, on 18 October, had the police investigation not been pursued to its conclusion, with apparent Cabinet prompting, by then.²⁴

Before we rush to conclusions about an ulterior motive, the possibility must be admitted that the involvement of the Federal Government was simply seen as a matter of honour, or manifest duty, following the Sultan of Johor's refusal to sign the July Proclamation. Should we suspect a trap for the Sultan if the Sultan himself behaved as if unaware of it? Yet some kind of 'erratic' reaction from the Sultan was predictable by any amateur psychologist; his very unawareness of danger (conspiratorial or otherwise) was characteristic. In the event, he certainly showed no inclination to 'let justice take its course' after the ban on his son, but in protest put intense (and effective) pressure on a number of Johor hockey teams to withdraw from national tournaments.²⁵

Matters came to a head on 30 November when Douglas Gomez, the hockey coach of a leading Johor secondary school, was summoned to the palace by the Sultan to explain his complaints about the enforced isolation of Johor teams

from national hockey. He was assaulted, and after receiving moral support from the cabinet – indeed, specific ‘advice’ from Dr Mahathir – lodged a police report on 6 December. The UMNO-controlled press at once became a forum for long pent-up popular outrage in its correspondence columns, under a tacit suspension of the Sedition Act. Posing as the saviour of the monarchy, not its enemy, the elective leadership warned that ‘the anger of the masses’ would not be containable unless reforms were instituted immediately. As early as 10 December the Lower House of Parliament was convened in special session and passed an unprecedented, unanimous resolution in favour of ‘all necessary action’ to curb abuses of power by Malay rulers. (Of electrifying effect in the House – greeted by a collective gasp and then the stamping of feet by the parliamentarians – was the declaration by Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba that rulers should not be able to kill their subjects with impunity.) And on 19 January 1993 the Lower House passed a Constitutional Amendment which not only removed judicial immunity from rulers in their private capacity and imposed limitations on the prerogative of pardon in cases involving royalty (Johor beware!), but also abolished immunity from political criticism in Parliament and the State Assemblies (Kelantan beware!).

This summary, however, only tells part of the story. Although Dr Mahathir had claimed at the outset that the rulers’ consent was not required, the rulers soon placed the government on the defensive by convening informally on 27 December to discuss the proposed Amendment Bill. The Sultan of Johor attempted to mobilize popular support by calling a rally at his palace (it was ultimately cancelled, but only after intense government pressure). Kelantan was also the scene of considerable opposition activity. The government began to show clear signs of nervousness lest the rulers should refuse consent. Indeed, they did so, following a formal session of their Conference on 16 January (from which they excluded the Chief Ministers and Prime Minister) and informal meetings among themselves over the next two days. They asked for ‘adequate time for consideration’ of a constitutional change which had such ‘unprecedented significance’, especially with regard to ‘the relationship between Federal Government and the states’. In fact, they refused consent even though a further clause had been included, after negotiation, providing for a special court for rulers.

The Lower House special session of 18–19 January took place, in other words, under the shadow of a looming crisis of much greater proportions. Dr Mahathir duly revived his claim that the rulers’ consent was not necessary anyway. But yet again the UMNO leadership went on the defensive, with a further round of negotiations. In the event, however, the leadership made no concession on the extension of ‘parliamentary privilege’, permitting criticism of rulers (though for some bizarre reason it claimed that it had). The only changes appearing in the version debated and passed by the Lower House on 8 March were the new provision that rulers should surrender their functions to a Regency, if a prosecution is pending; the deposition of a ruler sentenced to prison for more than one day; and the explicit exclusion of retroactive effect.

The provision for suspension from office had actually been demanded by the rulers themselves in their rejection of the original Bill on 18 January (i.e. on the morning of the day set for the presentation of the Bill in Parliament). But although the confirmation, 'for removal of doubt', that the law would have no retroactive application reflects an objective need of the rulers, the provisions for suspension and deposition from office seem, at best, 'neutral' in terms of advantage to either side. If the rulers saw patent benefit for themselves in these provisions, why were they not proposed a few days earlier, at the same time as the special court (which the government had time to incorporate into the Bill by 18 January)? A conceivable answer is that the eleventh-hour rejection, with measured constitutional reasoning, was designed (a) to establish beyond doubt the indispensable role of the Conference of Rulers as custodian of the Constitution; and (b) to cast the Yang di-Pertuan Agong in the role of a mouthpiece or agent of the rulers' veto (which the rulers previously lacked), taking advantage of the Agong's post-1984 power to send back legislation once, with a mandatory statement of reasons. Aspect (b) takes substance from the fact that the Agong did not himself pass on the statement of the Conference on 18 January (a statement which anticipated the vote in parliament and could not therefore serve as comment on a piece of legislation at that juncture), and did not send the Bill back at all quickly, either, but awaited the outcome of the further negotiations. The objections attached to the returned Bill were the reasons articulated by the Conference! Thus it was at least indirectly the Conference of Rulers which activated the process of reconsideration in Parliament.²⁶

Following the rejection on 18 January the government was at pains to propagate an image of the suicidal folly of Malay monarchy in opposing a Bill which so clearly represented 'the will of the people'; continued the campaign of exposure of individual records of material greed if not criminality, including the nexus between royal logging and Chinese entrepreneurship; and began to withdraw a number of extra-constitutional perquisites previously granted by the Federal Government and UMNO-controlled state governments (air transport, outriders, special hospital wards, and the like). The possibility has to be considered that this was a campaign of pressure designed to make the Conference change its mind. But since the rulers' statement had specifically accepted the main principle behind the Bill (the need to do away with judicial immunity) and had not spelt out any objection to freedom of criticism in Parliament and the State Assemblies – while the campaign gave further, embarrassing prominence to the executive's acceptance of the necessity of Conference consent – one might surmise that Dr Mahathir was really seeking to win or hold 'the moral high ground' in the eyes of his supporters, in a crisis which had exposed not a little division in UMNO over the legitimacy of Dr Mahathir's actions, as in 1983.²⁷

However this may be, there is no denying that Malaysia could never be the same again after these events. The fundamental, institutionalized taboo on criticism of royalty was broken by many actions during the crisis, and this

included the irrevocable exposure of a history of abuses to a previously unsuspecting public. The executive also gave free rein to Islamic criticism of monarchy, which had 'unhealthy' implications for the long-term survival of the institution in any form. The withdrawal of unwritten privileges after 18 January, which would presumably not be reversed, detracted further from the aura of royalty. And finally, thanks to the Constitutional Amendment itself, the rulers are no longer immune from the criminal law or (more importantly) from political criticism in elective Assemblies. Yet again, Dr Mahathir had revealed the strength of his political will and skills as a political fighter: an adversary whom few would be willing or able to challenge for several years to come, either within or outside the ruling party. The fact that it was he alone who was able to unleash public criticism and launch the constitutional reform had shown the unique concentration of power in his hands.

A postscript to the affair illustrates Mahathir's cool self-assurance. The Sultan of Kelantan rejected the revised (March) amendment on the grounds that he had never given his proxy vote to the Sultan of Kedah (contrary to what the latter maintained) for the meeting of the Conference on 11 February, and that the passing of the original version of the Amendment on 18 January was invalid anyway because it did not receive the consent of the Conference of Rulers in advance, as the Constitution stipulates. Dr Mahathir thus used his parliamentary speech on the revised amendment to question the legitimacy of the Sultan of Kelantan's succession, and in the following weeks the press was filled with the drama of a pretender, whose father's right had been lost in 1948 to Tengku Yahya (later Sultan Yahya, who died in 1979, father to the present Sultan Ismail)!

The fact that Dr Mahathir had lost 'the battle' over the power of constitutional veto of the Conference of Rulers – the referral power of the Agong beginning to look like an 'active' part of the Constitution – certainly did not mean that he was likely to lose 'the war'. The very fact that the crisis had revealed a residual royalism in UMNO's ranks, and left the monarchs with their own court of justice and a new sense of their right, if not duty, to guard the Constitution, was more likely to make him gird himself for renewed struggle at an early date. Indeed, the next round was not long delayed. The Pergau Dam crisis in Malaysian relations with Britain, starting in February 1994, provided the perfect screen of xenophobia and love-of-leader hysteria behind which to draft a discreet new Constitutional Amendment.²⁸

7.6 Tidying up

The Amendment did not waste its time with matters of marginal importance agreed within the past year. Perhaps they were too fresh in the public memory to be reversed without the appearance of a breach of faith. Instead, the Prime Minister aimed to remove the power of the King to delay legislative assent with a statement of reasons, as established in 1984. But although ten years old, the power was the highest ever given to the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong (and as argued above, was surely relevant to the working of the constitutional veto by the

Conference of Rulers). The possibility of another full-blown constitutional crisis over such an attack could not be overlooked. The possibility that the Prime Minister himself had not overlooked it, and was thus on the lookout for a diversionary tactic, would be inferred by any hardened Mahathir-watcher from the timing of the rather self-conscious challenge to the British media over the aid for the Pergau Dam. The Amendment was put to parliament without warning in May 1994, dressed up with the rationalization that the assent rule needed to be stated with consistency and in line with modern principle and actual practice, but also buried in a mass of other amendments, especially affecting the judiciary.²⁹

This time, in great contrast to 1983–84 and 1992–93, the royalty did not mobilize in opposition. It might be significant that the former judge, Azlan Shah, who had had a view behind the scenes in the 1983–84 crisis (just prior to his succession to the Perak throne) and held not only views but a key office through which to promote them in 1992–93 (being Yang Di-Pertuan Agong at that time), had by now stepped down from the supreme office at the end of his five-year tenure. One can guess that whatever the views of Azlan Shah in May 1994, the new Agong (from Negri Sembilan) and the royalty as a whole had no stomach for another bruising battle with Mahathir. With UMNO in control of every State Government of the Peninsula except Kelantan, drastic reductions in the Civil Lists and denial of business opportunity to royal families were all too credible weapons in reserve.³⁰ Even so, the silence of the Sultans *qua* State rulers on the application of the new, mandatory assent rule to themselves for states legislation, is quite astonishing, compared to their resistance in 1984, and would seem to bespeak a primary attachment to values other than ‘defence of the Constitution’.³¹

The next event of special relevance for Mahathir’s relations with the monarchy – even though its impact was on his relations with all interests in Malaysia, not uniquely or obviously the monarchy – was the general election of April 1995. The importance of the event is succinctly summed up in one annual survey:

The fourteen-party multiracial coalition substantially increased its support among the hitherto pro-opposition Chinese and Indian minority while consolidating its pre-eminent position among the dominant Malays ... For Dr Mahathir Mohamad ... the results were a massive popular endorsement of his post-1990 policy of subordinating racial redistribution to national growth and development, and he proceeded accordingly, simultaneously pressing his plans to turn Malaysia into a fully industrialized nation by the year 2020, and urging greater efforts to improve inter-ethnic harmony and strengthen national unity. But any hopes Dr Mahathir, who is seventy, might have had that he, and the country, could now leave off politicking to concentrate on the business of development were soon dashed by the intense manoeuvring in his core United Malays National Organization (UMNO) ahead of its triennial election in 1996, and by renewed speculation about his

relations with his protégé and deputy, Anwar Ibrahim, who is forty-eight. Rumours of a possible bid against Dr Mahathir as party president only ended in late November after he announced to the UMNO general assembly that it would 'not be long' before he had to step down and that Anwar would succeed him. The following day, delegates unanimously resolved that the two men should not be challenged as party president and vice [*sic*: read 'deputy'] president at its next election.³²

The significance of 1995 casts its shadow forward to the year 2000 and possibly well beyond. Anwar was being pushed by his clientele, as in November 1993, to 'assert his claims'. Clients become impatient when their own 'legitimate aspirations' are held up by a blockage to their leader. But unlike earlier UMNO leaders, Mahathir had already 'seen off' no less than two deputies who aspired to inherit his mantle; thus Anwar's action in 'jumping the gun' in 1993 (to become deputy president of the party by election, which in turn forced Mahathir's hand in making him Deputy Prime Minister) had already courted serious risks. Such undue haste had almost a touch of *lèse-majesté* about it in relation to a philosopher-premier who, after twelve years in the job, was not just 'getting into his stride' but had already 'got his second wind'. By 1995 he had not only a string of epic triumphs over domestic rivals but now four general election victories to his credit. More to the point, the 1995 victory was an exceptionally resounding one, which Mahathir, not unnaturally, saw as a personal mandate to carry on, in defiance of wide-spread expectation (let alone yearning in the Anwar camp) that he would announce his retirement after a final election victory.³³

It should not, therefore, occasion very great surprise that the financial crisis which swept South-East Asia in 1997–98, with President Suharto of Indonesia as its most celebrated victim, strengthened Dr Mahathir's conviction of his indispensability at the helm, while also challenging him to show that he, of all Asian leaders, could survive such a storm. When Anwar in his capacity as Finance Minister came out in support of the IMF's prescription for exchange rate stabilization, namely deflation and potential unemployment, Dr Mahathir took control of economic policy and imposed exchange controls to 'beat the international speculators'. There could be no basis of further cooperation with Anwar in an hour of such national crisis. In fact, the conflict could best be resolved by removing him from the public scene altogether. At least this was more or less inevitable once Anwar responded to his dismissal as Deputy Prime Minister by organizing rallies to protest about 'high-level corruption'. His trial on charges that he himself had perverted the course of justice, while being personally perverted in his sexual habits, gave a seal of judicial legitimacy to an 'execution' which was purely political in its motives. It was not political in the sense of an ideological conflict, but involved, latently or objectively, a contest for the highest office, however it might be concealed or denied by the pretender. Anwar paid the price of insulting unanointed 'majesty' at a high point of its subjective charisma, when it was becoming convinced of the legitimacy of life-long tenure.

The relevance of the Anwar saga to Mahathir's relations with Malay monarchy is possibly obscure, certainly oblique. But the suggested, primary connection is that Mahathir's 'execution' of Anwar reveals a man whose self-confidence, and sense of total entitlement as a national and international leader, had grown through a series of successfully concluded conflicts. In fact, the symptoms were all visible in early 1994, when Anwar was forced to act as a leading spokesman for Mahathir's campaign against the British media, which though 'irrational' by most standards, nicely strengthened Mahathir's position by projecting him as the national father-figure who had been 'wronged by the whites'. If even an Anwar – second-in-command of the ruling party – had to tread carefully, then every potentially activist individual and autonomous institution in Malaysia needed to watch its step also. A climate of pervasive nervousness, cynicism and apathy has evolved over several years, exacerbated now by signs of an arbitrary tendency within the police force, symptoms of non-independence in the judiciary, and events such as Tengku Razaleigh's return to the UMNO fold.³⁴ In this situation, the fragmented Malay monarchy, itself intimidated, is perhaps the last institution that would feel inclined to speak out in defence of a civil society. It did not speak out in May 1994, when directly challenged. Today, it would fear its own abolition if it were to raise a voice in defence of the rights of anybody else, whether in a case of individual persecution; or at a more abstract, academic level; or by blocking further reinforcement of the power of the executive.

Yet one hastens to add that this is almost totally hypothetical in any case, for an institution which has never been oriented towards custodianship of civil rights. The kind of rights which the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong is required by the Constitution to safeguard, and the Sultans are presumed by convention to safeguard in their respective states, are defined or conceived ethnically, not in terms of defence of the individual *vis-à-vis* Leviathan. Besides, the Sultans have even been prepared to surrender their autonomy within the last bastion of their personal prerogatives: religion. Whereas in 1978 the UMNO General Assembly humbly petitioned the rulers to agree to the coordination of religious affairs administration among the states – and with scant effect, as the issue of moon-sighting continued to show most strikingly! – in 1997 the Conference of Rulers immediately agreed to a proposal from the Prime Minister that Shariah laws should be harmonized across the country. Even the Sultan of Kedah, one of the most independent Sultans in religious matters in years past, merely asked to 'study the proposal first' before deciding.³⁵

No doubt, Mahathir's timing was excellent – as usual. The occasion of his initiative was a harsh sentence imposed by the Shariah Court of Selangor on three Malay girls in a beauty contest, and the resulting uproar in at least the more secular quarters of the Muslim public. But most striking of all is the fact that the Sultan of Kelantan, still advised by a Chief Minister of the Islamic Party, also supported the plan. Conceivably, the return to UMNO by the Sultan's uncle and confidant, Tengku Razaleigh, had had a bearing on Kelantan's accommodating attitude. Or did fear of a renewed challenge to Sultan Ismail's right of succession play a part? The exact interplay of sentiment and personality,

in Kelantan or any other state, is anyway not important. In historical perspective, the basic contrast with a period as recent as twenty years before, or even with the 1992–93 crisis (in which the rulers did put up quite a fight), is simply breathtaking. The heirs to ‘the glory of Malacca’ look distinctly overawed. Their role seems now more purely symbolic than at any time in their history – and in proportion to the equally unprecedented concentration of executive power, which the trial of Anwar Ibrahim seems more likely to secure than subvert.

However, as Mahathir girded himself for the general elections of late 1999, he seemed to have acquired a moral liability by his betrayal of the sacred Malay version of *noblesse oblige* (now incumbent on him in his own monarchical incarnation), in putting his ‘loyal servant’ (Anwar) to shame.³⁶ Although the ‘first-past-the-post’ electoral system worked to the benefit of the dominant coalition in delivering a two-thirds majority yet again, the victory involved an unprecedented dependence on Chinese and Indian votes, as an unprecedented number of Malay voters shifted to the Islamic opposition.³⁷ For the first time, the opposition in parliament is basically a Malay opposition (and the official Leader of the Opposition no longer a Chinese). It is obviously premature to write Mahathir’s political obituary, just as speculation about his retirement after 1995 has proven misplaced in retrospect.³⁸ Nevertheless, the way ahead may be less than tranquil, and in a situation of widespread and growing Malay alienation some openings for a mild exercise of royal influence are imaginable.³⁹

8 Brunei

Perks and perils of absolute rule

8.1 The 'rentier state'

It is by now something of a cliché that Brunei is a 'Shellfare state' – meaning a society cushioned by the welfare which a multinational oil company (Royal Dutch Shell, in fact) generates. A widely remarked effect of pervasive welfare, at least in this Malay society only quite recently experiencing modernization, is the 'depoliticization' of the populace. But this is not solely a direct effect of the welfare. We must also take account of the impact of oil on the country and its structures, and thus on the people indirectly. The State has become 'empowered' – materially if not morally – to control the population, and organizes itself accordingly. Indoctrination in favour of the *status quo* has become a more important function of the bureaucracy than in democratic polities of South-East Asia. Even the schools and locally based higher education are significantly involved. The concept of 'rentier state' is particularly useful in focusing our attention on the State (the political institution) as well as its 'clients'.

But these clients, comprising most of the population in some form, are not purely 'passive' consumers of authoritative doctrine, any more than they are of welfare. Large numbers of the working-age population have become dependent on the State as its employees. A culture of committed, or (dare one say?) 'active', dependency and deference is thus consolidated, rather than the culture of enterprise, entrepreneurship and production that is associated in Western experience with political pluralism and the rise of a civil society. This is apart from any traits of clientship and dependency in relation to Brunei on the part of neighbouring countries, or even universities further afield which are not averse to a little financial help from 'oil-rich sheikhs'! Various definitions of the 'rentier state' have been mooted, but there is no great variation between them. The central feature is that the main source of the state's revenue is external. And this is more or less equivalent to saying that the economy is a 'rentier economy', in which few of the local population are involved in production but draw salaries from the State, i.e. State expenditure generates the bulk of Gross Domestic Product, or the State itself supports the economy, rather than the domestic economy supporting the State. It might occur to the sceptical browser in this

theoretical literature that oil revenue is at least based on production carried out within the respective countries and thus is distinct from, say, remittances from emigrant workers, or income from tourism, or international aid. But the point, clearly, is that the organizational and scientific skills, risk capital, and usually the majority of the workforce involved in exploring for oil and producing it, are foreign. Analytically this turns the revenue into 'rent', since it is not earned by 'local effort'. Incidentally – but crucially – as transient non-citizens the workers cannot claim any political rights.

These interconnected realities have not changed (in fact we ought to speak of intensification) since the 'oil producers' became rich through the 'OPEC revolution' and learned how to negotiate the most profitable possible deals with the foreign oil companies, helped by fierce competition between the companies themselves. Even governments which have foreseen the need to develop alternative sources of revenue in the long term have remained painfully dependent on increasing their oil revenue, and have had to enlarge the scope of the State itself, precisely in order to foster new sectors of production. Again and again good intentions are frustrated by the 'rentier mentality' of the populace, which is reluctant to shift towards productive work, let alone pay tax on its income if it were to make such a shift – except possibly on condition of democratic participation in decisions on expenditure by the State! But in such circumstances, political paralysis on the part of elites is an understandable response, where an elite has become no less 'dependent', in its own way, on the uneven economic and political advantages accruing to it from oil 'rents'. This will bring us back, shortly, to the question of the structure of this kind of political-economy – more especially to the role of royal families who treat the State as an instrument of patrimonial largesse, and delight in the quasi-traditional deference which money buys, not to speak of the huge portion of the revenues which control of the State guarantees for their personal use.¹

But first of all, some basic economic realities of Brunei. What could not be foreseen in 1963, either by the Federation of Malaya's leaders or by Brunei when they haggled over Brunei's contribution to a future Malaysian Treasury, was the rise of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the extraordinary, windfall oil-profits accruing to OPEC members and non-members alike in the decade of the oil-price revolution. Brunei was turned into a 'rentier state' twice over: first, through the flow of oil profits from the activities of an international company; second, through the flow of interest from the astronomical financial reserves which the oil revenues were generating. Although at 1990s' oil prices current revenues no longer leave a surplus over annual expenditure for investment in the reserves, in principle, income from the reserves is constantly available for reinvestment.

The size of the reserves is a subject of fascinated speculation on all sides, fuelled but not informed by the wall of protective secrecy. A 'popular' but in many ways perceptive study estimated US\$27.8bn as the 'total assets at the Sultan's disposal' by 1987.² This is basically a reference to the size of the national reserves, although the journalist in question spiced up the topic by

referring to the whole of the wealth as 'the Sultan's', as often as he distinguished between reserves and the Sultan's 'direct and personal income'. (The first perspective can certainly be argued, but the Brunei Government vigorously refutes it, and the present writer stands somewhere in the middle, preferring to try to distinguish between different accounts.) Meanwhile, a valuable essay researched just after independence had suggested a figure of US\$30bn for the reserves, these being distinct from the further, unquantified 'personal fortune' of the Sultan.³ Not lack of interest but presumably lack of data resulted in one book devoted to the Brunei economy maintaining total silence on the reserves, except obliquely where the authors note that investment income was excluded from the published revenue statistics from 1986.⁴ But since the 'missing' quantity was around B\$4bn – say, very roughly, US\$2.35bn – then on an assumption of 7 per cent p.a. yields (and a notional exchange rate of B\$1.70 to US\$1) the underlying capital could be calculated at US\$33.57bn. Apparently the *Guinness Book of World Records* and *Fortune Magazine* were not prepared to take a chance on a figure higher than US\$31bn as late as 1991,⁵ but more recent estimates have varied between a low figure of US\$47bn (actually B\$80bn) suggested by a London banker⁶ and an outside high of US\$110bn.⁷ These latest estimates have not been adjusted to take account of drawings from the Brunei Investment Agency (BIA) by its former Chairman, Prince Jefri. But even were the losses as high as US\$16bn⁸ – and accepting that the wild variations in outsiders' estimates show nothing more clearly than the element of guesswork involved and that only US\$30bn (B\$51bn) is a completely 'safe' figure – even B\$51bn should be generating a comfortable B\$3.57bn p.a., which happens to correspond exactly to the B\$3.578bn government expenditure in 1996.⁹

In short, because of its minute physical proportions and population, Brunei is in a position to both sustain and develop itself for many years ahead from the income on its present reserves alone, even were the oil or the oil income to suddenly dry up. Such a disaster is of course entirely hypothetical, but the reassuring size of the money reserves must have some diluting effect on any compunction about private drawings, at least in the absence of a legislature to ask awkward questions; and given the legality of absolute royal control of State funds under Brunei law; and given the political value of using part of the 'private drawings' for direct patronage.

Naturally, per capita GDP in this 'hydrocarbon economy' is highly sensitive to oil price fluctuation, but also to the population growth which prosperity has facilitated. Per capita GDP stood at B\$35,544 in 1985; B\$25,685 in 1990; B\$24,980 in 1995, according to official calculations.¹⁰ But these are figures at current prices. Using the same source for population, namely, 218,100; 253,400; and 296,000 for the three years in question,¹¹ while referring to GDP at 'constant prices', namely, B\$3,535.3m; B\$3,605.1m; and B\$3,910.6m,¹² we would come up with a per capita GDP of B\$16,209; B\$14,226; and B\$13,211. However, this is highly abstract, since Brunei statistics, when expressed in constant prices, still take 1974 as their base date (though this is scarcely made explicit), whereas GDP in current prices had raced ahead, to B\$7,752.2m;

B\$6,508.6m; and B\$7,684.8m, respectively.¹³ Therefore, as the Brunei dollar is at par with the Singapore dollar, the current-price calculations probably give a better feel for the reality. Although Cleary and Wong¹⁴ cite a surprising figure of B\$19,000 for 1990 – surprisingly high, not low, as the authors seem to be working with constant prices – there can certainly be no doubt that in that year per capita GDP was ‘still one of the highest in the region’.¹⁵ It is also pointed out, citing work by colleagues at Universiti Brunei Darussalam, that even a decline in per capita GDP by no means signifies a decline in living standards, since the government has continued a ‘high rate of investment in community and personal social services’.¹⁶ Let us just remind ourselves that the high per capita GDP figures reflect not only strong revenue flows but a population which, even including transients, was estimated at a mere 305,100 in 1996.¹⁷

Brunei’s total revenue in the three years mentioned above (1985; 1990; 1995) was announced as B\$7,532.9m; B\$2,706.4m; and B\$2,450.5m, respectively. The dramatic, apparent slump actually dates from 1986 when income from the financial reserves ceased to be recorded. At any rate, assuming that before this change in accounting the figure for ‘Class IV, Revenue from Government property’ in 1985 was inflated by a notional B\$3,500m and thus total revenue ‘should’ have read B\$4,032.9m, then in those three years, ‘Class I, Duties, Taxes, Licences’ – of which direct income from hydrocarbon production is the overwhelmingly dominant proportion – accounted for 63.9 per cent, 59.48 per cent and 50.24 per cent, respectively of the current revenue of B\$4,032.9m, B\$2,706.4m, and B\$2,450.5m.¹⁸ At the time of writing, policies of diversification have clearly brought little change to the overall structure of the finances of this ‘rentier state’.¹⁹

Indeed, dependence on oil may be argued to have increased, though in two rather special senses: (a) because of persistently depressed prices, the government jacked up production at the time of the Gulf War (when there was a temporary price boost) and has maintained it at historically quite high levels, touching 180,000 barrels per day in both 1992 and 1994;²⁰ and (b) as even at a higher production level government expenditures could not be maintained from current revenue alone, the government would appear to have begun to make up the potential budget deficit by transfers back from the BIA, since 1995.²¹ This step, if confirmed, is radical in the light of the earlier, almost sacred rule that the reserves were being kept by the monarchy ‘in trust for future generations’. Such grim necessity may have made it easier for the Sultan, very late in the day, to regard certain other, ‘informal’, kinds of disbursement from BIA as a breach of the ‘sacred rule’. If this were so, then at least in one respect ‘rentier behaviour’ would have been modified. As the ‘cost of living’ allowances to government employees in 1998 showed, the government is in no doubt about the importance of maintaining disbursements to the people as a primary contribution to stability. It may be that such disbursements become more, not less, essential when royal scandals are in the air and the people potentially in a critical mood. Fortunately, as has been remarked, there is enough income from the reserves to notionally fund the whole of the government’s expenditure each year, not just cost-of-living

increments. Yet this would not cover royal 'cost of living' as well, estimated by one close observer at US\$2bn p.a.²² If, during the oil-price collapse of 1998, current revenues from hydrocarbons fell as low as US\$1.5bn, compared to US\$2.5bn in better times,²³ and if the reserves themselves were generating a low level of profit owing to the collapse in market value of properties across Asia,²⁴ the government's increasing dependence on reserve income hardly came at a good moment. Indeed, perhaps the day was looming when royal expenditures could only be maintained by tapping capital. Such a scenario would have given any alert and conscientious ruler food for thought, even more so if expenditures by one individual were clearly far in excess of those of the Sultan himself, and would have to be assumed to have dug deep into the reserves already.

It is tempting at this point to stay with the economics and develop the theme of management of the revenues by the elite. However, the background to such control is of course political, for it presupposes control of the State. Even if control of the State is itself partly explicable in terms of the economy, there is some analytical validity in turning for a moment to the political structure, postponing the more detailed discussion of revenue control – and 'failures of control' – till later in the chapter.

8.2 Political structure

Brunei is an absolute monarchy in which the Head of State is also the head of government. At present, there is no institution of a legislature, nor are elections held, except to the office of village headman and *mukim* (parish) chief. The village and *mukim* councils instituted in 1992 are essentially appointive, even though quite possibly intended to give the impression of 'steps towards democracy' (there is a 'National Assembly of Kampong Councils'). The occasional granting of registration to political parties may have a similar purpose, but the parties are effectively crippled by the ban on membership for all government employees. The existence of a Constitutional Review Committee under the presidency of the Perdana Wazir (Prince Mohamed), since 1994, has stirred speculation about reform but actual proposals, let alone change, are yet to be seen. The puzzling inclusion of the epithet 'democratic' in the self-description of the state in the Independence Declaration thus remains unexplained.²⁵

Meanwhile, the Minister of Law boasted for years that Brunei was subject to a 'rule of law', but although legislation with retroactive effect is mainly avoided, the government itself as well as the Sultan are 'above the law', at least in the sense of being exempt from prosecution or civil suit. A Public Order Act and tough Internal Security Act give sweeping powers of arrest and detention without trial for many seemingly petty offences, classified as a 'danger to the state'. A network of Special Branch informers (or certainly the widespread belief in their presence), and fear of detention in the political wing at Jerudong jail, ensure a pervasive absence of political discussion, even among friends. 'Political agendas' in society are set, to the maximum of its ability, by the State, which

controls the media directly or through censorship, and applies ample resources to the manufacture and propagation of ideology, including historical 'invention'.

The whole bureaucratic machinery is monitored and coordinated with increasing sophistication by the Prime Minister's Department (*Jabatan Perdana Menteri* or JPM), based in the Palace. There has been a steady increase in the number of other Departments directly under the control of JPM, including broadcasting and even religious dogma (the Department of the Mufti). This is apart from the fact that the Ministry of Home Affairs is in the hands of the Special Adviser to the Sultan (who simultaneously runs JPM), and the fact that the Sultan is currently both Minister of Defence and Minister of Finance. Although the imbalance of cabinet appointments at the time of independence (five ministries controlled by four members of the royal family, five others by three non-royal bureaucrats) has subsequently been 'corrected' (with a total of three ministries currently controlled by the Sultan and one Prince, nine others by eight bureaucrats), the Sultan still has a completely dominating position by virtue of JPM and the apparent absence of functional cabinet meetings: that is, ministers are called to meet, or request to meet, the Sultan in individual audience, where the Sultan is presumably flanked by his Special Adviser but the individual minister is not backed by a group of colleagues. The psychological advantage of the Sultan is enhanced by the deference which traditional etiquette imposes on his non-royal ministers.

It should not be thought that these authoritarian features are simply a reflection of the new opportunities of the 'OPEC era' and independence. Non-economic history has also played a part. The Brunei Constitution, promulgated in 1959 as the first, fundamental step in the transfer of powers from the British Residency, was a comprehensive but already markedly conservative document.²⁶ Although elections were provided for in Part VI, the elected members of the Legislative Council were not in the majority (and were not even summoned to take their seats after the 1962 elections), and Part III made the Chief Minister (and through him, his assisting officers such as the State Financial Officer) responsible to the Sultan, in whom the 'supreme executive authority of the State' was vested. Part VII speaks of the Sultan making laws 'with the advice and consent of the Legislative Council' but no matter concerning finance or security could even be discussed without the Sultan's consent. There has never been a statement concerning individual rights, let alone anything which takes precedence over other laws – except that emergency orders and Constitutional Amendments were originally subject to Legco's approval, under Sections 83 (7) and 85 (3) (in Parts XI and XII), respectively.²⁷

In any event, the marginally democratic features were subject to a process of attrition in due course, starting with the abolition of elections in 1970 (they had been held twice, in 1962 and again in 1965);²⁸ and moving on to the 'suspension' of the Legislative Council as such in early 1984. At the time of full independence, a few weeks earlier, the post of *Menteri Besar* (Chief Minister) had been converted into 'Prime Minister', and assumed by the Sultan. Clearly enough,

however authoritarian the structure launched in the early phase of decolonization, it was consolidated in the last phase by an elite impatient for great power.

From a 'constitutionalist' point of view it may seem ironic, yet is true, that the authority of the Constitution continues to be invoked biannually, in the Government Gazette, as the legal basis of the 'State of Emergency' and indirectly for the many Legislative Orders issued in this framework. In official speeches today the Constitution is seen as embodying the values of the state ideology – particularly the executive power of the Sultan and the official status of the Muslim religion.²⁹ The Constitution has also been described as 'the highest law of the land', while being said to have been 'adapted' in the light of changing needs. When the Constitution was amended at the end of 1983 to empower the Sultan to appoint Ministers,³⁰ and in early 1984 to suspend the Legislative Council,³¹ these amendments were effected by Emergency Order, not through the Legislative Council itself. Since then it seems to have become a practice to extend the Sultan's powers through further Emergency Orders (Subsidiary Legislation) which invoke the authority of the Constitution yet do not amend its text in the relevant Sections. Reflecting its declining importance, the Constitution has not been published for general sale since the early 1970s, and Constitution Day (29 September), after being effectively moribund for some years, was replaced, from 1991, by Teachers' Day (23 September) as an annual mark of honour to the late Seri Begawan Sultan.³²

In a sense, the Constitution has been superseded, as the supreme 'charter' setting forth the goals of the state and role of the people, by the national ideology of 'MIB' (*Negara Melayu Islam Beraja*, or 'A Malay, Muslim Monarchy') – even if MIB, to date, remains at a rather low level of systematization. The relationship of the ideology to political structure needs to be considered carefully. First of all, state ideologues maintain that MIB simply reflects the 'ancient reality' of a community bound to the monarchy by ties of loyalty, which reciprocate the many-sided protection and benefit bestowed by the rulers since time immemorial. These ties are also seen as expressing religious solidarity with the Sultan as a 'caring Caliph' of outstanding virtue. But an academic social scientist might see in this scenario, second, a larger element of historical 'invention' than authenticity. He might suspect that history is being mobilized to reinforce an ideological formula for the present, by providing an aura of dignified, august precedent for whatever structure and behaviour are now being prescribed. It is always striking that Brunei ideologues deny that colonial administration detracted from royal sovereignty: thus there was no break in political tradition, they say, let alone a rescue operation to save throne and territory from extinction. As a third point, but less immediately ascertainable, one wonders about the extent of moulding of contemporary belief and behaviour in line with the propositions of MIB, so that society's responses and aspirations become more 'pacified', less 'participant', respectively, in relation to State decision-making and outputs, as the ideologues hope. A fourth dimension, following on from the third as its subtle consequence, might comprise an incipient belief within the Palace that the ideology gives an accurate account of

the Brunei world, as well as a correct prescription for the political role of the Sultan himself. By extension, the ideology might proffer permissive sanction for his actions generally. Put a little more bluntly, the Sultan may have become 'convinced by his own ideology', and thus more complacent about behaviour which earlier he would have assumed to carry political risks. In short, MIB may have become a prophecy self-fulfilled and self-reinforcing at every level, allowing its very contradictions to co-exist more compatibly in the real world, and even protecting the idiosyncrasies of the Sultan's personality. It is both an emanation of concentrated power and an instrument which confirms and consolidates such power.

The three pillars of MIB only need to be spelt out for some underlying, internal contradictions to strike the eye. Taking 'Malay' to represent 'the people' in the context of an emergent nation-state – one whose early nationalist struggle against colonialism was actually more violent than in next-door Malaysia – how can this be squared with a version of 'monarchy' which very nearly decreed Brunei's merger with Malaysia, but has very firmly excluded the people from democratic rights since the decision to stay out? Taking 'Islam' to refer to the modern world religion which promotes a puritanical morality and vision of social justice in contexts of economic development – an ethical system officially propagated by religious teachers in Brunei itself, not least the many able Malaysian and Indonesian expatriates thus employed – how can this be held compatible with a version of 'monarchy' which cultivates court rituals of Hindu origin while funding a totally secular, 'jet-setting' lifestyle for the royal family through their monopoly of the national revenues? Or taking 'Islam' to mean also the universal religion which transcends and abhors separate national identities among believers, how can it tolerate the Brunei monarchy's promotion of ethnic consciousness, as a basis of solidarity between ruler and ruled?

The beginnings of an answer to these somewhat rhetorical questions may best be sought in the institutional interest of the Brunei religious establishment. This distinct hierarchy, Al Azhar-educated and built up by the State from early in the reign of the last Sultan, is deeply attached to its privileged position in society. It will never oppose the Sultan publicly, so long as the State continues to fund religious activity and the Sultan maintains a high profile as protector and promoter of orthodox, Sunni Islam. Indeed, it will assiduously cite scriptural authority in support of the institution of monarchy, maintaining silence if not voicing criticism on the subject of democracy. It can even lend tacit support to the strategy of ethnic solidarity by expressing it in terms of anti-Westernism, which equates with 'defence of Islam' against its 'avowed enemy'. Such a symbiosis can only be fortified by the intellectual affinity of absolute monarchism with the absolutism of Islamic truth. But the high premium on unquestioning faith in both spheres will not find us surprised if the religious establishment places more emphasis on rituals, as the key to eternal bliss, than on practical solutions to social problems. Religious ritual will look like a structural counterpart to the rituals of the court, which are so much dedicated to symbolizing, if not securing, harmony in the earthly kingdom that the mere hint of the

existence of social problems may be branded as disrespect for the symbols themselves and their efficacy! At the same time, the Sultan does make a practical contribution to 'harmony' (between himself and his Muslim subjects, and between himself and the religious establishment) by channelling his personal, 'populist' patronage through mainly Islamic institutions such as the Islamic Bank of Brunei, a Trust Fund dedicated to financing pilgrimages and other good works, the Brunei hand-written Quran project, and a giant *wakaf* (royal endowment) mosque. And whereas government subsidies for the pilgrimage pre-date the more personalized patronage of the Hassanal Bolkiah era, the Sultan is able to refurbish his sacred image by almost annual pilgrimages on his own account. Ritual activity is never completely divorced from material transaction – as the stream of converts from the indigenous tribes know to their benefit.

Of course, the underlying rationale of the ideology of MIB is precisely to bridge and integrate ideas which are in contradiction logically or forces which have been in conflict historically. But upon analysis of Bruneian political practice, one can see that it is above all Islam that acts as the bridge between the other two (potentially the most hostile) elements of the polity: an absolute monarchy and an emergent nation. Islam has the advantage over absolute monarchy that whereas monarchy is an institution of this world, constructed by and based on fallible humankind (and hence potentially not above criticism), Islam is the Word of God, to be questioned only on pain of eternal damnation. However, this 'invulnerability gap' need not work against the interest of monarchy if the monarchy has the religious establishment on its side. A 'coup' that must have given the Sultan reassurance at about the time of the Jubilee was the return of his former critic, Professor Ustaz Saedon Othman, exchanging a post at the International Islamic University of Malaysia for an appointment at the Institute of Islamic Studies in Brunei.³³ It may also have value for political legitimization that the historical dimensions of the state ideology have incorporated the thesis that all Sultans since the founder have been 'caring', on the basis of a kind of 'contract' with their people – an idea which finds some resonances (rather anachronistically) in both the Malay tradition of Malacca and in Islam.³⁴

A glance at the ever expanding horizons of royal, private aviation – an area of 'tropical luxuriance', as one might say – may provide a hint of a monarchy morally fortified by long exercise of power. At least there is no obvious discomfort about operating by an apparent plurality of principles. Thus, alertness to 'logical divergences' may have been dulled over time. If it is not the reassurance of Islam itself that enables Islamic and a less Islamic morality to be practised side by side, then we have to turn to explanations such as the reassurance which an effective official media provides, in keeping the more secular aspects out of the public eye; or the self-depoliticizing priority which some of the people give to preparation for the next life over reflection on the present one; or the fact that yet others are prepared to tolerate inconsistency because they agree that high rank bestows certain 'prerogatives', provided that prosperity is shared with each according to his station or expectation. More

important than any of these mitigating factors could be the overriding effect of a shared ethnic identity with the Sultan, strengthened by the 'siege mentality' of a minute nation in a world of menace, objective or imagined.³⁵ There seems to have been a certain openness to heterodox ideas, plausibly presented by a succession of 'gurus' and PR-men bearing formulas of the morality of absolute power exercised 'by God's will'.³⁶ At the same time, there have been reports of emotions instantly swayed by minor symptoms of social disorder, which have been prone to be interpreted as a warning that the youth need more instruction regarding the divine intention and the necessity of prayer. It was at one such moment, in late 1988, that leading bureaucrats of a more religious background or reputation saw a dramatic revival of their fortunes at court, and MIB began to be elaborated and propagated with unprecedented commitment.³⁷ The importance of 'mood' in the definition of the moral parameters of action is not contradicted by the psychological dominance which the totally secular Prince Jefri appeared to achieve during the same period.

8.3 Controlling the purse strings

It is time to move the discussion progressively towards royal control of revenue, as promised, while keeping political structure in mind and also the enabling self-assurance which ideological propagation seems to implant. No less than certain systems of the Middle East (and how many of the uninformed public in most countries of the world will not hazard that Brunei itself is 'somewhere on the Persian Gulf?'), Brunei offers a case study of both the 'rentier-state' phenomenon and a monarchy transformed, materially and mentally, by oil. In fact, the transformation was taking shape in advance of the self-conscious formulation of MIB in 1983.³⁸ MIB has simply put the philosophical seal on the emergent structure, albeit a psychologically persuasive and structurally self-perpetuating seal. For purposes of contrast between the humility of the late Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin and the hubris of the court of Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, one need look no further than the contemporary photographic evidence.³⁹ One dimension, though, that was developed by Sultan Omar and has stood Hassanal Bolkiah or his advisers in good stead in the changed circumstances is the dimension or concept of forging direct, quasi-populist links with the populace over the heads of the bureaucracy. Already this had indicated a need for direct royal access to part of the revenues. In his negotiations with the British for the 1959 Constitution Sultan Omar made a special point of securing, as the supreme executive authority, the monopoly over the national revenues. Ironically, however, it was not Sultan Omar who later demanded more than the bare Civil List for himself, but apparently British expatriate advisers, who urged the creation of a Trust Fund to 'cushion' the royal family in the future, should the reserves (the geological variety) be used up.⁴⁰

Be this as it may, the taste for independent wealth and a strong sense of its political uses may well have been implanted by 1970, when the abdicated Sultan Omar, working behind the throne of his son, effected the abolition of democratic

elections to the Legislative Council. Importantly, these years also saw the advent of a more aggressive style of negotiation with Royal Dutch Shell, leading to the purchase of a majority stake in Brunei Shell Petroleum by the Brunei State in 1975. Not that restructured equity facilitated royal access to funds – that depended on control of the Treasury through the State Financial Officer (a British expatriate) – but the change was symptomatic of an era in which Middle Eastern precedent, and especially royal behaviour, were beginning to influence royal consciousness and behaviour in Brunei, partly through the intermediary of international oil consultants. At any rate, by the early 1980s, on the eve of independence, not only was Brunei very rich, measured by the national reserves, but the young Sultan was psychologically primed and politically poised to channel millions into extra-bureaucratic accounts, for the purposes of direct patronage as well as personal indulgence.

The most ‘rentier’-type phenomenon at the time of independence was the non-legislated creation of a new head of Charged Expenditure, deceptively yet aptly designated ‘royalty’, for sums of a value approximate to current hydrocarbon income. This category was distinct from the ‘Civil List’ but might be guessed to have endowed the personal needs, and patrimonial or ‘patronage’ obligations, of the royal family. In the three years 1983–85, Charged Expenditure as a whole totalled B\$6.5bn, compared to a mere B\$150m between 1980–82. It has been suggested delicately that the construction of the new Palace mopped up a large part of the money,⁴¹ but we should not overlook the fact that there was also a jump of almost B\$1bn in Ordinary Expenditure in 1984, which could have served that purpose in part. Whatever the case, at about the point when BIA became fully operational, not only did investment income cease to appear in the official revenue statistics, but Charged Expenditure was heavily reduced (though never back to pre-1983 levels). Since then there has been evidence that BIA took responsibility for the supervision of the overseas real estate investments which the Western press attributed to ‘the Sultan’.

Yet this critical period in the rise of royal wealth and special accounts for handling it has been ‘written out of history’ by the British PR-consultant, Lord Chalfont, who declares that the wealth is virtually as ancient as the dynasty.⁴² A Bruneian spokesman such as the Minister of Religious Affairs, when announcing the Sultan’s gift of the Jame ‘Asr Hassanil Bolkliah mosque to the nation in 1992, stressed that the money was to come out of the Sultan’s ‘private fortune’, though without specifying its lineage. It is clear that access to accounts outside the government’s budgetary system is functional to the Sultan’s reputation for ‘charity’, while enabling him to appear to have no need to manipulate State revenues, even though in reality the law gives him this power and that is precisely why so much money has become available for his nominally ‘private’ expenditure.

We referred in section 8.2 to the practice of extending the Sultan’s powers through Emergency Orders. This is seen, for instance, in the Order under which any Order under a Proclamation of a State of Emergency by the Sultan is deemed to have validity even though the previous Proclamation had expired or not been properly laid before the Legislative Council;⁴³ and in the Order

transferring authority over the finances from the Sultan himself acting as 'Sultan in Council' to the Minister of Finance acting 'with the approval of His Majesty'.⁴⁴ While the first provision may be seen as merely safeguarding the State from legalistic quibble about the new process of legislation generally, the second has turned out to be of major historic significance, in enabling the Sultan first to assume full financial control at independence (January 1984), then to delegate it within the family to his youngest brother, the Pengiran Digadong or Prince Jefri (October 1986), secure from any bureaucratic scrutiny, after the death of the Seri Begawan Sultan.

8.4 A sea of perils

It cannot be stressed too much that financial control by the Sultan and its delegation to a brother were both legal under Brunei law and ethical by the lights of neo-traditional Malay monarchism. Did not the Sultans of yore farm out tax collection to their kinsmen and have absolute discretion over the disposal of such revenue as reached the royal coffers? Brunei's independence was a 'royal independence' above all, fought for doggedly (this means delayed doggedly) by the present Sultan's father until there was a viable structure to bestow on his dynasty. Indeed, the British government had obliged the dynasty in 1959, not only by giving legal recognition, in advance, to the succession of its descendants, but by laying the most vital foundation of its survival, royal control of the finances. And pragmatically, just in case any citizens of independent Brunei should take the government's propaganda about modern 'nationhood' and the concept of 'public property' rather literally, the ideology of MIB offered an instant antidote in the shape of a Sovereign conceived as the fount of sovereignty, but who, because of his similarly-minded ancient lineage, would never abuse his trust as guardian of the people's best interest.

As for any somewhat 'un-Malay' forms of self-indulgence, let alone behaviour condemned by Islam, much of it could be kept remote from public awareness by control of the Brunei media, or simply by being practised abroad. In fact Prince Jefri tried more than one astute and antidotal formula of patronage on his own account, by distributing a little of his wealth to the needy from time to time, and also by inviting the masses to come and 'share in the fun' at a high-tech amusement-park at Jerudong, close to his palace. Prince Jefri and his son, Prince Hakim, were also responsible for introducing 'Sky' TV channels to Bruneians, via a rediffusion facility at Jerudong, initially free of charge. Prince Jefri blamed his eventual fall from grace on 'Afghan Arabs infiltrating the Sultanate and trying to seize control'.⁴⁵ This explanation leaves one in little doubt that he had conceptualized the less religiously-oriented, more 'MIB-resistant', Bruneians as a diffuse 'constituency of sympathy' in case of trouble with the Islamic establishment, his rivals for the Sultan's ear. The great irony of the Jefri drama which unfolded during 1997–98 is that Jefri himself, whether aware of it or not, had been protected even more than the rest of the Bolkiah family by the legitimizing sanction of Islam. A point may have come at which 'the Mullahs' could no

longer hold the line against a wave of cynicism threatening the credibility and power of their hierarchy itself.

This suggestion is merely intuitive, but we cannot ignore the penetrative power of international electronic media, including the Internet, in breaching Brunei Government censorship. Although the content of the satellite TV channels rediffused through Jerudong has been controllable, more or less – and Rupert Murdoch's offerings are already tailored to the puritanical standards of the more authoritarian Asian regimes – viewers with their own powerful parabolic dishes were already receiving and taping programmes from as far away as Japan a couple of years earlier. One piece of 'dynamite' was a discussion programme from a station in Manila, picked up in September 1993 via the Palapa B2P satellite (courtesy of CNN, it is believed), on the subject of the Philippines Senate hearings on alleged 'contracts' for Filipina actresses and beauty queens at the Sultan's Palace. 'Miss Philippines', Charmaine 'Ruffa' Gutierrez, who had given testimony at the Senate Committee, appeared on the programme and spoke at length and with sophistication. She denied any impropriety on her part, or on the part of anyone that she knew, but during a phone-in the Chairman of the Muslim Bar Association of the Philippines was heard condemning Prince Jefri for using 'the wealth of Brunei, illegally and immorally, to exploit women'. He claimed that the scandal was 'a public knowledge not only here but even in Brunei'. He called it 'a mockery of Islam, for Islam is the official religion in Brunei'.⁴⁶

The next major exposure, but this time on a more world-wide scale, concerned the attempt by a former 'Miss USA', Shannon Marketic, to sue both the Sultan and Prince Jefri in a Los Angeles court, for alleged demeaning treatment and demands during thirty-two days' virtual imprisonment at the Palace under a contract for 'promotional appearances'. The case was first reported in the British press on 3 March 1997, but originally had 'sealed' status and may thus have been several days old by the time it leaked out. The inference is irresistible that Prince Jefri's resignation as Finance Minister ten days earlier had been required so that he, and not the Sultan, would appear to be the guilty party as soon as the news broke. Certainly damage limitation was the order of the day during the next two months in Brunei, with an unusually busy schedule of kampong visits by the Sultan, a more informal style of interaction with the families visited, and an unprecedented, exculpatory TV address for the Feast of Sacrifice, or Pilgrims – *Aidiladha* or *Hari Raya Haji* – at the end of April, in which the ruler rejected allegations that the 'sanctified' Palace could ever have been used for an immoral purpose.⁴⁷

But Brunei never ceases to surprise. Within a year, that is by February 1998, so far from showing remorse, or at least caution for the sake of the Sultan, Prince Jefri had turned down the opportunity to settle debts of £80m allegedly owed to two Armenian brothers, his emissaries for highly-priced acquisitions, and had picked up the gauntlet of a civil suit in the High Court of London. In fact he announced a counter-suit for £100m. Titillating details of his lifestyle filled the submission by counsel for the plaintiffs early in the hearing, and text as well as

pictures of *objets d'art érotiques* duly filled the British press.⁴⁸ Only after substantial damage had been done to both parties by the unwonted publicity was a compromise reached out of court.⁴⁹ One would suspect that the Sultan's original support for Jefri 'as a matter of family honour' was an angle put about by aides of Jefri himself, but even if there was any truth in that claim, one would suspect even more strongly that it was an intervention by the Sultan that had forced Jefri to withdraw. Four months later, the assets of Jefri's conglomerate, Amedeo, were seized,⁵⁰ and by the end of July Jefri had been removed as Chairman of the Brunei Investment Agency.⁵¹ The prince took 'evasive action' by going abroad, even as his lawyers were concluding a financial settlement with an anonymous British model who had apparently sued him even earlier than Ms Marketic had done.⁵² By this time a procession of foreign accountants had begun to peer into the 'black hole' in Brunei's reserves, on behalf of a Sultan who wished it to be understood that he had known nothing of what had been going on until very late in the day.⁵³

It would be odd if the Sultan were so protected by protocol and official myth that he was not fully aware of developments which any expatriate professional could observe on the ground in the early to mid-1990s. A huge area of dignified, colonial-era bungalows for government staff close to the centre of the capital was being redeveloped by 'the Ministry of Finance', working under the umbrella or 'turn-key' company known as Ulfert. This outfit was run by a Malaysian Chinese whizz-kid who had found favour with Prince Jefri. The redevelopment comprised new palaces and a royal park, as well as an estate of luxury villas. These villas were ready in time for the Jubilee in 1992, and housed visiting royalty and Heads of State, but later they were often used for lesser celebrities, such as entertainers, visiting to perform in Brunei or in transit to perform elsewhere. Further wholesale demolition after 1994 made way for huge condominiums, owned by members of the royal family. These were used initially by athletes at the South-East Asian Games hosted by Brunei in August 1999, but were destined to be let in due course to government employees through their Departments at high fixed rents. All these developments illustrate royal control of the State in another way: the Land Department gives priority to processing transfer of title from private individuals to royalty after purchase (at market prices), makes compulsory purchase orders 'in the state interest' for peasant land needed for royal projects (with compensation at less than market prices), and issues title for State land alienated to royal ownership (for a statutory, purely nominal fee); while all Government Departments become agents for block lettings of royally-owned flats.

Meanwhile, and even more boldly, several miles of sandy beaches had been put off-limits to the public for the construction of a vast recreational zone for the super-rich, including a (rumoured) international casino and the (confirmed) Jerudong Park Hotel, which was constructed at such cost that it was estimated to need to charge \$500 per night and achieve a 90 per cent occupancy rate for fifty years to make a profit.⁵⁴ There was also a state-of-the-art private hospital staffed mainly by New Zealanders, and a pre-university High School or 'Sixth Form

College', teaching in the English medium, ostensibly for the children of staff of Amedeo, the operating or holding company for most of the work around Jerudong, successor to Ulfert.⁵⁵ In advance of the major projects the Jedurong redevelopment zone had received its own, highly visible, gas-fired power-station. The works were also preceded by a multi-million dollar shore defence project, involving the shipment of giant boulders from abroad to arrest the drift and erosion which affects that part of the northern Borneo coastline. The amusement park for the masses is one of the projects – the only one serving the people in any sense – but the luxury developments are guarded by Gurkhas and not even visible to the public.

Most of the developments would be visible, however, from the hill-top Istana Nur ul-Izzah, the palace of late 1980s' vintage belonging to the Sultan's second wife, where the Sultan has spent many an evening. This detail is inserted here because of the persistent puzzle about how much the Sultan knew, and, if he knew, why he took so long to act. The timing of the actions against Prince Jefri could be crucial to an interpretation. If it was the Asian financial crisis that made the Brunei national finances suddenly look shaky, action should not have been taken until late 1997 at the earliest. On the other hand, if Jefri was judged to be abusing his power at BIA, he should have been removed from his chairmanship at the same time as resigning as Minister of Finance. But the facts are that (a) Prince Jefri resigned from the Cabinet in February 1997, a week before the 'ex-Miss USA' scandal hit the press, and well in advance of the Asian financial crisis; but on the other hand, (b) he retained control of BIA (a position ten times more sensitive than the Ministry of Finance) until July 1998. Now it cannot be denied that when he was removed from BIA it was the result of an investigation begun in the midst of the Asian financial crisis and partly prompted by suspicion of wrong-doing at home. But the nagging question remains: why not in 1997? Again, the factor of 'extra-curricular activities' and their exposure springs to mind. Thus, 1998 was proving to be a year of even greater Western media interest because of the Manoukian brothers' suit and the salacious tales and pictures which emerged. One read of prostitutes kept on the upper floors of the former Playboy Club in London's Park Lane (bought by Prince Jefri for an inflated £50m), or 'forty girls at a time' housed temporarily at the Dorchester (the Sultan's hotel).⁵⁶ One saw a photo of an erotic pen made in Geneva, whose top appears to copulate with the bottom.⁵⁷ Prince Jefri's yacht, named 'Tits', and its two speedboats, 'Nipple 1' and 'Nipple 2', were becoming household names for some British newspaper readers – and for Bruneian students studying in Britain! Thus, a vessel which was not visible to the Bruneian public when moored at the navy quay in Muara port, was now on full display, photographed from seaward, in British 'colour supplements'.⁵⁸

The crystallizing interpretation is this. If it is in any way true that 'the efficient secret' of the Brunei royal regime has consisted of its own secrecy, it becomes possible to surmise that, whatever the Sultan may or may not have known about, action became imperative essentially because of the embarrassing exposure of royal behaviour in the Western media. It had been possible for

officials to brush off the occasional speculation in earlier years about who owned the wealth. Most importantly, the Bruneian public as a whole already believed that the Sultan owned it, and indeed accepted this, on the basis that he would distribute an equitable share to the people. What distinguished the new wave of Western media interest was its intensity, due mainly to the sexual dimension. The interest of the British quality press was also, admittedly, fuelled by the spectacle of a famous dynasty in financial and political disarray, as the mega-losses came to light and hubris seemed to meet its nemesis. But this interest merely reflected the attempts by the Sultan to recover control. If we want to answer the question why the Sultan decided to assert himself in the first place, we should consider the impact of the foreign media in breaching Brunei Government secrecy. The Sultan's subjects were now able to learn, as never before, of the breathtaking gulf between the regime's high religious principle and its less than virtuous financial and sexual practices. In fact, for some time previously some of the more literate Bruneians had begun to murmur about religion as 'a propaganda' – meaning, in effect, what Karl Marx would have called a screen of 'false consciousness' to keep the masses ignorant and docile. Events of 1998 speeded up the potential for a much more widespread analytical perception along these lines. And it was surely this, not the 'black hole in the reserves', that posed the most serious threat to the regime. Financial statistics are intangible to a semi-literate people (and even, surprisingly, to some quite literate individuals), but gross sexual indulgence is not. For the Sultan himself, Jefri's 'irresponsibility with the national finances' (as Western values might judge it) need not be a serious issue either, for all members of his family stood more or less above the law, and had all benefited from the Sultan's and Jefri's financial control, so that it would be a most unbrotherly act (leading to revelations embarrassing to the government) to query Jefri's handling of the finances after he had been entrusted with them.⁵⁹

Let it again be stressed that from the point of view of regime interest as well as its moral judgement, Jefri's grievous error lay neither in the area of financial management, nor at the level of the inconsistency of his behaviour as such with the principles of the very religion which shielded him. After all, it is a major social function of any religion to shield its protectors reciprocally. Rather, the crisis arose from the fact that this inconsistency 'came into the public domain' and thus exposed the regime, if not Islam, as 'hypocritical'.⁶⁰ Jefri's complacency about both the need for secrecy and the implications of his behaviour for the compact between 'Church and State' were on a scale that eventually shook the Sultan. Jefri behaved as if his oil company, Jasra, had struck a bonanza, when in fact commercial oil was still some years away and his joint-venture partner Elf-Aquitaine had not even reached a final production-sharing agreement.⁶¹ Might it be that Jefri's dreams for the glorious middle years of his life had been predicated on the success of his oil concession, but that by the time it became clear that the oil profits were delayed, a series of international contracts signed by Amedeo had already reached a point of no return? Commitments underwritten by BIA then had to be met by cash from the same source, though one presumes that the transfers were secured in turn on Amedeo assets (the assets

confiscated by the Sultan in mid-1998). Such financial insouciance, of addictive proportions, is not in itself what led to Jefri's undoing: it simply illustrates a psychological pattern which, when expressed in his even more addictive orientation towards British objects of great price and prestige, became a focus of intense media interest. It was this exposure that very likely pushed the Sultan, belatedly but rationally, into tackling the image problem and the financial problem simultaneously. But a rational explanation of Jefri's conduct looks like remaining elusive.

In the Brunei context many things are possible which would destroy their perpetrators in other cultures and political systems. Jefri returned to Brunei in about October 1998, having received guarantees, obviously, of dignified treatment – at least nothing worse than some form of house-arrest.⁶² The Sultan and his wives intensified their religious devotions, including a minor Haj (*umrah*) in January 1999, as if atoning for sin in the family; and the Islamic intellectual, Professor Saedon, took over as Vice Chancellor of the University in May, with a brief for the rapid indigenization of the academic body. During the Sultan's absence in Saudi Arabia the Perdana Wazir, Acting Sultan, spoke enigmatically of 'change',⁶³ but the official media seemed to be relying on an older formula, by showing the dismal scenes of political conflict and disorder in Indonesia and Malaysia and urging Bruneians to 'count their blessings' and stay loyal to their own 'unique way of governance'. It is true that the Brunei press had responded to public disquiet in the second half of 1998 by advocating a new 'openness' and practising the same in its correspondence columns, and that the Perdana Wazir in his first interview with a European press agency (on the eve of a state visit by Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh in September) had spoken of imminent constitutional reform. But at the time of writing, a year later, no significant changes had eventuated.⁶⁴ The immediate cash haemorrhage has been staunched and the culprit disgraced, although allowed to leave Brunei again and live in London.⁶⁵ The cash disbursements to the population at the Sultan's Birthday in July 1998 may have been economically injudicious but were politically prudent, for they stood to reassure the population that the finances were still healthy after all, while dampening the growing restlessness over a long-delayed salary revision. The investiture of the Sultan's eldest son as Crown Prince in August was also hardly in the spirit of economic retrenchment, but was politically well-timed to demonstrate regime solidity and its will to survive. Provisionally, it seems possible to conclude that the system has been able to save itself by some last-minute crisis management, in which the Perdana Wazir obviously played a leading role, with the close collaboration of the pious Pehin Aziz, Minister of Education. Pehin Aziz was entrusted with the Brunei Investment Agency in place of Prince Jefri. No one has thrown the weight of a religious reputation behind the regime's survival as much as he. And it will be noted that the author interprets his involvement as activated by the regime in its quest for survival: it is not a case of 'an Islamic coup' against the regime, as Prince Jefri maintains.

One remaining Achilles' heel is the collapse of the market for rented detached homes, which affects middle-class parents with overseas college and university fees to meet. And this is due not only to the general recession but partly to the increase in royally owned condominiums, which mop up a captive clientele through enforced lettings to Government Departments. But amidst these tensions, the regime enjoys two assets that stand out above others. One is an armed forces officer corps which apparently lacks political ambition for itself, or even a political vision for the country, provided that salaries remain high and equipment up-to-date by ASEAN standards. The other is a general population which cannot easily conceptualize the extent of the losses from the reserves (which in any case have been a matter of rumour, not official announcement), and to a large extent has never yet learnt to conceive of the reserves as belonging to 'the nation'. Nor are these mind-sets and mental levels purely a legacy of 'the past' in a more distant sense, but reflect three or four decades of deliberate depoliticization by the monarchy itself. Thus in a way, Prince Jefri's complacency has been vindicated. The regime has passed its most critical test since the 1962 Revolt, and not without owing part of its success to its own statecraft across the intervening years. Absolute rule looks set to continue in this South-East Asian enclave because even when its perquisites were abused, the system proved to be adaptive enough to head off the corresponding perils. For the future, the political system is bound to be more vulnerable to oil price fluctuation than it ever was before, but by August 1999 oil prices were looking much healthier.⁶⁶

9 Thailand

A King for all seasons

9.1 The days of democratic turmoil

The situation of monarchy on the Indochina Peninsula in late 1973 was nothing if not varied. In Cambodia, the charisma of ex-King Sihanouk was lending invaluable legitimization to the Maoist Khmer Rouge, and Sihanouk seemed unlikely to regain the political power first lost to General Lon Nol in the coup of 1970, if and when his new-found Communist allies won the civil war after the end of US bombing. The constitutional monarchy of Laos, upheld by the Laotian coalition government of 1973 as by the pro-American regime before it, was probably only as durable as the right-wing factions would prove to be if there was a Communist victory in Vietnam. But in Thailand, a remarkable, quiet transformation was proceeding, from a 'passive' constitutional monarchy to a more 'active' model. Before, during and after the month of 'student revolution', October 1973, the King stepped forward as patron of democratic reforms, effectively turning the tables on the military elite which had sought to exploit royal charisma in its own interest from the late 1950s.

It is a notable paradox that whereas the opening of Thailand to Western trade and cultural influence in the Fourth Reign, the great administrative reforms of the Fifth, and the nationalism of the Sixth, had combined to create a rival bureaucratic elite and supply it with an ideological justification for acting against the old order, the Praetorian dictatorship of Field Marshal Sarit pursued economic development with an intensity that brought further new strata, with independent political aspirations, quickly into being. Not only did the urban petty bourgeoisie and salariat expand inexorably, but also the army of their offspring entering higher education. The eagerness for political rights among many of the latter also coincided with, and took strength from, their experience of full ethnic 'passage' from Chinese to Thai identity. Meanwhile the 'Ninth Reign' – in the person of *Phrabaadsomded Phracawyuuhua Phuumiphon Adumdeed* (King Bhumibol Adulyadej in English) – entered its twenty-fifth year in 1971, when the incumbent was 43 and growing in prestige. His growing prestige was due to the more public role initially enjoined upon him, in support of its development

strategy, by the military leadership, but then built upon according to his own lights, by the King himself.¹

The more interesting aspect of socio-economic change from the point of view of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) was the crisis of debt, landlessness and poverty in rural society. Needless to say, this was not a crisis affecting the whole of rural society but only those on the wrong side of the widening gap of stratification dividing comfortable land-holders of increasingly bourgeois profile from their tenants.² Perhaps somewhat less needless to say, the crisis reflected most fundamentally a novel shortage of land in relation to Thailand's population, combined with the workings of a cash economy. It was not due to the machinations of an 'exploitative ruling class' (or at any rate not more so than in any South-East Asian country facing comparable crises of development), yet the crisis lent itself to that kind of interpretation, whether sincerely or opportunistically, on the revolutionary Left. And in view of the advance of insurgency and almost symbiotic growth of the military and police budgets (whether 'parasitically', or financed by the United States) without any clear countervailing effect on the security problem, this was a crisis which necessarily impinged on the consciousness of the King in a multi-dimensional way. His speeches to students began to reveal a conviction that it was time for a new, educated elite to step forward and apply its idealism and skills to the search for new solutions. He even blamed the oppressive hand of government officials for peasant alienation and the growth of Communism.³

If the King subsequently 'encouraged' the military coup of October 1976, as has been alleged, then it is even more true that he had pointed the way to some sort of confrontation with the military by October 1973. Sure enough, the pioneers of radical, mass political participation were the student activists, whose efforts in October 1973 led to bloody confrontations on the streets of Bangkok and the exile of the military triumvirate. But it was only through the intervention of the King that the two dictators, Thanom and Praphat, and their successor-designate (as well as son and son-in-law), Colonel Narong, were prevailed upon to leave the country in the event. The King then stepped into the vacuum of authority by selecting a Convention, which elected a provisional Legislative Assembly with responsibility for drawing up a democratic Constitution. The celebrated, aristocratic author-musician, Mom Raachawong Kukrit Pramoj, was elected President of this Assembly, headed the Constitution Drafting Committee, and subsequently formed his own political party, the Social Action Party. It achieved a tally of only eighteen seats in the January 1975 elections under the new Constitution but Kukrit's national stature made him the agreed nominee of four other coalition parties to be the first Prime Minister.⁴

But Thailand's new democracy was regarded with considerable reserve on 'the Right' (represented, most powerfully, by the military interest), and on 'the Left' (represented, most vocally, by the student movement). Both the military and the student leadership felt excluded from their self-perceived, legitimate roles as articulators and custodians of national aspiration and interest. Where the student leaders were unable to influence events by themselves, they assisted with

the mobilization of the peasantry or urban working class on the streets of Bangkok, for economic protest. The student leaders' sense of political deprivation also drove them ideologically further to the Left; in other words, their movement became increasingly tolerant towards Marxist perspectives, and correspondingly open to an infiltration by the CPT.⁵ All this was happening against the backdrop of Communist victory in Cambodia and Vietnam (April–May 1975), a heartening event for Thai student radicals but disheartening for their opponents (who saw the spectre of foreign conquest added to 'the New Society'). In the country itself, the death toll from insurgent attacks was running at 400–500 per year. As sponsors of the annual mass cremations of the fallen, the emotions of the King and Queen could hardly remain untouched. The abolition of the 'sister monarchy' of Laos in December 1975 was traumatic to an extraordinary degree. Meanwhile, in response to open student contempt for the three 'leading institutions' of Thai society (Sangha, Monarchy, Military) and efforts to achieve quick results through street demonstrations, expressions of deepest anxiety and a resolve to 'take back control' of streets and campuses had begun to be heard from 'the Right'. Not least among the prophets of doom and implicit advocates of reaction was a Sino-Thai, royalist Professor of Law and High Court judge, Tanin Kraivixien.⁶

Faced with the impossibility of maintaining his cabinet's credibility in the eyes of the military, Kukrit tendered his resignation after one year in office and asked for a parliamentary dissolution. The military was looking for a more dominant role in government, in order to deal with 'the student challenge' and Communism, while Army commander General Krit aspired personally to cabinet membership. As Kukrit would not yield an iota of sovereignty to the non-elective military interest, Krit had cultivated the opposition Democrat Party, and was able to secure the Ministry of Defence in the incoming Democrat-led cabinet of Seni Pramroj (Kukrit Pramroj's younger brother), in April 1976. (Kukrit himself lost his seat – or rather, failed to be re-elected in an ill-chosen constituency.) It was in this election campaign that the socialist lecturer, Dr Boonsanong, was assassinated, and many observers have seen a connection between right-wing violence and the decline of support for left-wing candidates among an electorate presumed to be intimidated.⁷

Ironically, perhaps, the new cabinet proved no less able to 'hold the line' against student radicalism and widespread social and economic unrest than Kukrit had been. The Democrat Party back-benchers proved peculiarly vocal in attacking Thailand's international alliances, inherited from earlier governments. Thailand was beginning to show signs of a 'domino' psychology. Within a few months the King showed his disaffection from the trend of democracy by visiting, in a Bangkok temple, the former general and Prime Minister Thanom, who had returned to Thailand in the guise of a monk. Protesters at a student rally at Thammasat University staged a play involving the mock hanging of a colleague bearing a striking resemblance to the Crown Prince. The massacre of students by an invading mob of Border Patrol Police and Village Scouts followed on 6 October. The King sanctioned the State of Emergency demanded by the military, and later in the month appointed Tanin Kraivixien as Prime Minister,

from a list presented to His Majesty by the junta (some say the King added the name). A considerable number of students fled to the jungle to join the resistance, 'Thailand's democratic experiment' was at an end, and indeed the Tanin government proposed to return to full democracy only after a period of careful preparation lasting twelve years.

In the light of all this, it seems ironical that the military turned against Tanin and, after securing his replacement by one of their own number, General Kriangsak Chamanand, in October 1977, presided over a return to elections by April 1979. This can be explained in terms of the mutual hostility between the military and Tanin on a number of counts, including not only the decision on the military side to try to win the fugitive students back from the jungle by more 'political' means than Tanin and the King thought advisable or necessary, but Tanin's close alignment with the King in general. It is noticeable that the 1978 Constitution accorded a special position to the military which it had lacked in the Constitution of 1974.⁸

9.2 Visions of Thai constitutional monarchy

Before this chapter traces the fortunes of the Thai monarchy during the following two decades – that is, during the decline and demise of the Communist Party of Thailand – a few observations will be made about the dynamics of King Bhumibol's role during the so-called 'democratic experiment'.

It so happens that not only the towering figure of the democratic Prime Minister, Kukrit Pramoj, but also the King's appointee in the military interregnum, Tanin Kraivixien, wrote essays on the subject of Thai monarchy. The essays themselves offer no startling insights. In fact in many ways they are banal and obsequious, if not self-serving, and Tanin's is regrettably silent on the King's actions in October 1976. But in their respective ways and through their respective biases the essays show both the constitutional-cum-modernizing and the more authoritarian-cum-mystical side of the monarchy's role in this reign.⁹

Given the different dates at which they were written, they also reflect the contrasted, current prospects for constitutional monarchy, namely, a passive, conventional role just prior to the upheaval of October 1973; and an activist role just after October 1976, when the King was dismayed by the turbulent trend of democracy, possibly due to Communist infiltration, and – knowing his potential as he now did, but also anxious because the monarchy itself was under attack from the Left – had seized a couple of further opportunities to influence events. As the King did not depend on election, but correspondingly could not appeal to a democratic mandate, it is not very surprising that he allowed a conservative publicist to emphasize the more magical side of monarchy and even his personal, transcendental qualities. That the latter emphasis is merely a means to a rationalistic end has been clarified by a recent British biographer.¹⁰ But even in late 1976 there did not seem to be any good reason to assume that the King had taken leave of his senses and deserted his basic ideals of constitutional order and process, in favour of 'a pact with the devil' on the Right. Tanin's text is most interesting for what it reveals about the King's antipathy towards the military for

pre-empting his uncle, Rama VII's, plans for a Constitution in 1932. This perspective has been spelt out even more explicitly in an essay in a weekly magazine in 1983, one of a growing genre of popular history writing with a patriotic or monarchist agenda.¹¹

It is true that we cannot expect two texts which are basically ideological to give an *exact* reflection of the King's state of mind, least of all in any particular scenario of Thai politics, whose pragmatic imperatives will vary from the last one and the next one for a political King assessing the latest, principal threat to 'process' and 'order'. Nevertheless, Tanin's text, which has a lot of detail on the present King's role, must have been seen and cleared by the Palace. Although the bloodshed and royal intervention preceding his own appointment in October 1976 are omitted, his appointment is proof enough that his writings were in line with royal thinking as of 1976, even had the text not been completed during his premiership and published by a government ministry. And Kukrit's text, although quite out of step with Tanin and thus by extension with some part of the King's position in mid-1976, need not have been out of step with the King when it was written, that is, prior to the intervention of the King in October 1973 and before he himself had had an opportunity to extend the scope of constitutional monarchy creatively, or had even conceived of its possibility on the scale that actually occurred. It had simply been overtaken by events.¹²

At any rate, the two texts, when placed side by side, may constitute a record and measure of actual historical change, at the level of an individual (but strategically placed) mind – yet a pattern of change whose stages are linked by common threads of rationalism and altruism. This can be asserted even where these threads manifest themselves in the confusing guise of the most ingenious, almost Machiavellian, pragmatism (not even eschewing his more 'magical' assets), as the King adjusted to changing political currents in order, as first priority, to preserve the monarchy itself (partly by demonstrating, and partly in order to validate, its resilience as a pillar of national cohesion at a moment of acute political crisis); but then to exercise, with judicious restraint, its new-found potential for intervention, as an instrument of reform and modernization (leading optimally to a society free from chronic crisis, a society that would no longer need a king in any of Bhumibol's manifestations).

It might also be unwise to ignore the memoirs of the King himself, as a source of sincere self-representation: for instance, *The Story of Mahajanaka*,¹³ in Thai and English, an allegory of political constancy in pursuit of national improvement; or in English, *A Memoir of His Majesty King Bhumibol Andulyadej of Thailand*, from which a short, concluding passage is extracted below. This book focuses mainly on the King's activities as a promoter of self-improvement among the rural populations with the help of education and simple technology. We learn of his extensive contribution comprising moral encouragement to professional specialists, advice to government agencies based on his own scientific experiments, and even personal patronage to the needy. More fundamentally or broadly, his constant presence among the people has communicated a genuine concern for their condition, which has been reciprocated by a deepening loyalty towards the

monarchy on the part of those affected. To an outside observer, the overall 'project' has obvious features of a 'nation-building' exercise yet seems to transcend and even challenge the authority of bureaucrats, military, and elected politicians. Perhaps that is not entirely unwelcome. At the least, the creation of a dynamic niche for this so-called 'constitutional monarchy' is not denied, even though all instances of conciliatory intervention in high-level political conflict, facilitated by the King's growing prestige, are omitted from the account (unless the second sentence contains an oblique allusion to it).

Thus for forty-one years now His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej has striven in his own way to give a meaning to the function of the Throne of Thailand under a constitutional system. He has always had the strength to devise his own approach and his own method by first observing the conditions closely until the true circumstances become clear, and then by using his logic and intelligence to find the most appropriate courses of action. Above all, he has given his life to the task as he vowed on ascending the Throne. Thus his dedication to the welfare of his people becomes so apparent and infectious for all people in all walks of life, and they respond to him and his generosity in an equally dedicated manner. In this way, a link is formed between the King and his people which has steadily grown into a bond of mutual trust and affection. Wherever there is joy or celebration, the King is there to bless the joy and share in the celebration. Wherever there is a problem, the King is there to help look for a solution. Wherever there is distress or sorrow, the King is there to soothe, to assist, to strengthen. People thus become used to feel his presence in all instants of life. The King and the People become one. The Throne and the Nation become one, and a profound meaning is thus given to the Thai Throne. It becomes the personification of the Thai nationhood, the symbol of the Nation's unity and independence, the invariable constant above the inconstancies of politics, indeed, as it is written to be, the repository of the sacred trust of the whole nation. If King Bhumibol Adulyadej could pause to look back at his work, he might well feel satisfied, but it would never occur to him to pause, for the avowed dedication to his aim is continuous and life-long.¹⁴

9.3 The new constitutional monarchy in practice, 1977–92

After the above assertions about the progressive ideals and dedication of the King, even when their implementation or expression came in tactically conservative guise, it is time to examine the actual royal record of the fifteen years after Tanin. Not every study of Thai society should focus predominantly on the 'upper end', but one which does so will be able to justify itself by pointing out that for all the much documented 'change' in Thai society, the elites still enjoy 'continuity' in either wielding enormous power in what is appropriately defined as both a 'bureaucratic polity' and a 'Praetorian political system' or in retaining a

high degree of legitimacy even without wielding manifest power in what is just as correctly called 'a system of monarchy'. But of great interest also, even if our probing remains shallow, is the fact of change at the 'upper end': first, a monarchy vastly weakened since 1932 but now competitive with other segments of the elite for a slight recovery of its power after being brought out of seclusion by Field Marshal Sarit for his ends; second, the phenomenon of all elite segments paying more attention to, or developing new forms of, manipulation and orchestration of attitudes at the 'lower end'. For instance, there is the feature of military 'sophistication' in public relations, in affecting 'reluctance to intervene in politics' and a commitment to 'restore democracy' at the first opportunity after intervention takes place.¹⁵ But as soon as 'democracy' is restored, the military and bureaucratic interests are at pains to secure as many votes as possible (though as a safeguard trying to dominate the Upper House by writing an appropriately conservative Constitution!). On the other side, there is the emergence of monarchist and anti-Praetorian or anti-bureaucratic literature of the type represented by the Kukrit and Tanin texts, which employ a modern medium of communication but appeal for popular support for the monarchy on a basis that is traditional, or at best, 'neo-traditional' in style, arguing for the relevance of charisma in a modern guise as a beacon for political modernization. This in turn complicates the prospects for bureaucratic/Praetorian self-advancement, while possibly even goading these elements to advance themselves more assiduously.

Certainly if one were considering the relevance of Kukrit's or Tanin's principles in relation to political conflict in the mid-1990s (at least if one's interest is not merely analytical but partly prescriptive, on the side of a wider diffusion of power), one would have noted signs of a continuing, high level of ambition or subjective prerogative on the bureaucratic/Praetorian side. Consequently one would have felt that there was a need for the same level of royal involvement as Kukrit and Tanin supported in the 1970s by many words spoken or written (defusing a crisis by terminating military rule); or as Tanin also supported *de facto* as Prime Minister (attempts to give democratizing direction to military rule after a coup); or as Tanin possibly favoured in addition, but was not prepared to spell out (a higher profile still, i.e. involvement in lower-level – and thus more frequent – crisis-solving). However, all three propositions may seem controversial, since the King's intervention in 1976 is ambiguous at first sight. At least the third option, hypothetical for the moment, could only come into consideration if one had accepted the partly moral proposition that under the empirically tested second option the King acted in 1976 as a supporter of democracy, certain appearances (or at any rate, certain interpretations) to the contrary. (In fact, if we take into account the King's gesture of disfavour towards an unstable democratic government at the moment of Thanom's return, it may seem as if the third option had already been 'tested', with unfortunate results.) Thus a little more of the intervening history needs to be filled in, in order to demonstrate the King's *bona fides* in relation to democracy, whether our purpose is purely analytical or oriented towards prescribing more of the same.

One aspect of the alternation between military and civilian governments in Thailand between 1969–79, it has been remarked¹⁶ was its more even tempo compared to earlier decades, i.e. in terms of periods of tenure for the civilian type more equal to those for the military type of government (civilian 1969–71, 1973–76; military 1971–73, 1976–79). Indeed, the elective, civilian rule inaugurated by the general elections of April 1979¹⁷ was not interrupted until February 1991. But of course the classification into ‘civilian’ and ‘military’ governments is problematic. Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn (1969–71) was an ex-general who did not stand for a parliamentary seat in the 1969 elections. He then led, or was led into, the 1971 coup and remained Prime Minister until his expulsion from the country in 1973. Of the three civilian Premiers between 1973–76, the last (Seni Pramoj) depended heavily on the military ‘approval’ mediated to his government by General Krit.¹⁸ The fact that the military then blurred the distinction (or rather, let the King do so) by having a non-military official, Tanin Kraivixien, to lead the post-coup government of October 1976, is insignificant in terms of the basic civilian–military dichotomy of Thai governments. It does, however, relate to military concerns about its image as power-broker, and these concerns will partly explain the quite rapid return to elections, by 1979. But as with the Thanom ‘civilian’ government of 1969–71, which had succeeded the Thanom military government of 1964–69, it was a non-elected ex-general, Kriangsak, who formed the government after the April 1979 elections, having already led its military predecessor (successor to Tanin’s cabinet) since October 1977. The subsequent longevity of the post-1979 ‘civilian’ period owes a great deal to the fact that a non-elected military man, General (latterly, the ex-general) Prem Tinsulanond was the Prime Minister in five successive governments, spanning three elected parliaments, between 1980–88.¹⁹

But immediately after the elections of July 1988 Prem withdrew from politics. He had shown masterly skill in surviving armed forces intrigue, including coup attempts in April 1981 and September 1985,²⁰ and had achieved a small degree of ‘domestication’ of the military;²¹ but what he felt no longer able to survive or willing to confront was the mounting resentment among civilian politicians that he was, after all, a military man himself and a non-elected Prime Minister. In other words, the very assets which had enabled him to preserve a semblance of democracy-in-process-of-institutionalization were among his liabilities in the light of the democratic principles which it was his putative mission to honour and promote. The smooth transfer of power to an elected Prime Minister after the 1988 elections was vaunted too early as a ‘triumph for democracy’. Notwithstanding the reputedly ‘pro-military’ complexion of his party, Major-General (retired) Chatichai Choonhavan’s particular brand of technique in handling the military backfired. He was successful in tempting Army commander General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh to exchange his uniform for a ministerial position, but Chavalit did not find the atmosphere in the cabinet congenial. His early resignation was not the least significant signpost on the slippery path back to military government, which was inaugurated by General

Sunthorn Kongsompong's coup of February 1991 as an ostensible blow against 'corrupt politicians'.²²

This is certainly not to deny the suggested generalization that military governments of the pure type stay in power for shorter periods than in earlier times. New elections were held as early as March 1992, and it was only because no politician could be found with both a sufficiently strong party and a sufficiently clean personal record to become Prime Minister, that General Suchinda Kraprayoon 'answered the call' on 7 April. Yet this brings us to an excruciating irony: that the demonstrators who went to their deaths in Thailand's 'Tiananmen Square' in May were demonstrating for a principle (an elective premiership) which could not be realized because another principle of democracy (probity in public figures) was not fulfilled by the two most manifest candidates for the office.²³

It would be foolhardy to generalize from just two cases of 'ineligibility', but one senses that they may be symptomatic of the many-sided malaise of Thai democracy, including the lack of continuity of democratic government as such (due to repeated military intervention) which is not conducive to career choices in favour of politics by professionals; the retardation in the growth of popular understanding of, confidence in, and support for, democratic institutions, not only as an effect but also as a reinforcing cause, in turn, of the paucity of 'good men';²⁴ and the fact that some of the more successful parties at the polls seem to entertain close links with bureaucracy and military as well as with business, as if democracy was an arena in which, most typically, rival elite interests have been constrained to compete for popular support (and not without considerable expense), given the imperative of 'modern political legitimacy', but with no commitment to changing the inegalitarian distribution of power in favour of the broader 'nation' to which all pay lip service. The Thai syndrome is analysed commonly enough in terms of a powerful 'legacy' of traditional values which favour the heirs to absolute monarchy,²⁵ but such values would undoubtedly decline if those heirs were not actively appealing to them – appealing, not least, to 'monarchy' itself, as a pillar of the Thai order which those heirs purport to defend! – in the course of sustaining their power in more modern guises. In other words, the electoral arena needs to be liberated from the dominance of interests that are out of tune with its declared principles. By a terrible irony, this includes more and more the new breed of business-based politicians who have brought 'money politics' to the rural areas under the cloak of 'democratic competition' – though it must be recorded that the strongest party emerging from the April 1992 elections was a new group with military sponsorship, the Samakkhi Tham.²⁶

But at least the appeals to 'monarchy' by its self-appointed defenders have enhanced the profile of the throne step by step, and liberated it for an ever more salient role in the defence of democratic principles whenever the need or opportunity has arisen. By deep and tragic irony it was the very extremism of the military violence in defence of 'order' in May 1992 that played into the King's hands. His Majesty was able once again to bring peace to the streets of Bangkok, through the medium of a televised audience with the leader of the

pro-democracy demonstrators (Colonel Chamlong) and the Prime Minister (General Suchinda) who had ordered the troops to open fire – both of whom, in the kneeling posture of humble subjects of His Majesty, were strongly admonished to pull back from their confrontation.²⁷ Shortly afterwards, Suchinda resigned and the King could then follow up initial ‘crisis defusion’ by appointing not a mere caretaker (like Sanya Thammasak, 1973–75) while a new Constitution was being drawn up, but an activist Premier in the person of ‘technocrat’ Anand Panyarachun, to operate under (though somewhat peripherally to) an existing Constitution. (Anand had indeed been something of a ‘caretaker’ between February 1991 and March 1992, working as Premier in the shadow of the NPKC, but not during his second term.)²⁸ By the time of his second appointment the newly elected parliamentarians had passed, either from conviction or panic, a Constitutional Amendment which ruled out further appointments of non-elected Prime Ministers, but then had been unable to agree on their own candidate; and anyway, the Amendment had not yet been signed by the King.²⁹ After his reappointment, Anand proceeded to dissolve the Assembly and then, in the weeks remaining to him until the second general elections of 1992, took new action against corruption, removed the responsibility for internal security from the Supreme Commander by executive order, and made sweeping changes in the armed forces’ hierarchies in favour of a more ‘professional’ (i.e. non-interventionist) type of commander, besides taking steps to remove the public enterprises (a vital source of funds) from military control. As the September elections approached, he threw the weight of the executive into a media campaign for a high voter turn-out and rejection of vote-buying.

This ‘quiet revolution’ under royal protection is not astonishing when we recall the King’s stand in 1981 in support of Prem and in tacit alliance with General Arthit Kamlang-ek, against the attempted coup by a group of ‘Young Turks’;³⁰ and again in support of Prem in late 1984 but this time against the threatening posture of General Arthit himself in the so-called ‘devaluation crisis’.³¹ Critics of the King will argue that his apparent amenability towards a ‘mixed polity’ (i.e. ex-military, non-elected Premier under royal patronage, combined with an elected Parliament) had not amounted to a commitment to democracy. But there had been an even more important, diagnostic episode spanning 1987–88. As an army commander getting close to retirement and contemplating a political career, General Chavalit began to theorize about the role of the army in national life, ‘post-CPT’: it should continue to be a principal provider of development to the rural masses, while also extending its prerogatives as the glorious counter-insurgency agency into other spheres of public life.³² The ideal political system, he mused, would not be characterized by divisive pluralism. But these fancies were dismissed in a famous polemical attack by Kukrit Pramoj as having a ‘totalitarian’ or ‘Politburo’ complexion.³³ Then, when Chavalit resorted to a less intellectual, more old-fashioned form of military posturing in the run-up to the general elections of 1988, by using a coup threat (or at least ‘coup hint’) even against ‘a respected, former military commander’ (i.e. Prem) (nor was it the first time),³⁴ Kukrit was granted a private audience

with the King before launching an unrestrained verbal attack on the army commander.³⁵ To all appearances, Kukrit had accepted the progressive politicization of the constitutional monarchy since, in the post-CPT and post-Vietnam War scenario, he did not anticipate even a tactical alignment of the King with the political ambition of the military elite – which was now desperate for a credible role with the waning of Thai Communism but by the same token less and less credible in laying claim to one. This was a quite ‘historic’ imprimatur for the King from this august, aristocratic democrat. His original prescription for the monarchy had been implicitly much more ‘constitutional’ in the English mould (even though he had benefited personally from royal ‘interventionism’ in 1973 and 1974), but he now saw an ‘active’ monarchy as the best guarantee for democratic consolidation.³⁶

9.4 The view of the King as a ‘reactionary’

In light of the omens just discussed, the attitude and achievement of the King in 1992 become almost predictable, and one is tempted to pass on quickly to the ‘crowning glories’ of 1997 when the bloody trauma of Thai democracy was exorcized by a quite uniquely democratic, new Constitution with the King’s blessing. However, a word or two must first be inserted about two tricky questions: the King’s apparent hesitancy in defending democracy until the anti-democratic forces have overplayed their hand or are in disarray; and the persistence of the *lèse-majesté* law and cases arising from it.

In the first connection, the King did not withhold his retrospective sanction for the 1991 coup – which, like others before it, required a retrospectively legitimized suspension of the Constitution in order to conduct government provisionally without parliament, not to mention amnesty for illegal actions undertaken in seizing power.³⁷ The royal sanction was duly forthcoming, even though the King was outraged by the cynicism of the coup leaders in attending an audience on the day itself, without informing His Majesty;³⁸ and even though the coup was rather manifestly the last desperate throw of a military elite that saw its political power eroding beyond recall.³⁹ Moreover, when, the following year, General Suchinda as non-elected Prime Minister turned the guns on the crowds demonstrating against himself, the King seemed painfully slow to act. Nevertheless, it is highly credible that the King was actually being kept in the dark by the military during the hours in question.⁴⁰

With regard to the second dimension – the *lèse-majesté* law and its ramifications – it has often appeared that the King, or at least the court, were loath to intervene to stop cases brought for clearly opportunistic reasons by factional interests claiming to ‘defend the monarchy’, or to grant early pardons when defendants were found guilty and imprisoned. Is it not surprising that these interests have been allowed to get away with their charade of protecting the monarchy, when it is so clearly their own lack of legitimacy that puts them in need of the monarchy as a protective camouflage for themselves?⁴¹ The most gracious explanation the present writer can intuit is that the King knew the

importance of ancient charisma as the deeper foundation of his authority, and that this should be maintained in the eyes of the simple folk in the interests of monarchy's preservation – self-preservation being the most elementary condition of any kind of political effectiveness in support of constitutionalism or democracy in the long term. It might be very difficult for uneducated Thais to grasp the concept of 'manipulation' of the monarchy by 'selfish interests' which claim to be defending it, and the King might appear ungracious to his loyal servants if refusing to be 'defended' in this way.

But another argument is that the more the monarchy has become an object of tawdry mass consumption as the central symbol of nationhood (thus, less charismatic in the authentic sense), the more (paradoxically) it has had to be defended from criticism in the name of national security.⁴² Certainly there are signs of a cynical – yet politically dynamic and apparently untouchable – commercialism in new historical invention such as the recent cult of Princess Suvana Kanlaya, an elder sister of King Naresuan of Ayut'ia (reigned 1590–1605) and notable patriotic heroine.⁴³ Even the Department of Fine Arts, when 'investigating' such revelations, has to show some political sensitivity, notwithstanding the new discourse of Thai academic historiography which understands very well how history writing has served the court, or other vested interests, in the past.⁴⁴ Among the more bizarre factors enhancing the sacrality of monarchy through 'commodification' is the government's assiduous promotion of tourism. The Bicentennial of the Chakri Dynasty in 1982 was 'big business' in terms of foreign-exchange earnings, and resulted in tourism (plus cultural promotion abroad) getting an even higher profile in government thinking and organization in subsequent years.⁴⁵

Still, the greatest demand for state ceremonies has been generated – and has to be satisfied – among the Thai public itself. Hence, in part, the eleven-month lying-in-state of the King's mother, culminating in a royal-style cremation (although the 'Princess Mother' was a commoner) in 1996, and the sumptuous celebrations of the King's Golden Jubilee in the same year, which continued long enough to appear to merge with His Majesty's Sixth Cycle Anniversary (his 72nd birthday on 5 December 1999). Whereas in 1977 the only tangible cult impinging on the consciousness of one visiting foreigner was that of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), celebrated at the Equestrian Statue each 23 October,⁴⁶ eighteen or nineteen years later everything had been surpassed if not quite eclipsed by the effective cult of the living monarch.⁴⁷

Thus, surrounded by an intensifying mystique, the King is both liberated for potential action and possibly constrained to honour sacral expectation when under attack, real or imagined. Even the 'correct' view of his more secular role as guardian of the Constitution and guarantor of political order – what has been called the 'total standard view' of the contemporary monarchy – comprises some almost transcendental elements and has taken on, as a whole, a quality of myth over and above the empirical reality of periodic intervention. In such capacity, the 'total standard view' can only be challenged at the risk of penalty.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the King is constantly enticed towards a greater subjective sense of

his special gifts by the serious current of intellectual opinion which sees Thailand's salvation in an even stronger monarchical role than has ever evolved under democracy – indeed a return to a modified form of absolute monarchy.⁴⁹ Given such pressures, and given also the King's deep sense of historic duty, not to say prerogative, as heir to the reforming Chakri dynasty, it speaks highly for his innate virtue that he has managed to preserve a still essentially modest and rationalistic definition of the royal duties.⁵⁰

In any case, if we stay alert to currents of change in Thailand amidst the proverbial continuities, we will notice (a) the King's quite early intercession in 1984 to have the charges against the celebrated intellectual and social critic, Sulak Sivaraksa, withdrawn, in the classically bogus prosecution of his critical Thai book, *Unmasking Thai Society* – essentially part of the power play at that time of military 'withdrawal symptoms' and the career anxieties of General Arthit.⁵¹ Furthermore, we will notice (b) the historic dismissal, in 1995, of the most famous *lèse-majesté* case of all: that which was brought against Sulak by General Suchinda, mainly for accusing the General himself, in a speech at Thammasat University in August 1991, of having committed *lèse-majesté* by his unauthorized abrogation in February 1991 of a Constitution promulgated by the King. No doubt, it was easy enough in this case for the court to take the view, as it did, that Sulak had not been criticizing the monarchy, but the leader of a coup, and that Sulak had a democratic right to criticize the leader of the government of the day, since that leader had already stepped down amidst general ignominy. Arguably also, a unique opportunity was missed to deliver a judgement on Sulak's key thesis: that all military government since 1932 has involved offence against the majesty and sanctity of the Throne (in whose name all coups, like every *lèse-majesté* case, are routinely justified), because each overthrown Constitution existed ultimately only with the authority of the King.⁵² Yet all this being said, it would be rather surprising if the judge was out of step with the sentiment of the King in such a high-profile judgement. And, inasmuch as Thai law was slowly but surely being moved forward, this was surely in a direction which the King himself approved and desired.

A token, from a different sphere, of the royal family's commitment to national salvation through democracy is its *engagement* on the side of Thailand's environment, where the stakes are high and the despoilers as willing to resort to graft and violence as in any other country now losing its forests and its wildlife. (This was one important theme of Sulak's speech at Thammasat.) Evidence of royal commitment had been seen in the funerary honours accorded by the King to Seub Nakhasathien, the forestry official and game warden at the Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary who committed suicide in 1990 after failing to fulfil his mission of conservation (he believed he had a 6,000 baht price on his head at the time of his death).⁵³ The Thung Yai forest has a special symbolism in the history of struggles for justice, as a student campaign against army poaching of protected species there was one of the first of the actions which led cumulatively to the fall of the Thanom/Prapat dictatorship in 1973.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, the appearance that the King was moving into a more active phase of democratic commitment in 1995 is reinforced by his early, indirect, criticisms of the money-based elected government of provincial-strongman Banharn Silpa-archa.⁵⁵ This may constitute ‘circumstantial evidence’ of a sort for the King’s likely, moral support for the judgement acquitting Sulak – who is a constitutional democrat upholding the sanctity (though not divinity) of the throne, whereas the money-driven party bosses are prone to bring both democracy and monarchy into disrepute in spite of paying loud lip service to the sanctity (and even divinity) of the throne. It is only sad that since 1995 Sulak has continued to advertise, for foreign consumption, the King’s ‘imprisonment in ceremony’, the heavy thrall of the *lèse-majesté* law, and the ancient taboos on touching the King’s or the Queen’s bodies, as if these are unchanging realities.⁵⁶

9.5 The drama of the new Constitution

If by now the King has been identified, with any degree of plausibility, as one of ‘the angels’ (not to say ‘the Angel!’) of Thai democracy, we may move on, at last and quite briefly, to the most recent episode in the drama: the drafting and passing of the new Constitution, 1997. The episode is full of surprises, but the attitude and involvement of the King should not be one of them. The context of the process of Constitution-drafting included several vital elements. First, the coalition led by Democrat Party leader Chuan Leekpai since the elections of September 1992 collapsed in May 1995. It was a record run, in Thailand, for an elected Prime Minister, but the victory of Chart Thai in ‘Thailand’s most corrupt election’ of July 1995, seemed a bad omen for democratic politics despite the smooth transition between governments by formally democratic methods.⁵⁷ Consequently, when the King addressed the new Cabinet of Banharn, he was at pains to remind the ministers to give responsible priority to their executive role over their status as elected legislators.⁵⁸ Shortly afterwards His Majesty began to criticize the performance of this government publicly, in a way never experienced by any of its predecessors.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, Prime Minister Banharn had inherited a testing task from the previous Cabinet (of which he had, however, been a member) in the shape of a constitutional reform programme which, however progressive in Thai terms, was failing to satisfy the reform movement that was gathering considerable momentum outside parliament and threatening to leave the elected politicians behind (or deprived of essential prerogatives if they put its demands into effect). The constitutional reform movement was, of course, a maturing consequence of the military violence in 1992. A one-man hunger-strike in 1994 had caused the Lower House Speaker to set up a Democratic Development Committee (DDC) to make wide-ranging proposals.⁶⁰ Although the House was dissolved by Chuan before it could debate the DDC’s blueprint, the Banharn Cabinet found itself under constraint to carry on with the process, and appointed its own committee, the Political Reform Committee (PRC). Like its predecessor, the PRC agreed that the new Constitution should be drawn up by a special Commission appointed by the

King – in other words, taking the process out of the hands of parliament. The King would have the discretion to call a referendum on the future Constitution, should the joint Houses of Parliament reject it. This proposal caused unease and tension within the government, not least within Banharn's own faction-ridden party, rather than defusing it.⁶¹

The Banharn government collapsed in September 1996, most directly because of internal squabbling, but indirectly in a context of middle-class disaffection from a government tainted with corruption.⁶² The elections of November 1996 at last gave retired General Chawalit his chance to be Prime Minister, through the victory of his New Aspiration Party, strong in the Northeast.⁶³ Chawalit's clearest aspirations were in the area of reforming national financial management – to lessen interference by elected interests – but the most notable event early in his Administration was the by now irresistible appointment of the Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA) on 26 December. The appointment was effected by parliament, but the candidates were picked from lists submitted from the provinces, civic groups, professional bodies, etc.⁶⁴ Early in 1997 ex-Premier Anand emerged as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee. Strong pressure for political accountability and recognition of 'community rights', separate from the constitutional reform movement as such, was felt throughout 1997 from the highly organized 'Assembly of the Poor'. Chavalit handled this challenge with not a little populist panache.⁶⁵

However, a far greater crisis arose – spelling eventual doom for his government but working to the benefit of the new Constitution, which was approved in its final draft by the CDA on 15 August and passed by Parliament on 27 September. Poor regulation of the financial sector, which Chavalit perceived as a problem but was incapable of curing, had precipitated the drain on the Baht in May which forced several other currencies into 'knock-on' or competitive devaluations – the great Asian financial crisis of 1997–98. The passing of the Constitution was not consistent with normal parliamentary self-interest, given controversial clauses such as the one requiring parliamentarians to relinquish their seats on becoming ministers (a fulfilment of the idea of executive/legislative separation articulated by the King in mid-1995). But the action was one of a series of desperate attempts by the government, in effect, to save its skin in the great financial crisis. It was perceived and urged by both business and military that a confrontation with the forces of the reform movement was the last way of restoring international confidence in the Thai currency. By refusing to defuse the crisis over the Constitution, the government would have forfeited credibility in the eyes of its most solid domestic backers in Thailand's hour of need. As *Acaan Prudhisana* has put it, summing up this unique constellation of pressures and events, 'Civil society pressure was aided by the financial crisis in creating an environment wherein vested interests in political society had to acquiesce to the reform Constitution.'⁶⁶

Just as historic as the passing of this extraordinarily radical Constitution as such was the attitude of the military, in (a) calling for it, and then (b) refusing to contemplate a State of Emergency on 21 October when Chavalit (revealing

himself in truly 'traditional' military colours!) broached it as the only way of saving his government in face of a new, popular challenge.⁶⁷

Also significant in Thailand's economic and political crisis was the way Prem's name surfaced in late July in the context of a 'royal intervention scenario' dear to some hearts,⁶⁸ with Prem himself seeming ready to 'answer a call' in late August, and actively calling for a 'national government' in early October. But even more to the point is the fact that the King distanced himself firmly from this 'non-elected Premier' scenario.⁶⁹ Let it be also noted that the Constitution is not a 'royal Constitution' in the sense of enhancing the King's formal powers above and beyond any previous model.⁷⁰

Finally, by way of a provisional 'happy ending', inter-party negotiations after the resignation of Chavalit brought Chuan back to the helm without the need for another round of disruptive and demoralizing elections. Enjoying wide esteem and the favour of the King for his previously proven integrity and commitment to the poor, Chuan was able to take the necessary measures of financial reform with a great reserve of public support. The King added his moral support with a Royal Birthday call for a re-emphasis on rural self-sufficiency – as advocated by rural development NGOs for some time past.⁷¹

9.6 The nature of the turning point

In trying to capture the essence of this historic turning point one would need to emphasize, above all, the alignment of the King with the military on a common agenda of constitutionalism, whereas in the past, whenever the military perceived that the politicians were too 'selfish and corrupt', they overthrew Constitutions – and without consulting the King. It would be incorrect to say that the military have ceased to be interested in politics, but the orientation of the new commanders is towards good governance, rather than seizing power 'for the good of King and country' as a thinly veiled rationalization of military self-interest. This makes it easier for the King to side with 'the Constitution', yet not because of pressure to embrace electoral democracy for its own sake as the lesser of two evils, in the often vain hope of blocking the greater, a reactionary coup. On the other hand – and it may be salutary to remind ourselves of this as the Communist option fades from memory – democratic institutions are no longer potential channels of subversion of the larger institutional structure, deterring royal and military support alike. But most of all, the choice has been facilitated for both King and military by the fact that the highly educated campaigners for the new Constitution were as concerned to forestall democratic abuse as to banish military coups. Thus the main losers are the tribe of provincially-based, money-grubbing power-brokers; the main winners potentially the unsophisticated masses, plus urban educated elements without financial power, whose rights to disinterested representation and general redress are built into the new charter. Appropriately, it is on 'the losing side' that we now meet most of the demagoguery in ostensible defence of 'Religion, Nation, Monarch'.⁷²

Now even allowing, as we must, for inevitable shortfalls in practice from the newly enshrined principles, do we not discern in clearer outline than heretofore the modern political order for which the King has so long striven, in which and whereby the common people are both enfranchised and protected under a benignly custodial, occasionally activist, dynasty within a framework of law? However tentative the achievement, the dogged and self-disciplined pursuit of the goal across more than forty years of a single reign is surely the most epic personal odyssey of any Chakri monarch. Certainly, the growth of education has changed the balance of forces in society in a way that favours stable constitutionalism. But the monarchy's contribution has been inestimable on two planes: as the primary focus of national cohesion during the long transition, and as a beacon of commitment to lawful process and hope for its realization. This twin contribution forms the kernel of a new charisma of monarchy for the modern age, less magical but no less pregnant with Dharma than in ages past. Even in life, the King has come to be revered as – or at least 'as if' – a Living Buddha.

9.7 Looking ahead

These are strong words, of a type not conventionally found in studies of politics. Among several possible objections to the attempt to pass judgement on the historical significance of the reign it may be pointed out that the reign is in fact continuing, and that by that token an assessment seems premature. But if this point be conceded, let us at any rate admit that the King is mortal, and is probably only alive today thanks to modern heart surgery in 1995.⁷³ While it is, mercifully, premature to draft an 'obituary', we may be allowed a few moments of crystal-gazing in the light of King Bhumibol's towering achievement – which will have to be admitted for the purpose of the exercise.

The 'problem of the succession' strikes nearly all observers as acute because of two factors: first, the achievement of the King is a function, overwhelmingly, of his personal creativity and commitment in the role, difficult to replicate in another individual; and second, the particular heir-designate has displayed qualities which defy laws of probability by the degree to which they do not replicate those of the father. The King has been criticized by one writer for not 'institutionalizing' the role of the monarchy. This is meant in the sense that the King has improvidently worked for a 'conservative polity', not a modern-constitutional one in which the monarchy could retreat into the background and survive in a niche regardless of the personality of the incumbent.⁷⁴ This typically Western view rejects the relevance of institutional interests such as the bureaucracy and the army – indeed the charismatic Throne itself – as elements which should be allowed some moral weight in the polity for its overall cohesion. At the same time, paradoxically, the use of the term 'conservative' seems to belie the personal element in the development of the authority of the throne to its present position. How, we may ask above all, could King Bhumibol have achieved so much if he had constantly referred to institutional precedent instead of his own judgement on the needs of the hour? The whole 'project' becomes

meaningless and unthinkable without a commitment which has been, precisely and essentially, personal, and breached received norms. Therefore, a problem of succession is almost inherent in the nature of the King's achievement – though also of the hereditary principle. It is a problem which rightly causes concern, but should not be phrased to imply a criticism of the King: unless at some point Princess Sirindhorn (the second of the King's two daughters) was seriously perceived by the King as his heir, but was then superseded again by her only brother, the official Crown Prince.⁷⁵ Even then one would wish to understand more fully the role of the Queen.⁷⁶

The Constitution (Section 23) does in fact allow a female to inherit the throne but if there is a male heir apparent she could only be nominated by the Privy Council in the event that the late King had failed to appoint the male officially. As for the Palace Law on Succession (1924), it continues to require male succession in any event, and besides, sober observers reckon that the present Crown Prince's title amounts to an 'appointment' in the terms of the Constitution. On the other hand, a comparison of the present Constitution (Section 22) with the previous democratic landmark, that of 1974 (Section 25), appears to reveal a far larger prerogative for the King and Privy Council in amending the Palace Law on Succession, while the present requirement of the Constitution (Section 23) that a female can only be nominated if the late King failed to appoint a male has replaced, at some time in the previous twenty-three years, the stipulation of the 1974 Constitution (Section 25) that a female can only be nominated if the late King had no surviving male issue.⁷⁷

The present chapter was completed to this point before the publication of that extraordinary book *The Revolutionary King*.⁷⁸ Although Stevenson's diffuse, wandering style seems to subvert his apparent, primary aim of burying once and for all the speculation around the death of the Eighth Rama, it is a book which cannot be overlooked, for it appears to have benefited from access to, and some kind of sponsorship by, the monarch. Thus, in its English way, it is on a level with the essays a quarter of a century earlier by two Premiers-to-be. It felicitously confirms and complements both those essays, though perhaps Kukrit's rather more than Tanin's: this on account of its recurring references to the King's long-term vision of a 'self-reliant Buddhist republic', meaning a self-reliant society dominated neither by military violence nor royal charisma but by law – even though the latent, personal transcendence derived from Buddhist disciplines is also described. In a two-centuries' perspective the 'republic' idea is recognizably an updated expression of 'Chakri Reformation'. Yet repeatedly we meet the King's dilemma that in order to liberate Thai society from the thrall of its history he in effect exploits the historical charisma of his position, whose roots could be traced – though even the mystically-minded Tanin was careful not to suggest it – back beyond the Chakri dynasty to Ayut'ia, with its much depreciated ideology of the absolutist God-king. The next reign will offer a similar choice of options to the new incumbent. No doubt, the particular mix of 'ancient' and 'modern' postures and approaches which that person adopts will have significance for the further staying power of the monarchy itself.⁷⁹

Part IV

Closing thoughts

10 Monarchy and democracy

Western theoretical discussion of South-East Asian politics was in a single mould, in its early days, with the analysis of the politics of 'developing areas' or 'new states' generally. There was a characteristic assumption, after World War II, of the inevitability not only of economic development but of 'political development' as well – meaning development of 'modern', i.e. Western-type, State structures and, above all, democracy. These political phenomena were called 'development' partly, it seems, because they were seen as a consequence of economic development. Indeed, their presence or extent tended to be tested by the same, quantifying or statistical criteria.

US political scientists were almost all liberals by moral persuasion and sympathetic to the advance of liberal democracy in competition with totalitarian Communism, whether or not they individually took contracts as consultants for foundations and think-tanks funded by the US Government. It is surely ironical, at first sight, that even in the midst of 'Cold War combat' on the intellectual front they seem to have embraced one fundamental tenet of the 'Marxist–Leninist enemy', that is, the causal connection between economic and political change, and betrayed a quasi-historicist conviction in the inevitability of this progression. However, needless to say there was a crucial difference. The liberal view of the economics–politics nexus did not see the end of the historical process in terms of working-class or peasant revolution, but on the contrary as a political economy in which the 'bourgeoisie', as owners of private capital, would not only be a major economic force but would very likely have a dominant (and permanent) political influence as well. Thus the situation that Marxist–Leninist theory assumed to be a mere passing phase was conceived instead as the more natural 'terminus' of history, or certainly well worth working for by means of economic aid and strategic alliance with groups which shared the US vision.

But it was not many years before a historical 'hitch' occurred, or at least was brought to the attention of liberal analysts by one of the more perceptive, less conformist, members of their fraternity. The typical record of the 'new states' was not one of crystallizing democracy but of chronic disorder. Economic change was proving politically destabilizing, and political instability often served as a pretext for military juntas to seize power. But right-wing dictatorship could hardly be stabilizing in the long run either, since the social forces (including

ethnic groupings) which were a source of instability previously were now merely suppressed, and even more alienated in the absence of participant and incorporative citizenship. The worst paradox was that the very leaders who had seemed, or who claimed, to be the friends of 'Uncle Sam' looked like being more than helpful to the Marxist–Leninist revolution which their very existence was supposed to negate! The allegedly counterproductive nature of US alliances in the Third World was a common criticism or latent 'discourse' on the liberal wing of US journalism during the Cold War years, most of all with reference to Vietnam. However, that is by the by. Our interest, here, is in academic political science, specifically the 'Huntingtonian revolution' which summoned the discipline back to its roots as a partly philosophical activity, not a mere branch of sociology in the thrall of behaviourism as it had tended to become, by invoking its traditional concern with political order and the conditions of order. The focus, Huntington argued, should not be on democracy as an assumed product of economic development, but on the preconditions of durable democracy located within the sphere of politics itself. In short, the focus had to be on political institutionalization, meaning both diversity of structures and that capacity for self-renewal or continuity by which an 'institution' is essentially defined. Countries with a long-established, powerful judiciary and civil service, such as India, were the most likely to have a viable democracy.¹

A little while later, Huntington became a bogeyman of the Left after his name was linked to a purported 'doctrine' of accelerated urbanization to counter a revolutionary movement in the countryside. Since the Cold War he has theorized about likely realignments in the international system, based on ancient ties of 'civilization' predating but now superseding 'class ideology'. Love him or hate him, his ideas are among the liveliest in the political science of our time. But his versatility has not lured him into any fundamental diversification. There has been a constant thread of interest in the conditions of durable democratization. In reverse chronological order, he has seen revived 'civilizational' identities, especially Islamic identity, as a basis for detachment from Western-promoted liberal democracy for states which may well have been 'clients' of the West during the Cold War;² he produced some more overt analysis of the 'prospects for democracy' in the world in his 'middle period';³ the notion of removing people beyond the reach of rural terrorism looks like a common-sense contribution to democratization,⁴ albeit, if correctly attributed, the notion must have been informed also by classical liberal assumptions about pluralist social structure as a normal concomitant of democratization;⁵ and, 'first but not least', there was the call for clarity about the widespread failure of democratization in newly independent states by the mid-1960s and the necessity of the restraints of political institutionalization if democracy was to work.⁶

It must be an illustration of the hazards of unusual intellectual stature that Samuel Huntington has lately become a bogeyman in international Islamic quarters because his hypothesis about how the post-Cold War world would be realigned was taken as advocacy of how it ought to be realigned. At a time of official US triumphalism about 'a New World Order' post-USSR; or boasts

(however untrue!) about 'saving Kuwait for democracy' in the Gulf War; or attempts to 'export' a US conception of 'human rights' to places like China, some sensitivity or even prejudice in face of the writings of an eminent US academic are understandable. Yet it would be a sad loss to international understanding if Third World intelligentsias (not only Muslim intelligentsias) were to overlook the extensive common ground between Huntington and themselves. Upon examination it might turn out that his early interest in institutionalization anticipated in spirit, if not in every detail, the concern with order that has infused the theory and propaganda of 'Asian values' in the 1990s. The emphasis on the institution of the family, as an arena of socialization into respect for authority and as a building block of larger-scale structures up to and including the State, is highly compatible with the spirit of Huntington's earliest writings.

For that matter, Huntington is not alone in US political science. The writings of Lucien Pye (focused more on pluralism than order) are ever open to facets of Asian values and behaviour which may, or do, in some countries prove conducive to pluralism and indirectly to democratization.⁷ It is true that Western advocacy of an independent middle class as the catalyst for some of the requisite institutionalization suggests an antipathy towards any autocratic or totalitarian tendency in Asian politics. To that extent there must be antipathy between Western democratic theorists and the most assertive advocates of 'Asian values', who have coined or elaborated the new idiom as an instrument of consolidation of authoritarianism. But to embrace this agenda would be to abandon any pretence of theorizing about the conditions of 'democracy', while to abandon 'democracy' as the focal point of enquiry and tacit prescription would simply be self-negating for the scholars concerned. So we have to live with the approach but should acknowledge, in its favour, how much some of the US writing on democratization and the civil society in Asia is sympathetic to Asian conditions as a whole, despite being rooted in Western historical experience.⁸ Besides, it would be a betrayal of the aspirations of many Asians to take a stand against democracy as a system 'unsuited to Asian conditions'. The issue and the challenge are to strike the optimum balance between diffusion of power and effective exercise of power by a legitimate centre, in societies which are not only extremely diverse but find themselves in the throes of very rapid change.⁹

Readers may have begun to grasp the direction and guess the destination of this discussion. The possibility which needs to be explored is that monarchy may offer special assets to a polity in transition towards democracy. Apart from the intangible asset of representing or symbolizing continuity with a nation's past, as 'nation-state' evolves out of 'galactic polity' via a 'bureaucratized colony', the charisma of monarchy should provide a more potent source of legitimization for the modern State than untried or turbulent democratic competition can do. Moreover, as an institution separate from legislatures – and indeed empowered to settle or restrain unresolved conflict between the interests represented therein – yet at the same time secure in its own system of succession, monarchy meets both the 'diversified' and the 'self-renewing' criteria of 'political institutionalization'.

There should be a basis here for Western advocates of democracy and the proponents of 'Asian values' to agree with each other.

So much for the rosy ideal. Perhaps the role of monarchy just sketched would serve better as a non-normative, analytical model, from which particular, empirical cases would be anticipated to diverge in some degree. In any case, the present study has set out to offer mainly analysis, not advocacy. And the picture which has emerged from the case studies in Part III suggests that the model is only clearly confirmed in one case, that of Thailand. Even in Thailand's case, the monarchy has been able to develop its extraordinarily creative function, somewhat above the level of 'constitutional monarchy' in European states, through the unique combination of virtues and longevity found in the present King, at least as much as through the historic charisma of the institution. Nor is the promise of continuity into the future – that is, the hereditary succession which is an advantage of monarchy in the light of the institutionalization principle – necessarily a bonus where the heir apparent is in a quite different mould. The first years of the next reign could see some instability, arising either directly from problems within the Palace, or indirectly where a typical crisis of Thai democracy remains unresolved because the new monarch lacks the prestige or the political skill to deal with it.

Malaysia offers an interesting contrast with Thailand in more than one way. Not that there are no similarities: the modern inheritors of authority and power in post-war Malaya (UMNO) saw the Malay monarchy as a vital, supplementary prop to their legitimacy, just as their counterparts in Siam (the military elite) had done in the 1930s. But whereas the Thai military elite tended to become more dependent on the monarchy in this sense (and ultimately have been overshadowed by it), perhaps because they lacked the legitimization of democratic underpinnings, UMNO leaders never became dependent, despite the strengthening of the Malay monarchs' position 'on paper' in the context of acute ethnic anxiety in 1971. There could be no greater contrast than between Dr Mahathir's success in grinding down the residual royal prerogatives since 1983, and the subtle elaboration of the royal prerogative by King Bhumibol since 1973. If Thai monarchy now stands somewhat 'higher' on the continuum from weak thrones to powerful ones, Malay monarchy arguably enjoys even less influence today than do the constitutional monarchs of Europe. There is nothing that they seem able or willing to do to uphold modern principles of law, so the question of providing a stabilizing, institutional antidote to the 'excesses of democracy' cannot arise. Besides, the 'excesses' which some observers might discern are in the area of increasing executive power, not the collapse of authority sometimes associated with multi-party competition. Malaysian democracy is already rather well controlled: by an elected leader who has concentrated a few of the pre-modern attributes and functions of monarchy in his own hands!

It is therefore entirely logical that when Dr Mahathir delivers a homily on 'Asian values', arguing for an executive unhampered by a free-for-all party system and a fastidious conception of human rights, he conspicuously does not include

monarchy in his political formula, because in the present Malaysian context monarchy is a conceivable rival to his own power if not constitutional critic.

Another reason for being silent on monarchy – a subtle one, but not insignificant – is that it cannot provide a common denominator in an intellectual discourse which is supposed to be relevant and applicable in a huge diversity of Asian political systems, whose ideologues need to present a common front to their reputed detractors in the West. The discourse of Asian values has had to be compatible with the dynamics of systems as diverse as the Communist People's Republic of China and Socialist Republic of Vietnam; 'soft authoritarian' democracies without a monarchy such as Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and the (recently superseded) 'New Order' Indonesia of Suharto; and monarchies of several types, ranging from strictly 'constitutionalist' Japan to strictly 'absolutist' Brunei. When Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, ex-Premier of Singapore, equates his 'Asian values' with Confucianism he may be conjuring up an image of monarchical authority from Chinese history, and this might appear to be compatible with ideas of Malay monarchy. But if the Confucian line is pressed too far it must clash with the doctrines of Asian Muslim states. Thus Lee Kuan Yew is constrained to stress the lowest common denominators of 'Asian values', even to the point of meaninglessness, in order to find common ground with Muslim Mahathir, in the same way as Dr Mahathir must play down specifically Malay features, including monarchy, for the sake of consensus with Chinese republicans from Lee Kuan Yew to Jiang Zemin. Meanwhile, Thai discourses about 'Asian values' are notably subdued or absent, probably because the monarchy has become a sponsor of democracy against the authoritarianism of the monarchy's ostensible defenders.

At least Mahathir's silence on monarchy comes naturally, thanks to domestic imperatives. But these imperatives remind us, in turn, that monarchy may be more attractive to Western theorists of democracy than to Asian leaders who have firm control. Why detract from the stability of a powerful executive by fostering a competitive institution? The effect could be as bad as the worst scenario of Western-type democracy evoked in the 'Asian values' debate! Meanwhile, if monarchy holds 'anomalies' for certain non-royal leaders, monarchies which are powerful enough to propagate legitimizing images of their own past, as in Thailand and Brunei, seem to have little time for the 'Asian values' debate. Apart from the reason just suggested for Thailand (the King's sponsorship of democracy), this could be because the 'Asian values' theme, with its highly diffuse, pan-Asian sources and application, can only detract from the memories or myths of a specific, national monarchy, to the detriment of national identity-building as well as the security of the monarchy itself.¹⁰

If we now compare present-day Thailand with present-day Cambodia, there is a question mark over the future of both monarchies, and for comparable reasons. In both the Thai and the Cambodian case the prestige of the present incumbent is a major factor in the viability of the institution. In both cases the King has to maintain a delicate relationship with the power that holds the weapons: respectively, the Thai military elite (despite its current reconciliation

with a democracy that it does not control) and the Cambodian People's Party (which controls its 'democracy' only too well 'from the barrel of a gun'). The Thai military draws some direct legitimacy from the throne, and appreciates its contribution to national cohesion. About the same can be said of the Cambodian People's Party, or certainly of the Prime Minister, Hun Sen. But the desire for legitimacy does not infer legitimization at any price whatsoever, and one wonders how well the next royal incumbents will satisfy the requirements of these interests. Not that the situation regarding succession is exactly the same. The Thai succession seems fairly certain, while the Cambodian succession is not fixed. However, the consequences of a more or less fixed Thai succession are as fraught with uncertainty as the consequences of fluidity and rivalry in Cambodia. The air of 'tenure on sufferance' which characterizes the restored reign of King Sihanouk could be felt in Thailand in due course, besides becoming stronger in Cambodia itself under any of Sihanouk's kinsmen. And by definition, if the monarch is subject to the whims of a well-organized power elite, he will not be able to restrain either the excesses of their power or the excesses of an open democracy.

In the meanwhile, if one were inclined to rank King Sihanouk on a scale of political effectiveness as of now, he is surely several points below King Bhumibol, though still well ahead of the 'faceless men' who sit in turns on the throne of Malaysia. He does play a part in negotiations to solve political crises, but always lends his authority and blessing, in the event, to solutions acceptable to the ruling interest. There can be little question of Sihanouk throwing his weight behind pro-democracy efforts since democracy is far from being a priority for the interest which calls the shots, including the acceptable parameters of kingship itself. Sihanouk is more a client than a patron, though still clever enough to have avoided the status of a mere puppet. Thus the dimension of Thai monarchy that is truly historic, in a ground-breaking sense, is that the present King has not facilitated democracy purely 'negatively' by restraining its excesses, but has mobilized his authority more often to block its enemies on the Right, who previously manipulated monarchy in order to block democracy. This amounts to a 'positive' strategy for the fostering of democracy in the long term, subject to the requirements of constitutional order. No doubt, the monarchy benefits too, in its historic rivalry with the military, but let this not blind us to the more fundamental process at work.

Last but by no means least, the situation of the three South-East Asian monarchies discussed in the preceding paragraphs is more or less in contrast with the monarchy of Brunei. On the criteria of present power and future 'life chances', the Brunei monarchy is far ahead of the rest of the field. In fact, the future prospects are buoyant in no small part because present power invests thought and money in securing its future. It should only be added, as a proviso, that the money is available because of hydrocarbons, which are a 'gift of God', not a creation of political finesse.

Political science has not given much attention to the survival instincts and material assets of all regimes in maintaining continuity. Possibly the point has

seemed too obvious to require emphasis. At any rate, it is the case, or can be argued, that there has been no fundamental change of political system in any of the founder-member countries of ASEAN between 1967 and 2000.¹¹ In saying this, one is of course putting the emphasis on basic 'formations' of economic and political power, in semi-Marxist style: e.g. one has to regard any short-lived suspension of democracy as an interlude of no fundamental significance. A Marxist would maintain that democracy has no significance under capitalism even when elections are being held; whereas in non-Marxist terms, if Indonesia under Suharto had characteristics of a 'quasi-monarchy', the transition to democracy in 1999 amounts to a change. But maybe Suharto himself would deny that his regime ever departed from democracy. At all events ... the present writer sees a tendency for democracy to 'bounce back' in the short or medium term, suggesting the genuine resilience of forces (not least the middle class) which have once savoured the benefits of democracy. As for Cambodia, which joined ASEAN in 1999, it may seem at first sight to have traced a discontinuous course from Communism back to democracy and monarchy, but on examination there is a great deal of – non-democratic – continuity there too: the power of the Communist Party is still essentially intact; the forms of democracy are more cosmetic than substantive, having been reintroduced under intense pressure from a temporarily united international community; and the reinstatement of Sihanouk owed much to his unique personal role in earlier times and more recent years (which also explains international support for his appointment), plus his readiness to accommodate to the ruling interest. If it is not too early to speak of a 'final analysis', Cambodia's traits are not deeply divergent from those of Laos, where the monarchy was not restored after being manipulated with some success on the road to a Marxist–Leninist revolutionary takeover.

Our line of thinking is that if continuity is the basic rule even in Cambodia, then it should be no surprise to find it in oil-rich Brunei. Brunei, which joined ASEAN at Independence in 1984, differs from its partners in terms of political system but not in terms of the rule that interests which once control the levers of power do not readily relinquish power. If the Brunei People's Party had prevailed over monarchy and the colonial power in the 1962 revolt, we need hardly doubt that a PRB regime would still be in power today, dispensing oil wealth as the currency of patronage to sustain itself in power. But in the event it was monarchy that prevailed. The monarchical regime has coined the ideology of a 'Malay Islamic Monarchy' to rationalize its victory by way of historical underpinnings, but this 'narrative' is deceptive: the 'glorious past' was not the prelude, let alone the cause, of victory, but to a large extent an 'invention' made possible by victory itself.

As for democracy, the Brunei monarchy does not make it secure by forestalling excess, but forestalls its very existence because popular power is contrary to the self-interest of the monarchy itself – and of the by now deeply institutionalized structures of its support. In this connection, we espy a subtle parallel with Malaysia. Dr Mahathir does not use monarchy to restrain 'democratic excess', but only because as a national leader impregnably ensconced he takes care of

that problem himself (though as his regime originated in democracy, he cannot dispense with elections as such, as the Brunei monarchy can do). The point is that monarchy's moderating role *vis-à-vis* 'democratic excess' is academic or redundant if colonial succession and political modernization have engendered (a) a power structure of undemocratic inclination, headed by an elected but powerful and authoritarian leader; or (b) a monarchical State which never countenanced democracy in the first place, or at least turned irrevocably against it after the experience of a rebellion by the democratic forces. Indeed, it is Brunei that illustrates most aptly the rather hypothetical nature of any discussion of monarchy in fostering (in the process of moderating) South-East Asian democracy. The case of Thailand is quite unique. In general, the roles and relevance of monarchy can only be predicted or judged in the specific, differing contexts in which it is still found. Its potential is situational. And the potential may be hostile to democracy where modern history has delivered overwhelming power into the hands of monarchy itself.

Lately a new, would-be moral prop has been added in the shape of the 'Asian values' discourse of the region, which gives the benefit of the doubt to authoritarian tendencies, though not explicitly favouring anything quite as authoritarian as the Brunei State. Evidently, the chances of objectivizing 'Asian values' in the form of constitutional monarchy (on the basis that monarchy can moderate democratic excess, as was proposed above) are nil in this enclave. Let us also not forget that the appeal of authoritarian values in South-East Asian societies, if it is a fact, owes not a little to the inheritance of monarchical values, even where the chief beneficiary is a Mahathir or a Suharto, not a king as such. To this extent, Brunei's ideology is not necessarily out of step with an important trend of 'the Malay world'. However, a regime equipped with its own home-spun ideology, as Negara Brunei Darussalam is, will not wish to detract from the authority of its 'revelations' by admitting that they are merely a local variant of modern regional ideology. Brunei ideologues do not pretend that their ancient monarchy was unique in ancient times, but they do insist that the survival of its values in Brunei is unique, and therefore that a historic mission is bestowed on Brunei to repropagate these values to the rest of the Malay world, not receive political ideology from its neighbours.

In referring once again to a diffuse 'inheritance of monarchical values', even benefiting non-royal leaders, the preceding paragraph has remained in step with the argument of Chapter 1, section 1.3 that the charisma passed down from the ancient past is a component of attenuated causation in relation to present structures. But at the same time, the strongest emphasis surely has to be on the thesis that the impacts of colonialism or the Independence process have been the more immediately decisive factor for the survival of monarchies into the late twentieth century (or their demise as the case may be), as well as the particular relationship of any surviving monarchy to democracy. Assuming, though, that where a monarchy is relatively independent (Thailand), let alone absolutely powerful (Brunei), the State will engage in ideological activity on behalf of monarchy's further perpetuation, a generation of citizens will be fostered who

are keenly aware of a national past dominated and moulded by glorious monarchs, who were guided, axiomatically, by Buddhist precepts (Thailand) or the will of Allah (Brunei). The political and moral universe of these citizens may become so strongly coloured by such conceptions of the past that outsiders could be excused for assuming an absolute continuity of historical recollection, political values, and authoritative structures in these societies.

But let our alternative perspective also be kept in view: that the existence of these three phenomena may depend quite intimately on the power vested in monarchy by the time of the dawn of 'nation-building' in the modern, self-conscious and concerted mould. In other words, a strong, surviving monarchy at the end of the colonial era is the likely, basic cause of these phenomena, not their consequence. In the case of Brunei, especially, they are created precisely in order to obfuscate the importance of the colonial era in enabling the monarchy to survive into the twentieth century and go from strength to strength during and after the colonial retreat. In Thailand there has been genuine continuity throughout the Chakri dynasty, because the country was never colonized, but there is still an element of myth-making. Typically, in rationalizing the monarchy as a glorious and indispensable asset of the nation, national myth has to play down the loss of territory to colonial powers at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which was in fact the price paid for colonial toleration of Siam's independent existence and thus for the preservation of the monarchy indirectly. On the other hand, traditional charisma was the reason for preservation when the Thai military after the 1932 Revolution feared a failure of legitimacy for themselves if the monarchy were abolished.

We may postulate, finally, that the preserved and now self-consolidated Thai monarchy faces quite favourable life chances for the next decade at least, provided that they are not squandered by an improvident heir. The monarchy's modern 'Dharma of democracy' is a priceless asset. But nothing can surpass the good prospects of absolute monarchy in Brunei. The absolute power of decision-making in its own interest – including propagation of its own, well-funded 'Islamic Dharma', i.e. benevolent Caliphate – is its most powerful guarantee, provided that the underlying financial assets are not squandered, and barring a 'crisis of authoritarianism' due to external factors outside the regime's control.¹² By contrast, although the Thai King's defence of 'democracy' is no doubt a supremely virtuous act, forces hostile to monarchy could still manipulate democracy to bring that monarchy to an end. But on the other hand again, crises of external provenance are more prone to galvanize national unity and rally popular support for a throne which has transcended authoritarianism. The Asian financial crisis, 1997–98, which began in Thailand, enabled the King to enhance his role as giver of fatherly advice and admonition to democratic politicians. But the external factor most likely to help the monarchy, at least indirectly, because it is a pro-democracy monarchy, is US-led international sentiment in favour of democratization since the Cold War.¹³

Part V

Steps retraced

11 Further glimpses of the deeper past

This chapter mainly offers further discussion of monarchy in early South-East Asia, in the form of citations from leading secondary texts, and some connecting commentary. Clearly, not all readers of this book will want to be regaled by a succession of such material, but a slightly more specialized group, such as undergraduates starting out in South-East Asian Studies or the social sciences, may discover interest in it.

11.1 The division of South-East Asia between a Sinicized and an Indianized zone

A British scholar has noted, regarding King Souligna Vongsa of ‘Indianized’ Laos and his successful attempt to negotiate and define a boundary with Vietnam in the mid-seventeenth century:

In doubtful areas, where the watershed was hard to distinguish, it was agreed that people who built their houses on stilts and with verandahs were to be considered Laotian and the rest subjects of Vietnam. The distinction might have been drawn in other ways, for the difference is one of culture rather than of race. Those who ate long-grained rice with chop-sticks and ornamented their houses with dragons belonged to the Chinese-influenced civilization of Vietnam although their language might be closely akin to Lao; those who ate glutinous rice with their fingers, and decorated their houses with serpents, were part of the Indian-influenced civilization of Laos, Cambodia, and Siam.¹

11.2 The Sinification of Vietnam

Although some features of Vietnamese culture were being assimilated by neighbouring upland peoples through contact, as the previous citation suggests, there are two striking facts about the ‘Sinification’ of the Vietnamese themselves which distinguish it from the process of ‘Indianization’ further west. One is that the Vietnamese – wherever their ultimate ancestors may have hailed from – were an already incipiently Sinicized people in the third century BC, when the Han

Dynasty began to display a conscious interest in Tonkin. The second is that any such cultural orientation was then profoundly reinforced by a Chinese occupation-cum-tutelage lasting more or less uninterruptedly from AD 40 until 939, even though at the same time a distinctively separate (non-Chinese) political identity was developing.

The formative effects of this experience on the Vietnamese as a nation were destined to manifest themselves only at a future date when other factors arose to set them on the march. But it is most probably to those centuries, not earlier, that the fusion of the Tonkinese into one people speaking one language, with its profound Chinese flavour, belongs; it was then that they learned a system of government whose principal function was to regulate drainage and irrigation, and it was then that the Tonkinese became so completely imbued with the Confucian social and political philosophy which has persisted down to the present day alongside the primitive beliefs, as well as certain of the religious practices of Buddhism, which they share with their Indianized neighbours. It was during the ninth and tenth centuries that the new factors arose in Indochina from which Vietnam drew her separate national identity.²

The factors in question, as Duncanson's assessment of the evidence has proposed,³ were population pressure, which pushed Vietnamese southwards from the Red River in search of new cultivable land; the decline of the power of the T'ang, who could neither protect Tonkin from incursion nor stop Vietnamese seeking their own opening to the south; and the relative vacuum to the south, created by the weakening of the Indianized state of Champa in its wars with Angkor, and of Angkor too in its wars with Champa and (a few centuries later) with the Thais in the west.⁴

11.3 How Indian influence spread

This zone of 'Indianization' on which the Vietnamese encroached, had not come into being among the browner-skinned peoples to the south and west through some migration from India, nor did these peoples absorb Indian influences under an Indian political yoke, but through contact with travelling or settling Indians – who might, at most, contract marriage alliances with local royalty and establish priesthoods in their courts. Out of this process developed eventually a pattern of kingdoms organized on Indian principles, informed by Indian statecraft, and with religions of the same provenance (i.e. Hinduism, usually denoted as 'Brahmanism' in the context of South-East Asian court life; or, later, Buddhism, in its two schools).⁵ Negatively speaking, perhaps it was helpful to Indian influence that there was no significant cultural competition from the Chinese. The Middle Kingdom did not lack a commercial interest in South-East Asia from time to time, and merchants from south China were regular visitors across the centuries, whatever the policy of their government on

trade. The Middle Kingdom even acted as overlord to many states of the region. But there was a singular lack of any proselytizing urge except towards the invaded and subjugated Vietnamese. It is immensely difficult to reconstruct a plausible, general complex of reasons, but the outcome is clear: Indian cultural penetration was extensive, Chinese minimal except among the Vietnamese, where special conditions applied because of physical contiguity.

One of the great French scholars of South-East Asia suggested that the 'success' of Indian penetration was due to the very fact that it was not imposed. The heavy hand of military occupation and imposed government could never achieve so much; in fact it would be counterproductive:

It is amazing to observe that in countries so close to China, which entered into commercial and diplomatic relations with her from the first centuries of the Christian Era onwards, the cultural influence of the Middle Kingdom should have been insignificant, whereas it was so intense in the delta lands of Tonkin and northern Vietnam. One is struck by the profound difference in the effects seen among the countries of the Far East, as between the civilizing impact of China and that of India.

The reason lies in the radical difference in the methods of colonization used by the Chinese and the Hindus. The Chinese proceeded by conquest and annexation: the soldiers would occupy the country and the officials spread Chinese civilization. Hindu penetration, or rather infiltration, seem almost always to have been peaceful, and nowhere were they accompanied by the destructive ravages which dishonoured the equestrian invasions by the Mongols or the conquest of America by Spain. So far from being obliterated by the victors, the local peoples found, in the transplanted and softened Hindu social forms, a framework in which their own societies were able to integrate and develop themselves.

Nowhere did the Hindus practise military conquest and annexation in the name of a state or metropolis, and the Hindu kingdoms which took shape in 'further India' during the first centuries of the Christian era only had ties of tradition with the ruling dynasties of India proper, without political dependency. Exchanges of embassies between the two coasts of the Gulf of Bengal were conducted on a footing of equality, whereas China always demanded from the 'southern barbarians' recognition of her suzerainty, which was expressed by the regular dispatch of a tribute.⁶

There are several nagging difficulties posed by this passage, evidently. For one thing, there is no case of military occupation and political colonization from India, nor a Chinese case of sufficient intensity or length outside northern Vietnam by reference to which one could test the hypothesis that force must be counterproductive. For another thing, and as an empirical fact, 'barbarian' kingdoms which recognized Chinese suzerainty were not expected (were not even believed to have the capacity) to emulate Chinese culture, as Coedès implies – so again the hypothesis cannot be tested, or arises from a false assumption. Not

that it would follow, on the other hand, that 'peaceful penetration' from India provides the main explanation of 'success'. But most strangely, the conquest and thousand-year administration of the Vietnamese by China did leave them with a Sinicized culture, as Coedès readily admits! Perhaps the point is, or should be, that with the Vietnamese, Chinese pressure could work on a receptive base of pre-conditioned Sinic culture; whereas the primordial base in the rest of South-East Asia was unreceptive to Chinese ideas, indeed even in some mysterious way prone to embrace Indic culture.⁷

11.4 A list of the Indianized states

The tally of initially Indianized states, whether or not converted to Islam later, is very long, though the extent of knowledge about them varies greatly, needless to say. Between the first and fifteenth centuries AD, we could list, within the scope of modern Indochina, Funan, Champa, Cambodia (usually known in early times by the name of its most famous capital, Angkor, while the earliest Khmer kingdom of all was Chenla) and Laos (centred originally on Luang Prabang); in the area of Siam (modern Thailand), arising quite late (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries), the Thai kingdoms of Chiengmai, Sukhot'ai and Ayut'ia; in the area of modern Burma, Prome (capital of the Pyus), Pegu (capital of the Mons) and Pagan (capital of the Burmans); in the Malay Peninsula, Langkasuka, Kedah, Tambralinga and Malacca; on the north coast of Borneo, Vijayapura – alias 'Srivijaya', forerunner of Brunei;⁸ on Java, old Mataram (taken over as a principal, early centre of the Buddhist Sailendra dynasty that erected the terraced stupa of Borobudur), Kadiri, Singosari and, last but not least, Majapahit; east of Java, Bali, which has maintained its Hindu religion to this day (the only South-East Asian society to do so, though without a surviving monarch); and west of Java, on Sumatra, the better-known of the two Srivijayas – 'Srivijaya the Great', whence the Sailendras first extended their sway to Java – as well as numerous lesser kingdoms or principalities located facing the Straits, such as Melayu, Perlak, Pasai, etc.

11.5 The rise of Muslim states

Some of the principalities of the east coast of Sumatra would be among the first states of South-East Asia to receive Islam, whence it crossed the Straits to Malacca after 1400. Islam encompassed in due course the coastal principalities of northern Java (and Madura, offshore), followed by latter-day Mataram and lesser courts of central Java (though not without some syncretic accommodation to earlier Javanese ideas); the coastal kingdoms of Borneo; the southern Philippines, through the influence of the Sultanate of Brunei; the Malay Peninsula during the fifteenth century hegemony of Malacca, at least as far north as Pattani (part of southern Thailand today); and the Chams, by the time their kingdom as such (Champa) was obliterated by the expansion of Vietnam in the seventeenth century.⁹

11.6 The earliest scene

The general scene, around 2,000 years ago, including the importance of sea-borne trade in bringing Indian influence, is sparkingly set in the following synthesis, which takes off from the existence of thriving South-East Asian ports and trading populations:

A critical stage in their evolution was apparently reached when in the early centuries AD a new surge of Indian influences was transmitted, by means not yet clearly understood, to those societies. We know, in the main, what these novel elements were. The earliest to arrive (in southern Cambodia where we have the first evidence of them) were elements of Sanskrit learning, including conceptions of political office. Thereafter both Brahmanical and Buddhist religious elements were added, together with their monumental architecture. Early inscriptions suggest, moreover, that Indian techniques of irrigation and of land distribution were among those elements then imported, although indigenous systems of irrigation were almost certainly already present. Thereafter we find the rapid development of centralized states, evidently based upon a fusion of traditional leadership with Indian, mainly Brahmanical, theories of government.

The loci of these early Indian-styled states make clear their dependence upon sea trade. Minor states flourished on the Malay Peninsula near the Isthmus of Kra – across which goods were for a while trans-shipped – in north Sumatra, and along the northern and eastern coasts of Borneo. The major states which came to dominate commerce through South-East Asia in a three-cornered contest had their origin in southern Cambodia near the mouth of the Mekong, on the east coast of Sumatra in the area of Palembang, and on the northwest coast of Java near present-day Jakarta.

These harbour states drew, in part, upon their hinterland for trade resources and, in Cambodia at least, established a form of overlordship. By the eighth century, however, in both Cambodia and Java, inland states had developed that became more powerful than their coastal predecessors. In contrast to the harbour states, these inland states based their power more on the control of their population's manpower than upon control of the sea trade. Economic power came from the agricultural production of a dense population by means of intensive irrigated farming. Military power came more from a large land army than from sea power.¹⁰

The account goes on to say that the history of South-East Asia from then on until colonial rule was broadly characterized by the struggle between these two systems of State control, with inland states eventually gaining the hegemony. These states had the advantage of fertile, irrigated land and large populations, and it was here that their monumental architecture, elaborate courts, and sophisticated music and drama developed – as well as their massive armies. Monarchy found theological supports for its authority in the core of a system of philosophy that combined Buddhist, Brahmanical, and indigenous religious

elements syncretically. Owing to the similar factors in play, these inland societies produced social and cultural forms which even today show some striking parallels.

11.7 State organization and theory of kingship in Indianized states

More elaborated insights into these matters are found in the work of a famous Viennese scholar:

The primary notion with which we shall have to deal is the belief in the parallelism between Macrocosmos and Microcosmos, between the universe and the world of men. According to this belief humanity is constantly under the influence of forces emanating from the directions of the compass and from stars and planets. These forces may produce welfare and prosperity or work havoc, according to whether or not individuals and social groups, above all the State, succeed in bringing their lives and activities in line with the universe. Individuals may attain such harmony by following the indications offered by astrology, the lore of lucky and unlucky days and many other minor rules. Harmony between the empire and the universe is achieved by organizing the former as an image of the latter, as a universe on a smaller scale.¹¹

After carefully noting that cosmological principles were also a feature of medieval European society, the scholar proceeds to describe a number of specifically South-East Asian features:

Whereas speculation pertaining to the relation between State and universe formed an important subject of ancient Chinese literature, we would look in vain for a theoretical treatise on this topic in the various literatures of South-East Asia. Yet, there is overwhelming evidence of the cosmological basis of State and kingship in this area. This evidence is found in numerous passages in literature and inscriptions, in the titles of kings, queens and officials, in the 'cosmic' numbers of queens, ministers, court priests, provinces, etc., in rites and customs, in works of art, in the lay-out and structure of capital cities, palaces, and temples. One need only put these various items together to obtain a relatively clear picture. This picture will be more complete in continental South-East Asia, where the old forms of Buddhist State and kingship survived into very recent times. It will be hazier in the Archipelago as a result of Mohammedan and European influences.

According to Brahmanic doctrine the world consists of a circular central continent, Jambudvīpa, surrounded by seven annular oceans and seven annular continents. Beyond the last of the seven oceans the world is closed by an enormous mountain range. In the centre of Jambudvīpa, and thus in the centre of the world, rises Mount Meru, the cosmic mountain around

which sun, moon and stars revolve. On its summit lies the city of the gods surrounded by the abodes of the eight Lokapalas or guardian gods of the world.¹²

But we learn that Mount Meru stands at the centre of the universe in the Buddhist system likewise, surrounded by seven mountain ranges, which are separated from each other by seven seas. Beyond the last mountain chain the sea is an ocean in which four continents lie, one in each of the cardinal directions. The continent south of Mount Meru is Jambudvīpa, where the human race is found. Meanwhile, on the slopes of Mount Meru itself lies the lowest of the paradises, that of the four Great Kings or guardians of the world, while on its summit is the second paradise, that of the thirty-three gods, with Sudarsana the city of the gods, where Indra reigns as king. Above the mountain the rest of the heavenly abodes tower upwards, one above the other. Basically, the Brahman and the Buddhist systems agree in their fundamental characteristics, i.e. their circular form, constituted by concentric zones around Mount Meru. In abbreviated form, the image of either has symbolic meaning in each faith.

Even more than in Europe, Heine-Geldern continues, the capital stood for the whole country, being not just the nation's political and cultural centre but indeed the magic centre of the empire. In Thailand and Cambodia the circumambulation of the city has formed one of the most essential parts of the coronation ritual, whereby the King takes possession not only of the capital city but of the whole empire. It is noted that whereas the cosmological structure of the country as a whole could only be expressed by the number and location of provinces and the functions and emblems of their governors, the capital city could be shaped architecturally as a much more 'precise' model of the universe, a microcosmos within the macrocosmos of the empire. In fact, as the remains of some of the ancient cities testify, cosmological ideas pervaded the whole system of government. Appropriately, the capital city symbolized its cosmological status and centrality in the empire by having a counterpart 'Mount Meru' built at its centre.¹³

Apart from the importance of the compass points in palace lay-out and the positioning of major office-bearers in relation to the king on ceremonial occasions – indeed, the whole population of Siam was divided into two classes: the right (South) and the left (North), for rendering military and civilian services respectively¹⁴ – the cosmic and divine role of the king was projected through the coronation ritual, by the regalia, and above all in royal funerary architecture.

11.8 Further reconstruction of Angkorean ideology

The mausolea of Cambodia held a peculiar fascination for the first French archeologists who studied them.¹⁵ The following commentary sees the king not merely as a link between his subjects and the cosmic sphere, but as a being who was himself, or could eventually become, divine. Several passages by Coedès are worth quoting, not simply for the intrinsic interest of the subject, or its

interpretation, but because the cultural legacy of such kingship (or at any rate manipulation of the idea of royal divinity in early times), still plays a part in the political dynamics of today. Meanwhile, in ninth- to twelfth-century Angkor:

Undoubtedly, the countless statues of Vishnu, Siva and other gods which the ancient Khmer Angkor has bequeathed to us will hardly ever represent in an 'impersonal' way, as it were, these great figures of the Hindu pantheon. The images are in the great majority of cases those of kings, princes and high dignitaries, portrayed in the guise of the god in whom they have been absorbed – or will be, at the end of their earthly existence. The names carried by the statues are usually formed from a fusion of the individual's name with that of the god, thus showing clearly that this is a case of a cult of the person.

This cult, of very modest extent in India proper, saw a considerable expansion in 'further India'. It is evinced in the ancient Cham kingdom, and above all in Java and Bali ...

The personal cults are in evidence [in the Cambodian context] from the beginning of the Angkorian period and no doubt reach back much further. Among the images designed for the purpose of these cults – a term which we must take in a broad sense, for it was sometimes a *linga* which was thus consecrated¹⁶ – we should distinguish between those dedicated to the memory of persons deceased, and those for living personages, involving a founder who was either consecrating statues to his parents, or erecting his own image or one carrying his name.

In the ninth century, the Angkor region shows us the first great archaeological ensemble consecrated to the funerary cult of the royal family: namely, the group at Roluos, some twenty kilometres south-west of Angkor, taking in the temples of Bakong, Prah Ko and Lolei. This ensemble reveals to us, at the same time, the ties linking this funerary cult to that of the God-king ...

With rare exceptions, the idols named at the entry to the sanctuaries [of the twelfth century Bayon] receive the title of *kamrateng jagat*, 'Lord of the Universe'. In the pre-Angkorian epoch, and during the first part of the Angkor period up to the end of the tenth century, the gods were given the same title as the king, the princes and the high dignitaries: *kamrateng anh*, meaning 'My Lord'. From the second half of the tenth century, one sees an increasing, general use of the formula *kamrateng jagat*, 'Lord of the Universe', which supplants *kamrateng anh*, 'My Lord', to designate the gods. This formula had the advantage of establishing a more precise distinction between men and the world of the gods.¹⁷

This distinction became indispensable, it is suggested, when the custom of erecting personal statues became general, i.e. it allowed, in effect, a real promotion to be conferred (generally but by no means necessarily posthumously) on a prince or a dignitary, raising him from a *kamrateng anh* ('My Lord') to a

kamrateng jagat ('Lord of the Universe'), as represented by a statue of divine attributes. Take, for example, an inscription of Banteay Chmar, whose text confers the honours of apotheosis upon four valiant warriors who had fallen while fighting for a prince, son of Jayavarman VII. It is a virtual decree of canonization! Indeed, from the ninth until the end of the twelfth century we meet an uninterrupted sequence of examples, which go to prove the existence of a cult devoted to images which enshrined the attributes of the great figures of the Brahmanical and Buddhist pantheons, but whose names recalled the titles of the persons divinized. When the Khmers erected one of these idols, a *kamrateng jagat*, they believed that they were fixing in stone the very essence of the individuals whom they wished to adore.

This cult of great men was not more Hindu than Buddhist. We learn from the epigraphy something of the underlying concepts. It was not a strictly funerary cult, since it included the erection of statues of persons still living. Yet when, in the final stanzas of an inscription, we meet with a plea by the royal founder, sometimes almost vehemently expressed, for the maintenance of the temple by his descendants, we become aware of his concern for happiness in the hereafter. So in effect we are dealing with cases of individuals arranging for an appropriate mausoleum for themselves, during their lifetimes. Within this consecrated structure was an idol bearing the founder's name and containing his 'essence' or 'fine, inner self'. Once his mortal remains were interred there – probably for the re-animation of the image – a personal sanctuary became a tomb.

At this point Coedès turns to the connected phenomenon of the cult of the *Devaraja* or God-king. He reckons that in South-East Asia the Hindu cults, especially that of Siva, accentuated a tendency already present in India, and evolved into a cult of kings. The essence of the royalty, or (in some texts) the 'ultimate ego', of the king, was considered to reside in a *linga* placed on a pyramid at the centre of the royal city (this being the ideal centre of the world, as we have seen). The miraculous *linga*, a sort of palladium of the kingdom, was supposed to have been brought by a Brahman who had obtained it from Siva. It had been bestowed on the founder of the dynasty. Appropriately, this communion between the king and the god – this entering into relations with the world of the divine by way of a consecrated image and a priestly intermediary – took place on the holy mountain at the centre of the capital. This amounts to saying that the great god of ancient Cambodia – he to whom the greatest ensembles of architecture, or at any rate the pyramids or temple-mountains, were consecrated – was the king.¹⁸

As mentioned briefly in Chapter 1, in modern Thailand the conviction that the borrowed but 'alien' Khmer ideology of *devaraja* lies at the root of Thai political absolutism has become something of an intellectual obsession. As for Cambodia itself, the fact of continuity, or at least imitation, at the root of modern absolutism, is taken for granted. Whatever the correct analysis of modern political phenomena, *devaraja* has characteristically been at the centre of academic speculation about the nature of Angkor:

One is probably not far off the mark if one characterizes the *devaraja*-cult as the most often described State-cult of the Hindu middle ages in South-East Asia. In the country where it found its essential expression, Cambodia, '*devaraja*' has become a synonym for the divinised 'God-king'. There are those who believe they have uncovered in this cult of divinised kingship the real 'source of the inspiration of the great edifices of Angkor' [Coedès], seeing in it 'the essential, binding element of antique Khmer society' of the ninth to the thirteenth centuries AD.

If we go in search of the origins of this cult and its ramifications further afield, a picture emerges of myriad connections throughout South, South-East and East Asia. In the extensive literature on the *devaraja*-cult we meet references to its influence from India, China, Funan, Chenla, Champa and Indonesia and also to traces of it in the megalithic culture of the whole region. The cult has been further linked, via the theme of the cosmic mountain, to the Near Eastern cult of the ziggurat. Influences of the cult have been pointed out in Indonesia and Thailand – especially in the Ayut'ia period – and in Cambodia with reference to its originally Sivaite nature. Here its continuity was traced both in the Sivaite temple of Angkor Wat and in the Mahayana-Buddhist temple of the Bayon, in the form of a *Viṣṇunuraja* and a *Buddharaja* respectively. There are countless references, also, to the further impact of the cult down to the present. Thus the life-size statue of a standing *Buddha* in the central (Theravada-Buddhist) Vat Preah Keo temple in Phnom Penh is supposed to represent 'in truth' the idealized statue of the Cambodian King Norodom (1859–1904), which Coedès links very closely to the statue of the 'Lord of the World' (*kamraten jagat*) in the Angkor temples. Even in the 'Buddhist Socialism' of Sihanouk traces of the late, Buddhist form of the *devaraja*-cult can be picked out.¹⁹

There is no need to devote any great attention, here, to the controversies which have swirled around the interpretation of *devaraja*, but suffice it to say that Hermann Kulke (of Heidelberg) and I.W. Mabbett (of the Australian National University) have both pointed out the paucity of solid evidence on the actual nature of the cult, in the stone inscriptions that are known. As far as Kulke can make out, the *devaraja* was a cult around a light, movable *linga*, which was consecrated by a Brahman in the reign of Jayavarman II (802?–850), to mark and legitimize this king's new-found independence from Java.²⁰ The consecration took place once, and once only. The object was not even thought, or found, to be necessary by subsequent rulers as a guarantor of victories or proof of a legitimate succession. *Devaraja* in the sense of the 'Lord of the Universe' which the object symbolized, was not the king (*pace* Coedès) but Siva, 'king of the gods'.²¹ The earthly king was subject to him, albeit at the same time – importantly – a 'participant' or 'sharer' in godship by being Siva's representative on earth. As for Mabbett's interpretation, its most stimulating aspect is the point that in Sanskrit grammar the combination of the words *deva* and *raja* bears at least four possible meanings, while in poetry there is even greater potential for

ambiguity, by way of punning and metaphor. This was far from being an ideology of control, albeit – importantly – the metaphorical attribution of godly characteristics or ‘counterpart functions’ (on earth) must have legitimized certain kings’ positions *vis-à-vis* rivals.²²

In fact, for all the scholarly scepticism about the cult of *devaraja* as such, indications of the king’s divinity do seem crucial for an understanding of medieval Khmer kingship. In a later study, Mabbett has applied his powerful intuition to a construction of a reputed, nightly copulation of King Indravarman III (1295–1308) with a *naga* (a mystical snake) at the top of the Phimcanakas (one of the Angkorean ‘temple-mountains’ or stone pyramids). Its suggested significance is that through it the king enacted the role of a bridge between two cultures: the ‘high’ culture (in both a royal, and a heavenly sense) of gods like Siva, and the ‘low’ culture (in both a folk, and an earthly if not subterranean sense) of the ancient, pre-Hindu deities of the Khmers. This two-way communion, vital for the prosperity and safety of the realm, presupposes a virtually divine nature of the king himself.²³ Although the study as a whole emphasizes the probable limitations on royal power in practice, in most reigns, clearly a politico-religious ideology of royal divinity or quasi-divinity was constantly fostered by the priesthood and ever on hand to be invoked by the kings (though as an explanation of success only for the stronger ones, we may guess; a mere plaintive plea for obedience by the weaker!). In his earlier study the scholar has no hesitation in speaking of the ‘general practice of king-worship’.²⁴ And this brings us back to ‘fellow sceptic’ Kulke, who leaves us in no doubt that while the *devaraja* cult was not at the centre of ruler-deification, and at best only provides circumstantial evidence of it, there is ample proof of its development in the stone *linga* erected by individual kings as a personal shrine, for example the Tribuvaneshvara of Jayavarman IV (928–942).²⁵ So in this respect, Kulke does not disagree with Coedès after all.

11.9 Borobudur

Reference was made in Chapter 1 to the moral obligations of kingship as one possible part of the legacy. The moral dimension is perhaps even more powerfully symbolized in the late eighth- and early ninth-century architectural wonder of Java, Borobudur, than in the monuments of Cambodia.

The Borobudur, which represents the highest expression of the artistic genius of the Sailendra period, is utterly unlike any other Javanese monument. It is not a temple with an interior, but an immense stupa in the form of stone terraces covering the upper part of a natural hill, on the flattened top of which stands the central stupa. Its height is 150 feet. To traverse the whole distance through the galleries up to the summit involves a walk of over three miles. The walls of the galleries on both sides are adorned with bas-relief sculptures illustrating Mahayanist texts. They run to thousands. In

addition there are 400 statues of the Buddha. The base has a series of reliefs depicting the effects of good and evil deeds in daily life producing karma ...

From the religious point of view the sanctuary as a whole forms an impressive and convincing textbook of Buddhism as taught by the Nalanda school. The style of sculpture follows the classic models of Gupta India, but the reliefs are not Indian, they are Javanese.²⁶

This is the greatest landmark of the Buddhism brought to Mataram from Palembang in Sumatra by the Sailendras, and replacing Hinduism for a period. It is believed that pilgrims to this centre could only 'graduate' to the ultimate stupa by memorizing the text of every relief along the ascending path. And this intellectual feat might take a lifetime. However, was there, we muse, a special dispensation for royalty to meditate inside one of the perforated 'honeypot' structures around the pinnacle? If so, then the combination of 'performance' and 'morality' epitomized in this miraculous edifice itself yielded the usual privileges associated with effective royal power!²⁷

11.10 Brahmanical theory of society and kingship

The work of S.J. Tambiah has already been cited at some length in Chapter 1. We saw, *inter alia*, that there was an original doctrine of a transfer of a share of the brahman's good *karma* to the king, and that the brahman's superiority rested more especially on his knowledge of the law, whereas the king implemented it through *danda* and in so doing engaged in *artha*-type action (which might involve killing, both as capital punishment and in warfare). But to balance the potential 'impurity' of a king thus engaged there was also the doctrine of a particular relation of *karma* and merit transfer between subjects and their king according to the justness of his use of *danda* for the people's protection. And on top of this there was the conception that the Lord created the king for the protection of this whole creation, the king being formed of the particles of eight deities, Indra, Wind, Yama, Sun, Fire, Varuna, Moon, and Kubera (lord of wealth), and emulating the energetic action of these gods, e.g. by providing copious rainfall (like Indra), or by exacting taxes (on the model of the sun drawing up the water with its rays), or by maintaining a network of all-seeing spies (who move everywhere like the wind).²⁸

11.11 Centre and periphery

Professor Tambiah has also been cited on the concept of 'the galactic polity', which rationalizes the weakness of central power in terms of Buddhist political theory in bestowing on peripheral principalities or provinces a legitimated, obedient or adulatory, relationship to the morally superior centre.

To see how this sort of perception could be applied to Cambodia – inductively from the local evidence rather than deductively from Indian 'first principles' – let us look at this passage:

Moreover, Khmer statecraft utilized an elaborate royal cult to integrate subordinates with the centre. In *devaraja* ideology, there was an interaction of the human and the divine in the person of the king. Traditional symbols of divinity and power, such as the *linga* and the mountain, merged local ancestor cults and the cosmological symbolism of Indian religious theory to form an ideological basis for Khmer kingship. Royal ceremony generated the king's powers. The royal court, its activities, and its style recreated a world of the gods – in theory a heaven on earth. By successfully fulfilling his role as the hypothetical focus of all sanctity and power, the king maintained the orderliness of the world.

The king's court appears to have been ritually linked to its subordinate centres of power as the subordinate centres sought to imitate the style of the centre. This ritual unity was probably more important than administrative control in maintaining the State's dominance over areas outside its core. For a lasting state, territorial unification was not sufficient to sustain the empire. This was attained by successfully integrating indigenous folk traditions, symbols, and religious beliefs into a cult which was visibly concentrated in the centre. Local deities and, of most consequence, local ancestor worship became focused in the State's religious ceremony ... Under the Khmer kings this ancestor worship and its traditional symbols, the *linga* and the mountain, the former representing fertility and the latter the abode of the dead, were subordinated to a State-level cult.²⁹

It might be logical at this point to follow up the 'sphere of influence' theme, as it applied to relations between states of the region which were far beyond each other's realistic scope for control at any time, owing to geographical distance. In other words, was there an 'international system of South-East Asia' worthy of the name in classical times – indeed, not only a 'system' of interaction discernible abstractly to would-be observers, like today, but a 'community' of shared philosophy and identity for those involved in the practice of 'international' relations? If there was such a subjective 'community', its relevance must be very oblique indeed for our own era, with its Western-originated attachment to the nominal equality of all states. Still, conceivably certain notions of order and hierarchy were diffused through such an international system and have left residues in the 'strategic culture' and diplomatic behaviour of the present, or at least in more general political culture.

This is all very tentative, if not whimsical, but by any standards the following piece of theory should not be left out:

The infusion of kingship by divinity was bound to contradict the assumption that all rulers were equal. Each ruler was acclaimed in his own country as one who had unique claim to 'universal' sovereignty, which was derived from a single and indivisible divine authority. The map of earlier South-East Asia which evolved from the prehistoric networks of small settlements and reveals itself in historical records was a patchwork of often overlapping *mandalas*, or

'circles of kings'. In each of these *mandalas*, one king, identified with divine and 'universal' authority, claimed personal hegemony over the other rulers in his *mandala* who in theory were his obedient allies and vassals. Thus, a Khmer ruler in the early seventh century could be eulogised as 'the glorious sovereign of three kings', and the Angkorian ruler's polity in the tenth century could be rendered as 'a pure circle of kings and brahmans'. The fourteenth century Javanese poet Prapanca describes unambiguously the organization of space in earlier South-East Asia:

All illustrious Javanese Kings and Queens, the honoured ones who equally are distinguished by their towns (*nagara*), each having one for his own or her own.

In one place, in Wilwa Tikta (Majapahit), they hold in their lap the honoured Prince-overlord.

In practice, the *mandala* (a Sanskrit term used in Indian manuals of government) represented a particular and often unstable political situation in a vaguely definable geographical area without fixed boundaries and where smaller centres tended to look in all directions for security. *Mandalas* would expand and contract in concertina-like fashion. Each one contained several tributary rulers, some of whom would repudiate their vassal status when the opportunity arose and try to build up their own networks of vassals. Only the *mandala* overlord had the prerogative of receiving tribute-bearing envoys; he himself would despatch officials who represented his superior status.

Sometimes a *mandala* would include no more than, for example, the districts in the island of Java, but it could also be geographically extensive and contain peoples whose descendants today live in separate nation-states.³⁰

Above all, the longer view reveals a more or less constant flux in the size of all *mandala* in the region, with peripheral zones falling under the sway of different rulers at different times.

Not that the *mandala* organization of space was necessarily a harsh reality. Although many wars have been recorded, local centres were rarely permanently obliterated. That is, courts at the perimeter continued to replicate court situations at the centre, within a framework of constant shifts in the centres of dominant spiritual authority and political power.³¹

Wolters goes on to stress the vital importance of intelligence gathering and diplomacy in the exercise of this quite tenuous kind of 'international power'.³² But practical ambiguity at the periphery did not detract from philosophical assurance at the centre, whose emphasis was all on hegemony and hierarchy. And obviously, such a philosophy, founded in the idea of royal divinity, must be friendly to an extreme absolutism and personalization of government at the centre, constituting the Ayut'ian expression of Buddhist kingship (learnt from Cambodia).

11.12 Theravada Buddhism and kingship at Ayut'ia

It was noted in Chapter 1 that the ideological legacy of Thailand's past is a synthesis of both Buddhist and Hindu components. Also mentioned was a certain feature of Thai intellectual life: that of seeing the absolutism of Ayut'ian monarchy, not as a positive, but as a negative, model. This is characteristic of defenders of the reformist Chakri dynasty as well as latter-day democrats opposing military dictatorship. But this does not mean that the analysis is necessarily wrong. In practical terms, a much noted feature of Ayut'ia was its genius in devising and implementing a system of total control of manpower – comparable in some ways to European feudalism, though not based on a division of land. However, such evidence of a successful 'totalitarianism', or even of the existence of a 'serious' theory as its foundation, can be so repugnant that it may only be allowed to lurk between the lines of a commentary, as in the next quotation:

Many foreign writers, not excluding even the more learned ones, misunderstand the relationship of the King *vis-à-vis* the Church, and often attribute to him sacerdotal powers. The ideal monarch of Buddhist India, however, was expressly a warrior by birth, though not encouraged to be warlike in his ideals. The Siamese king has never in theory or practice been a High Priest at any time whatever. What duty he was required to perform in this connection was either that of a worshipper or an 'Upholder of the Faith'. The Buddhist priest, really a monk, seeks release from worldly ties, and the king cannot really afford to do that, unless he is prepared to be accused of neglecting his duties.

Later contact with the Khmer coated this patriarchal and – in a way – limited kingship with a veneer of divinity. It gave outward dignity to such ceremonies as the coronation and royal obsequies. In the former, Hindu deities were invoked to pervade the anointed monarch, who was given such regalia as the trident of Siva and the discus of Vishnu, and bore in his full style such an epithet as the 'Incarnation of the celestial gods' (*Dibyadebavatar*). In the latter, the body of a dead monarch was encased in a *kosa*, the traditional Khmer cover for the emblem of Siva, thereby attributing divinity to the royal corpse. Since the cult of this divinity was Hindu and rather involved, all this had no significance in Siam beyond outward dignity. The average Siamese, then as now, has never taken seriously the idea of his king being connected with Hindu divinities, who after all had no place in his Buddhist faith.³³

Considerably less squeamish about the evidence of a 'totalitarian' disposition in Thai political tradition is one of the leading figures – arguably the most eminent – in contemporary Thai political science. Unlike Tambiah, he attributes the most authoritarian tendency to Hinduism, not Buddhism, although showing that at the level of the masses Buddhism has traditionally performed an important legitimating function for authoritarian rule:

The Hindu model of autocratic monarchy and bureaucratic organization fitted well the nature and functions of the patrimonial State, for it offered the ruling elite what they could not find in Buddhism. Although Buddhism was adopted as the State religion and served as the basic integrative mechanism in traditional Siamese society, it offered neither systematic secular law nor a politico-administrative blueprint needed to rationalize an autocratic form of government. Hindu law and bureaucratic organization were adopted by the Khmer, and the early Ayut'ian bureaucracy was patterned after this Hinduized Khmer model. Buddhism appeared as an influential social philosophy whose concepts of justice and social welfare served to legitimize autocratic government.

In the institution of the monarchy, Hindu and Buddhist conceptions were integrated through the idea of *Dharma* (the teachings of Buddha). *Dharma* has had a profound impact upon the traditional Thai concept of kingship. The prescriptive *Rajadharma* or 'duty of Kings' is considered a pre-eminent political concept in the *Dharma*. There is, however, a major difference between Hindu and Buddhist conceptions regarding a king's role and behaviour. Hindu concepts contain two types of prescriptive codes of conduct: rules laid down for normal government, and those propounded to cope with critical periods ... In the Buddhist concept, by contrast, the role and behaviour of the King are highly moralistic and leave no room for deviations from the ideal type. In other words, while the Hindu model of kingship provides for flexibility and for adoption of Machiavellian policies, the Buddhist model is not concerned with *real politics* at all.

Because of this inconsistency, there existed in the Ayut'ian period a body of mixed political thought which combined features of Hindu and Buddhist political concepts regarding the duty, role and behaviour of the rulers. The duty of the rulers was to provide for the people's protection and justice according to the *Dharmasastra* and the *Rajadharma* (better known as *Tosapitradharma*, the Ten Royal Virtues). The ruler's role was that of a warrior. Prescriptive behaviour was taken from both Hindu (in a document called the *Rajaniti*) and Buddhist thought (mainly from the *Tosajati*, the ten lives of the Buddha-to-be).³⁴

Professor Chai-anan goes on to explain that the *Tosajati* prescribed, most importantly, the redistributive aspect of rulership. This served as a guiding principle for rulers in their dealings with the *Sangha* and the masses. As for the *Sangha*, this was the only Buddhist social organization. Entry was open and voluntary. Although hierarchical, it was (and is) an organization in which an individual can rise on his own merit, i.e. essentially an egalitarian body. The elaborate and detailed body of rules are basically religious rather than secular and are mainly applied to monks, not laymen. The ultimate goal of Buddhism being to enable people to conquer their own selves, not the world or other men, it could complement, but hardly threaten, a warring state dedicated to aggrandizement or acquisition of worldly matters. This being so, Ayut'ian kings

maintained Buddhist concepts and skilfully utilized them to legitimize the power of their autocratic rulership over the masses. The Hindu model of bureaucracy as well as other symbols were employed for direct political purposes. In short, two major streams of thought existed, side by side, in the Ayut'ian and early Ratanakosin (Bangkok), as well as the present, periods. Social organizations resulting from these two concepts have flourished, each reinforcing the other. In a sense the masses have been caught between the secular State's preoccupation with wars, glory, material benefits and worldly happiness, and the goals of peace of mind and renunciation of worldly things espoused by the Buddhist State and its *Sangha*. The overall function and effect of this symbiotic merger of major concepts have been the perpetuation of authoritarian rule on the one hand, and the attitude of contentment on the other. Little wonder that in traditional Siam, as in Burma, the kings, princes, high-ranking bureaucrats and rich merchants built thousands of temples, or that monks were well treated. The latter acted not only as religious figures but as a major social-control cadre in periods of slow communication. This fusion of religion and polity amounted to an integrated system in which rulers, clergy, religious norms of behaviour, and coercive government power combined to maximize social stability.³⁵

But continuity down to the modern era cannot be explained solely by the astute prescriptions of an ancient political theory, or by the supportive role of a religious order, least of all by a royal claim of divinity. 'Charisma', defined in this sense, could lead to a king being dethroned if his performance did not live up to such pretension! Thus the resilience of the Ayut'ian regime across three centuries has to be explained, Professor Chai-Anan suggests, by reference to further factors, not least the beginnings of bureaucracy, combined with the routinization of charismatic authority (both that of the kings and the brahmins) by way of hereditary succession and the use of rituals which surrounded the royal office with an air of mystery and sanctity. The routinization of charismatic patterns of authority is notable from the reign of Trailok (1448–88). His *sakdina* system of reward and punishment, whereby social stratification was based on the control of manpower and wealth, facilitated the integration of the administrative staff, both central and provincial. Thus from Trailok's time up to 1932 Siam became a patrimonial polity, wherein the creation and appropriation of individual positions (and their economic advantages) were sought by the administrative staff under the authority and ultimate control of the King as supreme patrimonial leader. Other royalty took a share in power, status, fiefs, and other economic benefits.³⁶

11.13 Aspects of Malay kingship

The Malay Muslim world on the eve of British intervention (1874) still showed elements of a surviving, if diluted, 'Hindu-type' divinization, and the phenomenon of autonomy at the periphery in relation to the sanctified (but by that very token, indispensable) centre. To elaborate on the brief allusion in Chapter 1, the following reading is prescribed:

The apex of the political system of each State³⁷ was the ruler called *lång di-Pertuan* (He who is made lord), *Raja* (Hindu Ruler) and *Sultan* (Arabic Ruler). Whatever may have been the case in earlier periods, the Sultan ... did not in most States of the nineteenth century embody any exceptional concentration of administrative authority. Powerful district chiefs could and sometimes did flout his wishes with impunity; some of them were wealthier than he was. A Sultan was generally in control of a royal district which he governed after the fashion of a district chief. But his role in the political system of the State, as distinct from his additional and local role of district chief of the royal district, did not consist in the exercise of pre-eminent power.

The Sultan's role was to symbolize and to some extent to preserve the unity of the State. In the Malay States there were many forces tending towards conflict and disintegration. Except in Negri Sembilan there was a lack of cultural homogeneity in the subject class. In all the States the existence of district chiefs constituted foci of purely local power and influence. It is true of course that the opposition of the chiefs to each other tended to neutralize their disruptive potentialities in regard to central authority. The chiefs, however, were often at odds with the Sultan as much as with each other. They certainly resisted the exercise of any royal authority in their districts. Yet the hard facts of trade, national defence and the need for law and order over a wider area than a district dictated the preservation of peace if the State was not to disintegrate completely. (Civil wars were indeed of frequent occurrence.)

Hence there was an acceptance of the Sultanate, if not of the Sultan, as the formal head of the State. Chiefs fought and intrigued to put one claimant on the throne instead of another but never to destroy the Sultanate itself. Government was *kerajaan*, the state of having a ruler, and they visualized no other system.³⁸

Indeed, here was a case of investing the symbols of group unity with an aura of sanctity and supernatural power. The Sultan acquired majesty (*daulat*) at his installation, and then became different from himself in his previous capacity, and different from his royal kinsmen. Anyone who infringed his majesty was believed to be vulnerable to retribution from the impersonal force of outraged royal dignity, in accordance with ancient Indonesian, Muslim Indian, and Hindu ritual signifying the presence of innate supernatural power. Any touching of this sacred person was taboo. The royal dignity was asserted by the doctrine, among others, that white blood ran in the Sultan's veins, his divinity by the convention that at ceremonies he should sit impassive. Yellow clothing (and hangings, State umbrellas, etc.) was a royal monopoly. At his installation the Sultan received an elaborate ceremonial washing to mark the making of a new man, and his new sacredness was communicated to his regalia (*kebesaran* – symbols of greatness). These regalia (including musical instruments, insignia, weapons), each symbolic of some particular attribute, were believed to be self-created and to be filled with sufficient supernatural power to blast any unauthorized person who handled

them. There was also a special vocabulary called the *bahasa dalam* (the language within the palace), used in referring to the movements and activities of the Sultan. The house in which he lived had a special title – *Istana* (Palace). At his death the Sultan was no longer known by the name he had borne in life. And so on. There was a general belief that the Sultan by his personal influence or good luck could bring or ward off pestilence and bad harvests.

Gullick goes on to point out that there were comparatively few ceremonies in which a Sultan appeared as the leader of his people in temporal matters or as a mediator with supernatural powers. His symbolic role was essentially passive, and the major public occasions of his reign were in fact his installation and his funeral, in which the chiefs of the State took their customary part.³⁹ (The subject class gathered in considerable numbers but the crowd was still only a fraction of the total population. In general, communications did not permit the convening of large assemblies of the common people.) In any case, what is striking is the contrast between the elaborate apparatus of belief in the dignity and supernatural power of the Sultan, and some actual behaviour of chiefs. On the one hand, the approved norm of conduct towards a Sultan required a posture of deep respect, as represented and reinforced by the moral tales of Malay history in which servants of the Sultans of Malacca showed blind obedience. This requirement of formal submission of the chiefs to the Sultan was symbolized and expressed in the obeisance (*menghadap*) ceremony at the installation, entailing not a little physical agility, balance and refinement of movement on the part of those expressing their submission.⁴⁰ Yet on the other hand there is evidence on the eve of British intervention that some chiefs viewed this formal and public obeisance with repugnance. In their own districts they were magnates to whom their subjects abased themselves with scarcely less ceremony. Such chiefs only submitted to the government of the Sultan to a very limited degree. Clearly, obeisance ceremonies were occasions of tension.⁴¹

So why, Gullick asks, did the ceremonies of obeisance, sometimes unwelcome to both sides, take place at all? The answer seems to lie in their function as the symbolic expression of the position of the Sultanate as the apex of a political system which the district chiefs wished to preserve. Except in Negri Sembilan, the chiefs derived their title from the Sultan under the constitutional theory of the Malay State. In controversial or important acts the chief would seek the approval of the Sultan, from whom his authority was derivative once he had performed his formal obeisance.⁴²

11.14 Brunei through its chronicles

Bestowal of title and grant of lands by a superior centre had been a critical matter for Brunei, even after it had achieved what its modern dynastic historians, as well as an early nineteenth-century chronicler, vaunt as 'independence' from Majapahit in the late fourteenth century. We read in two versions of the royal chronicle, in preambles drafted even as late as 1807 (though claiming the authority of oral tradition), of the importance of Johor in this connection.⁴³ The

ruler acknowledged by the chronicle as Brunei's first (or at any rate the earliest one mentioned) is also the one who brings Islam to Brunei – in other words, the first *Muslim* ruler or Sultan, even if there were non-Muslims before him (a more mythical text infused with Hindu elements certainly offers a previous genealogy, including some supernatural ancestors).⁴⁴ But if Johor (the heir to Malacca) serves as the conduit for the new religion of the Malay world, Islam, it also channels the legitimacy of ancient Malacca and its forerunners to this state on the eastern frontier and periphery of Malay culture. The repeated references to the sacred instruments resonate with this deeper background.

With the rise of Islam, there was a novel cultural factor for differentiation between the states of the region. Nevertheless, initially the old pattern of international hierarchy did not adjust to changes of religious allegiance. In the Brunei chronicle itself, no sooner have we learned about the 'conveyance of title' from Johor than we read that the first Sultan gave his daughter's hand in marriage to a Chinese merchant-prince, whom he then proceeded to appoint as his heir. Alternatively it was the Sultan's brother who became his heir and married the sister of the Chinese merchant-prince.⁴⁵ All tastes seem to be catered for by the variety of versions, but the essence of it is that religion was not yet a bar to dynastic and strategic alliance.⁴⁶

11.15 Malay States and the expansion of Thai power

As has been remarked, on the threshold of the modern era Malay States on the moving, southern frontier of Thai power and culture accepted Siamese suzerainty in the classical way – albeit not without some reservations as the emergent Chakri State revealed its newly centralizing imperatives. The following excerpt illustrates a phase of transition between the ancient mould and a more bureaucratized and dynamic system of relations between centre and periphery, in which religious and cultural difference would add to any tensions naturally arising:

From the end of the thirteenth century, when Siam first made conquests in the Malay Peninsula, the south had been an important area of expansion of the Siamese empire. The area over which Siam exercised control fluctuated considerably, but by the end of the Ayut'ia period (1767) the northern parts of the peninsula down through Nakhon Srithammarat (or, commonly, Nakhon) and Songkhla had been firmly incorporated in the kingdom as provinces and Siam's suzerainty had been established over Pattani and Kedah. Siamese ties to the peninsula were temporarily broken by the Burmese defeat of Ayut'ia in 1767, which left Siam without a central government. The Burmese took over peninsular Siam from Chumpon to Nakhon, and the vassal states affirmed their independence.

Under the programme of reunification of Siam begun by King Taksin of Thonburi and continued by the first two kings of the Bangkok dynasty,

Siam's peninsular dominions were recovered. By the time Rama III came to the throne his vigorous predecessors had not only recovered all territory in the peninsula that Siam had previously held but also added two new vassal states – Kelantan and Trengganu – to the kingdom. The Bangkok kings had also established Siamese claims to Perak, which had been successfully invaded by Kedah and had thereby become a tributary of Siam. Perak, however, had succeeded, with the aid of the Sultan of Selangor, in severing connections with Siam two years before Rama III came to the throne. Rama III had every intention of reclaiming Perak and continuing the policy of expansion to the south.

Although the most spectacular evidence of Siamese expansion on the peninsula was, of course, the addition of new vassal states, Siamese expansion had also been proceeding in quieter ways that promised more lasting results. The gradual increase in the proportion of Siamese living in Malay areas on the peninsula, although probably not consciously sponsored by the Siamese government, was certainly a factor in the Siamese expansion southwards. By the reign of Rama III, Siamese were already a majority in all parts of the peninsula that had been incorporated as provinces in the kingdom, and the Siamese minority in the vassal states – particularly in Pattani – was large and growing.⁴⁷

Probably in pursuit of the long-term goal of absorbing additional Malay territories into Siam proper, the Siamese Government constantly sought to tighten and expand administrative control over these southern vassals. In theory, the Siamese vassal states such as Kedah, Pattani, Kelantan and Trengganu, were in a tributary relationship to Bangkok, i.e. not directly governed as an integral part of the kingdom as were Songkhla, Nakhon, and the peninsular provinces further north. The vassals were expected to send tribute to Bangkok consisting of ornamental gold and silver trees known as *bunga mas* once every three years. Gifts and emissaries were also expected in Bangkok on special occasions, while vassal states were expected to provide arms, men, and supplies in times of war. Their foreign relations were handled by Bangkok and their rulers had to be confirmed in office by Bangkok. The Malay rulers, or Sultans, and their principal officials received Siamese titles and insignia of office (in fact the rulers were termed 'Governors' by the Siamese, bearing the title of *Phrayaa*). In return for assuming the responsibilities of vassalage, these states were guaranteed protection from external threats and allowed to live under their own laws, customs and rulers.

Within this outline of suzerain–vassal relationships, Vella continues, considerable variation existed, but this was largely a reflection of relative distance from the centre, or of the ebb and flow of administrative and military coherence at Bangkok. Naturally, in the absence of bonds of language, culture or religion with the Siamese, it was Thai military power, plus the divided condition of the Malay States among themselves, that kept the latter within the ambit of Thai hegemony.⁴⁸

11.16 Bali: a 'theatre state'

As sketched in Chapter 1, the absence of either international trade, Dutch political interest, or Islam, allowed Bali to remain a cultural 'backwater', preserving unique forms from an ancient era. The following extract owes its main interest to two arguments: first, that 'Indianized' civilization derived its legitimacy in significant degree from its international 'lineage' as a legacy of the conquest of Bali by Majapahit; and second, that this partly fossilized Indianized State-form reveals that ritual in such a structure was an end in itself. In fact, first and foremost, it did not merely exist to serve the State, but the State existed in order to perform it.

The expressive nature of the Balinese State was apparent through the whole of its known history, for it was always pointed not toward tyranny, whose systematic concentration of power it was incompetent to effect, and not even very methodically toward government, which it pursued indifferently and hesitantly, but rather toward spectacle, toward ceremony, toward the public dramatization of the ruling obsessions of Balinese culture: social inequality and status pride. It was a Theatre State in which kings and princes were the impresarios, the priests the directors, and the peasants the supporting cast, stage crew, and audience. The stupendous cremations, tooth filings, temple dedications, pilgrimages, and blood sacrifices, mobilizing hundreds and even thousands of people and great quantities of wealth, were not means to political ends: they were the ends themselves, they were what the State was for. Court ceremonialism was the driving force of court politics; and mass ritual was not a device to shore up the State, but rather the State, even in its final gasp, was a device for the enactment of mass ritual. Power served pomp, not pomp power.

Behind this, to us, strangely reversed relationship between the substance and the trappings of rule lies a general conception of the nature and basis of sovereignty that, merely for simplicity, we may call the doctrine of the exemplary centre. This is the theory that the court-and-capital is at once a microcosm of the supernatural order – 'an image of ... the universe on a smaller scale' – and the material embodiment of political order. It is not just the nucleus, the engine, or the pivot of the state, it *is* the state. The equation of the seat of rule with the dominion of rule, which the *negara* concept expresses, is more than an accidental metaphor; it is a statement of a controlling political idea – namely, that by the mere act of providing a model, a paragon, a faultless image of civilized existence, the court shapes the world around it into at least a rough approximation of its own excellence. The ritual life of the court, and in fact the life of the court generally, is thus paradigmatic, not merely reflective, of social order. What it is reflective of, the priests declare, is supernatural order, 'the timeless Indian world of the gods' upon which men should, in strict proportion to their status, seek to pattern their lives.⁴⁹

The crucial task of legitimation, Geertz continues (the reconciliation of this political metaphysic with the existing distribution of power in nineteenth-century Bali, as he puts it) was achieved by a myth of colonization, referring to the conquest of Bali in 1343 by the great east-Javanese kingdom of Majapahit. (The king of Bali defeated at this time features as a supernatural monster with the head of a pig.) In this momentous event the Balinese see the source of virtually their entire civilization; in other words, they regard themselves as descendants of the Javanese invaders, not the ur-Balinese defenders. This myth – not the only one in the world of this type – became the origin tale which explained and justified actual relations of command and obedience, superseding the epoch of chaos, demons and villains.

Although the content of that preceding epoch is more or less blank to Balinese memory, events following the conquest are quite well elaborated. Gajah Mada, the famous Prime Minister of Majapahit, asked for spiritual assistance from a Javanese Brahmana priest in pacifying the chaotic (because now rulerless) Bali. Gajah Mada appointed one of the four semi-divine grandchildren of the priest to govern Bali. This new king duly established his court, in 1352, at Samprangan, not far from where the pig's-head ruler had met his fate. Order was soon wrought out of anarchy with the aid of both the inborn charismatic force of the king and various sacred objects carried as heirlooms from Majapahit. Subsequently, down to the seventeenth century, there was occasional turbulence, and finally the unity of the ruling class, and the kingdom, were shattered and a number of minor power centres established, though still acknowledging the spiritual superiority of the principal centre, or *negara*. The fundamental point of this legend is that it gives concrete expression to the Balinese view of their political development, comprising the foundation of a Javanese court which, at its second location (at Gelgel), had a palace designed to mirror in exact detail the palace of that most exemplary of exemplary centres, Majapahit itself. What was created was not just a centre of power – that had existed before – but a standard of civilization. The Majapahit conquest is seen as cutting ancient Bali off from animal barbarism and ushering in a renescent society of aesthetic elegance and liturgical splendour. The transfer of the capital was the transfer of a civilization. Correspondingly, however, the later dispersion of the capital was the dispersion of the civilization. Thus Bali's experience of an uplifting colonization is followed (in the myth, at any rate) by a decline of unity: not a relentless, upward progression but a gradual dissipation of a classic model of perfection.⁵⁰

11.17 Historical foundations of Indonesian political culture

This section is more relevant to Chapter 4 than to Chapter 1. It was suggested that we need to take note of the nature of the royal or aristocratic legacy in Javanese culture, in expectation of explanatory leads in the area of late twentieth-century social leadership and political power, and what impact these

factors had on political cohesion in the Republic of Indonesia. Here, first of all, is a summary of a passage from Robert R. Jay on the transmission of monarchical values across the colonial period, by way of a native class structure, an essentially non-colonial bureaucracy, and a philosophical tradition which seems to have flourished in almost direct proportion to the intellectual opposition of Islam and loss of political power to the Dutch.

The major, relevant feature in this saga has been the alignment of the Javanese aristocracy and bureaucracy with the syncretic form of Islam, showing a latent antipathy towards those aligned locally with a relatively orthodox form. While Jay avoids any causal argument for this development, he does see a close formal consistency between the social and cultural position of the aristocracy and bureaucratic elements on the one hand, and the philosophical and aesthetic character of their syncretism on the other, which is in most respects a carry-over from the pre-Islamic philosophical system. These formal connections, or 'congruences', are distinguishable from the obvious immediate cause of the cultural alignment, namely, personal commitment to the Mataram ruler and the State apparatus. First, the Javanese bureaucracy itself was/is intensely hierarchical – a phenomenon which is paralleled in the philosophical sphere by the Javanese definition of personal spiritual power as reciprocally related to political and social rank, which in turn is defined as proximity to the ruler. Second, grace of movement and refinement of speech, and their elaboration in literary and dramatic forms, are an obvious intellectual delight in Javanese culture – a phenomenon which (being upheld quintessentially by this bureaucratic class) is paralleled by the identification, in syncretist philosophy, of spiritual power with inner poise, calm, controlled movement, and social fixity. There seems to have been a great increase during the eighteenth century in the elaboration of just these cultural elements, something of a late 'Byzantine flowering' of traditional Javanese culture at the central Javanese courts of Mataram. Not that Mataram was able to strengthen itself *vis-à-vis* its orthodox opponents: on the contrary, its power was in process of eclipse by the Dutch, who were increasingly taking over the court's old struggle with orthodoxy. Yet it was precisely this loss in external interests that stimulated the courts to such heights of cultural refinement, as if the Javanese aristocracy, relieved of political responsibility, opted to put their energies into further elaboration of traditional culture and its congruent syncretist philosophy. The alternative, tacitly rejected, would have been to veer towards more orthodox Islamic culture and theology. But orthodox Islam in Java has been puritanically averse to cultural elaborations, and has also maintained a relatively egalitarian bias in social relations. These aspects of the 'rival' cultural current ensured that there would be no merger.⁵¹

The continuity of this bureaucratic culture-with-royal-antecedents is seen, after Indonesian Independence, in values and patterns of the centre-periphery relationship – precisely those which were implied by the rejection of federalism as Indonesia's state structure by 1950. Here is an important passage from Anderson:

It should be readily apparent that the traditional concept of Power in Java provides a coherent perspective within which to view the structure and operations of the patrimonial State. In the first place, the image of the proportional fading of the lamp's radiance with increasing distance does not merely correspond to the decline of the ruler's Power *vis-à-vis* a neighbouring ruler at the periphery of his domains. It can be applied with equal aptness to the centre-province struggle to which Weber and Schrieke attach such importance. Indeed within the traditional perspective no clear analytical distinction can be made between a powerful provincial notable and a rival sovereign. Each is potentially the other, depending on the Power that the centre can accumulate. The cone of light's luminosity expands as the ruler is able to force the submission of rival rulers and demote them to the status of provincial notables; it contracts as provincial notables free themselves from the centre and establish their own independent areas of rule. The dreaded 'looseness' at the centre corresponds then to successful pressures for decentralization, and the admired 'tautness' to the successful imposition of centralization.

Secondly, what Weber and Schrieke note as the highly personalistic character of patrimonial rule,⁵² in which the corps of officials is regarded as an extension of the person of the ruler, implies that proximity to the ruler, rather than formal rank, is the key to power in such a state. The commoner ministeriales owe their ascendancy to this proximity. Ultimately everything depends on the personal Power of the ruler. The emanation of this Power reveals itself in a quite undifferentiated way along three separate axes: the centre-periphery axis, which we have already discussed; the 'ascriptive' axis, or the diachronic diffusion of a powerful ruler's seminal Power through seven generations of descendants; and the patron-client or administrative axis, whereby the Power of the highest patron (the ruler) seeps down through descending strata of patron-client clusters till it reaches the peasant base of the society.⁵³

The point is that proximity to the ruler was a more politically significant relationship than might have been expected by comparing the ancestry of the ruler and his ministers of commoner origin. This is germane, Anderson argues, for understanding some aspects of political behaviour in contemporary Indonesia. Given the marked consonance of the traditional Javanese concept of Power with the political structures and behaviour of the patrimonial State, it will not be surprising if the marked 'indigenization' of bureaucratic structures and behaviour after the middle 1950s was accompanied by an apparent reemergence of the patrimonial model. This will no doubt have been due in part to the fact that the rational-legal bureaucracy bequeathed by the Dutch could not sustain itself economically, but the resilience of traditional perspectives so consonant with patrimonialism must also have played a causal role. The continuing impact of old conceptions about relationships between centre and provinces as indicators of the 'health' of the realm must have played their part, also, in the

striking unwillingness of the *pusat* (centre) to accede to demands for decentralization and regional autonomy in the late parliamentary period (1956–58). Then, when the centre triumphed over the regional rebellion in 1958 and Guided Democracy was consolidated, one saw a great increase in the appointment of ‘ministeriales’ to key military and civilian posts in the regional bureaucracy. ‘Ministeriales’ also appeared in the new, centrally appointed administrative positions of governor and *bupati* (regent), owing their appointments more to their loyalty to Jakarta than to any special administrative competence.⁵⁴

11.18 Objections to ‘long-range causation’

For our purposes in Chapter 1, section 1.3 (the discussion about historians’ objections to the notion of long-range causation), an important point is that in the very act of selecting certain contexts and certain ‘layers’ of the past as relevant, historians are also signalling that a great deal more has got to be excluded, and that their willingness to exclude much more confirms their credentials as practitioners of an ‘art’ which is yet highly ‘scientific’ in spirit.⁵⁵ To seek causation in remote epochs, *vis-à-vis* the present, reminds them of the pretentious charting of the rise and fall of whole civilizations by philosophers of history, or the vain attempts of cultural anthropologists to compare and classify whole societies according to their artefacts and folklore. It all smacks of ‘overarching theory’, which is not what historiography in an enlightened age (whatever the Enlightenment may have felt about it) should or can be about.⁵⁶ Even the interest of the French *Annales* school in ‘cultural ambiances’, as a crucible of a kind of causation, offers little mileage for any theory of long-range cultural nexuses in South-East Asia, for the *Annales* method is no good at accounting for change – tending to chart ‘mental phenomena’ over a long period as if nothing at all ever does change, it has been suggested.⁵⁷ This is not, therefore, going to be the starting-point for a new determinism in place of Marxism, nor even for a revival of the ‘Idealist’ approach which posits the existence of a ‘spirit’ or ‘idea’ informing particular human institutions in various times and places.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, one could take some encouragement from Hughes’ optimism in this general connection: while not siding with any of the metaphysical tendencies which (as he notes) have achieved prominence in modern times side by side with the more influential stand of those historians ‘obsessed with the particular and strictly factual’, he believes in the possibility of striking a balance between the extremes of this fixation on particular situations and the love of generalization characteristic of the social sciences. He has one particularly encouraging passage where he proposes a way of adumbrating the contours of the past from present observation, not using the past to explain the present;⁵⁹ but is not the present, thus observed, the ‘product’, vice versa, of the past that is to be reconstructed?

It would be logical enough to refer, at this point, to E.H. Carr. For a reasonably sympathetic and context-explicating commentary on his diluted ‘determinism’, which had in view the role of long-term predisposing factors for certain

developments as distinct from the precipitating or triggering (and thus not seriously causal) role of the individual, Richard Evans may be consulted.⁶⁰ As a study of the original text also shows,⁶¹ the 'determinism' in question has nothing to do with the notion of 'historical inevitability' which certain critics were alleging against any serious search for causation, but reflects an optimistic belief in the possibility of eliciting a reasonable hierarchy of 'relevant' causes of events, where, if such causes were absent, the events themselves would not have occurred. Out of this kind of intellectual activity, also, certain fruitful generalizations about historical process could be derived.⁶²

11.19 The sociological theory of charisma

Max Weber, one of the fathers of modern Western sociology, devised a scheme of 'ideal types' to denote, for analytical purposes, the major bases of legitimacy in historical political systems. Each of these types of legitimacy, as defined by Weber, was in fact associated with, indeed unthinkable without, a particular structure of political organization. Another way of saying this is that successful power-holders or leaders must conform to the prevailing institutional norms. The two main types of institutionalized system, or structure, that Weber identified (apart from the very earliest, 'patrimonial' system of the tribal society), were the 'traditional', based on transmitted custom (the typical leader would be the hereditary head of a clan, still 'patrimonial' but now constrained by a corpus of received 'tradition'); and the 'legal-rational', based on or linked to a modern bureaucracy (the typical leader owes his authority to election or appointment under legislated rules, and to conformity to written law and regulation). Very importantly, Weber was concerned to capture the essence of these fundamental types of authority in order to be able to understand the dynamics of change from one system or 'level' to another, in other words the key to historical change. So far so easy – though of course, it can quickly be seen as too 'easy', too simplifying, as one begins to apply the theory to concrete cases, and many historians reject it out of hand as intellectually corrupted and corrupting.⁶³

There is an interesting note of warning from Pye, in a passage which points out that Weber's typology does not exactly lead us to expect paternalistic authority persisting or reviving in a modern, nation-state context:

Convention holds that paternalistic authority can survive only in small arenas, such as tribes, feudal fiefdoms, outlaw bands like the Mafia, family enterprises, or companies operating in backward environments. The imperatives of successful organizational management supposedly preclude the continuation of paternalistic practices. Max Weber declared that patrimonial authority, his version of what we are calling paternalistic authority, was historically superseded by three more profound forms of authority – traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal. Yet in Asian political cultures the establishment of the nation-state as the basic framework of politics and

government has not weakened, and indeed in many cases has strengthened, the ideals of paternalistic authority.⁶⁴

Now once we begin to think along the lines of combinations or interactions between different types of authority, it becomes easier to postulate that one type has served the survival or revival of another. This brings us directly to 'charismatic leadership' – Weber's third category, over which controversy is most rampant. Weber's charismatic leader is one who sets himself in conscious opposition to some established aspects of the society in which he works: he is, in effect, a revolutionary at heart; he may invoke a divine mission or transcendental qualities in justifying his demand of obedience; his followers may credit him with these qualities on the basis of epic achievement (which their own obedience, maybe, has made possible), or the sheer daring and originality of breaking away from the established norms; and a great historic transformation of the society and its political order may result. But – we may ask – can a leader genuinely operate 'without the law'? An important part of Weber's own theory is the notion that for perpetuation of the new order, if one has been inaugurated, charismatic authority can and must be 'routinized', i.e. be transformed in line with the creation of institutional structures of either the 'traditional' or the 'legal-rational' type. And an important part of the empirical, mid-twentieth-century world is that, even in situations of highly 'novel' leadership amidst apparent 'chaos', it normally transpires upon enquiry that the leaders dubbed 'charismatic' have operated in a framework of existing, normative belief about the authority for social action, or their authority can be seen to be simultaneously in part 'traditional', part 'rule-bound', in nature.⁶⁵ It is also both important and helpful to acknowledge that, if at all there is a distinctly 'charismatic' form of 'leadership', it is conceptually distinct from 'rule', any particular structure of government. But once this is agreed, it becomes easier to grasp that legitimacy can derive from an eclectic range or combination of principles.⁶⁶ In short, authority is not tied exclusively and irrevocably to, and should not be defined by, particular structures – not even to/by a situation of chaos, which, although structureless, is nevertheless a condition defined by reference to structure.

More importantly still, although it does not follow completely logically, it is not completely surprising either, if all types of government structure, institutions, even ideologies, are found to partake of some degree of charisma, understood in its original meaning of 'a quality of sacredness' or 'inherent transcendence'.⁶⁷ From there it could be argued that, while Shils was applying his analysis to modern societies, the value of returning to the original meaning may be much greater for theorization about the historical roots of contemporary South-East Asian legitimacy, for is it not manifest that there will have been a far higher 'charismatic quotient' (as to both the quantity of infused objects and the intensity of their infusion) in ancient societies whose politics were conceptualized ideologically as a branch of religious activity? Of course 'traditional' authority, in Weber's sense of 'custom', was also present – certainly far more than any 'rule-based' authority.⁶⁸ The morality of 'righteous kingship', and 'custom'

generally, are particularly complementary with charisma, indeed, may at first sight seem to be the more likely source of the values of paternalistic authority in the modern age. However, custom as such can only be transmitted across time by being practised without any effective break, whereas cultural objects and ideas which are endowed with a transcendental or mystical quality akin to 'magical potency' may constitute a more durable force, independent of continuing political institutions but ever on hand to legitimate new institutions by association with them in due course.

What is being argued, in fact, is that Weber can and should be turned almost completely on his head: instead of (revolutionary) charisma being inevitably superseded by kinds of authority appropriate to either a 'traditional' structure or a 'legal-rational' structure through 'routinization' as these structures take over, on the contrary, (religio-magical) charisma is available for 'reinforcement' of those other kinds of authority which on Weber's conceptual terms could never be combined with it. This is naturally at the expense of some adaptation on the part of the kinds of authority being reinforced, giving to South-East Asian politics that authoritarian flavour which offends human rights activists but is lauded by proponents of 'Asian values'. The politico-cultural ambience is also one which particularly favours the perpetuation of monarchy wherever monarchy has indeed survived into the present. On the other hand, where it has not survived, there is virtually no chance of revival, since incumbent elites are adept at tapping the same charismatic values for their own legitimization and self-perpetuation, which a monarchical revival would place in doubt.⁶⁹ The Malaysian case may confirm the 'neo-monarchical' tendency rather than monarchical perpetuation, since an elected leader of considerable longevity has been eroding the autonomy of the Sultans while increasingly claiming that he is the true representative and heir of 'Malay tradition'.⁷⁰

11.20 Charisma in the context of social breakdown

Conceivably, the great appeal of Weber's idea for twentieth-century Western sociology lay originally in the fact that it addressed situations of social breakdown, accompanied by irrational behaviour, as typified by the period of the rise of Nazism in Germany. Subsequently, it seemed to have relevance to the rise of a new kind of leader, sometimes called 'messianic', in newly independent countries of the 'Third World' where the masses are afflicted by 'existential anxiety' or an 'identity vacuum'.⁷¹ But as soon as we begin to conceive that a revolutionary-nationalist leader is personifying 'the national identity', it is difficult to imagine him doing this except by invoking some image of the race and the role of its leadership handed down from the past. Thus we are quickly referred back to the conception that there can never be a real vacuum as to 'structures of belief', even if 'structures of social organization' break down from time to time. Even the charismatic leader – or perhaps precisely the charismatic leader – appeals to a sense of the loss, or betrayal, of the authoritative values which assured the cohesion and well-being of society before: he promises to restore, in some form,

what was lost. No doubt there will be a promise of radical modernization, in keeping with the times, and this may make the leader look, at first sight, like a man with no moral roots. But if we examine the whole range of symbols that he manipulates, we are very likely to find historic images featuring large among them.⁷²

This is even more naturally predictable if we have accepted that 'charisma' is an authority-type, or perceived quality of leadership, not specific to one structure of action or organization alone. For instance, in Old Java, it has been argued:

[A]ll rule was charismatic insofar as it was based on belief in Power. Bureaucracy there was, but it drew its legitimacy and authority from the radiant centre, which was seen to suffuse the whole structure with its energy. In such a society, 'charisma' was not a temporary phenomenon of crisis, but the permanent, routine, organizing principle of the State.⁷³

Clearly, therefore, the key to the authority of a modern, so-called 'charismatic' leader – such as Sukarno, in the case of Java – will have to be sought, in no small measure, in his ability to tap these local conceptions of the nature of power, and thus to appear to be summoning or conjuring a reconcentration of that precious quality which had been dissipated, not sweeping old types of authority away as the core Weberian concept proposes.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, objections to the concept of charisma continue to be strongly held, here and there, not only because Weber cut it off from established structures and cultural traditions, but because some political scientists, and particularly journalists, have cut it off completely from Weber's motivating social and psychological context, using the term without any rigour whatsoever, sometimes to mean no more than that a leader can sway his followers by his demagoguery.⁷⁵ The present writer admits to finding some attraction in the notion of the reintegrating function of epic potential and performance in a situation of social breakdown. And in some situations 'epic stature' may even be perceived by the followers because a touch of unorthodoxy and unpredictability was an element in ancient expectations from the exercise of power. However, it seems generally unlikely that the epic leader will go as far as to destroy existing structures if they are functioning well. At most, when the founder of a new religion is the man in question, he may be motivated by the perception that the structures have broken down, at least in the sense of being morally bankrupt. In modern times, however, as 'new' states have arisen to replace the colonial regimes which had succeeded to the old states, a sense of moral vacuum may be quite widespread – the new succession being in some ways more traumatic or discontinuous than the earlier one. There is thus a reintegrating function waiting to be fulfilled. And this is where 'charismatic leadership' may come into its own: not in Weber's sense of a leadership which destroys the past but one which draws one part of its moral strengths from the past, even while promising 'modernity' and 'progress' to its followers.

11.21 Moral excellence versus precise boundaries

Relevant, possibly, to the concept of empires of fluctuating extent, in which subsidiary centres look up to the superior 'centre' without being directly controlled by it (cf. section 11.11, above), is the late Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin of Brunei's non-prioritizing attitude to modern territorial sovereignty, as seen in two important instances. One was the case of extraordinary 'modesty' when he turned down opportunities of a re-expansion of his diminished realm in the 1950s as the potentially leading partner in a Northern Borneo Federation, as if it were more important to radiate a moral example around the region than to have one's excellence defined by a particular extent of territory. The other was where, after he had turned down that chance, Sultan Omar turned towards merger with Malaysia. In such a union Brunei would have been very far from enjoying a leading role, and certainly it would have reduced the significance of having any precise boundaries at all. Nevertheless, since it proved economically possible, in the event, to reach for a separate Independence, the very modesty of Brunei's geographical extent has enabled absolutism to operate within these narrow borders with an intensity which in some ways lacks any historical precedent.⁷⁶ However, in the curious case of Brunei not wanting to expand, in the mid-1950s, there was a possible pragmatic consideration in play: the fear of Muslim monarchy being swamped by Iban democracy.⁷⁷ In the equally curious case of being willing to suffer a loss of 'demarcation' through merger, in the early 1960s, one could possibly point to an acute fear of insecurity in face of international threat, which made merger with Malaysia seem the lesser of two evils.

11.22 Monarchist historiography in contemporary Thailand

***Commentary on a text by Kukrit Pramoj*⁷⁸**

On the surface, this essay is an exercise in popular cultural history-writing – an non-chronological tale of Thai monarchy through the ages, centred on an attempt to explain the origins of certain rituals and beliefs, of which vestiges survive today. But at the same time the author offers a theory of the 'staying power' of Thai monarchy in terms of a mixture of ideological elements: a mixture of Thai 'freedom' and Khmer 'despotism' in which the former persists and is always in the end decisive, even when the Khmer influence seems to have won the upper hand. There is a clear emotional and ideological parallel, I think, with the English idea of Norman yoke versus Anglo-Saxon liberty. The fact that the Khmer ideology was not imposed on the Thais by a 'Norman conquest' but by the Thai kings themselves is not emphasized as much as the case perhaps demands, but Kukrit does clearly affirm that 'we Thais' compelled Thai monarchs to conform to the national genius and thereby enabled the monarchy to survive. Appropriately enough, the existence of a Thai national identity or at least ethnic self-consciousness as Thais, and their will to survive in that form, are

assumed uncritically for the whole period of one thousand years surveyed by the essay. But it is interesting that the Thai love of freedom which characterizes the national spirit in Kukrit's account is never even illustrated by reference to some later conquest. Even the revival of Thai culture after the sack of Ayut'ia by the Burmese is not invoked. Rather, Thai 'independence' expresses itself in this essay as independence from internal despotism and the whole mystical apparatus that goes with it. In fact, the fundamental motif of the Thai 'soul' as interpreted by Kukrit is not its 'love of freedom' as such but a broad humanism which rejects all manner of unreason and superstition. To me this seems as unhistorical as it is ideological. Is not Kukrit projecting an absurdly modern picture of pre-modern Thai culture, for a modern ideological purpose: namely, to legitimate contemporary monarchy by bringing its antecedents into close association with contemporary values?

At the same time, Kukrit gives an attractive account of many of the traditional features of the monarchy in times past, as well as some of the residual ritual of today. But it is residual, and this aspect of the presentation may be informed or motivated by the sentiment that 'tradition' should be kept alive and brought to people's attention because it can be a source of national consciousness and pride in the modern world. In other words, Kukrit's attitude towards 'tradition' seems self-consciously instrumental or manipulative. He is merely, with one hand, putting some artificial glamour back into an institution which he himself, with the other hand, is actively demystifying – or which the passage of time will demystify in any case.⁷⁹

The demystification of monarchy would certainly tend, I think, to be one of the subtle effects of the essay. I do not know how far Kukrit may be conscious of such a purpose or whether it is a side-effect of the attempt to legitimate through retrospective association with, and subjection to, contemporary humanistic, populist and nationalist values. (Either way, writings such as this may fulfil the same function for monarchy as, according to Kukrit, Thai values did in the past: i.e. to mould it to the needs of time and place and thus guarantee its perpetuation.) Demystification may certainly come naturally to a man of high birth and genius who loves the King but has no reason to fear him.⁸⁰ Kukrit's uninhibited, even humorous accounts of some destructive taboos and practices which persisted into the early modern period show how he himself is emancipated from the pervasive contemporary taboo of 'delicacy' about all matters which might in any way give offence to the Royal Family.⁸¹ Did not some malicious minds turn to thinking, of Kukrit, during his premiership: 'With so much charisma of his own, does such a man need a monarch?'⁸² Even without personal charisma Kukrit came to the office of Prime Minister through the electoral process and was in no way dependent on the King, however deep his devotion. In short, a truly modern Prime Minister; and one who, subsequently, in the pages of *Sayaam Rad Sabdaa Wicaan* would not conceal his contempt for 'the other type': those who get their office by appointment.⁸³

11.23 Contemporary Thailand: people and monarchy

***Commentary on a text by Tanin Kraivixien*⁸⁴**

I will start by noting an apparent contradiction between Tanin's concluding statement, which makes the survival of the monarchy logically dependent on the survival of the Thai race; and the major theme of the book, which is that the survival of the Thai race has been and will be dependent on the survival of the monarchy. But the criteria of strict logic may be beside 'the point' – which in this case is probably an essentially ideological one: namely, Tanin is not predicting, but prescribing, preservation of the monarchy,⁸⁵ as a means to a completely consistent end, the survival of the Thai race.⁸⁶

The criteria of strict logic appear to be irrelevant in another, more profound respect. Superficially this is a highly methodical and pedagogical presentation by learned Professor of Law Tanin Kraivixien, laying the foundations of a scientific analysis of the monarchical institution in Thai society. But there is no pretence but that this 'scientific analysis' is intended as a normative rationale, phrased in appropriately 'modern' terms, for the preservation of the present monarchy. Such an ideological use of social science then provides the linkage, or smooth transition, in turn, to the more dynamic parts of the argument, those couched in terms of hagiography and patriotic rhetoric of rare emotional intensity.⁸⁷

A comparison with Kukrit's essay will be fruitful. I noted that Kukrit gives an attractive account of 'tradition' but ultimately (consciously or unconsciously) the effect is to demystify the monarchy. With Tanin, by contrast, an ostensible exercise in showing how rational it is to have a monarch (and how up-to-date the present one is) invokes and revives the 'pre-modern' values of tribal identity, patriarchalism and royal charisma. Of course the 'irrational' loyalty of many Thais to their sovereign is a social and political reality, but it is a reality which Tanin is determined not merely to describe but to consolidate and extend. Although he claims that popular wonderment at the achievements of King Bhumiphol has nothing to do with the ancient belief in the King's divinity,⁸⁸ he posits a link (without the Kukritian dimension of 'Thais forcing their kings to be Thai') to the patriarchal ideology of Sukhothai, and he infers a transcendental factor, mediated by Buddhist piety, in the present King's extraordinary energy and intelligence.⁸⁹ Where Kukrit demystifies, Tanin remystifies.

It is curious, almost, that Tanin should pretend to be an advocate of 'democracy' at all. But the democratic prescription which one may piece together from Tanin's pages – at least for Thailand – is nothing if not a conservative one. It follows the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Monarchs in its insistence on a very slow mobilization of the masses for political participation and avoidance of innovation for innovation's sake. Now that the die is cast and constitutionalism irrevocably launched nonetheless, it remains to ensure as wide a scope as possible for the extra-constitutional initiatives and leadership of the King. The King is said to promote 'democracy' in economic and social, as well as political, fields.⁹⁰ This observation, taken together with Tanin's emphasis on the paternalism of

the monarchy in the past, indicates that welfare is a more critical component of 'democracy' than participation: very much a case of 'outputs' exceeding 'inputs' (apart from passive support). One might call this the 'bureaucratic model' of (and for) the Thai polity but for the fact that Tanin does not attempt at any point to analyse Thai bureaucratic power: monarchical absolutism ends abruptly in 1932, but it is not made clear to whom power then devolves. Presumably 'the people'? Yet there are more than a few hints about the opportunism of the People's Party, as if the interests of 'the people' had somehow been left out of account in the course of political development. Indeed, one senses that it is almost necessary and functional that the people should have been neglected since 1932, for this gives scope for the exercise of the King's paternalism. In the same way, by logical but ironical extension, even political anarchy may have a function for the monarchy (as in October 1973 – but what if things got right out of hand?) because breakdowns of order provide the King with his recurrent pretexts for political intervention.

But the last consideration is certainly not the reason why Tanin refrains from blaming the democracy of 1973–76 for such scandals as anti-monarchical propaganda! The nearest he gets to a criticism of democratic politics in Thailand is in his hint that foreign policy was mishandled in 1976.⁹¹ He even cites as 'heroes' the students whose action precipitated the fall of the 'Three Tyrants' in 1973.⁹² The most plausible explanation would be that the King himself took the side of 'the people' and 'democracy' against the military strongmen on that occasion. Thus again the motif of abuse of bureaucratic power (how close all this is to what we know of the King's own thinking!). And if for any reason other than modesty or haste Tanin neglects to include the King's selection of himself as Prime Minister among the examples of national salvation through felicitous royal intervention, may it not be because democracy was brought to an end by a military coup? Tanin speaks of the 1974 Democratic Constitution almost as if the short, NARC version had not superseded it.⁹³ Of course, Tanin's model for 'democracy' is the 'bureaucratic model' and he is a bureaucrat through and through, but given bureaucratic rule, the prescriptive question at issue is: 'Which bureaucrats?' Certainly not the men of 1932 and their political progeny.⁹⁴

Much of this is latent rather than explicit in a book which is extraordinarily sparse on the detail and dynamics of recent political events, and which ostensibly maintains the legitimacy of the 1974 Constitution. But as Premier, Tanin was true to these latent prescriptions, and introduced a plan for a return to full representative democracy only after twelve years, naming it the 'Chulalongkorn Plan' (I have not yet pointed out that the thoughts of Rama V on political modernization and royal responsibility are quite extensively quoted in the book).⁹⁵

However, such a conservative conception of democratic development was repugnant to the deeply held convictions of a number of articulate groups, and since Tanin was, at the same time, uncooperative with his military sponsors (the NARC), a tacit anti-Tanin alliance sprang up between the military leadership and assorted 'democratic forces' with the result that we know: Tanin was ousted

in October 1977 and a limited form of representative democracy restored by the military by way of the December 1978 Constitution and elections in April 1979.

Both by default (in failing to build alliances with any influential interest) and by conscious choice Tanin was 'the King's man'. He owed his appointment to the King and probably also his continuation in office for a full six months after the military had decided that he was a political undesirable. In effect, the court was his only 'constituency'. Now if he had come to the Premiership with a modicum of political experience he could have been expected to make certain compromises in the interests of survival, and by surviving in office might well have presided (one may think) over an expansion of the influence of the monarch. But to assume the possibility of success in that objective begs the question whether the military were merely irked by Tanin's obstinate independence of themselves, or alarmed by the prospect of increasing monarchical power. If there was an element of the latter apprehension – if, in short, Tanin represented not just 'reaction' (against democratic excess) but 'restoration' (reversing the bureaucratic and military gains of 1932) – it is difficult to see how he could have survived in any circumstances. In the event, his scrupulous loyalty to principle, which made him so attractive to the King, provided the military with an early pretext to overthrow him: that is, they were able to claim that he was too 'dogmatic' and never had to admit to any deeper motivation in the affair. In reality what may have been much more alarming for the military was Tanin's peculiarly intense relationship with the Thai monarchy or its present incumbent, suggestive of a shared vulnerability: Tanin Kraivixien the 'new Thai', of Chinese ethnic background, anxious to serve his country and establish his Thai identity and patriotic credentials under the King's patronage (yet as an 'outsider' immune from normal group pressures and pleas for Thai 'reasonableness' about corruption); the King, devoting his life self-consciously and simultaneously to a struggle against Communism and the bureaucratic abuses which feed it, yet by that token ever alert to military and bureaucratic resentment of the revival of monarchical power and needful of men of new vision and mental detachment to protect it.⁹⁶

11.24 Modern Thailand: the King and the Constitution

***Précis of an article in a news magazine*⁹⁷**

On 24 June each year we remember the change of administration in 1932. But did it bring us the enjoyment of democracy that was promised, or were there elements of democracy in the previous, monarchical system which would have led Thailand more surely towards a democracy as found in other civilized countries?

The great majority of monarchs under the ancient system of governance observed principles of morality, so their 'dictatorship' was not oppressive. Indeed, the governance of Sukhothai contained many elements of an essential

democracy, wherein the people had both rights and freedom in the pursuit of livelihood, and could present petitions to the monarchy. It was more a system of 'patriarchy' than 'absolute monarchy' - though it is true that in the period of Ayut'ia, under the influence of Khmer Brahmanism, the monarchs became more remote from the people. And yet, even then the people's steadfast adherence to Buddhism constrained the monarchs to rule with virtue and not abuse the excessive power which they had.

The democratic tendency became manifest in a more modern guise with the reign of Rama IV, who saw the necessity of modernizing the administration as Siam developed relations with foreign countries. For instance, freedom of religion was promulgated, and the people were encouraged to come out and gaze at royal processions, instead of staying indoors and shielding their eyes from the awesome divinity. Buddhist principles were the order of the day, the King governing his subjects on the pattern of the Buddha ruling his community of disciples on democratic principles.

In the next reign, although no elective assembly was brought in, the foundations of local government were laid, and the King issued an edict in 1874 relating to a Council of State and a Privy Council (a personal cabinet) from which he should take advice. What Rama V was trying to do was to diffuse responsibility among a wider circle of competent citizens as the complexity of government increased. Indeed, in 1885, a proposal was put up by the staff of the diplomatic service in Paris and London, for a Constitution. Although the King had other priorities, namely to develop a full-time civil service and cadre of competent legislative draftsmen, he insisted that he had no desire to cling to his absolute power for its own sake. In 1892 he carried out a sweeping reorganization of the government, comprising twelve ministries. He took an important step towards democracy in abolishing slavery, and by laying the foundations of economic, social and educational development. Just before his death he expressed the hope that his son would grant a Constitution.

Rama VI acknowledged and embraced this aspiration of his father, and therefore launched the Dusit Thani theatre-experiment in municipal government, the King himself playing a part in the game as plain 'Mr Rama'. Both at Dusit Thani and in society at large, rights of free expression were granted, and the King himself, under various pen-names, took issue with government officials, but without vindictiveness. Sad to say, one group was impatient for an immediate Constitution, and attempted a coup. The King himself had intended to grant a Constitution but was deterred for the time being by the evidence that the people were not yet mature enough to operate democracy. Rama VI was no great advocate of absolute monarchy, whose weaknesses he understood well, especially the problem of inheritance by a King of low intelligence, and the danger of power gravitating to the cronies of a weak or selfish King. Clearly a system in which an incompetent minister could be dismissed in response to popular discontent was far preferable. Nevertheless, by the end of his reign he had not yet had time to grant this 'gift' to the people, as he had wished.

So it fell to Rama VII to make the first, more serious moves, by establishing a State Council and giving a more formal structure to his personal Cabinet/Privy Council. This was all working towards a broadened system of consultation and decision-making. With a future parliament in mind, the King in 1927 issued an edict giving immunity to members of the Privy Council. He also gave the Council the power to call for facts and figures from government ministries. It was beginning to look like the English parliament, with those appointed as ministers being groomed to accept cabinet-type responsibility.

By 1931 the King's plan for a Constitution was far advanced, indeed it had been drafted, with the help of an American adviser. However, some ministers urged delay. In the meantime, the King was preparing to give the people experience of self-government at local level (he saw that it could be fatal for the reputation of democracy in the eyes of the people if it were to fail in its early endeavours). He also directed the young journalist, Kulaab, to set up a newspaper in order to disseminate the concept of democracy.

Yet, in the end, all his projects were forestalled by the coup of 24 June 1932. To avoid bloodshed, the King abdicated his traditional powers. He had been fundamentally guided by the conviction that although democracy was desirable and inevitable, careful preparation was essential, so that irresponsible groups would not be able to seize control of the process, with dreams and promises of utopias. The people must elect representatives truly dedicated to their welfare.

It is thus clear that democratic thought was interwoven with the principles and practice of Thai absolute monarchy from days of yore. But Rama VII's 'slowly-but-surely' principles were apparently too slow for a certain group of individuals, who changed the system of government by coup. And when they could not honour their democratic intentions, they reverted to dictatorship. Absolute power simply shifted from one group to another, but without the mitigating quality of compassion which had typified the rule of Thai Kings.

Notes

1 Introduction

- 1 Cf. Trevor-Roper (1983); Cannadine (1983).
- 2 Nevertheless, it may be acknowledged that the concept of a 'South-East Asia' which includes Vietnam only originated in the name of a war zone in World War II. The countries of the region – as defined – then came to be grouped together for purposes of academic organization, regardless of presence or absence of cultural affinity.
- 3 Tambiah (1976), *passim*. The following lines are paraphrased from passages in pp. 24–25, 52–53, 70, 89–90, 110–112.
- 4 This thesis seems logically distinct from that whereby power, in Theravada Buddhist societies, is taken as a sign of great, karmic merit by definition, and is therefore self-justifying, regardless of whether the holder actually practises merit in this life (as where a king protects the Sangha). Cf. Hanks (1962).
- 5 Ayut'ia has perhaps proved easier to discredit by virtue of the fact that the capital city was totally destroyed, with all the documents relating to its government and history, by a Burmese army in 1767. For further discussion of Buddhism and Ayut'ia see Chapter 11, section 11.12.
- 6 Geertz (1980).
- 7 For discussion of these dimensions of historical explanation, see, for instance, Tosh (1991: 116, 118–119); Evans (1997: 159).
- 8 Jenkins (1991: 50–52).
- 9 On differences of interpretation see Tosh (1991: 140–141). This feature of the modern historian's craft relates partly, of course, to the plethora of methodologies now available, referred to by Tosh (this reference) and Jenkins (see previous note).
- 10 A little further discussion of conventional historians' scepticism about long-range causation is incorporated as section 11.18 of Chapter 11.
- 11 D.G.E. Hall (1955).
- 12 D.G.E. Hall (1981: 244–251). This new Chapter 12 first appeared in the Fourth Edition itself, though incorporating material already introduced in the Third: see *ibid.*: xvi.
- 13 Wittfogel (1957).
- 14 D.G.E. Hall (1981: xvi). The idea of a 'generic' South-East Asian history was popularized by another great figure in the field, Harry J. Benda. See Benda (1972), esp. the article from 1962, reprinted at pp. 121–153. One is thus prompted to ask whether perceptible synchronic affinities among the countries of the area could imply not only a recurring, interactive influence between them across the centuries, but more importantly, the existence of some common mechanisms of transmission of cultural and structural forms from past to present within discrete populations and

- polities. Refreshingly, this is indeed what Benda is mainly about. (Several of the positions set out in this chapter and in sections 11.18–20 of Chapter 11 were sketched previously – some in a more, but others in a less, condensed form – in Kershaw (1988).)
- 15 I.e., which does not need to be related to qualities, objective or purported, of the individual power-holder. Cf. note 4, above.
 - 16 For a sharp attack on the use of models, see Milner (1982: viii) with Gullick (1958) in his sights.
 - 17 Wisseman-Christie (1986).
 - 18 Thus at one extreme there is the patrimonial-cum-bureaucratic view of the agrarian states (van Leur 1955), reinforced by the ‘Oriental despotism’ thesis which takes off more specifically from the organizational imperatives of irrigation (Wittfogel 1957). At the other extreme there is the idea of *negara* as ‘theatre state’, a structure concerned purely with ceremony and the bestowal of rank (Geertz 1980), and radiating its prestige, but not exerting control, over dependencies beyond the immediate centre (Wolters 1982). In the upshot, the two extremes define a middle ground which more cautious scholars seem willing to tread, engendering composite accounts which almost honour both extremes by suggesting, in effect, that ‘the truth lies somewhere in between!’ See Mabbett (1978: 2, 25); Wisseman-Christie (1986: 75). However, in taking her distance from Wittfogel, the second writer is not merely cautious but states outright that he is ‘demonstrably wrong’ (ibid.: 85.)
 - 19 Pye (1985).
 - 20 Ibid.: 91–92.
 - 21 Ibid.: 93.
 - 22 Ibid.: 93–94.
 - 23 Ibid.: 95.
 - 24 Ibid.: 107–111.
 - 25 Ibid.: 326–329.
 - 26 See, for instance, Samudavanija (1987: 15–22). Or, from a non-Thai scholar, Terwiel (1984). Riggs (1966) has applied the concept of a ‘prismatic polity’ to Thailand – with the significance, for our purposes, that the bureaucratic culture which can ‘refract’ the foreign values adopted in the course of modernization has, by definition, an enormous capacity for the perpetuation of its own historic values – including, of course, deference to the monarchy which initiated modernization in the interests of basic continuity. Rabibhadana (1969) is a study more of bureaucratic transformation than of continuity, but the leadership in modernization given in each period by the kings surely says much about the function of the bureaucracy as an instrument of royal power and hence repository and transmitter of monarchical values.
 - 27 See Morell and Samudavanija (1981: 24–33) for an immensely important survey of normative political vocabulary in the Thai language.
 - 28 Ibid.: 92–93.
 - 29 Geertz (1966: 4).
 - 30 In order not to wax too didactic in this Introduction, the author inscribes his best thoughts on the matter as sections 11.19 and 11.20 of Chapter 11. The debate about charisma in political science circles goes back several decades, and the author does not purport to be making an original contribution. The hope is simply to stimulate interest in the said debate by setting out one person’s understanding of it and his own position on it. In particular, social science beginners may find this useful.
 - 31 At first sight there is an exception in the form of Brunei, which saw a case of extraordinary ‘modesty’ on the part of the last Sultan when he turned down opportunities of a re-expansion of his diminished realm in the 1950s. For discussion, see Chapter 11, section 11.21.

- 32 An intriguing ‘twist’ to this dimension is that, although in Theravada Buddhism high earthly rank is seen as a sign of innate merit accumulated in a past life, this is not the same as saying that the merit was inherited from one’s own ancestors – e.g. the King of Thailand’s Chakri forbears. However, in Thai folk belief no clear distinction is made between karmic and genealogical excellence. Therefore the length of a dynasty and accumulation of merit by royal ancestors (rather than himself in earlier incarnations) tend to be heavily legitimizing for the present incumbent of the throne, though not of course as legitimizing as his personal, ‘objective’ qualities of compassion, etc., in this life. For further discussion see the final paragraph in Chapter 3, section 3.2.

2 The colonial era: varieties of Indirect Rule

- 1 Although ‘drawing a line’ against a French advance into Siam, there was solid British self-interest in play in the sense that the central river basin of the country remained secure for British economic penetration, whereas Laos offered nothing economically either to the British or the French. Careful strategic calculation also coloured British actions in the sense that preoccupations on other imperial fronts made a war with France something to be avoided at almost any cost.
- 2 The question of Siam and the loss of Laos is taken up again in section 2.3, below.
- 3 Toye (1971: 80, n. 1).
- 4 Ibid.: 81, n. 1. It should be noted that the ‘Laos’ formed by the French after 1893 was very different from the ancient kingdom of Luang Prabang. Since the French had claimed the Mekong as the frontier of their empire, correspondingly a considerable amount of territory and population on the west bank passed under Siamese rule. Yet this did not mark a radical change from the situation following Siamese military advances in the *Isan* – today’s North-east Thailand – in the 1820s. Anyway, the ‘new’ kingdom of Luang Prabang consisted of only three provinces (ibid.: 58), but was augmented by the recovery of Sayaboury from Siam in 1904 after repeated royal representations to the French. The earlier background includes the annihilation of the Kingdom of Vientiane by Siam in 1828 (as mentioned in Chapter 1, section 1.1, above, and alluded to in the third sentence of this note), and the fact that the Vientiane of the eighteenth century, although embracing the *Isan* on the right (western) bank of the Mekong, was only the rump of the earlier Kingdom of Lang Xang (capital originally at Luang Prabang but moved to Vientiane in the sixteenth century): for the succession disputes following the consolidating reign of King Souigna Vongsa (1637–94) had seen, first, a seizure of the throne at Vientiane by Sa Ong Hué with help from Vietnam (1700), and second, by reaction, the secession of Luang Prabang as a separate kingdom under another line descended from Souigna Vongsa (1707). The emergence of this separate Luang Prabang, distinct from Vientiane, was followed by the breakaway of a small, third kingdom, Champassak in 1713 (see Dommen 1982: 307). Thus, incidentally, despite the demise of Vientiane in 1828, it is still true to say that the French took two Laotian kingdoms under their charge in 1893. Champassak was integrated with the Kingdom of Laos in 1941 (ibid.: 309), together with certain provinces of the north, historically linked to Tonkin (northern Vietnam) (see further, Chapter 3, note 1, below, on this event).
- 5 Toye (1971: 48).
- 6 France re-incorporated them into Cambodia, under the terms of a general settlement of differences with Siam, in 1907.
- 7 D.G.E. Hall (1981: 705).
- 8 Osborne (1973a: 181).
- 9 Norodom Sihanouk (1972: 31–32).
- 10 Ibid.: 33.

- 11 Osborne (1973a: 178). For further analysis of French Indirect Rule in Cambodia, see Osborne (1973b: 19–37).
- 12 See Osborne (1973a), *passim*, or, in a shorter rendering, Osborne (1968).
- 13 It may go without saying, but perhaps should be noted, that the apparent fecundity of kings was often due to the institution of polygamy. Of course the sons by a Principal Queen would normally have precedence over those by lesser wives in traditional society, but the French in Indochina found themselves faced with a gratifyingly large ‘field’ to choose from.
- 14 Lacouture (1979: 251) has called Sihanouk a monarch who was ‘invented’. The inventive French clearly had more than one reason for their creative act in 1941. Note that Sihanouk’s father was still living and by most standards had a presumptive right to prior consideration! Indeed he was still living and was called to the throne in 1955 (by Sihanouk himself) when Sihanouk abdicated!
- 15 A number of Sultanates had been plagued by succession disputes, which weakened the authority of the ruler, or compounded other factors of disintegration. On the west coast of the Malay Peninsula, Perak, the first to accept British protection, was the most chronically divided. Actually a rather rational system was in operation, whereby when a Sultan died his son (likely to be young and inexperienced) did not inherit the throne but joined a sort of queueing system of leading dynastic families, which involved tenure of the ranks of Bendahara and Raja Muda first (Cowan 1961: 42, *passim*). But the system broke down when Raja Ismail jumped the queue, giving the British an alternative, frustrated candidate to promote, in Raja Abdullah! Also rather fascinating is the late nineteenth-century phenomenon of the ‘wicked uncles’ of Kelantan – brothers of deceased Sultans who were loath to yield to their nephews (Kessler 1978: 46) – which provided a rationale for urging British intervention in some minds. Or again, a division in the Brunei royal family dating from a judicial murder in about 1824 made a claimant out of the victim’s brother, who in 1841 found a willing enough patron in James Brooke (D.E. Brown 1970: 146–149). (On the beginnings of the Brooke imperium, see below.)
- 16 The four northern UFMS were under Siam’s suzerainty until 1909, thus their accession to ‘British Malaya’ represented part of a general rationalization of Siam’s domain and borders, as well as the basic fulfilment of British visions for the Malay Peninsula since the ‘spheres of influence’ agreement with the Dutch in 1824. Johor, on the other hand, had become integrated within the British imperium in all but name for many years past, and more or less by name in 1885, with a Treaty of Protection under which the British had recognized the ruling line (actually Temenggongs) as ‘Sultans’ but Johor had handed control of its foreign relations to Britain and accepted an Agent.
- 17 For a classic study of the different currents in Malay nationalism, according to educational background, see Roff (1967).
- 18 The first general elections for 52 out of 98 seats in the Federal Council in 1955 produced a landslide majority for the multiracial Alliance Party, but already by 1959 gains by the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party in the north-east raised a question about the feasibility of integrating the Chinese community on the basis of the generous ‘Independence bargain’.
- 19 The Baram is a river system encompassing the present-day enclave of Brunei to its west and south.
- 20 Reference was made in this paragraph to Labuan. This island a few miles off-shore from the Brunei estuary had been ceded to Britain as a colony in 1846, by Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin II (1828–52). This was at the conclusion of hostilities which arose out of opposition, within Brunei, to the establishment of James Brooke’s power at Kuching. Later, Labuan was incorporated into the Straits Settlements. Today it belongs to Malaysia, as indeed Sarawak and Sabah do. The Sultan who sold Sabah was Sultan Abdul Momin (1852–85).

- 21 His name in full: Sultan Hashim, Jalilul Alam Aqamaddin (1885–1906).
- 22 A compact, clear account of these events is Ranjit (1984). The authoritative, heavy-weight study is Tarling (1971).
- 23 The sovereign status of Johor, for instance, under the treaty with the British Crown, was last upheld by the Privy Council in 1952 (Mohd. Suffian 1972: 34).
- 24 Here is a commentator – one of the researchers of the Brunei History Centre – both denying that the Resident was entitled to any say over Malay custom, and denying that ‘advice’ had any right to be followed up by administrative action: ‘Although the role of the British Resident in Brunei according to this system was only to advise the Sultan, excepting in matters of the Muslim religion and Malay custom, in reality the British took over the governing and administration of the State’ (Muhd. Hadi 1992: 141; translated by R.K.). But in fact the most anti-British tone in Brunei historiography is not found in texts by Bruneians. A book full of slurs on British integrity is the work of a Sri Lankan employed by the Brunei University. While he admits that acceptance of British advice was specified as obligatory by the Agreement, he maligns British authorities for disregarding Brunei custom when it suited them (Hussainmiya 1995: 3). But just as often the British are accused of neglect. The rest of this paragraph, and the next note, continue the riposte. The last two sentences of the paragraph before last are germane to *ibid.*: 149, wherein is rejected the opinion of a qualified constitutional lawyer that Brunei’s status was one close to ‘Colonial Protectorate’.
- 25 Some ‘taxes’ were exacted in kind, e.g. the commandeering of young girls for concubinage.
- 26 This observation is offered in response to the passage in which Hussainmiya accuses the British of neglecting education, compared to their record in the other Malay States (*ibid.*: 3). The leading Bruneian historian is salutary (because honest), in admitting that the British Residents were committed to the development of education, but met a serious obstacle in the attitude of Muslim parents that the education offered in government primary schools was ‘secular’ and therefore contrary to Islam (Mohd. Jamil 1992: 3).
- 27 The role of the dowager in the life of Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin is believed to be described in a memoir of Malcolm MacDonald bequeathed to the University of Durham. The original incident over Omar’s education is referred to obliquely in State of Brunei 1933: 34 (quoted also in a Brunei source, Mohd. Jamil 1987: 13) and Hussainmiya (1995: 46 and 72, n. 3), citing various sources. The second incident is known to the present writer from a personal communication, 1989, by Datin Pretty, widow of the already twice-serving Resident of Brunei, E.E.F. Pretty. She described how he was sent hot-foot to Brunei on returning to Singapore after their wedding (virtually in the middle of their honeymoon), in August 1934, to dampen the flames of a crisis. The writer believes that this was connected with Omar’s education – i.e. at this point, whether it should continue. Certainly the former Resident ‘read the Riot Act’, leaving the ruler in no doubt that his position was precarious, and Datin Pretty recalled Omar’s later gratitude to Dato Pretty for the education which had made his succession possible, expressed to Dato Pretty (now serving as Resident for the third time) at his coronation in 1951. A second ‘trouble-shooting’ trip to Brunei by Pretty is recorded for 1936 – see *ibid.*: 47 and 72, n. 7, citing various sources. Its precise context is not mentioned, but this was the fourth and final year of Omar’s education.
- 28 Personal communication, Datin Pretty, 1987.
- 29 The conflict is described with some versatility in Chapters 5–8 of Hussainmiya (1995), though without as much empathy for British constitutionalism – represented by the progressive mid-1950s Resident, Gilbert, and the hapless High Commissioner, Abell – as some might have hoped.

- 30 Anderson (1978: 199–200, 209). Anderson does also suggest that parallels can be found with the ‘modernizing’ regimes of colonial Southeast Asia (the extension of central power to remote provinces, for instance). As a non-Thailand specialist, Anderson acknowledges some influence from Benjamin Batson on his formulation, citing a passage from a PhD thesis, which reappears in Batson (1984: 12).
- 31 Ibid.: 208.
- 32 Apologies are due to Thais for using Christian era dates in this text written for an international audience. Strictly speaking, the correct dating of the dynasty, to date, is 2325–2543 B.E.
- 33 Again an apology is due to Thais. Mysteriously, the Western usage for the fourth Chakri king, ‘Mongkut’, does not correspond to the normal Thai nomenclature, which is *Phra’ Côm Klaaw*. His son, ‘King Chulalongkorn’ (1868–1910), is called by Thais *Phra’ Cmlacôm Klaaw*. The King whose Thai name approximates to the Western name for Rama IV is actually Rama VI, or Vajiravudh (1910–25), known to Thais as *Phra’ Mongkut Klaaw*. For obvious reasons, though reluctantly, this book will conform to received Western usage.
- 34 The British sent a clear political signal – which the King read just as clearly – in appointing the Governor of Hong Kong to head the critical mission to Bangkok in 1855.
- 35 Not to be ignored are changes in the position of the monarchy in Thai society, which partly reflected the King’s awareness of what the West regarded as ‘civilized’, but also no doubt his own convictions as to how society needed to change in order to be more resilient. Notably, some ancient taboos surrounding the person of the king were abolished.
- 36 Nartsupha and Prasartset (1981: 71–225).
- 37 Samudavanija (1987: 15–22).
- 38 Also Marxist-inspired but more open to the kind of change Chai-anan Samudavanija is writing about, is Elliott (1978).
- 39 They had in fact paid allegiance to Burma since the sixteenth century, but the inhabitants were linguistically Tai, and Siam could and did assert a claim, so long as there was no actual administrative integration into Burma.
- 40 In decreeing that all Thais should take a surname, the King revealed his Englishness, but in personally allocating a name to the leading families he revealed himself in a Thai-absolutist manifestation.
- 41 The personality and policies of Rama VI are touchingly if not movingly described in Vella (1978).
- 42 See *ibid.*: 55–56, 268; Samudavanija (1987: 28).
- 43 Vella (1955); Mokarapong (1972).
- 44 Thai ladies were directed to wear hats, and their husbands to kiss them on the cheek on leaving the house in the morning for the office.
- 45 These events have recently been described in an extraordinary biography of the Ninth Rama, Stevenson (1999: 74–76). This book will inevitably be referred to in Chapters 3 and 9.
- 46 The above jottings on the life of Colonel (in due course Field Marshal) Phibun could be followed up by any interested party in the authoritative work on the subject, Suwannathat-Pian (1995). More specifically about the ending of absolute monarchy, see Mokarapong (1972) and Batson (1984).

3 On the threshold of the present: post-war developments

- 1 This area was extended to cover the whole of northern Laos, in compensation for the loss of two Mekong provinces (including Sayaboury) to Thailand, after Phibun had taken advantage of French weakness (as pawns of Japan) and Thailand’s

- temporary strength (as Japan's allies, not yet occupied). There was talk of the King's abdication if honour was not restored (Toye 1971: 58).
- 2 See Simmonds (1963: 166–168).
 - 3 Toye (1971: 218).
 - 4 Simmonds (1963: 171).
 - 5 D.G.E. Hall (1981: 917).
 - 6 Toye (1971: 106).
 - 7 Ibid.: 85.
 - 8 Whereas Pathet Lao (the name of the movement) stands for 'Lao State', the front formed around it took the title *Neo Lao Hak Sat*, meaning Lao Patriotic Front.
 - 9 Simmonds (1963: 176–177, 190–191).
 - 10 Toye (1971: 177–185).
 - 11 Ibid.: 203.
 - 12 Langer (1969: 70).
 - 13 Zasloff (1970: 65).
 - 14 However, Dommen (1971: 42) sees the offensive in the Plain of Jars by the Meo General Vang Pao, in mid-1969, as the decisive provocation (to the PL/North Vietnamese) which upset the balance.
 - 15 Langer (1969: 74).
 - 16 Dommen (1971: 44).
 - 17 For an evocative Vietnamese account of the Trail see Dommen (1972).
 - 18 Dommen (1971: 43).
 - 19 Zasloff (1973a).
 - 20 Brown and Zasloff (1974).
 - 21 Zasloff (1973b).
 - 22 For recollection, the regnal dates of Sisavang Vong are 1904–59; of Savang Vatthana, 1959–75.
 - 23 Simmonds (1963: 171).
 - 24 See note 1, above. N.B. Sayaboury on the east bank of the Mekong opposite Luang Prabang, whose loss was the major cause of anger at the French in 1941, was returned by Thailand at the end of World War II, and remains part of Laos today. Something of the aged king's character may also be seen in his refusal to flee the capital in 1953 when it seemed under danger from Vietminh attack (Toye 1971: 86).
 - 25 This Amendment was part of the complicated manoeuvring which led to the formation of the second coalition.
 - 26 This organization arose during the 'swing to the right'. It was an anti-Communist body, formed by prime minister Souvannaphouma towards the end of the 1956–58 coalition, in order to rally support among the younger, better educated officials and army officers and to counter American pressure for his ouster because of election gains by the PL (Toye 1971: 118). It then featured as an influential element in the Phoui Sananikone government.
 - 27 Or more than 'sympathy'? While right-wing forces were threatening Vientiane (defended by Kong Lé), Souvannaphouma retired to Phnom Penh with six of his ministers, though he did not resign. The King thereupon declared his government illegal (Simmonds 1963: 192). In a study of Lao royalty we might slip in a reference to the fact that the right-wing politician just mentioned was a scion of a princely house (the defunct monarchy, indeed) of the south, as his Thai-sounding title evinces: Chao Boun Oum na Champassak.
 - 28 I.e. in late 1961 and early 1962, at the end of the government of Boun Oum. Under the recent Constitutional Amendment the King invited Souvannaphouma to form a government in October 1961 but it took a long time to agree the terms of hand-over by Boun Oum (Toye 1971: 175). In February 1962 the Right even proposed a government headed by the King (ibid.: 181).

- 29 In July 1972 he did refuse to approve a government reshuffle because of the unsuitability of certain new ministers. But it turned out that the Prime Minister himself was not committed to the appointments anyway.
- 30 The three preceding paragraphs draw substantially on Reddicliffe (1981: 184–187). With regard to the peace negotiations and their outcome between 1970–73, we could add that the Five Points of the PL, proposed in 1970, included ‘respect for the Throne’, while one of two letters sent to Vientiane by Prince Souphanouvong as part of the first tentative contacts was a letter to King Savang Vatthana. In the 1973 Protocol the Provisional Government of National Union and National Coalition Political Council were described as equal organs cooperating under the King.
- 31 See Ministère de l’Information (1970). The publication of these historic cabinet lists constitutes an assertion of continuity and hence legitimacy of governments and the elite up to and including the overthrow of Sihanouk. On the remarkable longevity of a small number of leading personnel, subject to some ideological inconsistency, across the years, see Osborne (1973b: 47).
- 32 Osborne (1973b: 38–39).
- 33 Osborne (1973b: 39–40). A small point that it may be useful to add to Osborne’s account is that Son Ngoc Thanh’s is a Vietnamese name, indicating Vietnamese descent on his father’s side. In Cambodia, people of Vietnamese or Chinese patrilineal descent preserve their ancestral names without any social stigma or suggestion of being less than Cambodian. Besides, Thanh was from the surviving Khmer-populated area of South Vietnam known as *Kampucie Kram* (‘Lower Cambodia’), which has been regarded as an irrendenta by most modern regimes of Cambodia, and he owed his political rise to his position as the librarian of the Phnom Penh Buddhist Institute in the 1930s (see Osborne 1973b: 31). However, for Sihanouk, Thanh’s mixed ancestral origins may well have added a little to his political animosity. (Osborne often refers to him as ‘Thanh’, as if this is his surname. It certainly looks like a Vietnamese surname, though moved from the front position used in both Vietnam and Cambodia to the Western-style position after his given names. Did the owner hope in this way to subordinate it to the ‘Son’, which is also a common Khmer name, or was it just a case of adopting a ‘modern’ style consistent with 1930s Asian nationalism? Unfriendly to the assumption that this is a surname, is the fact that the Vietminh in the early 1950s invented a ‘Cambodian leader’ called Son Ngoc Minh, whose name was supposed to evoke fraternity in a double sense with Son Ngoc Thanh.)
- 34 Notable among this group were Prince Sisowath Youtevong and Chhean Vam.
- 35 Osborne (1973b: 40–43).
- 36 The five features identified in this paragraph are drawn from the analysis of Osborne (1973b: 43–45). We could add, for further contrast with the French Republic, that even without Article 21 Sihanouk was King, and King for life, whereas the French President was elected by the two houses of parliament, for a fixed term. On the powers of the King, see also Preschez (1961: 25). Preschez does add a proviso: that Article 21 itself included the proviso that the comprehensive powers of the King were to be ‘exercised in the way established by the present Constitution’. But he also remarks (apparently overlooking Brunei) that the Cambodian Constitution was in contrast to every other in South-East Asia at that period, which all located sovereignty with the people.
- 37 This paragraph, to this point, reflects Osborne (1973b: 47–49). An ironical additional aspect is that it was Sihanouk himself who had asked the French to let Son Ngoc Thanh return, to appease the Democrat Party opposition (Preschez 1961: 46). Osborne’s statement that the French had control of the military comes on p. 53, n.11. The situation in this respect was, not, however, unambiguous: see Preschez (1961: 40) on a delegation of command (to Cambodian officers) in Siem Reap. Laurent (1968: 51) includes Kompong Thom in the scope of delegated command.

- At any rate, control of the army was an issue of the highest sensitivity in Franco-Khmer relations, and played some part in the fall of Yem Sambaur in May 1950.
- 38 Discussed in Osborne (1973b: 48–49).
 - 39 The story is told in a formal style (perhaps ghosted by civil servants) and with much emphasis on precedents for royal campaigns of national salvation in history, in Norodom Sihanouk (n.d/a).
 - 40 Laurent (1968: 57).
 - 41 Ibid.: 42–46.
 - 42 Ibid.: 43.
 - 43 It was even accepted that Cambodia was entitled to join any alliance and accept foreign bases on its soil.
 - 44 His constitutional proposals were, however, slightly modified at this stage.
 - 45 The lexical components signify, in their Khmer order, ‘society/the people/preferring’; thus in English word order, but still rather literally, it might be rendered as ‘people-upholding association’; or, less awkwardly, ‘The Populist Union’. Sihanouk’s ideas and the party’s programmes were reported and propagated through the magazine *Neak Chiet Niyum*, signifying ‘person/nation/preferring’; thus ‘nation-upholding person’; or ‘The Nationalist’.
 - 46 Contemporary political doctrines in South-East Asia mainly stress ‘communal, mutual self-help’ as a precious Asian value, but this tradition in village society was always a tradition of reciprocity between families. Working ‘voluntarily’ for the State, even to build roads and irrigation ditches, was too reminiscent of *corvée*, its benefits for the individual or family too remote or abstract to be seen as a ‘return for labour’.
 - 47 *Samdec* (or *Samdech*) is usually rendered in French as *Monseigneur* (‘My Lord’). But the term is also applied to the present-day ex-Communist Prime Minister of Cambodia, Hun Sen, suggesting ‘Excellency’ or ‘The Honourable’ by itself. Sihanouk’s more complete appellation in the Sangkum period was *Samdec Preah*, meaning ‘My most elevated Lord’, i.e. ‘His Royal Highness’. Alternatively, he could affect a democratic touch by way of *Samdec Sahachivin*, literally ‘My Lord and Companion’, i.e. ‘My Royal Comrade’. He also adopted, at the time of his abdication, *Samdec Preah Upayuvaree*, meaning roughly ‘HRH the Lower Junior King’. Or, to emphasize his patriarchal ties to the common people, there was *Samdec U*, meaning ‘My Lord and Father’. (The *e* in our transcription sounds much like the *ch* and is often thus spelt in romanization.) The author thanks Eva Maria Kershaw and David Smyth for their assistance in this field.
 - 48 Hou Yuon became Secretary of State for Commerce and Industry, Hu Nim Under-Secretary of State at the Office of the President of the Assembly (see Ministère de l’Information, Phnom Penh 1970: 74). It is recorded that Hou Yuon gained a doctorate in economics from Paris in 1956 (Chau Seng n.d.: 152). Hu Nim received his doctorate in Law rather later – from the Royal University of Cambodia, in 1965 (ibid.: 159). These were two of a ‘trinity’ of left-wing deputies who were to become famous in the 1960s.
 - 49 In face of intimidation, only one Pracheachon candidate was bold enough to maintain his candidature right up to the 1958 elections, and he obtained only 396 votes in his Phnom Penh constituency against 13,542 for the Sangkum candidate (Preschez 1961: 89). In the light of Pol Pot’s 1977 account of the history of the Party it is now clear that the ‘three left-wing deputies’ mentioned in the previous note were secret members of the Cambodian Communist Party/Pracheachon, but were pursuing a ‘parliamentary road’ at this time, with or without the Party’s full blessing (see Pol Pot 1978: 39 for a note of mild reproach). The third of these deputies, Khieu Samphan, whose name would first appear in a cabinet list with that of Hou Yuon in October 1962 – see next paragraph – is recorded as gaining a doctorate in economics from Paris in 1959 (Chau Seng n.d.: 153). He alone, of the three,

- was found to be loyal enough to the Cambodian Communist Party boss, Pol Pot, after the establishment of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1975, to survive the holocaust. In fact he has even survived Pol Pot himself, who died in 1998.
- 50 Leifer (1967: 128).
 - 51 Osborne (1973b: 85).
 - 52 Leifer (1967: 128).
 - 53 See membership list of the Nineteenth Sangkum Cabinet in Ministère de l'Information, Phnom Penh (1970: 96–98).
 - 54 Osborne (1973b: 89).
 - 55 See Kiernan (n.d.); Pol Pot (1978: 55) for varying perspectives on the Samlaut rebellion.
 - 56 Osborne (1973b: 102–103). On the regime's ready capacity for 'assassination and secret pursuit' see also *ibid.*: 76; on the probable assassination of a left-wing newspaper editor in 1960, see *ibid.*: 95, n.6. It was well recalled by diplomats of the post-1970 Khmer Republic – not without a little trepidation – that Khieu Samphan had not only been brutally beaten up by the police when he was a student, but worse still, had been viciously 'debagged' in order to 'investigate' and 'expose' his sexuality, which, in view of his high-pitched voice, was suspected of falling short of Khmer standards of masculinity.
 - 57 But one must be careful not to overrate the resolve of the 'reactionaries', let alone the advance planning behind the coup (with its corollary of CIA instigation). At least Lon Nol was never a man to act in haste. One personal communication to the present writer from Cambodian bureaucratic circles, in 1972, asserted that during his absence in Paris Sihanouk was bombarded with telegrams urging him to return, because of the Vietcong aggression, and it was not until he started to abuse his government as 'American lackeys' and flew to Moscow instead of Phnom Penh that he was declared deposed.
 - 58 Osborne (1973b: 98).
 - 59 On Sihanouk's political style, including its 'Byzantine' aspect, see Leifer (1968: 131).
 - 60 Several flashes of acute personal sensitivity and political paranoia are seen in Norodom Sihanouk (n.d/b). In retrospect, he himself has admitted that his hostility to the Western camp was due in large part to criticism in the Western press, which he perceived as attacks on Cambodia ('le Cambodge, c'était moi!'): Norodom Sihanouk (1981: 200).
 - 61 For two excellent retrospects on the decline and fall of the Sihanoukist system, see Chanda (1970) and Girling (1971). For a contemporary account of Sihanouk's underlying shift towards the USA as Vietnamese infiltration increased, see Gordon (1969).
 - 62 Sihanouk declared in favour of the Cambodian Communist movement within five days of his ouster, when he announced the *Front Uni National du Kampuchea* and the *Gouvernement Royal d'Union Nationale du Cambodge*, uniting 'all patriotic forces' under his nominal leadership. Thus was deeply wounded royal dignity mobilized to serve the cause of a former King's former Communist enemies, in a unique variation of the 'United Front' idea. Cf. Kershaw (1976). Noticeably, Pol Pot (1978) makes not the slightest acknowledgement of Sihanouk's valuable support since 1970, or of his presence at Phnom Penh during this speech in 1977 – although he also refrains from accusing Sihanouk of responsibility for the suppression of the Communists during his regime. But nor does Pol Pot acknowledge the vital role of North Vietnamese forces in tying down the army of Lon Nol's Khmer Republic from mid-1970, enabling the Khmer Rouge to establish its presence and power widely in the countryside (in other words, it was not the coup directly that gave the Khmer Rouge their chance but the response to that coup by Hanoi).
 - 63 A sense of the intimate identification of Sihanouk with government and State in post-war Cambodia is gained from a glance at the names of the Heads of Government

- from 1945–1970 (see Ministère de l' Information, Phnom Penh 1970). Sihanouk himself headed sixteen cabinets, including instances where he was simultaneously King or Head of State. Ten of the cabinets were in the Sangkum era.
- 64 There was something chilling about Sihanouk's glee at the rocketing of Phnom Penh at close range in late 1972, reputedly by the Khmer Rouge. This was one dominant tone or theme of an interview given to Jean Debert at Tientsin, and broadcast on France Inter in the series 'Le Monde Contemporain' on 23 December 1972. For more extensive remarks about the 'patriotic Khmer Rouge', on the eve of Sihanouk's return from Peking to Phnom Penh in late 1975 (a sequel to the Khmer Rouge victory in April), see Decornoy 1975. For a particularly insightful psychological sketch see Osborne (1973b: 73).
- 65 Dauphin-Meunier (1968: 119–120); translated and paraphrased by R.K.
- 66 I.e., 'Royal Socialist Khmer Youth'. See Preschez (1961: 116–117); translated and paraphrased by R.K.
- 67 The last two paragraphs are distilled from *ibid.*: 118–121. A more succinct study of Sangkum democracy is Baruch (1968).
- 68 Norodom Sihanouk (1972: 73–74); translated by R.K.
- 69 *Ibid.*: 74–76. Norodom Sihanouk (1972) as a whole is an immensely readable, and thus superficially plausible self-defence by the ex-King, ranging over the whole of his political career to date. He comes across as a far more rational and consistent actor than most observers have judged him to be, but this impression is given partly at the expense of casting himself as a long-standing friend of the Left, to suit the circumstances of his exile at Peking as a client of PRC (1970–75). (But at least in this book he does less violence to the historical reality than we see in Norodom Sihanouk 1973.) More attractive still are Norodom Sihanouk (1979) and Norodom Sihanouk (1981), written after his release from captivity at Phnom Penh as a captive of the Khmer Rouge (1975–79), when he was freer to admit, and even seek credit for, actions hostile to the Left in the 1960s (although the first of these post-Khmer Rouge books is still unnaturally positive towards the Vietnamese Communists, on whom Cambodia depended for its reconstruction and the expulsion of the Khmer Rouge, immediately after the Vietnamese invasion of January 1979).
- 70 Tambiah (1976) is the relevant, heavy-weight text for this theme.
- 71 For a simple statement of the conception that we are selected for birth into a particular family by merit earned or talents developed in previous lives, not by the reproductive activity of our two biological parents, see Humphreys (1962: 104). This explains as well as any theory of heredity the phenomenon of special talents or dispositions being shared by children with their parents.
- 72 Among relevant references see Hanks (1962: 1247, 1248, 1253); Reynolds (1973: 41); Tambiah (1976: 486) and Skrobanek (1976: 10). The latter is quoting from the mediaeval classic, *Traiphuum Phra Ruang*. We should note of course that extensive reformulation of Buddhist thought has been going on in Thailand in recent years, along with the decline of more specifically cosmological belief among the educated classes. This has resulted in shifts of emphasis in the ways of royal legitimization in that country. Cf. Jackson (1991).
- 73 The valuable account of Thai kingship in Wilson (1962: 72–92) stresses the longevity of monarchy more than the doctrine of merit accumulated in potentially non-monarchical, past contexts, as an important ingredient of the prestige of the modern kings.
- 74 I.e. Norodom Sihanouk (1972: 73), quoted above.
- 75 Norodom Sihanouk (1981: 30–32.) There is a chapter on Buddhist Socialism in this book too (*ibid.*: 259–268). The emphasis is entirely egalitarian, and later (*ibid.*: 385) Sihanouk stresses that his relationship with the people was 'affectionate', indeed 'loving', with no suggestion of divine status: his political power was built purely upon 100 per cent electoral victory. In Norodom Sihanouk (1973: 162) he admits

that he was perceived as a 'God-king' while King, but insists that abdication enabled him to shake off the aura. In Norodom Sihanouk (1981: 241–244) he portrays the royal duty of listening to grievances as a more essential basis of pre-Sangkum legitimacy, which was carried over into the institution of the National Congress. These themes are treated sympathetically but not unobjectively in Lacouture (1969b): cf. on p. 190–191:

Even if his new condition as prince-leader has given him another type of authority and more freedom of action, he remains the heir of dynasties which were glorious – and the official propaganda never ceases to remind us of it. Citizen-king, a human divinity, he participates in the earthly and the heavenly sphere simultaneously.

The present writer has had only one encounter with Sihanouk (at a reception hosted by the British Foreign Office on 19 March 1980, during his peregrinations in search of international support for action to expel the Vietnamese forces) and recalls the electrifying effect of his entrance: a minute man with a huge, shaven head and a childlike countenance which radiated both serenity and a kind of vulnerability, as if not quite of this world.

- 76 Before the rise of elected legislatures, 'each Ruler was empowered to act in opposition to the advice given to him by members of the [State] Council if in any case it should be in his judgement right to do so' (Colonial Office 1957: 12).
- 77 By an ironic twist, Onn Jaafar had become the leader of an 'anti-Independence' movement (i.e. an Independence-delaying party) after he had been forced out of UMNO over another issue and then realized that, with UMNO riding the crest of a wave in the mid-1950s, he himself would have no hope of becoming the first Prime Minister if Independence were to be gained early. At the same time, it happened that Onn Jaafar's own ruler, the Sultan of Johor, was a leading royal critic of democracy and Independence.
- 78 Singapore remained under British rule until 1963, when it 'merged with the mainland' to form the enlarged Federation of Malaysia, together with Sarawak and Sabah. Like the original eleven States of Malaya, the additional three each had their separate Head of State, but acknowledged the Malay 'Agong' as Head of State of the Federation. Owing to conflict over the position of the Malays in more practical respects, Singapore was expelled from the Federation in 1965.
- 79 Continuing the anticipation of Singapore's expulsion in the previous note: the tensions which led to it were not at the level of the Agong and the Head of State of Singapore (also a Malay at that time) but would take the form of a battle of wills between the UMNO leader, Tunku Abdul Rahman, and the Prime Minister of Singapore and People's Action Party leader, Lee Kuan Yew.
- 80 Cf. Mohd. Suffian (1972: 21–27), though he deals with duller aspects too.
- 81 Kershaw (1993: 290–291).
- 82 From this sentence onwards, this paragraph replicates, but also corrects and augments paragraph 4 in an essay by the author (Kershaw 1979c: 300).
- 83 By January 1973, as a key component of the restructuring of Malaysian party politics post-1969, Asri had 'surrendered the independence' of both party and State to a coalition with UMNO, which guaranteed not only a flow of federal funds to the State, and a federal ministerial salary for Asri (substituting the cash flow from shady timber concessions), but also an informal amnesty from investigations into any previous shady practices. Asri's many-sided benefits from these arrangements will also have contributed to the Sultan's sense that his own material benefits should be enhanced *pari passu*, whatever the timing of his first hint about the 'poverty' of his circumstances. Meanwhile, the peasants whose land was subject to compulsory purchase for construction of the palace, and who saw the opulence of the building

- and its grounds in due course – financed from public moneys – dubbed it *Istana Ayer Mata Rakyat*: ‘Palace of the People’s Tears’.
- 84 On aspects of the Malayan ‘symbiosis’, see Kershaw (1993: 283–284), and Chapter 7 below.
 - 85 For some discussion of the theory of boundaries in this connection, see Chapter 11, section 11.22.
 - 86 The termination of the previous (1971) Agreement was negotiated by a Labour Administration in 1979. There was never any suggestion that a future Conservative Administration would reverse this – unlike 1970. (Besides, unlike 1970, the Labour policy was enshrined in a Treaty.) However, the 1979 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation (cf. text in Ranjit 1984: 242–245) was vague enough to act as a framework, or at least reference point, when the next Conservative Administration negotiated terms for the continued stationing of the Gurkha Battalion in Brunei, in 1983.
 - 87 This may not be a matter of deep significance for most of the elite, but inasmuch as it does count, it would be relevant that title holders of pre-1967 vintage were in many cases promoted to higher ranks in the 1970s or later, which has involved an oath of loyalty to the younger Sultan directly. The pregnancy of these ceremonies comes partly from the use of Hindu mantras, called *ciri*, and considered anti-Islamic by Muslim purists today.
 - 88 The Malaysian government played a part in springing a group of rebels from their detention in Brunei, and gave tacit, or more than tacit, encouragement to numbers of school students to leave Brunei in the expectation of subsidized higher education, plus sponsorship as an opposition-in-exile along with the escapees of earlier vintage. This was the decade, it will be recalled, when Indonesia annexed the Portuguese colony of East Timor.
 - 89 On the hypocrisy of international calls for ‘self-determination’ in the 1970s, where there was a perfect understanding that Britain was maintaining its defence and foreign affairs responsibilities only at the will of the legal government, and no intention to force Brunei to be governed by the will of its people if Britain did withdraw, see Leifer (1978).
 - 90 For a disingenuous – or at least half-hearted – attempt to rationalize the failure of the King to intervene, see Stevenson (1999: 110–122).
 - 91 Suwannathat-Pian (1995: 190). Stevenson (1999) as a whole has characteristics of a sponsored exercise in exonerating the King from any role in his brother’s death, choosing a sinister Japanese intelligence chief, Tsuji, as the most likely plotter of an assassination (ibid.: 70–71, etc.). However, the two Kings’ mother had prevailed on Prime Minister Pridi to announce that it had been an accident – at least in order to divert the alternative supposition, that it was suicide, and save the royal family’s face (Sivaraksa 1993a: 267). This kindly act on Pridi’s part had then backfired and exposed him to the rumour-mongering of his military enemies about a ‘Communist plot’. But nor did it spare the new King from blackmailing insinuation about his own possible role, by those same military elements. At all events, such genuine evidence as has surfaced does seem to suggest an accident of some kind as the most credible of the three possibilities: ‘The King and his younger brother Bhumibol ... were known to be fond of playing with guns’ (Stowe 1991: 364).
 - 92 Stevenson (1999: 103–104); Wilson (1962: 114); Chaloemtiarana (1979: 310) but based on Wilson – albeit he asserts that the King’s objections to the Constitution were unsuccessful, whereas Wilson claims ‘some success’ in influencing it. The coup in question was that of 1951, which was actually staged partly with the motive of pre-empting any activism of the King on his return from studies in Switzerland (Suwannathat-Pian 1995: *loc. cit.*; Chaloemtiarana 1979: 74–75).
 - 93 Suwannathat-Pian (1995: 290).
 - 94 Chaloemtiarana (1979: xii–xiv).

- 95 His marriage and coronation had taken place, as a series of linked ceremonial, in 1950.
- 96 *Ibid.*: 310, quoting Wilson (1962: 114).
- 97 Chaloehtiarana (1979: 123).
- 98 See Dr Thak's wonderful evocation of the type in *ibid.*: 339–340.
- 99 *Ibid.*: 174.
- 100 Cf. his vision of partnership between State/government, government officials, and public (*ibid.*: 273).
- 101 *Ibid.*: 311.
- 102 Dr Thak is referring to the posthumous discovery that the 'Great Father' of his people had exercised the kingly right of astronomical embezzlement of national assets. Another, perhaps more titillating, weakness was a taste for the company of beauty queens; in fact it was known that any girl winning the title of 'Miss Thailand' would be expected to become his mistress.
- 103 *Ibid.*: 333. For another valuable summation of the symbiotic dynamics of Sarit's relationship with the King, see Morell and Samudavanija (1981: 64–66). 'Neither fully trusted the other, but each had by necessity found ways to accommodate the other's fundamental requirements' (*ibid.*: p. 64).
- 104 Paraphrased from Kershaw (1979b: 257).
- 105 Kershaw (1979c: 304–305).
- 106 On the rise of the Thai 'student estate', so crucial to the revival of monarchical power, see Heinze (1974), Zimmerman (1974) and Jumbala (1974).

4 Indonesia: the exception that proves the rule?

- 1 One important study of the nationalist revolution which, among many other themes, deals with royalist reaction and Dutch-supported efforts in favour of a federalist structure, is Alers (1956). For a shorter discussion of the federalist movement and its victorious alternative, with some references to the interests of royalty, see Feith (1962: 58–77).
- 2 These themes are developed in Chapter 11, section 11.17, with citation from Jay (1963: 12–13) and Anderson (1972: 35–36).
- 3 Palace of a Javanese prince.
- 4 Legge (1972: 356–357).
- 5 Idenburg (1961: 148–149); translated by R.K.
- 6 *Ibid.*: 149–150.
- 7 Vatikiotis (1993: 29–30). For further discussion of traditional elements in contemporary culture, see Chapter 11, sections 11.17 and 11.20.
- 8 *Ibid.*: 152.
- 9 *Ibid.*: 98–99. Having retreated from high government office in 1953, he had returned to be Vice-President under Suharto from 1973 to 1978. Thus the memories of the Sultan as a public servant, which pulled in so many mourners, could date from as recently as ten years before.
- 10 *Ibid.*: 99–100.
- 11 A date taken not entirely at random, but the year in which Hayam Wuruk (Rajasanagara) succeeded to the throne of Majapahit – without calling in question the effective rule by Chief Minister Gaja Mada or destabilizing the gains of Majapahit's latest wave of imperial expansion led by the latter.
- 12 The name of the female shaman who became a principal informant of the anthropologist.
- 13 Emphasis by Tsing. Tsing is indicating her scepticism that the ancient shamanistic religion was or is 'Hindu'. Indeed, it is more likely that Hindu elements were incorporated for the first time from Majapahit. And yet it might be wrong to completely

rule out earlier Indian influence on Bornean cultures. Indian influence had, after all, been present in the archipelago for a long time before Majapahit.

- 14 Tsing (1993: 271).
- 15 Ibid.: 272–273.
- 16 Custom, local tradition.
- 17 Tsing (1993: 273–274).

5 Laos: bowing off the stage of history

- 1 Brown and Zasloff (1974).
- 2 Zasloff (1973b).
- 3 Brown and Zasloff (1975). The present writer, having had no research interest in Laos apart from collecting some material on its monarchy in Bangkok in the mid-1970s, is gratefully dependent on the work of specialists such as Zasloff, Brown and Dommen. This chapter will continue to denote the Communist movement as ‘PL’.
- 4 The last three paragraphs are drawn mainly from Brown and Zasloff (1975).
- 5 Brown and Zasloff (1976).
- 6 Ibid. In the event it lasted years. Estimates of political prisoners held in these northern camps varied from 10,000 to 40,000 in 1980 (cited from Amnesty International Report, 16 April 1980, in *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, 1981).
- 7 Brown and Zasloff (1976).
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Brown and Zasloff (1977).
- 10 Brown and Zasloff (1978).
- 11 Souvannaphouma, interviewed in *New York Times*, 24 March 1979 (see *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, 1981). The ex-Premier is quoted as saying ‘It’s a pity. He understood badly. Nothing was changed in his normal life, but he made contact with Vang Pao’s people.’
- 12 *Keesing's Contemporary Archives* (1990).
- 13 See the thumbnail historical sketch in Chapter 2, note 4, above.
- 14 Apart from the valuable short review of dynastic history in Dommen (1982), see the King lists provided by D.G.E. Hall (1981: 977–980).
- 15 See Chapter 3, note 1, above.
- 16 On Western-style economic reforms, ushered in at the moment of Prince Souphanouvong’s retirement at the age of 81 from all party posts, see Pringle (1991a; 1991b).
- 17 In Laos, things might have been different if the throne had been occupied, post-World War II, by an activist personality such as Prince Phetsarath. For a brief biographical sketch, and contrast with King Sisavang Vong, see Halpern (1964a: 119–125).
- 18 The ethnic diversity of Laos is such that the ethnic lowland Lao, strictly defined, constitute probably less than 50 per cent of the population (Halpern 1964b: 10; and Table 9). This is what most basically reduces the ‘cultural’ relevance of any restoration of Lao monarchy. Also, cadres of ‘tribal’ origin are an important element in the new generation of leaders, given the long years in which PL had its bases in mountainous areas. Yet the last King’s son emerged to stake a claim in 2000.

6 Cambodia: the King with nine lives

- 1 On the first steps by the Vietnamese in organizing Khmer village administrations and militias by late 1969 – the prototype of FUNK – see David E. Brown (1972: 127).
- 2 Some instances of Sihanouk’s ‘United Front’ behaviour in the early 1970s have already been anticipated in Chapter 3. One excursion which he seems particularly

to have enjoyed was a furtive trip to a 'liberated area', where he posed for the camera with the 'three missing Deputies', and was photographed marching in single file along a jungle trail, dressed in Khmer Rouge uniform. The perfect 'Communist King'!

- 3 The author penned a personal reflection on Sihanouk's 'resurrection from the dead' in Kershaw (1979a).
- 4 Than (1991). Already in the course of 1979, Sihanouk had begun to work for the elimination of the Khmer Rouge as well as the Vietnamese occupation. He was responsive to the anxiety of Hanoi regarding Chinese sponsorship of the Khmer Rouge, as the rationale for the occupation, and also realized that in practical terms only the occupying Vietnamese army would be able to defeat them. For elaboration, see Kershaw (1980a: 179). On the semantics of 'Cambodia' versus 'Kampuchea' as symbols of sanity and revolutionary madness respectively, see the quotations from Sihanouk in Kershaw (1980b). For passages which extend a hand of friendship to Hanoi as a would-be saviour of Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge in the situation of 1979, see Norodom Sihanouk (1979), *passim*.
- 5 ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (six-strong after the accession of Brunei in 1984), was the most adamant in maintaining recognition of the Khmer Rouge 'Democratic Kampuchea' at the United Nations, because of the ominous precedent for 'disrespect for national frontiers' which the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia constituted in their eyes.
- 6 He was Vice-President of the Cabinet with special responsibility for economic affairs twice between 1965 and 1969, and Prime Minister once (doubling as Minister of Economics part of the time) in an Administration headed by Sihanouk. (See Ministère de l'Information, Phnom Penh 1970: 102–113.) He also held the office of Governor of the Central Bank at that period. Son Sann travelled from Paris to the Thai-Cambodian border area in late 1978 to organize the disparate bands of an existing 'Khmer Serei' ('Free Khmer') right-wing resistance movement for defence against a foreseeable Vietnamese invasion. The KPNLF was proclaimed inside Cambodia in October 1979 (see Kershaw 1981a: 518–519 for an outline).
- 7 See *ibid.* on Sihanouk's resentment at Son Sann's initiative, and his steps to create his own movement, also partly based on former 'Khmer Serei' warlordism. (Also on the irreconcilable pretensions of Sihanouk and Son Sann, see Kershaw 1981b.) FUNCINPEC as such, under that title, emerged in 1981. Its most fundamental function was to challenge KPNLF for international legitimacy as the nucleus of a successor-state to Democratic Kampuchea. It tacitly asserted the historic claim of monarchy, as Sihanouk's brief plan for a government-in-exile had done in 1979.
- 8 The Cambodian People's Party (*Pracieun* in Khmer) is the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party, renamed in 1991 on the eve of the Paris Conference on Cambodia.
- 9 See note 5, above.
- 10 For a view – perhaps not completely impartial – of Sihanouk's self-promoting role in 1981, attention is drawn again to both Kershaw (1981a) and Kershaw (1981b).
- 11 For the basic election results see Frost (1994: 85). Son Sann's Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BDLP) won 10 seats, and the break-away faction from the former KPNLF, Sak Sutsakhan's Liberal Democratic Party, none (though it polled more votes than another right-wing splinter group, Moulinaka, which gained 1 seat).
- 12 On Sihanouk's indefatigable round of contacts with ASEAN and other parties in 1989, for instance, see Palmujoki (1990). On the unique convergence of post-Cold War international perspectives on Cambodia in 1991, which offered such a rich prize to anyone who could orchestrate it, see Yeong (1992) (in June 1991 Sihanouk made a subtle shift towards Hun Sen by agreeing to the latter becoming his deputy as Chairman of the projected Supreme National Council – a concession which could not but help to keep Hanoi on board for the settlement).

- 13 Frost (1994: 88).
- 14 On this ominous trend, see Klintworth (1993: 116–120) and Frost (1994: 79). Also, in retrospect, Peou (1998a: 93).
- 15 It was even suspected that Sihanouk was party to the secessionist charade by Prince Chakrapong – part of the pressure on Ranariddh to yield to Hun Sen (Frost 1994: 86). Indeed, Sihanouk had already tried to pre-empt the election results before they were fully known by proposing a coalition government involving CPP and FUNCINPEC, to be headed by himself as Head of State, President of the Council of Ministers and Commander of the Armed Forces (*ibid.*: 85)!
- 16 In this light, Son Sann's indulgence towards monarchy may have had the positive motivation of setting up a conservative counterbalance of the most prestigious and effective kind available, to the dangerous power-monopoly of the thuggish pseudo-Left that was emerging. But what if the King-to-be was tacitly in league with the ex-Communists?
- 17 On the sacking of the Minister of Economics and Finance, Sam Rainsy, and sympathetic resignation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prince Norodom Sirivudh, in 1994, see Brown and McGrew (1995: 133) and Mehta (1996: 115). Sirivudh was succeeded as Foreign Minister by a FUNCINPEC man more amenable to both Ranariddh and Hun Sen: Ung Huot.
- 18 For discussion of the accusations and counter-accusations of the two sides, and the volatility created by Khmer Rouge decline, see Peang-Meth (1997: 295–296); and in greater detail, Peou (1998a: 86–93).
- 19 Despite the integration of royalist units into the official armed forces during the UNTAC interregnum, the enlarged army remained factionalized according to the allegiance of unit commanders, so 'faction armies' of limited strength did persist in a sense. A particularly provocative development for Hun Sen was the move by Ranariddh to beef up a personal bodyguard unit with imported arms.
- 20 On Sihanouk's poor health and its consequences, see Frost (1994: 89); Brown and McGrew (1995: 132); Mehta (1996: 118) and Peang-Meth (1997: 297).
- 21 Brown and McGrew (1995: 133).
- 22 Mehta (1996: 118).
- 23 *Ibid.*: 117.
- 24 Peang-Meth (1997: 289–290, 299).
- 25 *Ibid.*: 299–300. On Ranariddh's bitter recriminations against his father for this act, see *ibid.*: 307, n. 38.
- 26 Mehta (1996: 117).
- 27 In refusing to proffer reassurance to Prince Ranariddh in October 1995 when asked to take the armed forces under royal control, Sihanouk may have been adopting the 'correct posture of neutrality' for a Head of State (*ibid.*: 115), but his position will have earned some credit with Hun Sen, while also suggesting that Ranariddh was not Sihanouk's choice as heir to the throne. He then again played the 'accommodating neutral' (arguably more 'accommodating' than 'neutral') in December 1995 by proposing the solution which enabled Hun Sen to dispose of Prince Sirivudh 'painlessly' – by sending him into exile in France after the ex-Foreign Minister was arrested on a trumped-up charge of planning to assassinate Hun Sen (on this affair, see *ibid.*: 116). Or take the case of the royal amnesty granted to the first really important Khmer Rouge defector, Ieng Sary, in September 1996, which had been set up unilaterally by Hun Sen (Peou 1997: 85) and thus prompted Ranariddh to look for comparable opportunities in other Khmer Rouge defections, as described above.
- 28 Peang-Meth (1997: 298–299).
- 29 Peou 1998b: (294–295).
- 30 *Ibid.*: 282. And see Lizée (1999: 83–86) on the desperate importance of the King's name and reputation for Ranariddh, as a slight counterbalance to the CPP's control

- of the elections machinery and even more important predominance of arms as factors for victory. Sam Rainsy (Sam Rangsi) is a courageous liberal-democrat.
- 31 The Sam Rainsy Party gained fifteen.
 - 32 For an assessment of both the 'free and fair' and the 'flawed' perspectives, which itself leans towards the latter, see Peou (1998b). A downright expression of contempt for the Joint International Observation Group is seen in Lizée (1999: 84). The UN was able to monitor the elections but had no administrative function, unlike 1993. In early calculations of the result, FUNCINPEC would have got 42, CPP only 50, and SRP 29.
 - 33 The events recorded in the rest of this chapter, spanning July 1998-April 1999, are drawn from *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (Far East and Pacific)*, and thus based mainly on radio broadcasts and official statements from inside Cambodia.
 - 34 Part of the agreement was to establish a Senate. It seems a convoluted explanation, but could it be that the move was necessary in order to compensate Comrade Chea Sim, as well as CPP, for the loss of the Chairmanship of the National Assembly and the perquisite of providing the Acting Head of State? In the absence of the Chairman of the National Assembly it was agreed that the Chairman of the Senate should act as Head of State.
 - 35 Note, incidentally, that the declaration that he is 'Head of State for life' would still stand!
 - 36 Hypothetically, Sihanouk needs the facility to abdicate at a moment of his choosing so that he could wield some influence over the choice of his successor, working possibly through Prince Ranariddh as Chairman of the National Assembly and *ex officio* pre-eminent member of the Throne Council, who in the latter capacity would probably be disqualified as a candidate himself.
 - 37 Lim (1998: 4).
 - 38 Ou (1999a: 6).
 - 39 A strong statement in concurrence with this view, published latterly, goes as far as to say that 'the new Prime Minister had simply found, with the endorsement given by the King to his effort to form a government, the legitimacy he seemed unable to attain on the streets of Phnom Penh' (Lizée 1999: 86).
 - 40 But regime consolidation with the help of the King might also render that service partly redundant: see *Far Eastern Economic Review* (2000) on a symptom of disrespect for the King and Queen.
 - 41 By way of a post-script: at the end of 1999 Sihanouk and Ranariddh were, like Hun Sen, strangely equivocal as to the need for a credible international tribunal to try Khmer Rouge crimes, perhaps fearing that their own ambivalent relationship with the Khmer Rouge would be exposed and questioned. See Ou (1999b: 5).

7 Malaysia: monarchy overawed

- 1 This chapter draws most of its ideas, and much of its material up to 1993, from Kershaw (1993). However, from a standpoint in 1999 it has seemed appropriate to emphasize, not just the conflict between two 'foci of power', but a theme of Malay monarchy being overshadowed to the point of redundancy and replacement. For elaborating detail not included in this chapter, see the footnotes to Kershaw (1993).
- 2 The Federation was created simply to accommodate the Sultanates as separate entities; or in other words, 'It is not communalism which maintains the states': see Shafruddin (1987).
- 3 Dr Mahathir's celebrated work on Malay backwardness (Mahathir 1970) links the 'sham' of special rights to residual aristocratic influence in business and the civil service.

- 4 For more detail see Kershaw (1993: 288 n. 11). On the crisis from the point of view of federalism see Shafruddin (1987, Chapter 9); this work by a Malaysian scholar is unfortunately very sparse on the role of monarchs acting in their own interest.
- 5 The Agong insisted that the ensuing prosecution for assault be handled by Tan Sri Salleh Abbas, the Solicitor General (of whom much more later). Raja Azlan Shah, a member of the Perak royalty (of whom, also, more later) was on the bench. A three-year prison sentence was handed down but the offender's father exercised his prerogative of pardon.
- 6 These cases have become fairly widely known through the report of the appeals case: see *Malayan Law Journal* (1973). The prosecution appeal, lodged by Tan Sri Salleh Abbas (still Solicitor General) against sentences deemed too light, was heard by Raja Azlan Shah. The judge (who by a twist of fate was to become Sultan of Perak in 1984 and Agong in 1989) delivered a number of memorable remarks on the behaviour of the accused. (He was constrained to describe the accused as a first offender because of the royal pardon overriding the earlier sentence.)
- 7 The sentence in this case was six months' imprisonment for 'culpable homicide', but the offender was again subsequently pardoned by his father. The incident is mentioned in Jenkins (1983). Also of significance in the light of later events is the fact that again Tun Salleh Abbas prosecuted, as is mentioned by Means (1991: 272). The involvement of a private army – the Johor Military Force – in anti-smuggling operations (the responsibility of the Federal Police and Customs Service in other Malay States of the Peninsula) is a matter of considerable constitutional interest.
- 8 The forcing from office of the Johor Chief Minister following the succession (Kershaw 1984: 115) was connected with his reservations about the latter event, as one Malaysian scholar has reported (Selvaratnam 1982: 251).
- 9 Kershaw (1984: 116). For a lawyer's commentary, see Rawlings (1986).
- 10 For complete clarity regarding the emergency power, it must be noted that the Agong's obligation to consult the Cabinet, mentioned in Kershaw (1984: 114, 116), had never actually been spelt out in Article 150 of the Constitution. On this and other aspects of the emergency power, such as the invariable enhancement of the institution of monarchy (as well as executive power) which every State of Emergency bestows, see Lowe (1982: 81, 83). On the fact that the rulers' agreement, at the end of the 1983 crisis, that the Agong would always consult the Cabinet, was only by verbal assurance, see Rawlings (1986: 251). It is also relevant that the 1981 Constitutional Amendment which Dr Mahathir 'inherited' from the previous cabinet had potentially enhanced the Agong's power not only by taking away parliamentary review of Proclamations of Emergency but by making the Agong's belief in a merely 'imminent' danger to public order a sufficient ground for such a proclamation: cf. Lee (1986a: 147–148). For complementary coverage of the 1983 crisis and the temperament of the Sultan of Johor, with some additional detail, see Milne and Mauzy (1999: 30–38).
- 11 The extraordinary informality of the contacts between ruling party and rulers during the crisis is well described by Ong (1984). Above all, during these contacts, when they had reached an impasse, Dr Mahathir threatened to go ahead with the Amendments without royal agreement: Rawlings (1986: 251). Not surprisingly, during the next crisis, ten years later, royalists would maintain that the abolition of the Agong's putative power of dissent in 1983 was illegal because never formally agreed to by the Conference: see *Straits Times*, 23 January 1993. But part of the strength of Dr Mahathir's position in 1983 was possibly that the Constitution nowhere specifies the modalities of the exercise of the Conference's veto, not even indicating that the Agong would act as mouthpiece for the Conference in any matter, let alone this one.
- 12 The view that the Conference should have been consulted on any Amendment affecting their powers – as enshrined in Article 38 (4) of the Federal Constitution

since Independence in 1957 – has been voiced in Kershaw (1984: 116); proposed for consideration by Rawlings (1986: 249); and extensively argued by Lee 1986b (see esp. p 245: the consent of the Conference should be obtained first). Lee also points out (*ibid.*: 249) that the whole crisis could have been avoided by applying to the Federal Court for a ruling on the implied right to refuse legislative assent. In the light of events to be discussed below, it may be legitimate to surmise that constitutional amendment appears to Dr Mahathir as a more effective way of achieving the executive will, since the executive has always commanded the requisite two-thirds majority for it, and besides, direct ‘appeal’ to Parliament avoids the uncertainties of judicial process.

- 13 The Sultan was in fact deeply embittered by Dr Mahathir’s attempt – unsuccessful though it had been in the event – to emasculate the legislative prerogatives of the monarchs within their States, since as Regent in the 1977 crisis he had bowed to UMNO’s centralizing imperatives and opposed neither a dissolution of the Kelantan State Assembly when requested by Datuk Muhammad Nasir (albeit his father intervened to postpone it), nor the subsequent Emergency and suspension of the State Constitution. Friends of the Sultan identify him, rather than Azlan Shah, as the man who warned the Agong (the Sultan of Pahang) in 1983 of the terrible significance of the Constitutional Amendments and galvanized him into rejecting them.
- 14 Apart from any souring due to later disagreements, Musa, a Johorean, had somewhat prevaricated over the 1983 Constitutional Amendments – until a famous rally at Batu Pahat, his enemies allege – and then had been at conspicuous pains to repair his relationship with his Sultan.
- 15 For an account of the origins, progression and outcome of this election, see Kershaw (1989). The basic intra-party events, up to and including the 1987 election, are enumerated in the said article but not the interplay between party and royalty mentioned in this paragraph, nor the fact that Tengku Razaleigh’s bitterness at his treatment also stemmed in some measure from the 1977 Kelantan crisis, since his contribution to UMNO on that occasion had seemed to count for nothing.
- 16 The exhibitionism of the Johor ruler-cum-Agong, as well as the Malaysian government’s indulgence towards it, was well attested on TV screens – as in the case of the Agong’s flamboyant appearance at a public ceremony, riding a police outrider’s motorbike, which was duly included as a ‘scene from national life’ in a ‘patriotic TV spot’ during his tenure.
- 17 A source close to the Prime Minister indicated to the writer in mid-October 1987 that action against the judiciary was being contemplated. This was four months after the UMNO dissidents had brought their suit against the party elections, but the Aliran conference, ‘Reflections on the Malaysian Constitution: 30 years after Merdeka’ (held in Kuala Lumpur on 16 August and addressed by Tunku Abdul Rahman) and the University of Malaya Faculty of Law conference, ‘The Malaysian Constitution after 30 years’ (22–23 August, and addressed by Sultan Azlan Shah of Perak) may have added to the sense of alarm in executive quarters; a reply to propaganda branding the first conference as ‘anti-Constitution’ is included in the published collection of its papers – see Chandra Muzaffar (1987: 310–314). At the end of the year there was also an intractable *habeas corpus* case involving an opposition MP (Means 1991: 237). On other ‘irritants’, see Harding (1989).
- 18 The effect of suspension was to enable the appeals hearing to be postponed. It went ahead on 9 August – and confirmed the illegality of UMNO – after Tun Salleh was definitively removed from office following a tribunal. Two other judges were removed by another tribunal. For an extensive legal – but also politically perceptive – analysis of the whole affair, see Harding (1990).
- 19 Means (1991: 238–239), merely notes that it was an ‘ironic twist’ that Tun Salleh should have appealed (regarding the intimidating behaviour of the executive) to the man whom he had sentenced, in 1977, to six months in jail.

- 20 Means (1991: 220, n. 19). On the Tunku's proposal for a special court, see also Abdul Rahman (1987). In fact, although the golf course incident was not aired in the news columns seen by the present writer, a letter by Tongkat Semambu (pseud.) in *Berita Harian*, 26 December 1992, called for the killing of a caddy, and the allegedly related case of Private Adam, to be investigated as a matter of urgency. (On Private Adam, see paragraph after next, and note 21.)
- 21 Subsequently, Private Adam Jaafar was put on trial, in the interests of (formal) justice; but in the interests of (informal) justice, as it were, was exonerated in the light of 'psychiatric evidence', which invoked the trauma of degrading acts forced upon him as a recruit in the course of ragging as well as hereditary epilepsy – arguments against which the prosecution mobilized no refuting testimony.
- 22 Although the party that Mahathir was trying to reconstruct was called 'New UMNO', it claimed to be the only true heir to the old one and thus alone entitled to celebrate its anniversaries. The emotional significance of the foundation of the original party in 1946 is evinced by the title of Tengku Razaleigh's dissident movement, officially registered under that name in June 1989.
- 23 Further regarding the enmity between the Prime Minister and the Sultan of Kelantan: an insider report indicated that at a meeting with the Kelantan UMNO leadership in April 1989 the Prime Minister referred to the need to indoctrinate the grassroots on 'the dangers of monarchy'; and there were indications (for instance, in remarks made to journalists during the 1993 crisis) that the late 1990 and late 1991 UMNO General Assembly debates on the monarchy were part of a conscious 'softening up' process, designed to accustom Malay opinion to the possibility of criticizing royalty. Friends of the Sultan of Kelantan, meanwhile, believed that Dr Mahathir was consumed with frustration because the Sultan is religious and had not risen to the bait of business opportunity with which Dr Mahathir had lured other rulers into compromising activity.
- 24 The long-serving President of the MHE, Sultan Azlan Shah of Perak (the Agong), would surely, at the least, have cleared the decision to proceed at the highest political level. And it is again quite striking that the Attorney-General did not order the police to arrest the prince until 11 December, *after* Parliament had resolved to take action to stop violence by reigning royalty. (The salient events in this and the next two paragraphs were reported in *New Straits Times* [Malaysia] and *Straits Times* [Singapore] on various dates during the second half of the year.)
- 25 With regard to possible tactical intent on the part of Dr Mahathir, one should also probably be cautious about seeing special significance in the extraordinarily low key of the Prime Minister's, and party members', comments on the monarchy at the UMNO General Assembly, 5–7 November. For one thing, since the prince had won a judicial restraining order in respect of the ban, on 26 October, the case was arguably *sub judice* and any new warning to the Johor royal house would have been improper on that count. Still, the first boycott of a hockey match had already occurred the previous month (in Ipoh), and could have been expected to attract angry comment at the party congress in normal circumstances.
- 26 The further session of the Conference which agreed to the revised draft of the Amendment Bill had taken place on 11 February. The Agong returned the original Bill to the Speaker of Parliament not long after this.
- 27 Beyond the ranks of UMNO, the most aggressive Malay criticism came from Tengku Razaleigh's Spirit of '46, but apparently on the classic, communalist grounds of 'the vital role of monarchy in symbolizing Malay supremacy', not in the name of constitutional pluralism and balance of power. Traditionally anti-royalist PAS was, at best, ambivalent because of its position in the Kelantan government and cordial relationship between the Chief Minister and the Sultan. DAP likewise was torn between conflicting emotions: the democratic desire to dismantle an archaic institution, and the perception that to vote for the Bill would further

- strengthen the power of Dr Mahathir to deal roughly with opposition parties (but its decision not to support the original Bill was facilitated by DAP's alliance with Spirit of '46 as much as by constitutional principle).
- 28 See Kershaw (1997) for an outline of this international crisis, which was engineered for important purposes of domestic and international political management, all distinct from the issue of authority over water rights which had slightly agitated Kuala Lumpur-Kota Bharu relations in 1992. The 'foreign enemy' was to play an even more prominent part in Dr Mahathir's scheme to remove his latest Deputy, Anwar Ibrahim, in 1998 – an incident cited at the end of this chapter. But it should not be ruled out that the 'Pergau affair' itself offered advantage for Dr Mahathir's rivalry with Anwar, after the latter had manoeuvred himself into the deputy leadership of UMNO in November 1993, some time in advance of Dr Mahathir's timetable for his promotion (also discussed below). Milne and Mauzy (1999: 38–39) devote only twelve lines to the 1993 constitutional crisis, which they relate purely to the assault on the hockey coach.
 - 29 A report in *Straits Times*, 14 May 1994, by a Malay staffer in Kuala Lumpur seems to miss the point of the Amendment on royal assent, even though listing it as first item.
 - 30 See also Vatikiotis (1994) on the poor standing of the rulers with public opinion since the revelations of the 1992–93 crisis.
 - 31 Two useful reports on the amendment are Vatikiotis (1994) and *The Economist* (1994). For the view of a Malaysian lawyer, questioning whether the federal parliament could thus amend states powers anyway, see Zainur (1994). On the opulent lifestyle and business activities of several of the royalty, see Pitman (1994). Most dangerously for them, Sultans or their offspring who have launched into capitalist enterprise are vulnerable to blocking of the lucrative construction contracts which the government is able to hand out (and which give the ruling party leverage on the Malay business class as a whole). More diffusely, they are prone to be attacked as 'parasites' in populist campaigns. During the 1992–93 crisis the Sultan of Pahang's private jet (a Boeing 727 on lease from the Sultan of Brunei) had come under the spotlight.
 - 32 Liak (1996: 217).
 - 33 A seminal study which discusses the dynamics of the 'people's mandate' in Mahathir's political strategy (but only up to 1990) is Khoo (1995).
 - 34 After a year as a re-admitted party member he was appointed head of his old constituency division in January 1998. See *Straits Times Weekly Edition*, 31 January 1998.
 - 35 On this issue, see *Straits Times Weekly Edition*, 26 July 1997; 2 August 1997.
 - 36 The opposition in the long drawn-out struggle to preserve justice have invoked the ancient compact between the founder of the Malacca line, Seri Tri Buana, and his chief minister, Demang Lebar Daun, as enshrined in the Malay classic, *Sejarah Melayu*. See *Aliran* (1999).
 - 37 For the first time since 1959, both Kelantan and Trengganu fell to the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party. See Watts (1999). Anwar's wife was leading the new Justice Party.
 - 38 Kershaw (1994: 147); Liak (1996: 236).
 - 39 A furtive challenge from Tengku Razaleigh for the leadership of UMNO in March 2000 adds at least some aristocratic spice to the brew, but Razaleigh's apparent failure will discourage further 'high-born' initiatives.

8 Brunei: perks and perils of absolute rule

- 1 The perspectives in this paragraph are derived from, or prompted by, the discussions in Beblawi and Luciani 1987, especially the editors' Introduction: 1–21. On the 'rentier behaviour' of the Saudi royalty, see Beblawi (1987: 55).
- 2 Bartholomew (1989: 18).

- 3 Koenig (1985: 86).
- 4 Cleary and Wong (1994: 73).
- 5 Weaver (1991: 65).
- 6 See Stephen (1999).
- 7 Rubin (1998: 90).
- 8 *Ibid.*: 89.
- 9 Ministry of Finance (1997: 117).
- 10 *Ibid.*: 177.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*: 175.
- 13 *Ibid.*: 177.
- 14 Cleary and Wong (1994: 78).
- 15 The two authors' potentially valuable discussion of GDP is difficult for at least the economic layman to handle, because it is silent or unclear about the basic data which have gone into the calculations. If the authors were using a figure for GDP that included income from the financial reserves, or if they had depressed the population figure to exclude foreign workers, in either case the per capita GDP would obviously rise, but no clues are given.
- 16 *Ibid.*: 78–79. They presumably mean that such investment has achieved a *higher* level, if general living standards have been maintained amidst declining per capita GDP.
- 17 Ministry of Finance (1997: 5).
- 18 Based on Ministry of Finance (1997: 117). This is obviously very rough and ready, but Cleary and Wong (1994: 73), whose data went up to about 1990, estimated that 'hydrocarbon revenues from royalties and taxes accounted for around 60%' of the total of revenue apart from investment income.
- 19 Naimah (1996: 106) points out that the government is resorting to the privatization of some State-run services as one way of fostering a private sector. (Certainly there is a need for it, given the modest \$40m earned by Brunei's much-vaunted textile exports in 1994! And it is not officially advertised that 'Brunei's textile industry' depends on joint-venture capital and mainly Thai seamstresses.)
- 20 British Petroleum (1997: 7).
- 21 Ministry of Finance (1997: 117–118). When Naimah (1996: 110) mentions a budget deficit two years running, and we know that there is no public borrowing by the Brunei Government, it follows as a matter of definition that the deficit is being made up from the reserves. Also instructive, 'between the lines', may be Ismail and Abdul Amin (1998: 57, 64–66) where they report (from a physical location and political stance close to the regime) the ambitiously funded Seventh Development Plan, while arguing that the inflexible long-term husbanding of financial reserves, or even of oil reserves, may be at the expense of more desirable forms of current development, including a redirection of resources away from the oil sector.
- 22 Alexander (1998).
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 Harding (1998).
- 25 See text in Negara Brunei Darussalam (n.d.: viii).
- 26 See State of Brunei (1959). Its twelve Parts were: I. Preliminary; II. Religion; III. Executive Authority; IV. Privy Council; V. The Executive Council; VI. The Legislative Council; VII. Legislation and Procedure in the Legislative Council; VIII. Finance; IX. The Public Services; X. The State Seal; XI. Miscellaneous; XII. Amendment and Interpretation of the Constitution.
- 27 State of Brunei (1959).
- 28 In 1962 the method of election was indirect, via the district councils; in 1965, direct to Legislative Council. In neither case did the elective element have the majority. In

- 1965, under intense British pressure, two elected members of Legco were included in the Executive Council.
- 29 'Even the British supported MIB' is a claim often heard with reference to the constitutional negotiations of 1959. (Cf. Mohd. Jamil 1996: 3.) See below, for an analysis of MIB.
 - 30 Negeri Brunei (1983).
 - 31 Negara Brunei Darussalam (1984a).
 - 32 The new date corresponds to the birthday of the late Seri Begawan Sultan. However, from 1994, 29 September has been revived: as 'Civil Service Day'.
 - 33 Next to the recruitment of Professor Saedon, perhaps the most important propaganda success of the 1990s was the surrender of the secular rebel of 1962 vintage, Zaini Ahmad, former second-in-command of the PRB. Like Saedon he had been in exile in Malaysia. Unlike Saedon, he had to serve a couple of years in detention, and then 'disappeared' into an anonymous retirement. His case is perhaps not quite as significant as that of Saedon because only Bruneians of the middle-aged and older generation would have remembered his name.
 - 34 For a critical exposition see Braighlinn (1992: 32–34).
 - 35 In fact, the Director of the Academy of Brunei Studies of Universiti Brunei Darussalam, which acts as research agency to the National Council on MIB, has sketched an approach to the 'meaning of MIB' which would treat Brunei–Malay culture as the matrix, instead of Islam (Abdul Latif 1994). Under this approach, both Islam and the monarchical system become expressions of Malayness, rather than subordinating Malayness to their authority. On the cultivated distinction in media discourse between 'Brunei, Abode of Peace' and the rest of the world as a 'Zone of Disorder', see Braighlinn (1992: 51–57).
 - 36 Not all of these intellectual entrepreneurs are Muslim. A few of the infidels are soothsayers, pure and simple. A notable British example was a (non-hereditary) British peer – not exactly an oracle but a plausible publicist whose biography and film of the Sultan must have strengthened the subject's own self-confidence at least a little (see Chalfont 1989). The present writer began to believe in the Sultan's faith in his divine appointment when tears filled his eyes at the ceremonial 'launch' of Brunei's completed, hand-written Quran – a sacred bestowal by the Sultan – at the time of the Silver Jubilee in 1992. For an observation apparently based on personal interview, see Tyler (1990: 64).
 - 37 This even involved academics at the local university, as mentioned in note 35. The two greatest bureaucratic beneficiaries – or leaders – of the Islamic trend were the Minister of Education, Pehin Abdul Aziz bin Umar, and a former Director of Information and leading ideologue, Pehin (Ustaz) Badaruddin bin Othman.
 - 38 On that initial formulation, see Kershaw (1984).
 - 39 Contrast merely the footwear and furniture in the pictures from Hassanal Bolkiah's childhood, and the period when his own two families were growing up, in Chalfont (1989: 32, 34; 58, 63). Even more telling is the contrast between the Palace of 1946 (in which Hassanal Bolkiah, son of a Bendahara, is said, with a little chronicler's licence, to have been born) and its successor but one of 1984, in *ibid.*: 33, 60–61.
 - 40 The idea that the 'oil will last only another twenty-five years' has been a consistent feature of Brunei forecasting, always based on current discoveries and available drilling technologies, but so far invariably superseded, so that the 'horizon of doom' always stays comfortably far off in the future.
 - 41 Cleary and Wong (1994: 74).
 - 42 Chalfont (1989: 147–148).
 - 43 Negara Brunei Darussalam (1984b).
 - 44 Negara Brunei Darussalam (1984c).
 - 45 BBC SWB (Asia and Pacific), 5 August 1998, quoting *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 3 August 1998. See also Jefri Bolkiah (1998), on his battle with 'religious conservatives'.

- 46 Long before the coming of satellite dishes and the Internet, Brunei had become fairly 'porous' to the fax machine. Whenever an article or picture was excised from a newspaper or magazine imported from or via Singapore, government officials would ask contacts in Singapore, etc., to fax through a copy for their information or entertainment. In the case of the 'Miss Philippines' sensation, and palace 'night-life' generally, there was ample, and clearly authentic, exposure in one of the Hong Kong news magazines, which will have found its way into Brunei – though not via the news-stands (*Asiaweek* 1993).
- 47 Efforts at the diplomatic level were rewarded by August, when the Sultan was granted a form of diplomatic immunity as a Head of State, by the US State Department. For the text of the Sultan's TV address, see *Pelita Brunei* (1997).
- 48 See Smith (1998); Horsnell (1998a, 1998b).
- 49 Horsnell (1998c).
- 50 Harding (1998).
- 51 Vines (1998).
- 52 Whittell (1998).
- 53 See Behar (1999: 64), quoting Pehin Aziz in a September 1998 briefing. The text of the briefing was printed in the relevant issue of the government newspaper: see *Pelita Brunei* (1998).
- 54 Harding (1998).
- 55 Ulfert, which had begun as a design and furnishing company, was still listed in the Brunei telephone directory in 1998 but Amedeo remained firmly ex-directory.
- 56 Horsnell (1998b).
- 57 Horsnell (1998a).
- 58 See Rocco (1998: 49). Rocco picks up the Jefri story in 1995 with his purchase of Asprey, the British Queen's jewellers, for £100m, through Amedeo Crown. The manning arrangements for 'Tits' are not mentioned in this article, but this could be the yacht whose complement of deck-hands consisted of mainly young Caucasian females, as several expatriates of the same race were able to notice when business or recreation took them to the estuary.
- 59 A glimpse into royal self-indulgence, more broadly than, but not excluding Prince Jefri's, is afforded by an illustrated exposé of royal automobiles, Rosamond (1998).
- 60 Of course Islam itself cannot be 'hypocritical' but its officials could be. Note that the Malay term and Islamic concept of *munafik* has overtones of infidelity because it involves something comparable to, but even more heinous than, the Christian sin of 'taking the Lord's name in vain'.
- 61 Elf (1996: 81).
- 62 On the kid-gloves treatment accorded to Jefri on his return see Behar (1999: 65).
- 63 The reference for the text of the speech is *Pelita Brunei* (1999).
- 64 See Cleary and Francis (1999: 72–74) on the 'new openness' during 1998 but lack of unambiguous pointers to change. The Perdana Wazir's September interview is reported in *Straits Times* (1998). In a further interview with the Western media Prince Mohamed has again said that 'a final decision' on constitutional reform – which could include 'elections' in some form – is still awaited (see Mitton 1999a).
- 65 For an account full of brilliant *aperçus*, including a general sense that family solidarity will protect Jefri – in other words, that the witch-hunt had an element of political theatre about it – see Behar (1999). For the general scenario as at August 1999, including the report of the auditors on Amedeo's debts, and Jefri's exile in London, see Mitton (1999b).
- 66 A final note is imperative on the civil suit launched on 24 February 2000 in the High Court of Brunei Darussalam (with parallel action in London), against Prince Jefri and his companies, for recovery of BIA funds (*Pelita Brunei* 2000). While eschewing a criminal prosecution against a prince of the blood, the government seems to perceive a need for public accusation and pursuit, probably in order to make 'wage

restraint' more palatable to the population and in order to confirm official commitment to financial probity and morality in public life. At one level, this is a remarkable victory for the Islamic reformists. And yet the case was soon settled out of court.

9 Thailand: a King for all seasons

- 1 On the King's frequent expressions of empathy with the problems and aspirations of rural poor, students and intelligentsia, in the five years prior to the 'October revolution' of 1973, see Morell and Samudavanija (1981: 64–69). Indeed, by 1973 'King Bhumibol had become the most powerful figure in his nation's political system' (*ibid.*: 68).
- 2 From contrasting perspectives, see Piker (1975); Turton (1978).
- 3 Cf. speech to students at Chulalongkorn University in 1969, quoted in Morell and Samudavanija (1981: 67–68).
- 4 This was after the largest party, the Democrat Party, had failed to win a vote of confidence for its coalition.
- 5 In this connection, it has proved possible for one foreign observer to deliver exceptionally sharp judgement on the complacency of many of the students' academic mentors for failing to foster an alternative, more patient orientation towards democracy, appropriate to Thailand's cultural realities: Zimmerman (1978: 70).
- 6 Cf. Kraivixien (1975). At the same time, the King himself was becoming vocal on the subject of 'institutional subversion': cf. the quotation from a December 1975 address in Zimmerman (1978: 81). The three institutional pillars – Sangha, Monarchy, Military – are not identical with the three sacral, national principles of Religion, Nation, Monarch, which constitute the core of the modern 'civic religion' and the content of official slogans (Reynolds 1973). Ideological tensions in recent times are partly attributable to the fact that when civic religion was supplemented by the principle of a Constitution after 1932, the Thai military only supported that principle at the level of lip service. Strenuous expressions of military support for the Monarch are perhaps functionally a way of both downgrading the Constitution and placing the Military itself on a par with the other sacral principles that it defends, through association.
- 7 Cf. Mallet (1978: 89); Girling (1981: 206) and Zimmerman (1978: 74). For an impartial discussion of the Kukrit administration, see Jumbala (1987). In 1976 the Social Action Party finished with an increased tally of 45 seats, but well behind the Democrat Party, whose total had risen from 72 to 114.
- 8 On these events and nexuses at greater length, see Kershaw (1979e, 1982). The sharpest focus of military power centred on the power of appointment to the Senate, which devolved on the military Prime Minister, General Kriangsak. However, in practice this does not seem to differ from what happened in January 1975, when the outgoing, provisional premier, Professor Sanya, countersigned the royal command in this connection.
- 9 See Pramoj (1975); Kraivixien (1977). Kukrit's text was written as a lecture in 1973, and was published by a local university during his premiership; Tanin's was based on a lecture given in 1975, and published by the government during his premiership. Some analytical commentary has been set out but not previously published in Kershaw (1980c). The substantive parts of that paper are reproduced as sections 11.22 and 11.23 of Chapter 11 and exactly in their original form as the paper has been cited elsewhere (Phillips 1987: 110, 378).
- 10 See Stevenson (1999).
- 11 See *Patinyaa* (1983), of which a précis is included as section 11.24 of Chapter 11.
- 12 It was not in Kukrit's nature to write anything about monarchy that was knowingly at variance with the King's view, albeit Kukrit used to annoy other intelligentsia by

his readiness to act as self-appointed spokesman for the King. There may have been a good degree of consonance in their views up until 1975. It was only later that Kukrit seemed out of step, especially when his growing prestige as democratic Premier posed a sort of competition to the charisma of the King, which had also taken a new lease of life from the events of late 1973. The apex of their alienation came about five months after Kukrit had ceased to be Prime Minister and returned to journalism: his newspaper column expressed horrified deprecation of the King's show of favour to the returning Thanom in September 1976 (Pramoj 1976a). A credible hypothesis for the period 1972–74 is that there was already a latent (but only marginal) difference of emphasis between the two personalities, but it was not apparent to either of them and only took on practical significance as the 'democratic experiment' came into effect and forced both King and Premier to act out their inner convictions or new opportunities in the open. Certainly it must be stressed that Kukrit never at any time demurred from the King's intervention in October 1973. For a sketch of his life, which spanned 1911–95, see the obituary, Stowe (1995).

- 13 See Bhumibol Adulyadej (1999).
- 14 The Memoir is entered in the Bibliography, below, under Office of His Majesty's Principal Private Secretary (1987). See p. 52 for this extract.
- 15 Xuto (1987: 197). See also Tan (1991: 289), on the difficulty for today's military leaders of staging a coup unless the government has suffered a serious loss of legitimacy.
- 16 Kershaw (1979d).
- 17 Kershaw (1979e).
- 18 *Ibid.*: 306.
- 19 The elections in question were those of April 1979 (Prem was appointed by the King to replace Kriangsak after the latter resigned, in February 1980); April 1983; and July 1986. Prem's tenure as Commander-in-Chief terminated in August 1981 (see Hong 1982). With the expiry of the 'transitional clauses' of the 1979 Constitution in April 1983 (Chinwanno 1984), it was no longer possible for a serving military officer or civil servant to occupy a cabinet position, but election to parliament was not mandatory.
- 20 Kershaw (1981c); Chinwanno (1984).
- 21 Santasombat (1989: 318).
- 22 On General Chaovalit's brief membership of the Chatichai cabinet during mid-1990 as a Deputy Prime Minister, and resignation in reaction to the taunts of elected ministers, see Tan (1991). For an excellent review of Prem's extended premiership, with emphasis on his dependence on the military more than the political parties, even while he partly domesticated the military, see Santasombat (1989). Although Sunthorn became Chairman of the National Peace-Keeping Council (NPKC), General Suchinda was considered the real coup leader (Bhuchongkul 1992: 314).
- 23 On the two candidates who 'failed the test', see Tasker (1992). On 'progressive-minded university professors' who had at first heralded Chatichai's appointment, simply because he was an elected MP, but later turned against him on account of perceived cronyism, rampant corruption and inter-party squabbles (the ostensible grounds for the February 1991 coup!) see Tan (1991: 286). The mounting pressure for an elected Prime Minister had not, as it happens, achieved any Constitutional Amendment to this end since 1979, so premiership by appointment was still perfectly legal throughout the 1980s. It was to be the violence of May 1992 (as political liability) that forced the armed forces interest to concede (i.e. not resist) this point constitutionally post-Suchinda.
- 24 Nakata (1987: 172); Xuto (1987: 205).
- 25 Samudavanija (1987: 10, 22, 33); Nakata (1987: 169, 178).
- 26 On the origins of this new party see Maisrikrod (1993: 327). On parliament as 'a political stock exchange where political posts may be acquired by well-endowed

- speculators making successful bids while the resourceless majority are excluded from the political system', see Santasombat (1989: 325). (Party-switching, especially by 'pro-military' politicians, was a conspicuous feature just ahead of the September 1992 polls.)
- 27 For a description of this scene and its significance see Maisrikrod (1993: 331, 334).
 - 28 NPKC was the military junta, the 'National Peace-keeping Council'. On the two administrations of Anand, see Tan (1992), based on an interview with him at the end of his second term.
 - 29 There are indications that the two Privy Councillors called in as mediators by the King, General Prem and Professor Sanya, urged the interests concerned not to rush into the nomination of a Premier if no immediate consensus was available. Conceivably this counsel of delay facilitated in a non-fortuitous way the King's reappointment of Anand. Certainly the withholding of royal consent to the Constitutional Amendment on an elected Premier was deliberate, in order to let Anand then occupy the post up until the September elections.
 - 30 See Kershaw (1981c); Hong (1982), on the attempted coup by 'young colonels' and the dramatic dash by Prem and the royal family, by road in the dead of night, to the North-East where refuge was assured under the regional command of General Arthit.
 - 31 See Hong (1985) for a full account.
 - 32 The political uses of Army Orders 66/2523 and 2525 outside the domain of counter-insurgency to which they originally referred have been documented by a succession of observers. First, we meet the basic notion that the Orders should be understood as justifying also the conventional or classical political role of the military (Chinwanno 1984: 312); then the ingenious claim of General Arthit that because the political approach to counter-insurgency had not been as successful as was at first thought, the army's conventional political influence should be allowed an 'extension' (the interest of Arthit, as of late 1984, in securing guarantees of his own extension the following year is of course no coincidence: cf. Hong 1985: 326); and later, on the grounds of its success in counter-insurgency, the revamping of a military agency, ISOC, by Arthit's versatile successor to combine the grass-roots function with national political leadership by co-opting party leaders into its structure as a 'promoter of democratic values' (Snitwongse 1988: 275-6).
 - 33 On 1 April 1987. See Ramalingam (1987); Snitwongse (1988: 276).
 - 34 There had been an oblique hint, in November 1987, in connection with the stormy issue of amendments to the Copyright Bill (Snitwongse 1988: 278).
 - 35 Santasombat (1989: 320).
 - 36 Kukrit's wrath in his 1987 polemic was in reaction partly to Chavalit's sheer presumption in allocating, uninvited, a purely passive and symbolic position to the King under his 'Communist-style' democratic centralism; but it also, clearly, reflected the fact that such a political emasculation was unacceptable not only to the King (for whom Kukrit appeared to be partly speaking) but also to Kukrit himself. (See Ramalingam 1987.) Kukrit's commitment to keeping his analysis of Chavalit's philosophy in the public eye was shown by his dramatic 'surrender' of himself to the police in August 1992 to answer a libel suit by Chavalit; while the validity of Kukrit's analysis seems to gain strength from the fact that none other than ex-General Suchinda was named in Chavalit's suit for similarly branding Chavalit as a crypto-Communist.
 - 37 This took the form of a self-drafted decree of the junta, initially. See Streckfuss (1996b: xi).
 - 38 This is as claimed by Sulak Sivaraksa, not in the published text of a famous speech of 1991, but according to the charge sheet in his *lèse-majesté* trial, presumably based on a tape-recording: see Streckfuss (1996b: x).

- 39 See the analysis in Bhuchongkul (1992: 314–315). The fact that political parties were not banned during the interregnum, and that the military clique launched its own political party Samakkhi Tham (as has been mentioned), to fight the next elections, clearly indicated that the coup leaders themselves (or some of them) appreciated that times had changed. A masterly analysis of ineluctable socio-economic change – the death knell of military rule in the long term, though not a guarantee of the immediate success of democratic institutions – is Paribatra (1993).
- 40 Maisrikrod (1993: 334). For that matter, Suchinda himself was possibly moving in an information vacuum at this point, believing that the demonstrations could not be spontaneous but were inspired by rival military factions (*ibid.*: 332)!
- 41 Streckfuss (1996a) is an absolutely seminal essay on the theory and practice of *lèse-majesté* in modern Thailand. Shorter, but not less acute, is Arnott (1996).
- 42 Streckfuss (1996a: 55).
- 43 See Limpopyorm (1999). This particular cult, arising from the reputed appearance by the Princess to a lady doctor in a dream, took part of its political dynamism from the current financial crisis and the present King's call for sacrifice. Indeed, the ghost of the Princess attributed Thailand's woes to precisely the decline of the spirit of sacrifice in this age of rampant materialism, and called for a return to the values which she had personified in becoming a concubine-hostage of the King of Burma.
- 44 On currents of historiography old and new, see the brilliant Winichakul (1995).
- 45 See *ibid.*, both for the application of the term 'commodification' to history as 'nostalgia industry', and for a passing reference to tourism as one agent of sponsorship.
- 46 See Kershaw (1979b: 256).
- 47 This is not to say that the cult of Rama V is not continuing, or may not be having a diffuse impact on the divinizing tendency surrounding the Ninth Rama himself. An essay on the former cult by one of the 'new generation' of historians is Aeusriwongse (1993). Professor Nidhi is also quoted on the subject in Vatikiotis (1995a). Two perceptive but sympathetic essays on the present King on the occasion of the Jubilee are Tasker (1996) and Vatikiotis and Fairclough (1996).
- 48 Hewison (1997: 73). This is another vital contribution to the study of Thai monarchy, and one that should be read as an antidote to any unduly 'rosy' perspective of the present writer. Hewison's approach would see royal altruism as essentially an axiom of the doctrine, not available for empirical testing.
- 49 See Vatikiotis *et al.* (1995) and Vatikiotis (1995b) on the view of an apparent confidant of the King who had been placed in a strategic position to make authoritative recommendations. Also Xuto (1987: 199), reviewing discussion of this option among others.
- 50 Nevertheless, the present writer is loath to be dogmatic in defending the King's actions as invariably altruistic or rationalistic. There was the long estrangement from the talented daughter who married an American, and the constant indulgence towards the academic 'halo' which local universities have bestowed on the second daughter. This subsidiary cult of the genius of the King's offspring is one of the negative features of the contemporary monarchy which has met with the disapproval of 'Thailand's most famous social critic' – disapproval which featured on the charge sheet in the second prosecution now to be mentioned. However, the reasons for any 'failings' may often look like reasonable excuses. For instance, the King surely faces some petty, 'reactionary' pressures from his circle, including immediate family.
- 51 See much documentation in Sivaraksa (1985b: 337–452). For detailed coverage of that case, see also Sivaraksa (1985a). On the King's intercession see Sivaraksa (1985b: 451); also a statement by Sulak (Sivaraksa 1993b: 309). The role of Arthit is elaborated upon in Hong (1985: 326); McKinley (1985: 400). Sulak's book is listed in the Bibliography of the present study as Sivaraksa (1984).

- 52 For this argument, with an expression of some chagrin that the court did not go further, yet with acknowledgement that what it did was without previous parallel, see Streckfuss (1996b: ix–x).
- 53 See Lovisuth (1990). Note also a 1989 speech by the King cited in Weatherbee (1990: 359); and the activities of Princess Chulabhorn which led to a death threat in 1992.
- 54 Also with regard to forest preservation or renewal, see Tasker (1994). On the other hand, conservationists were concerned throughout that period that the King had yet to distance himself from the cult of the white elephant, which can involve considerable slaughter in the process of capturing albino calves.
- 55 See Vatikiotis *et al.* (1995). The King's anxiety about 'money politics' taking over democracy was amply justified in the light of the reasons advanced by the Sunthorn–Suchinda coup-group in 1991 for acting against the Chart Thai-led government of Chatichai. Banharn was the new leader of the same party, which by now had acquired a reputation of even greater venality.
- 56 These are his videotaped views as heard in Part 2 of *The Royal Court of Thailand*, BBC2, 25 August 1998. But perhaps there is a danger of becoming too 'defensive' on behalf of the King: Sulak is, after all, the King's defender, not his deliberate detractor! Further to note 51, Sulak himself is well aware that the prosecution against himself in 1984 on account of some mild observations on foreign influence in the education of certain Thai monarchs, including the present King (see Sivaraksa 1984; also extracts in English in Sivaraksa 1985b: 417–419) was launched as a tension-building ploy in connection with General Arthit's desire for an extension of service as Army Commander-in-Chief after October 1985, if not succession to General Prem as Prime Minister at an earlier date; and that it was royal hostility to these manoeuvres, combined with adverse international publicity, that put an end to them by the end of the year. The moves against Democrat Party politician Veera Musikapong in July 1986 likewise emanated from General Arthit's entourage – four months after the latter's effective removal as Army Commander – and had nothing to do with any royal wish or initiative (see Rajah 1987).
- 57 Bunbongkarn (1996: 357).
- 58 Tasker and Vatikiotis (1995). This echoed an intellectual debate over the idea of separating the executive from the legislative branch, in the future Constitution.
- 59 Tasker (1995).
- 60 Bunbongkarn (1996: 362–363). This Committee was led by Dr Prawase, whose role (and access to the King) are reported in Vatikiotis (1995b).
- 61 Bunbongkarn (1996: 364).
- 62 In any system dominated by 'money politics' politicians have to be conventionally corrupt in order to recoup their investment (the vote-buying) at the polls, but Thai middle-class opinion has come to regard these politicians as lacking any democratic legitimacy in the first place, because their votes were bought.
- 63 This is the region where Chawalit was remembered for the rural development which he had delivered as army commander in the long haul of counter-insurgency against the CPT.
- 64 The fall of Banharn and rise of Chawalit are covered with all due analytical perception in Ockey (1997).
- 65 On all aspects of the year 1997, see the versatile contribution to contemporary record and analysis, Jumbala (1998).
- 66 *Ibid.*: 284. For an on-the-spot account of the looming confrontation on the streets between the pro-Constitution campaigners and the groups opposing it in the name of the monarchy and Buddhism, which the military scotched by telling Chawalit to go ahead and pass the law, see Vatikiotis (1997a).
- 67 Namely, street rallies led by businessmen, calling for his resignation! On the quite breathtakingly progressive draft Constitution, equalling if not surpassing some Western Bills of Rights and human rights regimes, see Jumbala (1998: 273–278). On

the firm stand of the military and police elites, especially the new army commander, Chettha, when asked about a State of Emergency, see *ibid.*: 285. Chavalit finally stepped down on 5 November, after one cabinet reshuffle, and after parliament had passed vital financial executive decrees and certain 'organic laws' which were essential to the operation of the new Constitution and thus imperative before parliament could be dissolved.

- 68 On a group of businessmen visiting Prem, in the hope of using him as a 'channel' to the King, see Tasker (1997).
- 69 On the King's behind-the-scenes influence during the events of October and November, including opposition to the 'Prem card', see Vatikiotis (1997b), and Vatikiotis (1997c.)
- 70 Vatikiotis (1997a.). (But see the penultimate paragraph of this chapter for a suggested, more relevant comparison with 1974.) As it happens, one striking objection to the draft, as expressed in the parliamentary debate, was that it detracted from the power of the monarch in favour of popular sovereignty, but this spurious argument may well have been a cover (in one expert Thai view) for defending absolute *parliamentary* sovereignty, undiluted by Independent Electoral Commission powers to impose sanctions for election frauds and vote-buying. The Constitution does recognize the notional possibility of the King refusing assent to a bill, but in such case the 'veto' could be overridden by the votes of two-thirds of parliament.
- 71 See Jumbala (1998: 288–290) on the final weeks of 1997. On the continuation of these positive trends in 1998, see – notwithstanding the pessimistic title of the article – Thabchumpon (1999). The King's view of Chuan was strongly in evidence in the bestowal of an honour in 1998: see *Far Eastern Economic Review* (1998).
- 72 See Jumbala (1998: 283) on the activities of the so-called 'Yellow Brigade' in opposition to the new Constitution. Yellow is associated with South-East Asian royalty and is also the colour of the garb of Buddhist monks.
- 73 See Vatikiotis *et al.* (1995); Bunbongkarn (1996: 367) on the King's hospitalization.
- 74 Hewison (1997: 74). For similar apprehensions, see the thoughts of Sukhumbhand Paribatra, quoted in Tasker *et al.* (1993), or in his own article, Paribatra (1993: 893).
- 75 The eldest, Ubonrat, left the court for the United States (see note 50). Recently, she has been gradually reintegrated with the royal family and public life. Sirindhorn is unmarried and declares that she will remain so. Chulabhorn is the youngest daughter. Prince Vajiralongkorn was the second child of Bhumibol and Sirikit, thus ahead of Sirindhorn.
- 76 For an early, brave Thai comment on the problem of heirs of low intelligence in systems of hereditary authority, see Sivaraksa (1976). For a glimpse of the situation around 1976–78, including the surge of popular expectation that Princess Sirindhorn would be the next monarch, see Kershaw (1979b: 263). The palace began to face the problem of Prince Vajiralongkorn's credibility head-on (or was it a veiled warning to the Prince himself?) when the Queen spoke to the American press about his rampant interest in women (Nations 1981). Some years later the Prince himself confronted rumours of his links with 'the mafia' (Handley 1993). Since then he has recovered some respectability by divorcing the former actress who had borne him four sons and a daughter, and accepting a measure of reconciliation with his royal ex-wife. (The disgrace of an aide-de-camp of the Crown Prince – see the oblique reference in Tasker 1996 – is connected with the second wife's own loss of diplomatic status.) The Crown Prince has been performing State duties abroad on behalf of the King for a few years now, as well as attending university convocations to bestow degrees. The decline of competition for political power between factions of the military may well ensure a climate less conducive to manifestations of hereditary violence.
- 77 One might also take note of the sensational hints of the King's alienation from his son in Stevenson (1999: 198, 223).

- 78 Stevenson (1999). However, a couple of citations have already been incorporated in notes earlier in this chapter.
- 79 The difficulty of promoting 'modernity' in the democratic arena through constitutional means has been demonstrated in the March 2000 Senate elections. In the name of democracy the 1997 Constitution required the Senate to be wholly elected, yet also without any party links. This has created an invidious task for the Elections Commission in vetting candidates, with possible lawsuits to come: see Bardacke (2000).

10 Monarchy and democracy

- 1 Huntington (1965: 410). In connection with 'returning to the roots of political science', there is a similar clarion call in Sartori (1969). The urge has also been related, in retrospect, to the shock of realization that in a rapidly changing world there was too little replication of cases for meaningful generalizations to be generated, in Pye (1990: 4).
- 2 Huntington (1993: 36, 41; 1996: 114–115).
- 3 Huntington (1984; 1991).
- 4 Provided, of course, that the State is not so beleaguered by revolutionary warfare that elections cannot be organized, either in towns or countryside.
- 5 And presumably he will not have forgotten the essential political corollary of social pluralism: the institutionalization of a number of structures of action apart from regular elections! That Professor Huntington had promoted a doctrine of regroupment of population through urbanization was an article of faith on the US and British Left in the Vietnam War, but the exact reference is elusive. The nearest the present writer could get to tracking it down was an allusion by Prince Souvanna-phouma in an interview with Noam Chomsky and others in 1970, printed in a book on Laos: Adams and McCoy (1970: 380).
- 6 Huntington (1965; 1968).
- 7 Cf. Pye (1985: 119) on how the patron–client culture in Indonesia may be adapted to legitimize divisions of authority based on technical specialization; or Pye (1997: 223) on the bizarre workings of money politics in Taiwan in giving rise to an effective opposition.
- 8 Another conscientious example is Hitchcock (1994).
- 9 It is difficult to resist the temptation of an aside about the latest big 'guru' in US political science, Francis Fukuyama. He has added to the 'quotient of friction' between US political ideology and the Third World, especially Islam, by pronouncing not just 'the death of ideology' but 'the end of history' (for statements of his thought, see, e.g. Fukuyama 1989; 1992; 1995). All societies – not only those released from the thrall of the Soviet Union, we understand – are now to converge on a single, US-style market economy and accompanying social structure, with development of democracy to match. Not only is this intensely irritating for elites who aspire to fashion their societies in other than the US image, but it also makes other US political scientists potentially redundant, because no further analysis and prescription regarding 'the conditions of democratization' will ever be necessary if Fukuyama is right!
- 10 There is a big corpus of sceptical commentary on dimensions of 'Asian values' (though not necessarily the disadvantage just referred to) in Western academic journals – possibly more weighty in sheer quantity of words than the speeches and newspaper articles in which Asian leaders have articulated their propositions! For a very short selection from Western commentary, see Krugman (1994); Patten (1996); Dupont (1996) and Mauzy (1997). A leading Singaporean polemicist is Kishore Mahbubani. For an argument rooted in the conviction that the Pacific Rim is the coming zone of world power, with a unity fostered by culturally-based skills in

international relations, see Mahbubani (1995). For his prophecy of a world divided by civilization – anticipating Huntington by a year, and a symptom of the ‘clash’ which the latter wrote about – see Mahbubani (1992).

- 11 The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which comprised originally Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines, but now includes Brunei, Vietnam, Burma (Myanmar), Laos and Cambodia.
- 12 The ‘crisis of authoritarianism’ is a phrase borrowed from Pye (1990). His discussion sees social and political change as arising frequently from the revolution in technology. Brunei, of course, is relatively immune to this since the skills for operating new technology can be hired from abroad.
- 13 For some comparison of Thailand’s situation with Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia in this context, see Thompson (1993: 480–481). See also *ibid.*: 475–476 on the steady habituation of the Thai people to democracy, and hence build-up of a determination to have and keep it, through a series of democratic ‘interludes’ between military rule.

11 Further glimpses of the deeper past

- 1 Toye (1971: 15–16).
- 2 Duncanson (1968: 33).
- 3 *Ibid.*: 34.
- 4 A study of early Vietnam which finds a worthy place in one collection on South-East Asia, being an exploration of the blending of local statecraft with the Confucian cult, is Taylor (1976), but it is clearly of far too specialized interest, even for this chapter.
- 5 I.e. Mahayana Buddhism (the ‘Great Vehicle’) and the reformed Theravada Buddhism (‘Lesser Vehicle’). The latter is the one which was eventually established as the religion of society in all ‘Indianized’ countries of the mainland, such as Siam (Thailand). Mahayana Buddhism is the school found in Vietnam and among overseas Chinese communities of South-East Asia.
- 6 Coedès (1964: 71–72); translated by R.K.
- 7 This is a question of vast potential scope but, given the absence of data at such a distance in time – and the intangibilities of ‘cultural history’ at any time – one that is prone to encourage great flights of speculation. The ‘seminal essay’ is Mus (1933), while a level-headed but receptive reading is offered by Mabbett (1978: 47–51).
- 8 Nicholl (1980: 222).
- 9 The most readable, and reasonably short, introduction to early South-East Asia – including most but not all of the places and events referred to in this paragraph – is probably that provided by Harrison (1964).
- 10 Jay (1963: 1–2).
- 11 Heine-Geldern (1956: 1).
- 12 *Ibid.*: 2.
- 13 *Ibid.*: 2–3. The Austrian anthropologist’s seminal ideas on the meaning of early South-East Asian architecture were already famously represented, before World War II, in Heine-Geldern (1930).
- 14 Heine-Geldern (1956: 6).
- 15 See, representatively, Aymonier (1904); Finot (1915); Coedès (1940) and Filliozat (1954).
- 16 A *linga* was a stumpy, upright stone – four-sided with a rounded top – representing a phallus and hence the idea of royal fecundity.
- 17 Coedès (1947: 44; 45; 49–50).
- 18 The preceding discussion is drawn from Coedès (1947: 54–55; 61–62; 63).
- 19 Kulke (1974: 24–25); translated by R.K. See also the humorous commentary on the reverse tendency to interpret ancient Khmer monarchy in terms of Western-derived

- stereotypes of political organization (the totalitarian; the democratic), in Mabbett (1978: 2). Kulke's article has been translated into English by I.W. Mabbett: see Kulke (1978).
- 20 On the mobility of the object Kulke follows L. Finot, from a citation by G. Coedès (Kulke 1974: 30, n.39). The source is *not* Finot (1915). However already the latter had sketched the outline of his interpretation at that date: see Finot (1915: 57–58).
 - 21 Kulke (1974: 33), citing appreciatively the work of Filliozat (1966) on South India.
 - 22 Mabbett (1969).
 - 23 Mabbett (1978: 51).
 - 24 Mabbett (1969: 204).
 - 25 Kulke (1974: 44–45).
 - 26 D.G.E. Hall (1981: 53–54).
 - 27 For five beautiful and instructive illustrations with thumbnail commentary, see Lubis (1979: 38–39).
 - 28 Tambiah (1976: 25).
 - 29 K.R. Hall (1976: 7–8). On the fusing of Indic with indigenous traditions, see also Mabbett (1978: 47–51), as previously cited, and wherein is suggested that the kingship has the vital function, among others, of 'reconciling' these traditions in a harmonious cultural whole.
 - 30 Wolters (1982: 16–17).
 - 31 *Ibid.*: 17.
 - 32 *Ibid.*: 18.
 - 33 Dhani (1947: 101–102).
 - 34 Samudavanija (1987: 9–10).
 - 35 *Ibid.*: 10. For a more detailed exposition of the 'classic' position of Thai historiography on the Sukhot'ai–Ayut'ia dichotomy in the ideological legacy of Thailand's past, see Griswold and na Nagara (1975).
 - 36 Samudavanija (1987: 12–13).
 - 37 When John Gullick uses upper case for 'State' he is referring to any one of the Malay States, such as 'State of Selangor', which is more or less equivalent to 'the country of Selangor' rather than 'the State' as an institution within society.
 - 38 Gullick (1958: 44).
 - 39 It is noted also that on the major festivals of the Muslim year the Sultan held a levee at which some if not all his chiefs made obeisance (*menghadap*) to him.
 - 40 See Gullick (1958: 48) for a detailed description of the physical movements. These are still an active part of court ceremonies in Brunei at the time of writing.
 - 41 The Sultan of Selangor even said in the 1870s, of the period just before, that he most feared assassination on such occasions.
 - 42 The account of traditional Malay government in the foregoing paragraphs is drawn entirely, and with due gratitude, from Gullick (1958: 44–49).
 - 43 On the dating of the two MSS extant in London, see Sweeney (1968: 2). The references to Johor in the respective versions appear in *ibid.*: 11, 51. It is not easy to translate whole passages of this archaic Malay into a plausible English, and in any case points of relevance are scattered widely.
 - 44 This is the epic poem *Sya'ir Awang Semaun*. For commentaries see D.E. Brown (1980) and Maxwell (1995).
 - 45 This version is seen in MS 'A', Sweeney (1968: 11). The version which tells of a Chinese second Sultan of Brunei is MS 'B', *ibid.*: 51–54.
 - 46 There is of course a risk in taking such a late source for a very early era too literally (not that chronicles written closer to the time in question were models of 'objectivity' either). The 'Chinese nexus' could have been incorporated in order to honour strategic imperatives or personal proclivities closer to the time of writing. At least, to its credit, the chronicle does not pretend that the first Sultan of Brunei received his lands and regalia as a gift of a 'Sultan of Malacca' (i.e. pre-1511), let alone as a gift

of a forerunner of the Sultans of Malacca based in Singapore – as a leading local historian of the monarchy has recently done in order to date the conversion of the Brunei monarchy to the period of Majapahit's decline in the mid-to-late fourteenth century itself (Mohd. Jamil 1990: 57–58; see Braighlinn 1992: 90–91, n. 64, for further exegesis).

47 Vella (1957: 59–60).

48 Ibid. 60–61.

49 Geertz (1980: 13).

50 Ibid.: 14–15. The passages quoted or paraphrased in this chapter as a whole are often chosen for a strikingly imaginative evocation. The more imaginative a reconstruction, the more likely is there to be controversy over it. For sceptical comments on Geertz's idea of 'statecraft-as-a-thespian-art', untouched by economic struggle and largely divorced from practical politics, see Wiseman-Christie (1986: 68–69).

51 Jay (1963: 12–13). The thesis of a 'late Byzantine flowering' is taken especially from Burger (1956).

52 Cited from Schrieke (1955) and Bendix (1962).

53 Anderson (1972: 35–36).

54 Ibid.: 36–37.

55 Jenkins (1991: 53–55); Hughes (1960: 22–23).

56 On the spirit of scepticism or antipathy towards overarching theory, see Tosh (1991: 156).

57 See Evans (1997: 155). Meanwhile, the objection from the post-modernists is that the meaning of cultural items can only be sought in their very immediate context (ibid.: 160), there being 'nothing outside the text'.

58 Again see Hughes (1960: 22), on 'Idealism' in the development of Western historiography.

59 Ibid.: 43.

60 Evans (1997: 129).

61 Carr (1961: 87–108).

62 Ibid.: 107.

63 Even the eminent sociologist, Talcott Parsons, is sceptical about Weber's use of 'ideal types', seeing it as uncomfortably normative at times (Parsons 1947: 15–16).

64 Pye (1985: 329).

65 From various angles, this is suggested by Shils (1958); Friedrich (1961); Willner and Willner (1965); Ake (1966) and Cohen (1972).

66 The points in these two sentences are argued by Friedrich (1961).

67 The original sense of the term is restored, and its application widened, by Shils (1965).

68 It is worth noting, as an aside, that custom is also in its own way rule-bound, being informed by precedent; but highly detailed, written regulation is absent from societies lacking literacy and legislatures.

69 The restoration of the Cambodian monarchy in 1995 may seem in contradiction with this proposition, but King Sihanouk was forced upon the ex-Communist group by very special circumstances. Moreover, Premier Hun Sen has deftly turned this situation to his advantage – but in a way that will hardly be valid under any future King. See Chapter 6.

70 For an example of Dr Mahathir's claim to represent 'the tradition of the party' (a tradition of strict hierarchy and deference), and even a suggestion that he personifies attributes of a Muslim ruler (Caliph), see Kershaw (1989: 135–137, 156–157; 153).

71 For a sympathetic handling of the concept of charisma in the Third World context, see Lacouture (1969a: 21–37).

72 An important – but distinctively high-powered – discussion is Anderson (1990), which reveals President Sukarno of Indonesia denying that he is 'charismatic' in the style of the 'mere demagogue' Hitler (and as Western, post-war social science had

come to use the term 'charismatic leader'), or even in the sense of possessing an ancient Javanese 'aura': rather he relates his power to his ability to correctly understand, and give leadership to, the forces of Indonesian history. But one may recall that most observers of Sukarno have not doubted his ability to 'wield symbols'! – cf. Feith (1962).

- 73 Anderson (1972: 66–67).
- 74 Anderson, a 'powerful' writer in his own right, is edifyingly careful to say that his examination of the concept of power in Java could well have application beyond the restricted geographical limits of Java or Indonesia (Anderson 1972: 64), but he is not a great citer of sociologists and political scientists who have anticipated his approach at a more abstract level, from outside the restricted academic limits of South-East Asian Studies, such as Shils (1965) foreshadowing Anderson (1972) on charisma as a permanent, inherent quality of ancient structures; or Hughes (1958: 289) foreshadowing Anderson (1990) on Weber's inkling that charismatic leadership might be a necessary antidote to the totalitarian tendencies within the bureaucratic State.
- 75 For a scorching critique of this tendency, see Anderson (1990: 89).
- 76 On the non-importance of known boundaries, see Mabbett (1978: 36).
- 77 Kershaw (1998: 93, n.30; 99).
- 78 This is the first substantive part of Kershaw (1980c), being a commentary on Pramoj (1975), with notes added during a mid-1990s revision.
- 79 One serious gap in the 1980 commentary is the lack of an explicit reference to Buddhism, which is an important theme at the end of Kukrit's essay. But consistently, royal 'transcendence' is diluted: Buddhism is 'typically Thai' and simply brings the King down to earth as a socially responsible ruler. There is little point of contact, incidentally, with the ideas of the 'Sixth Reign', 1910–25 – see Vella (1978: 214–230) – which were little concerned with the religious role of the King himself but focused directly on religion as a source of national identity and resilience.
- 80 Again see Pramoj (1976a), or the citation and comment in Kershaw (1979b: 259). As his title indicates, Kukrit is a great-grandson of a monarch, namely of *Phrabaadsomded Phraphudthalöödla Naphaalai* (the Second Reign). Mention of his 'royal connections' invariably prompts reference to the great novel of the 'Four Reigns' (Pramoj 1963), researched with the benefit of 'privileged access' (see Phillips 1975: 346; or further, Phillips 1987: 105–106).
- 81 The analyst was no doubt somewhat influenced in his view of what was generally proper and passable in the mid-1970s by association with the female-dominated Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University! Nevertheless, the view may be valid that few besides Kukrit could have written with such wit on the traditional method of executing a member of royalty: in a sack! (Pramoj 1975: 16).
- 82 Of not a little relevance in this connection may be a passage of analysis which describes Kukrit as 'an institution in his own right', economically independent and politically invulnerable well before 1973: Zimmerman (1978: 54).
- 83 Sadly, the reference for this attribution, obtained through a personal communication in 1978, has proved elusive. (There is at least a possibility that the 'offending item', or even edition, was seized by the censors before distribution.) In its place, however, and in very similar vein, may be quoted Kukrit's review of a collection of documents from the closing days of absolute monarchy (Teechaanan 1976) wherein he quotes (with an explicit admonition to the post-6 October 1976 government) the observation of *Phrabaadsomded Phrapogklaaw Cawyuuhua* (Rama VII) that the experience of his reign suggested that the Thais could no longer operate a system of true absolute monarchy, and would probably not make a success of fascism, but would always finish up with messy mixtures of dictatorship and democracy – to forestall which, a system of constitutional monarchy should be promoted post-haste (Pramoj 1976b). (The minute is translated in Samudavanija 1987: 31.) In cheekier vein, see the front-page item on the 'increasing incidence of mental illness in Thailand',

placed next to the report of Tanin's appointment to the Privy Council, in *Sayaam Rad*, 17 December 1977 (i.e. subsequent to his fall from power)! Kukrit's suspicion that the King was being led astray by a reactionary Queen is insinuated obliquely by essays in his newspaper on the baleful influence of Dowagers in Chinese history, and the exemplary reign of Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain: Pramoj (1976c, 1977). (Note: *Sayaam Rad* – or, non-phonetically, 'Siam Rat' – is a daily newspaper, *Sayaam Rad Sabdaa Wicaan* a weekend magazine.)

- 84 The second substantive part of Kershaw (1980c), being a commentary on Kraivixien (1977), with notes added. Cf. note 78.
- 85 A theme exemplified in general by Chapter 6 (pp. 93–109), 'A thought on the duties of the Thai Monarch in the democratic system'.
- 86 The element of external defence implied by the term 'survival' does not mean that Tanin is necessarily a disciple, here, of *Phra' Mongkud Klaaw* (albeit salvation from Burma under the Ayut'ia and Thonburi Dynasties features strongly on pp. 7–8). Rather, we may be seeing a reflection of the siege mentality of many right-wing Thais at a time of the triumph of communist armies in Indo-China, and the steady progress of the Communist Party of Thailand – which Tanin saw as the agent, essentially, of an international conspiracy. But admittedly this is never directly stated. At most, we are told about an affinity of revolutionary strategy between Asian Communist Parties: pp. 108–109.
- 87 The effect is achieved above all by accounts of the people's readiness to sacrifice possessions and even life itself for the King. Sacrifice might be expressed by the gift of a bunch of bananas by a humble peasant (p. 41) or by the urge of a devotee paralyzed in the October 1973 disturbances, to go on a suicide mission against the anti-royal students in October 1976 (p. 48).
- 88 On the contrary, it is based on the observed facts of the King's ability, energy and public dedication, which enhance the existing ties of blood (p. 40); alternatively stated (as the King himself expressed it to an American magazine), he is, in a sense, an elected figure who serves only at the people's pleasure (p. 39). And as a peasant found out, who grasped the King's foot to test it, he is made of flesh and blood like all other mortals (p. 77).
- 89 There seems to an element of imitation of Kukrit here (or of Kukrit's forerunners). On the patriarchy and tenfold traditional royal virtues of the Sukhothai dynasty, with special reference, respectively, to the First and Sixth Monarchs, see Kraivixien (1977: 6). The tenfold royal virtues (*thodsaphitharaachatham*) in the context of the contemporary monarchy are listed *in extenso* between pp. 32–37. On the personal qualities of the present King see, for instance, p. 94:

The strength of his body is something that springs from the royal heart, something tough and tenacious, and closely linked with the high mental concentration in which he has trained himself so well, in accordance with the principle of Buddhism which holds that the mind is set higher in importance than all else, and in line with the Buddhist proverb which says that a well-disciplined mind will naturally bring happiness – quite different from the Western idea of *mens sana in corpore sano*.

For explicit sentiments of equivalent strength from a member of the royal family, on the *barami*, or inherent grace, of the King, one would probably have to look to the Queen. Cf. Hong (1982: 351), quoting an interview with a Thai weekly in August 1981. None of this emerges in an earlier interview with the BBC: see *Mid Thai* (1980).

- 90 Kraivixien (1977: 23).
- 91 *Ibid.*: 50, referring, apparently, to strains in relations with Malaysia and the USA.

- 92 The word *wiirachon* occurs on p. 75 (where Tanin describes the King's welfare work for students injured in October 1973). A more extensive passage in which the King's sympathy for the students' actions is projected is the interview with a young man paralyzed by an army bullet and visited by the King in hospital (p. 46). Elsewhere the focus is more on the King's role as a non-partisan peace-maker in that conflict, but he is certainly grief-stricken by the bloodshed, and causes the Prime Minister to leave the country (pp. 57–58).
- 93 Cf. pp. 24–25, in a section on 'The legal status of the monarch'. Tanin is emphasizing continuity of both monarchy and democracy despite the October 1976 coup.
- 94 Students of Thai history who are aware of the growing research interest of recent years regarding the Seventh Reign and royal plans to introduce a Constitution (cf. Mokarapong 1972; Teechaanan 1976; Batson 1984) will not be surprised by the fact that Tanin devotes a section of six pages (pp. 17–22), under the heading 'The era of the turning point to democracy', to the constitutional ideas and plans of the Sixth and (especially) Seventh Reigns, which leaves the clear impression that the coup of 1932 'stole the king's clothes'. At the end of the book (p. 107), he quotes scornfully the declaration of the People's Party justifying its coup (pp. 105–106), and compares their later petition for royal forgiveness with the opportunism of the Indo-China Communists, who have also professed to be lovers of monarchy (pp. 108–109).
- 95 The conservatively progressive reflections of the Fifth Monarch (King Chulalongkorn) are quoted extensively, pp. 13–17, under the heading 'The era of the beginnings of democracy'; there is further quotation on the need for an incremental approach to the reform of custom and government, later on (p. 31), but emphasis also on the fact that the phasing out of absolute monarchy was a process initiated by the dynasty itself (pp. 31–32). It is as if Tanin is arguing both that the monarchy should not have been deprived of its power, and that it retains some form of political birth-right because it did not cling to power selfishly when challenged in 1932.
- 96 Tanin was actually selected by the King from a varied list which the junta (NARC) presented to His Majesty as a courtesy. Tensions between Tanin and the military over corruption were easily enough predictable from a reading of Tanin (1975), in which he sees a mass participation in democratic institutions as the surest defence. It is a passionately uncompromising paper which certainly throws light on his attractiveness to the King (more than the later projection of the King's transcendental qualities, which the King would probably accept only as a necessary, intermediate, means to an end).
- 97 'The monarch and the democratic system'. See *Patinyaa* (1983); translation and précis by R.K. The article is assumed to be close to the present King's view of events and ideals. However, it avoids the mystical dimension of certain other texts (e.g. Kraivixien 1977, reviewed in the previous section of this chapter) in favour of a kind of 'hereditary political virtue'. Note how 'democracy' is part of historical royal principles – but conversely and implicitly that monarchy is inseparable from the democratic ideal in the modern age.

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