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STATE AND UNCIVIL  
SOCIETY IN THAILAND  
AT THE TEMPLE OF  
PREAH VIHEAR

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STATE AND UNCIVIL  
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*For all my teachers:  
Chaiwat Satha-anand, Charnvit Kasetsiri,  
Ben Kiernan, Adrian Vickers, the late Melanie Beresford,  
and Thawit Sukhapanich*



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# Preface

This study examines the role of Thai state agencies and the mass movement led by the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) in the dispute over the Preah Vihear temple located close to the Thai-Cambodian border. It also evaluates the long-term repercussions of the PAD's uncivil action within the context of Thailand's post-Cold War policy towards its neighbours in general and Cambodia in particular.

The ending of the Cold War and of the war in Cambodia in the late 1980s opened up opportunities for a new era of economic development and cooperation in Southeast Asia. Thailand positioned herself as a centre of economic cooperation in the region. Policies promoted by various state agencies reshaped the relationship between Thailand and Cambodia from enmity to economic interdependence. Thailand's support for Cambodia's proposal to list the Preah Vihear temple as a World Heritage site arose from Thailand's cross-border tourism strategy.

The relationship between Thailand and Cambodia deteriorated greatly in mid-2008 when the PAD raised a protest against the proposed listing, claiming that it was linked to business deals by the former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra in Cambodia, and that it would sacrifice Thai ownership of a disputed area around the temple.

However, the PAD's allegation overlooks the fact that the bilateral cooperation over the listing was pursued consistently by three Thai governments and various bureaucratic agencies in an attempt to turn the once disputed monument into a symbol of friendship and cooperation between the two countries. For the first time in Southeast Asia two formerly antagonistic states were employing economic and cultural methods to settle a territorial dispute.

The ultra-nationalist movement launched by PAD not only derailed this essay in cooperation but also worked directly against Thailand's post-Cold

War strategy in the region. Instead of becoming a symbol of friendship, the temple became a symbol of hatred between Thailand and Cambodia. The success of the PAD's campaign is due in part to the support which PAD received from various civic groups and institutions. This support helped to legitimize the PAD's lies and propaganda, which shaped the Thai public's misperception of the issue. The role of the PAD challenges the conventional wisdom that active civil society movements contribute to democratization.

The primary objective of this study is thus to analyse the actions, strategy, and objectives of the PAD campaign on the Preah Vihear temple and the disputed area surrounding the temple. It will focus on factors enabling the PAD to successfully mobilize widespread support for its campaign. The study also evaluates the impact of the PAD movement on Thai-Cambodian relations and on the perceptions of Thai foreign policy decision-makers, including political leaders, the Foreign Affairs Ministry, and the military.

First it is imperative to understand the relationship between Thailand and Cambodia in the post-Cold War era, prior to the PAD campaign. I argue that expanding economic ties have shaped a bilateral relationship based on interdependence rather than enmity. This interdependence influenced the perceptions and practices of Thai foreign policy-makers. The study starts in this post-Cold War era of growing interdependence and ends at the close of the government of Abhisit Vejjajiva in July 2011.

The following chapters fall into four sections. The first chapter sets the stage, providing an overall picture of how the conflict between Thailand and Cambodia over the temple of Preah Vihear began and of various actors involved in the saga. It also discusses conceptual framework of complex interdependence and uncivil society used in this work. Chapter II discusses the change of Thailand's foreign policy toward its neighbours in the post-Cold War period as background for understanding the broad context within which the Thai and Cambodian governments entered into cooperation over the temple. Chapter III traces the development of bilateral cooperation up to the agreement to jointly promote the listing of the temple as a World Heritage site. Chapter IV examines the nature of the PAD, the objectives and tactics of its campaign over the temple, and its impact on the government, foreign policy-making, and international relations.

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