

Reproduced from "*Good Coup*" *Gone Bad: Thailand's Political Developments since Thaksin's Downfall*, edited by Pavin Chachavalpongpun (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2014). This version was obtained electronically direct from the publisher on condition that copyright is not infringed. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the prior permission of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. Individual articles are available at <<http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg>>.

# **“Good Coup” Gone Bad**

The **Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS)** was established as an autonomous organization in 1968. It is a regional centre dedicated to the study of socio-political, security and economic trends and developments in Southeast Asia and its wider geostrategic and economic environment. The Institute's research programmes are the Regional Economic Studies (RES, including ASEAN and APEC), Regional Strategic and Political Studies (RSPS), and Regional Social and Cultural Studies (RSCS).

**ISEAS Publishing**, an established academic press, has issued more than 2,000 books and journals. It is the largest scholarly publisher of research about Southeast Asia from within the region. ISEAS Publishing works with many other academic and trade publishers and distributors to disseminate important research and analyses from and about Southeast Asia to the rest of the world.

# “Good Coup” Gone Bad

Thailand’s Political Developments  
since Thaksin’s Downfall

edited by

Pavin Chachavalpongpun



INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES  
SINGAPORE

First published in Singapore in 2014 by  
ISEAS Publishing  
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies  
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace  
Pasir Panjang  
Singapore 119614

*E-mail:* [publish@iseas.edu.sg](mailto:publish@iseas.edu.sg)  
*Website:* <http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg>

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

© 2014 Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore

*The responsibility for facts and opinions in this publication rests exclusively with the authors and their interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views or the policy of the publishers or their supporters.*

---

#### ISEAS Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

---

“Good coup” gone bad : Thailand’s political development since Thaksin’s downfall  
/ edited by Pavin Chachavalpongpun.

1. Thailand—Politics and government—21st century.
2. Thailand—History—Coup d’état, 2006.
3. Democracy—Thailand.
4. Monarchy—Thailand.
5. Peasants—Thailand—Political activity.
6. Thailand, Southern—Politics and government.
7. Thailand—Foreign relations—Cambodia.
8. Cambodia—Foreign relations—Thailand.
- I. Pavin Chachavalpongpun.

DS586 G64 2013

ISBN 978-981-4459-60-0 (soft cover)  
ISBN 978-981-4459-61-7 (e-book, PDF)

---

Cover design by Wasin Pathomyok

Typeset by Superskill Graphics Pte Ltd  
Printed in Singapore by Markono Print Media Pte Ltd

# CONTENTS

<i>List of Tables and Figures</i>	vii
<i>Foreword</i>	ix
<i>Contributors</i>	xiii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xvii
<b>Section I The 2006 Military Coup: Impact on the Thai Political Landscape</b>	
1. “Good Coup” Gone Bad: Thailand’s Political Developments since Thaksin’s Downfall <i>Pavin Chachavalpongpun</i>	3
2. Unfinished Business: The Contagion of Conflict over a Century of Thai Political Development <i>Federico Ferrara</i>	17
<b>Section II Defending the Old Political Consensus: The Military and the Monarchy</b>	
3. Broken Power: The Thai Military in the Aftermath of the 2006 Coup <i>James Ockey</i>	49
4. The Monarchy and Anti-Monarchy: Two Elephants in the Room of Thai Politics and the State of Denial <i>Thongchai Winichakul</i>	79

---

5.	Freedom and Silencing under the Neo-Absolutist Monarchy Regime in Thailand, 2006–2011 <i>David Streckfuss</i>	109
<b>Section III New Political Discourses and the Emergence of Yellows and Reds</b>		
6.	“Vote No!”: The PAD’s Decline from Powerful Movement to Political Sect? <i>Michael H. Nelson</i>	141
7.	The Red Shirts: From Anti-Coup Protesters to Social Mass Movement <i>Nick Nostitz</i>	170
8.	Is Peasant Politics in Thailand Civil? <i>Andrew Walker</i>	199
<b>Section IV Crises of Legitimacy</b>		
9.	Reaping the Whirlwind: Thailand’s Coup and the Southern Problem <i>Marc Askew</i>	219
10.	From Marketplace Back to Battlefield: Thai-Cambodian Relations in the Age of a Militarized Politics <i>Pavin Chachavalpongpun</i>	253
	<i>Index</i>	283

# LIST OF TABLES & FIGURES

Table 3.1: Military Academy Class Sizes	55
Table 3.2: Military Budgets	58
Figure 5.1: “Typical” Historical Evolution vs. Thailand’s Historical (D)evolution	110
Figure 5.2: Increase of Punishment under Thai Monarchy, 1900–2011	114
Figure 5.3: Punishment for <i>Lèse-majesté</i> Worldwide, 2011	115
Figure 5.4: Freedom House’s “Freedom in the World” Score of Thailand, 2002–11	116
Figure 5.5: Ranking of Thailand, 2002–10 Worldwide Press Freedom Index	117
Figure 5.6: Press Freedom Index Rankings, 2002–10	118
Figure 5.7: Number of <i>Lèse-majesté</i> Charges/Case sent to and Successfully Prosecuted by the Court of First Instance Appeals Court, and Supreme Court, 2005–11	120
Figure 5.8: Number of New <i>Lèse-majesté</i> Cases Received and Prosecuted 2000–10; <i>Lèse-majesté</i> Complaints Received and Disposed of by Police, 2008–11	122
Table 8.1: Social Impacts and Economic Change	204
Table 10.1: Armed Clashes between Thailand and Cambodia (2008–11)	267





# FOREWORD

Even at the best of times Thai politics has not been easy to understand, and now, late in the reign of a revered and activist monarch, it is even more difficult to comprehend. Constitutions, sometimes written by the winning side that has taken power by extra-constitutional means, come and go with astonishing frequency. Since the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932 military coups have intervened so frequently (eighteen times) that regime change by force seems to be an integral part of the political process. Bloodshed often attends Thailand's political struggles. In the past four decades, the military has taken its arms into the streets several times, and national elections see a fair number of vote canvassers and journalists murdered. Little wonder that turbulence, polarization and violence describe Thai politics all too well.

The motivation for the army to cut short the electoral cycle is its self-appointed responsibility to protect the monarchy if it deems the supreme institution to be threatened. The army is jealous of its prerogatives especially with regard to promotions in the upper echelon of the officer corps. Wary of the slightest political interference, it insists on control over its own line management. Thai governments that have attempted to reform the military's relationship with the parliamentary system have been promptly dispatched, as happened in 1991 and 2006. As a result of the violent crackdown and arson attacks in Bangkok in April–May 2010, the army's reputation briefly plummeted, but this was reversed by its civic activism in offering a helping hand to communities affected by the floods in late 2011. Once again, the army proved its ability to adapt and respond to changed circumstances in a popular way.

The 1997 constitution, which was abrogated in 2006, may have been as flawed as its critics have charged, but it held promise. Crafted during the 1997 Asian financial crisis after a string of shaky coalition governments,

it aimed to reform the political system, curtail money politics and establish a strong executive. In response to the conditions for “good governance” attached to the IMF loan programme that aimed to lift the country out of the financial crisis, Thai public intellectuals seized on “good governance” and translated it as *thammarat*. For its architects and many of its advocates, the concept of *thammarat* would imbue politics and government with moral righteousness, truth and law. Good governance Thai-style was supposed to discipline the Thai state and create a legitimate space for civil disobedience against it.

Alas, as events unfolded, good governance Thai-style had an authoritarian strand as well as communitarian and liberal ones. Thaksin’s massive electoral victory in 2005, which led to dominance of the parliament by his Thai Rak Thai party, attracted the charge that he had created a parliamentary dictatorship. Running the country as if he were running a corporation, as he once said, did not mean he would consult widely or nourish a participatory politics. The command-and-control style of leadership that he was comfortable with did not sit well with all constituencies and powerful interests. When reporting on his activities, the Thai-language press is fond of including his rank in the police force, Police Lieutenant Colonel, as if to remind readers of his background in the security services. Although Thaksin had phenomenal electoral success, his leadership style often smacked of anti-democratic methods.

The root meaning of democracy is empowerment of people. Like democracy everywhere it has flourished, Thai democracy had a rocky start and has suffered many setbacks. If dated from 1932, Thai democracy has had a mere eighty years to evolve. In its early decades, it was handed down from above, an elite project in which the people were asked to abide by certain rules in exchange for their citizenship. This democracy-from-above was more about bureaucratic control and the legitimacy of authoritarian government than about empowerment of people. Even in the relatively liberal period following a new constitution in 1974, democracy was propagated through manuals “taught” by officials in public education programmes. The liberal winds of this period subsided long ago, and nowadays, once again, democracy has been thwarted by state institutions, powerful interests, and elite attitudes that discount the value of rural and subaltern votes.

Many upper class Thais hold rural voters in contempt, even as they cling to mythical memories of village society as a haven of tranquillity

and self-reliance. Economic growth over the past generation has brought prosperity to many households, but it has also increased the inequalities. Class cleavages, the rural-urban divide, and regional disparities have given rise to new social forces that the political system in its present configuration is unable to accommodate. Yet, it is worth remembering that the mass mobilizations and street rallies that have captured international attention in the past two decades are not new. The political conflicts that escaped from the parliament as the People's Alliance for Democracy and the red shirts took their campaign into the streets from late 2005 have long featured in Thai politics.

The expert authors in this book have chosen to study the social forces and mass mobilizations unleashed by economic change against the backdrop of a familiar political system that has been dysfunctional since the 2006 coup. Mistranslated often as "constitutional monarchy", the official designation of the political system is best translated as "a democratic system headed by the king". In that literal translation lie both expectation and limitation. The fervent, pro-monarchy, ultranationalism that has gripped Thailand in recent years has pressured state institutions to remain vigilant about the kingdom's territorial integrity and sovereignty, a topic taken up by three essays on the Cambodian border dispute, the Deep South and the increase in surveillance by the security services in their pursuit of *lèse-majesté* cases.

It is striking that electoral politics has faded from view in this collection of essays. Political leadership also receives little attention, another sign of how the political system was damaged by the events of 2006. At the time of writing, Thai political development has arrived at a new normal condition described eloquently in the following pages. Who knows how long it will last?

Craig J. Reynolds  
Australian National University  
Canberra, July 2012



# CONTRIBUTORS

**Marc Askew** is currently Senior Fellow in Anthropology, School of Social and Political Sciences, The University of Melbourne, Australia. He has taught and researched in Thailand for over twenty years, with a focus on urban and political culture. Since 2003 he has undertaken sustained periods of fieldwork in Thailand's south. In addition to newspaper and academic journal articles, his recent publications include *Performing Political Identity: The Democrat Party in Southern Thailand* (2008), (as editor and contributor) *Legitimacy Crisis in Thailand* (2010) and, with Sascha Helbardt, "Becoming Patani Warriors: Individuals and the Insurgent Collective in Southern Thailand", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35, no. 11 (2012).

**Federico Ferrara**, receiving his PhD from Harvard University, is assistant professor at the City University of Hong Kong, Department of Asian and International Studies. He previously taught at the Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore. He is the author of *Thailand Unhinged: The Death of Thai-Style Democracy* (2011) and a number of articles on comparative elections and party systems.

**Michael H. Nelson** is with the Southeast Asian Studies Program, Walailak University, Nakorn Si Thammarat. His research has focused on Thai politics, comparative sub-national government and decentralization, and globalization in Southeast Asia. He published *Central Authority and Local Democratization in Thailand* (1998), and co-authored (with Jürgen Rüländ, Clemens Jürgenmeyer, and Patrick Ziegenhain) *Parliaments and Political Change in Asia* (2005). He has also edited the two volumes *Thailand's New Politics* (2002), and *Thai Politics: Global and Local Perspectives* (2005). His current research interests concern the development of Thailand's parliamentary system, general elections and voting behaviour, and provincial-level political structures.

**Nick Nostitz**, originally a photographer, has followed closely the red/yellow conflicts since late 2005 with his camera. Not until 2008 has he begun to write articles on the subject more seriously, which could be found on the website *New Mandala*. He is the author of a series of books entitled *Red vs. Yellow, Volume 1: Thailand's Crisis of Identity* (2009) and *Red vs. Yellow, Volume 2: Thailand's Political Awakening* (2011). Currently, Nostitz is working on Volume 3 of the series, dealing more profoundly with the violent conflicts on 2010 and their impact on today's political life of Thailand.

**James Ockey** is associate professor at the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. His main interest is in comparative politics of Southeast Asia. His recent publications include "Individual Imaginings: The Religio-Nationalist Pilgrimages of Haji Sulong Abdulkadir al-Fatani" in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (2011), "Political Parties, Factions and Corruption in Thailand", in *Politics of Modern Southeast Asia: Critical Issues in Modern Politics, Vol. III Regimes and Institutions* (2010), and "Red Democracy, Yellow Democracy: Political Conflict in Thailand", in *New Zealand International Review* (2010).

**Pavin Chachavalponpun** is associate professor at the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, Japan. Previously, he had worked as a fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore, and a lead researcher for Political and Strategic Affairs at ISEAS's ASEAN Studies Centre. Earning his PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies, Pavin has written two books: *A Plastic Nation: The Curse of Thailand in Thai-Burmese Relations* (2005) and *Reinventing Thailand: Thaksin and His Foreign Policy* (2010). Pavin is also an editor of *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*.

**David Streckfuss** is an honorary fellow with the University of Wisconsin-Madison who has lived in Thailand for more than twenty years. He is interested in legal history, nationalism, and ethnic identities. His book, *Truth on Trial in Thailand: Defamation, Treason, and Lèse-majesté*, was published in 2011, and he was a contributor to the recent biography, *King Bhumibol: A Life's Work*. He also occasionally has pieces published in the *Bangkok Post* and the *Asian Wall Street Journal*.

**Thongchai Winichakul** is Professor of History at University of Wisconsin-Madison, and a Research Fellow at Asia Research Institute (ARI), NUS in

2010 when this conference took place. His book, *Siam Mapped* (1994) was awarded the Harry J Benda Prize from the Association for Asian Studies (USA) in 1995. He currently works on the intellectual foundation of modern Siam (1880s–1930s) and also a book on the memories of the 1976 massacre in Bangkok. He also writes in Thai on contemporary political issues.

**Andrew Walker** is an anthropologist in the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University. He is co-founder of the blog *New Mandala* which provides anecdote, analysis and new perspectives on Mainland Southeast Asia. His new book, *Thailand's Political Peasants*, was published in 2012.





# ABBREVIATIONS

ACD	Asia-Dialogue Cooperation
ACMECS	Ayeyawady–Chao Phraya–Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CDA	Constitution Drafting Assembly
CDR	Council for Democratic Reform
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CMC	Cluster Munition Coalition
CNS	Council for National Security
CPB	Crown Property Bureau
CPMC	Civilian-Police-Military Command
DAAD	Democratic Alliance against Dictatorship
FBA	Foreign Business Act
GBC	General Border Committee
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ISOC	Internal Suppression Operations Command
NESDB	National Economic and Social Development Board
NLA	National Legislative Assembly
NPP	New Politics Party
PAD	People’s Alliance for Democracy
PPP	People’s Power Party
NRC	National Reconciliation Commission
PTV	People’s Television
SBPAC	Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre
SBPPPC	Southern Border Provinces Peace Promotion Command
TRT	Thai Rak Thai Party
UDD	United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

