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**The Monarchy in Thailand:
At the Critical Royal Transition**

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The Monarchy in Thailand:

At the Critical Royal Transition

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In the evening of 19 September 2006, the military staged the 18th coup since the abolition of absolute monarchy in 1932, overthrowing the elected government of Thaksin Shinawatra. Although Thailand adopted a democratic model of governance to replace the *ancien régime*, the military has imposingly dominated the Thai political space throughout the past 80 years. It has worked intimately with the monarchy in cultivating a particular kind of politics whereby civilian governments were kept vulnerable, or faced the possibility of being toppled should they pose a menace to the power position of the traditional elite. Under this condition, a coup was therefore uncommon, especially as a tool to undermine a strong civilian government. The military's political intervention has become part of Thai political culture. Often, there have been attempts on the part of the military to legitimise the coups as a moral instrument in the riddance of immoral civilian regimes. From 2001 to 2006, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra enjoyed his electoral popularity, and thus managed to firmly consolidate his grip on power. He won two landslide elections, in 2001 and 2005, becoming the only prime minister who had ever served a full four-year term in Thai history. But his intensifying political strength gravely worried the traditional elite. They perceived him as a threat to their long-held political influence. With political interests in jeopardy, exercising the old trick, the traditional elite removed the Thaksin regime with the bluntest of tools; a military coup. They accused Thaksin of displaying disrespect for the King and committing corruption, among

other things. These accusations served to justify the unlawful coup as a necessity to punish the fraudulent government of Thaksin. A large number of middle-class Bangkok residents came out to lend their support for the coup; they were seen offering food and flowers to Thai soldiers who seized power on that ill-fated night. Tanks which rolled onto the streets were decorated with yellow ribbons—the colour that represents the Thai monarch. A sense of jubilation was felt in the Thai capital, a rather strange sentiment in a country known as the “Land of the Free”.

Same but Different

But as it turned out, this time, the effects of the coup were different. The coup that was meant to protect the political interests of the military and to safeguard the royal prerogatives gave birth to an anti-establishment movement whose members identify themselves in red shirts. That coup, initially staged to solidify the monarchy’s position in politics, also stirred up an anti-monarchy reaction among many Thais. They became aware of the extent to which the monarchy had long been actively involved in politics, with the backing of the army, despite its confined role under the constitution. While other studies tend to concentrate on Thaksin’s authoritarian behaviour and his corrupt policies as the root causes of the Thai crisis, this essay, based on the above context, argues that the Thai monarchy has played a large part in instigating and deepening the political conflict and that blaming Thaksin alone would be immeasurably misleading. Not just Thaksin, but the Thai monarch is an equally divisive figure. More importantly, the royal institution itself has increasingly become estranged with the ongoing democratisation. In fact, it has acted as an obstacle to the country’s democratic development. As political scientist Thitinan Pongsudhirak succinctly said, “In Thailand, there is more monarchy among the democrats than there is democracy among the monarchists.”¹ Such a statement suggested a stark incompatibility between the royal and the democratic institutions.

But before one arrives at the current episode of the crisis in which all significant actors have intentionally defined the fault line of politics around the monarchy, it is imperative to briefly discuss the nature of Thai politics in the past years. Duncan McCargo argued that the best way to understand Thai politics was to look at it through political

networks. And the most influential network has been the network monarchy with King Bhumibol Adulyadej situating on top of the political structure.² The real driving force behind the network monarchy is however not the King. It has been General Prem Tinsulanond, former prime minister and now President of the Privy Council. Network monarchy has functioned both as a powerful interest group as well as a separate political entity outside the parliamentary system. Despite having no position within the formal political system, network monarchy had effectively controlled the fate of Thai politics because of the intimate association it had with the King and the support from the army. Network monarchy was actively in operation throughout critical periods in Thai history, ranging from the Cold War when the threat of communism was imminent to the post-Cold War era during which the diminishing role of the military in domestic and foreign policies and the expansion of the middle class began to contest the monopoly of power in the hands of the traditional elite. Thus, as Thaksin strolled to the premiership in 2001 with overwhelming confidence and an indisputable electoral triumph, he threatened to recast the old political equation long dominated by the network monarchy. The result of this was the 2006 military coup.

Perceiving that Thaksin was scheming to construct his own network with the mass support made possible by his populist policies, self-proclaimed royalists, in the name of the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), embarked on a plot to overthrow Thaksin in 2005 by creating a situation of ungovernability so as to invite the military to intervene in politics. The PAD employed royal symbols as part of its campaign, successfully polarising society by cooperating with the network monarchy to attack political enemies. It erected a protective wall against Thaksin encapsulated within the notion of the King as the ultimate moral ruler of the country. Slogans like "Fight for the King" and "Loyalty to the Chakri Party" (Chakri is the name of the current dynasty)" signified the monarchy's consent to the removal of Thaksin from power by extra-constitutional means. There are at least three incidents that reaffirm the open involvement in politics of the monarchy: the coup-makers' meeting with the King on the night of the coup—apparently to seek the royal approval of the coup; the Queen's attendance at a funeral of a yellow-shirt member, Angkhana "Nong Bo" Radappanyawut, in October 2008, and; the exclusive interview of Princess Chulabhorn with Woody Milintachinda, a talk-show host, in April 2011 in which she openly condemned the red shirts for the deepening crisis which greatly affected the health of the King. The open intervention

in politics suggested a sense of desperation on the part of the monarchy in defending its position. But such practice of indiscreet political intervention went against the usual modus operandi of the monarchy, that of operating mostly behind the scene. And this surely was responsible for the rise of the anti-monarchy sentiment and as a result the rapid decline of the royal reverence which had been carefully built up over past decades.

Instead of stepping back from politics to re-establish their authority, members of the royal family and their defenders have chosen to further permeate themselves into the political mess in response to the continued challenges from their opponents. This was particularly evident after Samak Sundaravej, a Thaksin crony, won the election in December 2007 replacing the military regime of General Surayud Chulanont. Just when the traditional elite thought that they had eliminated Thaksin and his political stooges by a military coup, they were proven wrong. The premiership of Samak tremendously irritated the royalists and the supporters of the network monarchy. They sought to discredit Samak and his successor Somchai Wongsawat, also Thaksin's brother-in-law, by once again using the monarchy to fan hatred towards them and their diehard followers in the red-shirt camp. To oust Somchai, the PAD seized Suvarnabhumi and Don Muang Airports in late November 2008, virtually closing down Thailand from the outside world for about a week. At the occupied airports, the PAD members held the portraits of the King and Queen while shouting, "Somchai, Get Out!" At the end, both Samak and Somchai administrations were overthrown in a new kind of intervention, now known as "judicial coup". The Constitutional Court ruled that Samak must step down since he continued to work as a celebrity chef on the television while serving as a prime minister, thus being tainted by a conflict of interest. Similarly, the Court also ruled that Somchai must resign since an executive member of his party was found committing electoral fraud and that the party be dissolved, according to the 2007 Constitution.

Hyper-royalism

But the military and judicial coups are not the only weapons used to undermine adversaries of the network monarchy. Hyper-royalism has emerged as a dominant ideology designed to identify potential enemies of the monarchy and give the practitioners the legitimacy to punish them. Hyper-royalism has built a protective wall surrounding the monarchy, encapsulated within the concept of the monarchy being the most sacred, untouchable and inviolable

institution, in a country where democratic institutions have been treated with disdain. The need to defend the monarchy at all cost has come to rule the Thai consciousness. Those who fail to display love and respect for the monarchy, let alone insulting it, will be dealt with stiff social sanctions and legal means. As the end of the current Bhumibol reign is nigh, royalists have become increasingly anxious about the uncertainty ahead. After more than six decades of the Bhumibol rule, Thailand is now confronting a new reality in which the next monarch will be seriously lacking in moral authority and personal charisma. This sense of extreme anxiety has resulted in the proliferation of hyper-royalism.

Hyper-royalism had taken root and it proliferated everywhere, in politics, media and other social units. Recently, it has crept into the entertainment industry where business has been drawn along the subject of monarchy. Just three days before the deadly crackdown on the red-shirt protesters at Rachaprasong intersection, famous actor Pongpat Wachirabanchong, upon collecting his best actor accolade at the Nataraja awards on 16 May 2010, delivered his acceptance. It was perceived to be the fiercest defence of the monarchy in public and reflected the general attempt to initiate a new discourse of Thailand as an exclusive place for monarchists. He said,

“This is an award I received for playing a father role. I would like to seek your permission now to talk about our father (the King of Thailand) briefly. A father is a pillar to a house (which he meant “Thailand”). My house is very big. We have many people living together. Since I was born, this house was very beautiful and homely. For it to be like this, the ancestors of our father lost sweat and blood and sacrificed their lives to be able to build this house. Up to this point, this father is still working tirelessly to look after this house and to care for the happiness of anyone under this roof. If someone is angry at another, whoever, and then passed that anger down to our father, hate our father, insult our father, and have thoughts about chasing our father out of this house, I would have to walk up to that person and say, if you hate our father, and do not love our father anymore, you should leave, because this is our father’s house, because

this is our father's kingdom. I love our King. I believe that everyone here loves our King too. We are the same color. This crown on my head I bestow for the King. Thank you.”³

Such a discourse of the country being an exclusive place for monarchists has become popular and authoritative, being repeatedly referred to by defenders of the monarchy to justify their actions and policies against their opponents, even when those actions and policies were incompatible with democratic principles. At the height of the campaign to amend the draconian *lèse-majesté* law by a group of young law professors—Nitirat—at Thammasat University, Army Chief General Prayuth Chanocha, a confidant of the Queen, harshly condemned the young professors and asked them to “leave Thailand” because every Thai was supposed to love the King. Prayuth also said, “Will Nitirat be tolerable if their parents were insulted by others?”⁴ The social alienation of those with different political opinions and attitudes has indeed pulled the King from his subjects and intensified a sense of resentment which now represents a source of anti-monarchy sentiment in Thailand. Six years after the coup, the debate over whether the monarchy should readjust itself for the sake of its own survival in a new climate of political openness has become more vigorous as well as divisive. Some hyper-royalists never hide their aspiration to take Thailand back to the old days under absolute monarchy, as Sonthi Limthongkul, a core PAD leader, famously said, “Let’s return power to the King. His Majesty is a Dhammaraja King. This is the only way we can prevent Thailand from falling into becoming a failed state.”⁵ But in another reality in rural areas, most residents who lent their support to both Thaksin and the red shirts explicitly detest the political involvement of the monarchy. Many removed the portraits of the King and Queen which once adorned the walls in many households.⁶ It seems that monarchists are the ones who breed anti-monarchists.

Lèse-majesté Law

Unfortunately, there are no signs of the monarchy’s willingness to negotiate with democracy. To counter growing critical views of the monarchy, powerful royalists have practiced hyper-royalism by exploiting the *lèse-majesté* law as an alternative weapon. *Lèse-majesté*, or the crime of injury to royalty, is defined by Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code, which states

that defamatory, insulting or threatening comments about the king, queen and regent are punishable by three to 15 years in prison. Charges against Thais are usually grave and the investigation and prosecution process is by nature opaque. With King Bhumibol's frail health signaling the autumn of his reign, the royalists have launched an ever more aggressive campaign against critics of the monarchy. Prosecution has become more pervasive, virtually against anyone. The manipulation of the *lèse-majesté* law has severely impacted the human rights cause. In retrospect, cases of *lèse-majesté* have multiplied since the last coup. In 2005, 33 charges came before the Court of First Instance, which later handed down 18 decisions in these cases. By 2007, the number of charges increased almost fourfold to 126. This number jumped to 164 in 2009, and then tripled to 478 cases in 2010. The most dramatic increases occurred under the Democrat Party-led government of Abhisit Vejjajiva, which adopted a royalist line strongly backed by the military. Under the current Yingluck Shinawatra government, the cases continue to go up. Yingluck has appeared to shift her strategy by maintaining the political status quo for the sake of her government's survival.

The number of recent high-profile cases underscores the misuse of *lèse-majesté* law in the name of defending the monarchy and the display of loyalty of the government for the royal institution. The arrest of a 62-year-old Thai-Chinese man, Amphon Tangnoppakul, also known as Akong (or grandfather) who was sentenced to 20 years in prison, shocked Thai society. He allegedly sent four text messages insulting the Queen. Amphon always maintained his innocence. He died in prison of terminal cancer on 8 May 2012 after several requests for bail were turned down before being sentenced by the Thai court.

Joe Gordon, or Lerpong Wichaikhammat, a Thai-born American, was jailed for two-and-a-half years in Thailand after posting online excerpts from a banned book, "The King Never Smiles" authored by Paul Handley, while living in the United States. The U.S. government criticized the *lèse-majesté* law, but was taken aback by the response of Thai hyper-royalists, who called for the expulsion of the U.S. ambassador to Bangkok. Eventually, he received a royal pardon after serving 14 months in Thai jail. More staggeringly, Abhinya Sawatvarakorn, nicknamed Kantoop, or "Joss Stick", a 20-year-old student at Thammasat University, could be charged with a *lèse-majesté* violation over comments she made on Facebook two years ago. Kantoop was accused of committing *lèse-majesté* in April 2009

while she was still in high school. She would be one of the youngest ever to be charged under the law, and has already undergone a catalog of social punishments. For example, she was reportedly refused admission into Silpakorn University, where some professors painted her as an anti-monarchist. She also had a shoe thrown at her by a student at the esteemed Thammasat University, where she currently studies, and has been forced to change her name to avoid being recognised — and possibly attacked.

Also, Chiranuch Premchaiporn, director of the on-line newspaper Prachatai.com was charged on the grounds that she allowed Web-board comments with lèse-majesté content. She was found guilty and sentenced to 1 year in prison, which was then reduced to an 8-month suspended sentence and a US\$630 fine. Chiranuch was among three female journalists who won the 2011 Courage in Journalism Award given by the International Women's Media Foundation. Prosecuting her undoubtedly further tarnished the reputation of Thailand. In another case, Somyot Prueksakasemsuk, then the editor of the magazine *Voice of Thaksin*, was arrested and imprisoned without bail for nearly two years. In January 2013, he was charged of lèse-majesté and sentenced to a total of 11 years in prison. Somyut published two articles under a pseudonym critical of a fictional character of King Bhumibol. More and more people have been arrested for violating Article 112, including the cases of Daranee Charnchoengsilpakul, known as Da Torpedo, being sentenced 18 years in prison for insulting the king, and Surachai Sae Dan, or Surachai Danwattananusorn, also being imprisoned for 15 years for a similar crime. At the same time as the arrests have continued, the glorification of King Bhumibol has been religiously carried out by royalists as a way of legitimising the overpowering royal influence on politics and demoralizing the anti-monarchy elements. Initially, it was speculated that Yingluck's arrival in power in July 2011 following the election victory of her party, Pheu Thai, could aggravate the crisis because of the conflict between her brother and his enemies. Evidently, it is now clear that the Yingluck government is interested in making peace with the royalists in exchange for a safe return of Thaksin to Thailand. This has disappointed her red-shirt supporters. The fear is that any reconciliation between the government and the palace will likely eclipse the public call for the amendment of the lèse-majesté law for the sake of freedom of expression and the protection of basic human rights.⁷

The 2006 coup that was staged amid joy among many Bangkok residents—some even calling it a “good coup”—has turned out to be disastrous to the position of the monarchy and also the military itself. More devastatingly, it has caused a tremendous impact on the country’s democratization process which has to be slowed down owing to the continuing face-offs between the pro-monarchy and pro-democracy groups as well as between those who support the shift of the political order and those who prefer to conserve the status quo. The coup has revealed the ugly reality in Thai politics in which the long domination of power in the hands of the traditional elite using illegitimate tools to eliminate successive elected governments has refused to subside. As members of society have become more conscious about the unfair distribution of power, they have begun to fight back to defend their rights and more importantly the spirit of democracy. As the monarchy has defended its political territory, the military has worked indefatigably in tandem to maintain its footprint in politics. The consistent interference in policy by the current army chief is testimony of the typical attitude that prevails among top royalist generals; they have sought to exploit the monarchy in order to sustain their own political advantages. This explains why the military always claims that it is in its duty to protect the monarchy just as it is protecting Thailand’s national security. But the military-monarchy relations can sometime be volatile. This is because the network monarchy possesses its own particular clients in the army. Accordingly, it has caused disintegration within the military. The case of the “watermelon soldiers”—green only on the uniform but red at heart—indicates serious disunity of the army. The last coup partly brought about this split; some of the soldiers came from the poorest regions in Thailand where the elite’s control of power did not benefit them and their family. My own conversations with a number of military officers confirmed that not all soldiers are fond of the monarchy.⁸

So, what did the 2006 coup tell us? It tells that the crux of the Thai crisis is far more severe and much wider in scope than we previously thought. The monarchy is surely not the victim in the protracted political conflict. Rather, it represents both a root cause and a factor that has made the political situation more fragile. The coup has instigated more unjust uses of the *lèse-majesté* law, and in the process, led to more political prisoners. This unswervingly worsened the human rights condition in the kingdom. With the looming end of the current reign, more questions are being asked, including those about the future of Thailand without

the supposedly benevolent King, the competency and legitimacy of his successor, and the survival of the monarchy as an institution. It might be seen as a harrowing close of the Bhumibol reign—for the King to witness the waning royal institution—the institution that he had constructed throughout his lifetime by working personally with a series of despotic regimes and corrupt Western governments. The coup has also shredded the military into pieces, turning generals into desperate royalists who continue to live on the monarchical institution in order to survive.

Moreover, the coup produced a unique phenomenon in Thailand, the so-called colour-coded politics. The emergence of the yellow and red shirt movements has certainly complicated the Thai crisis. It unveiled another aspect of Thai politics in which non-state actors came to influence and manipulate the political process on a larger scale. The PAD and its yellow-shirt supporters have transformed themselves into hyper-royalists and extreme nationalists. Domestically, they have consistently expressed their nostalgia for the absolute monarchy. Externally, they demanded a war with Cambodia (over the Preah Vihear conflict) not only to discredit the Thaksin faction (because of Thaksin's cozy ties with the Cambodian leadership) but also to prove that they were more Thai than their nemeses. On the other hand, the coming to the scene of the red shirts is not unexpected. As emphasized earlier, not all members of the red-shirt movement are supporters of Thaksin. Many of them are simply pro-democracy. But the fact that there remains an inexorable association between the red shirts and Thaksin and the outstanding allegation against them over the arson attack (against the Central World Department Store in Bangkok supposedly in response to the state's brutal crackdown in May 2010) has become their inevitable stigma. Briefly put, the red shirts have been held hostage by Thaksin and the conflict he has with the traditional elite. This pro-Thaksin image has been lumped together with another image of being an anti-monarchy movement. Thus, there is a limit on what the red shirts can do without being accused by their opponents and misjudged by the society.

The New Reign: Vajiralongkorn

The Thai crisis, originated in and underpinned by the relentless political intervention of the monarchy, will surely continue into the new reign of Vajiralongkorn, the only son of

Bhumibol. Although more debates have emerged now on the question of whether the throne will actually be passed onto Vajiralongkorn, this essay follows the conventional thinking that, as Vajiralongkorn is the only heir apparent who is eligible to succeed the throne. It will therefore discuss the future of Thai monarchy under his leadership.⁹

Exactly because there are no signs of the monarchy reconciling with democracy, a pessimistic outlook is depicted. The royal transition will cause a huge impact on at least four aspects. First, Thailand after Bhumibol will be a different place. The extent to which the monarchy has become actively involved in politics particularly since the coup will cast a long shadow over the next reign. Unavoidably, Thailand will have to deal with the royal succession, which is not the end process even after the next king is enthroned. On the contrary, the enthronement will open up a variety of critical questions regarding Vajiralongkorn, such as the morality, acceptability and legitimacy of the monarch—all of which, under Bhumibol, served as benchmarks for a successful and authoritative reign. Unfortunately, the next King will not be able to claim such qualities and therefore will cripple his moral ability to command respect from his subjects. Apart from the (lack of) specific qualities of the new monarch, the issue of whether the monarchy will be willing to adjust itself in a changing political condition is significant. This raises a number of questions: Can the monarchy continue to meddle in politics with the support of its defenders? And what would be the political view of the new monarch? The prominent position of the monarchy has been made possible because of King Bhumibol and his personal efforts. In other words, what has been strengthened has been the position of Bhumibol, Thailand's most successful monarch in the 20th century, not the royal institution. For the next king to survive the crisis, the only way is to reform the monarchy, turning it into an acceptable institution, since the king himself will become the subject of controversy. So far, his supporters inside the palace walls have attempted to help recreate a new image of Vajiralongkorn; yet, it is too little too late. There are, too, other equally important questions associated with the royal institution. How will the network monarchy handle the anti-monarchy movement? Will they continue to exploit lèse-majesté law to protect the new king even when the protection of a supposedly immoral king would be an arduous task? Will there be a readjustment of key institutions within the network monarchy, such as the Privy Council and the military? What will be their views of politics without King Bhumibol?

Second, the political position of the military could be thrown into jeopardy. The military has known to be an indispensable force which has worked intimately with the monarchy for decades. They have found their mutual interests in the maintenance of the monarchy's power in politics, under the commanding motto of protecting the king as equal to protecting national security. But the military is no longer a unified institution, with the presence of the watermelon soldiers. Moreover, the direct political involvement of the military has greatly reduced its own professionalism and the corporateness. To further complicate the matter, and as appeared in WikiLeaks, some of the key figures in the network monarchy which have enjoyed a direct control over the military, like Prem, showed their disapproval of the Crown Prince. It is likely that the military will be caught in the dilemma; disapproving the new king, but being forced to support him for the sake of the military's position in politics.

Third, it is intriguing to witness how the society will respond to the royal transition, particularly to the new unpopular king. Will the royalists be ready to offer the same love and respect for Vajiralongkorn, considering that the charisma is a non-transferable trait? Equally fascinating is the question of how the red shirt will respond to the new monarch? At the eve of the royal transition, there could be street rallies in support of, or in opposition of, the new king. Thailand could once again slip into a political coma. Here, the role of Thaksin could be put on a spotlight. Thaksin has long known to be a keen supporter of Vajiralongkorn. Thaksin once gave an interview to the media, describing to the coming reign of Vajiralongkorn, "He is not the king yet. He may not be shining now. But after he becomes the king I am confident he can be shining. It is not his time yet. But when the time comes I think he will be able to perform."¹⁰ His remarks infuriated the members of the network monarchy.

Lastly, and undoubtedly, the new reign will bring about a new shift in the Thai political structure. In the past several decades, there have been periodic clashes between elective and non-elective institutions, with the latter being represented by the network monarchy. King Vajiralongkorn could be either in the position of further deepening the clashes or indeed stopping them by strictly staying above politics—something that his father was never willing to do. If the new king chooses to work with democracy, there will be a

chance for Thailand to move ahead and become a normal democratic society. Should the king decide to follow in the footsteps of his father, his rule will bring chaos, devastation, and violence, not only because he will lack the supports he needs, but also because of his lack of moral legitimacy that would generate an even greater sense of resentment among the subjects.

NOTES

¹ Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "Shifting Political Tides Portend Turmoil", *Bangkok Post*, 6 January 2012.

² See Duncan McCargo, "Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crises in Thailand", *The Pacific Review*, Volume 18, Number 4 (December 2005), pp. 499-519.

³ Watch his acceptance speech at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_CA0QY9Vdy4>.

⁴ "Prayuth Yontham Nitirat Thondairuamai Thookkhondhawha Por Mae Pee Yat Pee Nong" ["Prayuth Asked Nitirat if They will be Okay if their Fathers, Mothers, Relatives, Brothers and Sisters were Insulted"], *Kloomsue Prachachon [Group of People's Media]*, 6 February 2012

<<http://www.google.co.jp/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=18&ved=0CHUQFjAHOAo&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tfn5.info%2Fboard%2Findex.php%3Ftopic%3D34663.0&ei=nRSiT-eZDKHPmAWu-qm7DA&usg=AFQjCNGiOuOyyeWpHOKSyvjauwgs-EK5w>> (accessed 11 May 2012).

⁵ Mai Koraja, "Sam Khon Sam Khom Khuen Praraja Amnaj" ["Three Wise Men: Return Power to the King"], *Manager Online*, 22 May 2010 <<http://www.manager.co.th/Daily/ViewNews.aspx?NewsID=9530000070492>> (accessed 11 May 2012).

⁶ My own reservation during my fieldtrip to the Northeast region of Thailand, June 2012.

⁷ Pavin Chachavalpongpun, "If you don't Think the King Deserves to be Feted, Don't Say so in Thailand", *Japan Times*, 3 May 2012.

⁸ Interview with a number of unnamed military officers, Nakhon Nayok, Thailand, December 2011.

⁹ For sometimes now, a more interesting debate has been on whether the throne could be passed onto a more popular Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn who is sister of Vajiralongkorn.

¹⁰ Richard Lloyd Parry, "Ousted Thai Leader Thaksin Shinawatra Calls for Shining New Age after King's Death", *The Times*, November 9, 2009.