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The Impact of Chinese Studies on Thai Politics and Foreign Relations*

Nareumit Sodsuk

It is generally known that the main purpose of the study of international relations is to understand the movement of important events in various countries and in particular the impact that these events have on world politics. Moreover, such studies may be conducted along comparative lines. In this respect Chinese studies are particularly important. Comparative studies in development can be pursued and when considered appropriate certain aspects of Chinese development may be adapted for use in Thai society. As Thailand must have relations with other countries Chinese studies become absolutely necessary because China is not only a major power in the Southeast Asian region but also a major world power. It is thus important to ascertain whether or not Chinese studies affect Thai politics and foreign relations.

As a communist State, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has been perceived by Thai governments in the past as an ideological challenge to Thai security. However, a combination of international, regional and internal factors led the civilian government, led by M.R.Kukrit Pramoj to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC on 1 July 1975. Since then the attitude of the Thai government toward China has gradually improved though there have been periods when relations have been less than smooth. Whatever the case, since the founding of the PRC thirty five years ago there was a great deal of fluctuation within China itself and it is reasonable to argue that these changes have in turn affected Thai attitudes.

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The major hypothesis of this study is that important pressure groups within Thai society, in particular the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), Thai students and intellectuals and the military (especially the Democratic faction within the military), have a direct bearing on the formulation of the Thai governments’ policies on development which in turn affect politics and foreign relations. In the author’s opinion an important factor which influences the attitude of these pressure groups is the study of China both in terms of theoretical understanding and direct experience. Thus ‘Chinese studies’ refers to both the study of China in relation to various Chinese theories and ideologies and also the actual experiences of China which have affected these Thai pressure groups.

The Maoist period which stressed permanent revolution was important not only for its effects within China but also for the influences it had outside of China. While some Thai groups were favourable other were hostile to such an ideology. Thus considerable conflict and competition arose within Thai foreign policy circles. During the present era of the Four Modernizations these pressure groups are being influenced by new patterns of Chinese ideology and this is influencing in turn the direction of internal development which further affects Thai politics and foreign relations.

For the sake of clarity, ‘Chinese studies’ will be viewed firstly from the perspective of the Chinese themselves, then from a Western perspective, in particular that of the United States. The author will then go on to examine the effects of Chinese studies on Thai politics and foreign relations. Chinese studies-from Chinese perspective have had a direct influence on the attitude and role of the CPT, which enjoyed especially close relations with China during

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1. The author has previously analysed Chinese studies in Thailand from a different perspective. I argued that political factors, at both an international and regional level, have had important repercussions on Chinese studies in Thailand. However in this essay I stress the effects on Thai foreign policy which have emerged both from changes within China itself and changes in American’s knowledge of China. Finally, I look at how these changes have influenced those groups who play an important role in Thai policies.

the period of the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, these studies had an indirect influence on the role of the students and intellectuals, the Democratic Millitary Group and eventually the Thai government. Similarly, the American attitude to Chinese Studies had an important effect on Thai politics and foreign relations through the medium of Thai political and military leaders. Finally, The effects on Thai politics and foreign relations will be considered in detail through an assessment of the roles played by the various important groups within Thai society. As a short conclusion trends in Thai development will be briefly outlined.

Chinese Studies through Chinese Eyes

The Chinese acknowledge that basic analytic assumptions rest upon "the struggle between two lines"2. Such an assumption seems to have been continuously recognized by Chinese officials themselves. the only difference being the degree of divergence between the differing approaches. The extent of divergence becomes more apparent during periods of changes in power. In fact the root of the struggle lies in the different basic philosophies each group holds toward the direction of Chinese development. The first group under the inspiration of Mao Zedong emphasizes the concept of permanent revolution which aims at the formation of a socialist society in which there is absolute equality. The second group lays stress on the modernization of China's agriculture, industry, science and technology and of its military, At present this group is led by Deng Xiaoping. However Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi also supported such a strategy in which modernization was to be achieved in concert with a revolutionary ideology. The revolutionary group through the principle of self-reliance stresses the support of revolution abroad. The modernization group rather than supporting revolution stresses the building of

2. For a detailed examination of the basic differences between the two groups regarding the theory and ideology, economics, politics and government and foreign relations, see Nareumit Sodsuk, "The Chinese Communist Party and the Struggle between Two lines: Permanent Revolution or Four Modernizations", (Phak kommunist cin kap kan tor soo sorng naew thang: phatiwat talord kan reu si than samai) Asia Pharithat, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1983, pp. 1-31.
good relations with foreign governments and seeks economic cooperation. In the long run China, once it has established itself as an economic superpower, hopes to be able to encourage other Third World countries to establish more just societies.

The different basic philosophies of the two groups have led to a wide divergence of views as regards the direction of studies for Chinese development and self understanding. During the period of the Cultural Revolution enormous stress was placed upon the use of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist principles as a base for studies in social sciences. The major purpose of these studies was a concern with class struggle. Intellectuals were not to be preoccupied with mere academic research but rather they were to learn from actual practice. Conversely, during the present era academics are being encouraged to develop studies in various branches of the social sciences in order to serve the country's modernization policies.  

In the era of the Four Modernizations, class problems are not considered important. China hopes to attain its goals through reliance on the application of science as a base for development. Such thinking incorporates changes in Chinese social sciences in the fields of politics, foreign relations and economics. In addition research along internationally accepted lines is also being encouraged.

During the Cultural Revolution there was no research into politics along the lines of Western political science, one reason being that such research was thought to reflect the ideology of Western capitalism. However since about 1980 there has been a revival in liberal-influenced studies of political science. In more recent years though, a campaign has been launched by party theorists

4. For example, a Chinese social scientist holds that: "We must be aware that the Four Modernizations we want to accomplish are neither capitalist nor revisionist, but socialist modernizations. Therefore we cannot be without a correct Marxist theoretical guidance in philosophy, political economy, and the social sciences."

against social sciences (including political science) which they consider to be heading too far to the right. Such studies, they argue, should be more in accordance with basic Marxist theoretical principles so that modernization can be achieved along socialist not capitalist lines. 4

A major point argued by some present-day Chinese political scientists is that Chinese political science itself should be modernized, as previous studies by Marxist political scientists failed to emphasize sufficiently the building of a socialist society: emphasis was given only to abstract principles and particular periods in the struggle to establish a Chinese socialist State. The most important objective now is to study how a fully advanced secure nation is to be achieved. The details of such an objective can be found in the Five-Year Plan (1980-85) of the Chinese Political Science Association. Priority is given to study and research which will overcome existing theoretical and practical problems so that a modern socialist State can be realized. Crucial problems are to strengthen and improve party leadership, to affirm the dictatorship of the proletariat, to reform and improve the socialist political system, to develop socialist democracy, to reform the cadre system and to simplify the administrative structure so as to improve efficiency. 5

Importantly, within these ideas is the attempt to develop Marxist theory through a consideration of previous experiences so that the dogmatism of the past can be avoided. From the point of view of a socialist political system, Chinese modernization recognizes the need to conduct research from a variety of perspectives so that practical solutions can be found not opposed to human nature. Stated more simply, ideals which cannot be realized in practice should not be pursued. The important details of such a program include the democratization of the socialist system, the adjustment of relations between the government and the people and the government and the Party so as to be in accordance with the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is considered important that research is carried out to summarize the lessons of history, a history for which the Chinese have been severely criticized as practitioners of autocratic rule verging on bloody fascism. Political opponents were ruthlessly destroyed especially during the class-cleansing campaign held during the Cultural Revo-

olution. As regards the attempt to reaffirm the leadership of the Party, it is deemed necessary to clearly differentiate between the role and status of the Party in the revolutionary phase before the establishment of socialism and the role and status of the Party during the period of nation-building. Each phase is considered as a separate period in the development of relations between the Party of the proletariat and the people. In other words, the Party has a different role in each phase and its different roles must be clearly delineated. The problems to be faced and the duties to be carried by the Party in each phase must be considered as separate.

In 1980 there were some important internal political reforms aimed at correcting the centralistic and monopolistic control of power by Party leaders. The reforms included rectification of bureaucratic inefficiency so that those holding prominent Party positions could not hold concurrent prominent positions in the government. Moreover, clear guidelines were laid down which regulated employment, retirement, dismissal and the employment of young talented people to replace the older cadres who were to be appointed as advisors. In addition there was an effort to further the introduction of basic democratic principles into various levels of government and to allow the mass media greater scope to inform independently under the general supervision of the State. 6

From a political perspective, the Chinese today concede that they must conduct further extensive studies so that they can develop their political system to the point where it meets more closely the standard of democracy acceptable to the international community. At the same time, however, they must retain their identity as a socialist State.

As regards foreign relations, the Chinese, during the era of the Cultural

Revolution, emphasized the support of revolution abroad both in terms of political and moral support. The firm belief in Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology led the Party to hold steadfastly to such a policy. However, during the period of the Four Modernizations there has been a more scientific study of foreign relations in that State scholars and researchers have been able to take a greater part in the decision-making process for the formulation of foreign policy. 

For this reason, foreign policy in the modernization era is less concerned with ideological considerations and the support of communist parties in the Third World. Rather, there is an effort to build economic relations with foreign countries including both the powerful developed nations and those which are underdeveloped with the aim of expediting Chinese development. It would appear then that the Chinese have indirectly conceded that the policy of supporting revolution abroad was counterproductive.

With respect to economics, which is as the heart of policy changes in the modernization era, China is attempting to formulate a new strategy of economic development. The attempt includes the adaptation of capitalist forms for use in a mixed socialist or market orientated system similar to that of some Eastern European countries. This new system will allow for greater competition in production with material rewards offered as incentives and consequently a lessening of emphasis on class problems. The Chinese believe that these new methods will stimulate the economy through the use of mixed socialist techniques by which the government will directly regulate production planning and partially fix the public prices of agricultural and industrial goods. The system of taxes and prices and the issuing of credit will be part of guided planning which in turn will be led by the free market mechanism of supply and demand. Through these measures the principle of capitalist material incentives is introduced. In addition, China is formulating policies of expanding joint-venture investments with

foreigners in the special economics zones under the principle of "one country, two systems".\(^8\)

Moreover, studies of productive efficiency have been made and adjustments to the highly centralized administrative structure in State enterprises have been carried out with an eye to greater democracy. The government has been trying to limit the centrally controlled planning of State enterprises, giving the administrative sections and officers of various State enterprises an increasing opportunity to participate in decision-making, running businesses and being responsible for their own profits and losses. This decentralization is aimed at stimulating competition to make production more efficient.\(^9\) From above, it would seem that the Chinese have accepted that their old economic structure, which is thoroughly opposed to capitalism and competition in production, has been unable to provide sufficient economic advancement even though it did manage to satisfy certain ideological requirements. Even though China still adheres to the principle of self-reliant revolution, the changes in ideology with respect to politics, government, economics and in particular foreign policy, which no longer emphasizes support of revolution abroad, have had a direct influence on the CPT.

**The Western Attitude to Chinese Studies: The U.S.A.**

Thailand, as part of the Free World, has readily accepted Western influences in the form of conventional wisdom and the various sciences.


The United States as the leading superpower of the Free World, has had enormous influence over the Thai way of life. The Thai image of China, in particular that held by Thai officials, bares a direct relation to the image sketched by the American government. As a result of the Cold War, communism became the greatest threat to the Free World. Automatically China bore the brunt of Free World hostility. In such an environment, Chinese studies or the image of China reflected American bias. The gradual shift in the American attitude towards the establishment of more friendly relations with China was partly a result of efforts by American scholars.

From the point of view of the American government, the PRC was an aggressive country which aimed at extending the influence of communist ideology thus threatening the sovereignty of the Free World. However, in the decade following the Cultural Revolution the image of China, in the eyes of some American scholars, gradually became more positive. Maoist ideology with its emphasis on egalitarianism, popularism and selflessness began to attract the attention of considerable numbers of Americans, both in and outside of academic circles. As international pressure to end the Vietnam war intensified, it became increasingly necessary for the US to reach agreement with China. Gradually paths to better relations were opened up and eventually formal diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1979.

According to some American scholars, China during the Maoist period, though still very poor, still offered its citizens a better quality of life than that found in the competitive and polluted industrialized nations of the West. Chinese emphasis on socialism, collective harmony and egalitarianism was compared favourably to the American capitalist society with its competition, individualism and never ending search for modernization. The reasons for these changes in the attitudes of American scholars stemmed from a realization that implicit in past analyses of China were shaped by the moral and political values of the West. Moreover, studies were biased due to xenophobic fears and the use of Cold War stereotypes. The American government thus could not accept China's success but rather saw it as a complete failure. ¹⁰

However, whilst the 'demonic' image of China gradually shifted to an image of virtual 'saintliness', further changes in American perceptions were to follow. These changes emerged at the end of the Maoist era, following the fall of the Gang of Four and the beginning of the Four Modernizations period marked by Deng Xiaoping's purge of Mao's successor Hua Guofeng. The most recent period, under Deng's command, has seen an attempt to put into practice the policy of 'Four Modernizations'. As part of this attempt, Maoist Ideology has been criticized as being an obstacle to the achievement of modernization, and the Gang of Four's illegitimate exercise of power, under Mao's name, has been exposed. These most recent events have further affected the attitude of American scholars to Chinese studies. It is now widely accepted that the admirable image of China presented during the period of the Cultural Revolution was itself extremely one sided. Several American scholars have admitted that their information was gleaned only from the official press and Red Guard newspapers and wallposters. These news sources merely emphasized the success of the Cultural Revolution. The limitation of such news was due to the use, during the Cultural Revolution, of an anti-Western closed-door policy. Although some Chinese refugees expressed critical opinions, such views were rejected by those Chinese experts who were sympathetic to Maoism. Criticism by people fleeing China was regarded as biased and unrepresentative. Moreover, though American scholars invited to China during the Cultural Revolution were given grand welcomes, they were shown only those areas especially prepared by the Chinese government and thus had no opportunity to see China from alternative perspectives. Thus in the eyes of some American scholars China was something only to be admired. Later these trips to China came to be known as "Revolutionary Tourism". 11

A further influence on American scholars' perceptions of China has been Amnesty International's concern with human rights. Such concerns became particularly influential under Carter's promotion of human rights as a policy for resisting communism. These new value

judgments led to the criticism that China, during the Cultural Revolution, violated human rights through restriction of both civil and political rights. There had been widespread imprisonment and forced conscription into work gangs for those who had expressed political dissent. It was argued that such measures were necessary in order to instill a love of labour and to change political attitudes. Thus the criteria used by American scholars in their study of China during the 1970s differ markedly from those used in the 1980s. Harry Harding, an American expert on China, has come to some interesting conclusions as to the orientation of some of the leading American scholars involved in Chinese studies.\(^{12}\)

Firstly, with regard to economic equality, most American scholars argue that China no longer exhibits the idealistic characteristics of the Cultural Revolution era. There is the problem of the wide gap which separates the most advanced agricultural regions and the poorest communes. In addition, there is still enormous economic inefficiency coupled with the problems of inflation and unemployment.

Secondly, in relation to political equality, several American scholars have argued that the Cultural Revolution was not a success despite the fact that attempts had been made to abolish the newly formed bureaucratic class which was inefficient and which provided a base for privileges and the domination of the people. However, it did appear that measures which allowed the masses to offer criticism and take part in decision-making processes had been successful, though only at lower governmental levels. On the other hand, high ranking officials in the government and the party retained privileges which allowed them to pursue their own interests. Such practices were part of what Mao termed ‘the

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12. Moreover, Harry Harding has pointed out that those interested in Chinese Studies should learn from the studies of previous scholars and not just accept official Chinese interpretations. He has also argued that present day studies should attempt to construct a balanced, unbiased picture of China. In other words, studies should not reflect the anti-communist ideology of the Cold War period nor should they express the Maoist views of the Cultural Revolution. Harding claims that this is essential for a more realistic understanding of China.

personality cult' by which those seeking various comforts would seek out leaders in order to obtain favours.

Thirdly, during the Cultural Revolution, those Chinese leaders who were part of the group espousing permanent revolution were portrayed as opposing self-aggrandizement and the seeking of material gain. However, lately American scholars are seeing these leaders less as statesmen and more as politicians: even though the Chinese themselves explained the various struggles in terms of ideology rather than power, each faction had to seek power in order to impose its own ideological options.

Fourthly, the image of Mao and the period of the Cultural Revolution have been reassessed by American scholars who now argue that the period lacked democracy. Some have even gone so far as to compare it with the eras of Stalin, Hitler and Pol Pot, Mao is charged with the destruction of intellectuals and universities, thus setting China back more than a decade.

Finally, large numbers of American scholars had praised the successes of Chinese development during the Cultural Revolution by predicting that its impact would be felt worldwide particularly in the fields of promoting education, literacy, nutrition and women’s rights. However, during the more recent period China has been less than happy with such ‘successes’. When compared with other countries, particularly those in the rest of Asia, Chinese development only ranks at a middle level. Such a comparison has further led American scholars to reassess their previous views. At any rate, it is now widely accepted that the difficulty in solving problems of Chinese development stems from China being the most populous nation on Earth.

To summarize, the attitudes of American scholars to Chinese studies have led the American government and the American people to realize that during the Four Modernizations period changes have made China both more democratic and friendlier toward the Free World. Various pressure groups within Thailand have been directly influenced by the work of American scholars and the American government’s policy of friendly relations with China. These groups include the Thai government, students, intellectuals and factions within the Thai military. This improved
attitude to China will be examined in detail in the next section. With regard to the CPT the influence of American scholarship has been much more indirect.

The Thai Perception of Chinese Studies

Just as American attitudes have undergone important changes it would appear that Thailand has also altered its perception of China. Although it is true that even now some Thais remain opposed to China such attitudes are in effect mere remnants from the Cold War period. Thai scholars interested in Chinese studies have played an important role in encouraging Thai politicians and the general population to reach a better understanding of the PRC. Previously, government officials, in particular members of the military, took a negative view of China. However, Thai academics, like their American counterparts who had attempted to understand Maoist ideology during the Cultural Revolution, have presented studies which have helped Thais, especially students and intellectuals, to form a more rounded, greatly improved image of China.

With the fall of Mao and the beginning of the Four Modernizations period the media, which had been controlled by Mao and the Gang of four

13. In a previous work, I have divided Thai approaches to the study of China into two major categories. The first group carries out macro studies along the lines of political economy whilst the second group pursues specific micro area studies. These approaches can be further divided into Maoism, area studies, political economy and area studies and Marxism.


14. During the Maoist period, Khien Theeravit, a senior Thai scholar of Chinese studies, pointed out the difficulties of understanding Chinese politics. One interesting observation made by Khien is that western studies of China should not be seen as providing a framework for Chinese political analysis due to the underlying differences in political ideology between China and the West.

during the Cultural Revolution, were used by the State to attack the ideology of permanent revolution\footnote{Khien has pointed out that the Chinese government, during the Four Modernizations period, exercises tight control over information pertaining to existing conditions within China. This is also true of the Cultural Revolution period, when Mao and the Gang of Four used the media to attack the Four Modernizations group led by Deng Xiaoping. Thus it is just as difficult to gain an insight into the conditions which existed during the Cultural Revolution as it is to discover the real facts in the Four Modernizations period. As Khien Theeravit points out: “the current Chinese leaders possess clearly differing beliefs and policies from those who led China during the Cultural Revolution. Thus there is the problem of discovering the real facts because the leaders and the media only refer to the faults of the Cultural Revolution whilst emphasizing the merits of the new policies. One’s own good deeds are exaggerated at the expense of the misdeeds of the political enemy. A political system under which the media are tightly controlled by the state presents major problems for scholars. The merits of those who oppose the government and the faults of policies proposed by those in power cannot be understood from either the press or other forms of media…..”} As new facts became available to Thai scholars through the work of their American counterparts, perceptions of China began to vary. Together with news broadcasts by the Thai mass media on the changes within China, these new perceptions led some Thai groups to alter their attitudes from the period when Maoist ideology was favoured. Nowadays, considerable numbers of Thais realize that the Chinese are neither ‘demons’ nor ‘saints’ but rather human beings both good and bad who still wish to continue their own development.

The Thai pressure group most directly affected yet the slowest to

\begin{enumerate}
\item Khien has warned of the use of Chinese sources during the period when Mao still influenced Chinese politics.
\end{enumerate}

\begin{quote}
“…..having obtained sources there still remains the problem of analysis and interpretation, it is at this point that one should exercise extreme caution. Print from mainland China is government advertising. It is informing the world about things which the Communist Party feels should be happening rather than what is actually happening. Analysis cannot rest upon official information only but must also seek out other sources. Moreover one must understand Chinese political culture and firstly be able to distinguish facts from fiction, ideological pronouncement from actual policy…..”
\end{quote}

See Khien Theeravit, \textit{Politics and Government in the People’s Republic of China (Kan meung le kan pok khrong khorng sataranarat prachachon cin)}, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 6-7.

\begin{enumerate}
\item Khien Theeravit has pointed out that the Chinese government, during the Four Modernizations period, exercises tight control over information pertaining to existing conditions within China. This is also true of the Cultural Revolution period, when Mao and the Gang of Four used the media to attack the Four Modernizations group led by Deng Xiaoping. Thus it is just as difficult to gain an insight into the conditions which existed during the Cultural Revolution as it is to discover the real facts in the Four Modernizations period. As Khien Theeravit points out: “the current Chinese leaders possess clearly differing beliefs and policies from those who led China during the Cultural Revolution. Thus there is the problem of discovering the real facts because the leaders and the media only refer to the faults of the Cultural Revolution whilst emphasizing the merits of the new policies. One’s own good deeds are exaggerated at the expense of the misdeeds of the political enemy. A political system under which the media are tightly controlled by the state presents major problems for scholars. The merits of those who oppose the government and the faults of policies proposed by those in power cannot be understood from either the press or other forms of media…..”
\end{enumerate}

See Khien Theeravit, \textit{the Birth of a New Chinese Era (Cin phlad paendin)} (Bangkok: Thai Wattana Panich Press, 1984), preface page.
change its views was the Communist Party of Thailand. Formerly, the CPT enjoyed especially close relations with the Chinese Communist Party particularly during the Cultural Revolution, when the Chinese emphasized the support of revolution abroad. The major shifts in Chinese ideology and policy affected the very survival of the CPT.

Disagreement arose within the various Thai pressure groups and Thai perceptions of China. The Thai government, in its response to the CPT, was led to adjust its stance and policies to meet the changing realities. Important changes occurred in the Thai military’s view of the communist problem with respect to both the CPT and China. These changes led to greater unity between the civilian government and the military, particularly the Democratic Military Group, in their common opposition to the CPT. The underpinnings of Thai foreign policy toward China and the countries of Indochina stem from the various Thai governments’ perceptions of China.

The Impact on Thai Politics and Foreign Relations

During the period when the Thai government pursued an anti-communist policy the Army was used to suppress the CPT which was perceived as a direct threat to Thai capitalism. This policy remained central to the thinking of the Phibun, Sarit and Thanom governments. With regard to foreign relations this policy was in accordance with the American opposition to the spread of communist influence in Indochina. This confrontationist stance began to change following the United States’ withdrawal from Vietnam. After the events of 14 October 1973 Thailand’s civilian government realized the necessity to adjust its position to meet the changing international environment and thus became more receptive to closer cultural relations between the Thai and Chinese people. Eventually in 1975 Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj decided to establish formal diplomatic relations with China. The aim of this policy was to promote better relations at government level with the hope that greater friendship would lead China to lessen its support to the CPT. Economic was another
important factor in the sense that Thailand was able to establish another line of international trade and in particular could benefit from the purchase of Chinese oil at privileged prices. M.R. Kukrit understood that Chinese foreign policy supported the CPT politically and morally but did not go so far as to provide troops as was the policy of the Soviet Union.

M.R. Kukrit realized that efforts must be made to solve problems of injustice within Thailand. In particular he wanted to attack the extreme inequalities in Thai society, particularly those existing between the city and rural areas. The hope was that, if successful, it would ensure that those who were dispossessed and without political representation would be prevented from turning to the CPT thus further fuelling the revolutionary movement.  

Following the events of 14 October 1973, Maoist ideology became more influential. Even though M.R. Kukrit’s government became more interested in solving the problem of the CPT through political and economic reform rather than through military measures, the injustice and inequalities present in Thai society remained, such as the low wages for workers and the unfair prices paid to farmers for their produce. During the period when the people were free to protest conflicts arose throughout Thai society. The various conflicts increased in intensity at the time of M.R. Seni Pramoj’s administration. Within Thai society during that period the conflicts between groups with differing economic and political aspirations were exacerbated. These groups became polarized, the students representing the interests of workers and peasants, and the soldiers, police and right-wing groups (Nawaphon, Krathing Daeng and Village Scouts) representing the capitalists, the feudalists and the military. The situation eventually led to the events of 6 October 1976 when the army under the leadership of Sa-ngad Chaloryu staged a coup and established the extremely conservative government of Thanin Kraivixien.

17. See the details of both internal and external factors which have influenced the establishment of diplomatic relations between Thailand and the People’s Republic of China in Nareumit Sodsuk, The Diplomatic Relations between Thailand and the People’s Republic of China (Sampantaphap tang kan thut rawang Thai kap sataranarat prachachon cin) (Bangkok: Thai Wattana Panich Press, 1981), pp. 54-133.
The effects of Chinese developments politics can be clearly seen from the influence Maoist ideology had on Thai students, intellectuals and sections of the population. From a Maoist perspective, Thai society was perceived as basically unjust and thus there was an attempt to exert political pressure to solve various problems which included the undemocratic involvement of the military in politics, the low wages of workers, the low price being paid for agricultural produce and the brutal handling of the people by the military in the name of communist suppression. It is believed that the CPT, under Chinese influence, attempted to push the student movement into opposing the government as part of a united front. Finally, the students movement and a section of the population were crushed on 6 October 1976 causing many to flee to join the CPT’s revolutionary movement. Initially, this exodus strengthened the Party’s fight against the government. However, various events occurred which led to a weakening of the CPT’s position. A central reason for this emanated from changes in Chinese ideology and foreign policy. The central committee members of the CPT remained tied to Maoist ideology which emphasized revolution through the encirclement of the cities by the countryside. However, the change in Chinese policy and the subsequent lessening of support for revolution abroad were to have several effects within the Party. Though it is true that the newcomers were able to ally themselves with the Party under the organizational structure of the Co-ordinating Committee for Patriotic and Democratic Forces (CCPDF) basic conflicts began to arise. The CCPDF, which consisted of representatives from a number of groups such as the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) and the Socialist Party of Thailand (SPT), had to formulate revolutionary strategies which would be widely acceptable. But the CPT rejected them, for although in theory it accepted the need for a national democratic revolution (i.e., a revolutionary phase that would seek support from all groups who loved the nation and democracy) it argued that the time for such a revolution had now passed. Rather, emphasis was to be given to the stage of proletarian socialist revolution under the leadership of the Party.

This conflict over strategy was an important factor which led to the
split between the CPT and the CCPDF. Between 1976 and 1979 the CPT and the CCPDF continued to cooperate in an increasingly uneasy alliance. An important factor which led to the final split can be clearly seen to have emanated from China. The coming to power of the ‘Four Modernizations’ faction in 1979 and the criticism of the Gang of Four and of the ideology of permanent revolution sent shockwaves through the ranks of the CPT and even more so among CCPDF representatives. The latter argued that the CPT was too closely tied to the idea of permanent revolution even though China itself had ceased to believe in such a strategy. The split within the revolutionary movement widened as the Chinese sought closer relations with the Thai government in order to oppose the influence of both the Soviets and the Vietnamese, the latter having invaded Kampuchea in December 1978. A concrete example of this closer cooperation was the Chinese government’s closure of the CPT radio station, the Voice of the People of Thailand (VOPT). In return the Thai government initiated a policy opposing Vietnam and allowed China to send aid to the Khmer Rouge through Thai territory.

A further factor which contributed to the growth of conflict within the Thai revolutionary movement stemmed from the clashes between the socialist countries of Indochina following the end of the Vietnam war in 1975. The dispute between China and Vietnam over the control of Kampuchea eventually led to the Vietnamese invasion which was subsequently followed by China giving Vietnam a “lesson” on their common border. The CPT, which had previously received support from both China and Vietnam, was greatly affected by the conflict, and was eventually forced to choose between Soviet-backed Vietnam and China. Its decision to side with China led Vietnam-aligned Laos to expel those sections of the Party which were operating from Lao territory. The result was that the CPT was unable to continue receiving assistance from China due to the loss of its bases in Laos and Kampuchea.  

Changes in the international situation fueled the conflict between the CPT and the CCPDF. Eventually ideological differences became so marked that the CCPDF withdrew from the movement. By 1980 the main point of contention was that the students and intellectuals that the CPT lacked autonomy and had fallen under the domination of the Chinese. Even though the Chinese, during the Four Modernizations period, had changed their ideology, the CPT remained wed to the Chinese revolutionary idea of ‘the rural surrounding the urban’. Moreover, the CPT characterised Thai society, as the Chinese once had done as semi-colonial semi-feudal. Thus the CPT was perceived as being a mere servant of Chinese policy in that it was unable to form an independent understanding of Thai society which would lead to the success of revolution. The students and intellectuals, as one group within the CCPDF, no longer saw Thai society as being semi-colonial semi-feudal. Rather they argued that Thailand was now semi-feudal semi-capitalist, dependent on the new imperialism and on the road to becoming a capitalist society. Thus, they went on, the revolutionary movement had to expand to incorporate the proletariat in the cities, the semi-proletariat in the countryside, the petit-bourgeois intellectuals and middle level capitalists. Moreover, the administration of the Party was centralistic but not democratic, for lack of consultation at grassroots level. The students and intellectuals, who had previously been free to form their own ideas, were thus unable to accept the control placed upon them by the Party.  

Following the failed attempt by the Thanin administration to


restrict the growth of the CPT, the political reformist group decided to carry out a coup against itself. After becoming Prime Minister on 20 October 1977, Gen. Kriangsak Chamanan pursued more relaxed political policies. His government released students and labour leaders, abrogated press censorship regulations and gave greater freedom to trade unions. Significantly those students and intellectuals who had joined the CPT were encouraged to return to the city without having to face penalties. Elections were promised for the following year, and that promise was kept.

This new policy, which opened up opportunities for a political settlement, encouraged considerable numbers of student and intellectuals to break away from the CPT. The other pertinent factor stemmed from changes in Chinese politics, economics and foreign relations. The period of the Four Modernizations allowed Thai students and intellectuals of realize that even China itself recognized the need to become more democratic. However, in complete contrast, the CPT leadership refused to re-adjust its position to allow greater democracy and more freedom for the CCPDF to participate in policy formulation. Thus, from about 1980-81 onwards important members of the CCPDF have broken away from the party.

After becoming leader of a new government in 1980, Gen. Prem Tinsulanond attempted to solve the problem of the CPT by issuing Prime Ministerial Order 66/2523, which defined a new strategy emphasizing the use of political rather than military means. The government’s aim was to eradicate inequalities within Thai society, in particular, economic monopolization and dishonesty and malpractices within the bureaucracy. In addition, together with the suppression of the communists by the military, the people were to be given greater opportunity to participate in policies which would lay the path to democracy. The major force behind this policy was the Democratic Military Group led by Gen Harn Linanon and Gen. Chavalit Yongchayut.

Gen. Prem’s government was the first to issue clear and systematic policies aimed at solving the communist problem. It was accepted that this problem had its roots in the injustice and lack of democracy in Thai society. To ensure greater democracy the government relaxed its suppression of the population and attempted to make some basic adjustments in the country’s
economy. Emphasis was also given to improving the conditions of those living in the poorest parts of the countryside. At the same time the government used military measures to destroy the armed forces of the CPT.  

As is well known, the “brain” behind the “66/2523” policy was Prasert Sapsunthorn. As former central committee member of the CPT, he eventually abandoned the Party believing that, under Chinese influence, the revolution would not be successful. After leaving the Party, Prasert began to circulate his ideas within military circles, particularly within the Democratic Military Group. He professed that, as a solid integrated force, the military formed the pivot of several changes and as such its role in the building of democracy should be greater than that of both the CPT, which was under Chinese influence, and the civilian politicians who were dominated by the political parties controlled by capitalists. At this point it is interesting to note that both Prasert and the Democratic Military Group have basically identical attitudes to that of communism and fascism in that they believe it is necessary to use absolute power to build society in


21. ‘The democratic faction within the military believed that in order to forestall and thus defeat the CPT, they themselves would have to act democratically. The military realized that if the problem was left to grow the CPT would emerge victorious. The military are in a position to lay the foundations for political, economic and social democracy. Once the foundations were laid, problems within society would be alleviated and obstacles preventing the creation of a democratic constitution would be overcome. Through their strength the military could ensure the sovereignty of the people by offering them a democratic constitution.

See Nareumit Sodsuk, “The April First Coup: The Democratic Revolution of the Middle Class”, (Kabot 1 Mesa Kan pathiwat prachathipatai khorng chonchan klang) in Matichon (20 April 1981), pp. 6-7. See also further details on the ideas of the democratic Military Group about the problems of Thai democracy in Chai-anan Samudavanija, “The Young Turks and the Democratic Military : An Analysis of the Role of the military in Thai Politics,” (Young Turk kap thahan prachathipatai kanwikhroh botbat thahan nai kanmuang Thai) (Bangkok : Bannakit Press, 1982), pp. 181-197.
accordance with a pre-established ideology. However, the image of the Democratic Military Group was tarnished following the attempt to change the Constitution so that certain powerful army officers, in particular Gen. Arthit Kamlang-ek, could occupy concurrent position both within the government and the armed forces. The attempt and the thinking which lay behind it were criticized because they meant the army was becoming involved again in civilian politics which is not in accordance with the principles of international democracy.  

The Democratic Military Group intended to carry out land reform and give representatives from all sections of society, including the CPT, the opportunity to participate in parliamentary politics. However, many groups agreed that in the long term there were no guarantees that the military, like the CPT, would not seek to monopolize power and legitimacy. Today it appears that all the various pressure groups, students, intellectuals and the general population, are fed up with all systems, whether fascist or communist, which lack democracy. Thai politics are now in a period where attempts are being made to establish free democracy which will give all groups the opportunity to compete peacefully through the structure of parliament.

With regard to foreign affairs, relations with China have become much closer now that the Thai government has gained a better understanding of the ideological aims of the Four Modernizations. Foreign policy no longer perceives China as a political enemy but rather accepts that even though there are differences in political and economic ideology peaceful co-existence can be achieved through the principle of respect for each other’s sovereignty. Both the Thai and the Chinese hold one principle


of foreign relations in common and that is the opposition to the use of outside military force to attack another nation. With respect to Indochina both Thailand and ASEAN have affirmed their opposition to Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea and extension of its influence over Laos.

In practice the Thai government has co-operated with China by supporting the three Khmer factions of Sihanouk, Khieu Samphan and Son San and opposing the Vietnamese backed Heng Samrin administration. Thailand has allowed China to send aid secretly through Thai territory. It has also accepted refugees some of whom have been repatriated back to Kampuchea whilst others have been sent to third countries.

Many people agree with Thailand's policy of opposition to Vietnam by arguing that if Vietnam is able to establish its authority over all of Indochina then Thailand would become Vietnam's next target. However, others argue that the policy which binds China and Thailand together leads the latter to go too far and to become involved in a situation which is outside of its sphere of concern and which in the long run would have adverse effects on the Thai economy.

To summarize, the present Thai foreign policy is a result of the new perception which Thailand has of China. China has withdrawn its support for the CPT, holding that the situation is a wholly Thai affair. China desires peace in the region so that it can fully develop its own autonomy. In the long run, if China is able to succeed in becoming a major political, economic and military power what role will it play both within the region and internationally?

Such a situation is still far off in the future and for this reason Thailand is more preoccupied with the present Vietnamese situation than the long term problem which China may pose. At the very least the Thai government is now satisfied that it can contain the CPT, which is considered to be the greatest danger to national security. Moreover, Thailand feels hostile to Soviet backed Vietnam for supporting groups which split away from the CPT, such as the Northeastern Thai Liberation Movement or the Green Star Movement. For this reason Thailand is pursuing a foreign policy which seeks much closer relations with China than with either Vietnam or the Soviet Union.
In conclusion, it is clear that the developments within China, in the form of the conflict between the Permanent Revolution Group and the Four Modernizations Group, have affected Thailand through the medium of the CPT. Moreover, these changes have altered Western perceptions of China which have influenced the policies of the American government which in turn has affected Thai politics and foreign policy. During the period when the Chinese emphasized revolution the effects were felt both at national and international levels. Similarly, the period of the Four Modernizations has had an important influence on Thai domestic politics and foreign relations.

The changes in Chinese ideology and development policies during the Four Modernizations period should provide a worthy lesson to Thailand as she pursues her own development strategy. Most importantly progress must be based upon political and economic democracy. Equality and justice between urban and rural areas are essential for the country's development. The Chinese themselves concede that no matter how powerful the party is, there is a lack of democracy which prevents the utilization of the knowledge, ability and cooperation of all groups, so that the possibility of successful development will be diminished. During the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese laid great importance on rural areas and the development of agriculture. More recently they have turned their attention to the development of urban industry. These changes clearly reveal the need to strike a balance in development strategies. Previously, Thailand emphasized the building of urban industry at the expense of agriculture. Over the last decade, partly thanks to the example of Chinese policy, there has been development of rural areas. However, these development still lag far behind changes in urban centers. Thailand must now ensure that rural areas are developed in conjunction with urban development.