THE FUTURE OF THAILAND?
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1977, rewritten 1979, details and notes in 2011, as marked

Something over two years ago this journal published an article by Jeffrey Race entitled "The Future of Thailand", which sought to provide some answers to questions such as the probable security of foreign investments, whether "local VIP's ... should keep their riches in the country", and whether Thailand was going to be "another Vietnam".[1] These are certainly questions of great interest to readers of *Pacific Community*, and they were no doubt impressed by Race's apparently 'scientific' arguments buttressing his conclusions.

The conclusions were generally optimistic: "Thailand will not become 'another Vietnam'," "there will be no red flag over Government House in Bangkok", for "the dynamics of Thai history, the strength and relative coherence of the Thai elite, and their ties to the countryside will prevent (it)"; and "there will always ... be a secure heartland in the Central Plain, where free-enterprise and pro-western Thai leaders ... will hold sway". To be sure, Race left in question the more specific details within the picture inferable from the above broad conclusions, but he said, "the problems are understood, the answers known",[2] which together with his assertion that "some futures are excluded by Thailand's history, and some futures favoured",[3] his listing of factors favouring democracy,[4] and his confidence that in spite of serious reforms which he finds necessary, the "domestic economic structure" is not to be changed and "Thailand must and inevitably will continue its economic, diplomatic and cultural stance favouring the West "[5] must have gladdened the hearts of *Pacific Community* readers at a time when Indochina had become solidly Communist and the most hopeful development in Thai politics in modern times had recently been destroyed ((the democracy period 1973-76, ending with the Thammasart University massacre October 1976).

It is time now [1979], particularly given recent developments among Thailand's neighbors to the east, to take another look at "Thailand's Future" and to reexamine Race's methods and conclusions to see if the latter still seem as secure as in January 1977. In the process I am going to argue that Race was guilty of tendentious use of facts and illegitimate distortion of method, and that if his methodological framework had been applied honestly,

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[1] *Pacific Community,* Vol. 8, No. 2 (January 1977), 303-325. Cited further as Race, "Future". Quotation on p. 303.

[2] Race, "Future," 323 - 24

[3] Race, "Future," 304

[4] Race, "Future," 305 - 07.

[5] Race, "Future," 321.

the conclusions would inevitably have been different. Of course, saying only this much does not take into consideration the question of the validity of that type of method as such. Even if the latter is faulty, Race's conclusions about Thailand, as *ad hoc* prognostication, or as articles of faith, <u>could in theory</u> prove to be accurate by chance even if not based on any kind of solid reasoning.

We must first be aware that Race's "Future" was not an entirely autonomous self-contained piece of work, but was a part of a series of studies, dating from over a year earlier, which offered contradictory conclusions and which must also be examined to fully understand Race's purpose.

"The Future of Thailand" had its origins in early 1976 in a cooperative effort of an anonymous group of western social scientists in Bangkok to call the attention of the Thai elite to certain serious problems facing Thailand and to ways of solving those problems in a manner which would avoid violent social upheavals. This cooperative effort was called "Blueprint for the Future of Thailand" and was published in six parts in the *Bangkok Post*, 15-25 February, 1976.

Race was one of the "Blueprint" group, writing Part II in its entirety, and probably sections of Parts I and VI;[6] and following "Blueprint", on March 30-April 3, 1976 he published, under the pseudonym "Jonathan Swift", a further series of five articles which both continued, and partially negated, the arguments of "Blueprint" in interesting ways, and which over a year later were republished in *Pacific Community* as "The Future of Thailand".

In order to understand fully the efforts of Race and his "Blueprint" colleagues, we must recall that in 1976 the three-year experiment with civilian, democratic government was breaking down and that by the time Race's "Future" was published it had been overthrown, with fanatical violence, by right-wing extremists operating under military and police guidance, something which did not deter Race from maintaining his optimistic picture of 'Thailand's future'. We must also recall that Americans concerned with Thailand, both academic and official, had generally been ambivalent in their reactions to the pro-democracy uprising of 1973 and to the overthrow of the Thanom-Prapas dictatorship. The social scientists who produced whole shelves full of volumes on Thailand tended to idealize its happy villages in their so-called 'loosely-structured society';[7] and they

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[6] Race's authorship of Part II is clear because its content is nearly identical to his "The January 1975 Thai Election: Preliminary Data and Inferences", *Asian Survey* (AS), XV, 4 (April 1975), 375 - 81. Either Race was the author, or some one else grossly plagiarized his work. As for Parts I and VI, certain sections are so close to what Race wrote in Part II, or later in "Future", that his responsibility for those inputs is palpable.

[7] For a discussion of American scholarship on Thailand before the 1970's see Benedict Anderson, "Studies of the Thai State" paper submitted to the conference on the State of Thai Studies, Chicago, March 30, 1978.

apparently saw no signs of the contradictions and frustrations which were to erupt in October 1973 while the United States government, the main support of the Thai military in their return to power after World War II, were clearly dismayed at the events of 1973 and intolerant of the new civilian government. As evidence of this we need do no more than refer to Ambassador Unger's farewell speech shortly afterwards, which, at a time when the Thai public as a whole was still euphoric over the change of regime, implicitly scolded them for neglecting the more important problem of communist insurgency. There was also the foot-dragging over evacuation of military bases; and the arrogance toward the Thai government at the time of the Mayaguez affair. One should also realize that had the U.S. Government done no more than offer wholehearted <u>moral</u> support for Thai democracy the coup and massacre of 1976 might never have occurred.

Even though the academics were not fundamentally hostile to the change of 1973, and for the most part probably even welcomed the replacement of the old military dictatorship, many of them were certainly as troubled as their official compatriots by what seemed to be the drift leftward in Thai politics culminating in the strong, for Thailand, showing of the left in the elections of January 26, 1975, in which they took 31 seats and 14% of the votes.[8]

This concern over the new freedom which the post-1973 situation allowed Thailand's indigenous left was compounded by the fall of the country's three Indochina neighbors to socialist or socializing regimes; and although it seems incredible in retrospect, in early 1975 it was not at all impossible to believe, or to fear, that the new regimes in Indochina could prove attractive to Thai peasants or workers and encourage their demands for economic, social and political reforms.[9]

The most likely concerns of Race and the "Blueprint" group when they completed their work in 1976 were thus (1) how to avert both the rise of socialism and the return of an extreme, and <u>thereby counterproductive,</u> military dictatorship, (2) how to preserve a relatively open (to foreign traders and investors) capitalist system, and (3) thus maintain Thailand in the role it had occupied for the last 100-odd years – a solid client of the capitalist West in Asia and a bulwark against the new menace from Indochina. Their most clearly announced overt goal was to show the way for Thailand to overcome insurgency and avoid the revolutions of its neighbors, but it must have occurred to a number of readers that other practitioners of the American political science doctrines which so obviously permeated their views had signally failed to realize the same goals in those very same Indochina

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[8] See Jeffrey Race, "The January 1975 Thai Election: Preliminary Data and Inferences", *Asian Survey* (AS), XV, 4 (April 1975), 375 - 81

[9] Even in 1979 when this was written, when Indochinese 'socialism' seemed discredited, it could not be excluded that many Thai peasants, hearing of Pol Pot's brutality against the Cambodian bourgeoisie, might long for a chance to carry out similar policies at home; and ultimately this facet of anti-Cambodian propaganda may have an unintended effect.

countries in which, in some cases, they had a good deal more leverage than in Thailand.

The most important central idea of "Blueprint" was decentralization, which at times seemed to have been offered as a panacea which would immediately put a number of things right. They argued that a major portion of the control of finances and administration should be taken away from the central, overly bureaucratized, government and given to regional, provincial, district and local authorities, that this would promote greater responsibility and efficiency and would also serve to increase the loyalty of the peasantry through giving them a greater stake in the system.

One *Post* reader, a Thai, probably writing from experience which gave him a clearer view than that of transient foreign academics, immediately challenged them, saying that Thailand was not ready for such decentralization and that *tambon* (sub-district) officers were too corrupt to be trusted with added responsibility.[10]

Although this might seem a daring, even irresponsible, comment, careful reading of even a moderate organ like the *Post* shows that there is probably more blatant oppression of the people at the province and lower levels than directly by the central government, and in such a situation decentralization by itself would only increase the power of the rural reactionaries.

They are already so powerful that even the well-intentioned govern-ment which Thailand had between 1973 and 1976 was unable to impose its will in the appointment of officials who might have challenged the customary prerogatives of provincial conservatives. Thawatt Mokarapong, an administrator who is also well known as a scholar, was twice transferred from provincial governorships in a very short time for his efforts to take the part of the people against local elites.[11] One of his problems was the regulation of mineral rights, and simple decentralization would probably open the door to even more wasteful exploitation of natural resources. The reader could well have asked at that point, in whose interest, ultimately, was "Blueprint" drawn up, since as it stood, the decentralization advocated would have favored all the special interests which have been looting Thailand's resources and oppressing its people.

So far as the identity of the "Blueprint" writers is known, however, we can be confident that they are intellectually honest and were not just engaged in lobbying for corrupt businessmen, local or international; but in their surprising emphasis on decentralization they may have been unwary victims of certain parochial influences from their personal and academic

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[10] "Letter to the editor", *Bangkok Post,* March 3, 1976.

[11] See the *Bangkok Post*, December 11, 1975; January 1, 1976; and March 28, 1976. For the nature of one of the issues during his tenure as governor of Phang-nga see *Far Eastern Economic Review* (*FEER*), April 4, 1975, 36-37, "Thailand: Rebuff for Foreigners".

background in the United States, a country whose developmental path may not automatically be transferred abroad.[12]

In the United States local government developed well before central authority and had solid roots, with mechanisms for popular participation. When the federal government was formed certain powers were voluntarily transferred to it, while others were, and still are, jealously guarded.

Almost everywhere else in the West the only local authority before modern times was held by a small elite group in one or another 'feudal'-type arrangement, and some type of centralization, breaking the power of those elites, was one of the steps necessary to the distribution of political rights to the population. Centralization of course did not always lead to such diffusion of political rights – the central power could also make an alliance with the feudal classes against the peasantry, or bourgeoisie, but in all cases it was a necessary step.

The reforms of King Chulalongkorn, to which "Blueprint" more than once referred, were of this type, and led to new freedoms for the common people, but not to their participation in decision making. The *Post* reader to whom I referred above also argued that Chulalongkorn's reforms did not sufficiently weaken the 'feudal' classes and I do not think one needs to go beyond the columns of the *Post* to find evidence supporting his contention.[13]

Thus, before any decentralization can be carried out, a whole class of people must be politically neutralized or they will frustrate its purpose; and the weakest point of "Blueprint" was its failure to come squarely to grips with this problem. It was briefly touched only in part IV, where there was a proposal for a decent police organization "with locally recruited *tambon* forces under the control of police chiefs appointed by the *tambon* councils". Then, "there would be channels for ... acting against people believed to have gained wealth from the exploitation of the community".[14] Excellent, but imagine the following scenario: decentralization has been carried out and in the distribution of local offices the corrupt have been by-passed. There is a local government of newly elected popular *tambon* officials with their policemen "recruited from local youth", they find it necessary to arrest half a dozen of the until then leading citizens and charge them with extortion, theft, or murder, something which any careful reader of the *Post* will certainly admit as plausible, and the new local court sentences them to long terms of imprisonment or death. Will this be accepted at higher levels, or will the cen-

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[12] Douglass C. North, The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 1993, Prize Lecture, Lecture to the memory of Alfred Nobel, December 9, 1993, "Economic Performance through Time", in which he warned against the automatic transfer of institutions.

[13] Michael Vi*ckery, "Thai Elites and the Reforms of King Chulalongkorn", Journal of Asian Studies*, XXIX, 4 (August 1970), 863-811. I am not attempting to use the term 'feudal' with any precision, and indeed I would argue that Thailand should not be called 'feudal'. See below ...

[14] *Bangkok Post,* February 21, 1976, p. 11, column 1.

tral government, which as far as "Blueprint" was concerned, would not have changed its socio-economic basis, intervene? It is characteristic of the academic and political world in which "Blueprint's" authors appear to have their roots that the importance of class interest on politics is neglected, but until the problems of transferring effective power to the <u>people</u> at *tambon* level, not just to the local elites, is resolved, formulations such as those of "Blueprint" are utopian, if not irresponsible.

As far as Race's own work is concerned, the lack of sufficient explicitness on this point reflects either inconsistency or a want of consultation with other members of the "Blueprint" group, since in his own work on Vietnam there is ample documentation of the gradual drifting away of the peasants to the communists because the elite were 'ripping them off', while the government officials were unable to see the problem of class or the fact that much of the trouble was due, and I quote from Race, to the "consequences of the organization of the society itself", and that piecemeal aid to the peasants could only have been meaningful, "if the government village chief had also had the power and inclination ... to arrest and imprison an exploitative landlord ... (which power) the government declined to grant".[15]

In addition to criticism of centralization in Thailand, "Blueprint" also made reference to certain foreign experiences with centralized versus decentralized governments, and here also the arguments seem tendentious.

Thus Italy and France are held up more than once as bad examples and the fault is attributed to their centralized governments. Now it is one of the quaint prejudices of American political science that the French and Italian political systems are somehow inferior to the Anglo-Saxon, that they are "fragmented political cultures", ridden with ideology, with governments in which consensus is impossible, with a low degree of legitimacy, etc.[16] Anyone innocent of that discipline, however, would probably feel that France and Italy have done rather well politically and economically since world War II, and that their ideologically multi-party systems provide channels for effectively representing the interests of groups whose need for political expression may be quite frustrated in, say, the United States.

Of course, the real problem for some American political scientists and, I would say, for Race and the "Blueprint" group, is that France and Italy have large, legal, Communist parties, which according to part I of "Blueprint" and reemphasized in part VI, have only been kept out of power by "tight political/military alliance ... with the West, and massive infusions of foreign capital", as well as "heavy subsidies from the CIA to non-

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[15] Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An,* 152, 177.

[16] See Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., *Comparative Politics,* Boston 1966, pp. 61-62, 109, 111, 263 - 66, 320 -21; for both an acknowledgement of the problem and a critique John Frears, "Conflict in France : the Decline and Fall of a Stereotype", *Political Studies,* XX (1972), 31-41. Race, at this point, appears as almost an embarrassing parody of the attitude Frears criticizes.

Communist parties"[17] (at this point some thoughtful readers might have wondered what "Blueprint" was really suggesting for Thailand); and in 1976 the U.S. establishment was more than ever worried by those Communist parties, since it appeared that they were getting ever closer to power through legal, peaceful, parliamentary channels.[REF]

Again, the reader could well have been confused. Had not American advisers to the Third World always taught that Communists are dangerous because they want to destroy the democratic system? If they are suddenly even more dangerous upholding it, the poor man who feels victimized by non-Communist systems anywhere, and the Thai peasant in particular, might legitimately ask if the elite does not have some other, unexpressed, reasons for opposition to Communism, and if the writers of "Blueprint" might not have been more concerned with the interests of their own polity than with the development of Thailand.[18]

When Race continued "Blueprint" on his own, in the series of articles which eventually became "The Future of Thailand" he was even more insistent on the need for real changes, but he then vitiated his argument by utilizing other models to show that Thailand was firmly on the right track, even allowing the reader to understand that the course of history had already determined that the needed reforms would be carried out. Thus whether Race intended it or not, the advice to Thailand sounded very much like U.S. advice to pre-1975 Saigon and Phnom Penh and to other would-be capitalist states of Asia; preserve the status quo, follow the lead of western capitalism, and let social problems take care of themselves as the wealth dribbles down through the free enterprise system.[19]

Perhaps Race realized what was apparent to any reader of "Blueprint" familiar both with Thailand and with various theories of historical development – that the reforms advocated by "Blueprint", however laudable in the abstract, could not be put into effect without a social revolution, which was the first thing the writers wished to avoid. Race therefore sought, in certain considerations of long-term historical development, arguments which would allow him to 'have his cake and eat it too', as it were, to have a reformed, progressive Thailand without the revolutionary upheavals which would otherwise appear necessary.

Race's arguments in "Future" are in part historical and in part theoretical. He has attempted to identify certain long-term historical trends and to interpret them into a body of theory in a way to produce certain 'scientific' predictions. The accuracy of his predictions, then, if other than

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[17] *Bangkok Post,* February 15, 1976, p.5, column 3; February 25, 1976, p. 7, column 1.

[18]. The history of anti-communism is replete with evidence that the greatest terror of communism among the bourgeoisie was not of Russian invasion, but of the possibility that the communist states might be able to live up to their ideals of prosperity together with the elimination of class distinctions. Dubcek and Gorbachev were more frightening than Stalin.

[19] The most active exponent of such advice at present is Herman Kahn. See the *New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), February 19, 1975.

mere guesses, depends first on the accuracy of his facts and second on the coherence of his theory; and it is to these points which I now wish to turn.

The historical background

      For Race, the "factors involved in the rise and fall of civilizations on the [Southeast Asian] peninsula are known in general outline" and "it is no accident that Bangkok speaks Thai, not Mon and Saigon speaks Vietnamese, not Khmer".[20] These statements should give a start to most historians, who probably feel that those two linguistic changes are fine examples of historical accidents, and that if any explanation is possible it would fall into the realm of the sociolinguists. Indeed I would argue, although the point is extraneous here, that the language of Bangkok – Thai, Mon, or Khmer – was not finally settled until well into the 15th, or even the 16th, century, long after the polity which was to become Thailand was well established.[21]

      What Race seems to mean is that these language changes were part of a historico-deterministic scheme which he perceives, and which links the Vietnamese triumph over the Cham, and the Thai triumph over the Mon, to a superiority of agriculture-based civilizations over the "maritime and trading civilization of Southeast Asia's past". That is, Funan, Srivijaya, and the Cham "were overtaken by civilizations based on settled agriculture at a higher technological level, and with ... a greater vitality and resiliency to their local village communities", although except for the case of the Cham, supplanted by the Vietnamese, Race is unable to specify what the new polities were.[22]

      Now the structural division of the polities of early Southeast Asia into maritime trading societies and inland agricultural ones has long been a commonplace among historians, and it has been recognized that the shifts in relative power among them were important historical problems. Race, however, seems innocent of any acquaintance with such work, since his deductions concerning the problem are nearly the opposite of those reached by the specialists.

      Funan, the most ancient relevant case, was indeed a coastal polity, as far as we know (and we are unlikely to ever know more), which flourished between the first and sixth centuries and is last mentioned in the seventh, and, assuming it to have been located in southern Cambodia and Vietnam, it was replaced by a number of small inland polities, some of which in the 9th century coalesced to form Angkor. Here the sequence Race postulates seems reasonably clear, but the cause has not generally been seen in the superiority of agricultural states over trade centers.[23]

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[20] "Future", 303.

[21] "The Khmer Inscriptions of Tenasserim: A Reinterpretation", *Journal of the Siam Society* (*JSS*) LXI, 1 (January 1973), 51-70.

[22]. Race, "Future", p. 316.

[23] See Vickery, "Funan".

Although Srivijaya declined as a major straits port state in the 13th century, it was replaced a century later by Malacca, which was in turn eventually replaced by Singapore. No powerful inland agricultural state ever developed in that region, and there has been a continuity of coastal trading polities from the beginning of recorded history up to the present time. It should not be necessary to argue at length that in such institutional history the important point is not the ethnicity or language, nor even the precise location of a capital, but rather the fact that major ports close to the Malacca straits have filled an international need since very early times.

As for the Cham, I would suggest that Race has some of his facts wrong. They were indeed "skilled voyagers on the sea", but so were the Vietnamese who conquered them; and the Cham were anything but "semi-nomads on land".[24] Their centers, which covered most of central and southern Vietnam, resembled the centers of Cambodian Chen-la in religion, in art and architecture, and insofar as the evidence can be read, in economy and type of society; and if they never established anything equivalent to Angkor, it needs no more than a glance at the orography of their region to show why such a scale of development was impossible. Their absorption by the Vietnamese may well have been due to superior social organization of the latter, but it was not a clear-cut case of seafarers being conquered by agriculturalists; and some specialists would even argue that Vietnamese agriculture in the south profited from contact with the Cham.[25]

A more accurate picture than Race's would be; after the fall of Funan a period of small agricultural states in Cambodia and Champa (south and central Vietnam), succeeded by the agricultural empire of Angkor, and later, following a brief period of Angkor-Cham unity in late 12th and early 13th centuries, the unity of Vietnam under the Vietnamese. On the straits and peninsula the same period saw continuing predominance of maritime-type states, while in the Menan-basin area before the 13th century the historical facts are not at all clear.

The next development which Race called a "third major pattern" was the decline of "these technologically and organizational superior civilizations", which for Race, in the pre-modern period, means Angkor. Here he presents the conventional picture: Angkor became top heavy, the peasants were exploited, and it fell to the younger, more vigorous Thai.[26]

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[24] Race, "Future", p. 303 It is now accepted that the Cham arrived in what is now Viet Nam by sea, perhaps from Borneo, and established themselves in river-mouth ports where they developed their temple centers.

[25] Jean Chesneaux, *Contribution a l'histoire de la nation vietnamienne,* Paris 1955, 31 - 32; and for other types of Cham influence on Vietnamese culture, *Ibid.,* 101, and Alexander Barton Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model,* Harvard 1971, 29 Taylor, Vickery, etc, Li Tana.

[26] "Future", 317 - 18. For those who might question this critique of Race's treatment of the Angkor period, based apparently on the 'authoritative' *Encyclopedia Britannica* ("Future", note 12) I must point out that in a field in such rapid evolution as early Cambodian history

Historians have long recognized that Funan probably declined as the major trade route between China and Southeast Asia shifted southward to the peninsula and Indonesian islands; and in his *Fall of Srivijaya*, O.W. Wolters has demonstrated that shifts in Chinese trade patterns show interesting correspondences with political changes in the peninsular and straits areas right up to the 15th century.[27] That is, Srivijaya declined when the increased direct Chinese shipping in the later Sung and Yuan periods destroyed its entrepot monopoly. Following this the reemphasis on such a monopoly by the early Ming caused several new ports to compete for the favored status which was finally granted to Malacca. Among these new ports, as noted by Wolters, was Ayutthaya, which had probably begun its development as "Hsien" already during Yuan times.[28]

In addition to this, I have earlier pointed out that an astonishingly similar pattern appears both in Cambodia and in the Menam basin in the 14th-15th centuries. In both there was a sudden spurt in trade and diplomatic missions to and from China, while in both places riparian ports – Ayutthaya and the Phnom Penh area – began to develop at the same time as Angkor declined.[29] Thus Angkor probably did not decline because the Thai conquered it, but because Cambodia participated in a large-scale shift in economic emphasis covering much of Southeast Asia. The real decline of Cambodia in comparison with Ayuttaya came later, from the 17th century onward, and may have been due principally to the superiority of Ayuttaya's site over that of Phnom Penh. This general Southeast Asian economic shift, then, which affected Cambodia, the Menam basin, and possibly other areas, was the opposite of what Race deduced. It was the replacement of high-technology agricultural states by new maritime polities.

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an encyclopedia article is *never* an authoritative last word, particularly when written by a non-specialist such as Milton Osborne is for pre-19th century history. Top-heaviness and exploitation may have played a role (the dynamics of development within Angkor have been inadequately explored), but for the type of historical analysis in which Race is engaged, certain different patterns have been revealed by recent research.

[27] O.W. Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce,* for the early shift of trade route; and *The Fall of Srivijaya in Malay History,* chaps. 3,4,5.

[28] Wolters, *The Fall of Srivijaya,* 67. When this paper was first written the 'Hsien' problem was still controversial and had not been settled. As preliminary remarks relating to the present suggestion I offered Michael Vickery, "Cambodian after Angkor: the Chronicular Evidence for the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries;, Ph.D. thesis, Yale, 1977, 509-517; Vickery; "The 2/k. 125 Fragment, a Lost Chronicle of Ayutthaya", *Journal of the Siam Society* (JSS) LXV, 1 (January 1977), 79-80; "A Guide through Some Recent Sukhothai Historiography", JSS, LXVI, @ (July 1978), 205; "A New *Tamnan* about Ayudhya", 2 (July 1979). Now the question has been settled, and the consensus is that Ayutthaya began and developed as a maritime center before expanding inland. See Chris Baker, "Ayutthaya Rising: From the Land or From the Sea", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34/1 (2003), pp. 41-62; and Yoneo Ishii, "A reinterpretation of Thai history with special reference to the pre-modern period". Paper presented at 8th International Conference on Thai Studies at Nakhon Phanom, January 2002.

[29] Vickery, "Cambodia after Angkor", 517-521; "The 2/k.125 *Fragment,* 79-80

The concern here, however, is specifically Thailand. For some time in the 14th century Ayutthaya competed with Malacca for control of the entire peninsula and its entrepot trade.[30] Malacca's victory in this contest did not end the importance of foreign trade for the Ayutthayan economy. Gradually conquering its hinterland, Ayutthaya shifted from an entrepot role to an exporter of its own products. As its hinterland expanded, and particularly after the absorption of inland, agricultural, Sukhothai (circa 1438), Ayutthaya became a mixture of the two classical types of Southeast Asian polity – an agricultural polity sustaining its own needs, but in which the surplus for the luxuries desired by the elite and for embellishing the capital came from foreign trade, a trade in hinterland products which presupposed some kind of constraints over the agricultural and upland populations.[31] Probably inheriting certain institutions from inland Angkor and Sukhothai, Ayutthaya built up its capital city on lines similar to the classical inland polities; and a large bureaucracy rapidly developed, which at some point, possibly mid-15th century, was given land, or the right to the produce of land, in amounts corresponding to official rank.[32] This society has often been called 'feudal', but in recent treatments '*sakdina*', using the Thai term to indicate a special type of pre-capitalist formation different from feudalism; and it is at this point that the type of theoretical historical analysis utilized by Race becomes relevant. That is, how was Ayutthaya, and later Bangkok, to pass from 'feudalism'/*sakdina* to a more modern form of society, and with or without 'democracy'? But before getting into the specifics of that problem, which involves the conscious application of theory, it is necessary to investigate Race's use, and misuse, of the latter.

Theoretical considerations

Race's carelessness with historical fact, although embarrassing in an article which uses long-term historical background to justify arguments about the present, can in certain respects be treated leniently, since even among specialists there is much disagreement about the empirical facts of Southeast Asian history, and an outsider to that field can easily be led astray.

Much more serious is Race's tendency to play fast and loose with theory, and it is less forgivable, since political theory is presumably one of his special fields. The facts of the past, assuming we have them correctly

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[30] Wolters, *The Fall of Srivijaya,* loc.cit.,and chap. 11, p. 25.

[31] Although not elsewhere emphasized as here, the expansion is part of the standard picture of Ayutthayan history, and the importance of trade is clear from all foreign work on Siam from the 16th century to the present.

[32] H.G. Quaritch-Wales, *Ancient Siamese Government and Administration,* 49-50; Jeremias van Vliet, *The Short History of the Kings of Siam,* 64-65; George Vinal Smith, "The Dutch East India Company and the Kingdom of Ayutthaya, 1604-1694", Ph.D. thesis, Northern Illinois University, 1974, 295. See also, Michael Vickery, "The Constitution of Ayutthaya", in *Thai Law: Buddhist Law*, *Essays on the Legal History of Thailand, Laos and Burma*. Edited by Andrew Huxley, Bangkok: White Orchid Press, 1996, pp. 133-210.

established, may only be used to explain the present and predict the future when integrated into a body of theory, whether the latter is explicit or covert; and to be convincing the theory, as well as the explanations and predictions which devolve from it, must be <u>at least</u> internally consistent.

As parts of his theoretical framework Race has made explicit use of the work of four men: Samuel P. Huntington, Seymour Martin Lipset, Gerhard E. Lenski, and Barrington Moore, Jr.[33] The last, whose work is probably of most relevance for the problems of Thailand to which Race has addressed himself, is a neo-Marxist sociological historian who used an analysis of conflict among social classes closely resembling those of standard Marxism to explain the development of either dictatorship or democracy in several countries of the modern world in their capitalist or post-capitalist phase – a problem generally ignored by mainstream Marxists as a question of the superstructure of capitalism which was of small relevance to those who believed that capitalism would in any case soon be transformed into socialism.

The most important conclusion of Moore's study is that democracy depended on the occurrence, in pre-modern times, of a violent revolution to destroy one or another of the main social classes – the landed aristocracy or the peasantry.

Moore thus contrasts England and France, where democracy developed, with Japan and Germany, where the class relations produced Fascism, and with Russia and China, where the result was peasant revolution and Communism. It should be noted, in view of Race's attempt to apply Moore's techniques to Thai history, that they require consideration of the developments of the last 300-500 years.

Lenski also saw the study of the distant past as important for understanding the present, and he also offers what purports to be a scientific, deterministic historical scheme of the development of ever more progressive "distributive systems" as a result, mainly of changes in agricultural, and eventually, industrial technology. Thus his stages, rather than proceeding out of revolution, as in Marxist and neo-Marxist theory, seem to develop peacefully one out of another. He does, however, see the inevitability of violence at the beginning of what he calls "political cycles" which are not congruent with his distributive systems, and which begin with the forcible seizure of power by a new elite. He does not provide a class analysis of the new elites, and his discussion of class shows that his ideas on that subject are quite different from Moore's.[34]

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[33] Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing States,* Yale 1968; Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man,* Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960; Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege,* McGraw-Hill, Inc., Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social origins of Dictatorship and Democracy,* Penguin Books 1966.

[34] Lenski, 59, 77.

Like Moore, Lenski believes that the nature of the struggle at the beginning of a new political cycle is of crucial importance, but his conclusions on this point are diametrically opposed to those of the former. Thus, obviously thinking of the American experience, he says, "constitutionalism develops more quickly after a prolonged and bitter war to free the nation from foreign tyranny than after a revolution which sets brother against brother", whereas Moore believed the American Civil War, rather than the War of Independence, to be the crucial revolution which insured the continuity of American democracy.[35] Again, in contrast to Moore, Lenski feels that "it is logical to predict that the tradition of constitutionalism develops more quickly after a brief and limited palace revolution than after a prolonged and far-reaching social revolution"; although recurrent palace revolutions "seriously hinder the development of constitutionalism", which bodes ill for Thailand.[36]

Finally, Lenski offers six factors whose presence insures that "constitutional government will be most highly developed". They are : (1) a political cycle of long duration, (2) present regime established during a war of national independence, (3) constitutional government flourished before the present cycle began, (4) few, if any, serious threats to the existing regime, (5) high level of productivity, and (6) a period of rapid economic development.[37] Quite apart from the extreme fragility of a 'constitutionalism' which requires the presence of the above factors, it is plain that the list derives from the Anglo-American experience and constitutes special pleading for that pattern as opposed to others; and it could be easily argued that at the time Race wrote none of Lenski's factors was present in the Thai case. Although Moore's analysis concurs in accepting the Anglo-American experience as a model of constitutional democracy, his causal factors are entirely different. Moreover, Lenski, in his factors 3, 5, and 6, implicitly confines the analysis within the modern capitalist period, whereas Moore explicitly saw the necessity of going back to at least feudal times to search for the origins of contemporary social structure.

Lipset was also greatly concerned with the development and maintenance of democracy and constitutionalism, but he confined himself almost entirely to the developed western nations and there is thus little relevance in his work for the specific problems of Asia. As crucial conditions for democracy he listed, (1) an open class system, (2) economic wealth, (3) an egalitarian value system, (4) a capitalist economy, (5) literacy, (6) high participation in voluntary organizations – factors which resemble Lenski's more than Moore's but which are less exclusively specific to the Anglo-American pattern[38] Also in contrast to Moore, by postulating the existence of

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[35] Lenski, 59; Moore, chapter 3.

[36] Lenski, 60.70.

[37] Lenski, 60.

[38] Lenski, 74. Lipset

capitalism and an open class system he ignored the whole question of the way in which those features of modern society developed out of earlier social, economic, and political structures. His idiosyncratic system of categorization allowed him (in 1960) to exclude Germany, Finland, France, Iceland and Italy from the "stable democracies", and lump them together with such countries as Albania, Greece, Portugal, and the rest of Eastern Europe, which suggests that his analysis may not be of much help in understanding the real world, particularly the problems of Asia.[39]

A partial exception to the above stricture might be Lipset's discussion of Fascism, in which he falls into agreement with Moore (and also with Trotskyist Marxism) as to the nature of European Fascism as a middle class (petit-bourgeois) phenomenon.[40] Lipset, though, is only concerned with the empirical facts of the interwar years while Moore (and more orthodox Marxists) seek to explain why the middle classes turned to Fascism at a specific time in certain countries but not in others. These deeper analyses (unlike Lipset's) would also seem to indicate that classical Fascism is unlikely in Thailand.[41]

Huntington, finally, was much less concerned, in his discussion of Africa and Asia, with democracy. He wrote, "today, in much of much of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, political systems face simultaneously the needs to centralize authority, to differentiate structure, and to broaden participation". In such case a one-party system may seem most relevant, for the "problem ... is not to hold elections, but to create organizations"; and "the primary need these countries face is the accumulation and concentration of power, not its dispersion, and it is ... not in Washington that this lesson is to be learned". "The political goals of the United States – elections, democracy, representative government, etc.," may be in inherent conflict with the social goals of modernization, reform, social welfare, and more equitable distribution of wealth; and the American system is impossible to duplicate.[42] To that extent he is in agreement with Moore, who also wrote that, "democratic capitalism [is] an historical formation that in any case is now past its zenith".[43]

But in contrast to Moore, Huntington's analysis leads him to link old China and France as centralized bureaucratic monarchies which were less adaptable than the more pluralistic feudal systems such as those of England

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[39] Lenski, 49. Lipset

[40] Lenski, 49. Lipset

[41]. See Moore, pp. 477-51, in particular the notions that Fascism is inconceivable without a prior development of real democracy and that it is most likely to appear with a rapid growth of capitalist industry "within the framework of a conservative revolution from above" (Moore, p. 448).

[42] Huntington, 137, 136,122 respectively.

[43] Moore, 483.

and Japan, where new middle-class groups were more easily absorbed.[44] Moore, we will recall, placed England and France in one category, Japan and Germany in another, and China and Russia in a third.

I said earlier that in a discussion dependent on theory the theory must be consistent; and it is clear now that the four theorists in question are in such fundamental disagreement on crucial points that their work may not be combined to form a total theory for the explanation and prognosis of Thai development. Neither is it permissible to cherry-pick details from one to combine with details from another, since, if we give each one credit for internal consistency within his own system, the details are parts of wholes which may be contradictory. The consumer approach to theory is no more legitimate than the same approach to factual historical source material.[45] In the natural sciences we would give little heed to anyone who, to solve a problem of celestial dynamics, picked something from Ptolemaic epicycles, a bit of Newtonian mechanics, and combined them with part of the theory of relativity; or who tried to combine the phlogiston theory of combustion with modern ideas on the subject. Yet this is just what Race has done in using Moore for one point, Huntington for another and Lenski for a third.

Of course, in the social sciences we are nowhere near so certain about 'correct theory' as in the natural sciences, and therefore both the temptation to eclecticism and the danger of slipping into it unawares are much greater. There are even times when different theories may be complementary, such as Moore's contribution to the analysis of the Marxist category of the superstructure of capitalism, or Lenski's theory of inconsistent status as an explanation of why certain members of the bourgeoisie might join, and lead, the proletariat.[46] It may also be interesting to take note of occasions on which otherwise different, or contradictory, theories converge; but the scholar who relies on either of these possibilities must make his own procedures explicit so that we may be certain that his own overall theory is at least consistent. That is what Race has neglected to do, and as a result, as I shall now demonstrate, his use of contradictory theory results in an analysis inconsistent with any of his theoretical sources.

Race's 'theory' and the Thai case

It is best to begin with his use of Moore, and the implications of Moore's theory for Thailand, since Moore's is the theoretically most rigorous work, and, as a study of ways in which various pre-capitalistic societies made the transition to capitalism, socialism, democracy, or dictatorship, it has clear relevance for Thailand.

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[44] Huntington, 87.

[45] J. Iuria (Ia. S. Lur'e), "Problems of Source Criticism", *Slavic Review* XXVII, 1 (March 1968), 1-22.

[46] Lenski, 88, 409.

The first point which derives from Moore, although unattributed, is that "some futures are excluded by Thailand's history, and some futures favored".[47] Race never says precisely which futures are excluded, something to which I shall return below, but he obviously considered 'Democracy' to be one of those favored, which is not at all congruent with Moore's analysis.

Race's explicit reliance on Moore concerned one of his own, and Moore's, most important arguments – that specific class alliances tend to produce specific political economic, and social results (this is what is meant by the exclusion or favoring of certain futures). In particular, coalitions of bureaucracy, commercial classes, and the military have produced fascism, as in Germany and Japan before World War II, and that particular type of coalition has been the prevailing pattern in Thailand over the past 40-odd years. To that extent Race is faithful to Moore. It is much more debatable whether the 1973-76 period really represented an escape, even tentative, from "such an unholy alliance", and in any case the coalition has been reinvigorated since 1976. Race then went on to seriously distort Moore in saying that democracy in Thailand depends on an alliance between commercial groups and farmers, which "provides the balance of social groups necessary for Democracy".[48]

First, Moore, in describing the German and Japanese military-bureaucratic-commercial coalitions, analyzed them in the framework of a revolution from above which was to destroy whatever traditional institutions and classes (including the monarchy if necessary) were hindering the development of modern capitalist industry. In contrast, the first purpose of the Thai coalition in its various forms since the time of King Chulalongkorn has been to preserve as much as possible of traditional society and institutions, in particular the monarchy, even when that meant slowing down modern capitalist development. As for an alliance of commercial classes and farmers to avert fascism, Race can only have Moore's depiction of the American case as an example, but his use of it grossly distorts what Moore said. The latter gave importance to the 19th-century alliance of northeastern <u>industrialists</u> and western independent farmers based on full private ownership of free government land – a class quite different from the Thai rice peasantry who rather fit into Moore's category of "labor-repressive" agriculture.[49] Even then, a violent revolution (the Civil War) was necessary to break the American equivalent of the rightist aristocratic military coalition. The other of Moore's examples of a potential proto-fascist coalition headed off in time was 18th-century France, but there too the alliance of countervailing classes required a revolution which destroyed the aristocracy.[50]

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47 Race, "Future", 304.

48 Pansak > Taksin?? See further below

49 Race, "Future", 307.

50 Race, "Future", 109.

Thus Race, in using Moore, has refused to consider the first principle emerging from Moore's rigorous analysis: all of the major roads to modern industrial society have required violent revolutions to destroy one or another of the important pre-modern social classes; and if revolution, as in Race's scheme, is excluded from the Thai scenario, Moore's theory becomes inapplicable. Another important point is that in Moore's theory, as in all socio-economic determinism, classes do not choose their positions as tactical maneuvers for the realization of future political ideals, such as democracy, but are forced into them by their real economic, social, or political interests as perceived in concrete historical conjunctures.[51] It thus makes no sense to ask for a voluntaristic alliance of Thai businessmen and peasants for democracy, particularly in a country where democracy is poorly understood and has never attracted large numbers of people. If commercial groups and peasants have not joined forces it is because their real interests do not coincide. Certainly Moore provides no example of such an alliance from any other part of the world, and we have no empirical basis on which to predict what the result might be, but it is difficult to see how such a coalition would be favorable to democracy rather than to some form of reaction different from any of the patterns described by Moore.[52]

In a third context Race has in a way recognized Moore's emphasis on revolution in his evocation of England as the classical model of successful two-party democracy and in acknowledging that one important reason was "acute polarization" in the past which resulted in the destruction of one of the factions. Moore even emphasized further that one of the reasons for the preservation of English democracy against a new threat of dictatorship was that "certain extremist Englishmen had chopped off the head of the monarch to shatter the magic of royal absolutism", an embarrassing condition for Race (let alone for a discussion of Thai politics) who will have nothing to do with revolution and who emphasizes the quite different Thai case where "the Siamese monarchy long ago triumphed over the nobility", apparently not having read Moore closely enough to realize that where monarchies have definitely triumphed over nobilities, not only has democracy been blocked but also the development of the modern industrial society in which democracy has some chance (the only type of society in which it has any

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[51]. A similar, and too little noticed, criticism of Race's generally well-received *War Comes to Long An* was made by Frances FitizGerald, *New York Review of Books*, October 19, 1972, p.25.

[52]. [added in 1994] There may be some signs of such a coalition in the attempts by Thai business-oriented political parties to establish themselves in the northeast, but this is based on money politics and raises concern among those Thais genuinely concerned about democracy. In 2011 it appears that such an alliance may be developing with the 'Red Shirt' movement, associated with Thaksin Shinawatra, but elements of which certainly hope to go beyond him, and it is difficult to see how such a coalition would be favorable to democracy rather than to some form of reaction different from any of the patterns described by Moore.

chance, according to Race's other mentors, Lipset, Lenski, and Huntington).[53]

If Moore's analysis is applied rigorously – and such theories must be applied rigorously or not at all – Thailand is seen now [1979] to have the type of social coalition which has elsewhere led to fascism, although Thailand will probably escape real fascism through its refusal, or failure, to carry through a policy of forced industrialization. What is left, then, within the limits of Moore's scheme, is that Thailand most closely approximates the countries following the path of peasant revolution to Communism, of which China was examined by Moore, and of which Vietnam and Cambodia more closely resemble Thailand in their pre-revolutionary structures. In any case, according to Moore, democracy is probably one of the excluded futures for those countries just going through the process of modernization in the 20th century.[54]

Turning now to some of Race's other theoretical considerations, let us note his remark that the ethnic and religious homogeneity of Thai society favors the evolution of democracy.[55] This idea is not attributed to any other scholar and is apparently one of Race's own. I do not see that there is much in favor of it. If we survey the developed countries of the world, we can note that together with the homogenous ones which do have democracy, such as Scandinavia, there are equally, or more, homogenous ones such as Japan (before 1945), China, Spain, Portugal, Greece, where democracy has not so far proved very successful.[56] There are also countries with solid, well developed democratic systems, such as Canada, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, which although they have "significant sub-cultural cleavages" also have solid records on democracy. Race seems to be troubled by this paradox and laments their lack of a "classical two-party system"; and it seems more to the point to admit that there is no discernible relationship between homogeneity and democracy. Interestingly, Huntington, in contrast to Race, sees the prospects for democracy brightened by pluralism, not homogeneity, and, writing before the civil war there, he highlighted Lebanon, the then most democratic Arab country, as a society with a "highly traditional politics of confessional pluralism".[57]

Race, together with the Thai elite, may also have been mesmerized by a false impression of homogeneity. Thailand is in fact riddled with ethnic differences, even among those sectors which speak Thai/Tai languages. The

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[53] . (46) Race, "Future", pp. 308-09; Moore, p. 444.

[54] Moore, 4, n. 1; 483. This opinion, expressed in 1979, has now been modified, as noted in footnote 52 above.

[55] Race, "Future", 305.

[56] . This was written when Greece was under the Colonels, and before democracy in Spain and Portugal was secure. Note that in the latter two cases the beginnings of democracy came via a kind of socialist revolution.

[57] Huntington, 136-37.

North (ancient Lanna) is culturally different from Bangkok, as is the really Lao Isan and also the peninsula, considering here only its Thai areas. Then, as is now seen more clearly than when Race was writing, the Malay-Muslim far South is a completely different nation, and the numerous linguistically Tibeto-Burman and Hmong non-Thai minorities of the Northwest, North, and Northeast have never been integrated, and in fact even when they wish to integrate, the process is hindered by a racial purist reactionary bureaucracy.

Race's further arguments in this section are specious. There is no evidence that pluralistic Malaysia is less favored for democracy than Thailand, indeed most political scientists studying Southeast Asia would probably argue the contrary (I am less than impressed by their arguments too, but do not think the crucial issue is pluralism vs. homogeneity). As for Race's examples of unstable northern and southern Thailand, the most serious violence has been, not among the different ethnic and religious groups, but within the dominant Thai society: the murder of numerous peasant organizers in the north, and the political-commercial-military violence in the Thai areas of Nakhon Si Thammarat and Suratthani in the south.[58]

Lipset was used by Race to support one particular point about the "three major challenges confronting every modernizing system". Now what Lipset really wrote was that "three major issues have emerged in Western Nations" "in modern times" (my emphasis), which is something quite different. Race has twisted Lipset's theory to fit it to a different time and place, where its relevance requires proof before it may be used. On two of the three issues, the role of religion and the distribution of national income, Race is at least faithful to Lipset's language, but on the third there is again serious distortion. Lipset did not talk about just "the incorporation of new groups into politics", but about "the admission of the lower strata, particularly the workers, to full political and economic 'citizenship' through universal suffrage and the right to bargain collectively", a formulation of much greater sensitivity for Thailand, and one which would make it much more difficult to give the Thai situation the optimistic cast on which Race insists.[59] Thus Race argues that Thailand faces only one (distribution of wealth) or one and one-half of the three major issues, since there is no religious problem and political participation in principle was decided long ago. Thai workers, however, are a long way from 'full economic citizenship',

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[58] On the former see Hans U. Luther, *Peasants and State in Contemporary Thailand,* Mitteilungen des Instituts fur Asienkunde, Nummer 98, Hamburg 1978, 21-29; and on the latter, "Probing the 'Red Drum' Atrocities", *FEER*, March 14, 1975, 22; "Surat Thani, where it is just like Vietnam", *Bangkok Post,* November 11, 1975; articles in the *Post* on Surat Thani, February 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 1976, in particular "The Red Attack that Wasn't", on February 20; "Officials Accused of Murder", (Nakhon Si Thammarat), *Bangkok Post* March 10, 1976; "How Long Can The Armed Forced Keep up the Pressure in Surat", *Bangkok Post,* April 3, 1977.

[59] Race, "Future", 305; Lipset, 83-84.

least of all via the right to bargain collectively, something which events of the last few years have indicated may constitute a problem and a half in itself.

Furthermore, in contrast to Lipset, who emphasized that in all modern western countries the state-church issue was something that had to be fought out, Race suggests that Thailand has been favored by having escaped such conflict altogether through the peaceful incorporation of the Buddhist church into the structure of the state itself, and that "the shape of the solution" is not important. This is first of all a distortion of Lipset, whom Race purported to follow. The co-optation of the church into the apparatus of a then absolutist Thai monarchy is vastly different from Lipset's democratic solution in which the church was forced out of government and politics; and the European countries which most resemble the Thai case with a close alliance of church and state are certainly not democratic models for Thailand. Spain and Greece are the best examples, and in Asia Sihanouk's pre-1970 Cambodia. As to the 'shape of the solution', surely it is not without interest that in the Thai case one segment of the elite can use the church to further the fortunes of another, proven undemocratic, clique, and that the church hierarchy in general either supports or acquiesces in the unholy alliance of businessmen, military and bureaucracy which Race deplores. Neither is acquiescence due merely to traditional monkish withdrawal from mundane affairs. In the case cited by the Morells the church's acquiescence violated standard church procedure and was thus a political act; and elsewhere various political monks function freely so long as they support the status quo. Monks taking other sides of controversial questions are severely punished.[60] There are signs that such political use of religion is causing tension, and thus Thailand may in fact have delayed its church-secular society conflict until it coincides with Lipset's other major problems, thereby providing Lipset's and Race's, worst-case scenario, some kind of revolution.

From the above general considerations of Race's theoretical schemes three fatal conclusion may be drawn: (1) Race's theoretical bases are contradictory among themselves, (2) in every case where he makes use of them for specific points he has distorted the original formulation, and (3) the constructions of all four of Race's mentors, in contradiction to Race, converge in implying, to the extent that they are at all relevant for Thailand, the impossibility of that country achieving democracy.

Do the requirements of theoretical rigor then force us to give up the quest for a way to democracy in Thailand and to adopt one of Race's pessimistic alternative scenarios? Not necessarily. Lipset was only concerned with the modern western countries whose patterns of development may not

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[60] David Morell and Susan Morell, "Thailand : the Costs of Political Conflict", published concurrently with Race in *Pacific Community,* January 1977, 337-38; Luther, *op.cit.,* 24-25; and the case of Phra Kitthivutho described in "Rumblings from the Right", *FEER*, July 25, 1975, P. 13.

be universal, Huntington's conclusion about the Third World derived mainly from Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America where patterns of development may also be non-conclusive for Southeast Asia, Lenski's developmental schemes are too loose to be convincing on such a question, and Moore, the most rigorous and intellectually honest of the four, admitted that in applying to Asia categories which "arose in the context of European history" they may be "wrenched beyond all recognition". Moreover, he recognized that for Asia there may be "specific chains of historical causation that do not fit into any recognizable frame of sequences."[61] Although Moore did not name it, this last comment irresistibly evokes thought of the "Asiatic Mode of Production" which is again the object of much scholarly attention and the main purpose of which is to prove that certain Asian societies have passed through a sequence of stages quite different from those of the West.[62]

There is thus a theoretical loophole through which one might search for a path to Thai democracy in spite of Moore, Lipset, Lenski, and Huntington; although it is only fair to note that no one who has ever dealt with the question of the Asiatic Mode of Production has felt able to demonstrate that democracy would appear at the end of its evolution.[63]

Thailand's future

Now that the theoretical underpinnings of Race's argument, and the long-term historical trends on which he relied, have been examined, we may return to the specific question of Thailand's future as seen by Race on the basis of those theories and trends. The best point at which to begin is Race's discussion of a 'responsible two party system' which he believed to be necessary for "coherence and the capacity to make effective policy" within the democracy which he believed was likely to prevail in Thailand. Taking off from Moore, he observed that the emergence of a two-party system is made much easier by acute polarization such as prevailed in England between monarchy and nobility at the time of its civil war. However, "since

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[61] Moore, 160-61.

[62] For a scholarly discussion and introduction to the massive literature on the subject see Marian Sawer, *Marxism and the Question of the Asiatic Mode of Production,* The Hague, 1977; Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. 1981-82. Review of Tichelman, Fritjof. 1980. *The Social Evolution of Indonesia: The Asiatic Mode of Production and its Legacy*. Translated by Jean Sanders. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff. In *Pacific Affairs*. 54:562-64; Cooper, Steve. 1987. Review of Stephen Dunn, "The Fall and Rise of the Asiatic Mode of Production". *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 17, pt. 4:500-01; Krader, Lawrence. 1975. *The Asiatic Mode of Production, Sources, Development and Critique in the Writings of Karl Marx*. Assen: van Gorcum; O'Leary, Brendan. 1989. *The Asiatic Mode of Production*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell; Michael Vickery, *Society, Economics and Politics in Pre-Angkor Cambodia: The 7th-8th Centuries*. Tokyo.The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies for Unesco, The Toyo Bunko, 1998, chapter 1.

[63] A possible exception may have been the late E. Thadeus Flood, See Peter F. Bell, "Marxist Scholarship on Thailand", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars,* 10, 1 (1978), 33-37, especially Flood's own remarks on p. 37.

the Siamese monarchy long ago triumphed over the nobility", polarization cannot develop around that issue. Race then suggested that the "role of the military and the bureaucracy" might be the issue around which "two clear tendencies could coalesce", that is, the military-bureaucratic alliance versus some other elite faction which would make a conscious choice to offer "a powerful opening to the farmers". In this connection he brought forth the experience of Turkey, where "the polarizing issue ... (was) city versus countryside", as "a (positive) model of one possible future for Thailand".[64]

Ignoring for the present the lack of necessary historical depth in Race's treatment of either Thailand or Turkey, the comparison is valid and interesting since both countries belong to non-western patterns of development which may require modification of both Moore's and more orthodox Marxist, as well as non-Marxist, theoretical schemes. There are also interesting structural parallels in the two countries' crossing of the threshold fro 'traditional' to 'modern' society.

The triumph of the Thai monarchy over the bureaucracy, to which Race referred, occurred definitively in the reign of King Chulalongkorn at a time when, perhaps because external pressures forced a change in the nature of local politics, the king was able to stave off the threat of a too-powerful aristocracy and effect the centralizing reforms for which he is famous.[65]

Those reforms destroyed the power of the bureaucrat-aristocracy both in the capital and in the countryside, thus releasing the people from certain elements of feudal-style bondage. The reforms were therefore 'good' from the point of view both of Moore's theory and of Race. What should then have happened was the growth of a new class of independent, prosperous farmers producing for the market and participating in representative politics, or the exploitation of the countryside by new capitalistically inclined large landlords, with the surplus peasants being absorbed into newly developing industries.

King Chulalongkorn's reforms, however, did not call for representative institutions, industry did not develop, the peasants lost out to new forms of exploitation at the hands of new elites, and in 1932 those new elites in the military and civil bureaucracies took state power into their own hands, but without effecting any major changes in the socio-economic structure.

In Turkey also, a modernizing ruler destroyed the power of old elites and military, formed a new army, and established strong central government, about 60 years earlier than in Thailand.[66] Then that new order was in turn

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64 Race, "Future", 307-09.

65 Michael Vi*ckery,* "Thai Elites and the Reforms of King Chulalongkorn"*, Journal of Asian Studies*, XXIX, 4 (August 1970), 863-811.

66 The reforms of Sultan Mahmud II, 1826-39. See Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey,* Oxford Paperbacks, 78-120; Dankwart A. Rustow, "The Modernazation of Turkey in Historical and Comparative Perspective", 99-101, in Kemal A. Karpat, ed., *Social Change and Politics in Turkey,* Leiden, Brill, 1973.

overthrown by its military in the early 20th century.[67] But since in Turkey the results of the first reforms had a much longer period of time to work themselves out, the monarchy had become more thoroughly reactionary, and thus for the late 19th and early 20th centuries there appears a contrast to Thailand, where the first major steps towards modernization were taken by a strong king against the bureaucracy with the help of a religious establishment fully under royal control, while the main current of Turkey's nearly contemporary revolution was opposition between a modernizing segment of the army and a reactionary elite composed of court, bureaucracy and religion. As a result both the Turkish monarchy and religious establishment were destroyed.

A comparable scenario in Thailand might have been the victory of the embryonic 1912 revolt about which very little has been written, or the one supposedly planned in 1917 and about which even less is known. The relevance of the Turkish situation was seen by King Vajiravudh (Rama VI), who was perhaps a historical determinist before the fact, and he castigated the Young Turks in no uncertain terms.[68]

The outcome of the Turkish revolution also depended very much on the powers of a unique leader, Ataturk, whose injection, comparatively, into the Thai scenario would be a trifle embarrassing, since of that sacred triad – throne, religion, nation – he had no use for any but the last. The only comparable development I can imagine in the Thai 'revolution' might have occurred if Phibul Songgram had been republican, atheist, and with the international and social outlook of Pridi Panomyong.

Even in the last 30-odd years, the period of Turkish history with which Race was concerned in his discussion of 'responsible two-party systems', the inferences drawn are tendentious. It is true that the Turkish Democrat Party developed into an aggregator of certain rural and business interests opposed to the more urban and bureaucratic interests of the Republicans, but this does not mean that it represented <u>peasant</u> interests, even though it was supported at the polls by peasant votes.

The motive for the Democrat Party's formation was to orient Turkey's economy toward free enterprise on the American model and get rid of certain more or less socializing policies of Ataturk's Republican Party. One, perhaps the most, important element in the Democrat Party consisted of wealthy landlords, who, under Republican rule, had been "alarmed by the creation of Village Institutes" to train rural children as teachers and by the threat of a law to distribute land to landless peasants. They were a group on whom no government dared impose an income tax, and as late as 1969 were still able to "simply [nominate] candidates for whom the local tenantry voted

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[67] Beginning with the 'Young Turk' movement in the first decade of the 20th century and ending with the Ataturk revolution in the 1920's.

[68] Walter F. Vella, Chaiyo King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism, Honolulu 1978, 68-71.

if they knew what was good for them." To the extent that their peasant support was genuine, it was gained partly by pandering to reactionary and obscurantist tendencies in the rural population – something which is not a major problem in the entirely different religious and cultural tradition of Thailand. Not long after their first electoral victory the Democrats abolished both the Village Institutes and the People's Houses, another institution for education, cultural, and social work in rural areas.[69]

The Turkish lesson, quite apart from the fact that the country is now [1979] a much less positive model than Race thought in 1976, is not in the formation of a two-party system, which even then had not existed for about fifteen years, nor polarization between <u>peasant</u> interests and those of the military bureaucrats. Polarization there certainly was, but not just between city and country. The Turkish Republican Party, which Race called the bureaucratic-military establishment, was modernizing, secularizing, and if transferred to the Thai context would embrace part of the military, perhaps, along with the urban intellectuals of the Democrat and New Force Parties, and probably a few socialists as well. It would be just that sort of coalition which Race wants, while the Turkish Democrats, in Menderes' day, represented the unholy alliance of government and business which Race deplores in Thailand, along with the rural elite. The real cleavages, already in 1960, when Menderes was overthrown, and even more clearly in the last ten years, are along economic class lines, between the haves and have-nots in both city and country. If Turkey had remained stable, rather than entering what now appears as a new downward spiral into revolutionary chaos, the lesson would have been, as Moore insisted but as Race tried to ignore, the necessity for the revolutionary destruction of one of the old social classes, in Turkey's case the royalty and nobility, carried out by Ataturk, in order for a modern, constitutional political system to be established. Another lesson is that even a 'responsible two-party system' may collapse in the face of economic class pressures if neither major party is willing or able to articulate the demands of downtrodden peasants or workers [now in 2011 the AKP (Justice and Development Party my be taking that road.]

The "classical two-party system", then, which Race acknowledges to be "a historical rarity, growing out of very special circumstances",[70] may not only be one of the futures excluded by Thailand's previous history, but may not even be appropriate or desirable. It involves, as Race wrote, large electoral coalitions in which ideology (a bad word for American political scientists) takes a back seat and interests are compromised and aggregated; but since in such coalitions the interests really served first are those of the most powerful groups in the coalition, it is difficult to see how the Thai

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[69] Geoffrey Lewis, *Modern Turkey,* London, Ernest Benn, Ltd., 1974, 138, 171, 184, 144; and Richard D. Robinson, *The First Turkish Republic,* Harvard U.P., Cambridge, Mass., 1968, 221.

[70] Race, "Future", 308.

peasantry, which Race agrees is the group most needing aid and support, would be served by a two-party system unless one of the parties were an <u>ideological</u> peasant party. Such a development in Thailand seems highly unlikely. Even the modest attempts by Thai farmers to organize themselves between 1973-76 were put down with vicious force;[71] and no powerful section of the Thai elite has decided that to preserve the country from a peasant revolution they should transfer real resources to the countryside and organize an increasingly prosperous peasantry as their political base. [Remember this was written in 1977-1979. The policies of Thaksin Shinawatra, and the so-called red shirt movement of rural and urban poor which they have awakened may have provided an opening. The coming election on 3 July 2011 may herald a real change]

What Race, and "Blueprint", seemed to be hoping for was a sort of bourgeois revolution, probably an anachronism in the 20th century, which at the same times would satisfy the goals of 20th-century peasant revolutions, but without class struggle – something which may be utopian, and is also contrary to be theories which Race tried to use in his analysis.

As Moore wrote, "the circumstances of peasant life have seldom made peasants the allies of democratic capitalism, a historical formation that in any case is now past its zenith. If the revolutionary wave continues to sweep through the backward world in the years to come, that is scarcely the form it is likely to take".[72]

With Race's treatment revealed as totally inadequate from whatever point of view, what now can be said about the future of Thailand beyond crude guesswork, which might, of course, turn out to be accurate?

In addition to his historical and theoretical discussion of Thailand as it now is, Race suggested certain positive steps which the Thai elite should take in order to go forward to both democracy and economic prosperity without changes to the basic structure of society.

The main focus of the policies suggested was the "opening to the farmers", meaning that the producing peasants should get a much greater share of the national wealth than at present and the country as whole should change its priorities in order to devote its resources to agricultural development at the expense of industry, "even if putative rates of return were lower". Race pointed out, probably correctly, that in the realm of export industry Thailand cannot compete with Hong Kong, Seoul, Singapore, or Tokyo; and the latest World Bank Report on Thailand painted a bleak picture for the prospects of import substitution industrialization as well.[73]

Not only Race then, but a broad spectrum of international expertise seems to agree that Thailand's economic future should lie in agricultural

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[71] See citations above, note ?? from Hans U. Luther.

[72] Moore, 483.

[73] Race, "Future", 309, 319-20; *World Bank Report on Thailand,* report no. 2059-TH, May 5, 1978, especially section 4.36.

specialization and that new high levels of investment should go into areas such as irrigation and fertilizer to improve rice yields and to develop other food and industrial crops for export. Compared to Thai priorities over the past decades such a policy is little short of revolutionary, but neither Race nor the World Bank suggests any major change in the political or social structure of Thai society. They seem to believe it plausible that the Thai economic elites, who have so far shown a readiness to sacrifice almost anything for immediate pecuniary gain, will voluntarily switch priorities to an area in which the 'putative rates of return' may well be lower.

Assuming for the sake of argument that sufficiently important segments of the Thai elite should see the handwriting on the wall to carry out such a policy, what would that imply for the other aspects of Thailand's future? First, all of the theoretical schemes which Race took as guidelines suggest that such an alliance of political elite and peasantry for the enforced development of agriculture would be a structure in which parliamentary democracy could not develop. At best, if such a policy were carried out through a relatively peaceful agreement among existing elite groups, it might lead to some kind of benevolently dictatorial 'socialism'; but if run efficiently, and in the face of inevitable demands by even economically prospering peasants and workers for greater political and <u>social</u> advancement, such as mobility into the still unchanged ruling class structure, the system would become in the end very much like the German or Japanese arrangement which led to Fascism (albeit with unpredictable differences resulting from the emphasis on agriculture rather than industry). If inefficient, it would probably degenerate to something like the Kuomintang which paved the way for violent peasant revolution. Again, we are back to the impasse: the theories and policies advocated by Race, if applied consistently and honestly, exclude the future he desires.

Those policies also have interesting implications for Race's friend, "the foreign investor (who) wants to know whether it is safe to sink funds into the kingdom", and who provides Race's livelihood by buying his advice on such matters. Safe or not, in an agricultural polity run by an honest, efficient elite-peasant alliance, there would be little place for the private foreign investor. Most of the major new investment such as irrigation, land improvement, or peasant-scale agricultural equipment will be either unattractive or infeasible for private foreign investors; and another major investment item, fertilizer, would probably be more economically purchased abroad by the state than produced at home. Run efficiently, such a system would in fact imply a good deal of economic autarky with strict limits on the importation of luxuries, or even unnecessary consumer goods; and the opportunities for foreign investors, whether in productive activities or import-export, would be considerably less than at present.[74]

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[74] It is interesting that of existing political-economic systems, that which most closely approximates the structure implied by Race is Burma, which Race, "Future", 323, seems to

I think anyone at all familiar with Thailand will realize that such a future is unacceptable both to foreign investors and to Race's other friends, the "local VIP", and is in fact utopian. By not making such limitations explicit Race is really saying that Thailand should adopt, or maintain, the position of a classical semi- or neo-colony exporting primary products and importing consumer and industrial goods from abroad, while redirecting just enough extra wealth to the countryside to dampen revolutionary spirits.

In any case events since 1976 have pushed most of the above considerations into the realm of pure theory and have made it unlikely that even the moderate reforms desired by Race will come about through peaceful electoral politics. The 'unholy' military-commercial-bureaucratic alliance is back in the saddle and the latest election results show a dangerous increase in right-wing extremism [written in 1979].

We have no way of knowing how many of the Thai elite read "Blueprint", or Race's "Future", but those who did must surely have noted the 'escape clause' in the first, which states that only "a tight political/military alliance ... with the West, and massive infusions of foreign capital", kept the communists out of power in France and Italy.[75] Any Thai general reading this could not have failed to consider that the western social scientist author was giving some covert advice: if you can't stomach the reforms suggested, return to the policies of 1958-73. In "Future" as well, we find a sort of codicil to that escape clause. There Race noted that in the past the United States had been a major prop of dictatorship with a "vested interest in suppressing Thai democracy", but that the "U.S. appears no longer to care what happens in Thailand", which was all the better for democracy. Here was another message which the Thai elite could not have failed to appreciate: a well known American political scientist and investment counselor was saying that the U.S. preferred dictatorship to democracy in Thailand and that if a regime like that of 1973-76 continued in power Thailand would be neglected by its powerful friends, which was the last thing they wanted.[76]

Whether or not these covert, and perhaps unintended, messages had any direct effect, the Thai government is now following a policy implied in them. The Thai elites, unwilling to undertake real structural changes, even of the moderate type suggested by "Blueprint", have obviously decided to rely on foreign inputs to shore up the economy; and since investment, even

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consider as one of the worst examples. The main structural difference is that the capitalist and commercial classes there were pushed aside, and in a relatively peaceful manner, which probably accounts for the lack of revolutionary development among the ethnic *Burman* peasantry in spite of the system's inefficiency.

[75] *Bangkok Post*, February 15, 1976, p. 5, column 3; February 25, 1976, p.7, column 1.

[76] Race, "Future", 306. At the time "Future" was published the statement about U.S. indifference to the nature of Thai government sounds almost like disinformation; but since Race has assured me privately that such was not his intention, we must put it down to naivete.

though it has improved in the last four years, will not alone be sufficient, they clearly have been tempted to return to their role of the 1960's as guardians for the U.S. against the supposedly expansionist policies of communist Vietnam. From 1977 until very recently the government was led by a military man with close long-term connections to the U.S.; and the latter government has officially announced that its global strategy now required the preservation of the status quo in Thailand;[77] increasing amounts of military aid are on the way; and Thailand, going along with an apparent U.S. policy to destabilize Vietnam, has joined in giving tacit support to a disparate collection of discredited Cambodian movements whose only point of agreement is opposition to everything Vietnamese.[78] Such policies can only lead to increased tensions in Indochina and to further injections of military aid into Thailand. Although this aid, and the short-term, quick profit-seeking investment which will probably accompany it might temporarily alleviate some of the economic problems of the Thai elite, it will also contribute to the social and economic instability which are already at dangerous levels.

The future of Thailand thus looks bleak, at least in the long run. The country seems to be caught in a pattern very like that which Race criticized so cogently in *War Comes to Long An*. Although Thailand, as Race said, will not become another Vietnam – there are too many differences between the two countries in history, culture, and general internal conditions – there is virtually no more chance of it becoming a stable, prosperous democracy either. What precisely will happen cannot be predicted in detail from any of the bodies of theory discussed above, beyond the generally recognized points that military-commercial-bureaucratic regimes generally lead to trouble, and that Thailand probably cannot have both democracy and economic progress, perhaps not either, without first undergoing social change drastic enough to be called revolutionary. A further consideration to keep in mind, one based on an analogy with certain other Third World regimes in the past several years, is that wherever the U.S. decides to support the status quo a particularly chaotic revolution is likely to follow.

[Note that, except for a few new comments and footnotes, the above was written during 1977-1979]

How does Thailand's future look now, in 2011? As noted above the changes set in motion by Thaksin Shinawatra may open the way for an alliance of some significant section of the commercial groups and farmers,

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[77] See the remarks of Richard Holbrooke at the June 13, 1979 hearing of the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, reported in the *Guardian*, July 25, 1979.

[78] The three main such groups were the remnants of Democratic Kampuchea ('Khmer Rouge'), a pro-Sihanoukist group, and a non-communist, non-royalist faction led by Son Sann. Under foreign pressure (US, China, Thailand) they were brought together in 1982 as 'Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea' which was able to occupy Cambodia's UN seat against the government of the People's Reublic of Kampuchea in Phnom Penh. See Michael Vickery, *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, Phnom Penh, Funan Press, 2007.

which, according to Race, "provides the balance of social groups necessary for Democracy".

Such an alliance will certainly provoke change, but whether in the direction of democracy is not assured. We must not forget that since the change in 1932 all Thai regimes, even the most militaristic and dictatorial, have called themselves democratic, and it cannot be excluded that among the rural and urban downtrodden that very term may have negative connotations.

This is not a situation peculiar to Thailand. As I have written elsewhere, all former colonial and semi-colonial countries, whether those which have claimed to be following a bourgeois democratic path, or those overtly more statist, are burdened by the 'democracy' inherited from those western models of democratic society, Britain and France, who in their liberal use of anti-democratic methods to maintain control have discredited democracy in Asia and permitted the hypocritical use of the term by their successors.

This perversion of 'democracy' by the major western democracies has been continued, and amplified, by the US since the end of World War II, until almost any horror can be justified by recourse to 'democracy'. In fact in the mouths of major US regime figures the very terms 'democracy', 'freedom', and 'human rights' have become obscenities. The Internal Security Acts which in Malaysia and Singapore permit arrest and years of incarceration without trial, and which those 'democratic' regimes are reluctant to give up, are relics of British 'democracy'.

Certainly some of the more reasonable, neither radical nor reactionary, persons at the summit of Thai politics are worried.

In 2010 the Thai Foreign Minister, Mr. Kasit Piromya, in a talk at Johns Hopkins University, characterized his country as "behaving like a banana republic", *International Herald Tribune* 15 April 2010, p. 3. And "one of the country's senior statesmen [Anan Panyarachun] has warned of collapse into a 'failed state'" [*The Nation*, Bangkok, 31 August 2006. Worse still, in *Bangkok Post*, 13 March 2011, p. 13, in a column entitled "The Dark Night of Thai Democracy", Mr. Voranai Vanijaka quoted Ms. Sodsri Satayathum, Thailand's election commissioner, as saying that if there is an election as tentatively scheduled for June or July, "it could create a situation that [she] believes may pave the way for a mass uprising", not a "coup d'etat, but a revolution from below". "Like in North Africa?", Mr. Voranai asked. "Like in North Africa", she said.