This lively, accessible book is the first new history of Thailand in English for two decades. Drawing on new Thai-language research, it ranges widely over political, economic, social, and cultural themes.

Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit reveal how a world of mandarin nobles and unfree labour evolved into a rural society of smallholder peasants and an urban society populated mainly by migrants from southern China. They trace how a Buddhist cosmography adapted to new ideas of time and space, and a traditional polity was transformed into a new nation-state under a strengthened monarchy.

The authors cover the contests between urban nationalists, ambitious generals, communist rebels, business politicians, and social movements to control the nation-state and redefine its purpose. They describe the dramatic changes wrought by a booming economy, globalization, and the evolution of mass society. Finally, they show how Thailand’s path is still being contested by those who believe in change from above and those who fight for democracy and liberal values.

Chris Baker taught Asian history at Cambridge University, and has lived in Thailand for over twenty years. He is now an independent writer, researcher, and translator. Pasuk Phongpaichit is Professor of Economics at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. She has written widely in Thai and English on the Thai economy, sex industry, corruption, illegal economy, and social movements. Together, they have co-authored Thailand: Economics and Politics, Thailand’s Boom and Bust, Thailand’s Crisis, and Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand.
A HISTORY OF THAILAND

CHRIS BAKER
PASUK PHONGPAICHIT
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Preface

History was invented for the nation-state. It has a tendency to imagine ‘the false unity of a selfsame, national subject evolving through time’ (Prasenjit Duara). All too easily, the nation becomes something natural which always existed but was only properly realized in the nation-state. In reaction against this tendency, historians today prefer to write about people, things, ideas, localities, regions, or the globe — anything but the nation. Or else they write reflective histories about the interplay between the nation and the production of its own history.

The approach adopted here is to make the career of the nation-state the explicit focus of the story. One of the themes of this book is about how the idea of the nation and the machinery of the nation-state were established in Thailand, and then how different social forces tried to make use of it — by reinterpreting what the nation meant, and by seeking to control or influence the use of state power. The second major theme is about the evolution of the social forces involved. After the introductory chapter, the chapters alternate between these two themes, though the division is rough not rigid.

The publishers want the books in this series to be accessible to a wide readership, not too long and not overloaded with academic referencing. Our policy has been to limit footnoting to the sources for direct quotations. The appendix of ‘Readings’ cites major published works in English, but rather little has been published in English on modern Thailand over the past generation. In Thai there has been a huge amount, and even more exists in unpublished theses in both Thai and English. Our dependence on these works should be easily recognizable by their authors and other experts. Some of the most important are: Srisak Vallibhotama, Geoff Wade, Phiset Jiajanphong, Sratrawadi Ongsakun on early history; Nidhi Eoseewong, Saichon Sattrayanurak on early Bangkok society; Davisakdi Puaksom, Attachak Sattayanurak, Rujaya Abhakorn on the Chulalongkorn reform era; Phimpraphai Phisanbut, Channongnsri Rutnin, Panni Bualek on city society; Chatthip Nartsupha, David Johnston,
Preface

Atsushi Kitahara on rural society; Nakharin Mektrairat, Eiji Murashima, Thamrongsak Petchloetanan, Chanida Phromphayak Puaksom, Saichon Sattayanurak, Chaloemkiet Phianuan, Morakot Jewachinda, Vichitvong na Pombejra, Phenphisut Inthraphirom, Matt Copeland on nationalisms; Chalong Soontravanich, Somsak Jaamteerasakul, Suthachai Yimprasoot, Charnvit Kasetsiri on the American era; Prapat Pintobtaeng, Thirayuth Boonmi, Anek Laothamatas, Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, James Ockey, Kasian Tejapira, Thongchai Winichakul on Thailand since 1975. We would like to record our appreciation and thanks, along with apologies for any shortcomings in our use of these works.

The book was written in Thailand but with indispensable help from forays to libraries and research centres. We are especially grateful to the Center of Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies in Copenhagen, Johns Hopkins SAIS in Washington, and the libraries of the Australian National University and Cambridge University.

We would like to thank Kevin Hewison, Craig Reynolds, Malcom Falkus, Grant Evans, Andrew Brown, and John Funston who commented on earlier drafts of the manuscript.

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Note on transliteration and names

Official spellings are used for kings and places, and conventional forms for some well-known names. Otherwise, Thai is translated using the Royal Institute system, with the exception of using ‘j’ for jo jan.
Abbreviations

BAAC  Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives
CDA  Constitution Drafting Assembly
CEO  chief executive officer
CIA  Central Intelligence Agency
CP  Charoen Pokphand group of companies
CPD  Campaign for Popular Democracy
CPT  Communist Party of Thailand
GDP  gross domestic product
IMF  International Monetary Fund
ISOC  Internal Security Operations Command
ITV  Independent Television
JPPCC  Joint Private Public Consultative Committee
KMT  Kuomintang
MP  member of parliament
NESDB  National Economic and Social Development Board, the planning agency
NGO  non-governmental organization
NIO  National Identity Office
NPKC  National Peacekeeping Council
PFT  Peasants Federation of Thailand
PPB  Privy Purse Bureau
SEATO  Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
TRT  Thai Rak Thai Party (Thai love Thai)
UN  United Nations
USAID  US Agency for International Development
Glossary

angyi
Chinese secret society

Baht
unit of currency

barami
charisma, innate authority

Bodhisatta
a future Buddha

cakkavatin
the universal emperor in Buddhist cosmology

chatyaphum
‘victorious emplacement’; the science of siting a city

Chakri
the name of the Bangkok dynasty; adapted from King Rama I’s former title as a minister of the military

chaophraya
one of the highest non-royal titles in traditional ranking system

chat
birth, race, nation

chatprathet
nation-state

chedi
stupa, reliquary temple

chuduek
traditional title for head of the Chinese community

compradore
agent of colonial firm, liaising with local partners or customers

corvé
labour exacted by a feudal lord

ekkanat
a unified and independent kingdom

farang
westerner, European, foreigner

Isan
the northeast region

itthiphon
influence

jao
lord, ruler; member of the royal family/clan

jao pho
godfather, mafia

jao sua
merchant prince, especially Chinese (Thai adaptation of a Chinese phrase)

jap jong
process of staking a claim to unused land
Glossary

jataka  
collection of tales of the former lives of the Buddha; often used for preaching, or as the subjects of temple murals

jek  
pejorative term for Chinese in Thailand

kannan  
the head of a group of villages

kammueang ning  
quiet or calm politics

kathin  
ceremony of presenting new robes to Buddhist monks

kha ratchakan  
bureaucrat; originally, the servant of the king

khon samai mai  
modern people

khun nang  
nobility; collective term for the old service bureaucracy

khwaen  
a confederation of mueang

lak ratchakan  
the principle of service to the king

lak wicha  
the principle of law and rationality

luk thung  
‘child of the field’, a music style

lukjin  
‘child of China’, term for Thai-born descendants of a Chinese immigrant

mahanakhon  
‘great cities’

mankhong  
security

manutsayatham  
humanitarianism, or a belief in people

muang fai  
weir-and-channel irrigation system

muang  
a political unit, originally a city-state, but applicable to countries

munnai  
overseer

naga  
mythological serpent

nai  
boss, overseer

nakleng  
tough guy

nibhana  
nirvana, release from worldly existence in Buddhist teaching

nirat  
a poetic form combining travel, remembrance of loved one(s), and observation of nature

phatthana  
development

phleng phua chiwit  
songs for life

pho khun  
a paternal ruler in the legendary mode of the Sukhothai kings

pho liang  
patron

pho yu pho kin  
‘enough to live and eat’, sufficiency

phrai  
in the traditional order, a freeman commoner bound to corvée
Glossary

phrai mangmi: rich commoners
phrakhlang: the royal treasury (and its minister) in traditional government
phramahakasat: great king
phu di: 'good people'; the aristocracy
phu noi: little (ordinary) people
phu yai: big (powerful) people
phumibun: 'man of merit', person of special or supernatural power, sometimes leader of millenarian revolt
phung ton eng: self-reliance
prachakhom: people's assemblies
prathet: country
prathetchat: nation-state
protégé: someone under the protection of a colonial power (Britain, France) under the extraterritorial provisions of colonial treaties
rachaap: 'royal language'; a specialized vocabulary for addressing kings
rai: unit of area, = 0.16 hectare
ratchathani: abode of kings; the inner, core kingdom
rattaniyom: cultural mandate; state edict
sae: Chinese clan name
sakdina: 'power over fields'; traditional system of numerical ranks; sometimes used as referent for Thai equivalent of feudalism
samakkhi(tham): unity
samakhom lap: secret society
sanchat thai: of Thai nationality
sawatdi: greeting
Seri Thai: Free Thai, resistance movement against the Japanese during Second World War
siwilai: Thai adaptation of the word 'civilized', encapsulating aspirations for 'progress'
sukhaphiban: sanitary districts
 tambon: administrative unit consisting of a group of villages
thamma: dharma, the teachings of the Buddha; righteous conduct
thammaracha: dharmaraja, a ruler adhering to Buddhist morality
thammathut: ambassadors of thamma
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<td>that</td>
<td>slave</td>
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<tr>
<td>thesaphiban</td>
<td>'control over territory'</td>
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<tr>
<td>thotsaphit</td>
<td>the ten laws of royal conduct</td>
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<tr>
<td>thudong</td>
<td>pilgrimage</td>
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<td>Traiphum</td>
<td>'Three Worlds'; an early Buddhist cosmology, perhaps written in the fourteenth century</td>
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<tr>
<td>wat</td>
<td>Buddhist temple, monastery</td>
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<tr>
<td>wiang</td>
<td>fortified settlement</td>
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<tr>
<td>wihan</td>
<td>assembly hall in a Buddhist temple</td>
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<td>winaya</td>
<td>the code of discipline for Buddhist monks</td>
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Chronology

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1569 First fall of Ayutthaya to the Burmese
1767 Second fall of Ayutthaya
1782 New capital established at Bangkok; accession of King Yotfa, Rama I
1822 First trade treaty with Britain, negotiated by John Crawfurd
1851 Accession of King Mongkut, Rama IV
1855 Bowring treaty
1861 French protectorate of Cambodia
1868 Accession of King Chulalongkorn, Rama V
1872 Chulalongkorn’s visit to India
1874 Front Palace Incident; Anglo-Siam Treaty over Chiang Mai; edict abolishing slavery
1885 Prince Prisdang’s memorial on a constitution
1890 Establishment of Privy Purse Bureau
1892 Formation of ministerial council
1893 French gunboats threaten Bangkok (Paknam Incident); foundation of Ministry of Interior
1897 Chulalongkorn’s first visit to Europe
1901 Ubon plumibun revolt
1902 Phrae revolt; southern states revolt; Sangha Act
1905 Conscription edict
1908 Sun Yat Sen visit to Bangkok
1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty finalizes Siam’s boundaries
1910 Accession of King Vajiravudh, Rama VI; Chinese strike in Bangkok
1912 Plot uncovered in military
1913 Nationality Act; Surname Act; Vajiravudh’s The Jews of the East
1916 Foundation of Chulalongkorn University
Chronology

1917  Siamese contingent to fight on Allied side in Europe; first ‘political newspaper’ published
1920  First publication of Prince Damrong’s *Our Wars with the Burmese*
1923  Press Act; W. C. Dodd’s *The Tai Race* published
1925  Accession of King Prajadhipok, Rama VII
1927  People’s Party founded in Paris
1928  Kulap Saipradit’s *Luk phu chai* (A real man); Khun Wichitmatra’s *Lak thai* (Origins of the Thai); Wichit Wathakan’s *Mahaburut* (Great men); boycott of Japanese goods
1930  Ho Chi Minh (intermittently in Siam since 1928 organizing Vietnamese émigrés) forms Communist Party of Siam
1932  Revolution converts absolute to constitutional monarchy (24 June)
1933  Boworadet Revolt
1934  Foundation of Thammasat University; Phibun becomes minister of defence and army chief
1935  Abdication of King Prajadhipok
1936  Wichit Wathakan’s play *Luat suphan* (Blood of Suphanburi)
1937  Second boycott of Japanese imports
1938  Phibun becomes prime minister; Thai Rice Company formed
1939  Siam renamed as Thailand; series of state edicts starts; Constitution Monument completed
1941  Japanese army enters Thailand; Thailand declares war on Allies; battle with French
1942  Phibun’s Sangha Act; Communist Party of Thailand refounded
1944  Seni Thai network established; Phibun ousted as prime minister; foundation of Bangkok Bank
1945  Pridi’s constitution; death of King Ananda Mahidol, Rama VIII; accession of King Bhumibol Adulyadej, Rama IX
1946  First May Day rally
1947  First national labour federation; coup returns Phibun to power
1948  Troubles in Muslim south after Haji Sulong’s arrest; CPT adopts Maoist strategy
1949  Palace Rebellion, Pridi flees
1950  Phibun’s sweep against Peace Movement
1951  King Rama IX returns to Thailand; Silent or Radio Coup; first US military aid
1954  SEATO formed
1955  Phibun’s democracy interlude
Chronology

1957  Sarit Thanarat takes power by coup; completion of Mitraphap highway
1958  Sarit’s second coup and repression
1960  Thai troops fight in Laos
1961  Khrong Chandawong executed; CPT forms first rural base in Phuphan
1962  Sarit’s Sangha Act; Rusk-Khoman agreement confirms US security alliance
1963  Death of Sarit, succeeded by Thanom Kittikhachon; Social Science Review founded
1964  First air strike on Vietnam flown from Thailand
1965  ‘First shot’ of communist insurgency
1966  Jit Phumisak shot dead in Phuphan
1967  Thai troops fight in South Vietnam; Hmong rebellion in northern hills
1968  Restoration of constitution
1971  Thanom coup against own government and abrogation of constitution; Village Scouts formed
1972  Student protest against Japanese goods, and for restoration of constitution
1973  Student uprising fells Thanom (14 October)
1974  Peasants Federation of Thailand formed; Dusit Thani strike
1975  Elected governments headed by Kukrit and Seni Pramoj; Nawaphon and Red Gaurs formed; US troops start to depart
1976  Massacre at Thammasat University and military coup (6 October)
1979  Restoration of elections and parliament
1980  Prem Tinsulanond as prime minister; political policy to end insurgency
1981  Failed April Fool’s Day Coup
1984  Devaluation of baht
1985  Failed coup; Chamlong Srimuang elected mayor of Bangkok
1986  Nidhi Eoseewong’s study of King Taksin published
1987  Remnants of CPT arrested; Sujit Wongthet’s Jekponlao published
1988  Chatichai Choonhavan becomes first elected prime minister since 1976; Nam Choan dam project cancelled
1991  Military coup by NPKC; Anand Panyarachun as prime minister
Chronology

1992  NPKC prime minister Suchinda Kraprayun forced out by street demonstrations of ‘Black May’; Kho Jo Ko protest against forest resettlement; death of Phumpuang Duangjan; Chuan Leekpai as prime minister

1994  Thai Culture Promotion Year; King Bhumibol’s sufficiency farming scheme; Pak Mun dam completed

1995  Establishment of Constitution Drafting Assembly; Assembly of the Poor founded

1996  Banharn Silpa-archa ousted after no-confidence debate

1997  Assembly of the Poor 99-day protest; passage of ‘People’s Constitution’; onset of economic crisis

1998  Foundation of Thai Rak Thai Party by Thaksin Shinawatra

2001  Thaksin Shinawatra becomes prime minister