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# Modern Monarchs and Democracy: Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej and Juan Carlos of Spain

Serhat Ünalđi

**Abstract:** The history of democracy is typically a history of struggle against monarchs and other such autocrats. The elevation of one person over others by virtue of blood and birth has come to be seen as anachronistic; yet some monarchies have managed to survive to this day. This paper analyses two examples of the uneasy coalition between popular sovereignty and royal leadership that is constitutional monarchy. Whereas Juan Carlos of Spain has been described as having steered Spain away from dictatorship, Bhumibol of Thailand has come under scrutiny for allegedly lacking a principled approach to democracy. I argue that structural as much as personal factors influenced the ways in which the two monarchies were legitimised – one by positively responding to the modern aspirations of the king's subjects, giving him a "forward legitimacy," the other by revitalising the king's traditional charisma and opting for "backward legitimacy."

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**Keywords:** Thailand, Spain, monarchy, democratisation, legitimation of rule

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## Introduction

Constitutional monarchy was not based on the opinion of the people; many thought that if public opinion were really to prevail [... a ...] republic would triumph in Spain (Dardé 1996: 208).

Spain gives the impression of a people that has received from outside political institutions alien to its customs and foreign to the mass of the nation (Charles Seignobos, in Dardé 1996: 209).

Reflecting on the nature of constitutional monarchy in Spain at the turn of the twentieth century, the above quotations could in many ways be referring to contemporary Thailand. During the Spanish Restoration, which lasted from the end of the First Republic in 1874 to the establishment of a military dictatorship with royal backing in 1923, elites resisted the development of an open, inclusive political system for fear of losing their privileges. A similar fear – not necessarily of republican sentiments but of the democratic effects on established power structures – is driving the Thai political crisis today.

The electoral arrangement of the Spanish Restoration was dominated by *caciquismo*, an Iberian version of Thailand's clientelistic system of *chao pho* (provincial godfathers).<sup>1</sup> Spanish politics was dominated by influential figures who aimed to contain forces potentially threatening to the status quo. As Richard Herr points out:

Once royal absolutism was replaced by parliamentary government, the elites of the country [...] discovered that their power was better guaranteed by controlling the central authority [...]. In the process they developed the institution known as *caciquismo*. [...] [*Caciquismo*] became the effective network for enforcing the policies of those with social and economic power (in Dardé 1996: 211).

The political exclusion of broad social sectors during the Restoration discredited the constitutional system and eventually led to frustration among the Spanish electorate, a revival of the political role of the military, and finally a coup backed by King Alfonso XIII, who had been brought up in the “most hieratic court in Europe” and who had grown increasingly impatient with the constitutional system (Carr 2000b: 235).

As can be discerned from the introductory quotation by French historian Seignobos, a contemporary of Alfonso XIII, to analysts of that time Spain was in a mess without any prospect of ever getting on the right track. As in Thailand today, there was talk about exceptional cultural and historical

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1 For a discussion of *caciquismo* in a Southeast Asian context, the Philippines, see Anderson (1988).

determinants, about the Spanish psyche that stood in the way of a supposedly “alien” system of democracy and liberalism. These ideas were exploited by the aristocracy and the military to extend their grip on power. A similar tactic, it will be argued, has been pursued by the Thai elite.

The case of Spain exemplifies the weakness of political theory based on cultural determinism, as another Spanish king – Juan Carlos – has decisively and successfully influenced the democratisation of his country. Despite the recent economic downturn that has hit the country hard, Spain ranks among the most liberal and politically stable democracies in Europe. Dardé comments:

Today in a country where, in less than a generation, radical changes have occurred in attitudes and behaviour that were previously considered constituent parts of the national character, explanations based on hypothetical psychological peculiarities of the Spanish people hold little or no water (Dardé 1996: 213–214).

Presupposing that in transforming societies which retain their monarchies, kings and queens play a decisive role for the success or failure of democratisation, the question this paper aims to answer is: What factors have determined the differing democratic commitment of the two kings, Bhumibol and Juan Carlos?

I argue that structural factors provide incentives to resort to “forward legitimation” (Juan Carlos) or “backward legitimation” (Bhumibol), in the terms of Giuseppe Di Palma (1980: 170). However, in his analysis of Juan Carlos, Bernecker (1998: 65) points to “the dialectical problem of personality and structure.” Many analysts of the Spanish transition have emphasised the importance of the personality, values and morals of elite actors over structures. These have proven decisive for democratic success (e.g. Gunther 1992: 42, 77–78). Di Palma (1980: 165) describes structures as mere “constraints or inducements, but upon which transitional actors [...] exercise various degrees of transformative inventiveness.” To Linz (1993: 143), the Spanish transition poses once more the question of whether “man makes the office, or the office makes the man.” One might ask: Do kings make history or does history make kings?

On the academic blog *New Mandala*, Paul Handley (2007), author of an unauthorised and rather critical biography of King Bhumibol, once complained about “the lack of discussion here and elsewhere over specific themes and content” of his book and the fact that “[e]veryone still focuses on the book’s existence and my intentions.” Handley countered claims that the Thai monarchy is unique and incomparable to, for example, the Spanish monarchy:

I tried to write the book as an example of one contemporary monarchy, since they all operate in similar structures. I would like to see more broadly discussed how similar (or not) the Thai monarchy is to other monarchies in the world (Handley 2007).

Even though Handley's book triggered a timely debate on the Thai monarchy, the authors of a very recent publication on the topic still hold that "the roles [...] for monarchs in different countries are diverse and quite incompatible" (Ivarsson and Isager 2010: 4). Countering that claim, this paper takes the comparative perspective suggested by Handley.

What follows is a discussion of the two kings and the discourses that surround them, especially with regards to their democratic commitment. A comparison will be followed by an analysis of the factors that influenced their actions. I argue that history makes some outcomes more likely than others, but that actors and their values and ideologies are crucial – especially when they hold huge reserve powers, as kings in transforming societies do. Thus, it will be hard to think of Juan Carlos as the mere enactor of a predetermined political fate, or of Bhumibol Adulyadej as being at the mercy of history.

## Kings' Quests

When in late 1975 Spain's dictator Francisco Franco died, Thailand was heading for brutal clashes between rightists and students, which eventually took place the following year. Both kings, Juan Carlos and Bhumibol, were facing tough challenges. As Franco's successor and newly crowned king, Juan Carlos saw the need for political change, and yet he had been entrusted with the heritage of 36 years of dictatorship. King Bhumibol watched with anxiety not only the fall of the Lao monarchy but also the increasing radicalisation and politicisation of his own subjects.

In the midst of political transformation and popular calls for change, both had to decide what paths their countries should take and what roles they themselves would play in that undertaking. Both acted on the basis of different historical, international and political factors. For neither Juan Carlos nor Bhumibol were the circumstances easy and any outcome seemed possible. However, the values and worldviews of the monarchs as human beings as well as their personal histories, which had shaped their approaches to politics, contributed to the resolution of the respective crises.

## Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand

Contrary to Juan Carlos, Bhumibol had not been prepared to be king. From an early age Juan Carlos was utilised by his father, Don Juan, as a tool to restore the monarchy in Spain, which had been abolished in 1931 – a throne to which Don Juan was the legitimate heir.

In contrast, Prince Mahidol, father of Bhumibol and his elder brother Ananda, did not seem to care much about the Siamese monarchy, entrenched as it was in pomp and ritual. Most of the time, Bhumibol's father preferred to stay overseas with his young family. Hence, as Handley writes, when Prince Mahidol “fell direly ill in 1928, he implored Sayre [the throne's American advisor] to prevent either boy from being placed on the throne if he died” (Handley 2006a: 14). His wishes were ignored when Ananda was named successor to King Prajadhipok, who chose to abdicate in 1935, three years after the overthrow of Siam's absolute monarchy in 1932. At an age when Juan Carlos was left alone at a grim boarding school in Switzerland where he was to prepare for the royal tasks ahead, Bhumibol and his brother Ananda – also residing in the royal sanctuary of Switzerland – were mostly kept at a distance from royal duties and the struggles in Thailand by their mother, Sangwal, who “was determined that [Ananda] have a normal childhood” (Handley 2006a: 59).

Back in Siam, royalists worked hard to undermine the new parliamentary system, lobbying for foreign support and against the coup's civilian leader Pridi Bhanomyong; spreading rumours; undermining the government; boycotting the establishment of political parties; revolting; inciting Chinese riots against the People's Party; and sowing discontent within the military, which became the new centre of Thai power (Copeland 1993: 207–211; Handley 2006a: 49–53).

Although over the following years military Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram successfully weakened the court, royals were still actively manipulating the course of Thai politics when in mid-1946, shortly after his return to Thailand, King Ananda was found shot in his room in the royal residence of Borom Phiman – ten years before Juan Carlos allegedly shot his brother Alfonso.<sup>2</sup>

Bhumibol succeeded his brother. He was a young and relatively untrained king, vulnerable to whispers from his royal advisors, who had years of experience in political backroom operations. The absolute monarchy lay only 14 years in the past, and as clever intriguers with vivid memories of the

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2 Kobkua (2003: 134) points to rumours which had it that royalists were behind the regicide in order to capitalise on the death of Rama VIII to stage a coup against the government.

days of noble rule, senior princes – most notably Prince Rangsit and Prince Dhani Nivat – used the death of Ananda to discredit the liberal post-war government and to revive royal myths and rituals. They tried to teach Bhumibol their version of Thai culture and history, which was essentially anti-democratic and paternalistic in nature. Arguing that electoral democracy was not suitable for Thailand, that people were not educated enough to wisely cast their votes and that Thai kings are democratically “elected” by consent of the people, they attempted to infuse the young king with their conservative views.<sup>3</sup>

Whereas during the formative years of the constitutional system civic education may indeed have been necessary to make democracy work, the idea of a backward populace unable to self-govern became a convenient excuse for later regimes to introduce Thai-style democracy, which was actually veiled authoritarianism.

An image was propagated of the king as the “Father of the Nation,” who knew best what was good for his subjects, thereby promoting a paternalistic version of Thai social order that reinforces mutual dependencies and enforces loyalty at all levels, from family life to politics.

In their endeavour to restore the old order, monarchists were supported by the military, the US Cold War logic and, later, emerging business elites who capitalised on ideas of a hierarchically ordered society in which the haves exert control over the have-nots. When long-time Prime Minister Phibun lost support from those conservative forces in the mid 1950s and, in need of legitimacy, once more turned himself into a democrat, Bhumibol began to “test his political muscle” (Handley 2006a: 134). Although he won the elections in 1957, Phibun was ousted in a coup led by military strongman Sarit Thannarat, who was backed by the palace. Sarit’s ascendancy and the power vacuum left by his death in 1963 heralded the start of excessive royalism.<sup>4</sup>

Instead of continuing with a chronological account it should suffice to quote Thongchai (2008: 11), who states that “the monarchy and the monarchists [...] have probably played the most significant role in shaping Thai democracy since 1932.” He goes on to write that “with distaste for electoral politics [...] they have undermined electoral democracy in the name of ‘clean’ politics versus the corruption of politicians” (Thongchai 2008: 11).

In letting royalists hijack democratic discourses for their own benefit (Ünalđi forthcoming), Bhumibol – willingly or not – allowed himself be

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3 Handley (2006a: 84–86) mentions a lecture on kingship by Prince Dhani Nivat which was attended by the Mahidols. For the full speech see Dhani (1976).

4 For a study of how royal projects were promoted and “royal hegemony” created see Chanida 2004.

turned into a demigod of *dharmic* righteousness. Charity projects funded by donations and income from the enormous institutional wealth of the Thai monarchy help to portray Bhumibol via loyal media, kept in check by the *lèse majesté* law, as the better ruler compared to the corrupt game of democratic politics.<sup>5</sup> Thus the Thai people's loyalty has been diverted away from political institutions. These weak institutions then provide the basis for clientelism, as Baker (2008) notes about network politics: "This is a very practical fact in a society where institutions do not always work as they should and personal contacts are what get things done."

Royalist historiography places the king at the centre of democratic development, glossing over the achievements of the Thai people in their pursuit of freedom and participation and reinterpreting the popular uprisings of 1973 and 1992 to present the monarch as the saviour of liberalism.<sup>6</sup> When "goodness" becomes the prerogative and source of power for a monarch, others will less likely be permitted to undermine that power in doing good, too. This might in part explain Bhumibol's hostile stance towards a welfare state, stating that the "individual on welfare will be a useless person for the community and even for himself" (in Hewison 1997: 67). Furthermore, considering its economic interests, it might not be too surprising that the Thai monarchy does not promote big government but takes a rather conservative approach to public spending.<sup>7</sup>

When the state neglects welfare policies, a benign monarch gains ground and his subjects start to put faith in his benevolence. In November 2007 Chatree, an impoverished 12-year-old boy from Phichit Province, sent a letter to "the Father of the Nation [...] as the last hope" to ask for a house and education (*The Nation* 2007). The king sent help. A week later, a follow-up of the story was published in the *Bangkok Post*, printing, "[h]is Majesty is there to help his subjects and his great generosity is for anyone, without discrimination – no matter how small a person is." The author used the opportunity to place blame on politicians, warning that

state officials can no longer afford to ignore the problem [of poverty]. They should realize that by turning their backs to poor people's plights, they have failed to perform their duty as good state officials.

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5 About how the royal charities were funded by donations ("the magic circle of merit") see Handley 2006a: 130–131.

6 For hagiographic accounts of the Thai monarchy see Dhani (1976), The Office of His Majesty's Principal Private Secretary (1987), Thongnoi (1990), The National Identity Office (2000), Vasiit (2006).

7 Porphant (2008: 184) has estimated that the worth of the Crown Property Bureau, the monarchy's investment arm, was 1.1 trillion THB as of 2005.



They have also failed His Majesty, who for decades has demonstrated how deeply he cares for his subjects' well-being (*Bangkok Post* 2007).

It is ironic that it was the “network monarchy” – the “leading [political] network of the period 1973–2001 [...] centred on the palace” (McCargo 2005: 499) – that helped Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra come to power in 2001 (McCargo 2005: 513). After Thaksin fell from grace with the network and, in 2006, was ousted in a coup – a tactic that was also used to resolve the political crisis in the mid-1970s mentioned earlier – the military Council for National Security neither initiated a debate over the reasons for Thaksin's popularity in the countryside – which would have exposed the insufficiency of the royally initiated projects in rural Thailand – nor did their government do better at answering middle-class demands for incorruptible leaders. Instead, they enacted the Internal Security Act, which gave the military special power in times of crisis – probably with the goal of achieving military control over the royal succession.

Apart from toppling Thaksin as a rival kingmaker (see Thongchai 2006: 4; 2008: 30; Handley 2006b) and serving the various interests of his critics in the military, the business sector and the middle classes, the coup also tried to restore the palace's hegemony, especially over Thaksin's strong rural constituency, but this attempt was unsuccessful: Times had changed. Even the harshest critics of Thaksin suspect that his so-called “populist policies” had a positive impact. Giles (2001: 15) saw them as “an indication of social pressure from below and the re-entry of class struggle into parliamentary politics.” Connors (2008: 161) remarks that recent debates about the monarchy have “greatly affected its standing, especially among supporters of Thaksin's social and economic policies” and that this “offers the possibility of the emergence of a more widespread egalitarian sentiment to challenge the hierarchical [...] sentiment that surrounds the monarchy.” Anti-monarchy tendencies have become apparent among groups within the red shirt movement. Posters and slogans of those groups rarely make positive references to the monarchy. During the peak of the red shirts' protests in April and May 2010, there were images of King Taksin on an altar behind the stage where the red leaders prepared for their speeches in downtown Bangkok. King Taksin (r. 1768–82) was dethroned and executed by the first king of the currently ruling Chakri dynasty. Some dedicated followers of Thaksin are said to consider him a reincarnation of King Taksin and the executor of the latter's revenge against the current regime (Thahanek Krungthon 2010). Some works of graffiti and certain chants created by red shirts contain direct attacks against the sacred charisma of the monarchy and place blame for the killing of fellow demonstrators on people in high places (Ünalđi forthcoming). The excessive use of the *lèse majesté* law (Streckfuss

2011) by authorities smells of desperation in the wake of tectonic discursive shifts.

## Juan Carlos of Spain

The king of Spain rarely smiles. Preston (2005: 1) explains the “perpetually sad look” of Juan Carlos as compared to his cheerful nature as a boy by citing the tensions in his life as a member of the Bourbon (Borbón) dynasty and as a human being. This interpretation resembles the common view of Bhumibol as burdened by the duty of kingship.

Apart from similarities in appearance, other parallels can be drawn. Both kings were born in foreign countries, spent their early years in the royal sanctuary of Lausanne and, later, lost their brothers to gunshots. In addition, both were raised or influenced by conservative reactionaries and had to lend authority to military dictatorships. However, the main difference between the two is also the central myth of the life of Juan Carlos:

How [should] a prince emanating from a family with considerable authoritarian traditions, obliged to function within “rules” invented by General Franco, and brought up to be the keystone of a complex plan for the continuity of the dictatorship [...] have committed himself to democracy[?] (Preston 2005: 1).

To explore this mystery, one has to go back to 1931 when the Spanish monarchy was abolished, a republic declared, and King Alfonso XIII, who had backed a coup against a liberal constitutional regime in 1923, was sent into exile, deprived of his citizenship and possessions. Alfonso went not without calling on his supporters to undermine the new republic so that the Spaniards would eventually beg for his return (Preston 2005: 2). Over the following years, monarchists in Spain funded emerging fascist groups, catered to middle-class insecurity, “opted for violent extremism” and, in doing so, made “the first deliberate attempt to undermine the [new] democratic system” (Preston 1972: 89–90, 100–101). There is no need to mention in detail the striking parallels to royal activities in Thailand after 1932.

The growing polarisation between and within the right and the left, encouraged by Alfonsists and other so-called “catastrophists,” was fuelled by international developments and made civil war inevitable. In January 1938, Juan Carlos was born to Don Juan, son of Alfonso and heir to the vanished Spanish throne, and his wife Doña María. The Spanish Civil War was still raging but was eventually won by rightist General Francisco Franco in 1939. Against the hopes of the exiled Bourbon dynasty, the monarchy was not restored. Instead, Franco established a fascist dictatorship with a strong anti-monarchical wing, the Falange.

In 1941, former King Alfonso died in Rome, disappointed by his one-time ally, Franco, who did not allow the king's body to return to Spain – much like Phibun, whose government did not provide for Prajadhipok's cremation in Thailand (Handley 2006a: 60). Franco took on some monarchical traditions himself, assuming the headship of state, dispensing titles of nobility, naming bishops, issuing decrees, letting the royal march be played at his own public appearances; in short, he assumed “power of a kind previously enjoyed only by the kings of medieval Spain” (Preston 2005: 14–15, 39). In his endeavour to “seek a way out of centuries of decadence” (Preston 2005: 68), he linked “the greatness of imperial Spain with modern fascism” (Preston 2005: 19) with a totalitarian monarchy modelled after the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Catholic monarchs. In contrast to Franco, Phibun, who has likewise been labelled a fascist dictator, rejected the absolute kingship of the historical kingdom Ayutthaya in favour of a supposedly more egalitarian Sukhothai kingship, using history to undermine royal absolutism and to promote an approachable and quasi-democratic leadership (Beemer 1999: ch. 6). Therefore, Phibun made it somewhat easier for the monarchy of the Ninth Reign to smoothly link itself with the past, whereas the medieval version of monarchy Franco promoted in Spain made it necessary for Juan Carlos to refashion Spanish kingship himself if he would or could not continue the Franco dictatorship.

After moving to Switzerland in 1942, Don Juan chose as his son's first mentor the ultra-conservative Eugenio Vegas Latapié, a staunch royalist who had been active in the ideological fight against the republic, comparable to the conservative Thai Princes Dhani and Rangsit. With his rejection of democracy, his nostalgia for the Spanish Empire and a vision of a military kingship in mind, “he laid the basis for the boy's later conservatism” (Preston 2005: 17). Yet, Don Juan became a regulating force in Juan Carlos' life. He was the stern but farsighted father Bhumibol never had. When Juan Carlos refused to learn English because his mentor Latapié had painted Britain as Spain's archenemy, Don Juan asked Queen Elizabeth on one occasion to sit next to Juan Carlos at the lunch table “so that he feels ashamed at being unable to answer your questions” (in Preston 2005: 65). After this experience, Juan Carlos swallowed his patriotism and started to learn English.

Contrary to how he handled Juan Carlos' brother, Alfonsito, who spent much time with his parents, Don Juan tried to toughen his eldest son up for later tasks. And so he left him alone at a boarding school in Switzerland when the rest of the family moved to Estoril, Portugal, in 1946. Don Juan pointed out the advantages of the solitary life in exile as compared to life in

a palace where “the atmosphere of adulation so often clouded the vision of the powerful” (in Preston 2005: 23).

The restoration of the Spanish throne remained Don Juan’s main objective. Hence, in 1948 he met with Franco and consented to send Juan Carlos to Spain for education. He understood that Franco was the key to the future of the monarchy. With a vivid memory of the turbulent Second Republic in mind, royalists in Spain as well as Western powers abroad preferred Francoist stability to the uncertainties of a restoration. Franco, in turn, concluded that Spain must once again become a monarchy after his death because the alternative, a republic, had proven disastrous in his eyes. At age ten, Juan Carlos was “sold into slavery” (Preston 2005: 1) in Spain to be educated in the spirit of Francoism. Yet, Don Juan had *carte blanche* to pick his son’s tutors at his school outside of Madrid with its liberal headmaster José Garrido Casanova. The lawyer Torcuato Fernández-Miranda, who was entrusted with Juan Carlos’ political education when he took up his university studies in 1960, became an important mentor for the future king. Though handpicked by Franco and deeply conservative, he taught Juan Carlos patience, the value of debate, and to think independently (Preston 2005: 151–152).

Occasionally, Franco presented Juan Carlos with his version of history, advising him to avoid aristocrats and courtiers (Preston 2005: 90). In contrast to Bhumibol, Juan Carlos came to intimately know the country he would be ruling over and its major players from an early age and from various ideological perspectives.

Yet, it was not at all certain that Juan Carlos would follow Franco as king and head of state. The 1947 Ley de Sucesión (Law of Succession) institutionalised Spain as a monarchy, making it easier for Western powers to accept the dictatorship. But, until his death, Franco remained head of state and retained the prerogative of naming his royal successor, playing potentials off against each other. Don Juan, although the rightful claimant to the throne, was an unlikely candidate, with an English mother and an all-too-liberal education. Franco wanted to install his own monarchy, preferring Juan Carlos. Yet, to strengthen his own position vis-à-vis Don Juan, Franco promoted other candidates: Alfonso de Borbón y Dampierre, the son of Don Juan’s elder brother Don Jaime, who had renounced his rights to the throne in 1933; Don Jaime himself; the Carlist pretender Don Javier; and even Franco’s own grandson.

The Spanish Crown went through decades of uncertainty incomparable in scale to the Thai case. Traditional sources of royal legitimacy were constantly undermined. Considering that the Thai coup plotters of 1932 even in their most direct criticism of the monarchy could not free themselves from

using court language (Sombat 1992), Franco's reply in 1943 to a call by Don Juan for national reconciliation and royal restoration is telling:

Others might speak to you in the submissive tone imposed by their dynastic fervour or their ambitions as courtiers; but I, when I write to you, can do so only as the Head of State [...] addressing the Pretender to the throne (Preston 2005: 20–21).

In 1958 Franco, who regarded himself a modern Columbus, unsuccessfully tried to prevent Don Juan from crossing the Atlantic in his own yacht (Preston 2005: 124, 126–127). In contrast, Bhumibol's 14-hour sailing trip across the Gulf of Thailand in 1966 was presented as a great accomplishment, proving royal virtue (Handley 2006a: 158).

Don Juan crossed the Atlantic as a way to help get over the death of his youngest son, Alfonsito, who had died of a gunshot wound two years earlier at age 14 in Estoril while playing alone in a room with his brother, Juan Carlos. It is generally accepted that it was Juan Carlos who accidentally pulled the revolver's trigger. This version has never been denied by the royal family, although an official enquiry was not conducted. Basque author Sverlo implies possible ulterior motives when he argues that Alfonsito was more intelligent than Juan Carlos and was Don Juan's favourite son.<sup>8</sup> Sverlo (n. y.: 35) mentions rumours that Alfonsito might have been chosen by Don Juan to succeed him if he were given the throne, whereas Franco favoured Juan Carlos, who was "more manageable, just in line with what was needed to continue the [Francoist] regime under the direction of his followers."

Contrary to Bhumibol's brother, Ananda, Alfonsito did not posthumously become a political tool given the undeniable involvement of Juan Carlos, the passive confirmation of this version by monarchists, and Don Juan's dependence on Franco, who, for his part, did not want to draw attention to the incident because "people do not like princes who are out of luck," as Franco reportedly commented (in Preston 2005: 105).

Back in Spain, Juan Carlos was kept busy courting sympathy from classmates and the public. During his time at the military academy in Zaragoza, starting in 1955, he had to defend his father's name from attacks by the anti-royalist Falange press, the Falange being the regime's fascist core. It would probably never cross Juan Carlos' mind that his position in Spain was secure, let alone divine. With broad anti-monarchical movements on the political right and, needless to say, among communists and socialists, and a dictator gambling with royal figures on a chessboard, Juan Carlos decided to

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8 Sverlo is a male Basque journalist who wrote the critical biography *Un Rey Golpe a Golpe* under a (female) pseudonym and does not mention his sources. As Preston (personal correspondence) described the book: "It is interesting but clearly biased."

take part in initiation rites at the military academy, preventing others from treating him deferentially, using his status to the benefit of his comrades and letting people address him informally (Preston 2005: 95–100).

After the total failure of an economic model based on national self-sufficiency in the mid-1950s, technocrats of the Catholic lay organisation *Opus Dei* took over the regime's administration, introducing economic liberalisation which eventually led to an economic boom for Spain in the 1960s – at a time when Thailand, too, was experiencing a stable period of growth. Mounting anti-government protests, which were at times brutally suppressed, the liberalisation of the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), and the growing appeal of European integration were accompanied by the fading health of Franco who, in 1969, officially declared Juan Carlos his successor, thereby severely worsening the relationship between Juan Carlos and an embittered Don Juan, who had harboured hopes of becoming king himself.<sup>9</sup> On 20 January 1975 *El Caudillo* died, believing that the institutions he had established would keep Juan Carlos' regime on the same track:

By excluding the monarchy from Spain for 40 years and by his arrogance in nominating his own royal successor, Franco seemed to have destroyed any political neutrality Juan Carlos might have enjoyed, just as he had undermined the monarchy's other two central attributes of continuity and legitimacy (Preston 2005: 330).

As heir to Franco, Juan Carlos was considered a weak puppet. To prove his critics wrong and to prevent the monarchy from becoming a mere rubber stamp for the continuation of the *ancien régime*, Juan Carlos had to decide whether to exert his extensive constitutional and executive powers to link himself with Spain's authoritarian past or to give Spanish kingship new legitimacy by turning it into a catalyst of democracy and accommodating his critics on the left and right. His stern and comparably down-to-earth upbringing and historical as well as political consciousness made him choose the latter option. Also, his father declared he would renounce his right to the throne only if Juan Carlos implemented full democratic reforms (Preston 2005: 321–322).

Contrary to Bhumibol, who in times of crisis had no constitutional responsibility to intervene in politics, Juan Carlos had been entrusted with direct authority. As Bernecker (1998: 72) puts it, “Juan Carlos [...] was far more powerful than any other monarch in Europe.” Hence, in close collab-

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9 In response to Franco's announcement, Don Juan disbanded his 80-man-strong Consejo Privado (Privy Council) in July 1969. Juan Carlos did not establish a Privy Council of his own. Hence, no such powerful royal institution exists in Spain.

oration with his advisors and mentors, Juan Carlos assigned posts to pragmatic politicians and managed to sidestep the stubborn old guard. Juan Carlos and his close aides chose the young and able Adolfo Suárez as prime minister. Importantly, the king toured the country to gain popular support for the transition. Through his personal military friendships and his position as Franco's successor, Juan Carlos could keep most generals in check. Meanwhile, he became convinced – not least by the example of his father, who was close to the democratic opposition – that the legalisation and inclusion of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE – Partido Comunista de España) was crucial for the consolidation of the coming constitutional system.

Inevitably, the military resisted the dismantling of the old regime. Two planned coups in 1978 and 1979 were averted, in part because the government limited the supply of munitions and fuel. Repeatedly calling on soldiers to respect the rule of law and constitutional norms, Juan Carlos made it clear that a coup would not have his backing. However, rumours flourished that generals were lobbying for a government of national salvation under the leadership of General Alfonso Armada, who was on good terms with the king. When, at the beginning of 1981, Suárez resigned as PM, Juan Carlos did not give in to Armada but, on 10 February, invited Leopoldo Calvo Sotelo, member of the ruling Union of the Democratic Centre (UCD – Unión de Centro Democrático), to form a government. Yet, giving his co-conspirators the impression that the king would back a coup, Armada went on with his plans. On 23 February Colonel Antonio Tejero, accompanied by 320 members of the Guardia Civil, stormed the Spanish parliament, the Cortes, and took the parliamentarians hostage. Over the next several hours, Juan Carlos and his aides rang various strategic players to undermine the coup-makers' claim that the putsch was carried out in the name of the king. "Only he stood between Spanish democracy and its destruction," Preston (2005: 475) writes. At 1:15 a.m. Juan Carlos appeared on television, ending his brief speech with the following statement:

The crown, symbol of the permanence and unity of the Fatherland, cannot tolerate any actions or attitudes by those who aim to interrupt by force the democratic process determined by the popularly ratified Constitution (in Preston 2005: 481–482).

Even if one wants to believe that Juan Carlos was involved in an unsuccessful "constitutional" or "smooth" coup,<sup>10</sup> he did not agree to a tearing up of

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10 Sverlo (n. y.: ch. 12), argues that Juan Carlos was involved in the coup because he benefitted from it the most. His intervention made him indispensable in the eyes of his people. Apart from an overall dissatisfaction with Suárez, Sverlo refers to US

the constitution, to whose success he had dedicated himself. Finally, in 1982, the socialist PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español) won the general elections, fulfilling an old prediction by Don Juan to his son that “the monarchy would not be fully consolidated until it had coexisted with a socialist government” (Preston 2005: 431). The Spanish democracy matured, contravening Franco’s assertions that “the Spanish temperament made liberal experiments disastrous” (Preston 2005: 196) and that a democratic system would unleash “Spain’s family demons” amongst which he ranks a “lack of cooperative endeavour” (Preston 2005: 203). History proved him wrong.

## Setting the Stage: Structures

Most generally, democracy is defined as a system in which the

most powerful collective decision-makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote (Huntington 1993: 7).

According to this definition, Thailand fails to meet the most basic democratic requirements since, as the paper showed earlier, the most powerful decision-makers are not necessarily elected. And if the definition is extended to a substantive conception of democracy comprising inclusiveness, social justice and freedom from corruption and coercive practices, Spain must be considered much more democratic than Thailand. The influence of their respective kings has been a significant factor for the unequal development of these two “third-wave” democracies, but existing structures played a part as well. Whereas Thai conditions encouraged a “backward legitimation” of Bhumibol’s reign, Juan Carlos was more likely to adopt “forward legitimation.”

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pressure on Juan Carlos to initiate a policy change in order for Spain to join NATO, a move Suárez was not fond of. According to this version, Juan Carlos and Armada planned a “smooth coup” within the constitutional framework, leaving Tejero in the dark, sacrificing him. Tejero was made to believe that he had executed a full-blown “hard coup”. Armada would then walk into the Cortes and present himself as the solution. Involved parliamentarians would accept Armada’s proposal to form a government of national salvation to which the king would solemnly agree – all without breaching constitutional laws. However, Tejero rejected Armada’s solution, leading to the abortion of the coup. As evidence, Sverlo cites Juan Carlos’ 1980 Christmas speech: “We consider politics as a means to obtain an aim and not an aim in itself” (112). The author mentions a suspicious meeting on the eve of 6 February, when Juan Carlos and Armada dined and talked until early morning. In his later trial, Tejero held that Armada had told him: “The monarchy needs strengthening, for that reason His Majesty has ordered this operation to me” (114).



## Spain – Structures

Spain has long been treated as an exceptional part of Europe. The Iberian Peninsula of the nineteenth century was regarded by romantics as a harmonious, backward region which had deliberately preserved old social structures and values. In the eyes of these observers the Spanish Inquisition had successfully fended off Northern intellectualism. Localism and traditional morality had been preserved in Spanish villages studied by Anglo-Saxon anthropologists of that time.<sup>11</sup> However, what had long been overlooked was the history of liberal struggle in Spain and the many breaks with tradition.

With the Habsburg succession in 1516 – Charles I (r. 1516–56) ruled simultaneously as Holy Roman Emperor Charles V – humanist thinking gained ground among Spanish intellectuals (Kamen 2000: 154–155; Barton 2004: 159–160). The Bourbon succession in 1700 was followed by centralising measures and a growing spirit of the Enlightenment under Charles III (r. 1759–88). When, after the invasion of Spain by Napoleonic troops in 1808, the Spanish king had to abdicate, Spaniards rebelled against foreign rule. They revived the Cortes, an ancient institution of local parliaments composed of magnates, prelates and representatives of towns dating back to the early thirteenth century (Barton 2004: 78–79, 138).

Though not genuinely representative, the Cortes summoned in Cádiz in 1810 was of great importance:

Since legitimacy could only derive from society [because the king was exiled], the representation of society was becoming an urgent necessity. [...] It was in this key period that the foundations of modern politics in the Hispanic world were laid and political practices emerged that promised a good future (Demélas-Bohy and Guerra 1996: 34).

In 1812, the Cortes drafted a constitution that established a liberal parliamentary monarchy. Yet, after his return to Spain in 1814, the popular King Ferdinand VII abrogated the constitution as he saw no need for constitutional restraints on his power. In 1820 a revolution was led by disaffected military officers who had been denied promotions – the similarities to Thailand in 1932 are evident. They joined the liberals and “proclaimed” the 1812 constitution, whereupon Ferdinand had to agree to become a constitutional monarch. With this first *pronunciamento*, as each Spanish coup came to be known, the foundations for a turbulent political future were laid (Barton

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11 For a short discussion of conventional historiography and today’s revisionism see Carr (2000a: 1–9). Carr believes that the old Francoist slogan “Spain is different” no longer holds ground.

2004: 164–167, 169–171; Herr 2000: 197–201). In 1823 the authoritarian powers took revenge and killed the liberal leaders of the 1820 revolution with the consent of large parts of the population, who, as Herr (2000: 203) puts it, “still largely devout, would not defend a constitution that gave them the vote but, as their preachers told them, threatened their salvation.”

However, to fanatical Catholics Ferdinand was still too enlightened and not absolute enough, making it necessary for the king to ally himself with moderate liberals. When Ferdinand died in 1833, the throne fell to his daughter Isabella II, to the outrage of radical royalists who wanted to see Ferdinand’s hardline brother, Don Carlos, on the throne. Carlism was born and the Carlist dynasty remained a constant threat to Ferdinand’s royal lineage.

The following decades were dominated by *pronunciamentos*, formalised coups, executed by generals on behalf of the Moderate or the Progressive Party, which alternated being in power. The system somewhat resembled Thailand’s twentieth-century experience. What remained of 1812 were economic liberalism and modern political institutions, whereas social reforms were abandoned. An urban bourgeoisie teamed up with the traditional land-owning aristocracy and – as in Thailand – “political power was to become a particular preserve of an ‘enlightened’ middle class” (Barton 2004: 185). Spain in the nineteenth century had its own Phibuns, Sarits and Preams. As Lambert (1982: 14) put it, “[t]he Iberian Peninsula [...] was] the ‘Third World’ of that period,” when modern political structures clashed with a traditional society.

In the 1860s, Queen Isabella lost patience with the constitutional system and appointed reactionary governments to office (Barton 2004: 190). Large sections of the Spanish populace grew increasingly impatient with their queen, who had earned a bad reputation. The leaders of another *pronunciamento* in 1868 sent Isabella into exile and, in the wake of this “Glorious Revolution” proclaimed a progressive constitution. In 1873 a short-lived republic was established, dissolving into chaos the following year. Alfonso XII, son of Isabella, was restored as king and the Restoration system was installed. The monarchy was weakened until Alfonso XIII reached majority age and reasserted his prerogatives (Lambert 1982: 18).

The system of constitutional monarchy guided by the elite eventually collapsed as it “could not accommodate new forces” (Lambert 1982: 19). In the 1910s, the established political party system broke down due to the emergence of new social and political forces, leading Alfonso XIII to back the establishment of a military dictatorship in 1923. The unresolved problem of accommodating new political demands – a problem Thailand is currently facing – led to the Second Republic (1931–36) and the Spanish Civil War.

When Juan Carlos became king he understood that he could not repeat the mistakes of his royal ancestors and the political right. As Preston states:

I think that his advisors made it clear to him that there could be no long-term future if he did what Franco and other right-wingers had wanted. The problem wasn't a choice between traditional values and democratic ideas but between brutal authoritarianism and democratic ideas (Personal correspondence, 2008).

After more than 150 years of liberal struggle, Spaniards finally had to be given a voice in a democratic system. Yet, as Bernecker (1998: 77) notes, of the three Weberian types of legitimate domination – traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal – “Juan Carlos then had at his disposal [...] only one: the legal” (see also Weber 1978: 215). Juan Carlos' legal right to rule had its roots in the Francoist state, thus initially giving the king a “backward legitimacy”:

The king and his government were in a position to use, and used laws and institutions of the old [Franco] regime [...] to seek a “backward” legitimization [...]. [...] Yet, as inheritors of a divisive past they could ill-afford [...] to arrest or distort the surge of new parties on the other side of the political spectrum; but they were also in a better position to promote it, thus at the same time legitimising themselves “forward” (Di Palma 1980: 170).

When, in 1977, Don Juan finally renounced his rights to the throne and dynastic harmony was restored, Juan Carlos was finally able to start building on the traditional source of legitimacy. Yet, Bernecker (1998: 78) points out that the strongest source of legitimacy was neither legal nor traditional but that “deriving from the democratic charisma” of the Spanish monarchy. “Therefore, given the various options of legitimising his rule, Juan Carlos and his advisors chose the democratic-charismatic,” notes Bernecker, who goes on to argue that

the legal rationale and traditional legitimising based on historic grounds were not considered. This was due to the structural weakness of the Spanish monarchy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries [and] the dynastic disputes in the royal palace (Bernecker 1998: 78–79).

Likewise, Gunther (1992: 44) notes that in Spain, with all its historic breaks, “there has been no continuous flow of tradition, no continuous transmission of cultural heritage, no continuous process of selection of the past.” Spain had experienced two republics in which kings were absent, along with a fascist dictatorship that constantly devalued the monarchy. Religion – an important feature of Thai kingship – was not available to provide a source

of traditional power, either. Preston (personal correspondence, 2008) explains that there might have been a connection between monarchy and Catholicism before 1931, “but not now, other than cordial relations of protocol. Juan Carlos is not head of the Church in the way that the Queen of England is.” Thus, the links to the past were thin. Juan Carlos saw the need to move forward, presenting himself as a “pilot of change.”

Other structural factors which contributed to a successful elite settlement in Spain that I will briefly mention here are the demands of Spanish capitalism, the strength of the movements of dissent (Maravall 1978: 170–171), less ideological polarisation following the economic boom of the 1960s, a gradual extrication of the Spanish military from domestic politics and a limited liberalisation of the political system in anticipation of Franco’s death, European integration providing democratic incentives, and a generational change among politicians, which, however, was facilitated by Juan Carlos’ political appointments. It is still important to point out that many circumstances were not favourable:

The new regime’s worst political crisis [...] coincided with a severe drought, a disastrous decline of several key industrial sectors, and rates of unemployment that eventually reached 22 per cent of the labour force [...]. And yet, support for the system among the general public, key national elites, secondary organisations, and political parties remained solid (Gunther 1992: 39–40).

## Thailand – Structures

Compared to the Spanish monarchy, Thailand’s ruling Chakri dynasty enjoys historical continuity. The focus here is on Thailand’s “institutional continuity spanning centuries and thus transmitting ‘Indianised’ forms, with their accompanying political culture, in a very direct way down to the twentieth century” (Kershaw 2001: 11). Whereas Thai kingship was continually refined over the centuries, combining ideas of righteous kingship with magical divinity, the Spanish monarchy even in its heyday never had a thaumaturgic or magical appeal across society, but practised instead a personalised kingship, receiving petitioners and touring the country (Fernández-Armesto 2000: 122–123).

In contrast to the brief Napoleonic colonisation of Spain, which empowered certain strata of Spanish people in the absence of a king, the project of self-colonisation triggered by the arrival of Western colonial powers to Thailand was an elite project a part of whose purpose was to preserve royal power. And, as already mentioned, the partial absorption of the royal discourse into modernity by the Phibun regime did not radically undermine

the ideological strength of the monarchy but made it all that much easier for the Thai nobility to stage a comeback after the fall of the post-revolutionary regime. Connors' (2007: 271) analysis of the case of Thaksin might also be true for Phibun: "Thaksin's fatal weakness was that while in power he did nothing to challenge royal ideology at an ideological level." Compared to politics in Francoist Spain with broad anti-monarchical forces on the left and right, the monarchy in Thailand could always harbour hopes of its resurrection in traditional form despite Phibun's leaning toward fascism and his cultural edicts to modernise Thailand. For the most part, Phibun's ideology existed alongside royal ideology, for some time overshadowing it, but the former was seldom expressly directed against the latter. In short, the legitimacy of the monarchy itself was never questioned on a scale comparable to the Spanish case. That means that in 1946, the Thai royalty was simply not yet insecure enough to realise the necessity for "forward legitimization" as opposed to the uncertainty lingering over the Spanish royals. Turning back the clock and reviving and inventing royal rituals by presenting Bhumibol as a modern *dharmaraja* was still tempting. Applying Weber's (1978) three sources of legitimacy to the Thai case, first and foremost traditional means were used to construct a sacred charisma around Bhumibol, in contrast to the democratic charisma of Juan Carlos. This sacred charisma could then be used to connect Bhumibol with a more modern discourse of rational, democratic leadership, the latter effectively glossing over the underlying and pervading traditionalism, or – in terms of the direction of legitimization – backwardness.

Kershaw, who believes that the Thai king truly aims to lead his people into a self-reliant future dominated neither by the military nor by royal charisma, points to the

king's dilemma that in order to liberate Thai society from the thrall of its history he in effect exploits the historical charisma of his position, whose roots could be traced [...] back beyond the Chakri dynasty to Ayut'ia [Ayutthaya], with its much depreciated ideology of the absolutist God-king (Kershaw 2001: 153).

Shifting the focus from factors of legitimacy to history it has to be stressed that the centralisation of the Thai state at the end of the nineteenth century had, a century before, already been accomplished in Spain. Hence, a revolution against the centralised absolute monarchy in Spain preceded the Thai revolution of 1932 by almost a century. The radical attempts by Spanish monarchists to regain their power after 1820 lasted over a century until a civil war and a fascist dictatorship caused royalists to agree to a liberal and inclusive system. The struggle of monarchists, sections of the nobility, military, economic elites and the middle class against a full-scale democratisation

in nineteenth-century Spain is now shattering Thailand. The impatience of some Thai royalists with the constitutional system bears more resemblance to the conduct of Isabella II in the 1860s and Alfonso XIII in 1923 than to Juan Carlos, as the former monarchs were much closer to tradition than the latter. One could say that Spain needed a civil war in order for the royalists to acknowledge that change was necessary. Thailand's streets recently got soaked in blood, as well, when Thais were killing Thais on Ratchadamnoen Avenue in Bangkok's old city and around Ratchaprasong intersection in the commercial heart of the city.

Finally, comparing other structural factors in the crucial phase of the 1970s in Spain and Thailand, commonalities can be found such as uprisings against the government or communist (in Thailand) and separatist (in Spain) rebellions. Yet, the differences are more important – namely, the Spanish experience of civil war and the resulting historical consciousness of the elite, and, crucially, international developments. Whereas Europe was integrating and exerting pressure on Spain to move forward, Southeast Asia was in the grip of Cold War clashes. The fall of the Lao monarchy in 1975 made it all the easier for the Thai court and its allies to feel threatened.

## Elite Settlements: When Man Makes History

[A] leader who cannot become an autocrat has an incentive to cooperate with others in establishing a non-autocratic government (Olson 2000: 33).

The above quotation by American economist Olson seems to imply that it is simply the circumstances that prevent leaders from becoming autocrats. However, elsewhere Olson points out that “historical outcomes surely depend not only on the incentives and self-interest of those with power but also on their morals and temperaments” (Olson 2000: 3).

The discussion of the two monarchs' personal backgrounds here was meant to stress this aspect of Spanish and Thai democratisation. The kings' upbringing and mentors – or lack thereof – influenced their decisions. Their morals and intellectual grasp shaped their attitudes toward democracy which, through their extensive legal or traditional powers, they were able to put into practice in their negotiations with other actors. In this process, their temperaments became important.

Gunther stresses that earlier discussions of the Spanish transition concluded that

although mass-level, social structural, international, and temporal factors all contributed to the consolidation of Spanish democracy in the

1970s and early 1980s, they were less decisive than were the actions of political elites (Gunther 1992: 43).

Later, Gunther (1992: 76) repeats that an analysis of the Spanish transition “cannot ignore the basic values, historical memories, and behavioural styles of individual members of the political elite.” He argues that

a different series of events would have transpired [...] if it had been Juan Carlos who had been accidentally killed by his brother [...]; or if King Juan Carlos had behaved like his grandfather, Alfonso XIII (Gunther 1992: 77–78).

One is tempted to ask what would have become of Thai democracy if, in 1939, Pridi-admirer and then-regent Prince Aditya had been elevated to the throne by Phibun (e.g. Kobkua 2003: 130–131; Handley 2006: 60–61). Or what if, after the abdication of Prajadhipok, Prince Varananda Dhavaj – born from a commoner consort to the deceased Prince Chudadhuj Dhara-dilok, who ranked higher in the succession line than Bhumibol’s father Prince Mahidol (Ünalđi 2012, forthcoming) – or the last surviving celestial son of King Chulalongkorn, Prince Paripatra, had been chosen as Rama XIII instead of being kept in exile after the 1932 revolution? Paripatra’s grandson, Sukhumbhand, is the current governor of Bangkok, a member of the Democrat Party and has for some time been counted among the critics of the present reign.

And yet, history made Bhumibol the longest-reigning monarch in the world. Over six decades, Thai monarchists successfully established royal hegemony. Bhumibol was left fatherless, grew up abroad, was never groomed to be king and was probably insecure as a young man brought up in posh Lausanne who was suddenly put under an ancient crown. He needed guidance from his courtiers, and their version of history, politics and society became a source of his reign. Throughout his long reign, he allowed the ideological synchronisation of the political discourse to occur, a discourse which is now to a great extent dominated by royalism. The king did little to mediate between conservatives and progressives, certainly also because this was not his constitutional role. But, as Burton and colleagues have noted:

A key to the democratic stability and survival of democratic regimes is [...] the establishment of substantial consensus among elites concerning rules of the democratic political game and the worth of democratic institutions (Burton, Gunther, and Higley 1992: 3).

Such an elite consensus seems impossible in today’s Thailand. Royal ideology has been used to suppress dissent, and the palace does not intervene in

the Maoist-like cult that has grown around the king to an extent that is even worrying those who respect the monarchy but fear a collapse of the royal bubble. A pluralistic environment is fundamental to a democratic elite settlement, as Gunther (1992: 70) has noted in the Spanish case: “An ideologically unified elite [...] might well have had no intention of democratising.” But pluralism may be on the rise in Thailand, too. Over the past years, political rifts among Thai elites have become apparent and this has already triggered a process of bargaining. This development might eventually lead to a democratic elite settlement or, in the worst case, to a chaotic continuation of power struggles to the disadvantage of the general public.

Even though the royal discourse in Thailand depends on Bhumibol’s passivity, the king himself has made use of his symbolic power to spread exclusive ideas of what being Thai means. In 2008, he was quoted as having told a delegation of Burmese generals that “the examples of some Western powers stood witness to the fact that too much democracy was not good” (*New Light of Myanmar* 2008). As Lambert has noted for the case of Spain:

The right has always regarded democracy as in some way “inauthentic”: Franco, in particular, was scathing in his attacks on “the liberal institutions which have poisoned our people” (Lambert 1982: 13).

Of course, the Spanish monarchy is not without faults, either. Like most monarchs, Juan Carlos is constitutionally placed above his fellow citizens. According to Article 56, Section 3, “the person of the King is inviolable and shall not be held accountable.” Spain has its own laws regarding the monarchy. Articles 485 to 491 of the Criminal Code relate to “felonies against the Crown.” Killing members of the royal family is punishable with up to 25 years imprisonment, causing injuries with 15 to 20 years. Hence, in order to receive a jail term of 15 years – the maximum jail term in Thailand for merely defaming the monarchy – in Spain one would at least have to physically hurt members of the royal family. On the issue of defamation, or *lèse majesté*, Article 490, Section 3 of the Criminal Code reads:

Whoever commits slander or defamation against the King or any of his ascendants or descendants, the Queen Consort or the Queen’s Consort, the Regent or any member of the Regency, or the Heir to the Throne, while carrying out the duties of office or due to or on occasion thereof, shall be punished with a sentence of imprisonment of six months to two years if the slander or defamation are serious and with that of a fine of six to twelve months if not (Ministerio de Justicia 2011: 150–151).

In 2007 two caricaturists were fined 3,000 EUR each for having mocked Crown Prince Felipe on the cover of a satirical magazine.



Over and above Juan Carlos' fondness for yachts, cars, women and hunting, rumours persist of "obscure financial operations making him vulnerable to be blackmailed" (Campmany 2007). A recent biography of Queen Sofia (Eyres 2012) describes the king as a professional womaniser and his marriage with Sofia a failure. A corruption scandal involving Juan Carlos' son-in-law Iñaki Urdangarin forced the monarchy in 2011 to disclose the detailed budget of the royal household (8.4 million EUR/year). According to the figures, Juan Carlos pays 40 per cent tax on his income and receives an annual stipend of 140,519 EUR (Royal Household 2011). Even though these were comparably meagre figures – they dwarf when compared to Thailand where, in 2011, the government allotted 2.6 billion THB (approximately 65 million EUR) to the Bureau of the Royal Household (Grossman and Faulder 2011: 300)<sup>12</sup> – they still reminded Spaniards that, in a dire economic situation, they are funding an institution whose legitimacy was dealt a further blow when it came out in April 2012 that Juan Carlos, honorary president of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), broke his hip on an expensive elephant hunting trip in Botswana for which the king eventually made an unprecedented public apology. Unlike in Thailand, however, where the public opinion of the people toward the monarchy has never been measured in numbers, leading Spanish newspapers subsequently published surveys assessing whether the Spaniards forgave their king. It turned out 70 per cent did. One of the numbers published in *La Razón* revealed that 50.2 per cent believed the monarchy was an essential institution. According to *El Mundo*, young Spaniards were less forgiving but overall, 73 per cent of all respondents consider King Juan Carlos' reign to have been good or very good (*La Razón* 2012; *El Mundo* 2012).

The figures show that Juan Carlos is more popular than the monarchy itself. Therefore, Spaniards are commonly characterised not as monarchists but as *Juancarlistas* – just as many Thais may turn out to be *Bhumibolistas* after the looming royal succession, even though Ockey (2005: 123–124) suggests that Bhumibol has sufficiently stabilised and prepared the monarchy for the changes to come. Against Ockey I would rather argue that, with the looming successions, both monarchies are facing the tough challenge of routinising

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12 As in Thailand, additional expenses such as security and transportation costs, official trips and visits by members of the royal family are met by the respective government ministries – in Thailand, this raises government spending for the monarchy to around 150 million EUR (Grossman and Faulder 2011: 300). Corresponding numbers for the Spanish case are not available but can be expected to be much lower. Data on the assets of the Spanish monarchy (landholdings, etc.) are not available so no comparison with the value of the Thai Crown Property Bureau can be made.

their traditional or democratic charisma, respectively, which has hitherto been their source of legitimacy. As for the Spanish case, Spaniards with some reason respect Juan Carlos as a democrat who has contributed to their country's political development. But the monarchy has been put at risk by the recent missteps of members of the House of Bourbon, including the king, at a time when the Spanish nation faces a deep crisis. The future of the Spanish monarchy thus depends on the continued success of Spanish democracy and on the continuation of the monarchy's democratic appeal. As Preston (2008, personal correspondence) states, "[Crown Prince] Felipe's best chance is [to stress] the greatest thing that the monarchy can offer Spanish democracy – an entirely neutral headship of state." To end with Bernecker:

Democratising, as the Spanish example shows, is by no means the only conceivable "logical" result of a crisis of authoritarian powers. Only the decision of authoritative political operatives favouring certain strategies leads in a specific context to a preference for democratic institutions [...]. The appropriate strategy and the result in the democratising process finally legitimised and stabilised the entire system (Bernecker 1998: 83).

## Conclusion

The comparative approach was applied here to counter claims that the Thai monarchy is too unique to be compared. The approach revealed similarities and differences to contribute to an understanding of the dissimilar developments in Thailand and Spain.

Structural factors for the two kings' different levels of commitment to democracy were analysed and it was argued that the Spanish conditions in the 1970s were more favourable to moderation among elites than the polarisation in Thailand was, triggered in part by the effects of the Cold War on mainland Southeast Asia. These structural factors provided the backdrop against which the kings acted or refrained from acting. Their choices were influenced by their personal histories, their educations, their values, the intellect and morals of the monarchs as individuals, and, probably even more important, by their mentors and courtly advisors. As was shown, Juan Carlos' character had been shaped by his father's desire to prepare his son for later tasks. Therefore, he was able to see the need for negotiations and inclusiveness. Due to his unforeseen accession to the throne and the traditional powers he had inherited, Bhumibol found it easier to look back instead of forward. It would have been an historic achievement by an individual monarch if, despite unfavourable circumstances, Bhumibol had helped

to foster a more conciliatory and inclusive socio-political environment in the polarised 1970s. But Bhumibol is only human and as a human being – not as a demi-god – he should be discussed.

Constitutional monarchs in a modern age can be beneficial to democracy if they strictly adhere to their role as neutral mediators in times of severe crises and, with their symbolic authority, strengthen the political system by committing themselves to constitutionalism and the rule of law – a law they do not themselves manipulate. However, as the embodiment of an old hierarchical order, they potentially provide the ideological basis for elite sectors to give a veneer of naturalness to social inequalities. If this ideology is set up or tacitly accepted by the monarchs themselves, they act against the well-being of their people.

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