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THE DYNAMICS OF DEMOCRATIZATION AND THE IMPLICATIONS ON THAILAND'S FOREIGN POLICY

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Abstract: *As Thailand undergoes a long democratization process, significant barriers to the country's consolidation of democracy include reserved domains and tutelary powers. While states are usually treated as homogenous units in understanding their behaviors in the international arena, the internal processes are important determinants of states' actions. Therefore, the swings in the embeddedness of Thai reserved domains and tutelary powers can shape the domestic constraints that governmental actors face in foreign policy formulations. In this paper, the Thai democratization trajectory was investigated in a comparative study to trace the changes in the prevalence of reserved domains and tutelary powers in different periods. Then, through an exploration into Thailand's foreign policy decisions that the country enacted towards the major powers and the neighboring countries in the Cold War and the post-Cold War periods, these foreign policy actions were scrutinized in connection to the dynamic of the decision-making apparatus of the time. The information was compiled through official papers, government statements, newspapers, and scholarly literature. The paper demonstrates that when tutelary powers and reserved domains are highly embedded in the policy-making structure, and conflicting standpoints on a foreign policy decision are presented, the outcomes of the policy-making process will lean towards the camp advocated by the non-democratic actors.*

Keywords: *Democratization; Foreign Policy; Reserved Domain; Tutelary Power*

INTRODUCTION

While states are usually treated as black boxes in understanding their behaviors within the international arena, the internal processes influencing a state's actions cannot be dismissed. In the case of Thailand, the country has long been drifting within the democratization process. The substantial roadblocks to democracy include reserved domains that are specific areas of government authority removed from elected officials' purview and tutelary powers, which constitute nonelected elites who can exercise policy-making decisions. Accordingly, the ebbs and flows of the Thai reserved domains and tutelary powers can shape the domestic constraints that governmental actors face in formulating foreign policy. Firstly, this paper's analytical framework explains the entanglement of reserved domains and tutelary powers in the consolidation of democracy and the application of domestic politics to the understanding of foreign policy-making. Secondly, the paper employs a comparative study to investigate the rise and fall in the prevalence of reserved domains and tutelary powers in different chronological

periods. Thirdly, the paper provides a descriptive elaboration of different foreign policy decisions of the Thai government towards the major powers and neighboring countries during the Cold War and the post-Cold War periods when conflicting standpoints are presented in the policy-making apparatus. The cases include the shift in Thailand's approach towards the United States and China during the democratic interlude in the 1970s, the Thai government's permission to allow the entry of Nobel Peace Prize laureates in the 1990s, the Thai engagement in the conflict with Cambodia in the 2000s, and the Thai decision to construct the high-speed railway in connection with China's Belt Road Initiative in the 2010s. The information for this research relied on primary and secondary sources: official papers, government statements, English-language and Thai-language newspapers, and scholarly literature. Overall, the research provides empirical evidence regarding Thailand's understanding of the relationship between democratization and foreign policy.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

While democratization or regime transition towards democracy necessarily demands the existence of elections, elections alone are not a sufficient condition for a democratic state. For instance, in 'Toward Consolidated Democracies', Linz and Stepan (1996) separate consolidated democracy into three dimensions measured behaviorally, attitudinally, and constitutionally which demand the conditions of free and lively civil society, autonomous political society, usable bureaucracy, the effective rule of law and institutionalized economic society (Linz and Stepan 1996, 15-18). Valenzuela (1992) describes that "reserved domains remove specific areas of governmental authority and substantive policy-making from the purview of elected officials" (p. 70). Additionally, tutelary powers exist when "those who win the government-forming elections are placed in state power and policy-making positions that are subordinate to those of nonelected elites" (p. 63). With reserved domains and tutelary powers, the consolidation of democracy is deficient, especially in terms of behavioral consolidation, illustrated in the work of Linz and Stepan (1996). That is because, in a democratic regime, no actor shall attempt or act in ways to achieve their objective by creating a non-democratic environment.

Moreover, in 'Embedded and Defective Democracies', liberal democracies comprise partial regimes of democracy located within the sphere of external enabling conditions. One of the essential partial regimes of democracy includes the guarantee of effective power to govern. Regarding reserved domains, Wolfgang Merkel (2004) states,

[T]his criterion prevents extra-constitutional actors not subject to democratic accountability, like the military or other powerful actors, from holding decision-making power in certain policy domains. Specifically, this refers to so-called reserved policy domains, areas over which the government and parliament do not possess sufficient decision-making authority, as well as the specific problem of insufficient control over the military and the police. It is crucial for the concept of embedded democracy that the effective power to govern lies in the hands of democratically elected representatives (p. 41).

Furthermore, Merkel (2004) stipulates various causes of defective democracies, which provide opportunities for critical actors to behave undemocratically. While the combination of causes is ultimately responsible for the emergence of defective democracies, to account for the prevalence or resilience of tutelary powers and reserved domains, the interplay during the transition towards democracy concerning the elites is deemed crucial. As seen in the seminal works on democratic transitions, such as those of Dankwart Rustow or of O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead, democratic transitions are considered mainly to be ushered forward by or as a product of elite interactions. Rustow (1970) notes that while the interplay of many factors instigates democratization, only a small circle of elites tends to play a disproportionate role in negotiating the terms of the process. In 'Transitions from Authoritarian Rule', O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead (1986) analyze contending political elites' choices and strategic interactions to form political pacts conducive to democracy. While the elites can be perceived as playing essential roles in initiating the transition, the country's democratic process can also be stalled by the interference of its elite groups. As Georg Sorensen (2008) states, "such groups as the military, traditional economic elites, and leading politicians may insist that the transition toward democracy includes acceptance of a set of agreements or political pacts that define vital areas of interest for the elites" (p. 70). In other words, in places where the existing elites accompany the country's transition, the democratization process can be dictated by the minorities who were able to assume tutelary roles, exercise political power and ensure that their interests are not affected in the new and more open arena.

In connection to foreign policy-making, studies into the unit-level characteristics of the states are increasingly recurrent in academic purviews of international affairs. As the focus on opening the states' black boxes to explain the engagements in international affairs began to bloom in the past four decades, the domestic political factors are among the various unit-level characteristics featured. They encompass the regime types, domestic institutional structures, and politics in the policy-making process that are believed to shape the countries' foreign policy. For instance, in the work of Doyle (1983), the democratic regime type constitutes institutional constraints through institutionalized rules and procedures that cause unilateral decisions by the leaders to be difficult and forestall the government from engaging in violent foreign policy actions.

With regards to domestic institutional structures, Robert Putnam's (1988) 'Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Game' is an influential work that presents states' international affairs as two coinciding games that link the deals between international actors to the domestic political constraints to which the chief negotiator must also respond. Bueno de Mesquita and Smith (2012) also elaborate that decision-makers face varying pressures based on the states' political structures, which underscore different levels of accountability. Likewise, governments that have autonomy from democratic accountability measures such as the legislative process, elections, or performance monitors can encounter fewer limits to the government's foreign policy decisions than democratic or democratizing states (Park, Ko, and Kim 1994).

In consideration of domestic opposition, the opposition's strength and intensity impact the states' foreign policy behavior, as presented in Hagan's (1993) work that specifies the influence of political party opposition on a government's control over policy processes.

Furthermore, while the executive branch tends to be more visible in foreign policy matters considered high politics, the study by Kaarbo and associates (2017) amplifies the fact that the parliament, especially in parliamentary democracies, can be an important constraint for a government's foreign policy decision-making. Additionally, public opinions play roles in foreign policy choices as governments consider the options compatible with the citizens' views and the impact on domestic political contentions (Risse-Kappen 1991).

Lastly, the foreign policy-making processes in the domestic realm are also spotlighted through the conceptual model of governmental politics, derived from Graham Allison's (1971) archetypal work, 'Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis'. The model rests on the assumption that the structure of the state's decision-making model constitutes various individuals and organizations. According to Allison and Halperin (1972), as states are not homogenous units in international affairs, the model identifies the domestic actors who may differ in interests. The resultant foreign policy is the product of the domestic players with diverse advantages and disadvantages navigating through the state's explicit and implicit rules in the action channel of policy-making. While the model pivots on the actors in the executive branch, Jones (2007) argues that the decision-making process also includes non-executive actors in influencing foreign policy outcomes.

THE EBBS AND FLOWS OF THAILAND'S DEMOCRATIZATION

Especially in the latter half of the twentieth century, the world witnessed an unprecedented embracing of democratic ideals around the globe. However, as in the case of Thailand, the expectations regarding the achievements of liberal democracy have not been reached. The problem is evidence of the country's lack of substantial requisites for the consolidation of democracy. Of these substantial requisites, the major concern in this paper is the persistent existence of tutelary powers and reserved domains. Evidently, after the country's transformation into a constitutional monarchy, the Thai route toward the consolidation of democracy was accompanied by existing elites, with the military being prominent among them. This meant that the democratization process was to be dictated by those minorities who could assume tutelary roles, exercise political power, and ensure that the political unfolding did not jeopardize their interests.

With the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932 and the wavering transition to constitutional monarchy, by 1948, Field Marshal Plaek Pibulsongkram took control of the government. As the country was subsumed under the military's dominance, the military establishment was able to instill influence through comprehensive clientelist networks. For instance, during Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat's regime (1958-1963), as infrastructural projects were encouraged, the limited bureaucratic reach allowed local actors with good connections to the administration to expand their resources, ensuring their pervasive roots in the provinces. Moreover, due to the history of discriminatory treatment towards Chinese businesses in Thailand that continued into the 1970s, patron-client ties between the Sino-Thai entrepreneurs and government officials were firmly established. Albeit constrained, the Sino-Thai businesses enjoyed the financial protection provided by the bureaucrat patrons while the patrons reaped gains from the advancement of their clients (Phongpaichit and Baker 2000).

While the military also gained legitimacy as protectors that preserved the nation from communist encroachments during the Cold War, beginning in the 1970s, many political shifts in Thailand were evident. A brief and fragile democratic experiment transpired after the military government was overthrown in 1973. At this time, there were lower levels of reserved domain dominated by the military, as seen in the Senate, where the military reserved only 17% of seats between 1975 and 1976 compared to 72.5% in 1969 (Chambers 2009, 9-10). Then, in 1979, a 'semi-democracy' or a parliamentary government headed by a military prime minister emerged and lingered until 1988. As Paul Chambers (2010) states, "such a system offered the bare trappings of democracy while guaranteeing military supremacy in non-regal elite positions of power" (p. 67). Furthermore, while Chatichai Choonhavan was elected in 1988, Chambers (2010) maintains that tight connections remained between the members of parliament and the armed forces. This allowed the military to continue influencing the political realm and the government's fate.

In the 1990s, an increase in civilian control over the Thai political arena can be seen. The structural influences of the economic boom under the Thai 'Developmental State' and financial liberalization and the ending of the Cold War unleashed the new civilian vigor that opposed the military authority. This is discernable in the violent uprising known as Black May in 1992, by which the military was forced from power after instigating a coup to bring back authoritarianism the year before. Then, after 1997, mainly due to the effect of the financial crisis, the constitution known as the 'People's constitution', which allowed for unprecedented arrays of political participation, was pushed forward. The Thai parliament was to become strongly bicameral, with the wholly elected Senate having more authoritative functions and influences upon a series of institutions to countermand the government (Ginsburg 2009). Simultaneously, the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party could enter the political scene momentarily. The resourceful party headed by Thaksin Shinawatra was able to attract a wide range of voters and revamp the clientelist networks into a grand coalition. Additionally, the TRT absorbed a decisive number of senators into orbit (Chambers 2009).

In this period, Thailand experienced a further decrease in the military's position in the representative body with the apex of civilian control over public policy formulations. During the gradual democratic transition in the 1990s, there were plans to amend military spending and increase transparency within the military organization. In terms of control over internal security, Thailand has long established the Internal Security Operation Command (ISOC) and Thaksin was able to place the TRT's military allies to oversee and influence the command. However, the centralization of the command to the Office of the Prime Minister was not formally restructured before the overthrow of the prime minister. While Thaksin succeeded in instilling greater control and reducing the military budget, it was later halted, and the organization's restructuring has since faced bureaucratic resistance and administrative disagreements (Chambers 2010).

As the dominant party held sway, the conservatives, including the minority urban middle class and the military with their continued stranglehold over their own autonomy, thus regressed and supported the 2006 coup d'état and inaugurated the 2007 Constitution with their continued stranglehold over their autonomy. Along with the new constitution, the Senate's composition had been altered to be half-elected and half-appointed. At the same time, their influences upon other governmental supervisory institutions are maintained, if not augmented.

As described by Chambers (2010), “following senatorial elections in early 2008, 15.3% of the entire 76 elected/74 appointed Senate is now composed of retired military officials to make this an indirect reserved domain” (p. 72). Moreover, the judiciary is deemed to be politicized after the 2006 coup to support the conservative alliance, which can be seen in the Constitutional Court’s removals of subsequent prime ministers and the banning of political parties that represented the conservatives’ opponents (McCargo 2014).

Through these developments, Thai politics was polarized, and the people chose to act outside the realm of the state and on the streets. Therefore, the army orchestrated another coup d’état in 2014, after which Thailand experienced military rule from 2014 to 2019, and a pro-junta constitution was enacted in 2017. After the 2019 General Election, the new constitution allows the nomination of an unelected prime minister and a fully appointed Senate body directly and indirectly chosen by the junta. The proportion of the Senate equals one-half the number of the House of Representatives members. This allows the Senate to act as a veto and serve as an influential organ that retains its powers over governmental supervisory institutions like the Ombudsman, the National Corruption Commission, the Election Commission of Thailand, the Supreme Administrative Court, and the Constitutional Court.

Moreover, to demonstrate the pressure of the reserved domains and tutelary powers, the Election Commission that was chosen by the junta altered the election formula calculation immediately after the General Election. The act served to resist the establishment of anti-junta coalitions and promote the ascension of Palang Pracharath, the military proxy party. Then, the appointed Senate voted in favor of the pro-military coalition to rubber stamp General Prayut Chan-o-cha’s position as the unelected Prime Minister (Jones and Agarwal 2021).

EMPIRICAL CASES OF THAILAND’S FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING

The instances of Thailand’s relations with the major powers and neighboring countries can provide empirical cases that showcase the implications of the interplay of politics on Thailand’s foreign policy. The first empirical evidence is that which occurred during the shift in the foreign policy-making apparatus in the 1970s. Concerning the major powers, specifically the United States of America (USA) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC), while Thailand employs a hedging strategy that combines elements of cooperation and deterrence, the Thai foreign policy presented periods in which the country swung more or less towards one or the other. In the early atmosphere of the Cold War, there was an anti-communist consensus in the Thai foreign policy-making process as the military leadership worked under the orbit of the USA against the Soviet Union and the PRC (Randolph 1986). In the late 1960s, the Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman attempted such overtures towards the PRC as sending Thai representatives to Guangzhou, but the stance to gear away from the USA later, in fact, jeopardized the foreign minister’s position. Formal relations with China were not established as the military administration feared the Chinese influence. While the military leaders could sense the decline of American attention towards Thailand, they were adamant that the close relationship with the United States was key to the country’s security (Bamrungsuk 1988). Also, Lydia S. na Ranong (1975) illustrates that:

The presence of foreign troops on Thai soil, especially in times of peace, never found favor with the Thai people. However, the subject was silenced publicly by equating it to anti-Americanism. Thus, anti-SEATO (South-East Asia Treaty Organization) or anti-American meant pro-communist, which was, and still is, an offense punishable by a jail sentence (p. 196).

With the turn of the decade of the 1970s, the intermission from the military rule that followed the student uprising on 14 October 1973 made possible the shift in the Thai foreign policy towards the major powers. The emergence of civilian governments and the popular pressures that equated US presence to the power behind the military leadership led to the drawing back of Thai cooperation with the USA. For instance, the national policy announcement of Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj in 1975 declared that there would be active steps to withdraw foreign troops from Thailand (Pramoj 1975, 201). Despite the Mayaguez incident in which the military went against the government and allowed the US marines into U-Tapao, the lower level of influence of the reserved domain was evident as the incident was followed by the Thai government's recall of the Thai Ambassador posted in the US. The withdrawal plan of American troops was completed by 20 July 1976 (Randolph 1986, 189-190). Concurrently, the normalization of relations with the PRC also made progress with Deputy Foreign Minister Chatichai Choonhavan's first official visit to China in December 1973 and the establishment of diplomatic relations in the year 1975 (Hewison 2017, 4).

The illustration, of which there is contention in standpoints concerning the time when the reserved domain and tutelary power were curtailed, can also be observed in the 1990s. While the period exhibited the country's political instability by having gone through eight different prime ministers in a decade, the military had retreated to the barracks. Coinciding with the strengthening of the Thai civil society and the international environment at the end of the Cold War, as visible in the elected Chuan Leekpai's administrations (1992-1994 and 1997-2001), the advocacy for democratic values was presented by the government. This was reiterated in the Democrat Party's commitment and various government pronouncements (Busabarat 2020). A major incident of political contention was demonstrated when Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai permitted a group of Nobel Peace Prize laureates to enter the country to campaign and lend support for the release of Myanmar's pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. Among the figures was Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader, who had previously been refused entry to Thailand in 1984, 1987, and 1990 (Buszynski 1994, 734). The authorization came despite the Chinese pressure on the Thai government to cancel the invitation (United Press International 1993). Concurrent with the pressure, conflict arose between the government and the military, especially as the army wanted to maintain the special relationship with the PRC due to the Chinese past assistance to Thailand during the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia and the sales of tanks and artillery from China at friendship prices (Lu 1993). Significantly, there was also a dispute concerning Myanmar. The military did not want to jeopardize the bilateral relationship with Myanmar, which was insulated by the cordial ties between the military elites of both countries (Ganesan 2006).

During the visit, Buszynski (1994) notes that apart from the ban on the Dalai Lama's appearance on the army-owned television channel, the opposition did not pose a major obstacle. And, Surachart Bamrungsuk (2001) elaborates:

The military sent a message of disagreement to the government. But when the cabinet announced its decision, the army stopped speaking. This was a good sign for Thai democratization. The military could voice its opinion so long as it did not threaten to overthrow the government. And the military agreed to stop voicing its opposition when the cabinet made its final decision- indicating a certain degree of civilian control over the military and military professionalism (p. 81).

In fact, regarding Myanmar, Chuan Leekpai's second administration (1997-2001) continued to display a hardening of Thailand's foreign policy stance towards Myanmar's military government. As Surin Pitsuwan, the administration's foreign minister, expressed, foreign policy was an extension of domestic policy, and democratic values were enshrined in the government's foreign policy outlook (Busabarat 2020, 691). Along with Surin's critical vocalization towards Myanmar's government, the government was also outspoken in its position for flexible engagement in ASEAN that would allow for the open discussion of other countries' domestic affairs. Nevertheless, with the arrival of an administration highly consolidated by the domination of the party of Thaksin Shinawatra, the government's business-oriented approach led to the resumption of a more accommodating stance and the emphasis on maintaining cordial relations with Myanmar (Ganesan 2006).

On another note, a substantial impact on Thai foreign policy can be demonstrated by the shift in the Thai political structure after the 2006 coup, which impelled the ascent of the reserved domain and tutelary power. The Thai foreign policy towards Cambodia serves as the most salient evidence. While the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in 1962 that the Preah Vihear Temple is under the sovereignty of Cambodia, the maps held by Cambodia and Thailand are different. As Cambodia adheres to the Annex I map, and Thailand respects the borderline indicated in the Thai 1962 Cabinet Resolution, an area of 4.6 square kilometers surrounding the temple is left unsettled. Notably, since Chatichai Choonhavan's administration (1988-1990), cooperation began to blossom between the two countries and the Thai-Cambodian Joint Commission on the Demarcation for Land Boundary (JBC) was established, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed, in the years 1997 and 2000, respectively. The agreements commit the states to recognize that the disputed area around the Preah Vihear Temple shall be ensued by border negotiations through joint surveys and demarcation that account for relevant documents adhered to by both countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011). When Cambodia nominated the temple to the World Heritage Committee (WHC), it included the area claimed by Thailand and precipitated the signing of the Joint Communiqué between Thai Foreign Minister Noppadon Pattama and Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Sok An in the year 2008. The communiqué stipulates Thailand's agreement to support the inscription of the Preah Vihear Temple while Cambodia agreed to withhold the attachment of the disputed area in the proposal as the management plan to the controversial area shall be done with the involvement of the two parties (An, Pattama, and Riviere 2008).

Nevertheless, a resurgence of conflict between the two states resulted in armed clashes and the return to the ICJ. The anti-Thaksin coalition deemed the joint communiqué as an act of handing over the Thai ownership of the territory to Cambodia. The nationalistic perception maintained that the only rightful borderline of the area was the one indicated in the Thai 1962 Cabinet Resolution and that Thailand also had the right to reclaim the Preah Vihear Temple (Pawakapan 2013). As aforementioned, the period of the post-2006 *coup d'état* ushered in the new constitution with more entrenched reserved domains and tutelary powers for the anti-Thaksin actors. Also, as Dressel (2010) articulates: "the activism of the Thai judiciary can thus be seen as a proxy for the larger battle for political hegemony. Judges have become critical to the elite project of consolidating the post-coup political order" (p. 686). Henceforth, seen as Thaksin's proxy, Samak Sundaravej's government's cooperative effort to sign the joint communiqué was restrained by the Administrative Court (Matichon 2008). Then, despite the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' affirmation that the communiqué was not a treaty after half of the senators and the opposition party filed a petition with the Constitutional Court, the Court ruled the joint communiqué as a treaty that may alter Thailand's territory. Consequently, the communiqué would require parliamentary approval that had not been acquired. Therefore, the act was considered a constitutional violation, and later the foreign minister was indicted for malfeasance in office by the National Corruption Commission (Pawakapan 2013).

Furthermore, even when the opposition Democrat Party took office after the Constitutional Court ruled against Samak and dissolved the People's Power Party (TRT's successor party) under Somchai Wongsawat, the role of the reserved domain continued to be visible. After the deadly clashes at the border in 2011, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was obliged by the United Nations Security Council to mediate the conflict. Thus, the government stance was presented when the Thai foreign minister agreed that Indonesian observers would be allowed to monitor the disputed area (Tansubhapol and Chuensuksawadi 2011). However, due to the steadfast objection by the Thai military, further talks for the Indonesian observers were deadlocked, and the agreement was not acted upon (International Crisis Group 2011).

Lastly, the high-speed railway (HSR) project presents another case of Thailand's pursuit of interstate relations impacted by the country's domestic politics. The HSR prospective was initiated between Thailand and China in 2010, which is projected to enhance ASEAN connectivity and is a part of China's Belt Road Initiative (BRI) (Subboonrueng and Sirirat 2020). While the achievement of the MOU with China was first largely undermined by the interparty conflict and fragile parliamentary coalition of the government of Abhisit Vejjajiva, the prevalence of reserved domains and tutelary powers served as a major roadblock to the Yingluck Shinawatra government's attempt to jump-start the project. As Yingluck, Thaksin's younger sibling, won a landslide victory in the 2011 General Election, the infrastructure investment of the HSR to connect Bangkok to Nakhon Ratchasima, Chiang Mai, and Hua Hin served as part of the party's campaign platform (Szep and Petty 2011). Instead of the joint venture with China that the Democrats government intended, Yingluck's government proposed a loan bill worth 68 billion US dollars to finance the infrastructure construction and planned to open an international tender. The loan bill received parliamentary approval in September 2013 due to the vast number of seats the government held in the parliament.

Nevertheless, the parliamentary approval of the loan bill was met with counteractions from the conservative forces as the Democrat Party, and anti-Thaksin senators filed a petition against the loan bill with the Constitutional Court (Aiyara 2019). In 2014, the Constitutional Court ruled that the bill was unconstitutional due to a breach in the parliamentary voting process and that the loan bill could only be authorized in the case of emergency. The Court did not regard infrastructure development as an emergency (The Momentum 2017). Trin Aiyara (2019) elaborates on this:

The sabotage of the Yingluck government's loan bill to finance the railway project showed that the Court controlled and demarcated the behaviors of the elected government. The Constitutional Court, as part of the 'deep state', was used to preserve the power of the conservative coalition and inhibit electoral politics (p. 339).

In contrast to this, after the coup d'état in 2014, the junta's National Council of Peace and Order (NCPO) reviewed the project and signed an agreement with the PRC for China to build a standard-gauge track from Nongkhai to Map Ta Phut deep-sea port in Rayong and from Kaeng Khoi to Bangkok (Bangkok Post 2014). However, further negotiations with China were not fruitful, and progress was stagnant in issues such as land rights, procurements of public projects, shareholding proportions, construction plans, and the employment of Chinese staff in Thailand. With pressure from China, which included Thailand's non-invitation to the Belt and Road Summit in Beijing and to overcome legal issues that were blocking the commencement of the project, Prime Minister Prayut invoked Section 44 of the 2014 Interim Constitution that gave the NCPO absolute authority from any legal constraints (Bangkok Post 2017). As Prayut has been quoted expressing to the legislative assembly: "I have lost my face so many times, and we [Thailand] could not conclude the deal. I will exercise my prerogative on this railway project. It must be started within this year" (Busabarat 2017, 7).

Furthermore, while the construction has until today remained sluggish, the bolstering of the Prayut government's foreign policy to accommodate China since the 2014 Coup continues to be observable. This can be seen in the case of the COVID-19 global pandemic. For instance, Thailand was the first country to be met with a Covid-19 case from Wuhan, but it was not until almost three months later that the Thai government imposed travel restrictions on China to prevent the outbreak (Pongsudhirak 2020, 8). By the end of 2021, there were three censure debates against the government, with the third debate having involved the government's tardiness in procuring a variety of vaccines through the COVAX program and its persistence in buying the Chinese Sinovac vaccine (Thai PBS World 2021). The government's survival from the no-confidence votes was expected because the 2017 Constitution, as aforementioned, has appeared and been applied in favor of the ex-junta to hold a majority coalition in the parliament (Yuda 2021; Pongsudhirak 2020).

CONCLUSION

While Thailand has gestured the embrace of democratic ideals, the consolidation of democracy has not been achieved. The existence of reserved domains that comprise specific areas of government authority that are not under the control of elected officials and of tutelary powers that are nonelected elites who can exercise policy-making decisions act as significant obstacles in the country's winding road towards democracy. As can be seen in the tracing of Thailand's democratization trajectory, the country oscillated in the presence of reserved domains and tutelary powers in different periods, with momentary decreases during the democratic interludes in the 1970s and between the 1990s and the 2006 coup against Thaksin's regime. At the same time, as the study of foreign policy analysis brought forward the notion that states are not homogenous black boxes in international affairs, domestic politics is a major determinant of the state's international engagement with others. Moreover, as there are many actors with various influences navigating the domestic political structures, the occurrences of reserved domains and tutelary powers of the time impact the state's foreign policy choices.

This paper explores the empirical cases of Thailand's foreign policy decisions towards the major powers and neighboring countries in the Cold War and the post-Cold War periods. The cases demonstrate that when tutelary powers and reserved domains are highly embedded in the political structure, and conflicting standpoints on foreign policy decisions are presented, the outcomes of the policy-making process lean towards the camp advocated by the non-democratic actors. For instance, this can be seen in the case of the Thai-Cambodian conflict in the 2000s, the Yingluck government's pursuit of constructing the HSR in connection to China's BRI, and Thailand's decision against the move away from the United States in the late 1960s. Conversely, at times when the tide of reserve domains and tutelary powers subsided, the civilian government had more leeway in its pursuit of foreign policy, such as during the democratic interlude in the 1970s and the Chuan Leekpai government's allowance of entry for the Nobel Peace Prize laureates in the 1990s. All in all, the research provides empirical evidence to understand the relationship between democratization and foreign policy. While the paper focuses on the case of Thailand, the research invites further studies that focus on other countries in light of the prevalence of tutelary powers and reserved domains in the democratization process and their implications on the formulation of the state's foreign policy.

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