



**HWA CHONG INSTITUTION (HIGH SCHOOL SECTION)**

**HUMANITIES RESEARCH PAPER 2021**

---

Title: Network Governance: An analysis of the Thai monarchy and factors leading up to anti-monarchical protests

Slant: History

Total Word Count (excluding appendices, footnotes & references): 5225

Student's (official) Name: Ethan Lee En Jie

Class: 3i4

Name of Teacher-Mentor: Mr Chua Yoong Tching Eugene

**Declaration**

I declare that this assignment is my own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion. The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced, failing which I am willing to accept the necessary disciplinary action(s) to be taken against me.

Student's Signature :

Date of Submission:

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

The Thai monarchy is a Constitutional Monarchy that wields little direct official political power, similar to most other modern-day monarchies. Views of the current monarch, King Maha Vajiralongkorn, who ascended to the throne in 2016, are starkly different from that of his father and predecessor, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who reigned from 1946 to 2016 - a striking 70 years on the throne. Bhumibol is largely reported to be highly revered by the Thai people within the media, to the extent of god-like worship, and this seems to be true. He has been portrayed as an arbiter and stabilising force in the tumultuous world of Thai politics. On the other hand, Vajiralongkorn has not received the same level of popularity as his father. This may simply be attributed to the practices put in place by Vajiralongkorn under his reign, and perhaps his eccentric personality as well. Yet, the Thai monarchy appears to be far more intricate than is suggested, with McCargo (2005) coining the term “Network Monarchy” to characterise the system of governance in Thailand. Fundamentally, the Network Monarchy is extra-constitutional and undemocratic. It is noted for tremendously influencing the political sphere in Thailand. Thailand is a country with much political strife. In the past century, a total of 22 military coups have been attempted in Thailand, with 13 successfully carried out. The Thai monarchy has been unwavering despite the instability in Thailand, at the very least during Bhumibol’s reign. In the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, unprecedented protests erupted against institutional figures in Thailand. Since July 2020, what started as campaigns by many Thai youths, students, and political activists against the self-professed democratically elected ex-military junta government, turned into protests also targeting the sacrosanct institution of the Thai monarchy. Under Section 112 of the Thai criminal code, anyone convicted of defaming, insulting or threatening the king,

queen, heir or regent faces between three and 15 years in prison on each count. There has been an uptick in the use of the *lèse-majesté* law following the protests.

## **1.2 Rationale**

Under the reign of Bhumibol, the extensive informal influence of the monarchy was generally accepted, and even extolled by the Thai people. Yet, in recent times, under Vajiralongkorn's reign, such power has been viewed as undemocratic and excessive by many Thais, especially the youth, resulting in protests and demands for reform. This paper intends to understand the power of the Thai monarchy, how Vajiralongkorn has affected it, and how it has contributed to a resurgence of anti-monarchical protests.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

1. How does the monarchy function within Thai politics?
2. To what extent have Bhumibol and Vajiralongkorn influenced and legitimised the Thai military respectively?
3. How far have Bhumibol and Vajiralongkorn undermined Thai democracy respectively?

## **1.4 Thesis Statement**

Due to the vastly different personalities of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej and the current King Maha Vajiralongkorn, opposition against the current King has been significantly intensified, despite little change in the governance of Thailand in the form of the Network Monarchy.

## **1.5 Delimitations**

This paper will focus on the reign of Bhumibol and the ongoing reign of Vajiralongkorn. It will employ McCargo's (2005) concept of the Network Monarchy to understand the Thai monarchy. The Network Monarchy is a form of Network Governance that makes use of proxies to achieve its aims. In addition, this paper will only utilise research and sources in English.

## **1.6 Significance**

The monarchy plays a large role in Thailand, and many, especially among the older generations, still overzealously support the monarchy. In light of the reignited anti-monarchical protests, which is a pressing issue, this research will seek to understand the role the Thai monarchy has played in the governance of Thailand, and the impact of Vajiralongkorn on Thailand, and why all these have culminated in protests.

## **1.7 Limitations**

Considering that the Thai language is the dominant language used in Thailand, key sources of information regarding this topic will be in Thai, undeniably indicating that important information will be missed out. As it is still early into Vajiralongkorn's reign, and events in Thailand remain ongoing, the scope of research is limited by the recency of events as well as the availability of sources regarding this topic. Thailand's strict lèse majesté laws may also limit the number of accurate sources regarding this topic due to self-censorship regarding this issue, in addition to state censorship by the Thai government. The personalities of Vajiralongkorn and Bhumibol has been the predominant factor taken into consideration within this research. However, it must be understood that protests uniquely erupting only under Vajiralongkorn's reign must have been a

result of a confluence of factors. Saliiently, the changes in the mindsets of the Thai populace, as well as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, should be fleshed out in further research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Network Governance**

Research on Network Governance, also referred to as Governance Networks, has proliferated in recent decades, driven by observed shifts towards such a system of governance (Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden, 2004). Network Governance has been defined differently by academics, but broadly refers to “interfirm coordination that is characterised by organic or informal social systems, in contrast to bureaucratic structures” (Jones et al, 1997). The first wave of scholars in the 1990s, including Jones et al (1997), focused on applications within the context of economic activity. The second wave of research has now studied Network Governance in the case of public administration and political science (Skelcher et al., 2011), which this paper will focus on.

Fundamentally, it has been recognised that Network Governance does not exist unilaterally, but in tandem with forms of hierarchy and structure (Dixon & Dogan, 2002). However, there is a lack of uniform definition and theoretical framework for analysis to understand Network Governance (Isett et al, 2010; Molin & Masella, 2015). It has been noted and argued that Network Governance improves policy-making, largely due to increased cooperation and efficiency, taking into account different perspectives of more stakeholders and resource allocation (Hileman & Lubell, 2018; Isett et al, 2010).

### **2.2 Democracy in Network Governance**

There is a concern for a lack of democracy in a system of Network Governance. (Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden, 2004). Börzel & Heard-Lauréote (2009) argue that a system of Network Governance marginalizes elected politicians, thereby circumventing the system of democratic elections and lacking democratic accountability. It can thus be inferred that Network Governance

is undemocratic to some extent. Kijn & Skelcher (2007) identify four separate conjectures on the relationship between Network Governance and democracy: “incompatibility” between them, “complementarity” between them, “transition” from democracy to Network Governance and Network Governance as an “instrument” of democracy. This suggests that democracy in Network Governance depends on individual contexts and that Network Governance is not inherently democratic or undemocratic. Sørensen & Torfing’s (2005) argument falls under the complementarity conjecture, asserting that for “democratic anchorage” to be achieved in Network Governance, there is a need for control by democratically elected politicians, representation of the interests of the people, staying accountable to the citizenry and following democratic rules. It can be inferred that networks need to willingly and actively strive to meet these goals for the criteria to be met.

### **2.3 Network Monarchy**

McCargo (2006) coined the term “Network Monarchy” to describe Thailand. Characterised by Network Governance centred around the monarchy of Bhumibol Adulyadej, the Network Monarchy involves actors including privy councillors, trusted military leaders, and major business figures to ensure that Bhumibol’s political will was felt, exercising power on behalf of the apolitical king, attempting to shape an ideal Thailand in his eyes. Fundamentally, this shows that the Thai monarchy has been functioning outside the boundaries of a Constitutional Monarchy. Network Monarchy and Network Governance have formed the foundation and become the predominant framework used to analyse Thai politics. Most have agreed with McCargo (2006) and cited Network Monarchy in their works, while others have built on it. However, it has been duly noted that Network Monarchy is a superficial schematic that requires

elaboration (Nishizaki, 2013). Mérieau (2016) argues that within the Network Monarchy, those who associate themselves with the king bring royal legitimacy to themselves, which enhances their power. This argument is compelling as it provides reasons as to why the monarchy is the keystone of these networks, previously a lingering question, beyond ostensibly loyalty to the monarchy. Harris (2015) emphasizes that the Network Monarchy is adaptable to developing conditions and able to integrate and discard actors, which was only mentioned in passing by McCargo (2005). Nishizaki (2013) contends that the Network Monarchy's goal is not to shape an ideal Thailand in the king's eyes, but rather to maintain a stable monarchy in favour of its "institutional interests". This assertion is valid, but the situation may not be as dichotomous as has been put forth by both McCargo (2005) and Nishizaki (2013). It has also been argued that the Network Monarchy is bound by ties within and between elite families, as proven by empirical data (Nishizaki, 2020).

#### **2.4 The portrayal and image of the Thai Monarchy**

The Thai monarchy is portrayed as an entity above corruption serving the interests of the people by harnessing the "historical, sacred and emotive capital of the Thai nation" (Fong, 2009), utilising religious and cultural beliefs by portraying the monarchy as a pillar of Buddhism and Nationalism (Dressel, 2018). It can be inferred that this underpins the general acceptance of the influence of the Thai monarchy in the political sphere by the Thai people. It has also been argued that the monarchy has attempted to present itself as above politics. (Thongchai, 2008). It is implied that this is advantageous for the monarchy as the monarchy would not be blamed for the state of affairs in the country. Ockey (2005) claims that Thais had begun to worry that without the "wise use" of the monarchy's influence, Thailand will struggle to resolve future issues. This

suggests that Thais believed that Bhumibol had correctly made use of informal royal influence to benefit the people. It has been contended that “Neo-royalism” has buttressed Bhumibol’s reign, supported by droves of royalists, where Bhumibol himself and not the monarchy as an institution is protected and portrayed to almost be divine (Pavin, 2015). This suggests that Bhumibol as a personality has formed the basis of the people’s reverence of the monarchy, instead of the monarchy as an institution according reverence to the king.

## **2.5 The partnership between the military and the monarchy**

A large part of the monarchy’s power is a result of its partnership with the military under the Network Monarchy. The crux of this partnership has been argued to be formed by the monarchy’s reliance on the military for military might and the military’s reliance on the monarchy for legitimacy. It has been asserted that there is a cycle of royal intervention in which the monarchy openly supports democracy, then portrays political activity not in its favour as corrupt, whereby it supports military intervention (Hewison, 2008). This shows that there is a system that ensures the monarchy and military are kept in power, ironically through developing an image of supporting democratisation, making it extremely hard to break the cycle. Chambers & Napisa (2016) claim that the military benefitted from and supported royalist sentiments. The purpose of the relationship is to deliver legitimacy to the military so that it can achieve its goals. Farrelly (2013) contends that a “coup culture” has been a result of, among other reasons, the collaborations between the monarchy and the military to promote their individual interests. It can be inferred from these arguments that the military will step in when it feels that the monarchy’s integrity is being impugned, and since the military’s legitimacy heavily relies on the monarchy, it will be seen as an attack on the military too. The 2006 and 2014 military coups have been

attributed to this relationship, where the military launched coups to defend the monarchy (Haberhorn, 2016; Pathmanand, 2008). However, Farrelly (2013) views that the palace may not be able to fully rely on the military to support it in the post-Bhumibol era. In addition, he observes that many Thais questioned the role of the military and the monarchy late into Bhumibol's reign. This suggests that the continued dominance of the monarchy and military in its current form may not be sustainable. This will be further explored in the following chapters of this paper.

## **2.6 The Anti-monarchy Protesters**

Pavin (2020) views that a combination of Vajiralongkorn's notoriety for being an eccentric self-serving figure, his unprecedented consolidation of formal power, and the emergence of social media as a platform for scepticism has contributed to anti-monarchical protests. Pavin's argument implies that the increased scepticism of the younger generation caused them to view the Thai monarchy as an institution and its actions as clashing with what state propaganda portrayed it to be, failing to inculcate the belief in the younger generation that the Thai monarchy is divine and to be loved. Sombatpoonsiri (2020) notes that during the pandemic, even among royalists, criticism of the monarchy for failing to play a larger role in alleviating the crisis, as Bhumibol was portrayed to have done so in his reign, has emerged. This shows that Vajiralongkorn has a high standard to live up to and cannot continue to rely on the support of previously staunch royalists.

## **2.7 Conclusion of Literature Review**

This literature review has, to some extent, provided answers to all three research questions posed in the previous chapter. Thailand has functioned as a Network Monarchy, an extension of Network Governance, with the monarchy as its keystone. The Network Monarchy is inherently undemocratic, undermining democratically-elected governments and collaborating with proxies, particularly the military and Privy Council, whose authority is buttressed by royal legitimacy the palace grants. This royal legitimacy is underpinned by its popularity, which is a function of its portrayal as a hallowed pillar of Thailand. In the subsequent chapters, this paper will explore the reigns of Bhumibol and Vajiralongkorn, specifically their different personalities, the opposition against them, and the changes in the governance of Thailand, in order to further explore the research questions posed.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In the following chapter, the reigns of Bhumibol and Vajiralongkorn will be explored, taking into account McCargo's (2005) concept of the Network Monarchy. The state of affairs of Thailand, particularly the undemocratic influence exercised by Bhumibol and Vajiralongkorn respectively will be explored. This paper will utilise case studies that have been carried out by McCargo in his 2005 paper, "Network Monarchy and Legitimacy crises in Thailand", to characterise the Network Monarchy. This will shed light on how the Network Monarchy functioned during Bhumibol's reign, and the effects of such a system. An understanding of the state of affairs under Vajiralongkorn's reign will be sought through a similar case study. Thereafter, the state of affairs will be contrasted with public opinion of the two monarchs, in order to determine if there is congruence of the actual actions of the monarchy with perceptions of them. Negative perceptions, such as in the form of protests and demonstrations, will be chiefly focused on, considering that they are more prominent and observable. A separate factor, in the form of the personalities of the Vajiralongkorn and Bhumibol respectively, particularly their actions, will be considered. This will include unfavourable decisions they have taken, such as Vajiralongkorn's long stays in the Bavarian Alps in Germany, as well as favourable decisions, such as the carrying out of royal processions and tours throughout the kingdom. These will culminate in an evaluation of the relationship between these factors, and thereafter an understanding of the changes that have taken place as well, and the practices that have continued. The shifts in the Network Monarchy under Vajiralongkorn, and their effects, will then be considered.

## **Chapter 4: Discussion & Analysis**

### **4.1 The palace's influence under Bhumibol**

Bhumibol reigned over Thailand for a staggering period of 70 years, from 1946 to his death in 2016. As has been noted in the previous chapters, Bhumibol has largely exercised his power informally through the Network Monarchy where proxies are employed to exercise his will (McCargo, 2005). Little of Bhumibol's influence was exercised publicly or directly. Notably, Bhumibol summoned the military dictator and the pro-democracy movement leader in 1992 to a televised royal audience, urging them to reach a peaceful resolution. Yet, such instances of direct and open intervention are rare and as McCargo (2005) has noted, only form a small part of political moves by the palace, most of which are hidden from the limelight. Chiefly, it must be noted that Bhumibol was not a day-to-day manager, but a largely entrusted proxies, particularly Prem Tinsulanonda, to exercise power on his behalf. Prem served first as army commander, followed by Prime Minister, and then President of the King's Privy Council. The Network Monarchy had a vested interest in ensuring a semi-undemocratic political system, where the palace would be able to exercise its influence. Bhumibol acted mainly to ensure his proxies were kept in power, such as in protecting Prem from being ousted thrice from 1980-1988 and consenting to the 1976 military coup. In more recent times, post-McCargo's watershed paper, the 2006 coup against the twice democratically-elected Thaksin Shinawatra government can also be taken to have been contributed to by the Network Monarchy. "The role of the king was critical in this crisis," said Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a professor of political science at Chulalongkorn University. There has been speculation that the king had prior knowledge of the coup and even helped to engineer it. Furthermore, on 14 July 2006, Prem addressed graduating cadets of the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy, telling them that the Thai military must obey the

orders of the king, not the government (McGeown, 2006). This can be taken to be a blatant push for a coup against the democratically elected government, or at the very least an undemocratic political move by the palace. Furthermore, every successful coup in modern Thai history had been consented to by Bhumibol. The unsuccessful coups all lacked his recognition.

#### **4.2 The palace's influence under Vajiralongkorn**

As opposed to Bhumibol, who exercised informal power, Vajiralongkorn has taken to utilising a combination of formal and informal power, albeit much more in the public eye as compared to his predecessor. The majority of Vajiralongkorn's newfound power has largely come in the form of the ability to appoint proxies directly to important positions. The Crown Property Act was amended in 2017, enabling Vajiralongkorn the sole discretion to appoint people to the Crown Property Bureau. The Act was then amended again in 2018 and it now legislates that any disputes over what assets are considered Crown property are to be decided by Vajiralongkorn. Plots of land in the vicinity of the Grand Palace, including at Dusit Zoo, the horse-racing track, Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall and the current parliament buildings. The Sangha Act was amended in 2017 to grant the king the power to appoint the Supreme Patriarch, the head of Buddhist monks in Thailand. In the same year, Vajiralongkorn appointed Amborn Prasathaphong, a representative of the Thammayut sect, which is generally associated with the monarchy, undercutting the nominee proposed by the Sangha Supreme Council (the governing body of the Buddhist order of Thailand), who is associated with the Dhammakaya sect, which is generally considered close to Thaksin. The Sangha Act was also amended to give Vajiralongkorn the power to appoint and dismiss members of the Sangha Supreme Council. (Mérieau, 2019) Vajiralongkorn requested changes to the Constitution in 2017, leading amendments of the

sections relating to the monarchy in the version that had already been voted on by the people in the 2016 constitutional referendum. In 2020, the government transferred two army units to Vajiralongkorn's personal command, giving direct military control to the monarchy, an unprecedented move in modern Thailand. These changes in favour of Vajiralongkorn are indications that the Network Monarchy is still very much in play, although its use has become more overt.

### **4.3 Comparing Vajiralongkorn and Bhumibol as personalities**

It is difficult to truly understand the personalities of the monarchs, but it is possible to seek some understanding through their actions. Public opinion of the monarchs can be said to be shaped by the perceived personalities of these figureheads. Specifically, actions directly linked to the monarchs that place them in a good light and those that are provocative, shape the public's perceptions of their personalities. A huge area of convention are the lifestyles that Bhumibol and Vajiralongkorn have led respectively. Bhumibol was known to be frugal and humble, with Paul Handley, an unofficial biographer of his, stating that "He didn't surround himself with opulence and people respected him for it ... they saw him as a pure figure". Such a message was promulgated by relentless propaganda campaigns. On the other hand, Vajiralongkorn has led a lavish lifestyle, despite the havoc the Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked economically on the Thai people. For a large part of 2020, Vajiralongkorn was widely reported to have rented out a hotel in Bavaria, Germany, for him and his entourage to live out of. This led to swarms of Thais to protest in front of the German embassy in Thailand, who demanded German Chancellor Angela Merkel's government investigate whether Thailand's king had exercised political power during his extended stays in Bavaria. These actions show that Vajiralongkorn is out of touch with his people, or perhaps simply does not care about their views of him. On this particular issue of the

Thai monarch's presence in Thailand, interestingly Bhumibol only left the kingdom once after the 1960s, and even then only for an overnight stay in the neighboring Laos. This is in stark contrast to the decisions of his successor and suggests that he understood the wishes of his people, whatever the reason behind such wishes may be.

#### **4.4 Public opinion of Bhumibol**

Criticism of Bhumibol during and after his reign was rare. Even after the 2006 and 2014 military coups against democratically elected governments, consented to by the king, there were no notable demonstrations expressing dissent against Bhumibol. Curiously, there were in fact demonstrations supporting the monarchy, known as yellow-shirts, who clashed with supporters of Thaksin Shinawatra, known as red-shirts, criticising the democratically-elected politicians, such as Thaksin, as disloyal to the monarchy. Despite the covert and overt interventions of the monarchy, Bhumibol was still highly revered and public protests against the monarchy were rare. It must be qualified that it cannot thus be concluded that there was no opposition to the palace. A multitude of factors, most prominently the strict *lèse-majesté* laws banning criticism of the monarchy may have prevented anti-monarchy protests from erupting. Anyone can file a *lèse-majesté* complaint, and the police must formally investigate all of them (Haberkorn, 2016). There are months-long pretrial detentions, and courts routinely deny bail to those charged. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention determined that the pretrial detention of an alleged *lèse-majesté* offender violated international human rights laws. The courts seem not to recognise the principle of granting defendants the benefit of the doubt. Judges have said accusers did not have to prove the factuality of the alleged *lèse-majesté* material but only claim it is defamatory. During his 2005 birthday speech, Bhumibol invited criticism: "Actually, I must also

be criticised. I am not afraid if the criticism concerns what I do wrong, because then I know. Because if you say the king cannot be criticised, it means that the king is not human". He further claimed that "if the king can do no wrong, it is akin to looking down upon him because the king is not being treated as a human being. But the king can do wrong." A barrage of criticisms ensued, ironically followed by a sharp rise in *lèse-majesté* prosecutions. *Lèse-majesté* cases rose from five or six a year pre-2005 to 478 in 2010.

#### **4.5 Public opinion of Vajiralongkorn**

There is a stark contrast in public opinion of Bhumibol and Vajiralongkorn in Thailand. Vajiralongkorn has been mired with controversy, even prior to his ascension to the throne. In 2002, *The Economist* wrote that "Vajiralongkorn is held in much less esteem (than the then-king Bhumibol). Bangkok gossips like to swap tales of his lurid personal life." In 2010, a separate issue of *The Economist* stated that Vajiralongkorn was "widely loathed and feared" and "unpredictable to the point of eccentricity". Public opinion of Vajiralongkorn has only worsened following his ascension, when he was thrown further into the limelight. Above all, protests from 2020-2021 in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, which began as demonstrations against the government, was followed by unprecedented demands for reform of the monarchy. The protests were a watershed moment in Thailand, breaking a longstanding taboo of publicly criticizing the monarchy. Paul Chambers, a Southeast Asian politics scholar, noted that "Such open criticism of Thailand's monarch by non-elites at a public place within Thailand with the police simply standing by is the first of its kind in Thai history." A series of ten demands were released by protesters, calling for major reform of the monarchy. The demands are as such (Sithijirawattanakul, 2020):

1. Revoke Article 6 of the 2017 Constitution, which does not allow anyone to make any accusations against the king. In addition, add an article to allow parliament to examine any wrongdoings of the king, as had been stipulated in the constitution promulgated by the People's Party.
2. Revoke Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code, allow the people to exercise freedom of speech about the monarchy, and give pardons to all those prosecuted for criticizing the monarchy.
3. Revoke the Crown Property Act of 2018 and make a clear division between the assets of the king under the control of the Ministry of Finance and his personal assets.
4. Reduce the national budget allocated to the king to be in line with the economic conditions of the country.
5. Abolish the Royal Offices. Units with a clear duty, for example, the Royal Security Command, should be transferred and placed under other agencies. Unnecessary units, such as the Privy Council, should be disbanded.
6. Cease all giving and receiving of donations by royal charity funds in order for all of the assets of the monarchy to be auditable.
7. Cease the exercise of royal prerogatives over expression of political opinions in public.
8. Cease all public education campaigns that excessively and one-sidedly glorify the monarchy.
9. Investigate the murders of those who have criticized or had some kind of relationship with the monarchy.
10. The king must not endorse any further coups.

These demands shed light on the undemocratic actions of Vajiralongkorn and the monarchy at large, whether systemic or informal. It should be noted that many of the aforementioned demands are in fact not specific to the actions of Vajiralongkorn. In fact, most of the practices had already been in place during Bhumibol reign, and many can be said to have even been pioneered by him. Strikingly, only the third demand, which addresses the Crown Property Act of 2018, is unique to Vajiralongkorn. A distinction must be made that Article 6 of the 2017 Constitution had already existed in similar forms in previous constitutions, and thus is not solely

related to Vajiralongkorn. Yet, it has been Vajiralongkorn's eccentric behaviour and open consolidation of power that has shed light on the undemocratic functions of the Network Monarchy. Hence, it can be argued that it is his unpopularity, and not the inherent lack of democracy in the Network Monarchy that has resulted in dissent against him, as there were no such demands under Bhumibol and the system has not changed significantly.

#### **4.6 Shifts in the Network Monarchy**

The Network Monarchy under Vajiralongkorn has paid less attention to keeping out of the limelight, as can be seen in its open consolidation of formal power. This move can be said to have not played out well for the monarchy, with growing unhappiness of the monarchy, especially amongst the youth, ostensibly weakening its bases of support, and thus influence. During Bhumibol's reign, the Network Monarchy can be said to have flourished, with the monarchy being able to exercise extensive influence, while remaining extremely popular. The changes in policy by Vajiralongkorn are unwise for the sustainability of the monarchy as an institution, and is extremely peculiar, as although the position and power of the monarchy has been solidified formally, its popularity has taken a nosedive, which can be seen as a bad trade-off. The reverence of the monarchy can be taken to have been held in high regard by Bhumibol, as can be seen in his frequent tours throughout the kingdom and his focus on keeping a tight check on the popularity of the monarchy. The fact that Vajiralongkorn has not regarded the popularity of the monarchy as a focal point, shows his disregard for its importance towards the continued power of the monarchy. Overall, however, these mistakes by Vajiralongkorn can be seen as to have been in the favour of Thailand democratisation, with increasing recognition of the overbearing power of the monarchy in its political sphere as a result of his actions. As has

been identified by Mérieau (2016), the Network Monarchy's strength is built upon the royal legitimacy granted by the palace. This royal legitimacy can be taken to be a function of the monarchy's popularity, given that all these are based upon the support of the Thai people. With the popularity of the monarchy falling, the Network Monarchy is concomitantly weakened. Proxies within the Network Monarchy may no longer be as enthusiastic to be associated with and to work with the monarchy. The Network Monarchy's future can be taken to be bleak, unless there are changes in the way Vajiralongkorn governs.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

This paper has utilised McCargo's (2005) concept of the Network Monarchy, a form of Network Governance, in order to understand the Thai monarchy. The Thai monarchy is a cult of personality, which has utilised proxies in the form of the military, politicians, and the Privy Council in order to achieve its goals. Its key selling point has been the royal legitimacy it provides, which has helped solidify coups and keep its proxies in positions of power. Both Bhumibol and Vajiralongkorn have undermined democracy through both formal and informal channels. Due to the vastly different personalities of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej and the current King Maha Vajiralongkorn, opposition against the current King has been significantly intensified, despite little change in the governance of Thailand in the form of the Network Monarchy. This has been shown through case studies and comparisons between how the monarchy influenced politics, the personalities of the two monarchs and public opinion of the monarchy, under Bhumibol and Vajiralongkorn's respective reigns. It must be recognised, however, that Vajiralongkorn's unpopularity has only acted as the trigger for anti-monarchy protests, with the systemic problems in the form of the Network monarchy being the root cause. Yet, the contribution of other factors including the changes in the mindsets of the Thai people, as well as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, towards anti-monarchy protests should be fleshed out in further research. With the monarchy facing rising unpopularity under Vajiralongkorn, the Network Monarchy has had its foundation weakened. The fight for undisturbed democracy in Thailand has been strengthened following the protests, but destructive social unrest is sure to follow in the coming years.

## **Bibliography**

- Börzel, T. A., & Heard-Lauréote, K. (2009). Networks in EU Multi-level Governance: Concepts and Contributions. *Journal of Public Policy*, 29(2), 135–151.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/s0143814x09001044>
- Branigin, W. (1992, May 21). Thai King Tells Rivals to Settle Crisis. *The Washington Post*.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1992/05/21/thai-king-tells-rivals-to-settle-crisis/518032fc-f32a-4421-854e-f903638b5f9c/>.
- Chambers, P., & Waitoolkiat, N. (2016). The Resilience of Monarchised Military in Thailand. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 46(3), 425–444.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2016.1161060>
- Dixon, J., & Dogan, R. (2002). Hierarchies, Networks and Markets: Responses to Societal Governance Failure. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 24(1), 175–196.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2002.11029344>
- Dressel, B. (2018). Thailand's Traditional Trinity and the Rule of Law: Can They Coexist? *Asian Studies Review*, 42(2), 268–285. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2018.1445196>
- Farrelly, N. (2013). Why democracy struggles: Thailand's elite coup culture. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 67(3), 281–296.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2013.788123>
- Fong, J. (2009). Sacred Nationalism: The Thai Monarchy and Primordial Nation Construction. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 39(4), 673–696.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00472330903077030>
- [Full statement] the demonstration at Thammasat proposes monarchy reform. Prachatai English. (2020). <https://prachatai.com/english/node/8709>.
- Guardian News and Media. (2020, August 4). *Thailand protesters openly criticise monarchy in Harry Potter-themed rally*. The Guardian.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/04/thailand-protesters-openly-criticise-monarchy-harry-potter-themed-rally>.

- Haberkorn, T. (2016). A Hyper-Royalist Parapolitics in Thailand. *Bijdragen Tot De Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde*, 172(2/3), 225-248. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.sg/stable/44325703>
- Harris, J. (2015). Who Governs? Autonomous Political Networks as a Challenge to Power in Thailand. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 45(1), 3–25.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2013.879484>
- Hewison, K. (2008). A Book, the King and the 2006 Coup. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 38(1), 190–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472330701652026>
- Hileman, J., & Lubell, M. (2018). The network structure of multilevel water resources governance in Central America. *Ecology and Society*, 23(2).  
<https://doi.org/10.5751/es-10282-230248>
- Isett, K. R., Mergel, I. A., LeRoux, K., Mischen, P. A., & Rethemeyer, R. K. (2010). Networks in Public Administration Scholarship: Understanding Where We Are and Where We Need to Go. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 21(Supplement 1), i157–i173. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muq061>
- Jones, C., Hesterly, W. S., & Borgatti, S. P. (1997). A General Theory of Network Governance: Exchange Conditions and Social Mechanisms. *The Academy of Management Review*, 22(4), 911. <https://doi.org/10.2307/259249>
- Klijin, E.H., & Skelcher, C. (2007). Democracy and Governance Networks: Compatible or not? *Public Administration*, 85(3), 587–608. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.2007.00662.x>
- McCargo, D. (2005). Network monarchy and legitimacy crises in Thailand. *Pacific Review*, 18(4), 499–519. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512740500338937>
- McGeown, K. (2006, September 21). *Asia-Pacific | Thai King remains centre stage*. BBC News. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/5367936.stm>.
- Mérieau, E. (2016). Thailand's Deep State, Royal Power and the Constitutional Court (1997-2015). *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 46(3), 445–466.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2016.1151917>

- Mérieau, E. (2019). Thailand in 2018: Military Dictatorship under Royal Command. *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 327-340. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26939702>
- Molin, M. D., & Masella, C. (2015). From Fragmentation to Comprehensiveness in Network Governance. *Public Organization Review*, 16(4), 493–508.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11115-015-0320-4>
- Nishizaki, Y. (2013). The King and Banharn: Towards an elaboration of network monarchy in Thailand. *South East Asia Research*, 21(1), 69–103.  
<https://doi.org/10.5367/sear.2013.0140>
- Nishizaki, Y. (2020). Birds of a feather: Anand Panyarachun, elite families and network monarchy in Thailand. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 51(1-2), 197–242.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/s002246342000020x>
- Ockey, J. (2005). Monarch, monarchy, succession and stability in Thailand. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 46(2), 115–127. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8373.2005.00267.x>
- Pathmanand, U. (2008). A Different Coup d'État? *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 38(1), 124–142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472330701651994>
- Pavin, C. (2015). Neo-royalism and the Future of the Thai Monarchy. *Asian Survey*, 55(6), 1193–1216. <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2015.55.6.1193>
- Pavin, C. (2020). Constitutionalizing the Monarchy: Uncompromising Demands of Thai Protesters. *Journal of International Affairs*, 73(2), 163–172.  
<https://www-jstor-org.proxy.lib.sg/stable/26939972>
- Pilling, D. (2011). *High time to concede the Thai king can do wrong*. Financial Times.  
<https://www.ft.com/content/f3ad24f4-b305-11e0-86b8-00144feabdc0>.
- Reed, J. (2020, October 13). All the king's money: Thailand divided over a \$US40b question. *Australian Financial Review*.  
<https://www.afr.com/world/asia/all-the-king-s-money-thailand-divided-over-a-us40b-question-20201014-p564xr>.

- Skelcher, C., Klijn, E., Kübler, D., Sørensen, E., & Sullivan, H. (2011). Explaining the Democratic Anchorage of Governance Networks: Evidence from Four European Countries. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 33(1), 7-38.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/29783164>
- Sombatpoonsiri, J. (2020). *Political Polarization in South and Southeast Asia: Old Divisions, New Dangers* (pp. 67-80, Rep.) (Carothers T. & O'Donohue A., Eds.). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26920.11>
- Sørensen, E., & Torfing, J. (2005). Network Governance and Post-Liberal Democracy. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 27(2), 197–237.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2005.11029489>
- The Economist Newspaper. (2010). *As father fades, his children fight*. The Economist.  
<https://www.economist.com/briefing/2010/03/18/as-father-fades-his-children-fight>.
- Thai protesters shun Parliament, ask Germany to Probe king*. CNA. (2020).  
<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/thailand-protesters-shun-parliament-ask-germany-probe-king-1296176>.
- Thomson Reuters. (2017, January 13). *Thai Parliament approves king's constitutional changes request, likely Delaying elections*. Reuters.  
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-king-constitution-idUSKBN14X0IF>.
- Thomson Reuters. (2019, October 1). *Thailand's King takes personal control of two key Army units*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-king-idUSKBN1WG4ED>.
- Thongchai, W. (2008). Toppling Democracy. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 38(1), 11–37.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00472330701651937>
- Van Kersbergen, K., & Van Waarden, F. (2004). ‘Governance’ as a bridge between disciplines: Cross-disciplinary inspiration regarding shifts in governance and problems of governability, accountability and legitimacy. *European Journal of Political Research*, 43(2), 143–171. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2004.00149.x>

