

Curriculum Project: Fulbright Hayes, Seminars Abroad, 2011: Thailand and Vietnam
Leslie Martin, West Forsyth High School, Clemmons, NC

Thailand's Monarchy in History and Culture, Symbols and Roles

Standards Addressed (Goals) (from National Council for the Social Studies, 2002)

I: Culture

II: Time, Continuity & Change

VI: Power, Authority & Governance

IX: Global Connections

I.C: Apply an understanding of culture as an integrated whole that explains the functions and interaction of language, literature, the arts, traditions, beliefs and values, and behavior patterns.

I.F: Interpret patterns of behavior reflecting values and attitudes that contribute or pose obstacles to cross-cultural understanding

I.G: Construct reasoned judgments about specific cultural responses to persistent human issues

II.E. Investigate, interpret and analyze multiple historical contemporary viewpoints within and across cultures, related to important vents, recurring dilemmas, and persistent issues, while employing empathy, skepticism, and critical judgment;

VI.E Explain the purpose of government and analyze how its powers are acquire, used an justified

VI.E Compare different political system (their ideologies, structure, institutions, processes and political cultures) with that of the United States and identify representative political leaders from selected historical and contemporary settings

Understandings:

- Role of government in leadership of a nation
- Role of history in development of culture
- Role and impact of primary source documents in understanding history and culture

Essential Questions:

- What are key characteristics of the Thai Monarchy?
- What is the evidence of the characteristics?
- How does the idea of nationhood shape Thai culture?
- What are the roles and functions of monarchy in the Thai culture?

Learning Activities

- Students will read a brief background of Thailand; use lonelyplanet.com or other sources of your choice.
- Extension activities
 - Students create an illustrated timeline of modern (and early)Thailand's history

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- Students identify major time periods in Thailand’s history and link it to other countries: China or Vietnam
- Students compare and contrast Thailand’s basic statistics with regional or non regional countries using the CIA factbook, focusing on major categories of Geography, People, Government, and Economy, communications, transportation and military. Students write and illustrate the similarities and differences.
- Students will read and analyze a selection of primary source documents focused on Thai government and monarchy
- Students will write a short essay addressing and answering the essential questions.

Document 1

Dr. Sumet Tantivejkul.

Excerpted from “The Great Pundit” by the Office of the Education Council, Ministry of Education, on the occasion of the 84th anniversary of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej on the fifth of December 2010. Dr. Tantivejkul was a close friend and professional associate of the king for many years.

His majesty [King Bhumibol Adulyadej] is said to be “the teacher of the nation”. In my 30 years of serving him, His Majesty has enlightened me about the earth, water, wind and fire. He has taught me how to live one’s life and behave in such a way that benefits other people. His main emphasis and the focus of his activity are agriculture, which I knew nothing about when I started working. Being well aware of this fact, His Majesty, from the very first day, taught me bits by bits on the matter. Since we have given him the title “Teacher of the Nations”, we are automatically his students, terrible ones if you ask me. I will speak without qualm right here right now before you professors that we Thais, regardless of age or profession, “love seeing but not looking at the King, and like hearing but not listen to him.”His pledge to serve the country is based on Buddhist Dharma. His Majesty interprets “Dharma” to mean “morality” and “righteousness”, two words that are the foundation of his reign. His Majesty’s Dharma is easy to understand but failed to interest Thais until the same concept was introduced by the western world. “Good Governance” has been the talk of the town since a recent economic crisis. The Thai translation of the term was popular to discuss among academia. The efforts yield several meaningless translations. I hate to say this but some scholars do think that the more complicated the translations sounds, the wiser people think they are. We eventually came down to a decent Thai term, which always seen together with the English counterpart closely followed in parentheses. The term has been used over and over by the public and private sectors and many other organizations, the Stock Exchange of Thailand for example. Attached to the term “good governance” are six of several attributes—all multisyllabic words: transparency, accountability, responsibility and what not. These words were no doubt taken from Western thinking and it was them to whom we gave credit for coming up with the notions. The truth is that His Majesty had originated the term “good governance” concept half a century before the word. It is a pity we took his lesson for granted and mindlessly look up to whatever done or told by the West. The United States is about 200 years old, the same age as

Bangkok, whereas Thailand is 900 years old. AN ancient country is sure to have our own Dharma as well as His Majesty's.

Reading Focus Questions:

1. Who wrote this? Why? Who is the intended audience?
2. According to the author, what are the roles of the king?
3. How and what does the king teach?
4. How does the author recognize the Thai people, and their intelligence? Does his argument work?
5. How does this selection tie the Monarch's role to religion?
6. How does the selection use history to support Thailand's independence and uniqueness?
7. How does the author link monarchy and religion? Is this effective?

Document 2

The Eagle and the Elephant

All Quotes taken from *The Eagle and the Elephant: Thai-American Relations since 1833*, published in 2009 by the Royal Thai Embassy. Based on editions 1-4, published by the United States Information Service, Bangkok, Thailand. 1982, 1983, 1987 and 1997.

A. *A press conference held at Reid's residence proved something of a sensation when the king announced his intention of laying the foundations for a system of self government in Siam upon his return, initially through municipal government. "The best form of government is the one which suits the people who live under it," he reportedly said. Concerning Siam's monarchy, he went on to say, "from olden times the King of Siam has been the father of his people, chosen when people chose their independence and adopted the name 'Thai' (free) for themselves, was 'Father of the Nation.'" (p.81)*

B. *In Siam there exists high admiration for the achievements of this great country, and a marked feeling of friendship towards both the American people and its government. This is largely due to the fact that Americans have made valuable contribution to the modern development of my kingdom, and that the government of the United States has shown sympathetic understanding both of the aspiration and achievements of my kingdom. (p. 83) Words of Rama VII, during a visit to the United States in 1924.*

C. *His Majesty's influence can be discerned in all his numerous projects, his lifelong interest in public health, his efforts to bring peaceful solutions in times of conflict and his generosity in helping refugees in neighboring countries. His contributions, on a both a large and small scale, have made King Bhumipol the prime source of inspiration, pride and joy among the Thai people. If a country can be defined in terms of a soul, King Bhumipol Adulyadej has become the sole of Thailand. (p. 124*

Tribute by United States Congressman Bob Clement on submitted to the Congressional record on February 13, 1995,

Reading Focus Questions

1. What is the purpose of a publication like *The Eagle and the Elephant*? Why?
2. How do each of the selections show support for the king and his rule of Thailand?
3. How do each of these selections portray the Thai monarchy with respect to American democracy?
4. How does the statement of Congressman Clement show support for the Thai monarchy?
5. Discuss similarities and differences in readings 1 and 2.

Document 3

Excerpts from *Siam Mapped*

Winichakul, Thong chi. *Siam Mapped: A history of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii. 1994

A. Since the late 1970s, the network of army-owned radio stations, which comprise two-thirds of the radio stations in Thailand, has broadcast two programs daily at 6:45 A.M. and 6:00P. M. to call for order and unity and to stimulate nationalism and the awareness of national security amid the communist threats from within and without. Its topics range from political commentary on social issues, including attendance on the civilian and elected governments from time to time, to letters and obituaries. But the themes are clear: what is right and wrong for Thai people, how they should behave, and how to think on every issue. It attempts to impose social and intellectual discipline and overtly ...Positively the commentaries often quote history, the king's speeches, and the words of the incumbent army commander as authority fro particular aspects of Thainess. Negatively, they usually refer to what is happening in other countries, especially in Indochina as examples of evil, degradation, and the values Thais must avoid. P. 9,

1. What is the tone of the author as he refers to the Thai government?
2. What point is he making about control of the airwaves? Give an example from the reading
3. How does this selection support the idea of the uniqueness of Thai government?
4. The author asserts that the uniqueness is used for a specific purpose; what is the purpose? Is it a legitimate purpose of government?

Document 4

Saying the Unsayable: Monarchy and Democracy in Thailand

Ivarsson, Soren, and Isager, Lotte, editors United Kingdom: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies. 2010. Introduction, p.1-10

The official roles assigned for a monarch may be similarly in two different constitutional monarchies and yet be defined by quite dissimilar sets of political and cultural meanings. It is, for example, unthinkable that a European constitutional monarch would intervene in rural development planning, not to mention other politic al affairs., in the way King Bhumibol has done in Thailand.....In Thailand the media generally combine the representation of royals as awe-inspiring extraordinary individuals possessing human qualities that are beyond the possibilities of ordinary mortals with reports about royal

displays of informality and familiarity during interactions with their subjects.another common trait of contemporary monarchs is the image as guardian of tradition and protector of the nations.Historically, the formation of the monarchies in the modern form was directly connected with the formation of the nation-states headed by the kings and queens. And just as a monarchy needs a nation in order to be monarch, the nations use the monarchy to symbolize the unity of the nations. One of the reasons why monarchs are well-suited for this role is that the lines of descent of the kings and queens add a sense of historical continuity and legitimacy to the relatively new forms of imagined communities, which nations are. p. 5,

Reading Focus Questions

1. According to the editors/authors what are some of the roles of monarchs?
2. How does the media portray the Thai monarchs?
3. How does the United States media portray the President or other important leaders?

Document 6

Excerpts from: *King Bhumibol and His*

Enlightened Approach to Teaching: The New Theory and the Sufficiency Economy

Foreign Office; The Government Public Relations Department. Rama VI Road, Soi 30, Bangkok 10400, Thailand

Furthermore, His Majesty has recommended a secure balance in the five following aspects to achieve the principle of self-reliance:

- *State of Mind: One should be strong, self-reliant, compassionate and flexible. Besides, one should possess a good conscience and place public interests as a higher priority than one's own.*
- *Social Affairs: People should help one another, strengthen the community, maintain unity and develop a learning process that stems from a stable foundation.*
- *Natural Resource and Environmental Management: The country's resources need to be used efficiently and carefully to create sustainable benefits and to develop the nation's stability progressively.*
- *Technology: Technological development should be used appropriately while encouraging new developments to come from the villagers' local wisdom.*
- *Economic Affairs: One needs to increase earnings, reduce expenses, and pursue a decent life.*

As His Majesty has stated, "If we contain our wants, with less greed, we would be less belligerent towards others. If all countries entertain this - this is not an economic system - the idea that we all should be self-sufficient, which implies moderation, not to the extreme, not blinded with greed, we can all live happily."

The Self Sufficiency Economy theory has led to diverse interpretations by many different groups. However, His Majesty has rejected extreme perspectives on his ideology, stating

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that self-sufficiency does not require families to grow food and make clothes for themselves. But, each village should have some quantity of sufficiency. For instance, if agricultural production exceeds the amount needed for the village they should sell the remaining amount to a nearby village, close in distance, to avoid unnecessary transportation costs.

The New Theory

His Majesty's self-sufficient ideology has a strong linkage to his New Theory, initiated in 1992. Seeking ways to help the people engaging in agriculture, His Majesty introduced the New Theory, to be implemented at the Royally-initiated Wat Mongkol Chaipattana Area Development Project, to serve as a model of land and water management for the farmers. According to the theory, the land is divided into four parts with a ratio of 30:30:30:10. Based on this ratio, 30% is set aside for pond and fish culture, 30% for rice cultivation, 30% for growing fruit and perennial trees, and the remaining 10% for housing, raising animals and other activities.

The New Theory consists of the three following phases:

- *Phase 1: To live at a self-sufficient level which allows farmers to become self-reliant and maintain their living on a frugal basis.*
- *Phase 2: To cooperate as a group in order to handle the production, marketing, management, and educational welfare, as well as social development.*
- *Phase 3: To build up connections within various occupation groups and to expand businesses through cooperation with the private sector, NGOs and the government, in order to assist the farmers in the areas of investment, marketing, production, management and information management.*

In short, the Self Sufficiency Economy and its expected outcomes are best summarized, by His Majesty himself; "Sufficiency Economy is a philosophy that guides the livelihood and behavior of people at all levels, from the family to the community to the country, on matters concerning national development and administration. It calls for a 'middle way' to be observed, especially in pursuing economic development in keeping with the world of globalization...At the same time we must build up the spiritual foundation of all people in the nation, especially state officials, scholars, and business people at all levels, so they are conscious of moral integrity and honesty and they strive for the appropriate wisdom to live life with forbearance, diligence, self-awareness, intelligence, and attentiveness. In this way we can hope to maintain balance and be ready to cope with rapid physical, social, environmental, and cultural changes from the outside world."

Reading Focus Questions

1. How does this proclamation show the king as a leader? In what ways? Does it position him as a leader in the GLOBAL world?
 - a. Compare and contrast with leadership roles/examples of the President of the United States

2. What is “the middle way” in Buddhism? How is the term used here? Are there any overlaps?
3. What does this imply about Thailand’s role in the world?
4. What does this imply about Thailand’s uniqueness?

Reading #6

Bombay Anna: The Real Story and Remarkable

Adventure of the King and I Governess.

Landon, Margaret. *Anna and the King of Siam*. 1944. New York: The John Day Company. P. 386-387

Note: The following quote is taken from fictional account of a British woman in Thailand (then Siam). It is included as an example of how fiction can be used to support (or undermine) an idea.

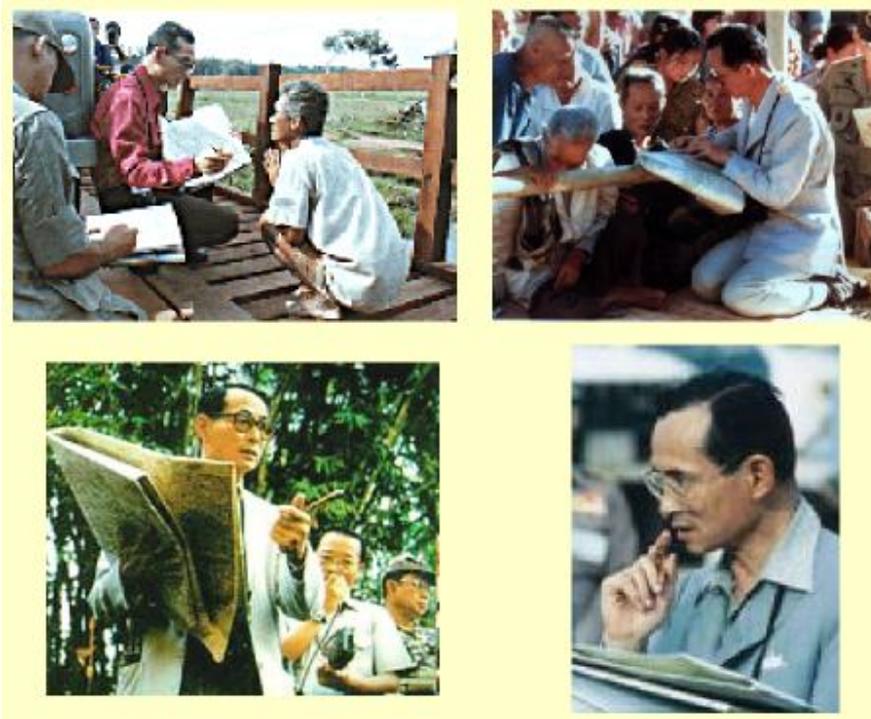
.....Thirty years after she left Siam in 1867, Anna Leonowens saw her most distinguished pupil again....It was another memorable day in her life. The King had reined for twenty-nine years, a grave, quiet, determined man who had accomplished much against great odds. The nobles whose privileges he had curtailed had secretly opposed him. The French had continued their depredations, seizing further territory on the slightest pretext. Nevertheless the work of reform had gone on. Schools had been established all over the kingdom. Missionaries had been encouraged in their efforts to start hospitals and schools. Transportation facilities were improved. The law courts had been reorganized. Gradually, educated officials were taking the places of the old feudal administrators. The whole system of government had been reorganized. The military forces were being modernized. Young men were being sent abroad for study and teachers from Europe and American were being imported. Already in his lifetime the Siamese were beginning to say that Chulalongkorn [Rama VI, r 1868-1910] was their greatest king. When he moved about Bangkok in formal procession they scattered rice mixed with flowers in his path—their highest tribute.It was thus with a feeling of deep gratitude and humility that Anna heard him say that was through the principles laid down in her teaching that he had formed the plans by which he had transformed his kingdom. He had kept his determination to recreate a free Siam.it was a change based on the idea of the worth of a human being as Anna had helped instill it into the monarch—a change based on democratic principles.

Reading Focus Questions

1. How does this selection support the King of Siam? Be specific and cite examples in your analysis.
2. How does the Governess take credit for HER influence over the king?
3. How does this selection support the idea of the King as Teacher?
4. How does this selection indicate that Siam and its king dealt with issues commonly facing states undergoing modernization: religion and state, education, military, building infrastructure, revolts?
5. How the Siamese people feel about their king? Why?

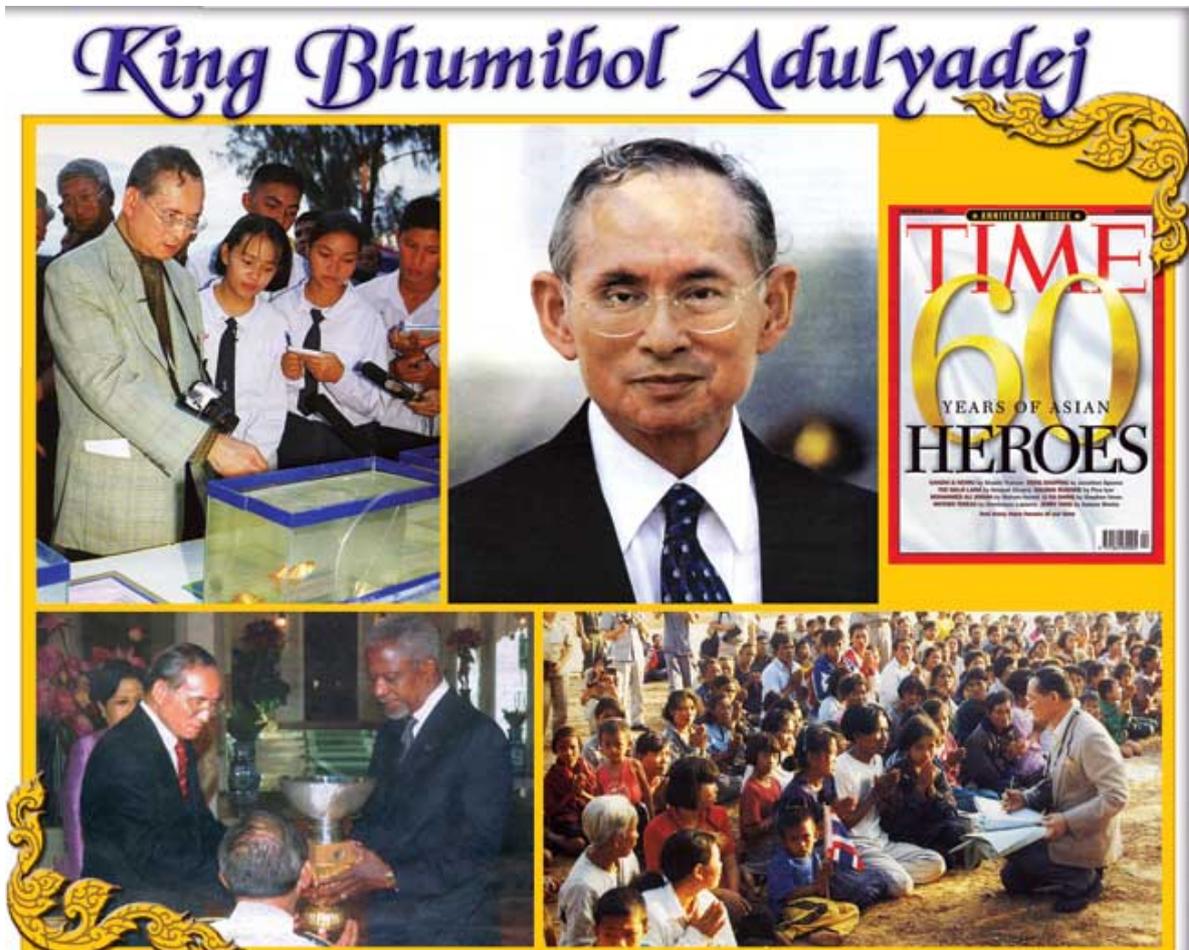
Document 7

Official Photos of King *King Bhumibol*



Reading Focus Questions

1. What is the king doing in each of these photographs? How is he dressed? How does he look: serious? Concerned? Happy?
2. What is the background or context of the picture? Who is with him? Why?
3. What message is each of these photographs sending to his people and others?
4. How do these images encourage the Kings' subjects to view him?
5. Why do you think THESE images were chosen to make available? What other images could have been used to illustrate the role/importance/attitude of the king?
6. Extension: Find images of leaders of other countries and compare. Is there a difference between official and unofficial portraits? Why?



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Optional Activities:

- Compare and contrast the National and Royal Anthems of Thailand. Both are easily available on the internet; there are several translations of the National Anthem.
- Analyze the Garuda, Mythical Hindu creature, half bird, half human, the steed of Vishnu. It is the symbol of Thailand and used by the king as his personal emblem.

