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## Comparison of Thailand's social, international, and environmental situation between the years 1940 - 1950 with 2000 - 2022

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### ABSTRACT

World War II is often discussed through the perspectives of the allies and, in particular, American and British soldiers. But, the discussion about Thailand's contribution, context, and situation is often lacking or overlooked. The author thus decided to compare the Thai situation (environment, society, and international relations) in the years 1940 -1950 with the present (2000-2022) after analyzing primary and secondary sources. During and just prior to the Second World War, Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram was the Prime Minister of the nation. Post-war, Seni Pramroj led Thailand. During WW2, the Thai government supported Japan in the battle. Since Thailand supported the Japanese, they were forced to pay reparations. Additionally, during WW2, the Thai people had electricity, electronics, cars, and even planes sold from Japan. Nowadays, Thailand has many allies, like the US. Thailand's technology has drastically improved along with the quality of life. Still, the natural environment has been damaged drastically through plastic and deforestation. Thus, there are numerous similar and different relationships between the past (1940-1950) and the present (2000-2022). The influence received from Western countries and the political influence of the Prime Minister are similar; however, the two periods differ in the environment, way of life, technology, and alliances.

**Keywords:** Thailand, Environment, Society, International Relations.

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### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Background

Thailand in the years 1940 to 1950 experienced both the beginning of World War II and its conclusion. Prior to 1940, Thailand saw the Siam Revolution in which the government shifted from an absolute monarchy to a democratic constitutional monarchy with Field Marshal Plaek

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Phibunsongkhram as its Prime Minister. In addition, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great, the ninth monarch was the King of Thailand from 1946 to 2016 (Holmes, 2016).

Thailand from 2000-2022 is currently developing in numerous ways. Thailand had a relatively strong economy ("Thailand", 2018). The King of Thailand was His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great. The latter part of this period saw the King of Thailand as His Majesty King Maha Vajiralongkorn Phra Vajiraklaochaoyuhua. Thailand in 2020-2022 is notably in the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic. This has damaged numerous Thai sectors, especially tourism which decreased by over 33 million tourists when the pandemic first hit (Manakitsomboon, 2022).

## 1.2 Importance, uniqueness, and research gap

There is currently a research gap in the discussion of Thai history with relevance to the Second World War. This topic is not often discussed, especially from the Thai perspective ("What Did," 2021). Additionally, the comparison of Thailand between two periods is also rarely talked about. There is in general a lack of research (Charoen, 2018). The modern period (21st Century) is often overlooked (Szijarto, 2020) with focus in current literature on Thailand from the Late-20th Century. Discussion about the environment is also something generally rarely discussed or neglected ("Assisting Developing," 1997), especially with regards to Thai history. The expected benefits of the investigation are to gain new knowledge that can be used to study the past and develop the country in the present (Al-Attili, n.d.). Additionally, the research should gain lesser-known knowledge for those who are interested in relevant topics such as historians (Umar, 2020). Knowledge gained can be used in the modern world ("How Institutions," 2020).

## 1.3 Methodology

Books from libraries, primary-source videos, and research papers will be utilized to obtain the data. This will be compiled and compared to make conclusions.

## 1.4 Main ideas and findings

From 2000-2022, issues of climate change, antibiotic resistance, unemployment, and increasing daily costs of goods and rent are also occurring. The first two issues were not as prevalent from 1940-1950. Thailand has many allies in both of the time periods, although they have shifted. Thailand is currently allied with China and the United States. The US and Thai relations in the Indo-Pacific are peaceful and brilliant. They first contacted each other (as shown in documents) in 1818. The first treaty with Thailand was signed in 1833. Ever since World War 2, the relationship between Thailand and the US continues to grow in commercial, diplomatic, and military aspects ("U.S. Relations," 2021). Thus, their relationship grew for more than 200 years. In the case of China, there is cooperation in many aspects. Both of the nations have long-term development programs for their relationship and agree to work together on numerous aspects such as on knowledge, science, and energy (Han Zhiqiang, 2019). Thailand and China trade to a large extent both through products and cultures. Thailand and China are allies. Both in trade, science and technology, exchange cultures with each other.

In the current environment, the number of trees has drastically decreased. Still, Thailand has more buildings and more roads than when compared to the 1940s and 1950s. Thailand currently experiences the issue of environmental destruction such as in the form of less wildlife, desertification, less trees, climate change, and less biodiversity ("Environment," 2017). The amount of usable water in Thailand has also decreased. Finally, there has been a change and general decrease in air quality.

## 1.5 Contribution of paper to literature

Current literature does not often discuss the environment, society, or international relations between the two periods. Together, these three topics are even less seen. This paper aims to discuss such issues from the Thai perspective in great depth and detail, with the goal of enabling the audience to understand the benefits and areas of improvement of our current society by looking at its past. Additionally, the writer is interested in providing such research for others to study and to make past events better understood through the understanding of the contexts this paper will communicate.

## 1.6 Structure

The paper will be discussing society, with the comparison of the time periods 1940-1950 and 2000-2022. Next, there will be a discussion about the historical aspect of the time period 1940-1950. Then, international relations will be compared. Afterwards, the environment between the two periods will be contrasted. Finally, a conclusion and policy implication will be provided.

## 2. Results and discussions

### 2.1 Society

In the years 1940-1950, the social situation and life of the people at that time involved numerous aspects of the world individuals see today, although with various aspect changes. There were numerous houses built of wood. Many houses were also situated near the water. There were many big and famous temples in Bangkok and other cities. Thus, this enabled people to make a career in trading and selling goods near such temples.

The transportation in those days consisted of the use of three-wheeled pedal bicycles. The city was significantly shaped by the large number of these vehicles. But there were also cars and buses, such as those created by Ford. Back then, there were electric light poles and trams on the roads. Some people even used boats to travel and sell goods (Kevinpkavanagh, 2009).

The popular sports played in those days were Sepak Takraw and Thai boxing.

Thailand was also influenced by America. The trams of that time were showing Coca-Cola ads on them, and Bridgestone tire advertisements were present. Longines signs were also on the billboards.

In the present moment, there are still wooden houses near the seas although there are fewer and instead more high-rises. Additionally, there are still individuals selling goods near the temples although these temples are older and aged.

There are more people whose quality of life is better and cars used to a larger extent on the roads (Simandan, 2010).

Sports like Muay Thai have continued to attract many interested fans. However, more sports are now being widely watched on TV. Also, Western ideas and brands are more prevalent in Thailand, such as Apple ads.

Individuals nowadays use advanced computers, internet, and mobile phones in order to communicate, which is fast and more convenient than the systems in the past. In addition, digital cameras are used to record images. Other modern technology like Night vision, AI, VR, and advanced robots were more recently developed.

### 2.2 History

Between the years 1940 - 1950, Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram was the Prime Minister of Thailand. In that period, the Thai government presented a request to the French government to improve the border line between Thailand and French Indochina.

On June 12, 1940, the French army surrendered to the German army in the war in Europe.

Later, when France signed an armistice with Germany, the Thai Minister also proposed an agreement between Thailand and France amounting to 3 items as follows:

1. Laying the boundary line along the Mekong River in accordance with international law.
2. Improving the boundaries to be natural as shaped by the Mekong River as the boundary between Thailand and Indochina from the North to the South of to the Cambodian border. Additionally, Thais are able to regain the territory on the right bank of the Mekong River opposite Luang Prabang and Pakse.
3. Ask the French side to certify that, if Indochina is independent, France will return Laos and Cambodia to Thailand.

But, France rejected all three proposals. Later, at midnight on September 12, 1940, Japanese troops invaded Indochina territory. They had a conflict with the French troops.

The Thai government tried to negotiate with France again, but their requests were denied. When negotiations were unsuccessful, the Thai government announced a canceling of the non-aggression pact with France. Thus, Thailand used this to declare war on Indochina and France on January 7, 1941 (“จอมพล ป. นำ,” 2021).

Although Thailand was initially successful, they eventually had a ceasefire and resolution. Eventually, the tide of war turned against the Axis, and both Germany and Japan surrendered. Thailand was treated like a defeated enemy nation to Britain but better treated by the US.

### 2.3 International relations

In the years 1940-1950, citizens of Thailand and Japan had a fascinating, often positive relationship. During the Second World War, some Thais were very supportive of the Japanese, to the point of willing to let Japan rule Thailand, but others disagreed. Many liked Japan since the nation did not harm Thailand but was more like an ally.

There are 5 reasons why Thai people are not upset with Japanese people, even post-war (Reynolds, 1990).

1) There were rarely any Japanese people in Thailand.

2) Japan's policy towards Thailand was rather good.

3) Japanese people helped some Thai people get jobs or earn more money.

4) Japan actually planned to fight the Thai people because of the Seri Thai. However, the war was concluded before any of this occurred.

5) Thais and Japanese dislike western countries due to imperialism and colonialism.

Thailand was rather fortunate since it emerged from World War 2 relatively unscathed especially when other countries suffered more severe damage. For instance, the Philippines were both invaded and taken over by Japan before being recaptured.

Still, Thai people also faced difficulties, for example, the baht's depreciation. Thailand was also told to pay reparations to the British (Darling, 1963). America did not demand any reparations. Thailand was also instructed to return taken territories back to France before Thailand was allowed to the UN.

In 1945, Thailand and Japan were cut off from one another, but in 1948, Thailand and Japan became allies again. In 1951, Thailand created an embassy in Tokyo. In 1955, Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram went to visit Japan.

When World War II ended, England forced Thailand to pay compensation. They also wanted to change the Thai military system and structure, control trade, and control the flights. This was in part since they wanted to get reparations because Thailand had damaged British infrastructure; however, America did not want Thailand to provide compensation. Because of an anti-Japanese Free Thai movement, the Seri Thai, the US was less harsh on Thailand after the war (Darling, 1963).

More specifically, the Seri Thai had cooperated with OSS, and the Americans thought that the Thai people didn't actually want to fight in World War 2. Rather, the US believed that only the Thai government wanted to join in support of Japan and the Axis Powers. Additionally, America wanted to help Thailand become independent. So, in the end, the Allies were to control Thailand's trade until 1947, and Thailand was told to pay 1.5 million pounds in reparations. However, Thailand ended up not paying, and the military structure in Thailand remained unchanged.

As stated prior, the government of Thailand in World War 2 was controlled by Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram. Near the war's conclusion, Seni Pramoj became prime minister and was also a supporter of the Free Thai movement.

Nowadays, Thailand has numerous international allies. They basically want to form alliances with many nations around the world (Pongsudhirak, 2017). Currently, Thailand is an ally with China and America. It is also one of the ASEAN countries. The current Prime Minister is General Prayut Chan-o-cha.

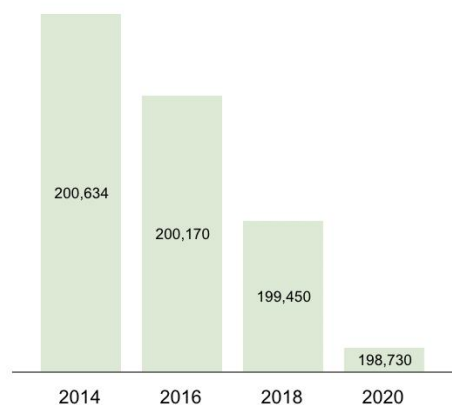
### 2.4 Environment

The use of plastic in Thailand has significantly increased when comparing the present (2000-2022) with 1940-1950 ("Plastic Crisis," 2019).

Forests in Thailand in 1945 were up to 64% of the country, but in 1955 the volume was reduced to only 55%.

In 2018, 2.7 million tons of plastic were produced

Total Thai Forest Area (in km<sup>2</sup>) from 2014-2020



Source: theglobaleconomy.com

and the number of trees in Thailand decreased by 37.1% (“Thailand Forest,” 2011).

Thus, environmentally, the situation has gotten significantly worse (“Environment,” 2017).

### 3. Conclusion and policy implications

#### 3.1 Conclusion

This study aims to study society, international relations, and the environment in the years 1940 - 1950 in comparison to today (2000-2022). The results of the study found that society in the past had numerous similarities with the current world, such as in brand advertising. Individuals also used cars, although they are more prominently used these days. Nowadays, people use new technologies such as AI and VR. In the history aspect of 1940-1950, Thailand fought with France for territories along the Mekong River. On the topic of international relations, during World War II, Thailand was allied with Japan. But some of the population supported the Allies through the Free Thai Movement. Finally, about the environment, there are a lot of plastics being used today, significantly more than that created between 1940- 1950. Also, the number of forests has decreased considerably more than from the past.

#### 3.2 Policy implication

From the research, it was found that the present environment is completely different from the past. Plastic problems increase and forests are reduced in amount. Therefore, improving nature is essential and conservation is important. If individuals are to compare themselves to the past, individuals ought to address climate issues which are intensifying as a result of the shifting world.

Additionally, as a result of the increased technologies, individuals should be more conscious about their decisions and misinformation. The fake news issues are even more widespread due to the new technologies that make us interconnected. Social behavior is also affected by using smartphones, a contrast with the pre-smartphone era.

Finally, as shown in the 1940-1950s period, fortunes can change. The Axis initially seemed winning, but they were actually lost. Not only this, but World War 2 also saw an extremely large number of deaths and suffering. With a dynamic climate in the current world, nations should consider world peace as an important agenda.

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