

# **Thailand**

**Thailand**, [b][c] officially the **Kingdom of Thailand** and also known historically as **Siam** (the official name until 1939), [d][e] is a country in Southeast Asia on the Indochinese Peninsula. With a population of almost 70 million, [11] it spans 513,120 square kilometres (198,120 sq mi). Thailand is bordered to the northwest by Myanmar, to the northeast by Laos, to the southeast by Cambodia, to the south by the Gulf of Thailand and Malaysia, and to the southwest by the Andaman Sea; it also shares maritime borders with Vietnam to the southeast and Indonesia and India to the southwest. Bangkok is the nation's capital and largest city.

Tai peoples migrated from southwestern China to mainland Southeast Asia from the 6th to 11th centuries. Indianised kingdoms such as the Mon, Khmer Empire, and Malay states ruled the region, competing with Thai states such as the Kingdoms of Ngoenyang, Sukhothai, Lan Na, and Ayutthaya, which also rivalled each other. European contact began in 1511 with a Portuguese diplomatic mission to Ayutthaya, which became a regional power by the end of the 15th century. Ayutthaya reached its peak during the 18th century, until it was destroyed in the Burmese-Siamese War. Taksin quickly reunified the fragmented territory and established the short-lived Thonburi Kingdom. He was succeeded in 1782 by Buddha Yodfa Chulaloke, the first monarch of the current Chakri dynasty. Throughout the era of Western imperialism in Asia, Siam remained the only nation in the region to avoid colonization by foreign powers, although it was often forced to make territorial, trade, and legal concessions in unequal treaties. [12] The Siamese system of government was centralised and transformed into a modern unitary absolute monarchy during the reign of Chulalongkorn. In World War I, Siam sided with the Allies, a political decision made in order to amend the unequal treaties. Following a bloodless revolution in 1932, it became a constitutional monarchy and changed its official name to Thailand, becoming an ally of Japan in World War II. In the late 1950s, a military coup under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat revived the monarchy's historically influential role in politics. Thailand became a major ally of the United States and played an anti-communist role in the region as a member of the failed SEATO, but since 1975 it has sought to improve relations with Communist China and Thailand's neighbours.

Apart from a <u>brief period of parliamentary democracy</u> in the mid-1970s, Thailand has periodically alternated between <u>democracy</u> and <u>military rule</u>. Since the 2000s, the country has been caught in continual bitter political conflict between supporters and opponents of <u>Thaksin Shinawatra</u>, which resulted in two coups (in 2006 and 2014), along with the establishment of its <u>current constitution</u>, a nominally democratic government after the 2019 Thai general election, and <u>large pro-democracy protests</u> in 2020–2021, which included unprecedented demands to reform the monarchy. Since



2019, it has been nominally a <u>parliamentary</u> <u>constitutional monarchy</u>; in practice, however, structural advantages in the constitution have ensured the military's continued influence in politics. [13]

Thailand is a <u>middle power</u> in global affairs and a founding member of <u>ASEAN</u>, and it ranks very high in the <u>Human Development Index</u>. It has the <u>second-largest economy</u> in Southeast Asia and the <u>23rd-largest in the world by PPP</u>, and it ranks <u>91st by nominal GDP</u> per capita. Thailand is classified as a <u>newly industrialised economy</u>, with manufacturing, agriculture, and tourism as leading sectors. [14][15]

# **Etymology**

Thailand [c] was known by outsiders prior to 1939 as Siam. [e] According to George Cœdès, the word Thai ([ne) means 'free man' in the Thai language, "differentiating the Thai from the natives encompassed in Thai society as serfs". [16]:197 According to Chit Phumisak, Thai (ln) simply means 'people' or 'human being', his investigation shows that some rural areas used the word "Thai" instead of the usual Thai word khon (Au) for people. [17] According to Michel Ferlus, the ethnonyms Thai-Tai (or Thay-Tay) would have evolved from the etymon  $kl(\partial)ri$ : 'human being'. [f][19]

Thais often refer to their country using the polite form *prathet Thai* (Thai: ประเทศไทย). They also use the more colloquial term mueana Thai (Thai: เมืองไทย) or simply Thai; the word mueang, archaically referring to a city-state, is commonly used to refer to a city or town as the centre of a region. Ratcha Anachak Thai (Thai: ราชอาณาจักร ไทย) means 'kingdom of Thailand' or 'kingdom of Thai'. Etymologically, its components are: ratcha (Sanskrit: राजन, rājan, 'king, royal, realm'), ana- (Pali āṇā 'authority, command, power', itself from the Sanskrit आज्ञा, ajñā, of the same meaning), and -chak (from Sanskrit चक्र cakra- 'wheel', a symbol of power and rule). The Thai National Anthem (Thai: เพลงชาติ), written by Luang Saranupraphan during the patriotic 1930s, refers to the Thai nation as prathet Thai (Thai: ประเทศไทย). The first line of the national anthem is: prathet thai ruam lueat nuea chat chuea thai (Thai: ประเทศไทย รวมเลือดเนื้อชาติเชื้อไทย), 'Thailand is the unity of Thai flesh and blood'.

The former name *Siam* may have originated from <u>Sanskrit</u> 외대 (śyāma, 'dark')<sup>[17]</sup> or <u>Mon</u> ရာမည (*rhmañña*, 'stranger'), probably the same root as <u>Shan</u> and <u>Assam</u>.<sup>[20]</sup> The word *Śyâma* is possibly not the true origin, but a pre-designed deviation from its proper, original meaning.<sup>[21][22]</sup> Another theory is the name derives from the Chinese calling this region 'Xian'<sup>[g][23]:8</sup> The ancient Khmers used the word *Siam* to refer to people settled in the west <u>Chao Phraya River</u> valley surrounding the ancient city of <u>Nakhon Pathom</u> in the present-day <u>central Thailand</u>; it may probably originate from the name of Lord <u>Krishna</u>, which also called *Shyam*, as in the <u>Wat Sri</u> Chum Inscription, dated 13th century CE, mentions Phra Maha Thera

	100°29′E			
Official language and national language	<u>Thai<sup>[1]</sup></u>			
Spoken languages	Thai, Isan, Lanna, Dambro, Karen, Pattani Malay, Bangkok Malay, Teochew, Hokkien			
Ethnic groups	80% Thai  - 37% Thai (Central Thai)  - 25% Thai Lao (Northeastern Thai)  - 8% Lanna (Northern Thai)  - 8% Dambro (Southern Thai)  - 2% (Western Thai)  12% Thai Chinese 4% Khmer 4% Malays			
<b>Religion</b> (2023) <sup>[2]</sup>	90% Buddhism 5% Islam 2% Christianity 1% no religion 1% undeclared			
Demonym(s)	<u>Thai</u>			
Government	Unitary parliamentary constitutional monarchy			
Monarch     Prime Minister	Vajiralongkorn Srettha Thavisin			
Legislature	National Assembly			
• <u>Upper house</u> • <u>Lower house</u>	Senate House of Representatives			
Formation				
<ul> <li>Sukhothai Kingdom</li> <li>Ayutthaya Kingdom</li> <li>Thonburi Kingdom</li> <li>Rattanakosin Kingdom</li> <li>Constitutional monarchy</li> <li>Current constitution</li> </ul>	1238–1448 1351–1767 1767–1782 6 April 1782 24 June 1932 6 April 2017			
Area				
• Total	513,120 km <sup>2</sup> (198,120 sq mi) (50th)			
• Water (%)	0.4 (2,230 km <sup>2</sup> )			

<u>Sri Sattha</u> came to restore <u>Phra Pathommachedi</u> at the city of Lord Krishna (Nakhon Pathom) in the early era of the <u>Sukhothai</u> Kingdom. [24]

The signature of King Mongkut (r. 1851–1868) reads *SPPM* (*Somdet Phra Poramenthra Maha*) *Mongkut Rex Siamensium* (Mongkut, King of the Siamese). This usage of the name in the country's first international treaty gave the name *Siam* official status, until 24 June 1939 when it was changed to "Thailand". Thailand was briefly renamed *Siam* from 1946 to 1948, after which it again reverted to "Thailand".

# History

# Prehistory and origins

There is evidence of continuous human habitation in present-day Thailand from 20,000 years ago to the present day. [26]:4 The earliest evidence of rice growing is dated at 2,000 BCE. [27]:4 Areas comprising what is now Thailand participated in the Maritime Jade Road, as ascertained by archeological research. The trading network existed for 3,000 years, between 2000 BCE to 1000 CE.  $\frac{[28][29][30][31]}{[28][29][30][31]}$  Bronze appeared <u>c.</u> 1,250–1,000 BCE.  $\frac{[27]}{[27]}$ : 4 The site of Ban Chiang in northeast Thailand currently ranks as the earliest known centre of copper and bronze production in Southeast Asia. [32] Iron appeared around 500 BCE. [27]:5 The Kingdom of Funan was the first and most powerful Southeast Asian kingdom at the time (2nd century BCE). [26]:5 The Mon people established the principalities of Dvaravati and Kingdom of Hariphunchai in the 6th century. The Khmer people established the Khmer empire, centred in Angkor, in the 9th century. [26]:7 Tambralinga, a Malay state controlling trade through the Malacca Strait, rose in the 10th century. [26]: 5 The Indochina peninsula was heavily influenced by the

<u>culture</u> and <u>religions of India</u> from the time of the Kingdom of Funan to that of the Khmer Empire. [33]

The <u>Thai people</u> are of the <u>Tai ethnic group</u>, characterized by common linguistic roots. [34]: 2 Chinese chronicles first mention the Tai peoples in the 6th century BCE. While there are many assumptions regarding the origin of Tai peoples,

Population				
• 2023 estimate	▲ 69,794,997 <sup>[3]</sup> (20th)			
• 2010 census	64,785,909 <sup>[4]</sup> (21st)			
Density	132.1/km <sup>2</sup> (342.1/sq mi) (88th)			
GDP (PPP)	2024 estimate			
• Total	▲ \$1.665 trillion <sup>[5]</sup> (23rd)			
Per capita	▲ \$23,707 <sup>[5]</sup> (74th)			
GDP (nominal)	2024 estimate			
• Total	▲ \$543.248 billion <sup>[5]</sup> ( <u>30th</u> )			
• Per capita	▲ \$7,731 <sup>[5]</sup> (91st)			
<u>Gini</u> (2021)	▲ 35.1 <sup>[6]</sup> medium			
<u>HDI</u> (2021)	▼ 0.800 <sup>[7]</sup> very high ( <u>66th</u> )			
Currency	Thai baht (\$)			
Time zone	<u>UTC</u> +7 ( <u>ICT</u> )			
Date format	dd/mm/yyyy (BE)			
Driving side	left			
Calling code	+66			
ISO 3166 code	<u>TH</u>			
Internet TLD	<u>.th • .ไทย</u>			

SPP MMongkut

Res Giamensum

SPPM Mongkut Rex Siamensium, King Mongkut's signature

<u>David K. Wyatt</u>, a historian of Thailand, argued that their ancestors who at present inhabit Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, India, and China came from the <u>Diện Biên Phủ</u> area between the 5th and the 8th century. Thai people began migrating into present-day Thailand gradually from the 6th to 11th century, which Mon and Khmer people occupied at the time. Thus Thai culture was influenced by Indian, Mon, and Khmer cultures. Tai people intermixed with various ethnic and cultural groups in the region, resulting in many groups of present-day Thai people. Genetic evidences suggested that ethnolinguistics could not accurately predict the origins of the Thais. Sujit Wongthes argued that Thai is not a race or ethnicity but a culture group.

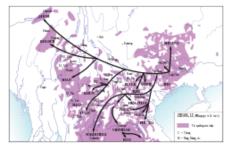
According to French historian George Cœdès, "The Thai first enter history of Farther India in the eleventh century with the mention of *Syam* slaves or prisoners of war in Champa epigraphy", and "in the twelfth century, the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat" where "a group of warriors" are described as *Syam*, [16]:190–191,194–195 though Cham accounts do not indicate the origins of *Syam* or what ethnic group they belonged to. [41] The origins and ethnicity of the *Syam* remain unclear, with some literature suggesting that *Syam* refers to the Shan people, the Bru people, or the Brau people. [41][42]

However, mainland Southeast Asian sources from before the fourteenth century primarily used the word *Syam* as an <u>ethnonym</u>, referring to those who belonged to a separate cultural category different from the Khmer, Cham, Bagan, or Mon. This contrasts with the Chinese sources, where *Xian* was used as a toponym. [41]

## Early Tai confederate cities: 691 BCE-13th centuries

Theoretically, <u>Tai-Kadai</u>-speaking people formed as early as the 12th century BCE in the middle of the <u>Yangtze basin</u>. Some groups later migrated south to <u>Guangxi</u>. However, after several bloody centuries against <u>Chinese</u> influence in <u>Guangxi</u> from the 333 BCE-11th centuries, hundreds of thousands of Tais were killed, [44]: 5[45]: 193,239–249 thus, <u>Tai people</u> began to move southwestward along the rivers and over the lower passes into the mountain north of <u>Southeast Asia</u> and river valleys in present-day <u>Assam</u> of <u>India</u>. Some evidence indicates that the ancestors of Tai people migrated en masse southwestwards out of Yunnan only after the 1253 <u>Mongol</u> invasion of Dali, but not generally accepted. [48]: 38

Tais defeated <u>indigenous tribes</u> and emerged as the new power in the new region, several Tai city-states were established, scattered from <u>Diện Biên Phủ</u> in present-day northwestern <u>Vietnam</u> and highland <u>Southeast Asia</u> to northeastern <u>India</u>. [49][50][51] According to the *Simhanavati legend* given in several chronicles, the first Tai city-state in northern Thailand, <u>Singhanavati</u>, was found around the 7th century; [52]:5,9 however, several modern <u>geology</u> and <u>archaeology</u> studies found that its center, Yonok Nahaphan, dates from 691 BCE–545 CE, [52]:7[53][54][55] coinciding roughly with the establishment of <u>Shan States</u>, another Tai's federated principalities in the present-day northeast <u>Myanmar</u>. [56][57][58][59] as well as <u>Muang Sua</u> (<u>Luang Prabang</u>) in the east. [60][61] After Singhanavati was submerged below <u>Chiang Saen Lake</u> due to an <u>earthquake</u> in 545, [53][55][62] the survivors then founded a new seat at Wieng–Prueksha, the kingdom lasted for another 93 years.



Map showing geographic distribution of Kra–Dai linguistic family. Arrows represent general pattern of the migration of Tai-speaking tribes along the rivers and over the lower passes. [27]:27



<u>Lan Na</u> kingdom during the reign of Tilokaraj. (r. 1441–1487)

In addition to Singhanavati, another northern principality probably related to the Tai people, Ngoenyang, was established as the successor of Singhanavati in 638 by Lavachakkaraj, also centered in Wieng–Prueksha (present-day Mae Sai District, Chiang Rai). Its seat was moved to Chiang Mai in 1262 by King Mangrai, which considered the foundation of the Lan Na kingdom. Mangrai unified the surrounding area and also created a network of states through political alliances to the east and north of the Mekong. His dynasty would rule the kingdom continuously for the next two centuries. Lan Na expanded its territory southward and annexed the Mon Hariphunchai of Dvaravati in 1292. [64]: 208

In the late 10 century, Tai people began to migrate further south to the present-day upper central Thailand. [65]:46–9,83–6 Around the 1100s period, several cities in this area, such as Songkwae, Sawankhalok, and Chakangrao, were ruled by the Tai people, and they eventually launched several battles against the pre-existing Mon of Lavo, who had been falling under Chenla and Khmer influences since the 7th century, thus bringing the establishment of the Tai people's independent state, Sukhothai Kingdom, in the upper Chao Phraya River valley in 1238. [34]:52–3

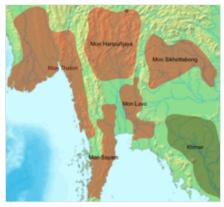
The earliest conflict between <u>Tai people</u> and the preexisting ethnics was recorded in the mid-4th century when the ruler of <u>Singhanavati</u>, <u>Pangkharat</u>, forcibly lost the seat at Yonok to King Khom from Umongasela (present-day <u>Fang</u>). He then fled to Vieng Si Tuang (เวียงศรีทวง; present-day Wiang Phang Kham, <u>Mae Sai district</u>) but had to send tributes to Yonok annually until his son, <u>Phrom</u>, took back Yonok and expelled King Khom from Umongasela. [66][67][68] <u>Phrom</u>

also marched the troops south to occupy <u>Chakangrao</u> from the enemy as well as founding the city of <u>Songkwae</u>. Some historians suggest that <u>Lavo</u>'s capital, <u>Lopburi</u>, was once seized by <u>Phrom</u>. In contrast, <u>Tai people</u> instead established relationships with Siamese Mon via <u>royal intermarriages</u>. [65]: 46-9,83-6

### Siamese Mon and Lavo: 5th - 13th centuries

As is generally known, the present-day <u>Thai people</u> were previously called Siamese before the country was renamed Thailand in the mid-20th century. Several genetic studies published in the 21st century suggest that the so-called Siamese people (central Thai) might have had Mon origins since their genetic profiles are more closely related to the <u>Mon people</u> in <u>Myanmar</u> than the <u>Tais</u> in <u>southern China, [37]</u> and they probably later became Tais through the <u>language shift</u> after the arriving of Tai people from the north around the 8th-10th centuries. [51][69][70] This is also reflected in the language since over half of the vocabulary in the central Thai language is derived from or borrowed from the <u>Mon language</u> as well as <u>Pali</u> and <u>Sanskrit</u>. [69][71] Moreover, the <u>Jinakalamali</u> chronicle of Tai's <u>Lan Na</u> also called the southern region occupied by the Mon <u>Haripuñjaya</u> of <u>Dvaravati</u> as *Shyam Pradesh* (<u>lit.</u> 'the land of Siam people'), which indicates that the ancient Siamese and the Mon people in central Thailand were probably the same ethnolinguistic group. [72]

The earliest evidence to mention the Siam people are stone inscriptions found in <u>Angkor Borei</u> of <u>Funan</u> (K.557 and K.600), dated 661 CE, the slave's name is mentioned as "Ku Sayam" meaning "Sayam female slaves" (Ku is a prefix used to refer to female slaves in the pre-Angkorian era), and the Takéo inscriptions (K.79) written in 682 during the reign of <u>Bhavavarman II</u> of <u>Chenla</u> also mention Siam Nobel: *Sāraṇnoya Poña Sayam*, which was transcribed into English as: the rice field that was given to the poña (noble rank) who was called Sayam (Siam). The Song Huiyao Jigao (960–1279) indicate Siamese people settled in the west <u>central Thailand</u> and their state was called Xiān guó (Chinese: 選國), while the eastern plain belonged to the Mon of Lavo (Chinese: 羅國國), who later fell under the <u>Chenla</u> and <u>Khmer hegemony</u> around the 7th-9th centuries. Those Mon political entities, which also included <u>Haripuñjaya</u> in the north and several city-states in the northeast, are collectively called Dvaravati. However, the states of Siamese



Political entities of the Mon people around the 6th-7th centuries.



Map of settlements of Dvaravati culture from the 6th to 9th centuries

Mon and Lavo were later merged via the <u>royal intermarriage</u> and became <u>Ayutthaya Kingdom</u> in the mid-14th century, while the southwestern <u>Isan</u> principalities, centered in <u>Phanom Rung</u> and <u>Phimai</u>, later pledged allegiance to Siamese's Ayutthaya during the reign of <u>Borommarachathirat II</u> (<u>r.</u> 1424–1448). The remaining principal city-states in <u>Isan</u> region became <u>Lan Xang</u> around 1353 after the twin cities of <u>Muang Sua</u> (<u>Luang Prabang</u>) and <u>Vieng Chan Vieng Kham</u> (Vientiane) became independent following the death of the <u>Sukhothai</u> king <u>Ram Khamhaeng</u>.

According to the Wat Kud Tae inscription (K.1105), dated c. 7th century, during the period that the eastern Mon entity, Lavo, was strongly influenced by the Chenla, the Siamese Mon in the west also established a royal intermarriage with Chenla as Sri Chakatham, prince of Sambhuka (ศามภูกะ, in the present-day Ratchaburi province), married to a princess of Isanavarman I, and two mandalas then became an ally. After Chenla sieged Funan and moved the center to Angkor, both Siamese Mon and the Angkorian eventually marched the troops to attack Vijaya of Champa in 1201 during the reign of Jayavarman VII, as recorded in the Cho-Dinh inscription (C.3).

### Sukhothai Kingdom: 13th-14th centuries

After the decline of the Khmer Empire and <u>Kingdom of Pagan</u> in the early 13th century, various states thrived in their place. The domains of Tai people existed from the northeast of present-day India to the north of present-day Laos and to the Malay peninsula. [34]:38–9 During the 13th century, Tai people had already settled in the core land of Dvaravati and

<u>Lavo Kingdom</u> to <u>Nakhon Si Thammarat</u> in the south. There are, however, no records detailing the arrival of the Tais. [34]: 50-1

Around 1240, Pho Khun Bang Klang Hao, a local Tai ruler, rallied the people to rebel against the Khmer. He later crowned himself the first king of Sukhothai Kingdom in 1238. [34]:52–3 Mainstream Thai historians count Sukhothai as the first kingdom of Thai people. Sukhothai expanded furthest during the reign of Ram Khamhaeng (r. 1279–1298). However, it was mostly a network of local lords who swore fealty to Sukhothai, not directly controlled by it. [34]:55–6 He is believed have invented Thai script and Thai ceramics were an important export in his era. Sukhothai embraced Theravada Buddhism in the reign of Maha Thammaracha I (1347–1368).

## Ayutthaya Kingdom: 14th-18th centuries

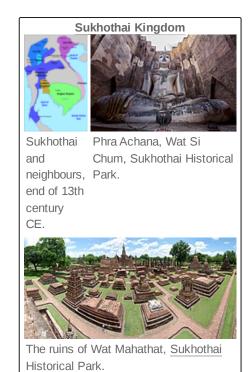
According to the most widely accepted version of its origin, the Ayutthaya Kingdom rose from the earlier, nearby Lavo Kingdom and Suvarnabhumi with Uthong as its first king. Ayutthaya was a patchwork of self-governing principalities and tributary provinces owing allegiance to the King of Ayutthaya under the mandala system. [80]:355 Its initial expansion was through conquest and political marriage. Before the end of the 15th century, Ayutthaya invaded the Khmer Empire three times and sacked its capital Angkor. [81]:26 Ayutthaya then became a regional power in place of the Khmer. Constant interference of Sukhothai effectively made it a vassal state of Ayutthaya and it was finally incorporated into the Borommatrailokkanat brought about bureaucratic reforms which lasted into the 20th century and created a system of social hierarchy called sakdina, where male commoners were conscripted as corvée labourers for six months a year. [82]: 107 Ayutthaya was interested in the Malay peninsula, but failed to conquer the Malacca Sultanate which was supported by the Chinese Ming dvnastv.[26]:11,13

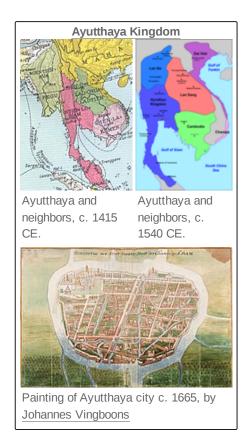
European contact and trade started in the early-16th century, with the envoy of Portuguese duke Afonso de Albuquerque in 1511. Portugal became an ally and ceded some soldiers to King Rama Thibodi II. The Portuguese were followed in the 17th century by the French, Dutch, and English. Rivalry for supremacy over Chiang Mai and the Mon people pitted Ayutthaya against the Burmese Kingdom. Several wars with its ruling Taungoo dynasty starting in the 1540s in the reign of Tabinshwehti and Bayinnaung were ultimately ended with the capture of the capital in 1570. [82]: 146-7 Then was a brief period of vassalage to Burma until Naresuan proclaimed independence in 1584.[23]: 11

Ayutthaya then sought to improve relations with European powers for many successive reigns. The kingdom especially prospered during cosmopolitan

Narai's reign (1656–1688) when some European travelers regarded Ayutthaya as an Asian great power, alongside China and India. However, growing French influence later in his reign was met with nationalist sentiment and led eventually to the Siamese revolution of 1688. However, overall relations remained stable, with French missionaries still active in preaching Christianity. However, overall relations remained stable, with French missionaries still active in preaching Christianity.

After a bloody period of dynastic struggle, Ayutthaya entered into what has been called the Siamese "golden age", a relatively peaceful episode in the second quarter of the 18th century when <u>art</u>, <u>literature</u>, and learning flourished. There were seldom foreign wars, apart from conflict with the Nguyễn lords for control of Cambodia starting around 1715. The

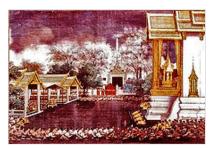




last fifty years of the kingdom witnessed bloody succession crises, where there were purges of court officials and able generals for many consecutive reigns. In 1765, a combined 40,000-strong force of Burmese armies <u>invaded it</u> from the north and west. The Burmese under the new <u>Alaungpaya</u> dynasty quickly rose to become a new local power by 1759. After a 14-month siege, the capital city's walls fell and the city was burned in April 1767. [85]:218

# **Thonburi Kingdom**

The capital and many of its territories lay in chaos after the war. The former capital was occupied by the <u>Burmese</u> garrison army and five local leaders declared themselves overlords, including the lords of Sakwangburi, <u>Phitsanulok</u>, <u>Pimai, Chanthaburi</u>, and <u>Nakhon Si Thammarat</u>. <u>Chao Tak</u>, a capable military leader, proceeded to make himself a lord by <u>right of conquest</u>, beginning with the legendary sack of <u>Chanthaburi</u>. Based at Chanthaburi, Chao Tak raised troops and resources, and sent a fleet up the <u>Chao Phraya</u> to take the fort of <u>Thonburi</u>. In the same year, Chao Tak was able to retake Ayutthaya from the Burmese only seven months after the fall of the city. [86]



Taksin the Great enthroned himself as a Thai king in 1767.

Chao Tak then crowned himself as <u>Taksin</u> and proclaimed <u>Thonburi</u> as temporary capital in the same year. He also quickly subdued the other warlords. His forces engaged in wars with Burma, Laos, and Cambodia, which successfully <u>drove the Burmese out of Lan Na</u> in 1775, <u>[82]: 225</u> <u>captured Vientiane</u> in 1778, and <u>tried to install a pro-Thai king in Cambodia</u> in the 1770s. In his final years there was a coup, caused supposedly by his "insanity", and eventually Taksin and his sons were executed by his longtime companion General <u>Chao Phraya Chakri</u> (the future Rama I). He was the first king of the ruling <u>Chakri dynasty</u> and founder of the <u>Rattanakosin Kingdom</u> on 6 April 1782.

# Modernisation and centralisation

Under Rama I (1782–1809), Rattanakosin successfully defended against Burmese attacks and put an end to Burmese incursions. He also created suzerainty over large portions of Laos and Cambodia. In 1821, Briton John Crawfurd was sent to negotiate a new trade agreement with Siam – the first sign of an issue which was to dominate 19th century Siamese politics. Bangkok signed the Burney Treaty in 1826, after the British victory in the First Anglo-Burmese War. Anouvong of Vientiane, who mistakenly held the belief that Britain was about to launch an invasion of Bangkok, started the Lao rebellion in 1826 which was suppressed. Vientiane was destroyed and a large number of Lao people were relocated to Khorat Plateau as a result. Balgive Bangkok also waged several wars with Vietnam, where Siam successfully regained hegemony over Cambodia.

From the late-19th century, Siam tried to rule the ethnic groups in the realm as colonies. [82]:308 In the reign of Mongkut (1851–1868), who recognised the potential threat Western powers posed to Siam, his court contacted the British government directly to defuse tensions. [82]:311 A British mission led by Sir John Bowring, Governor of Hong Kong, led to the signing of the Bowring Treaty, the first of many unequal treaties with Western countries. This, however, brought trade and economic development to Siam. [89] The unexpected death of Mongkut from malaria led to the reign of underage Prince Chulalongkorn, with Somdet Chaophraya Sri Suriwongse (Chuang Bunnag) acting as regent. [82]:327

Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910) initiated centralisation, set up a privy council, and abolished slavery and the <u>corvée</u> system. The <u>Front Palace crisis</u> of 1874 stalled attempts at further reforms. [82]:331–3 In the 1870s and 1880s, he incorporated the protectorates up north into the kingdom proper, which later expanded to the protectorates in the northeast and the south. [82]:334–5 He established twelve *krom* in 1888, which were equivalent to present-day ministries. [82]:347 The <u>crisis of 1893</u> erupted, caused by French demands for Laotian territory east of Mekong. [82]:350–3 Thailand is the only Southeast Asian nation never to have been colonised by a Western power, [90] in part because Britain and France agreed in 1896 to make the <u>Chao Phraya</u> valley a <u>buffer state</u>. [91] Not until the 20th century could Siam renegotiate every unequal treaty dating from the Bowring Treaty, including <u>extraterritoriality</u>. The advent of the *monthon* system marked the creation of the modern Thai nation-state. [82]:362–3 In 1905, there were unsuccessful rebellions in the ancient <u>Patani</u> area, Ubon Ratchathani, and Phrae in opposition to an attempt to blunt the power of local lords. [82]:371–3

The Palace Revolt of 1912 was a failed attempt by Western-educated military officers to overthrow the Siamese monarchy. [82]: 397 Vajiravudh (r. 1910– 1925) responded by propaganda for the entirety of his reign, [82]:402 which promoted the idea of the Thai nation. [82]:404 In 1917, Siam joined the First World War on the side of the Allies. [82]:407 In the aftermath Siam had a seat at the Paris Peace Conference, and gained freedom of taxation and the revocation of extraterritoriality. [82]: 408

# Constitutional monarchy, World War II and Cold War

A bloodless revolution took place in 1932, in which Prajadhipok was forced to grant the country's first constitution, thereby ending centuries of feudal and absolute monarchy. The combined results of economic hardships brought on by the Great Depression, sharply falling rice prices, and a significant reduction in public spending caused discontent among aristocrats. [26]:25 In 1933, a counter-revolutionary rebellion occurred which aimed to reinstate absolute monarchy, but failed. [82]:446-8 Prajadhipok's conflict with the government eventually led to abdication. The government selected Ananda Mahidol, who was studying in Switzerland, to be the new king. [82]: 448–9

Later that decade, the army wing of Khana Ratsadon came to dominate Siamese politics. Plaek Phibunsongkhram who became premier in 1938, started political oppression and took an openly anti-royalist stance. [82]: 457 His government adopted nationalism and Westernisation, anti-Chinese and anti-French policies. [26]: 28

In 1939, there was a decree changing the name of the country from "Siam" to "Thailand". In 1941, Thailand was in a brief conflict with Vichy France resulting in Thailand gaining some Lao and Cambodian territories. [82]: 462

On 8 December 1941, the Empire of Japan launched an invasion of Thailand, and fighting broke out shortly before Phibun ordered an armistice. Japan was granted free passage, and on 21 December Thailand and Japan signed a military alliance with a secret protocol, wherein the Japanese government agreed to help Thailand regain lost territories. [92] The Thai government declared war on the United States and the United Kingdom. [82]:465 The Free Thai Movement was launched both in Thailand and abroad to oppose the government and Japanese occupation. [82]: 465–6 After the war ended in 1945, Thailand signed formal agreements to end the state of war with the Allies. The main Allied powers had ignored Thailand's declaration of war.

In June 1946, young King Ananda was found dead under mysterious circumstances. His younger brother Bhumibol Adulyadei ascended to the throne. Thailand joined the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) to become an active ally of the United States in 1954.[82]:493 Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat launched a coup in 1957, which removed Khana Ratsadon from politics. His rule (premiership 1959–1963) was autocratic; he built his legitimacy around the god-like status of the monarch and by channelling the government's loyalty to the king. [82]:511 His government improved the



the sacred palladium of Thailand.

II in Saint Petersburg, 1897.



country's infrastructure and education. [82]: 514 After the United States joined the Vietnam War in 1961, there was a secret agreement wherein the U.S. promised to protect Thailand. [82]: 523

The period brought about increasing modernisation and Westernisation of Thai society. Rapid <u>urbanisation</u> occurred when the rural populace sought work in growing cities. Rural farmers gained <u>class consciousness</u> and were sympathetic to the <u>Communist Party of Thailand</u>. E2]: 528 Economic development and education enabled the rise of a middle class in Bangkok and other cities. E2]: 534 In October 1971, there was a <u>large demonstration</u> against the dictatorship of <u>Thanom Kittikachorn</u> (premiership 1963–1973), which led to civilian casualties. E82]: 541–3 Bhumibol installed <u>Sanya Dharmasakti</u> (premiership 1973–1975) to replace him, marking the first time that the king had intervened in Thai politics directly since 1932. The aftermath of the event marked a short-lived parliamentary democracy, often called the "era when democracy blossomed" (ยุคประชาธิปไตย เบ้าบาน).

## **Contemporary history**

Constant unrest and instability, as well as fear of a communist takeover after the <u>fall</u> of <u>Saigon</u>, made some ultra-right groups brand leftist students as communists. [82]:548 This culminated in the <u>Thammasat University massacre</u> in October 1976. [82]:548–9 A coup d'état on that day brought Thailand a new ultra-right government, which cracked down on media outlets, officials, and intellectuals, and fuelled the <u>communist insurgency</u>. Another coup the following year installed a more moderate government, which offered amnesty to communist fighters in 1978. [94]

Fuelled by <u>Indochina refugee crisis</u>, <u>Vietnamese border raids</u> and economic hardships, <u>Prem Tinsulanonda</u> became the Prime Minister from 1980 to 1988. The communists abandoned the insurgency by 1983. Prem's premiership was dubbed "semi-democracy" because the Parliament was composed of all elected House and all appointed Senate. The 1980s also saw increasing intervention in politics by the monarch, who rendered two coups in <u>1981</u> and <u>1985</u> attempts against Prem failed. In 1988 Thailand had its first elected prime minister since 1976. [95]

Suchinda Kraprayoon, who was the coup leader in 1991 and said he would not seek to become prime minister, was nominated as one by the majority coalition government after the 1992 general election. This caused a popular demonstration in Bangkok, which ended with a bloody military crackdown. Bhumibol intervened in the event and signed an amnesty law, Suchinda then resigned. [97]

The 1997 Asian financial crisis originated in Thailand and ended the country's 40 years of uninterrupted economic growth. Chuan Leekpai's government took an IMF loan with unpopular provisions. The populist Thai Rak Thai party, led by prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, governed from 2001 until 2006. His policies were successful in reducing rural poverty and initiated universal healthcare in the country. A South Thailand insurgency escalated starting from 2004. The 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami hit the country, mostly in the south. Massive protests against Thaksin led by the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) started in his second term as prime minister and his tenure ended with a coup d'état in 2006. The junta installed a military government which lasted a year.



Field Marshal Plaek
Phibunsongkhram, the longest serving Prime Minister of Thailand



King Bhumibol Adulyadej addresses a joint session of the United States Congress, 1960



United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship, Red Shirts, protest in 2010

In 2007, a civilian government led by the Thaksin-allied <u>People's Power Party</u> (PPP) was <u>elected</u>. <u>Another protest led by PAD</u> ended with the dissolution of PPP, and the <u>Democrat Party</u> led a coalition government in its place. The pro-Thaksin United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) protested both in 2009 and in 2010, the latter of which ended

After the general election of 2011, the populist Pheu Thai Party won a majority and Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin's younger sister, became prime minister. The People's Democratic Reform Committee organised another anti-Shinawatra protest after the ruling party proposed an amnesty bill which would benefit Thaksin. Yingluck dissolved parliament and a general election was scheduled, but was invalidated by the Constitutional Court. The crisis ended with another coup d'état in 2014.

The ensuing National Council for Peace and Order, a military junta led by General Prayut Chan-o-cha, led the country until 2019. Civil and political rights were restricted, and the country saw a surge in lese-majesté cases. Political opponents and dissenters were sent to "attitude adjustment" camps; [106] this was described by academics as showing the rise of fascism. [107] Bhumibol, the longest-reigning Thai king, died in 2016, and his son Vajiralongkom ascended to the throne. The referendum and adoption of Thailand's current constitution happened under the junta's rule. [1] The junta also bound future governments to a 20-year national strategy 'road map' it laid down, effectively locking the country into military-guided democracy. [109] In 2019, the junta agreed to schedule a general election in March. [116] Prayut continued his premiership with the support of Palang Pracharath Party-coalition in the House and junta-appointed Senate, amid allegations of election fraud. [110] The 2020–21 pro-democracy protests were triggered by increasing royal prerogative, democratic and economic regression from the Royal Thai Armed Forces supported by the Thai monarchy in the wake of the 2014 Thai coup d'état, dissolution of the pro-democracy Future Forward Party, distrust in the 2019 general election and the current political system, forced disappearance and deaths of political activists including Wanchalearm Satsaksit, and political corruption scandals, [111][112] which brought forward unprecedented demands to reform the monarchy [113] and the highest sense of republicanism in the country.

In May 2023, Thailand's reformist opposition,the progressive Move Forward Party (MFP) and the populist Pheu Thai Party, won the general election, meaning the royalist-military parties that supported Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha lost power. On 22 August 2023, Srettha Thavisin of the populist Pheu Thai party, became Thailand's new prime minister, while the Pheu Thai party's billionaire figurehead Thaksin Shinawatra returned to Thailand after years in self-imposed exile. [116]

# Geography

Totalling 513,120 square kilometres (198,120 sq mi), Thailand is the  $\underline{50th\text{-largest}}$  country by total area. [1]

Thailand comprises several distinct geographic regions, partly corresponding to the provincial groups. The north of the country is the mountainous area of the Thai highlands, with the highest point being Doi Inthanon in the Thanon Thong Chai Range at 2,565 metres (8,415 ft) above sea level. The northeast, Isan, consists of the Khorat Plateau, bordered to the east by the Mekong River. The centre of the country is dominated by the predominantly flat Chao Phraya river valley, which runs into the Gulf of Thailand. Southern Thailand consists of the narrow Kra Isthmus that widens into the Malay Peninsula.



Ko Tarutao, Satun

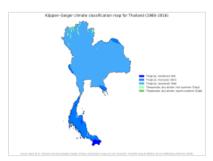
The Chao Phraya and the Mekong River are the indispensable water courses of rural Thailand. Industrial scale production of crops use both rivers and their tributaries. The Gulf of Thailand covers 320,000 square kilometres (124,000 sq mi) and is fed by the Chao Phraya, Mae Klong, Bang Pakong, and Tapi Rivers. It contributes to the tourism sector owing to its clear shallow waters along the coasts in the southern region and the Kra Isthmus. The eastern shore of the Gulf of Thailand is an industrial centre of Thailand with the kingdom's premier deepwater port in Sattahip and its busiest commercial port, Laem Chabang.

Phuket, Krabi, Ranong, Phang Nga and Trang, and their islands, all lay along the coasts of the Andaman Sea.

### Climate

Thailand's climate is influenced by monsoon winds that have a seasonal character (the southwest and northeast monsoon).  $\frac{[117]}{2}$  Most of the country is classified as Köppen's tropical savanna climate.  $\frac{[118]}{2}$  The majority of the south as well as the eastern tip of the east have a tropical monsoon climate. Parts of the south also have a tropical rainforest climate.

A year in Thailand is divided into three seasons. [117]:2 The first is the rainy or southwest monsoon season (mid–May to mid–October), which is caused by southwestern wind from the Indian Ocean. [117]:2 Rainfall is also contributed by Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) and tropical cyclones, [117]:2 with August and September being the wettest period of the year. [117]:2 The country receives a mean annual rainfall of 1,200 to 1,600 mm (47 to 63 in). [117]:4 Winter



Thailand map of Köppen climate classification.

or the northeast monsoon occurs from mid–October until mid–February. [117]:2 Most of Thailand experiences dry weather with mild temperatures. [117]:2,4 Summer or the pre–monsoon season runs from mid–February until mid–May. [117]:3 Due to their inland position and latitude, the north, northeast, central and eastern parts of Thailand experience a long period of warm weather, where temperatures can reach up to 40 °C (104 °F) during March to May, [117]:3 in contrast to close to or below 0 °C (32 °F) in some areas in winter. [117]:3 Southern Thailand is characterised by mild weather year-round with less diurnal and seasonal variations in temperatures due to maritime influences. [117]:3 It receives abundant rainfall, particularly during October to November. [117]:2

Thailand is among the world's ten countries that are most exposed to climate change. In particular, it is highly vulnerable to rising sea levels and extreme weather events. [119][120]

## **Biodiversity and conservation**

<u>National parks</u> in Thailand are defined as *an area that contains natural resources of ecological importance or unique beauty, or flora and fauna of special importance*. Thailand's protected areas include 156 national parks, 58 wildlife sanctuaries, 67 non-hunting areas, and 120 forest parks. They cover almost 31 per cent of the kingdom's territory.

The parks are administered by the <u>National Parks</u>, <u>Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department</u> (DNP), of the <u>Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment</u> (MNRE).



The population of <u>Asian elephants</u> in Thailand's wild has dropped to an estimated 2.000–3.000.[121]

Thailand has a mediocre but improving performance in the global Environmental Performance Index (EPI) with an overall ranking of 91 out of 180 countries in

2016. The environmental areas where Thailand performs worst (i.e., highest-ranking) are <u>air quality</u> (167), environmental effects of the agricultural industry (106), and the <u>climate and energy</u> sector (93), the later mainly because of a high  $\underline{CO_2}$  <u>emission</u> per kWh produced. Thailand performs best (i.e., lowest-ranking) in <u>water resource management</u> (66), with some major improvements expected for the future, and <u>sanitation</u> (68).  $\underline{^{[122][123]}}$  The country had a 2019 <u>Forest Landscape Integrity Index</u> mean score of 6.00/10, ranking it 88th globally out of 172 countries.  $\underline{^{[124]}}$ 

The population of elephants, the country's <u>national symbol</u>, has fallen from 100,000 in 1850 to an estimated 2,000. Poachers have long hunted elephants for <u>ivory</u> and hides, and now increasingly for <u>meat</u>. Young elephants are often captured for use in tourist attractions or as work animals, where there have been claims of mistreatment. However, their use has declined since the government banned logging in 1989.

Poaching of protected species remains a major problem. <u>Tigers</u>, <u>leopards</u>, and other large cats are hunted for their pelts. Many are farmed or hunted for their meat, which supposedly has medicinal properties. Although such trade is illegal, the well-known Bangkok market <u>Chatuchak</u> is still known for the sale of endangered species. <u>[127]</u> The practice of keeping wild animals as pets affects species such as <u>Asiatic black bear</u>, <u>Malayan sun bear</u>, <u>white-handed lar</u>, <u>pileated gibbon</u>, and binturong. <u>[128]</u>

# **Politics and government**







Srettha Thavisin
Prime Minister of Thailand
since 22 August 2023[129]

Prior to 1932, Thai kings were feudal or <u>absolute monarchs</u>. During <u>Sukhothai Kingdom</u>, the king was seen as a *Dharmaraja* or 'king who rules in accordance with <u>Dharma</u>'. The system of government was a network of tributaries ruled by local lords. Modern absolute monarchy and statehood was established by Chulalongkorn when he transformed the decentralized protectorate system into a unitary state. On 24 June 1932, <u>Khana Ratsadon</u> (People's Party) carried out a bloodless revolution which marked the beginning of <u>constitutional monarchy</u>.

Thailand has had 20 constitutions and charters since 1932, including the latest and current 2017 Constitution. All constitutions state that the politics is conducted within the framework of a constitutional monarchy, but the *de facto* form of government has ranged from military dictatorship to

electoral democracy. [130][131] Thailand has had the fourth-most coups in the world. [132] "Uniformed or ex-military men have led Thailand for 55 of the 83 years" between 1932 and 2009. [133] Most recently, the military junta self-titled as the National Council for Peace and Order ruled the country between 2014 and 2019.

### Government is separated into three branches:

- The legislative branch: the National Assembly is composed of the Senate, the 250-member fully appointed upper house, and House of Representatives, the elected 500-member lower house. The current constitution gives senators power to elect prime ministers along with the representatives until 2024. Its most recent election is the 2023 general election. The coalition led by Pheu Thai Party currently holds the majority.
- The executive branch consisting of the <a href="Prime Minister of Thailand">Prime Minister of Thailand</a>, the <a href="Mead of government">head of government</a>, and other cabinet members of up to 35 people. The Prime Minister was elected by the National Assembly. The current constitution mandates that prime ministers are to be considered from candidates nominated by political parties before the election. The current prime minister is <a href="Srettha Thavisin">Srettha Thavisin</a>, a candidate from Pheu Thai, who was supported by the coalition which include the parties associated with the military, and 152 unelected senators. <a href="[134][135]">[134][135]</a>
- The <u>judiciary</u> is supposed to be independent of the executive and the legislative branches, although judicial rulings are suspected of being based on political considerations rather than on existing law. [136]

Military and bureaucratic aristocrats fully controlled political parties between 1946 and the 1980s. [137]:16 Most parties in Thailand are short-lived. [138]:246 Between 1992 and 2006, Thailand had a two-party system. [138]:245 Later constitutions created a multi-party system where a single party cannot gain a majority in the house.

A <u>hereditary monarch</u> serves as Thailand's <u>head of state</u>. The current King of Thailand is <u>Vajiralongkorn</u> (or Rama X), who has reigned since October 2016. The powers of the king are limited by the constitution and he is primarily a symbolic figurehead. However, the monarch still occasionally intervenes in Thai politics, as all constitutions pave the way for customary royal rulings. Some academics outside Thailand, including <u>Duncan McCargo</u> and Federico Ferrara, noted

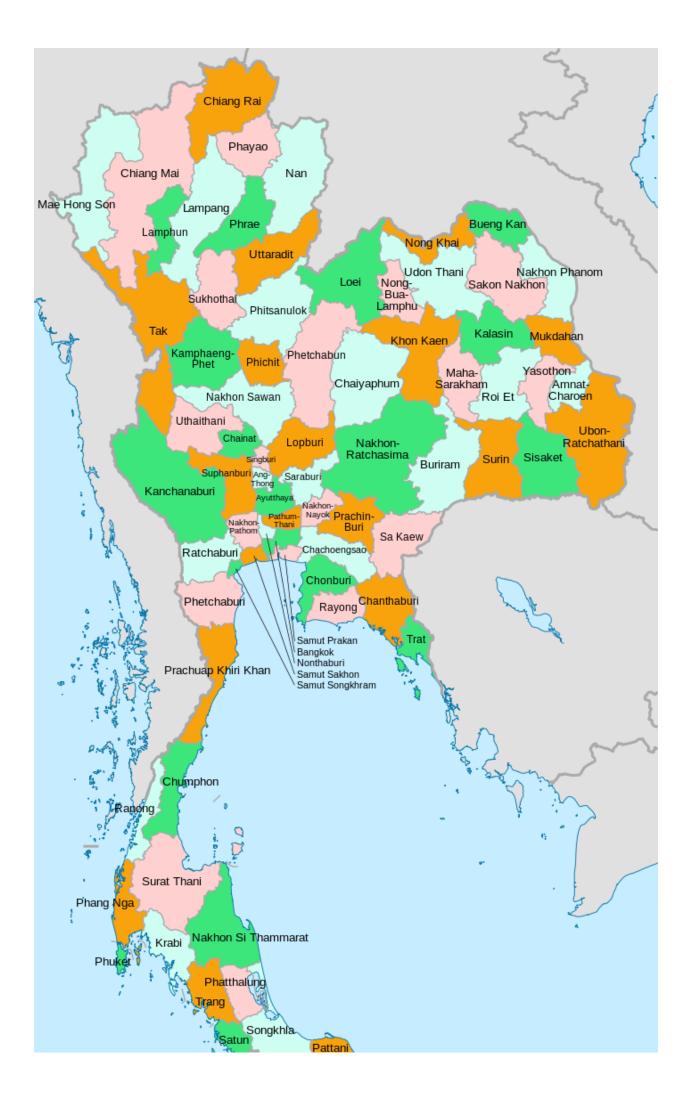
extraconstitutional role of the monarch through a "network monarchy" behind the political scenes. [139] The monarchy is protected by the severe lèse majesté law, even though the people's attitude towards the institution varies from one reign to another. [140][141]

The kings are protected by  $\underline{l\`{e}se-majest\'{e}}$  laws which allow critics to be jailed for three to fifteen years.  $\underline{^{[142]}}$  After the  $\underline{2014}$  Thai coup d'état, Thailand had the highest number of lèse-majesté prisoners in the nation's history.  $\underline{^{[143][144]}}$  Human rights in Thailand has been rated *not free* on the Freedom House Index since 2014.  $\underline{^{[145]}}$ 

### **Administrative divisions**

Thailand is a <u>unitary state</u>; the administrative services of the executive branch are divided into three levels by *National Government Organisation Act*, *BE 2534* (1991): central, provincial and local. Thailand is composed of 76 provinces (ຈັນหວັດ, changwat), [146] which are first-level <u>administrative divisions</u>. There are also two specially governed districts: the capital <u>Bangkok</u> and <u>Pattaya</u>. Bangkok is at provincial level and thus often counted as a province. Each province is divided into <u>districts</u> (ວຳເກວ, amphoe) and the districts are further divided into sub-districts (ຕຳບa, tambons). The name of each province's capital city (ເມື່ອນ, mueang) is the same as that of the province. For example, the capital of Chiang Mai Province (*Changwat Chiang Mai*) is *Mueang Chiang Mai* or *Chiang Mai*. All provincial governors and district chiefs, which are administrators of provinces and districts respectively, are appointed by the central government. Thailand's provinces are sometimes grouped into four to six regions, depending on the source.

A clickable map of Thailand exhibiting its provinces





## Foreign relations

Siam's and Thailand's way of conducting foreign relations has long been described as "bamboo bending with the wind", which means adaptable and pragmatic. In order to secure independence, it sought to pit one great power against the others so that it would be dominated by none. [148]

During the Cold War, Thailand sought to prevent the spread of communism so it joined the United States, including participating in <u>SEATO</u> alliance, sending expeditions to Korea and Vietnam, and offering the US to use its base. Thailand is one of the five founding members of <u>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</u> (ASEAN), initially to safeguard against communism. The end of Vietnam War was a turning point in Thai foreign policy and afterwards it sought to improve relations with Communist China and its now-Communist neighbours. Thailand



King <u>Bhumibol Adulyadej</u> in a meeting with U.S. President <u>Barack</u> Obama, 18 November 2012

remains an active member of ASEAN and seek to project its influence in it. Thailand has developed increasingly close ties with other members, with progressing regional co-operation in economic, trade, banking, political, and cultural matters. [149]

In the 2000s, Thailand had taken an active role on the international stage and participated fully in international and regional organisations. It is a major non-NATO ally and Priority Watch List Special 301 Report of the United States. When East Timor gained independence from Indonesia, Thailand contributed troops to the international peacekeeping effort. As part of its effort to increase international ties, Thailand had reached out to such regional organisations as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

During <u>Thaksin Shinawatra</u>'s premiership, negotiations for several <u>free trade agreements</u> with China, Australia, Bahrain, India, and the US were initiated. Thaksin sought to position Thailand as a regional leader, initiating various development projects in poorer neighbouring countries. More controversially, he established close, friendly ties with the Burmese dictatorship. <u>[153]</u> Thailand joined the US-led <u>invasion of Iraq</u>, sending a <u>humanitarian contingent</u> until September 2004. <u>[154]</u> Thailand also had contributed troops to reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. <u>[155]</u>

In April 2009, the <u>Cambodian–Thai border dispute</u> brought troops on territory immediately adjacent to the 900-year-old ruins of Cambodia's Preah Vihear Hindu temple near the border. [156][157]

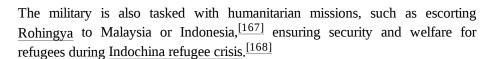
After the 2014 coup, Thailand leaned more towards China. [158] Growing Chinese influence and capital inflow caused some members of parliament to raise the concern about "economic colony" under China after many concessions. [159]

During the <u>Israel-Hamas military conflict</u> in 2023, at first Thailand's prime minister stated that his government strongly condemns the attack against Israel and extends its deepest condolences to the government and the people of Israel but the government later changed its position and announced that Thailand adopted a neutral stance in this conflict. [161] 28 Thai nationals were killed in this conflict.

### **Armed forces**

The Royal Thai Armed Forces (กองทัพไทย; RTGS: Kong Thap Thai) constitute the military of the Kingdom of Thailand. It consists of the Royal Thai Army (กองทัพบกไทย), the Royal Thai Navy (กองทัพเรือไทย), and the Royal Thai Air Force (กองทัพอากาศไทย). It also incorporates various paramilitary forces.

The Thai Armed Forces have a combined manpower of 306,000 active duty personnel and another 245,000 active reserve personnel. The head of the Thai Armed Forces (จอมกัพไทย, Chom Thap Thai) is the king, although this position is only nominal. The armed forces are managed by the Ministry of Defence of Thailand, which is headed by the Minister of Defence (a member of the cabinet of Thailand) and commanded by the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters, which in turn is headed by the Chief of Defence Forces of Thailand. Thailand annual defense budget almost tripled from 1.98 billion USD in 2005 to 5.88 billion USD in 2016, accounting for approximately 1.4% of GDP. Thailand ranked 16th worldwide in the Military Strength Index based on the Credit Suisse report in September 2015.



According to the constitution, serving in the armed forces is a duty of all Thai citizens. Thailand still use active draft system for males over the age of 21. They are subjected to varying lengths of active service depending on the duration of reserve training as Territorial Defence Student and their level of education. Those who have completed three years or more of reserve training will be exempted entirely. The practice has long been criticized, as some media question its efficacy and value. [170][171] It is alleged that conscripts end up as servants to



The <u>HTMS Chakri Naruebet</u>, an <u>aircraft carrier</u> of the <u>Royal Thai</u> Navy



A Royal Thai Air Force <u>JAS 39</u> Gripen

senior officers<sup>[172]</sup> or clerks in military cooperative shops.<sup>[173][174]</sup> In a report issued in March 2020, <u>Amnesty International</u> charged that Thai military conscripts face institutionalised abuse systematically hushed up by military authorities.<sup>[175]</sup>

Critics observed that Thai military's main objective is to deal with internal rather than external threats. Internal Security Operations Command is called the political arm of the Thai military, which has overlapping social and political functions with civilian bureaucracy. It also has anti-democracy mission. The military is also notorious for numerous corruption incidents, such as accusation of human trafficking, and nepotism in promotion of high-ranking officers. The military is deeply entrenched in politics. Most recently, the appointed senators include more than 100 active and retired military.

In 2017, Thailand signed and ratified the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. [180]

# **Economy**

The economy of Thailand is heavily export-dependent, with exports accounting for more than two-thirds of gross domestic product (GDP). Thailand exports over US\$105 billion worth of goods and services annually. [1] Major exports include cars, computers, electrical appliances, rice, textiles and footwear, fishery products, rubber, and jewellery. [1]

Thailand is an emerging economy and is considered a newly industrialised country. Thailand had a 2017 GDP of US\$1.236 trillion (on a purchasing power parity basis). [186] Thailand is the second largest economy in Southeast Asia after Indonesia. Thailand ranks midway in the wealth spread in Southeast Asia as it is the fourth richest nation according to GDP per capita, after Singapore, Brunei, and Malaysia.

Thailand functions as an <u>anchor economy</u> for the neighbouring developing economies of Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. In the third quarter of 2014, the unemployment rate in Thailand stood at 0.84% according to Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB). [187]

In 2017, the Thai economy grew an inflation-adjusted 3.9%, up from 3.3% in 2016, marking its fastest expansion since  $2012.\frac{[188]}{}$  High public spending, especially during the <u>COVID-19 pandemic</u>, prompted the authorities to raise Thailand's public debt ceiling from 60% to 70% of GDP. [189]

### Income and wealth disparities

Thais have median wealth per one adult person of \$1,469 in  $2016,\frac{[190]:98}{}$  increasing from \$605 in  $2010.\frac{[190]:34}{}$  In 2016, Thailand was ranked 87th in Human Development Index, and 70th in the inequality-adjusted HDI. $\frac{[191]}{}$ 

In 2017, Thailand's median household income was \$26,946 per month. [192]:1 Top quintile households had a 45.0% share of all income, while bottom quintile households had 7.1%. [192]:4 There were 26.9 million persons who had the bottom 40% of income earning less than \$5,344 per person per month. [193]:5 During the 2013–2014 Thai

political crisis, a survey found that anti-government <u>PDRC</u> mostly (32%) had a monthly income of more than \$50,000, while pro-government <u>UDD</u> mostly (27%) had between \$10,000 and \$20,000. [194]: 7

In 2014, <u>Credit Suisse</u> reported that Thailand was the world's third most unequal country, behind Russia and India. The top 10% richest held 79% of the country's assets. The top 1% held 58% of the assets. The 50 richest Thai families had a total net worth accounting to 30% of GDP. Bank of Thailand reported that during 2006–16, Thailand's top 5% largest companies had 85% of all corporate revenue in the nation, and only 6% of the country's companies were in export industries, which made up 60% of the country's GDP.

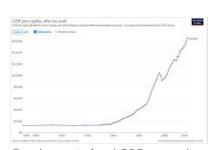
In 2016, 5.81 million people lived in poverty, or 11.6 million people (17.2% of population) if "near poor" is included. The proportion of the poor relative to total population in each region was 12.96% in the Northeast, 12.35% in the South, and 9.83% in the North. In 2017, there were 14 million people who applied for social welfare (yearly income of less than \$100,000 was required). In the first quarter of 2023, Thai household debts totaled 14.6 trillion baht or 89.2% of GDP; the average debt per household was approximately 500,000 baht. In 2016, there were estimated 30,000 homeless persons in the country.

### Economic indicators

Nominal GDP	\$14.53 trillion (2016) <sup>[181]</sup>			
GDP growth	3.9% (2017)[182]			
Headline inflation	0.7% (2017)[182]			
Core inflation	0.6% (2017)[182]			
Employment-to- population ratio	68.0% (2017) <sup>[183]</sup> :29			
Unemployment	1.2% (2017) <sup>[182]</sup>			
Total public debt	\$6.37 trillion (Dec. 2017) <sup>[184]</sup>			
Poverty	8.61% (2016)[183]:36			
Net household worth	\$20.34 trillion (2010) <sup>[185]: 2</sup>			



<u>Sathorn</u> in Bangkok is a skyscraper studded business district that is home to major hotels and embassies.



Development of real GDP per capita, 1890 to 2018

# **Exports and manufacturing**

The economy of Thailand is heavily export-dependent, with exports accounting for more than two-thirds of gross domestic product (GDP). Thailand exports over US\$105 billion worth of goods and services annually. 1 Major exports include cars, computers, electrical appliances, 1 extiles and footwear, fishery products, rubber, and jewellery.

Substantial industries include electric appliances, components, computer components, and vehicles. Thailand's recovery from the 1997–1998 Asian financial crisis depended mainly on exports, among various other factors. As of 2012, the Thail automotive industry was the largest in Southeast Asia and the 9th largest in the world. [199][200][201] The Thailand industry has an annual output of near 1.5 million vehicles, mostly commercial vehicles. [201]

Most of the vehicles built in Thailand are developed and licensed by foreign producers, mainly Japanese and American. The Thai car industry takes advantage of the <u>ASEAN Free Trade Area</u> (AFTA) to find a market for many of its products. Eight manufacturers, five Japanese, two US, and Tata of India, produce pick-up trucks in Thailand. [202] As of 2012, due

to its favorable taxation for 2-door pick-ups at only 3–12% against 17–50% for passenger cars, Thailand was the second largest consumer of pick-up trucks in the world, after the US.  $^{[203]}$  In 2014, pick-ups accounted for 42% of all new vehicle sales in Thailand.  $^{[202]}$ 

### **Tourism**

Tourism makes up about 6% of the country's economy. Prior to the pandemic, Thailand was the world's eighth most visited country according to the World Tourism rankings compiled by the United Nations World Tourism Organization. In 2019, Thailand received 39.8 million international tourists, ahead of United Kingdom and Germany [204] and was the fourth highest in international tourism earning 60.5 billion US dollars.

Thailand was the most visited country in Southeast Asia in 2013, according to the World Tourism Organization. Estimates of tourism receipts directly contributing to the Thai GDP of 12 trillion baht range from 9 percent (1 trillion baht) (2013) to 16 percent. [205] When including the indirect effects of tourism, it is said to account for 20.2 percent (2.4 trillion baht) of Thailand's GDP. [206]: 1

Asian tourists primarily visit Thailand for Bangkok and the historical, natural, and cultural sights in its vicinity. Western tourists not only visit Bangkok and surrounding areas; many travel to the southern beaches and islands. The north is the chief destination for trekking and <u>adventure travel</u> with its diverse ethnic minority groups and forested mountains. The region hosting the fewest tourists is <u>Isan</u>. To accommodate foreign visitors, a separate tourism police with offices were set up in the major tourist areas and an emergency telephone number. [207]

Thailand ranks as the worlds fifth largest <u>medical tourism</u> destination in spending, according to the <u>World Travel and Tourism Council</u>, attracting over 2.5 million visitors in 2018, and is number one in Asia. The country is popular for the growing practice of <u>sex reassignment surgery</u> (SRS) and cosmetic surgery. In 2010–2012, more than 90% of medical tourists traveled to Thailand for SRS. [210]

<u>Prostitution in Thailand</u> and sex tourism also form a *de facto* part of the economy. Campaigns promote Thailand as exotic to attract tourists. [211] One estimate published in 2003 placed the trade at US \$4.3 billion per year or about 3% of the Thai economy. [212] It is believed that at least 10% of tourist dollars are spent on the sex trade. [213]



Wat Arun, Bangkok is among the best known of Thailand's landmarks.



Fireworks at Phra Nakhon Khiri Historical Park, Phetchaburi

# Agriculture and natural resources

Forty-nine per cent of Thailand's labour force is employed in <u>agriculture</u>. This is down from 70% in 1980. Rice is the most important crop in the country and Thailand had long been the world's leading exporter of rice, until recently falling behind both India and Vietnam. Thailand has the highest percentage of arable land, 27.25%, of any nation in the <u>Greater Mekong Subregion</u>. About 55% of the arable land area is used for rice production.

Agriculture has been experiencing a transition from labour-intensive and transitional methods to a more industrialised and competitive sector. Between 1962 and 1983, the agricultural sector grew by 4.1% per year on average and continued to grow at 2.2% between 1983 and 2007. The relative contribution of agriculture to GDP has declined while exports of goods and services have increased.

Furthermore, access to <u>biocapacity</u> in Thailand is lower than world average. In 2016, Thailand had 1.2 global hectares<sup>[218]</sup> of biocapacity per person within its territory, a little less than world average of 1.6 global hectares per person.<sup>[219]</sup> In contrast, in 2016, they used 2.5 global hectares of biocapacity – their <u>ecological footprint</u> of consumption. This means they use about twice as much biocapacity as Thailand contains, resulting in a deficit.<sup>[218]</sup>

## Informal economy

Thailand has a diverse and robust informal labour sector—in 2012, it was estimated that informal workers comprised 62.6% of the Thai workforce. The Ministry of Labour defines informal workers to be

individuals who work in informal economies and do not have employee status under a given country's Labour Protection Act (LPA). The informal sector in Thailand has grown significantly over the past 60 years over the course of Thailand's gradual transition from an agriculture-based economy to becoming more industrialised and service-oriented. Between 1993 and 1995, ten per cent of the Thai labour force moved from the agricultural sector to urban and industrial jobs, especially in the manufacturing sector. It is estimated that between 1988 and 1995, the number of factory workers in the country doubled from two to four million, as Thailand's GDP tripled. While the Asian Financial Crisis that followed in 1997 hit the Thai economy hard, the industrial sector continued



Thailand has long been <u>one of the largest rice</u> exporters in the world. Forty-nine per cent of Thailand's labour force is employed in agriculture. [214]



The Train Night Market in Bangkok

to expand under widespread deregulation, as Thailand was mandated to adopt a range of structural adjustment reforms upon receiving funding from the IMF and World Bank. These reforms implemented an agenda of increased privatisation and trade liberalisation in the country, and decreased federal subsidisation of public goods and utilities, agricultural price supports, and regulations on fair wages and labour conditions. [222] These changes put further pressure on the agricultural sector, and prompted continued migration from the rural countryside to the growing cities. Many migrant farmers found work in Thailand's growing manufacturing industry, and took jobs in sweatshops and factories with few labour regulations and often exploitative conditions. [223]

Those that could not find formal factory work, including illegal migrants and the families of rural Thai migrants that followed their relatives to the urban centres, turned to the informal sector to provide the extra support needed for survival —under the widespread regulation imposed by the structural adjustment programs, one family member working in a factory or sweatshop made very little. Scholars argue that the economic consequences and social costs of Thailand's labour reforms in the wake of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis fell on individuals and families rather than the state: as the country's labour market became increasingly deregulated, the burden and responsibility of providing an adequate livelihood shifted from employers and the state to the workers themselves, whose families had to find jobs in the informal sector to make up for the losses and subsidise the wages being made by their relatives in the formal sector. The weight of these economic changes hit migrants and the urban poor especially hard, and the informal sector expanded rapidly as a result. [222]

Today, informal labour in Thailand is typically broken down into three main groups: subcontracted/self employed/home-based workers, service workers (including those that are employed in restaurants, as street vendors, masseuses, taxi drivers, and as domestic workers), and agricultural workers. Not included in these categories are those that work in entertainment, nightlife, and the sex industry. Individuals employed in these facets of the informal labour sector face additional vulnerabilities, including recruitment into circles of sexual exploitation and human trafficking. A 2012 study found that 64% of informal workers had not completed education beyond primary school. Many informal workers are also migrants, only some of which have legal status in the country. Because the informal labour sector is not recognised under the Labour Protection Act (LPA), informal workers are much more vulnerable to exploitation and unsafe working conditions. While some Thai labour laws provide minimal protections to domestic and agricultural workers, they are often weak and difficult to enforce. Furthermore, Thai social security policies fail to protect against the risks many informal workers face, including workplace accidents and compensation as well as unemployment and

retirement insurance. Many informal workers are not legally contracted for their employment, and many do not make a living wage. [220] Tens of thousands of migrants from neighboring countries face exploitation in a few industries, [224] especially in fishing where slave-like conditions have been reported. [225]

## Science and technology

Thailand ranked 43rd in the Global Innovation Index in 2023. [226] The Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation and its agencies oversees the development of science, technology, and research in Thailand. According to the National Research Council of Thailand, the country devoted 1.1% of its GDP to the research and development of science in 2019, with over 166,788 research and development personnel in full-time equivalent that year. [227][228]

Songkran Festival, Chiang Mai's ancient city wall

# **Infrastructure**

## **Transportation**



The <u>BTS Skytrain</u> is an elevated rapid transit system in Bangkok.

There were two failed project <u>Lavalin Skytrain</u> and <u>Bangkok Elevated Road and Train System</u>, before <u>Mass Rapid Transit Master Plan in Bangkok Metropolitan Region</u> endorsed by the cabinet on 27 September 1994 and to be implemented from 1995 to 2011.

The State Railway of Thailand (SRT) operates all of Thailand's national rail lines. Krung Thep Aphiwat Central Terminal and Bangkok (Hua Lamphong) are the main termini of intercity routes. Phahonyothin and ICD Lat Krabang are the main freight terminals. As of 2017 SRT had 4,507 km (2,801 mi) of track, all of it meter gauge. Nearly all is single-track (4,097 km), although some important sections around Bangkok are double (303 km or 188 mi) or triple-tracked

(107 km or 66 mi) and there are plans to extend this. [229][230] <u>Rail transport in Bangkok</u> includes long-distance services, and some daily commuter trains running from and to the outskirts of the city during the rush hour, but passenger numbers have remained low. There are also four rapid transit rail systems in the capital: the <u>BTS Skytrain</u>, <u>MRT</u>, <u>SRT Red Lines</u> and the <u>Airport Rail Link</u>.

Thailand has 390,000 kilometres (240,000 miles) of highways. [231] As of 2017, Thailand has over 462,133 roads and 37 million registered vehicles, 20 million of them motorbikes. [232] A number of undivided two-lane highways have been converted into divided four-lane highways. Within the Bangkok Metropolitan Region, there are a number of controlled-access highways. There are 4,125 public vans operating on 114 routes from Bangkok alone. [233] Other forms of road transport includes tuk-tuks, taxis—with over 80,647 registered taxis nationwide as of 2018 [234]—vans (minibus), motorbike taxis and songthaews.

As of 2012, Thailand has 103 airports with 63 paved runways, in addition to 6 heliports. The busiest airport in the country is Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport.

### **Energy**

75% of Thailand's electrical generation is powered by <u>natural gas</u> in 2014. [235] Coal-fired power plants produce an additional 20% of electricity, with the remainder coming from biomass, hydro, and biogas. [235]

Thailand produces roughly one-third of the oil it consumes. It is the second largest importer of oil in SE Asia. Thailand is a large producer of natural gas, with reserves of at least 10 trillion cubic feet. After Indonesia, it is the largest coal producer in SE Asia, but must import additional coal to meet domestic demand.

# **Demographics**

Thailand had a population of 69,799,978 as of 2020, [236] Thailand's first census in 1909 found the population to be 8.2 million. [237] Thailand's population is largely rural, concentrated in the rice-growing areas of the central, northeastern and northern regions. About 44.2% of Thailand's population lived in urban areas as of 2010, slowly increasing from 29.4% in the 1990 census and 31.1% in the 2000 census. [238]

Thailand's government-sponsored family planning program resulted in a dramatic decline in population growth from 3.1% in 1960 to around 0.4% today. In 1970, an average of 5.7 people lived in a Thai household. In 2022, the average Thai household size was 3 people. [239]

## **Ethnic groups**

Thai nationals make up the majority of Thailand's population, 95.9% in 2010. The remaining 4.1% of the population are Burmese (2.0%), others 1.3%, and unspecified 0.9%. [1]

According to the genetic researches, the present-day Thai people were divided into three groups; the northern group (Khon Mueang) are closely related to the <u>Tai</u> ethnic groups in <u>southern China</u>, the northeastern group (<u>Isan people</u>) are mixed Tai and several <u>Austroasiatic</u>-speaking ethnic groups, while the central and southern groups (formerly called Siamese) strongly share genetic profiles with the Mon people. [37][38][39]

According to the Royal Thai Government's 2011 Country Report to the UN Committee responsible for the International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, available from the Department of Rights and Liberties Promotion of the Thai Ministry of Justice, 62 ethnic communities are officially recognised in Thailand. Twenty million Central Thai (together with approximately 650,000 Khorat Thai) make up approximately 20,650,000 (34.1)

Ethnic groups of Thailand (2015 estimate by The World Factbook)

Thai (97.5%)

Burmese (1.3%)

other (1.1%)

unspecified (0.1%)



Hill tribes girls in the Northeast of Thailand

per cent) of the nation's population of  $60,544,937^{[240]}$  at the time of completion of the Mahidol University *Ethnolinguistic Maps of Thailand* data (1997). [241]

The 2011 Thailand Country Report provides population numbers for mountain peoples ('hill tribes') and ethnic communities in the Northeast and is explicit about its main reliance on the Mahidol University Ethnolinguistic Maps of Thailand data. Thus, though over 3.288 million people in the Northeast alone could not be categorised, the population and percentages of other ethnic communities *c*, 1997 are known for all of Thailand and constitute minimum populations. In descending order, the largest (equal to or greater than 400,000) are a) 15,080,000 Lao (24.9 per cent) consisting of the Thai Lao (14 million) and other smaller Lao groups, namely the Thai Loei (400–500,000), Lao Lom (350,000), Lao Wiang/Klang (200,000), Lao Khrang (90,000), Lao Ngaew (30,000), and Lao Ti (10,000); b) six million Khon Muang (9.9 per cent, also called Northern Thais); c) 4.5 million Pak Tai (7.5 per cent, also called Southern Thais); d) 1.4 million Khmer Leu (2.3 per cent, also called Northern Khmer); e) 900,000 Malay (1.5%); f) 500,000 Nyaw (0.8 per cent); g) 470,000 Phu Thai (0.8 per cent); h) 400,000 Kuy/Kuay (also known as Suay) (0.7 per cent), and i) 350,000 Karen (0.6 per cent). Thai Chinese, those of significant Chinese heritage, are 14% of the population, while Thais with partial Chinese ancestry comprise up to 40% of the population. Thai Malays represent 3% of the population, with the remainder consisting of Mons, Khmers and various "hill tribes".

Increasing numbers of migrants from neighbouring Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia, as well as from Nepal and India, have pushed the total number of non-national residents to around 3.5 million as of 2009, up from an estimated 2 million in 2008. [243] Some 41,000 Britons and 20,000 Australians live in Thailand. [244][245]

# **Population centres**

Population ce	entre	S						
Largest municipalities in Thailand "รายงานสถิติจำนวนประชากรและบ้านประจำปี พ.ศ.2563" (https://stat.bora.dopa.go.th/new_stat/fil								
318	Rank		Province	e/63/stat_		•	Province	Pop.
	1	Bangkok	Bangkok	5,588,222	11	Khon Kaen City	Khon Kaen	
	2	Nonthaburi City	Nonthaburi	251,026	12	Nakhon Si Thammarat City	Nakhon Si Thammarat	100,416
	3	Pak Kret City	Nonthaburi	189,458	13	Laem Chabang City	Chonburi	89,457
Markey de Vinsel	4	Hat Yai City	Songkhla	149,459	14	Rangsit City	Pathum Thani	84,268
Bangkok	5	Chaophraya Surasak City	Chonburi	146,474	15	Nakhon Sawan City	Nakhon Sawan	81,239 Pak Kret City
	6	Surat Thani City	Surat Thani	131,599	16	Phuket City	Phuket	77,778
Nonthaburi City	7	Nakhon Ratchasima City	Nakhon Ratchasima	122,730	17	Chiang Rai City	Chiang Rai	77,545
	8	Chiang Mai City	Chiang Mai	122,627	18	Ubon Ratchathani City	<u>Ubon</u> Ratchathani	<u>Hat Yai City</u> 72,855
	9	Udon Thani City	Udon Thani	120,202	19	Nakhon Pathom City	Nakhon Pathom	72,753
	10	Pattaya City	Chonburi	117,606	20	Ko Samui City	Surat Thani	68,994
Largest cities by urban population in Thailand								
onedptgis.dpt.go.th/onedpt-complain-ppl/ (https://onedptgis.dpt.go.th/onedpt-complain-pp  Rank  /) www.horandopa.go.th (https://www.bora.dopa.go.th)  Rank  /) www.horandopa.go.th (https://www.bora.dopa.go.th)								
		1 Bang		Bang		ince	10,539,00	0
Bangkok			ng Mai	Chiar		į	1,198,00	
			on Ratchasir			tchasima	466,09	
		4 Khon	Kaen Khon Kaen		412,75	8		
		5 Hat Y	⁄ai Songhkla		404,04	4		
		6 <u>Udon</u>	1 Thani Udon Thani		400,58	400,581		
		7 Chon			342,95	1/1 1/		
		8 Patta	ya	Chon	buri		328,96	1 Khon Kaen

### Language

Chiang Mai

9

10

Si Racha

Phitsanulok

The official language of Thailand is <u>Thai</u>, a <u>Kra–Dai language</u> closely related to <u>Lao</u>, <u>Shan</u> in Myanmar, and numerous smaller languages spoken in an arc from <u>Hainan</u> and <u>Yunnan</u> south to the Chinese border. It is the principal language of education and government and spoken throughout the country. The standard is based on the dialect of the central Thai people, and it is written in the <u>Thai alphabet</u>, an <u>abugida</u> script that evolved from the <u>Khmer alphabet</u>. Sixty-two languages were recognised by the Royal Thai Government. For the purposes of the national census, four dialects of Thai exist; these partly coincide with regional designations, such as Southern Thai and Northern Thai.

Chonburi

Phitsanulok

327,172

281,929



The largest of Thailand's minority languages is the Lao dialect of Isan spoken in the northeastern provinces. In the far south, Kelantan-Pattani Malay is the primary language of Malay Muslims. Varieties of Chinese are also spoken by the large Thai Chinese population, with the Teochew dialect best-represented. Numerous tribal languages are also spoken, including many Austroasiatic languages such as Mon, Khmer, Viet, Mlabri and Aslian; Austronesian languages such as Cham, Moken and Urak Lawoi'; Sino-Tibetan languages like Lawa, Akha, and Karen; and other Tai languages such as Tai Yo, Phu Thai, and Saek. Hmong is a member of the Hmong-Mien languages, which is now regarded as a language family of its own.

# Religion

The country's most prevalent religion is <u>Theravada Buddhism</u>, which is an integral part of Thai identity and culture. Active

participation in Buddhism is among the highest in the world. Thailand has the second-largest number of <u>Buddhists</u> in the world after China. [247] According to the 2018 National Statistical Office data, 93.46% of the country's population self-identified as Buddhists. [248]

<u>Muslims</u> constitute the second largest religious group in Thailand, comprising 5.37% of the population in 2018. [248] Islam is concentrated mostly in the country's southernmost provinces: <u>Pattani, Yala, Satun, Narathiwat, and part of Songkhla Chumphon, which are predominantly Malay, most of whom are <u>Sunni Muslims</u>. Christians represented 1.13% of the population in 2018, with the remaining population consisting of <u>Hindus</u> and <u>Sikhs</u>, who live mostly in the country's cities. There is also a small but historically significant <u>Jewish community in Thailand dating back to the 17th century</u>.</u>

The constitution does not name an official state religion, and provides for freedom of religion. There have been no widespread reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice. Thai law officially recognizes five religious groups: Buddhists, Muslims, Brahmin-Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians. However, some laws are inspired from Buddhist practices, such as banning alcohol sales on religious holidays. [251]

in

Buddhism (93.46%)

Christianity (1.13%) Other (0.04%)

Islam (5.37%)

Thailand

Religion

 $(2018)^{[246]}$ 

<u>Samanera</u> of <u>Theravada Buddhism</u>, the most practised religion in Thailand.

### **Education**

In 1995, as minister of education, <u>Sukavich Rangsitpollaid</u> out his plans for educational reform in Thailand. The goal of education reform is to realize the potential of Thai people to develop themselves for the better quality of life and to develop the nation for peaceful co-existence in the world community. [252] The

reform was considered a landmark movement after nearly 100 years of education under the previous system. [253]

Thailand's youth literacy rate was 98.1% in  $2015.^{\boxed{254}}$  Education is provided by a well-organised school system of kindergartens, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools, numerous vocational colleges, and universities. Education is compulsory up to and including age 14, while the government is mandated to provide free education through to age 17. The establishment of reliable and coherent curricula for its primary and secondary schools is subject to

rapid changes. Issues concerning university entrance has been in constant upheaval for a number of years. The country is also one of the few that still mandates uniform up to the university years, which is still a subject of ongoing debate. The quality of education in the country is often questioned.

In 2013, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology announced that 27,231 schools would receive classroom-level access to <a href="https://high-speedinternet.infernet.in



Chulalongkorn University, established in 1917, is the oldest university in Thailand.

The number of higher education institutions in Thailand has grown over the past decades to 156 officially. The two top-ranking universities in Thailand are <u>Chulalongkorn University</u> and <u>Mahidol University</u>. Thai universities' research output is still relatively low, even though the country's journal publications increased by 20% between 2011 and 2016. Recent initiatives, such as the *National Research University* and *Graduate research intensive university: VISTEC*, are designed to strengthen Thailand's national research universities.

The private sector of education is well developed and significantly contributes to the overall provision of education. Thailand has the second highest number of English-medium private international schools in <u>Southeast Asian Nations</u>. [260] Cram schools are especially popular for university entrance exams.

Students in ethnic minority areas score consistently lower in standardised national and international tests. [261][262][263] This is likely due to unequal allocation of educational resources, weak teacher training, poverty, and low Thai language skill, the language of the tests. [261][264][265] As of 2020, Thailand was ranked 89th out of 100 countries globally for English proficiency. [266]

Thailand is the third most popular study destination in ASEAN. The number of international degree students in Thailand increased by 9.7 times between 1999 and 2012, from 1,882 to 20,309 students. Most of international students come from neighbor countries<sup>[260]</sup> like China, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam. [267]

### Health

Thailand ranks world's sixth, and Asia's first in the 2019 Global Health Security Index of global health security capabilities in 195 countries, [268] making it the only developing country on the world's top ten. Thailand had 62 hospitals accredited by Joint Commission International. [269] In 2002, Bumrungrad became the first hospital in Asia to meet the standard.

Health and medical care is overseen by the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), with total national expenditures on health amounting to 4.3 per cent of GDP in 2009. Non-communicable diseases form the major burden of morbidity and mortality, while infectious diseases including malaria and tuberculosis, as well as traffic accidents, are also important public health issues.



<u>Siriraj Hospital</u> in Bangkok, the oldest and largest hospital in Thailand.

In December 2018 the interim parliament voted to legalise the use of  $\underline{\text{cannabis}}$  for medical reasons, making Thailand the first Southeast Asian country to allow the use of  $\underline{\text{medical cannabis}}$ .

### Culture

Thai culture and traditions incorporate influences from India, China, Cambodia, and the rest of Southeast Asia. Thailand's national religion, Theravada Buddhism, is central to modern Thai identity. Thai Buddhism has evolved over time to include many regional beliefs originating from Hinduism, animism, as well as ancestor worship. The official calendar in Thailand is based on the Eastern version of the Buddhist Era (BE). Thai identity today is a social construct of the Phibun regime in the 1940s.



Thai women wearing sabai, Jim Thompson House

Several ethnic groups mediated change between their traditional local culture, national Thai, and global cultural influences. Overseas Chinese also form a significant part of Thai society, particularly in and around Bangkok. Their successful integration into Thai society has allowed them to hold positions of economic and political power. Thai Chinese businesses prosper as part of the larger bamboo network. [271]

Respect for elderly and superiors (by age, position, monks, or certain professions) is Thai <u>mores</u>. As with other Asian cultures, respect towards ancestors is an essential part of Thai spiritual practice. Thais have a strong sense of social hierarchy, reflecting in many classes of <u>honorifics</u>. Elders have by tradition ruled in family decisions or ceremonies. <u>Wai</u> is a traditional Thai greeting, and is generally offered first by a person who is younger or lower in social status and



People floating krathong rafts during the Loi Krathong festival in Chiang Mai, Thailand

position. Older siblings have duties to younger ones. Thais have a strong sense of hospitality and generosity. [272]

Taboos in Thai culture include touching someone's head or pointing with the feet, as the head is considered the most sacred and the foot the lowest part of the body.

### Art

The origins of Thai art were very much influenced by <u>Buddhist art</u> and by scenes from the Indian epics. Traditional Thai <u>sculpture</u> almost exclusively depicts images of the <u>Buddha</u>, being very similar with the other styles from <u>Southeast Asia</u>. Traditional Thai <u>paintings</u> usually consist of book illustrations, and painted ornamentation of buildings such as <u>palaces</u> and <u>temples</u>. Thai art was influenced by indigenous civilisations of the <u>Mon</u> and other civilisations. By the Sukothai and Ayutthaya period, Thai had developed into its own unique style and was later further influenced by the other Asian styles, mostly by <u>Sri Lankan</u> and <u>Chinese</u>. Thai sculpture and painting, and the royal courts provided patronage, erecting temples and other religious shrines as acts of merit or to commemorate important events. [273]



Scene from the <u>Ramakien</u> depicted on a mural at Wat Phra Kaew.

Traditional Thai paintings showed subjects in two <u>dimensions</u> without <u>perspective</u>. The size of each element in the picture reflected its degree of importance. The primary technique of <u>composition</u> is that of apportioning areas: the main elements are isolated from each other by space transformers. This eliminated the intermediate ground, which would otherwise imply perspective. Perspective was introduced only as a result of <u>Western</u> influence in the mid-19th century. Monk artist Khrua In Khong is well known as the first artist to introduce linear perspective to Thai traditional art. [274]

The most frequent narrative subjects for paintings were or are: the <u>Jataka</u> stories, episodes from the life of the <u>Buddha</u>, the Buddhist <u>heavens</u> and <u>hells</u>, themes derived from the Thai versions of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, and scenes of daily life. Some of the scenes are influenced by <u>Thai folklore</u> instead of following strict Buddhist <u>iconography</u>. [273]

### **Architecture**

Architecture is the preeminent medium of the country's cultural legacy and reflects both the challenges of living in Thailand's sometimes extreme climate as well as, historically, the importance of architecture to the Thai people's sense of community and religious beliefs. Influenced by the architectural traditions of many of Thailand's neighbours, it has also developed significant regional variation within its vernacular and religious buildings.

The <u>Ayutthaya Kingdom</u> movement was one of the most fruitful and creative periods in Thai architecture. Architecture in the Ayutthaya period is designed to display might and riches so it has great size and appearance. The temples in Ayutthaya seldom built eaves stretching from the masterhead. The dominant feature of this style is sunlight shining into buildings. During the latter part of the Ayutthaya period, architecture was regarded as a peak achievement that responded to the requirements of people and expressed the gracefulness of Thainess. [275]



Two sculptures guarding the eastern gate to the main chapel of Wat Arun.

Buddhist temples in Thailand are known as "wats", from the Pali vata, meaning an enclosure: a temple has an enclosing wall that divides it from the secular

world. Wat architecture demonstrates many differences in layout and style, but they all adhere to the same principles. [276]

### Literature

Thai literature has had a long history. Even before the establishment of the Sukhothai Kingdom there existed oral and written works.

During the <u>Sukhothai Kingdom</u>, most literary works were written in simple prose with certain alliteration schemes. Major works include King <u>Ram Khamhaeng Inscription</u> describing life at the time, which is considered the first literary work in Thai script, but some historians questioned its authenticity. [277] *Trai Phum Phra Ruang*, written in 1345 by King <u>Maha Thammaracha I</u>, expounds Buddhist philosophy based on a profound and extensive study with reference to over 30 sacred texts and could be considered the nation's first piece of research dissertation. [278]

During the <u>Ayutthaya Kingdom</u>, new <u>poetic</u> forms were created, with different rhyme schemes and metres. It is common to find a combination of different poetic forms in one poetic work. *Lilit <u>Yuan Phai</u>* is a narrative poem describing <u>the war</u> between King <u>Borommatrailokkanat</u> of Ayutthaya and Prince <u>Tilokkarat</u> of <u>Lan Na</u>. One literary work is *Kap He Ruea* composed by Prince <u>Thammathibet</u> in the <u>nirat</u> tradition. Traditionally, the verse is sung during the colourful royal barge procession and has been the model for subsequent poets to emulate. The same prince also composed the greatly admired *Kap Ho Khlong* on the Visit to Than Thongdaeng and *Kap Ho Khlong Nirat Phrabat*. The <u>Thon Buri Period</u> produced <u>Ramakian</u>, a verse drama contributed by King <u>Taksin</u> the Great. The era marked the revival of literature after the fall of Ayutthaya.



Sculptures of Phra Aphai Mani and the Mermaid from the epic poem Phra Aphai Mani, a work of Sunthom Phu.

During the 18th century <u>Rattanakosin</u> period, which still fought with the Burmese, many of the early Rattanakosin works deal with war and military

strategy. Some examples are Nirat Rop Phama Thi Tha Din Daeng, Phleng Yao Rop Phama Thi Nakhon Si Thammarat. In the performing arts, perhaps the most important dramatic achievement is the complete work of Ramakian by King Rama I. In addition, There were also verse recitals with musical accompaniment, such as Mahori telling the story of Kaki, Sepha relating the story of Khun Chang Khun Phaen. Other recitals include Sri Thanonchai. The most important Thai poet in this period was Sunthorn Phu (สุนทรภู่), known as "the bard of Rattanakosin" (Thai: กวีเอกแห่งกรุง รัตนโกสินทร์). Sunthorn Phu is best known for his epic poem Phra Aphai Mani, a versified fantasy-adventure novel, a genre of Siamese literature known as nithan kham klon (Thai: นิกานคำกลอน).[279]

Some of the most well-known modern Thai writers include <u>Kukrit Pramoj</u>, <u>Kulap Saipradit</u>, (penname <u>Siburapha</u>), Suweeriya Sirisingh (penname Botan), Chart Korbjitti, Prabda Yoon and Duanwad Pimwana. [280]

### Music and dance

Aside from folk and regional dances (southern Thailand's <u>Menora (dance)</u> and <u>Ramwong</u>, for example), the two major forms of Thai classical dance drama are <u>Khon</u> and <u>Lakhon nai</u>. In the beginning, both were exclusively court entertainments and it was not until much later that a popular style of dance theatre, likay, evolved as a diversion for

Folk dance forms include dance theater forms like <u>likay</u>, numerous regional dances (*ram*), the ritual dance <u>ram muay</u>, and homage to the teacher, <u>wai khru</u>. Both ram muay and wai khru take place before all traditional <u>muay Thai</u> matches. The wai is also an annual ceremony performed by Thai classical dance groups to honor their artistic ancestors.

Thai classical music is synonymous with those stylized court ensembles and repertoires that emerged in their present form within the royal centers of Central Thailand some 800 years ago. These ensembles, while being influenced by older practices are today uniquely Thai expressions. While the three primary classical



Khon show is the most stylised form of Thai performance.

ensembles, the <u>Piphat</u>, <u>Khrueang sai</u> and <u>Mahori</u> differ in significant ways, they all share a basic instrumentation and theoretical approach. Each employs small ching hand cymbals and <u>krap</u> wooden sticks to mark the primary beat reference. Thai classical music has had a wide influence on the musical traditions of neighboring countries.

### **Entertainment**

Thai films are exported and exhibited in <u>Southeast Asia</u>. Thai cinema has developed its own unique identity and is now being internationally recognized. Films such as <u>Ong-Bak: Muay Thai Warrior</u> (2003) and <u>Tom-Yum-Goong</u> (2005), starring <u>Tony Jaa</u>, feature distinctive aspects of Thai martial arts "Muay Thai".

Thai horror has always had a significant cult following. <u>Shutter</u> (2004) was one of the best-known Thai horror movies and was recognized worldwide. The Thai heist thriller film <u>Bad Genius</u> (2017) was one of the most internationally successful Thai films; it broke Thai film earning records in several Asian countries, <u>[285]</u> Bad Genius won in 12 categories at



the 27th <u>Suphannahong National Film Awards</u>, and also won the Jury Award at the 16th <u>New York Asian Film Festival</u> with a worldwide collection of more than \$42 million. [286]

Thailand television dramas, known as <u>Lakorn</u>, have become popular in Thailand and regionally. [287] Many dramas tend to have a romantic focus, such as <u>Khluen Chiwit</u>, <u>U-Prince</u>, <u>Ugly Duckling</u>, <u>The Crown Princess</u> and <u>teen dramas</u> television series, such as <u>2gether</u>: The Series, The Gifted, Girl From Nowhere, Hormones: The Series.

The entertainment industries are estimated to have directly contributed \$2.1 billion in gross domestic product (GDP) to the Thai economy in 2011. They also directly supported 86,600 jobs. [288] Amongst several <u>Dance-pop</u> artists who have made internationally successful can be mentioned "Lisa" Lalisa Manoban [289] and Tata Young.

### Cuisine

Thai cuisine is one of the most popular in the world. [290] Thai food blends five fundamental tastes: sweet, spicy, sour, bitter, and salty. Common ingredients include garlic, lemongrass, kaffir lime, galangal, turmeric, coriander, and coconut milk. [291][292][293][294][295] Each region of Thailand has its specialities: *kaeng khiao wan* (green curry) in the central region, *som tam* (green papaya salad) in the northeast, *khao soi* in the north, and *massaman* curry in the south.



In 2017, seven Thai dishes appeared on a list of the "World's 50 Best Foods"— an online worldwide poll by <u>CNN</u> *Travel*. Thailand had more dishes on the list than any other country. They were: <u>tom yam goong</u> (4th), <u>pad Thai</u> (5th), som tam (6th), <u>massaman</u> curry (10th), green curry (19th), Thai fried rice (24th) and <u>mu nam tok</u> (36th). [296] Two

desserts were also listed in CNN's 50 Best Desserts Around The World: mango sticky rice and tub tim krob. [297]

The staple food in Thailand is rice, particularly jasmine rice, which forms part of almost every meal. Thailand is a leading exporter of rice, and Thais consume over 100 kg of milled rice per person per year. Thailand is also the world leader in edible insect industry and well-known for its street food; Bangkok is sometimes called the street food capital of the world. [300][301]

### **Units of measurement**

Thailand generally uses the <u>metric system</u>, but <u>traditional units</u> of measurement for land area are used, and <u>imperial units</u> of measurement are occasionally used for building materials. Years are numbered as B.E. (<u>Buddhist Era</u>) in educational settings, civil service, government, contracts, and newspaper datelines. However, in banking, and increasingly in industry and commerce, standard Western year (Christian or Common Era) counting is the standard practice. [302]

## **Sports**

Muay Thai (lit. "Thai boxing") is a combat sport that uses stand-up striking along with various clinching techniques. Muay Thai became widespread internationally in the late-20th to 21st century. Famous practitioners include <u>Buakaw Banchamek</u>, <u>Samart Payakaroon</u>, <u>Dieselnoi Chor Thanasukarn</u> and <u>Apidej Sit-Hirun</u>. <u>Buakaw Banchamek</u> has probably brought more international interest in Muay Thai than any other fighter. [303]

<u>Association football</u> has overtaken Muay Thai as the most widely followed sport in Thailand. The <u>Thailand national football team</u> has played the AFC Asian Cup six times and reached the semifinals in 1972. The country has hosted the Asian Cup twice, in 1972 and in 2007. The 2007 edition was co-hosted together with



Muay Thai, Thailand's signature sport

 $\underline{\text{Indonesia}}, \, \underline{\text{Malaysia}} \, \, \text{and} \, \, \underline{\text{Vietnam}}. \, \, \text{Another widely enjoyed pastime, and once a competitive sport, is} \, \, \underline{\text{kite flying}}.$ 

<u>Volleyball</u> is rapidly growing as one of the most popular sports. The <u>women's team</u> has often participated in the <u>World Championship</u>, <u>World Cup</u>, and <u>World Grand Prix Asian Championship</u>. They have won the <u>Asian Championship</u> twice and Asian Cup once. By the success of the women's team, the men's team has been growing as well.

<u>Takraw</u> (Thai: ตะกร้อ) is a sport native to Thailand, in which the players hit a rattan ball and are only allowed to use their feet, knees, chest, and head to touch the ball. <u>Sepak takraw</u> is a form of this sport which is similar to volleyball. A rather similar game but played only with the feet is buka ball.

<u>Snooker</u> has enjoyed increasing popularity in Thailand in recent years, with interest in the game being stimulated by the success of Thai snooker player <u>James Wattana</u> in the 1990s. Other notable Thai players include <u>Ratchayothin</u> Yotharuck, Noppon Saengkham and <u>Dechawat Poomjaeng</u>.

Rugby is also a growing sport in Thailand with the <u>Thailand national rugby union team</u> rising to be ranked 61st in the world. [306] Thailand became the first country in the world to host an international 80 welterweight rugby tournament in 2005. [307] The national domestic Thailand Rugby Union (TRU) competition includes several universities as well as local sports clubs like the British Club of Bangkok, the <u>Southerners Sports Club (Bangkok)</u> and the Royal Bangkok Sports Club.

Thailand has been called the golf capital of Asia. The country attracts a large number of golfers from Japan, Korea, Singapore, South Africa, and Western countries. The growing popularity of golf, especially among the middle classes and immigrants, is evident as there are more than 200 world-class golf courses nationwide, and some of them are chosen to host PGA and LPGA tournaments, such as Amata Spring Country Club, Alpine Golf and Sports Club, Thai Country Club, and Black Mountain Golf Club.

Basketball is a growing sport in Thailand, especially on the professional sports club level. The Chang Thailand Slammers won the 2011 ASEAN Basketball League Championship. [311] The Thailand national basketball team had its most successful year at the 1966 Asian Games where it won the silver medal. [312]

Other sports in Thailand are slowly growing as the country develops its sporting infrastructure. The success in sports like <u>weightlifting</u> and <u>taekwondo</u> at the last two summer Olympic Games has demonstrated that boxing is no longer the only medal option for Thailand.

The well-known <u>Lumpinee Boxing Stadium</u> originally sited at Rama IV Road near Lumphini Park hosted its final Muay Thai boxing matches on 8 February 2014 after the venue first opened in December 1956. From 11 February 2014, the stadium will relocate to Ram Intra Road, due to the new venue's capacity. [313] Thammasat Stadium is a multi-purpose stadium in Bangkok, currently used mostly for football matches. It was built for the 1998 Asian Games. <u>Rajamangala National Stadium</u> is the biggest sporting arena in Thailand, with a capacity of 65,000. The stadium was built in 1998 for the 1998 Asian Games and is the home stadium of the Thailand national football team.



Lumpinee Boxing Stadium

### See also



- International rankings of Thailand
- Outline of Thailand

### **Notes**

- a. Officially known in Thai as "Krung Thep Maha Nakhon"
- b. /tailænd, -lənd/, TYE-land, -lənd[8]
- c. Thai: ประเทศไทย, RTGS: Prathet Thai, pronounced [prathe:t thaj] 🕩 🗓
- d. /saɪˈæm, ˈsaɪæm/, sye-AM, SYE-am<sup>[9][10]</sup>
- e. Thai: สยาม, RTGS: sayam, pronounced [sajǎːm]; also spelled Siem, Syâm, or Syâma
- f. Through the following chain:  $*k \Rightarrow i: > *k \Rightarrow i: > *k \Rightarrow i: /*k \Rightarrow daj > *di: /*daj > *daj^A$  (Proto-Southwestern Tai) >  $t^haj^{A2}$  (in Siamese and Lao) or  $> taj^{A2}$  (in the other Southwestern and Central Tai languages classified by Li Fangkuei). [18] Ferlus work is based on simple rules of phonetic change observable in the Sinosphere and studied for the most part by William H. Baxter (1992).
- g. "Ayutthaya emerged as a dominant centre in the late 14th century. The Chinese called this region Xian, which the Portuguese converted into Siam."
- h. See #Ethnic groups section.
- i. The  $\underline{2016}$  Thai constitutional referendum was held on 7 August 2016. Its ratification was held on 6 April  $\underline{2017}^{[\underline{108}]}$

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