INTRODUCTION

1992 was another tumultuous year in Thailand's modern political history. The domination of the military, which had monopolized the governance of Thailand for roughly half a century, was being undermined such that May, 1992, must be seen as an occasion through which long-run processes of social change give rise to sudden and dramatic changes in the political system (Pongpaichit, 1993: paraphrase). While more details about the history of this military-dominated system will be brought into the discussion in Chapter 5, it may suffice to say here that subsequent political developments relevant to this study have been accompanied by several initiatives to enhance the promotion and protection of "human rights" in the post-May, 1992, years, ranging from efforts to set up a national commission on human rights, to the recognition of various rights for the people, including those of women, local communities and labor forces.

If one agrees that *human rights and fundamental freedoms are individual entitlements derived from human needs and capacities* (Beetham & Boyle, 1995: 54), findings about Thai perceptions of "human rights" and identification of some of the reasons for those perceptions may suggest that further evolution and commitment to democratic principles, along the Thai lines of *fairness and justice* (Jackson, 1993: 3), may bring about broader protection of "human rights" in Thai society, endorsing a notion of an implicit relationship between "democracy" and "human rights" which is both inter-dependent and mutually-reinforcing, even in the Thai case.

At the same time, depending on prevailing perceptions about "democracy" and "human rights" held by the Thai, which may suggest that the "failure of" or "breakdowns in" "democracy" would necessarily preclude any successes in improving the human rights situation in Thailand, the question of how to preserve and protect "human rights" under any and all circumstances is deemed one of central importance, and the motivation for this study in the first place.

While highlighting traditional value systems identified by a number of previous scholars, which may be important in understanding why the Thai hold certain kinds of perceptions about "democracy", it is this poignant question of how to uphold "human rights" under any and all circumstances which the author will attempt to analyze from the results of the data collected on the 1992-1999 human rights situation in Thailand and from the results of the "human rights" survey conducted by the author.

It could turn out that Thailand's traditional value systems may be more significant in dealing with the broader issues of studying how to uphold "human rights" independent of what could be termed the "success" or "failure" of "democracy" in Thailand subsequent to the May, 1992, political crisis, from which time there appears to have been a rapid increase in exposure to ideas about popular democracy, and where an altogether different social and political environment has been created with the nation's phenomenal economic growth, internationalization, and integration into the global economy in comparison with earlier decades.

Another possibility is that, if there are no pre-existing concepts of "human rights" other than those inherent in traditional value systems, then there may be a greater need to rely on those traditional value systems, on expanded democratic principles, and/or a unique combination of both, for enhanced promotion and protection of "human rights" in the Thai case. It is also expected that consideration of how to improve these systems, in order to shield those sectors of Thai society more prone to exploitation within the modern context, may be part of the answer.

Bearing in mind the four objectives of this thesis:

(1)   to study the assumption of an implicit link between democracy and human rights;

(2)   to conduct post-May, 1992, empirical research on the human rights situation in Thailand;

(3)   to conduct a survey on Thai perceptions of human rights; and,

(4)   to relate the research and survey findings back to the assumption about an implicit link between human rights and democracy,

Chapter 1 is a summary of the human rights situation in Thailand for 1992 - 1999, from the author's monitoring of the media and reports on human right practices in Thailand from a number of well-known sources available in English which underline the fact that there has been no marked improvement in the human rights situation in Thailand in the post-May, 1992, years. Chapter 2 comprises a general overview of the history and origins of human rights (from which the lack of a unified understanding and/or consensus about "human rights", even in the West, is apparent). Chapter 3 comprises some comments on the impact of Thailand's development track toward

global integration throughout the past decade on human rights with some discussion of "trade-offs"[1] in an attempt to understand the consequences such development has had on the post-May, 1992, human rights situation in Thailand. Chapter 4 covers the human rights survey and the survey findings. Chapter 5 looks at traditional Thai value systems and philosophical concepts identified by previous scholars which are said to form the most fundamental bases of social hierarchy in Thai society, as well as looking in more detail at the nature of Thailand's military-dominated political system and a survey on Thai perceptions of "democracy" by the Australian anthropologist, Dr. Richard Basham, which the author hopes will enhance comprehension and interpretation of the findings from both the empirical research on the post-May, 1992, human rights situation in Thailand and the survey into Thai perceptions of "human rights". Chapter 6, Comments and Recommendations, is an attempt to make the overall study more cohesive with some comments on what the author feels is the significance of this research for dealing with the aforementioned central question of how to uphold human rights by touching on how the respondents feel that human rights awareness and understanding could best be enhanced. The Conclusion contains a summary of the findings of each chapter and some thoughts on what the author feels the research findings reveal about the post-May, 1992, human rights situation in Thailand and what the realities of the post-May, 1992, Thai human rights situation tell us about the democracy-human rights implicit link assumption.

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[1]   Based on Donnelly's discussion of needs and equality trade-offs discussed in <u>Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice,</u> 1991.

The author concedes that it may be difficult to see the clarity achieved and/or relevance of this kind of study which is not thoroughly empirical. It is not just about "concepts" or "perceptions", per se. In a way, it is about both! That is to say, it is an exploration into what the author believes are some of the "concepts" from which apparent Thai "perceptions" of human rights and democracy may (or may not in the view of some) be based. For this purpose, the research design did try to use only what the author deemed interesting, reliable and valid sources for her data collection for the literature study, and, as is most important in research such as this, the people, themselves. Incidentally, in the Comments and Recommendations the author chooses to pick up some responses and not others because they are deemed more relevant and may be better supported by alternative evidence found in the literature.

Above all, it is hoped that the presentation of the results of the 4 objectives will be relatively cohesive, if not straightforward, with enough continuity to be an integration of academic knowledge which is both original and creative, but which hopefully would never lend itself to what some might term "borderline racist generalizations". It is also the author's intention to present, in an original and creative manner, an ordered, critical and reasoned presentation of her knowledge gained through the process of having conducting this study.

Lastly, before moving on to the Introduction, it is the author's belief that difficulties pertaining to clarity are unavoidable in a study such as this because there are bound to be both "positive" and "negative" linkages unveiled when looking at the assumption of an implicit link between "human

rights" and "democracy" as seen from the relatively "negative" results of the empirical research and, again, from the relatively "positive" results of the survey. That is to say, although the empirical research results do not substantiate a positive link between improved human rights as a result of increased democratic processes, the human rights survey respondents expressed their belief in a strong correlation between "democracy" and "human rights" as far as they perceive them. Although part of the reason is obviously the way in which democracy has developed in Thailand, still, it should be remembered that this apparent lack of clarity needs to be viewed in the context of a larger framework; the question of how to uphold human rights under any and all circumstances, regardless of the apparent "success" or "failure" of democracy.