'Thai-style democracy': A royalist discourse on democratisation.

By: Kevin Hewison, Professor of Asian Studies and Director of the Carolina Asia Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Following the overthrow of the government led by Thaksin Shinawatra in the military of 2006, there was renewed discussion of what democracy means in Thailand. Acknowledging the electoral popularity of Thaksin, the forces opposed to him made it clear that “elections are not enough.” Some of these groups have proposed political arrangements that may be characterized as “Thai-style democracy.” In this paper I trace the origins of ideas regarding Thai-style government and Thai-style democracy to a royalist political discourse that emerged most emphatically during General Sarit Thanarat’s despotic military regime of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The defining features of this political system are outlined and links drawn to current political debates and the future of Thailand’s democratization.

Professor Hewison is Professor and Director of the Carolina Asia Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author of more than 150 publications on Southeast Asia, with particular attention to Thailand. His current research interests include: globalization and social change in Southeast Asia, democratization, and labor issues.

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