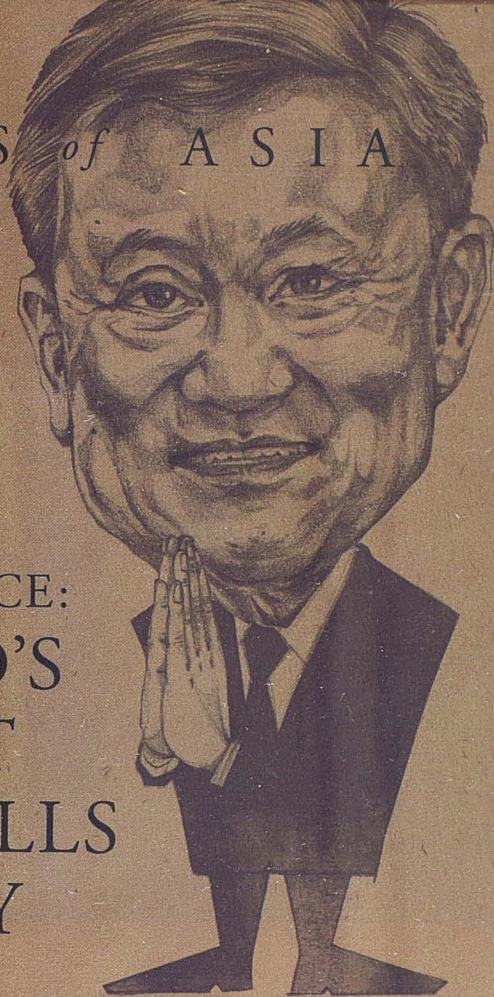


GIANTS *of* ASIA

FROM EXILE  
TO DELIVERANCE:  
THAILAND'S  
POPULIST  
TYCOON TELLS  
HIS STORY



conversations with

**THAKSIN**

TOM PLATE

*Author of the bestselling  
'Giants of Asia' series*

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*He laughs a little:* "I still believe that people should have the same voting right ... regardless of wealth or education ... That is, one man, one vote. Not some constituency system, where voters are stuck with three representatives from the same party."

"And so you're either a true democrat, or as your enemies would say, you're a demagogue, but either way, you believe that the poor farmer out there should have the same vote as the man with the PhD in Physics."

"Yes."

"And you think that system is the best one for Thailand?"

"Why wouldn't it work? Why not? Because, when you go out and tell them what you are going to do for them, if they vote for you, you have an obligation to do what you said you were going to do. If you cannot do it, there must be a very good reason why you cannot do it. And it's good that candidates are competing with each other over what they're going to do for the people."

"Yes, and you think that's a fair system?"

*He doesn't hesitate:* "That's the *best* system. That's the *fair* system. But it must be working in place ... otherwise, you know, democracy is no good."





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PUSTAKA PERDANA



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# A Note on the Conversations

Most of the dialogue with Thaksin Shinawatra emerged from the setting of his suburban Dubai home-away-from-home in December 2010, and is put in that setting. There were four two-hour sessions—then a fifth at a restaurant in the Burj Khalifa needle skyscraper downtown. About a half a year later, also in Dubai, we had an informal update session, one over dinner. In between there were several email exchanges, a phone call or two, and one lengthy Skype session between my home office in Los Angeles and Thaksin’s exile home in Emirates Hills, Dubai.

A transcribing note: in his enunciation of English, the former prime minister of Thailand understandably employs Thai-like grammatical constructions and staccato pronunciations that are not difficult to understand in person—but when transcribed exactly as spoken make it next to impossible to easily read. And so for the sake of clarity of meaning and ease of understanding, I have transcribed the conversations from a kind of Thai-literal English to a smoother normal-appearing universal English. To have not done would not only have made the conversations difficult for the reader to follow but would have served to mislead the reader about the clarity and structure of the former prime minister’s

thoughts. And on those rare instances when I was in doubt, I sought clarification.

Please also note that, given the laws of sovereign Thailand, the monarch is accorded special status under *lèse majesté*. These pointed laws are designed to provide the King and Queen protection from commentary that might be regarded as critical or disrespectful. Although this book has been, at least initially, published outside of Thailand, and thus is not technically subject to Thailand's laws, it is intended that the book will be available in Thailand, in perhaps English as well as Thai. It is not the author's intention or desire to flout these laws, as long as they remain in force, and so the subject matter has been approached appropriately. In this connection, it must be said that at no time did Thaksin Shinawatra express in any of these conversations with me anything other than respect for the King and the Queen, and any implication to the contrary is not a reflection of the reality of our exchanges or anything the former prime minister said or meant to say. However, due to the increasingly assertive degree of prosecution of *lèse majesté*, it seemed only prudent for publication and fair to the former prime minister, his sister Yingluck Shinawatra and his party to hold back certain turns of conversation until the prosecutorial climate changes, perhaps for a second edition.

*Tom Plate*  
*Beverly Hills, California*  
*September 2011*

# THANKING THOSE WHO HELPED MAKE THIS BOOK POSSIBLE

In a *Giants of Asia* format, nothing much can happen unless the subject of the study is willing to open up. And so experts about Thailand who have read earlier drafts of this book expressed the belief that here we have, finally, **Thaksin Shinawatra** at his most candid yet. For this, there really is no one else to thank except the former prime minister himself, who was unfailingly patient as this process unfolded, and helpful to the very end, not once asking to review a page or be tipped in advance as to what might appear.

Many thanks to researcher **Yena Kim**, a former ace student at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), who is now in transit to graduate professional school, where she will earn her master's degree in social work, and join ranks that include my brilliant and almost heroically dedicated wife **Andrea** in the worthy profession of American social work; she was the dogged fact-checker on this book, as she once was on my still-running syndicated political column. Immense gratitude, again, for the knowledgeable reading of



**My (Mimi) Lu**, a graduate of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, who was the crack researcher on the two prior 'Giants' books, and who now is a professional diplomat with the U.S. Foreign Service. And thanks yet again to **Anya (Zabolotnaya) Benton**, a former teaching aide at UCLA.

Thanks especially to Bangkok resident **Christopher Coles**, the jet-set artist and critically acclaimed painter of the demi-world of Bangkok, in all its pathos and existential vitality; his knowledge of Thai politics is as deep as it is passionate. And hats off to two elegant but necessarily anonymous/mysterious gentlemen who cannot be named but whom you would be quite happy to meet: they both know Thailand inside and out.

Special thanks to **Suranand Vejjajiva**, the Bangkok-based media commentator and former Thailand government minister [in the Thaksin years] who in the selfless interest of history translated documents and newspaper accounts from the original Thai that helped us definitively re-construct the narrative of the 2006 coup in Bangkok (that portion of this book being the sole chapter that he worked on). Special thanks as well to **Dr. Chiu Tsang**, the president of Santa Monica College, often viewed (rightly in my view) as perhaps the best two-year college in the U.S.; it was his suggestion for a full chapter on Thaksin as sportsman, with an emphasis on

