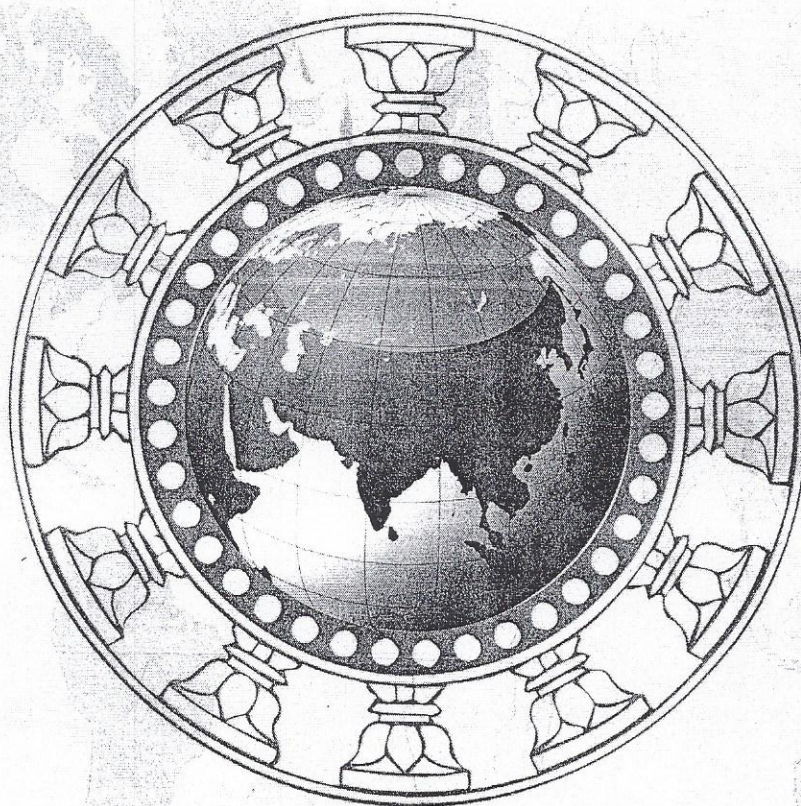
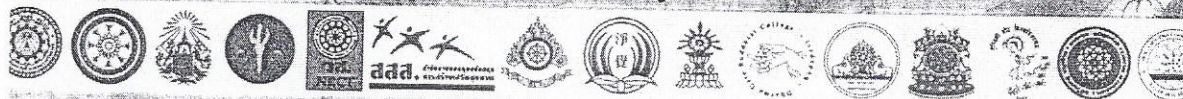


The 1th MCU International Academic Conference (MIAC)
"Buddhism and World Crisis"



29th May 2015

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University
Wangnoi, Ayutthaya, Thailand





Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University

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"Buddhism and World Crisis"
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HIDDEN THE FACE OF THAI-DEMOCRACY

By APITHAI SONTONG Ph.D.¹

Abstract

The day after 24 June 1932 to present: Thai political problems were had been for long time. The hidden problems that's were not accessing to democratically culture conscious of that many factors. If we want to stop Thais political conflict for sustainable ; must be stop main problems before, than very busy forever.

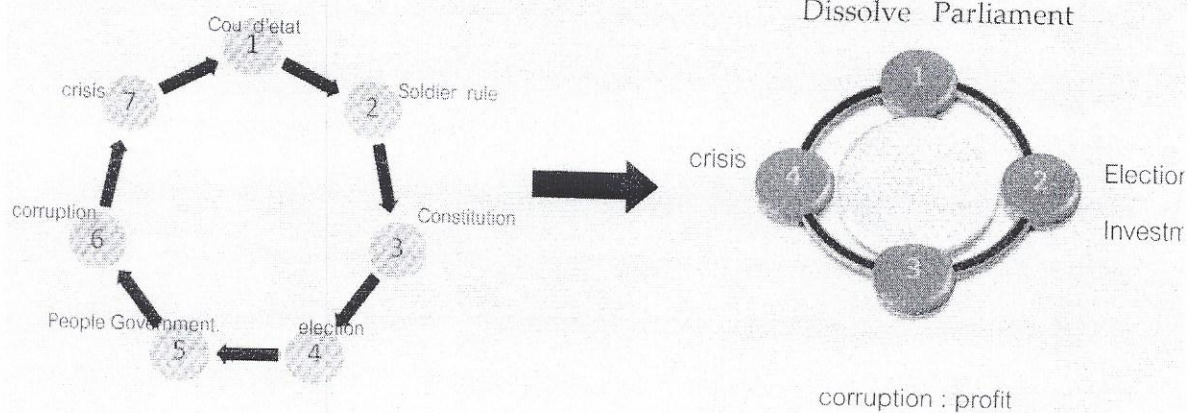
The Kingdom of Thailand, once known as "Siam" is located on the Indo-China and Malay peninsula in the South-East Asian region. Thailand borders with Myanmar to the North and West, Laos and Cambodia to the East and Malaysia to the South. Thailand is ruled by a democratic parliament and consists of 76 provinces plus Bangkok which is the capital city and government service center.

On 24 June 1932, during the reign of King Rama VII, Siam changed from having an absolute monarchical system of rule to a democratic one. The change in the system of government was a quiet revolution and on the 10th December 1932 Siam received its first constitution. Mano-Pragorn-Niti-Thada was the first Prime Minister but he held office for approximately 1 year and was followed by Prime

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Minister Pahol. In 1933 the Bua-var-dej rebellion broke out in favour of the old monarchical regime, but was quickly suppressed by General Poa. Pibhulsongkhram on 2nd March 1934. During this time King Rama VII abdicated his throne and King Rama VIII was made King at 9 years of age. In 1939 the Prime Minister resigned under pressure and General Poa. Phibulsongkhram stepped into office and this was then the start of the unsettling political cycle that continues to the present day between the military and military backed governments and civilian governments

During the first 80 years of Thai democracy (1932-2012) there have been 22 coups. During this period Thailand has also had 28 people serving as Prime Minister along with 18 different constitutions. Liket has characterized the political processes of the last 80 years in the following diagrams.



Corruption at the Core : The Roi-et Disease

In the past, subsequent to the 1932 revolution, elections in Thailand were first held under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior. Already in that period there

“was some corruption by politicians who gave gifts to the public such as canned fish, slippers, medicine, clothes and farming utensils. Slipper were a convenient gift as they would separate the pair, giving one before the election and its pair after the election. If the candidate lost, the voter never received the second slipper. The candidate would often sponsor a local festival and provide food, drink and entertainment to also persuade village to support him and his party. Sometimes they would also organize attacks on the opposition parties’ campaigners and supporters. During the short democracy period 1973-1976 a new constitution was promulgated stating that only a civilian can be a member of parliament and a candidate for premiership. In 1978 electorate persuasion took a new turn and money was first used as payment for votes in Roi-et by a member of the military who had resigned his commission so he could enter politics. This payment for votes has coined the term “Roi-et disease” in politics.

Thailand’s election process involves four categories of people 1. Financial Investor (political business man) 2. Politicians who are candidates for members of parliament 3. Election committee and 4. The electorate. At election time, the Financial investor provides his financial support to his preferred political party. The members of the party then uses some of the money to pay the campaigner. The campaigner will approach the voters to vote for his party in return for a small sum of money. The campaigner records the voter’s names and sends the list to the party members, who then disperses the payment to the campaigner to distribute to the voters. The opposing parties may also approach the same voters and sometimes the voters can receive monies from many different candidates. Some families will divide their loyalties to different parties to ensure they can receive revenues from many

² ลิจิต ชีระเวทิน.การเมืองการปกครองไทย.2543.

different sources and no one judges the other badly and it is not seen as morally wrong for people to receive a financial benefit.

Due to competition for votes, some politicians may spend up to 100 million THB on their electoral campaign. It is estimated to cost the party between 500 – 2000 THB per vote. The campaigner will receive 20-50% commission for each promised vote before the election.

Following the 1997 constitution it was decided that the Ministry of Interior would no longer be involved in the election process, but an Election Committee would be set up for this purpose.

But election fraud still continues and has developed more sophisticated forms of electoral fakery. Even the new system of the election committee was not inured from the "Roi-et disease".

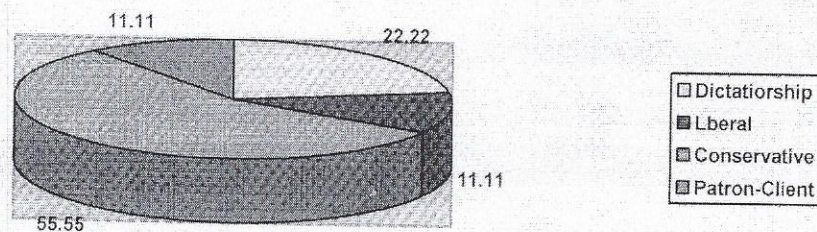
So people do not vote according to ideology or vote for the best candidate for the job

Why is election buying so easy?

Democracy was never introduced into Thailand by a foreign power. Thais had to gain their understanding about democracy through the education system and political behavior of the elite. And therefore Thai peoples understanding of democracy is incomplete and still being culturally developed to this day. Thai peoples understanding and practice of democracy is still convoluted with traditional feudal patron-client thinking as well as Buddhist ideology.

The Thai political system is rife with nepotism. Thais are well aware of corruption and nepotism in their society. In the mind of the average Thai, politics is only the business of the rich and powerful. According to research on Thai political

participation conducted by the King Pra-Pok-Krao Institution in 2000, it was found that only 48% of the Thai population had some form of political engagement, 50% were indifferent and only 2% were politically active. This suggests that most Thais are conservative in politics and do not challenge the political status quo. According to my own research conducted on "The political beliefs of students: A case study of Phetchabun Rajabhat University" carried out during August 2012. From a population of 200, it was found as shown in the model below that the students had the following political beliefs.



Most Thais are Buddhists. Thais are concerned with karma and making merit in this life while avoiding sinful acts that will have negative effects which can have impacts on their next life. People feel that they have a moral obligation to others, which affects their karmic existence. Lying and cheating is believed to have karmic repercussions. This way of thinking is vastly different from the underlying structures of thought that gave democracy to the rest of the world, which is rooted in the concept of natural law. Fearful of karmic retribution, Thai voters would usually not cheat the campaigner, because it would be seen as a sin to break one's promise. People fear sin that will affect their karma.

Politicians can be confident that their vote buying will work and that they can reap the political benefits and recoup their investment many times once they are

³elected. Financial investment is the start of the corruption that in turn leads to the political crises that continues to rebound time and time again in Thailand. Corruption further effects the development of the nation, as monies and resources are used for the benefit of a minority elite, while keeping the workers and the farmers in poverty with no apparent end to this cycle.

Even though people know that vote buying is wrong, many still abide by the modern Thai saying "no money, no vote". This shows that the general Thai population is politically indifferent, lacks ideological direction and is apathetic to the political democratic system. They still see themselves as clients to a patron who benefits them, rather than a free democratic voting public. Due to this system where the voter is seen as a client to a patron as well as the fear of karmic sin, the campaigner trusts that his party will receive the votes that they paid for.

³ บวรศักดิ์ อุวรรณโณ, ถวิลวดี บุรีกุล. ประชาธิปไตยแบบมีส่วนร่วม.
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