

Vote Buying: Situating Agency in the Politics of Negotiating Identity¹

การซื้อสิทธิขายเสียงในฐานะการเมืองของการต่อรองอัตลักษณ์

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Abstract

Profound changes in Thai socio-economy have brought about a “rural middle class” who are politically enthusiastic. These people have become increasingly interested in political participation through elections because of its significance to direct public policies which affect their lives. As a consequence, those middle classes have entered the political sphere as enthusiastic political agencies, particularly in local politics which offers

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newcomers unlimited access under diverse relationships. Local elections have become an apparatus deployed by the people to generate a space where they can rearrange their relationship with the state. Simultaneously, elections have provided an opportunity for newcomers to constantly access the political space.

Nevertheless, the image of rural areas is still represented by the myth of vote buying. In that myth, the votes are assimilated with the goods available in the market and the voters are regarded as only docile agents. In fact, elections and vote buying are too perplexing to be simply understood as an exchange under the market system. Unfortunately, mainstream political studies usually concentrate on structural and institutional politics without considering the political dynamics of political agencies. This results in those studies lacking multidimensional consideration. In addition, such indifference leads to the myth and the binary trap, which cannot comprehensively explain the political phenomenon. In consequence, taking account of the daily practice of individuals in order to negotiate against the definition, emotions and political consciousness could pave a way to understand the relationship of power in depth.

คำสำคัญ Local Politics, Election, Network Relationships

บทคัดย่อ

ความเปลี่ยนแปลงของเศรษฐกิจของสังคมไทยในช่วงหลายทศวรรษที่ผ่านมา ส่งผลให้เกิด “คนชั้นกลางในชนบท” ที่มีความตื่นตัวทางการเมือง และมีสำนึกทางการเมือง ที่ต้องการเข้ามามีส่วนร่วมทางการเมือง โดยเฉพาะผ่าน “การเลือกตั้ง” เพราะมีผลสำคัญ ต่อการกำหนด “นโยบายสาธารณะ” ที่ส่งผลต่อการดำเนินชีวิตเขาอย่างมาก เขาเหล่านั้น ได้เข้าสู่พื้นที่ทางการเมืองในฐานะผู้ประกอบการทางการเมืองที่กระตือรือร้น โดยเฉพาะ การเมืองในระดับท้องถิ่นที่เป็นพื้นที่เปิดที่พร้อมรับผู้เล่นหน้าใหม่เข้าสู่พื้นที่ได้อย่างไม่จำกัด ภายใต้การสร้างความสัมพันธ์ที่หลากหลาย ทำให้การเลือกตั้งเป็นเครื่องมือที่ประชาชนใช้ เปิด “พื้นที่” เพื่อสร้างสายสัมพันธ์กับรัฐบาลใหม่ พร้อมทั้งยังเปิดโอกาสให้ “คนหน้าใหม่” เข้าสู่พื้นที่ทางการเมืองอย่างต่อเนื่อง

อย่างไรก็ตาม คนชนบทก็ยังคงถูกรอคึงด้วยมายาคติเรื่องการซื้อเสียง เสมือนหนึ่งว่าการซื้อสิทธิขายเสียงเป็นการซื้อขายของในตลาด ผู้ออกเสียงเลือกตั้งเป็นแต่เพียงผู้ถูกระทำอย่างเชื่องๆ ทั้งที่การเลือกตั้งและการซื้อเสียงมีปัจจัยที่ซับซ้อนมากกว่าการแลกเปลี่ยนในระบบตลาด แต่การศึกษาการเมืองกระแสหลักกลับให้ความสนใจการศึกษาการเมืองเชิงโครงสร้างแนวสถาบันนิยม โดยละเลยการเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมืองของผู้กระทำการทางการเมือง ส่งผลให้การเมืองขาดมิติที่หลากหลาย นำมาสู่มายาคติและตกอยู่ภายใต้กับดักคู่ตรงข้ามที่ไม่สามารถอธิบายการเมืองอย่างรอบด้าน การหันมาให้ความสนใจปฏิบัติการของปัจเจกในชีวิตประจำวันเพื่อปรับเปลี่ยนนิยามความหมาย อารมณ์ความรู้สึกและสำนึกทางการเมือง จะทำให้เข้าใจปฏิสัมพันธ์เชิงอำนาจได้ลึกซึ้งมากขึ้น

Keywords การเมืองท้องถิ่น, การเลือกตั้ง, เครือข่ายความสัมพันธ์

1. Introduction

During the past decades, there have been many changes in Thailand's social structure, economy, occupations, and way of life (Ganjanapan, 1989). This has consequently brought about a new type of rural people which corresponds with the world's transformation of economic structure (Hart, 1998). Hence, people in rural areas do not live separately from society as a whole (Chiangthong, Sugunnasil, Rakchat, Meesaeng, & Jaipinta, 2011). Such transformation has not only shaped a lifestyle but has also constructed a new identity, emotions, and desire of people in rural areas (Kitiarsa, 2014). People have taken part in politics through "elections" since it is a significant mechanism to direct the "public policy". They have entered the political sphere as enthusiastic political agents under diverse forms of relationships in order to negotiate with the state as well as new forms of capital (Walker, 2012).

Even though elections in a democratic system have increased the bargaining power for people in rural areas (Walker, 2012), it turns out that the politics of this group is under the discourse of "stupid, poor, and hurt" (Satitniraramai, Mukdawijitra, & Pawakapan, 2013; Mukdawijitra, 2012). This discourse is to condemn people in rural areas who are trapped in economic utility and the short-term benefits and turn their right to vote into a commodity

in the market place. Votes from these people are thus pointless with no need to take the cultural particularity in each area into account (Barth, 1968).

Thus, considering the politics through the lens of structuralism, or a system, may not allow us to understand the “politics” comprehensively. It is because contestation and negotiation in politics have emerged not only in a formal sphere, but can be found everywhere. When considering the politics from below, the imagination and expectations of people in society, it should be investigated through contestation in the everyday life of people rather than looked at from a structural level. Additionally, an explanation for a level of economic utility or an institution’s structural transformation could not reflect the politics on an individual level. By looking at the area of the everyday practice of people (Bourdieu, 1977) which has previously been regarded as a grey or invisible area (Scott, 1985), changes in the politics beyond the ruling class or authorities is highlighted.

This paper aims to examine the politics and political mobilization of political actors, which is different from a study on politics from an institutional-structural perspective. The institutional-structural perspective has overshadowed multidimensional characters of politics and has led to a myth and a trap of the binary opposition that obstruct a thorough understanding about politics. An approach of paying attention to the practices of individuals in everyday life, the ways she/he defines, feels and conceives politics, will help us to understand the power relationship in other dimensions. Therefore, this paper attempts to explain politics by considering four elements: (1) the context of vote buying as a myth and economic utility, (2) economy in the context of globalization and structural transformation in rural areas, (3) new actors in the politics of identity, and (4) situating actors in negotiating identity.

2. The context of vote buying in a myth and economic utility

The myth of vote buying is that a candidate can buy votes easily; just like buying goods in a market. A series of questions about the social mechanism of voters to control vote buying of the candidates, the power of money to manipulate election results, and the conditions that weaken vote buying or conditions that lead to success have arisen. A study on democratic development in many places reveals that democratic development varies in each locality, both in the West and other parts of the world. Nonetheless, the various shades of democracy do not mean that people in one place should ignore violations of human and political rights in other places. It should be a means to realize the way and ideology of politics which is called “democracy”, which can vary from one place to another, including political movements either to achieve fully-fledged democracy or to reduce democracy under specific contexts (Mukdawijitra, 2012).

“Vote buying” has occurred throughout the country for decades. It is a phenomenon that has been haunting Thai society for a very long time. Politicians are stigmatized as greedy “animals” carrying a money bag to rural areas. It is one form of investment in order to reap rewards later when they are in office (Mukdawijitra, 2012). Consequently, people in rural areas⁴, especially those living in poverty, have become victims, as their votes could be purchased for small sums of money (Policy and Planning Office, Ministry of Interior, 1992; Laothamatas, 1993), just like goods in a market. Even though Thai society has undergone a significant period of political transformation, vote buying is still a dominant factor in Thai politics.

⁴ This work has investigated people in rural areas in a general sense referring to people inhabiting in rural areas of Thailand. Since it is a study on literature review and the state of knowledge, it has no analysis on specific groups of agency. Additionally, the study on specific groups of agency in Thailand are rarely found and it is, in addition, not adequate for further debates.

It might be said that conditions of vote buying correlate with a voting system and interpretation of a democratic system in each locality. Voting cannot reflect the transformation as the voting cannot make changes to the power relationship between people and the state. Their votes are thus pointless. This has also turned vote buying to a common practice in Thai society. Vote buying is not just an act of exchange in a market sphere or just for economic utility, but it is strongly dependent on the cultural aspects in each locality. In this sense, vote buying has become a problem because it is related to several conditions, as follows.

Firstly, there is a difference in the conception of an election between people in “rural” and “urban” areas, which has led to different ways of situating the politics in an election. Urban middle-classes are deeply skeptical about a voting system which entails “vote buying” or the provision of benefits in many hidden forms (Arghiros, 2001). This has caused negative views about elections among this group, who think that “people in rural areas establish the government but urbanites can remove it” (Ockey, 2004; Laothamatas, 1993). This reveals a bias towards the majority of the voters by regarding a rural society as an undeveloped society because of vote buying. Thus, a solution should be found through urbanization and modernization projects to guarantee that they will have a good government and good representatives. As Laothamatas (1993, pp. 83-91) pointed out,

“...the urban middle-class has a conflicting standpoint because they support democracy only in theory but do not like its system as it is in reality. They believe that the politics...is democratic only by its name, but it is actually the governance dominated by corrupt and incompetent politicians. They accept its principle that the rights to govern are given by the people but, in fact, this principle is simply worthless as vote buying is found everywhere. Moreover, most of the people lack proper knowledge about democracy. Therefore, good government is not only about a consensus from an election but also morality and competency...Some groups may focus more on integrity

and competency than voting...The urban middle-class reject a dictatorship only in its principle but in practice they believe that there may be a good dictatorship (as many call righteous dictator)...”

Furthermore... “the middle-classes or urbanites who have high income and received higher education often say that people in rural areas are the majority of the votes but they are trapped by a cycle of poverty and ignorance. They are victims of greedy politicians who invest large amounts of money to gain votes and will take it back later when they are in office...”. Hence, the middle-class views that a critical element in governance is morality and competency, not a consensus from the majority.

Nevertheless, under the “*patron-client relationship... which ties those in an upper class, in economy and society, with people in a lower class, people in rural areas cannot reject the power and patronage of “patrons”. Moreover, they cannot separate “favors” when considering politics. Giving their votes to patrons (who have either granted support in various forms for a long time or money during the election) is not wrong, but denying to give them the votes is considered an act of betrayal*” (Laothamatas, 1993, pp. 93-94). Laothamatas’ point of view seems sympathetic towards people in “rural” areas but it actually illuminates the failure of democracy throughout (Laothamatas, 2006, 2009a, 2009b).

The electoral system in Thailand is tied up with the patron-client relationship or the patronage system. Thus, people cannot separate “favors” in politics from other issues. Rural people are seen as uneducated and their votes are purchasable or “stupid, poor, and hurt”. This is a ‘label’ put on people in rural areas signifying their “tameness”, innocence and ignorance about democracy, and their inability to identify corrupt greedy politicians.

There is a different point of view about “democracy” between people in the upper and middle middle-classes and people in rural areas [see the discussion on democracy and the myth “stupid, poor, and hurt” which marginalizes people in rural areas due to their political innocence]. It is also a process to make people “passive” under the “patron-client relationship” that

deprives them of their independence in politics (Kongkirati, 2012; Mukdawijitra, 2012). As “election” and “people” are treated with skepticism, the many coup d’états by the military in Thailand have become “acceptable” (Laothamatas, 1993, pp. 90-91, 94-95), such as the coup in February 1991 by the National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC), and the coup on September 19, 2006 which gained great support from the middle-classes and academics.

Therefore, we can surmise that “democracy” from the view of the middle-classes does not need to be achieved through “elections” and “legitimacy” from the majority, but rather to have good and moral people. Even though good and moral people might come into power using immoral ways, such as a coup d’état, it is acceptable if they are competent. On the contrary, people in rural areas view an “election” as a means to achieve equality in society, because it recognizes the equal quality of a single citizen, who has only one vote all the same (Eoseewong, 2009, pp. 42-47).

Secondly, differentiated views of democracy between the urban middle-classes and rural people are that the former regard elections as the origin of vote buying. Hence, what they need is not elections but rather good and competent people (Eoseewong, 2011). In contrast, the latter regard elections in a democratic system as a means to create equality. Democracy, in this sense, has a deeper meaning than just voting. Even amongst the western countries who are still hoping to have an advanced stage of democracy. Therefore, democracy is a universal ideology which people in modern society are longing for. One approach to the study of a democratic culture is how democracy is interpreted differently in various places. It is to figure out the meaning of democracy defined by different groups of people based on their politico-cultural contexts. Each society then has its own conception of democracy. The different interpretations in different places have led to a process of positioning and negotiating identity of people in rural areas. This process has caused a debate when different meanings of democracy and elections have brought about a problem in positioning of agencies or voters in various aspects (Mukdawijitra, 2012).

Thirdly, “a voter” cannot be considered an individually isolated problem and “vote buying” then has a deeper meaning. “Duality of Thai politics” in the past two decades (Laothamatas, 1993) is a prominent concept shaping an understanding about politics as well as constructing a perception about elections to Thai society for a long time. The concept divides Thai society into two separated parts. The first part is urban areas, particularly Bangkok which is characterized by an advanced conception of democracy and individual-based society. The political behavior of urbanites is viewed as based on rationality; more concerned about national benefits than individual benefits. Whereas, people in rural areas are characterized by impoverishment, lack of self-reliance, and being caught in the patronage system. They have to rely strongly on the patronage of influential people and are inclined to change their vote according to political and economic reliance. They are either under the patronage of politicians, or might turn themselves into politicians (Ockey, 2004; Nishizaki, 2011). A characteristic of democrats in urban areas, who cry out for democracy, contradicts the image of people in rural areas who sell their votes and are induced either to support politicians or form demonstrations, and are addicted to popular policies (Mukdawijitra, 2012).

From the problem above, the question is, according to changing form of reliance in rural societies during past decades, how has decentralization transformed the political process in rural areas? How has money influenced elections, and what elements have influenced the decision-making for voters, and “vote buying” in the dynamism of politics? If an election in a democracy is situating relationships between the representatives and people by which people can inspect and control politicians through elections, “vote buying” is a reversed version of the power relationship. It means that instead of people, who should hold the power, the candidates hold it to manipulate election results. But why is the “sovereignty” of people so cheap; worth only 200 baht? I would suggest that vote buying is not just for economic utility or the long-term benefit, but it is pertaining to the structural transformation in rural areas

under the globalization of the market economy, where everything is commoditized while giving a meaning to the lives of people under this change.

3. Economy in the context of globalization and structural transformation in rural areas

Globalization or “neo-liberalism” has penetrating power in mobilizing rural areas, and transforming the structure moving towards a free trade system in a post-development period. It seems as if the system works by itself, however we should not look solely at the “mode of production” but also at the “mode of consumption”. Thus, the view that considers rural areas as isolated entities is no longer valid because rural areas have long connected with other parts of society and have formed a community chain, e.g., through cross-border trade and dams and power purchase (Biggs, 2008). During this time, people in rural areas have been active actors in negotiating and contesting processes to be involved in natural resource management. They use knowledge and discourse to counter-attack the mainstream discourse of development given by outsiders. For instance, in the north of Thailand, land in rural areas has been paved to serve the expansion of rubber plantation through the commoditization of land. The state’s policy has been changed from territorialization to de-territorialization of land, to allow market mechanisms to work freely (Barney, 2008). The state eagerly promoted rubber plantation to encroach the reserved forests. The state issued the regulation as well as pressured people in the local areas with a discourse that persuaded people to stop growing field crops and grow rubber trees instead, as rubber prices were much higher. According to interviews, people said that they would be arrested if they grew rice in the national park. Ironically, if they grew rubber trees, they could also grow rice. However, growing rubber trees had a hidden meaning which connoted modernity while growing rice connoted otherwise. People conformed to the state’s policy, yet under a strategic action of growing rubber trees in order to get the permission to grow rice in the same areas. The state, however, then changed the policy again by

limiting rubber plantation and supporting industrial crops and energy crops instead. In order to serve the growth of the market, there have emerged conflicts relating to natural resources until the state has taken over the rights to manage and control the issue and turned the commodity into state capital (Ganjanapan, 2006).

Since the 1970s, changes in rural areas under the tide of development and capitalism, have resulted in the production for commerce which relies on capital. However, only a small number of people who owned large pieces of land were able to turn themselves into agricultural entrepreneurs. At the same time, a large number of farmers lost their land, and with no other choice have become freelance labors. A complexity in the exploitation of laborers has emerged. Agricultural entrepreneurs have come with a variety of compulsions, including a high degree of effort to succeed in labor control (both laborers on rented lands and hired laborers). Peasants have adopted the production in capitalism. Later, they invested in commercial agriculture after the rice growing season. Even though this is not wholly capitalist production, it is a combination of commercial production and self-sufficiency. For instance, peasants use water for rice cultivation from local irrigation systems while also relying on their own groundwater (Ganjanapan, 1989). Rural society has a closer connection with authorities outside the state and the market system, for instance they sell cows and buffaloes in the markets. Local irrigation systems have caused many problems, such as profound inequality in a community. Some have no rice in the rice fields and have to be hired laborers. A number of people have no land to cultivate rice, while land owners make profits from land rental businesses which can cause a conflict between people about water allocation (Ganjanapan, 1989). To sum up, in the B.E. 2020s, a process of structural transformation under the era of development and capitalism brought about agrarian transformation. This transformation was an emphasized mode of production to become part of the capitalist system. We experienced the transformation through conflicts and violence in localities which related to the state and capital (Hart, 1998). We have found the exploitation and inequality between groups of people who had

different capacity to access capital. As a result, natural resources and the environment are considerably damaged.

The explanation of capitalism with its penetrating power de-territorialize nation-state's boundaries and undermining nation-state's significance cannot be applied in the case of Myanmar, because newly emerged capital groups in Myanmar have become the foundation for strengthening the state's sovereignty. The development of capitalism in this case is exceptional. Thus, it can be said that development of capitalism has taken place in a specific context for each locality, in which the consequence of it must be varied. In order to understand capitalism is to understand the context of a locality. Moreover, the state's territorialization is ironic. While the state wants to promote commercial crops to serve the expansion of the market, structural readjustment to access natural resources is still complicated and contradictory. Through the domination of knowledge and self-conflicting process in the expansion of power over resources to serve the expansion of the market, it is considered an exclusion process and intense battle over natural resources (Biggs, 2008). As a result, localities have lost control over resource allocation which also implies risk and uncertainty for the livelihood of people on the margins as well as ethnic minorities.

Peasants were driven out of agricultural sectors because of the deprivation of their right to access the land for agriculture. It is also a process to exclude and push them out of a state for being peasants. For instance, numerous pieces of lands were sold by peasants, and the rice fields have become the property of transnational entrepreneurs. The land use is more complex, and the land has become under the control of the market or "structural mechanism". The rights in decision-making is from outside, which is closely connected to state and global markets. In many rural villages, employing laborers is integrated with the employment of laborers in the global market. Small scale industries have come to invest in rural areas (Ganjanapan, 1989). At the same time, laborers seek out jobs outside the agricultural sector, including becoming subcontractors working at home. We have experienced the expansion of agro-industry. In some villages, people no longer work in the agricultural sector and rural communities

have become just a place to sleep (Hirai, 2002). Some people from rural areas now work in factories. Factories have become a commodity, and the laborers who work there have been mentally dominated and treated as wage earners as they are forced to work overtime by a propagation of “extra money” (Hirai, 2002). Laborers from rural villages have become slaves of wages in the extent that leads to economic domination to a more intense degree in rural areas (Harvey, 2005). In general, we might think that the market has been interfered with by the state, but actually the state lets the economic system work quite independently. Nevertheless, the state has neglected to establish a structural mechanism to strengthen the bargaining power of people in rural areas. As a consequence, there have been a number of demonstrations and social movements of peasants and people from rural areas working on various issues, such as a social movement for a community forest and urgent requests for aid regarding crop prices (Ganjanapan, 1989, 2011). These movements were formed primarily to readjust the power relationship between the state and society.

Regarding rural society through economic development, the first national economic and social development plan in 1961 aimed to develop the infrastructure of the whole country under the support of the U.S. and World Bank. After the B.E. 2500s, the main objectives of Thailand’s economic and social development plans were to “modernize” Thailand. The national economic and social development plan had adopted ideas from “modern-developed” countries as Thailand was classified as an “undeveloped country”. Economic development was then a priority of the plan. The first to the third national economic and social development plans (1961-1976) were aimed at infrastructure development, e.g., roads, dams, electricity to serve the production in industrial systems, including increasing productivity and per capita income. The development of infrastructure has benefited the transportation of commodities, services, and resources from rural areas to the center, such as big cities in respective regions as well as Bangkok. Land transport networks have crossed over rural areas and have been used to serve the expansion of authority into rural areas all over the country (Samnieng & Nasee, 2014b).

Development in the modern era has transformed the farmers' mode of production from growing rice for consumption and sale to other kinds of commercial crops. They use products made in the cities and have engaged more in a dependent economy. Consequently, this has caused a wide gap of income between groups of people, including uneven development amongst the cities in the regions (Ganjanapan, 1989).

It can be said that development gives birth to a middle-class, which is a result of the expansion of education to cover a larger part of the country. In the late B.E. 2500s, regional universities were established, e.g., Chiang Mai University in the North, Khon Kaen University in the Northeast, and the Prince of Songkla University in the South. As a result, there has emerged a middle-class which is typified by modern education and high income. Nonetheless, it has widened the gap between cities and rural areas, and, at the same time, conflicts over resource allocation have been found across the country (Samnieng & Nasee, 2014a).

During the development of capitalism and the state, people were deprived of resource capital, such as land, water, and forests. Many regulations were issued to control and manage resources, which were previously under the care of local communities, under the state, e.g., the National Reserved Forest Act B.E. 2507, and the National Park Act B.E. 2504. The construction of big dams to generate electricity forced people to move out from their lands and has caused chronic problems. The uneven development of the state has also created a gap of income as well as having a negative effect on people's lives. For example, the collapse of rural societies has resulted in people in rural areas becoming low-wage laborers.

In the mid B.E. 2520s, NGOs raised public awareness of rural development in various dimensions corresponding to the awareness of "community culture" which recognized the value of the rural community. This phenomenon demonstrated a process to develop an alternative approach for development apart from the mainstream one. It was because the development led by the state failed to create equality and a fair allocation of resources. Moreover, people in rural areas were unable to access the resources and many had become wage

earners and “poor”⁵, either living in the cities or in rural villages. The social movements formed during that time were an attempt by people in rural areas, including people on the margin, to empower themselves against the state. Simultaneously, it was regarded as an attempt to put pressure on the state for a structural mechanism to monitor and counterbalance the market system (Polanyi, 1957). However, it was not a mechanism to control the market system but to help the market system to work better, or in a way not to cause high rental prices. People were struggling for new structural mechanisms in the structural readjustment of the rural societies, especially a widened income gap. This problem was based on a lack of structural mechanisms for resource control and management. It was because, throughout the development process, the state had neglected to set up this kind of mechanism to monitor the market system (Ganjanapan, 2011).

Even though rural societies under a global context have undergone structural transformation in various degrees, it does not mean that people react passively under this transformation. On the contrary, people in rural areas have entered a contested, negotiated space under different conditions, such as in a work of Santasombat (1992) which illustrated the adaptability of people in rural villages to respond to the structural transformation. When they turned towards intensive farming, from self-sufficiency to commercial production, including intensive use of production factors, the farmers needed more cash. The former relationship system in the society collapsed, such as women’s status in production and rituals in the North were slowly disappearing. Individualism and consumerism crept into rural areas. A number of young girls were forced to engage in “productive activities”. They were turned into commodities serving

⁵ Poverty and “poor people” here means those who are unable to access resources and have no choices in other dimensions. Eoseewong (1998) has suggested that poverty is the inability to access resources resulting in the delimiting of bargaining power and dehumanization. “Poor people” are unable to accumulate security and money to a proper level for a living. Therefore, they have to pursue security through other means, which is to form a relationship with people or groups of people who can help them.

the sex industry. Prostitution is just one amongst many problems in rural Thai areas which was as a result of the development. However, Santasombat suggested that prostitution cannot stay isolated from cultural conditions, and these sex workers did not have such a low status in rural society. They had established a new identity to counterattack the mainstream discourse of society on prostitution, such as sponsoring religious activities in communities and being grateful people (to their parents) in accordance with Thai culture.

Santasombat (2003, 2008) pointed out that although there was a condition that made agricultural work uncertain and strong reliance on factors outside under the commercial production, including the relationship between people in rural areas that no longer served the production, farmers have never conformed to the “encroachment” or made a condition to limit their lives. They sought out alternative approaches, redefined the meaning of development, and created a variety of productions, e.g., growing rice twice a year and finding jobs outside the agricultural sector to create a variety of livelihood strategies. This perspective is elaborated in his later work in 2003. This work examined forms of adaptability of peasants who had entered the wage-earning sphere. They worked in various kinds of jobs outside the agricultural sector and became a source for the family’s security. This work also investigated the transformation of the renting-capitalist system which was previously a fundamental source of social relations in peasant societies in the North. Santasombat argued that working as wage earners or in various kinds of jobs outside the agricultural sector had an effect on decreased importance of the renting-capitalist system, including the relationships linked by this system. People who were once called “peasants” had now become entrepreneurs and capitalists. Accordingly, the social structure of rural societies had become more complex. At the same time, another group of people opted to respond to the change by seeking out alternative modes of production, adopting an idea of self-sufficiency, and trying to be free agents in the production and livelihood, as Santasombat called “flexible peasants.”

A work of Ganjanapan (2012) indicated that people in rural areas created a ritual space to build up bargaining power against the state, capitalism, and to

readjust the power relationship between people in a rural society. Ritual space had also contributed to the establishment of new social institutions based on traditional beliefs that created new forms of relationships. He surmised that if people held the power to create the knowledge and identify their own identity, communities would be equipped with various forms of adaptability. In that situation, they had to respond to the rapid changes, instead of being stuck with the mainstream discourse of development which left few choices (Ganjanapan, 2015), so people have redefined the meanings of development, life, and value to make it possible to be consumed in many different ways. This strategy was a crucial factor enhancing the adaptability of people in rural areas.

It can be concluded that rural areas have undergone a period of transformation at various levels which have affected people's lives in a variety of ways, such as the delimiting of bargaining power, loss of self and identity, marginalization, and some were left behind. However, people in rural areas have never been passive or victims of development. On the contrary, they have redefined and re-interpreted the meaning of development and democracy (as I shall elaborate in the following section) in order to react and negotiate with the changes in different degrees. This action has led to the establishment of social movements in rural areas as well as political awareness (Nishizaki, 2011) which aims to engage in politics, the negotiation of identity, and the reconstruction of the myth of "stupid, poor, and hurt." People, thus, have tried to propel the establishment of new structural mechanisms. They hope that these mechanisms will enhance their bargaining power and the power to create their own meaning of development and democracy. For example, a campaign for the Community Forest Act which aims to preserve common property of the community and prevent it from being under private ownership, or the political engagement of people in both formal and civil political spheres (Ganjanapan, 2011). Another example is the creation of alternative occupations, which Santasombat calls "flexible peasants" (2003). The structural transformation in rural societies as demonstrated above has led to the making of a new identity for people in rural areas which is quite different from the past. Their new identity has influenced the definition of themselves and their

political actions to enhance bargaining power and readjust the power relationship with the state and new capital. This implies that people will not allow the state and the market system to gain absolute right to control their society.

4. New actors in the politics of identity

The economic changes during the past two or three decades has taken people out of the agricultural sector to increasingly serve industrial and service sectors. Even production in the agricultural sector has become more commerce-oriented rather than for self-sufficiency. This gave birth to “the middle-class in rural areas” who have become active agents in the political arena. Their lives are closely connected with politics. Thus, political change, either at local or national level, has a direct impact on their livelihood. The middle-classes in rural areas want to engage in politics through “elections” because it is a crucial channel to design public policy which will affect their quality of life. They have entered the political sphere as active “political agencies”.

People who have entered local politics have encountered a significant self-transformation. Local politics are open spaces in which different groups of people can move into for their “private” and “public” agendas. It can be seen that new actors, e.g., petty-local capitalists, small entrepreneurs or the middle-classes in different levels have taken part in the “political arena”. This phenomenon reflects the heterogeneity of interest groups. In the past, local politics were directed by a few interest groups, such as big and wealthy families in respective localities, big brothers, middle men, sub-district chiefs, village chiefs, monks, and teachers (Eoseewong, 2011; Turton, 1976). These groups took control of access to the resources in communities. They formed connections with civilians and politicians on a national level and established the “exploiting patron-client relationship”.

In recent days, we have found new and active actors in local political arenas. They have come with different purposes and formed different patterns of relationships in local politics. Through a legal channel that requires relatively

low specifications, people in general are able to get involved in local politics. Local administrative organizations are “new spaces” for people to identify their position in the political sphere. It is because these organizations are newly established bodies⁶ which are not fully directed through the governmental system but have close ties with people in the area. In other words, they are “quasi-formal” spaces in which people in respective areas are able to decide on a direction for their community as they wish. In so doing, they have formed connections with new actors in the political arena and do not permit any group to take control of others. They have also adjusted the local administrative organizations to suit the specific context of the locality. These organizations are quite small in the extent that they permit people to monitor, inspect, and make use of them through various channels. Moreover, they are not yet “dominated” or “closely tied” with the governmental system. Thus, they are able to be flexible and have the opportunity to be geared towards the “people’s organization” (Samnieng & Nasee, 2014a, 2014b).

Regarding the production outside the agricultural sector, or commercial production⁷, it has inevitably brought people in those sectors to be inside the current politico-economic transformation, which is larger than the local sphere. Additionally, the previous relationships (including the old form of patron-client

⁶ “Newly established bodies” here means organizations which permit people to get involved. Formerly, these organizations were founded as a sub-units under the structure of regional and central government, even though they were located in local areas. Accordingly, the policies and direction of the organizations were made chiefly by government officials in the Ministry of Interior.

⁷ The production in the agricultural sector in rural areas is not primarily for self-sufficiency but also for commerce. Furthermore, the main source of household income is not from the agricultural sector but from other production sectors, such as service, commercial, and industrial sectors. The transformation of production sectors has caused changes in rural societies in a variety of ways and has also given birth to the “middle-class in rural villages” (Eoseewong, 2012). This group of people have a significant role in the Red Shirt movement as well as political engagement at various levels.

relationship) have lost their function to solve existing problems in society. The forming of new connections in a new form of patron-client relationship⁸ and commercial system, for example, have inspired people in rural areas or as Keyes (2010) suggested, created the “cosmopolitan villager”. This concept is used to elucidate the livelihood of people in rural villages which is closely tied with the macro-economic system. Therefore, their thoughts about politics and local politicians differ from what had been found in previous generations. According to Arghiros (2001), Walker (2012), Ockey (2004), Nishizaki (2011), Laungaramsri, (2013), and Satitniramai (2013), actors in local politics are so diverse; such as charismatic leaders, petty-local capitalists, freelancers, and retired officials. Diverse groups of people in local politics signify heterogeneity of interest groups who are obliged to serve people in accordance with the assigned policies.

Various forms of politics, formal politics and politics in everyday-life, of the new generation implies that people want to engage in making political decisions. This engagement does not only refer to politics in terms of structure but also politics in everyday-life. Haberkorn Tyrell (2007) examined the social movement of peasants by establishing big organizations to negotiate with the state through legal channels which are also controlled by the state. Their strategy is to call for strict compliance with the regulations of the state. Her study is, thus, different from other studies which analyzed people as nonconformists to the state and regulations, living in informal spaces (e.g., Scott, 1985). Haberkorn suggests that within a formal space, peasants have also been active in the contestation and negotiation processes, although they were eventually suppressed and eliminated by the state. This signifies that peasant movements are equipped with diverse strategies and tactics (De Certeau, 1984;

⁸ The transformation of production sectors in Thai society has brought about a “new form of patron-client relationship” under new forms of production. This form of relationship is not based on a firm and stable system or even in accordance with a traditional pattern (Rabibhadana, 1996; Pongsapich & Kuwinpant, 1996), but it is related to production sectors which are “fragile” and “narrow”, unlike the old one. Nevertheless, the new form is “flexible” in the degree that it enables clients to have more bargaining power.

Bourdieu, 1977) which is different from the analysis in the vein of resistance in everyday life suggested by Scott (1985) and Kerkvliet (2005). Haberkorn depicted the political transformation which is not only led by the ruling class or authorities. Political authority or political movements are a sphere that everybody can move in and out of as they wish. Actors in this sphere can be replaced and no one has the absolute right to define the valid meaning of politics to society. Ordinary people are able to form an organization or re-adjust the state's instruments to serve their struggles against the state. Walker (2012) investigated the politics of peasants and pointed out that the negotiating strategy of peasants is not to resist the state, but to take advantage of the state. This implies that the structural changes have given birth to diverse and complex political actors.

The study on everyday politics is a shift from the perspective of political structure to the practice of everyday life in the theory of practice. This approach is to recognize that people can “negotiate with” or “resist” the structure or the authorities. It is different from Durkheimian and Marxian perspectives which regard humans as subjects whose actions are directed by the social structure. Humans in the theory of practice permits us to see the power relationship in which actors can take action to challenge the structure (Mukdawijitra, 2013). The challenges could be some small actions, such as making shortcuts through buildings (De Certeau, 1984), stealing, boycotting, avoiding joining the rituals of wealthy families, destroying properties, or giving a new meaning for wealthy persons as “stingy”. These actions aim to resist and re-adjust the relationships at the same time (Scott, 1985) in order to postulate that humans in everyday life are not totally dominated. They can express their resistance through several actions and activities in order to show that they are not passive to a discourse given by others.

The study on resistance in everyday life is not to examine resistance against the system of authority or reproduction of a process but rather to look at how individuals navigate. It is because sometimes they take action in an unconscious level, thus resistance is not necessarily operated through a conscious realm. Resistance is about conflicts based on the power relationship

between individuals and society. People as individuals are trying to challenge society, which is repressing them from above, through small resistance actions in everyday practice (Mukdawijitra, 2013).

Bourdieu (1993) described cultural production of symbolic power by asking why social structure, in which social order is set forth in each period of time, still exists without challenge or why people live without consciousness of being dominated. It is interesting to ask a further question about how social process works to maintain the differences. Bourdieu (1993) suggested a concept of culture as an expression of power to examine a process of self-reproduction of the structure. It is to understand the conditions which support self-reproduction of the structure. He has found that self-reproduction can be accomplished through the construction of actors, groups or individuals, with a set of knowledge to construct their actions. By this process, the structure is accordingly reproduced. In other words, the structure can be reproduced through actors who are embodied with a set of habitus expressed through their practices which consequently run the reproduction process.

He puts emphasis on the field as a network of relationships between individuals and institutions. The concept of the field is the construction of space for practices under a set of logics. The field is a contestation sphere for resources, space, and power over that space. Bourdieu defines fields as playing fields. They denote contestation which is not only for victory over the opponents but also for the power to control the game, players, results, and to broaden the space of the contestation. For example, in a legal sphere which is usually self-conflicting, those who claim legitimacy through legal compliance shall raise a question about the holders of the authority for decision-making and legitimacy to take action (Benson, 1999). Individuals are actors in the field. Even though they are in the same space, they cannot be considered as a unified group. Interaction between people in each area are thus complex yet interrelated (Bourdieu, 1984).

Moreover, Bourdieu argued that practices are more meaningful than just human's actions because practices are what we choose to do or not to do under a motive in a respective field. For instance, players or actors learn a set

of rules for the game and combine it with personal competency. Practice happens in the social field in which actors live. Therefore, the structure of a field is a space of the power relationship between individuals (Benson, 1999).

The concept of practice suggested by Bourdieu is in the same vein as the identity politics concept, which explains social movement by denying a binary opposition perspective, between agency and social structure in a debate in which elements have determined social behavior. These two concepts focus on complex and inseparable relationships between agency and social structure. In these relationships, the constructing identity is highlighted since it is an ongoing and fluid process and an open space for negotiation, re-interpretation, and contestation over the definition, by individuals or groups. The constructing identity is thus an open space to express the heterogeneity of people whose social opportunities were once blocked. Selfness and identity is both a process and social space which contains heterogeneous practices of definitions, as persons define and are defined at the same time (Feungfusakul, 2003). Everyday life practice is about conflict and negotiation over the power relationship between “definers” and “defined”. It is not a one-way relationship but a chain of power which is eternally working in everyday life (De Certeau, 1984). In order to identify political behavior, there are two perspectives, (1) a structural politics approach which focuses on how organizations work under the structure of power relationships, and (2) a patronage system and practices of agency approach which focuses on contestation and negotiation under different conditions. These perspectives help us to understand the state of the study, including the strong and weak points of each approach.

Nonetheless, these approaches are based on a political ideology of “democracy”. Following these ideas does not mean that we need to have relative presence (Mukdawijitra, 2012). Examining elements to control mechanisms and different meanings of democracy from different dimensions could enhance our understanding.

A seminal work on practice in politics through democratic institutions in everyday life, which work under the structure of power relationships and

institutional structure, is “Democracy in America” written by Alexis De Tocqueville in 1994. De Tocqueville investigated the governance in democratic idealism and pointed out that the success of a democratic system was based on a hypothesis that “people are socially equal since they are born not after that.” In other words, citizens are born with political equality. It is not something given by surnames, residences, hometowns, education, or profession. In some way, it was close to the democratic system in America. De Tocqueville also argued that a democratic society, in which people were freed from any commitments in Feudalism and had become greedy individuals, forming as a group was not only a choice for being newly liberated individuals but also a mechanism to make them devoted to social benefits.

Furthermore, it is a school to develop social and thinking skills in accordance with a democratic ideology for members of the groups. De Tocqueville’s view on a democratic society is based on democratic idealism where people were able to express themselves freely, using America as a role model.

Dahl (1961) disagreed with De Tocqueville’s thesis (1994) by arguing that although politics through elections could make people all equal for voting, they were unequal in terms of economic status, the power in decision-making that consequently caused unequal access to resources. Therefore, an individual was not fully independent in his/her decision-making. As previously suggested by De Tocqueville (1994). Dahl’s study was a debate on political behavior. He believed that groups of individuals were formed by intentional and active forces and their views were expressed through political actions on various public issues, according to their interests. He emphasized the benefits of and losses by individuals which had become the motive for political actions by individuals/groups. Individuals were then not fully independent actors in political actions. He pointed out the difference between “procedural democracy” and “substantive democracy”. Procedural democracy comprised the lowest point of process which was related to democratic practices, i.e. the government of people’s representatives in the constitution. Election was fair

and free. Citizens had total freedom to access information, to form interest aggregation, to criticize the government and society without fear of interference and punishment.

In contrast, democracy by definition is an ideal type where society has achieved fully-fledged democracy in all dimensions; politics, society, and the economy. At this present time, there is no country in the world that has ever achieved this goal.

“Democracy” varies from one group to another. The varying meaning of democracy is the creation of equality. Democracy in this sense means not only elections. Due to the specific context in development of the politics and cultures of each society, the meaning of democracy is thus defined differently (Mukdawijitra, 2012). This has caused different positioning and strategies for negotiation amongst different groups. Hence, investigation only through the structure of institutions is inadequate since practices in politics are related to the emotions of individuals who have joined the actions in each locality.

The study of the politics of a network in daily life puts emphasis on the patronage system and practices of the actors. The political relationships which have been formed at a local level through “the patronage system” and the forming of “entourages” in a complex level of status has led to the forming of social, economic, religious, and legal networks. However, this kind of relationship is flexible, in which hierarchical order can be moved up and down depending on an individual’s charisma and social status. Additionally, it can be terminated at any time if one fails to satisfy the counterpart.

This is one of the approaches to understand the transformation because the patronage system is rested on relationships among people in Thai society. Pongsapich and Kuwinpant (1996) described “the patronage system” in Thai society as a system that weaves the relationships of different groups of people. However, this system is rooted in inequality of access to power and resources. According to Rabibhadana (1984), the patronage system in Thai society was formal. It is a concept and political direction under feudalism which divides human beings into two classes: lord (ruler) and peasant/slave (subject).

Additionally, this system had intra-class patronage which was made up of three aspects: (1) inequality in exchanges, (2) vertical relationships, directly from patron to client, and (3) unstable relationships, relying upon individual relationships. Therefore, the political loyalty of Thais was centered on groups while the legal use of the political power to create equality on a national level had never been realized.

Walker (2008) pointed out that the patron-client relationship is horizontal. Additionally, there has emerged a patron-client relationship by the state which is coincident with the politics of elections. Arghiros (2001) also found a transformation in the patron-client relationship as well as livelihood in rural villages which is as important as the spoils-family system, since relationships in rural villages have become more diverse.

Similarly, a work of Eoseewong in 2009 depicted the social transformation in Thai society which has led to inequality in access to resources and strong patron-client relationships. Furthermore, Laothamatas (1993, 2006, 2009b) suggested that the patron-client relationship is closely related to elections. As a result, elections in rural areas are less productive while vote buying is found widely. In this sense, these areas need to be “urbanized” according to a hypothesis that “villagers establish the government but urbanites can remove it”. However, these studies share the idea that the patron-client relationship is a consequence of unequal access to power. This form of relationship is fragile because it is based on individual relationships.

Other studies have touched on interactions between “the state” and “villages” in the areas of local administration through village headmen, government officials and agencies (Turton, 1976). They have suggested that Thailand’s political structure strongly relies on the structural transformation of the upper class. A group of businessmen have gained a significant role replacing the old power group which relied on the bureaucratic system. Thailand’s political society has undergone a period of transition from bureaucratic polity to money politics (Hewison, 1989) while political relationships at individual levels as well as patron-client relationships through influential people like “god

fathers” have been established. Tamada (1994) pointed out that capitalists in agricultural businesses have formed a relationship of reliance with farmers. This relationship has not only caused reliance in business but also in the politics which farmers are obliged to repay through political support. This case demonstrates the turning of business reliance into social and political obligations (Satitniramai, 2013).

A paradigm shift in the patron-client relationship from a vertical and static to a horizontal and flexible pattern, among new and different groups of people, allows us to further understand the patron-client relationship in recent days. People in rural villages should not be taken to account by the patron-client relationship with the state in a static and passive way. Additionally, it is no longer described by the resistance against the state’s exploitation of laborers and resources through horizontal peasant movements. People in rural villages make use of the state’s authority and other sources of authority outside to empower their movements and strengthen the bargaining power in the politics of negotiation and contestation over resources (Walker, 2008; Keyes, 2014).

This study urges us not to overgeneralize the politics using grand narratives, such as the middle-class has emerged during the B.E. 2500s with new class consciousness, new perspectives on life and politics. It is because each group of the middle-class has changed under the specific context and produced a unique consequence. Thus, we have to be aware that they are not all the same even though they are identified as “the middle-class”. Due to their differences, the overgeneralization of the “middle-class” in terms of their political awareness, tastes and emotions has overshadowed many critical points. According to the studies above, roles of actors or political entrepreneurs in the political arena are highlighted through various practices, such as elections and relationships built among different groups of stakeholders.

5. Money, gifts, tokens of kindness, premium pay: elections in the politics of negotiating identity

The changes in rural Thai society have led to negotiations to establish new structural mechanisms. Social movements of rural people are the politics of new knowledge space in order to prevent the domination of knowledge (Ganjanapan & Hirsch, 2010). Moreover, these movements are considered the politics of negotiating identity, especially laborers who have constructed varying identities in order to make themselves more visible in society. Under the readjustment of social structure in rural areas, we hardly notice the people's power since they are generally treated as invisible. People in Thai society have often been exploited. We rarely recognize them as creators or producers, but just as resources. Thus, we seldom treat them as human beings (Ganjanapan, 2011). The confinement of people in the market system has also confined people in the myth that everything is purchasable, including the "right" to vote for short-term benefits. This view neglects actors who have tried to negotiate under the politics of elections in several dimensions. This negotiation is the politics of identity over the definition of "right". The loss of identity and self of rural people has brought about the utilization of politics as a tool to negotiate, struggling over the definition of humans. Under the myth of vote buying, people in rural villages have come up with a new meaning which is used to re-adjust the power relationship with the state (Keyes, 2014).

An "Election" is the participatory action of people in politics. Elections are a necessary condition even though they are not effective in a democracy (Farrell, 2001 cited in Kongkirati, 2012). They are based on the sovereignty and equality of people, hence people have the right to decide who should hold the power and the right to remove them. Elections have also enabled participation and opposition to access power in politics so that no one can claim absolute right (Kongkirati, 2012). The principle of politics in a democratic system, either small or large scale, is that an election allows an individual to have only one vote. They are all equal no matter how differently they feel

about the election. From the rural people's perspective, an election is a means to get "involved" in the decision-making process for their future. They have defined an election as a process to create equality in society. After the coup d'état in September, people became more interested in politics and paid more attention to elections. This signifies the growth of political consciousness that had never previously occurred (Satitniramai, Mukdawijitra, & Pawakapan, 2013).

A study on democratic culture in Thailand needs to be done using different questions instead of regarding it as a process towards the prototype, which is an old-fashioned evolutionist approach. In the author's view, this approach is not inadequate since it is derived from a framework of cultural idealism originating in Europe. Studies in the following period have turned towards specific definitions of democracy within specific localities. Furthermore, it is more focused on how democracy has been used as an instrument in political contestations of different groups of peoples. If the focus is specifically on vote buying, we should take into account the structural and cultural conditions which nurture the vote buying and how we can understand this phenomenon under the specific context (Mukdawijitra, 2012). Laothamatas's studies (1993, 2009a) demonstrated the limits of "electoral politics" because it has caused corruption on a large scale, including low quality of representatives and governments at both local and national levels. However, during the past two decades, we have experienced the flourishing of civil societies, such as NGOs, and social movements of rural people and the middle-classes, which have gained a significant role in the process to mobilize, reflect, and resolve many issues for society. Additionally, local people have been engaging more in monitoring and administrating affairs for their communities or the so-called "self-government democracy". This indicates that democracy should evolve at a local level, and democracy at a local level could serve as a strong foundation for democracy at a national level.

The electoral politics is a complex sphere. Work to form a network of relationships in one facet may not assure victory in an election. Thus, various forms of "social capital" have significantly been drawn upon, e.g., kinship,

cronyism, and social activities. The claiming of a representative of one ethnic group does not help the candidate to win. Money has thus gained an increasing significance in elections which is not only for vote buying but also for maintaining relationships in networks (Mauss, 1989; Nishizaki, 2011; Unno & Bundhuwong, 2012). For instance, the former Chief Executive of the Sub-district Administrative Organization (SAO), Tha Nuea was not reselected because “...he is not generous enough. He often donated small amounts of money for funerals, festivals, housewarming ceremonies, or weddings in the community which was inappropriate. He is the chief of the Sub-district, so he should think about his status. For instance, he donated only 100-200 baht for a wedding which was too small, and, in addition, it was even less than lay folks. He is not generous, not venturesome, so he is not good at administration and helping others.” People contrast him to the current Chief Executive of the SAO who is younger and “...he is so generous, he supports a lot of activities in the community, including feasts and celebrations. He is a wealthy person and has supported people all the way, so he has been selected” (farmer1, personal communication, May 20, 2012; Nasee & Samnieng 2013).

During an election campaign, the candidates invest large amounts of money in vote buying but people treat it as “a token of kindness” or “a gift” (Mauss, 1989; Barth, 1968) which has slightly influenced their decision-making. It is because in respective elections, people usually have the “one” in their minds while “money” is just used to “confirm” their previous decision-making. For example, in the last election there were three mayoral candidates and more than twenty candidates for representatives on the municipal council; three from the teams of three mayoral candidates with eighteen independent candidates. The representatives on a municipal council and the mayor receive a monthly income and, importantly, it is the “pride and prestige” of family. There is high competition so the candidates employed different and sophisticated strategies in order to gain more votes. It is a high-stakes game in which the candidates have to invest a lot of money. It is found that in the case of a mayoral position, the investment could reach as high as more than 300,000

baht. This includes a competition to pick those influential people in each village to be under their team. Each of them in a team has to seek votes for the candidate. Furthermore, the former mayor decided not to run for it, thus this was a competition of new faces. Each candidate had their own bastions, thus the one and only thing to turn the tables was “money”. Rong Ko, the former deputy mayor had invested large amounts of money to run for mayor. He was the first one who declared his intention and formed his team using the assistance of his network, Na Nguan, Pho Luang Khuean, and A Lek. He also had several former representatives on the municipal council and canvassers in his team. Thus, he was certain to win. His team began cash giveaways in villages by drawing up an account listing who they were going to give to. They set up a mission for several subgroups, and each canvasser would look after around 100-200 votes. This was to ensure that they would get around 2,000 to 2,500 votes, which would be enough to win the election. They also trusted their bastions with the “tokens of kindness” they provided. However, they underestimated the opposition, and other candidates, such as the elected mayor, could take all votes from two villages through a family network. Furthermore, the elected deputy mayor also had a strong connection in two more villages. This included a network of candidates for representatives on the municipal council and a huge investment in vote buying; 500 baht before the election and 300 baht on the election day for those who were not in their bastion. The vote buying had a big influence on people who were not sure and had no preference. Some among them felt that they had had enough of Rong Ko because he was quite old and had contributed little to the community. Additionally, the candidates for representative positions in his team were the same people as on the former council, and people needed a change. Moreover, as there were three teams in the race, the bastions were consequently broken down into small subgroups while some overlapped with the bastions of Rong Ko. As a result, his team had not been selected as there was a rumor that some candidates in his team had been paid one hundred thousand baht to transfer to the rival’s team. Thus, people were unsatisfied by this behavior and declined to vote for them.

Moreover, it was found that some canvassers cheated people by taking some amounts of money planned to give to each voter, such as giving around 200-300 baht for each vote instead of 500 baht as it should have been. These were factors to explain why they lost the election (Nasee & Samnieng, 2013).

“Money” in vote buying does not confirm victory in an election since all candidates also want to win while some lose in spite of thousands baht invested. The “vote buying” is depended on a complex set of relationships. Moreover, those who are able to induce people to vote using vote buying must also possess personal charisma, such as being senior members in a family or community leaders. For instance, the general election in 2011 was marked by political fragmentation at a severe level between “peasants” and “lords”, the “Red shirts” and the “Yellow shirts”. Voters made decisions based on their political ideologies, while several campaigns to intensify the issue of the politics of colors were found throughout the country. This was a contestation over the meaning of democracy under negotiation of the meaning of the vote (Satitniramai, et al., 2013). It was found that the Red shirts in Fang, Mae Ai, and Chai Prakan districts of Chiang Mai province, in which the candidates from the Pheu Thai Party were behind the rivals, had deployed several strategies, such as marking people’s houses with red flags and breaking down a team to help each candidate in a campaign to seek votes. Their goal was to have their candidates win the election both at regional and national levels in order to show the ruling class that people needed the election. Even though the rivals had paid considerable amounts of money for vote buying, they eventually lost. This indicates that vote buying does not confirm a victory, because the politics of colors in Thailand is rested upon contestation on the meaning of democracy. It has significantly influenced the decision-making process of voters (Laungaramsri, 2013).

In some rural villages, familial relationships are more important than money, including the contribution of politicians for their communities. For example, Mayor Kanoksak (of the SAO Mae Tha in Mea On district of Chiang Mai province) has been in office for three terms without rivals because he has undertaken many projects for the community (Nasee & Samnieng, 2013).

Therefore, “money” or “vote buying” does not guarantee victory for politicians in an election. With large amounts of money invested but without social capital, e.g., family network, cronies, contributions and continual activities within the community, politicians are unable to induce people to vote for them. It is because an election in the view of people is complicated and there are many other factors involved (Eoseewong, 2009, pp. 68-73). Importantly, politicians at all levels affect people’s lives at different degrees. People have, thus, engaged more in elections and vote buying alone cannot manipulate the election results (Bowie, 1988).

Moreover, a study on the election results in 2011 by Siripan, presented in a seminar on “knowledge dynamism and the myth on election and rural Thai society”, showed that people who had received only elementary education voted for the Pheu Thai Party at 55.2% and for the Democratic Party at 35.6%. People who had received secondary education and vocational education voted for the Pheu Thai Party at 54.5% and for the Democratic Party at 34.7%. For people who had received Bachelor’s degrees, they voted for the Pheu Thai Party at 40.1% while for the Democratic Party at 46.5%. People who had received post graduate education voted for the Pheu Thai Party at 50.3% and for the Democratic Party at 32.3%. In respect of the vote buying, the North and the Northeast were generally acknowledged as the most intensive areas for vote buying. The study revealed the percentage of people in respective regions who gave votes to the vote buyers as follows: Bangkok 2.1%, the Central region 12.2%, the South 19.3%, the Northeast 7.6%, and the North 7% (Sawasdee, 2012).

In the general election on July 3, 2011, on a national level, money was not a vital factor to induce people to vote for a candidate. In other words, it was not the most significant factor to manipulate the election results anymore. Voters who, even though were not paid for vote buying, still voted for the “ones in their minds” were at 48.62% while people who were paid but did not vote for the givers were at 46.79%. The statistics are consistent with a report from a series of sub-group meetings of community leaders in many places which shows that, in the past elections, people did not vote for money (Isranews, 2013).

In recent days, giving money during a campaign for votes is no longer treated as an act of exchange, just like in a marketplace, since there is no requirement to vote for the givers in return. It is rather considered “premium pay” or “a token of kindness” of which refusing to vote for the givers does not cause any feeling of guilt or dishonesty (Nishizaki, 2011).

The myth of vote buying in rural areas is one of the main obstructions for making sense of the transition of Thai politics during the past decades. As we have seen, the myth provides an explanation of vote buying just on the surface, blaming rural people for their poverty, innocence in politics and the authoritarian system, and a strong reliance on patrons from outside. This myth has fulfilled a paradigm of the Thai middle-class towards rural people and the politics which has consequently led to a devaluation of the votes from rural people. Subscribing in this myth is a way to delimit our understanding in a study of the politics from local community aspect. This myth has also overshadowed the will and desire of rural people, as well as their expression through various forms of political engagement (Sangkamane, 2012).

Phongpaichit and Baker suggested in the paper “Vote-buying claims nothing but dangerous nonsense” that the blame on the illegitimacy of a government winning an election by vote buying is dangerous nonsense. Nonetheless, vote buying still exists because money is still significant for the candidates to prevent them from being accused of being “stingy” or “unkind” by people. However, the point is that money is no longer an absolutely essential factor to manipulate the election results. For example, the pattern for the election on July 3, 2011 was obviously different. In large parts of the country, adjoining constituencies usually got the representatives from the same party by a landslide victory. For instance, in the major part of the Northeast, the Pheu Thai Party had victory over the Democratic Party by more than 60% of the voters while in the South (except the southernmost area where Muslims make up a majority of the population), the Democratic Party had victory over the Pheu Thai Party by more than 60% of voters. Misconception about vote buying in recent days has become a crucial element undermining the campaign

for electoral democracy. In this sense, the problem is people, in increasing numbers, have realized the value of their votes and are using it for their own purposes (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2013).

Local politics is complicated in which money is not the major source of network formation and the main factor for victory in an election. “Capital” drawn from other sources is also crucial, such as kinship, cronyism, social activities, and ethnicity. Relying on a single form of relationship does not help to win. Money is thus important in somehow or other in an election.

“Money” does not mean “vote buying” but it demonstrates an effort to maintain network relationships, for example, people explained that the former Chief Executive of the SAO, Tha Nuea has not been reselected because “...he is not generous enough. He often donated small amounts of money in funerals, festivals, housewarming ceremonies, or weddings in the community which is inappropriate. He is chief of the sub-district, he should concern much about his status. For instance, he donated only 100-200 baht for the weddings which was too small and, in addition, it was even lesser than lay folks. He is not generous, not venturesome, so he is not good at administration and helping others.” People contrast him to the current Chief Executive of the SAO who was younger and “...he is so generous, he supports a lot in activities of the community, including feasts and celebrations. He is a wealthy person and has supported people all the way, so he has been selected (farmer2, personal communication, May 20, 2012)

However, giving money during election has a big influence but people treat it as “a token of kindness” which is not the main factor to give their votes. It is because, in each election, people usually have the “ones in their minds” and “money” is just to “confirm” their previous decision-making. The representatives in a municipal council or the mayor gain monthly income and, importantly, it is the “pride and prestige” of family. Thus, it is high competitive while the candidates have employed different and sophisticated strategies in order to gain more votes. It is a high-stakes game in which the candidates have to invest a lot of money. It is found that in a case of the mayor position, the

investment could reach as high as more than 300,000 baht. This includes a competition to pick those influential persons in each village to be under their teams. Each of them in a team has to seek votes for the candidate.

Furthermore, the former mayor decided not to run for it, thus this was a competition of new faces. Each candidates had their own bastions, thus the one and only thing to turn the tables was “money”. Rong Ko, the former deputy mayor had invested large amounts of money to run for the mayor. He was the first one who declared the intention and formed his team by a great assistance of his network, Na Nguan, Pho Luang Khuean, and A Lek. He also had several former representatives in a municipal council and canvassers in his team. Thus, he was certain to win. His team began cash giveaways in villages by making an account listing who they were going to give. They broke down a mission for several subgroups, each canvasser would look after around 100-200 votes. This was to affirm that they would get around 2,000-2,500 votes which would be enough to win the election. They also trusted their bastion as well as “tokens of kindness” they provided. However, they underestimated since other candidates, such as the elected mayor who could take all votes from two villages through a family network. Besides, the elected deputy mayor also had a strong connection in more two villages. This included a network of the candidates for representatives in a municipal council and a huge investment in vote buying, 500 baht before the election and 300 baht on the election date for those who were not in their bastion. The vote buying had a big influence on people who were not sure and had no ones in their minds. Some among them felt enough of Rong Ko because he was quite old and had a little contribution for the community. Additionally, the candidates for representative positions in his team were the same persons in the former council but people needed changes. Moreover, as there were three teams in the race, the bastions were consequently broken down into small subgroups while some were overlapped with the bastion of Rong Ko. As a result, his team had not been selected as there was a rumor that some candidates in his team were paid by hundred thousands baht for transferring to the rival’s team. Thus, people

were unsatisfied by this behavior and declined to vote for them. Nonetheless, spending money for vote buying does not guarantee the victory in election since all candidates want to win, too. They have also invested large amounts of money in order to gain votes but many cases failed because “vote buying” is dependent on a complex set of relationships. Moreover, those who are able to induce people to vote by vote buying must also be featured by personal charisma, such as senior members in family or community leaders, and, significantly, people who receive “money” must have no the “ones in their minds”.

“Money” and “vote buying” no longer guarantees the success of local politicians in elections. Because even though they may have invested large amounts of money for the vote buying, without social capital, e.g., kinship, cronyism, or continual activities to stay in touch with the local people, they cannot win. The decision-making of people is complicated and relies upon many elements (Eoseewong, 2009, pp. 68-73). Importantly, local politics has a considerable effect on people’s lives; it is about what they would gain or how much their community would be developed within the next four years. It is quite different from the politics at a national level (members in the house of representatives and senate) which has a lesser effect on people’s lives and has frustrated many politicians and nearly financially broken others (Samnieng, 2016).

To vote or not to vote is an importance decision for people in rural villages. It is viewed as the “absolute power” to decide the fate of politicians. This has brought politicians to maintain their bastions among different groups of people as long as possible in order to keep their status as “politicians”, both at local and national levels. Politics through elections has enhanced the bargaining power of people either as patrons or clients (Bowie, 2012). However, an “election” is the only process to guarantee that politicians will respond to the needs of people as well as inspection and monitoring in many ways, such as through civil politics. These are crucial tools to mobilize a community and create political space for people.

Vote buying may be “fruitless” since people no longer see its importance. This implies that people are no longer an “instrument” of politicians but rather

they “need” to take part in the structural development of the nation, just like the urbanites. An election is, thus, embedded with a complex set of relationships in which various factors have influenced the act of “selection”, such as kinship, cronyism, ethnicity, and interest groups. Even though a voter, member of an organization, executive or layperson is under one interest group, eventually s/he (layperson) will select the candidate according to her/his “short-term” and “long-term benefits (Bowie, 2012).

It can be concluded that the myth of vote buying is constructed by the urbanites towards rural people without considering the complex relationship of votes, money, and culture which govern actions. This form of relationship enhances the “bargaining power” of rural people and sets forth political direction at different levels, including the redefinition of vote buying referring to it as “a token of kindness” and “premium pay”, which is different from what has been perceived by the urbanites. This includes cultural mechanisms which control vote buying, canvassing, and kinship. Vote buying is the readjustment of the power relationship between politicians and voters that is governed not only by money or the short-term benefits, but also by further conditions and meanings (Samnieng, 2016). By redefining democracy, money for vote buying has created negotiating space on identity. It is the politics of meaning to readjust the power relationship between the state, urbanites, and rural people. Rural people give a new meaning to vote buying by referring not only to economic utilities and short-term benefits but negotiation and contestation under the transformation of social structure in various dimensions. This point of view helps us not to look at vote buying as superficial and static.

6. Conclusion

The “vote buying” in rural Thai society has considerably changed. If an election in a democratic system is the determination of the relationships between authorities and people by enabling people to inspect and monitor politicians through a decision-making process, to vote or not to vote, the “vote

buying” is a reverse version of this power relation. Instead of voters, the candidates hold the power to manipulate the election results. Hence, vote buying is not solely aimed at economic utilities and individual benefits in the short term but is related to the transformation in the structure of rural societies under the globalized economy, which has changed everything into commodities. This transformation has shaped people’s view on life and self.

The transformation in Thai economic structure during the past two-three decades has repressed people in rural villages to be naked, powerless and selfless. Moreover, some have been left behind by the discourse of development. Nonetheless, development which is aimed at advancement in various aspects has also caused political awareness of “rural people”. They are characterized by a desperate need to engage in politics through elections since it is crucial for the making of “public policies”. They have entered into the political space as active “political agencies” in order to negotiate an identity and counterattack the myth of “stupid, poor, and hurt”. The myth which condemns rural people and the vote buying delimits our understanding in the transition of Thai politics during the past decades. It is because, as we have come across, the myth gives a meaning of the vote buying on a basis of poverty, political innocence, victims of politicians and authorities, and a strong reliance on outsiders, which is superficial. This myth has served the middle-class’s perspective on rural people and an attempt to devalue the votes of rural people. Consequently, the myth-based knowledge on vote buying has obstructed an effort to understand politics at a community level. Therefore, the desires of rural people as well as their political actions to achieve their goals have never been explored.

The decision-making of people, to vote or not to vote is vital and the “authority” to “decide the fate” of politicians. Thus, politicians have tried to maintain their bastion amongst different groups of people as well as their status as “politicians” as long as possible, both at local and national levels. The politics through elections have enhanced the bargaining power of people as clients in the patronage system. Vote buying which might be considered

fruitless should be reviewed. People in rural areas are no longer an “instrument” of politicians but they also “need” to take part in the structural development of the nation, the same as the urbanites. Therefore, an election is a complex relation of “selection” since factors to “select” are based on different angles of relationships, such as kinship, cronyism, ethnicity, and interest groups. In this sense, the vote buying has a minor influence on the decision-making of people.

In conclusion, people’s votes are based on “individual benefits” both in the short term and the long term. An election is a means to determine whom people will rely on. This includes the re-interpretation of “vote buying” as “a token of kindness”, “premium pay” which is in contrast with what the urbanites understand. By taking into consideration cultural mechanisms which control the vote buying, canvassing, and familial relationship, vote buying is the determination of the relationship between politicians and voters which is not purely about money or individual benefits in the short term. It has a complex meaning and is operated under complex conditions. It is, therefore, the contestation and negotiation of meaning in the politics of election.

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