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EDITORIAL

It is my proud privilege to welcome you all to the TheIRES International Conference at Zurich, Switzerland. I am happy to see the papers from all part of the world and some of the best paper published in this proceedings. This proceeding brings out the various Research papers from diverse areas of Science, Engineering, Technology and Management. This platform is intended to provide a platform for researchers, educators and professionals to present their discoveries and innovative practice and to explore future trends and applications in the field Science and Engineering. However, this conference will also provide a forum for dissemination of knowledge on both theoretical and applied research on the above said area with an ultimate aim to bridge the gap between these coherent disciplines of knowledge. Thus the forum accelerates the trend of development of technology for next generation. Our goal is to make the Conference proceedings useful and interesting to audiences involved in research in these areas, as well as to those involved in design, implementation and operation, to achieve the goal.

I once again give thanks to the Institute of Research and Journals, TheIIER, TheIRES for organizing this event in Zurich, Switzerland. I am sure the contributions by the authors shall add value to the research community. I also thank all the International Advisory members and Reviewers for making this event a Successful one.

Editor-In-Chief

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THE MYTH OF VOTE-BUYING SCHEME IN RURAL AREAS IN THAILAND

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Abstract - Understanding of vote-buying, especially in rural areas in Thailand, is a myth that distorts the fact. The myth of vote-buying is a main factor that judges the election and leads to condemnation when there is vote buying in election. This article is aimed to discuss about the myth. Despite vote buying exists, vote buying in rural areas is not a factor which could decide the result of election. On the other hand, vote buying still exists because it is an important tool of voters in rural which is assessed carefully, not just be paid and votes without conscious – an assumption of rural villagers are not political ignorance. Documentary research on various aspects and field work in anthropology (as a case study) were methodology of this article.

Index Terms - Vote-buying, Myth, Local election

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades of Thai political transformation, Thailand's economic and social structures have been significantly reshaped, especially when democratic elections and values have been progressively embedded and implemented within the Thai society. Unfortunately, the merit of elections in Thailand has been greatly challenged by a 'myth' or a 'misunderstanding' towards vote-buying schemes in a great number of rural areas in Thailand. Such myth has been exploited as an excuse to overthrow any government elected after any election. Thus, that is, by far, one the most important topics to study. Such political problem of the myth and its impacts should be analyzed by reviewing the related literature. In addition, this study will also outline a story of vote buying in Thailand in another respect, reflected through the community survey of political studies within social anthropology framework. All information used and scope of this study are collected from and framed by a selected community as the case study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of Everyday Politics was basically derived from the concept of Everyday Resistance asserted by James C. Scott and Benedict J. TriaKerkvliet.[1] The so-called idea or concept calls for an awareness within the society to view political phenomena in rural areas on a daily basis by offering a re-definition of the term, 'politics'.

III. RESULT AND EXPLANATION OF THE STUDY

The cliché of rural areas in Thailand being embedded with vote buying and selling has been becoming a popular but dangerously misleading discourse. In other words, it has been commonly believed and accepted that the people in undomesticated areas in Thailand are highly likely to buy or sell their votes. Subsequently, the so-called selling and buying votes in such rural areas inevitably have a huge impact on who will win an election – a game changer. Hence, this whole set of (mis)understanding has led to electoral condemnations and/or rejections because such rural places had already been branded by the 'society' as horrendous and undemocratic. An article called, 'Tales of Stupidity, Poverty, and Illness of Rural Voters: Myth and Bias of Thai Political Scientists', written by PrajakKongkirati[2], asserts a full detail of the linkage between rural voters and elections. He mentions that the scandalous belief of rural vote-buying is a strong myth. Additionally, such myth has even been able to be cascaded and embedded in the hearts and minds of the people within the society from generations to generations. This phenomenal discourse does not act only as a negative challenge towards elections, but also an attempt to pinpoint bandits in the Thai political realm, which in this case are unavoidable the poor villagers and election candidates. These two bodies are habitually found guilty as being accomplices, committing an undemocratic crime through vote-buying system seen in the present.

Moreover, not only have negative opinions towards the poor and rural electors occurred, the myth of vote-buying has also become a legitimacy in reducing Thai democratic value. As William A. Callahan[3] asserts, the so-called myth has been becoming a discourse where an urge of tackling vote buying are simultaneously developed as a disguise of anti-democracy in a form of multiple political transformations. Further, such myth has compromised the identity of Thai politics towards negativity, which is an opposite to a good example of being a full democracy. Joseph A. Schumpeter[4] mentioned that such political phenomenon was called a procedural democracy. Three effective exits to such political problem is to demolish the relationship between elections (administrative positions) and election inspections, design an electoral system that limits
The Myth of Vote-Buying Scheme in Rural Areas in Thailand

people's power, and invent an ideal organization that is so 'pure' or politics free. Furthermore, in 2002, Frederic C. Schaffer [5] introduced that the fanaticism of reinventing a clean, political society was not simply shared within the society. It, in contrast, has been introduced and acted upon by only the high society or elites. Unfortunately, this has caused a disharmony in a divided society even more. Hence, violent response towards elections – resulting from the clash between moral codes – is to be expected and unable to control.

The next point worth considering is whether or not vote buying is a real problem in itself, and if so, to what extent? According to Katherine A. Bowie [6], vote buying is only an innovation within certain time or context in the history. It is rather something irrelevant to rural election. Thus, there will normally be complex dynamics at the level of village going on and on. Any explanation without taking history into account will inevitably reduce the significance of various types of vote-buying schemes and will not be able to bring about a long-term solution towards the real problem.

A stigma of poor or rural people buying and selling votes have been embedded within the Thai society due to the separation between rural and urban areas – putting these two groups of people on the opposite sides of the Thai political and social spectrums, framed by the Thai civil society and patron-client systems. A vital book by Dr. Anek Laothamatas (1995) – A Tale of Two Democracies: Conflicting Perceptions of Elections and Democracy in Thailand [7] – asserts that the fundamental problem of Thai democracy is, in fact, derived from the differences of financial and social needs between the two masses (rural and urban). Subsequently, it is inevitable for some political observers to separate these two groups of people based on their financial status, and most of the time the poor are highly likely to be put in a lower position. However, it is rather ironic because the number of seats in the parliament won by rural candidates are, in turn, significantly higher than those of urban counterparts. This has caused the middle class observers to develop a stereotype against the low-income, and target them as the centrality of Thailand's democratic problem. This stereotype was clearly expressed in the years of 2013 to 2014 when there was a strike to overrule the general election.

Furthermore, the truth about vote buying studied in this research could possibly help us stray away from the aforementioned myth. Thus, this study used some information from the field work in an anthropology realm. The study did survey the political perspectives of the villagers towards local elections in Somboon community [8] Nonthaburi province, in the year of 2012. During the last election, inside Somboon community, there was no evidence of a direct vote-buying in the way which money was given to trade with votes.

Some information was collected through interviews, 'There are no more these days, flat out. But before hard, there used to be some people giving out 200 Baht per head.', villager number one said.

'In my entire life, I saw such vote-buying scheme only twice.', villager number two mentioned.

Then, villager number three discussed, 'In the past, there would even be someone asking of how many people in each household and then just give out the money. However, for the past ten years, there has been none.'

'Since I got here, I have never come across anything like that. Or perhaps they do give out money, but it has never reached us. I do not know.', villager number four stated. Lastly, villager number five asserted that, 'Do they have it? I have never received it. I do not know about others.' [9] Even though most of the rural people are low-income and living in an agriculturally-based community, they still earn some amount of money when they are connected to the outside world. However, they still need more, and had they been offered a vote-buying money during an electoral campaign, they would receive only certain amount of money and only once. This sum of money would not be sufficient to elevate these villagers' standard of living on one go. As a result, the rural people need to seek for other windows of opportunity to gain more benefits. Hence, it can be clearly concluded that buying these villagers' votes is not likely to be a rational choice for election candidates aiming at winning an election, especially when it is not effective and also an illegal activity. Although direct vote buying has disappeared, canvassing with money during election campaign still stands (in a different form of action). Now, it has come in a form of 'dividend'; The money will be given to canvassers according to Noi's interview. Noi [10] said that, 'There have been canvassers. That canvasser receives some money from the Mayor. Normally, they will not call it a direct bribery ("Pan-Hun") because the money is used to help those in need in forms of donation, buying food, arranging small civil societies, buying stuff, and etc. Actually, I am not a canvasser myself, Mayor used to ask me to become one and offered me two-thousand Baht so I could send my men into different streets and ask people to join some activities. Anyhow, I did not like the idea. Hence, I rejected the offer knowing in my heart that if Mayor won the election, I would be fine. However, in contrast, if he did not win, I would definitely be in trouble. What would happen if I received his money but he lost an election? Besides, if I did something bad, I would be hated for it.' An interviewer asked Noi more that, 'Is it well aware that there are a number of canvassers in this whole panel of committees, but they refused to disclose their identity?' 'Do not mention about them, Yes, they are committees, but they will not bother us. If we can help them with something, we are okay. However, if they force us to vote for particular candidates, we will not

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do it. And they would not force us to do it anyway because if they pushed too much, the people would condemn them. What could be gains are now losses for them.’ [11] ‘They have been rumors that most of the upper canvassers are corrupting politicians’ money. That is why there have not been enough financial supports to help build a greater good for the community, arrange parties, or to rally for voting turnouts. Is this true?’, the interviewer inquired. ‘Those canvassers corrupt. Once they have received the money, they would share it within their own body.’ Noi responded. [12]

Whilst the money used for the ‘dividend’ scheme has no direct effect towards rural people’s vote decision, very few of some election candidates (originally with good and grounded support) pay attention to this method. On the contrary, when it comes to the newbies, these new politicians need to build up their identity in a short period of time.

One of the community’s committees asserted that, ‘These new politicians or candidates spend a lot of money. If you really want to get rich, it is best to help the opposite side — not the new faces. It would take a lot for the newbies to break into this business even though they have already had the guts. They are always in hurry. However, since we are quite obvious about where we stand, we shall not switch sides. The villagers will bawl at us. It is not worth it. But for those who choose to do otherwise, we should not talk about it.’ [13]

Another villager who gained benefits from this story said that, ‘When it comes to an election, the new faces will provide a lot of incentives and caress me. Unfortunately, I have already chosen my side.’ [14] Two of the most important qualifications of canvassers is to be widely known by the community and to be able to plan things accurately. ‘These people know exactly what to do. They do not treat every household the same way. Some households get so upset and drive those canvassers off. Anyhow, helping the villagers out is like an image building. The canvassers must know how to do it properly. Otherwise, people will reject them, and that is bad.’ Noi replied. [15]

The competency of the community’s committees is of importance, and the help given to the villagers need to come in a form of service e.g. sending maintenance guy to check electric appliances at every household, sending gardeners to help cutting down trees or maintaining the gardens, and sending presents or gifts to greet the elderly because it is part of the Thai culture. All of the above incentives are not supposed to be done in a blatant way. Doing anything like this must not be obvious, but it needs to be consistent and long. The key of a being a successful canvasser is to keep the merriment going.

‘This process needs to be consistent in a long term — at least twice a year. The villagers must be able to see the process of helping and embrace it. This is not an on-and-off thing to do but rather sincere and promising.’ a villager replied. [16]

It can be interpreted that canvassers in a rich community have no higher position or privilege over other villagers. They are not able to manipulate the villagers’ decision, even with money giving. This showcases that fact that such canvassing system works only because the villagers want to exercise their power, not to serve politicians’ desires.

According to the case study, it is found that using money to campaign or canvass in rural or local areas are still of importance and ongoing because the bribe paid to the rural electors by vote-buying politicians is a symbol reflecting the villagers’ political existence and importance, which is linked to the community’s needs in a complex way. [17] To better understand this, YuktiMukdawijitra [18] outlined in 2012 that the meaning of money in the eyes of rural mass is far different from the vote-buying discourse since the money acts only as a token of appreciation, not as a normal legal tender or paper or coin currency to purchase products. As a consequence, rural politics is still involved with money but in a different manner. Last but not least, at the same time, such money does not guarantee the winning of elections.

CONCLUSION

The myth of rural vote-buying has affected a number of people’s understandings, which have normally been intertwined with an idea of fleeing from the democratic path. However, the true story about the rural vote-buying in Thai, local politics has shed some new lights on the duality of Thai politics and the superficial discourse aiming at condemning poor, rural electors as they have been seen to be more concerned about their personal interests rather national or public. Most of the times, these people are naturally convicted as supporting the Thai patron-client system through a vote-buying scheme; in other words, they are being politically and economically dependent on powerful politicians. Anyhow, in sum, there are the two findings from this study: (a) vote-buying is not an ultimatum of election results because the political consciousness of the villagers or rural electors are not necessarily based on individual figure within the patron-client system. This means that these rural electors are not literally forced by any politicians to vote for them. On the contrary, the villagers are wise enough to simply exploit the situation and reap as many benefits as possible from any opened windows from each election.[19] Another way to explain this is that when cultural meanings of money and future help for the electors are analyzed, it is learnt that the rural voters do not only or mainly consider what have been offered.
The Myth of Vote-Buying Scheme in Rural Areas in Thailand

by their election canvassers, but they are far more interested in exercising their vote power and being recognized and respected by their election candidates. To this effect, it can be concluded that election canvassers are only there to provide reciprocal benefits between the villagers and the candidates; and (b) there is no correlation between a direct, money-based vote-buying and low-income areas.

REFERENCES


[8] A pseudonym was employed to protect respondent confidentiality in qualitative research.


[10] A pseudonym was employed to protect respondent confidentiality in qualitative research.


[16] Information from informal conversation with a villager, 29 June 2014.


