



# RURAL POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE



# Bangkok Power

- By the 1980s: Thailand → capitalist take-off
- Urban centers were being transformed by capitalist development
- Supraconcentration of wealth and enterprise in the principal cities
  - ▣ Bangkok → a prototypical primate city
  - ▣ Metropolitan complex → Excess population, traffic, and capital
- Nodes of urban life is critical for the region's general prospects for social and political stability

# Imbalance between capital and provinces

## □ Provinces?

- Social and environmental impacts, ‘emptied towns’
- But, were hardly imagined to have impact on metropolitan life
- Villagers were subordinated to mightier affairs by the presence of nearby centers (the government district – ‘*amphoe*’, and provincial offices – ‘*changwat*’).

# Imbalance between capital and provinces

- Stereotype of Bangkok-provinces
  - “A bureaucratic elite ruling over but detached from an undifferentiated, autonomous, and generally passive peasantry”.
  - The country folks were seen to live largely self-sufficient lives; no source of authority or goal for ambition
  - The market was far from central to their existence

# Imbalance between capital and provinces

- Explicit and implicit promotion of ‘*Standard Thai*’ from the centers
  - Tools: Education system, mass media, government projects
  - The ‘*ban-nok*’ discourse
    - Non-Bangkok = primitive, underdevelopment, inferiority, the uncivilized, uneducated
    - The country who had only mastered dialect was humiliated and looked down
  - The better-off villages had the prospect of attaching themselves to the skirts of state power by gaining enough schooling to become a teacher or more member of the local government staff

# Provincial politics

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- Model of Monolithic, centralized bureaucracy
  - A heritage of an ancient Oriental despotism ideology
  - “Bureaucratic empire”
    - Bangkok had related to its subjects through a series of local and regional chiefs, whose power – especially in the peripheral areas of the Kingdom – was based as much on local sources of support as on the capital’s endorsement

# Provincial politics

- Model of Monolithic, centralized bureaucracy
  - ▣ Local officers → balance two powers
    - Upward power: State's absolute authority → convince their superiors and patrons higher in the bureaucracy that he was a loyal supporters who should be considered for a posting closer to Bangkok → '*Gifts culture*'
    - Downward power: Extracting the surplus from the populace under their authority rather than subsisting on a centrally provided salary → '*Surplus-eating culture*'

# Provincial politics

- Competition for business and political leadership
  - The most evident source of local wealth was the ‘marketplace’
  - The market areas formed a ‘downtown’
  - ‘Merchant class’
    - Shopkeepers, rice millers, dealers in local products, local lenders
    - most of them are Sino-Thai (the great influxes of Chinese immigrants to the provinces in the 1920s-1930s)

# Provincial politics

- Competition for business and political leadership
  - ▣ Merchants vs. Government officers
    - To officers → merchants were always, to some degree, *illegitimate* since they implied power outside the state
    - To merchants → the bureaucrats were *hindrances and parasites* since they needed money, and businessmen required permits and concessions
    - Deal of mutual profits → ‘*Reciprocal corruption culture*’

# Provincial politics

- Rural communities developed leaders of its own (once the old hierarchy of supra-local rulers was ended)
- Rural leaders (Village heads, Sub-district Chief, LAO members)
  - A) Natural leaders
  - B) Those who come from families locally acknowledged as sources of power
    - Who offered protection/advice to those who gave them loyalties and labors

# Provincial politics

- To the popular viewpoint: the headman's duty was to defend local interests against state intrusion
- Rewards of the rural leaders (Village heads, Sub-district Chief, LAO members)?
  - Few financial rewards
  - Reputation/honours as a 'generous patron' > material goods
  - 'Cosmetic values'
- Wealth requirement: In some areas, prominent families retained popular regard for a long time → the appearance of their descendants as champions of local interests
- Influential power requirement: 'Gangsters culture'
  - Justice and protection were not to be found in the government and laws but in personal relationship
  - A man of influence had to make sure that he commanded his own means of physical enforcement

# Provincial politics

- Local officers vs. Rural leaders?
  - To bureaucrats → Local chiefs served to convey the government's will to the people
  - Officials seeking local cooperation would first of all offer opportunities for enrichment to such men of influences
  - The boundary was often blurred, sometimes, rural leaders were
    - the officials who had served in the area earlier or
    - the Sino-Thai merchants who wanted to build business-political links
      - → 'Chao Pho' (local mafia), those who combined roles in the markets with personal followings
      - Illegality → gambling/ liquor distribution/ prostitution/ exploitation of forest lands/ drugs
      - Power games → to sustain their monopolistic powers → Criminal activities

# Provincial politics

- Growing importance of provincial support for national power-holders
  - Dictatorship: too many business interests perusing too few sources of patronage
  - The 1973's revolution → Opened up democracy a way in which local power could be exercised openly and independently of officialdom
  - Money-Politics Dilemma:
    - All parties in Thailand are now basically 'business parties'
    - Business leaders consider politics a natural extension of their accumulative efforts
  - Offering of money to voters? -> 'vote brokers'
    - 'Vote-buying culture'

# Provincial politics

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- What shapes and transform rural political networks?
  - “New money”
    - Expansion of banking system
    - Transportation
    - Local funding → Tambon development programs

# Provincial politics



- Popular consciousness?
  - ▣ Policy demands