Political Development Council: The Making of Public Policy in Thailand

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Abstract

After the bloodless revolution in June 24, 1932 that turned the absolute monarchy into a constitutional monarchy Thai political system has been unstable since. The popular participation is limited and the political development has been slow. While General (ret.) Surayud Chulanont was in his office as the 24th prime minister of Thailand (1 October 2006-29 January 2008), he appointed the Drafting Political Development Council Subcommittee under Prime Minister's Office to create the Political Development Council (PDC) model with the appropriate structure, status, role and authority. The PDC missions are to better politics in constitutional monarchy system, promote political ethics and empower people.

The case writer was a researcher who analyzed and synthesized information from relevance documents, 32 hearing forums with almost 3,500 people around the country participated, seminars, workshops and interviews in order to propose the PDC model to the subcommittee. Later on, the model was passed through the political process for the National Legislative Assembly of Thailand to consider whether to pass the Political Development Council Act.

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This case study focuses on what the National Legislative Assembly of Thailand should decide on the PDC structure, secretariat, sources of income, role and activities. What are the perspectives that the National Legislative Assembly of Thailand should take into consideration in designing the PDC.

Keywords: Public Administration, Public Policy, Politics, Political Development, Institutions

สภาพัฒนาการเมือง: การกำหนดนโยบายสาธารณะในประเทศไทย

ณัฐฐา วินิจนัยภาค

บทคัดย่อ

หลังจากการปฏิวัติที่ไม่สูญเสียเลือดเนื้อ เมื่อวันที่ 24 มิถุนายน 2475 ที่เปลี่ยนระบอบการปกครองจากระบอบสมบูรณาญาสิทธิราชย์ไปสู่ประชาธิปไตยอันมีพระมหากษัตริย์ทรงเป็นประมุข ระบบการเมืองไทยก็ไม่มีเสถียรภาพตลอดมา การมีส่วนร่วมของประชาชนมีจำกัดและการพัฒนาทางการเมืองเป็นไปอย่างเชื่องช้า ขณะที่พลเอกสุรยุทธ์ จุลานนท์ ดำรงตำแหน่งนายกรัฐมนตรีคนที่ 24 ของประเทศไทย (1 ตุลาคม 2549 - 29 มกราคม 2551) ได้แต่งตั้งคณะอนุกรรมการยกร่างสภาพัฒนาการเมือง ในสำนักนายกรัฐมนตรี เพื่อสร้างตัวแบบสภาพัฒนาการเมือง (สพม.) ที่มีโครงสร้าง สถานะ บทบาทและอำนาจหน้าที่ที่เหมาะสม พันธกิจของสภาพัฒนาการเมือง คือ พัฒนาการเมืองในระบอบประชาธิปไตยอันมีพระมหากษัตริย์ทรงเป็นประมุข ส่งเสริมจริยธรรมทางการเมือง และเพิ่มพลังอำนาจให้ประชาชน

ผู้เขียนกรณีศึกษาเป็นนักวิจัยที่ทำการวิเคราะห์และสังเคราะห์ข้อมูลจากเอกสารที่เกี่ยวข้อง เวทีรับฟังความคิดเห็นจาก 32 เวที ที่มีผู้เข้าร่วมเกือบ 3,500 คนทั่วประเทศ การสัมมนา การประชุมปฏิบัติการ และการสัมภาษณ์ เพื่อที่จะทำการเสนอตัวแบบสภาพัฒนาการเมืองต่อคณะอนุกรรมการยกร่างสภาพัฒนาการเมือง ซึ่งในที่สุดจะถูกส่งเข้าสู่กระบวนการทางการเมืองไปยังสภานิติบัญญัติแห่งชาติเพื่อพิจารณา และหากได้รับความเห็นชอบจะออกมาเป็นกฎหมาย

กรณีศึกษาเน้นประเด็นว่าสภานิติบัญญัติแห่งชาติควรจะตัดสินใจอย่างไรในเรื่อง โครงสร้าง สำนักเลขาธิการ แหล่งที่มาของรายได้ บทบาทและกิจกรรมของสภาพัฒนาการเมือง มุมมองในแง่มุมใดบ้างที่สภานิติบัญญัติแห่งชาติควรจะนำมาพิจารณาในการออกแบบสภาพัฒนาการเมือง

คำสำคัญ: รัฐประศาสนศาสตร์ นโยบายสาธารณะ การเมือง การพัฒนาการเมือง สถาบัน

In January 2007, the twenty-one members of the newly formed Drafting Political Development Council Subcommittee in the Prime Minister's Office were immersed in intense deliberations concerning what specific Political Development Council model to propose to the Prime Minister for presentation to the National Legislative Assembly for consideration and adoption. The Subcommittee had been established by General (ret.) Surayud Chulanont, Thailand's 24th prime minister, with the aim of advancing the government's role in supporting political development. Believing that a central task of government entails the building of institutions that could meet the expressed needs of constituents and that promote participation, the Chulanont government was keen to bring these abstractions to reality by way of a new institutional model that could serve as a bridge between the citizenry and the State.[1]

As conceptualized by Prime Minister Chulanont, the mission of the Political Development Council (PDC) was a tripartite one – i.e., improve politics in the constitutional monarchy system, promote political ethics, and empower people. It was the task of the Drafting Subcommittee to develop the model -- including determining its structure, status, role and authority – that would maximize the PDC's prospects for fulfilling its designated institutional mission. This deceptively straightforward task had to take into account the dynamics and evolution of Thai political history and culture – realities that made the Drafting Subcommittee's mission anything but simple.

Thai Political History and Culture – A Not-So-Democratic Tradition

It had long been accepted among students of public policy that political history and culture played a major role in the degree to which political participation manifested itself within a society. Further, it was conventional knowledge that political participation was an important adjunct to good governance and national development. Participation promoted representation, strengthened democratic processes, and built the civic virtues required for good governance. Thus, with regard to the task before the Drafting Subcommittee, any aspects of Thai society's political history and culture that tended to dampen participation would necessarily tend to thwart the prospects for success of the new institutional model that the Subcommittee was charged with developing.

In this connection, the political history and culture of Thailand presented evidence of several problematic attributes that the Drafting Subcommittee needed to take into account in designing the PDC. First and perhaps foremost was the country's long history of political instability, a factor that many believed would eviscerate the mission of all but the most thoughtfully, carefully, and skillfully designed Political Development Council. Second, and as an outgrowth of political instability, was the reality and nature of what some experts described as the "bureaucratic polity" that had long characterized the Thai political system. Third was a confluence of deeply held cultural norms and values that served to hold "in check" the citizenry's expectations of and desire for ongoing engagement with a political system whose decisions greatly impacted their lives. In the sections below, each of these complicating factors or potential impediments to the Drafting Subcommittee's task is discussed in turn.

Instability: The Decades-Old Bane of Thai Politics

Thailand was a constitutional monarchy with a democratic form of government. For the greater part of its history, Thailand had a bicameral National Assembly comprised of a House of Representatives elected by popular vote and a Senate elected by popular vote and/or appointed by His Majesty the King upon recommendation of the Prime Minister. The cabinet was headed by a prime minister. The judicial powers were exercised through the court of justice.

The beginnings of Thailand's long and uncertain march to democracy began with the June 24, 1932 bloodless revolution that turned the absolute monarchy into a constitutional one. However, any euphoria that may have surrounded that watershed event in Thai history was to be decidedly short-lived, as the shift to the constitutional monarchy form of government ushered in not so much a thriving democracy, but seemingly unending political instability. The nearly three decades from 1932 to 1958 were characterized by military governments -- governments in which political freedom, freedom of speech and basic human rights were strongly compromised. Civilian governments came to power from time to time during this period but their duration was very short. The shortest was that of Tawee Boonyaket (August 31, 1945 - September 17, 1945), which lasted just eighteen days. Although few governments during this era lasted more than one year, the regimes of General Phraya Phahon Phonphayuhasena and Field Marshall Luang Plaek

Pibulsonggram were two notable exceptions: General Phonphayuhasena remained in office for five years (1933 to 1938), while Field Marshal Pibulsonggram stayed in power for almost six years (1938 to 1944), followed shortly by another nine-year span (1948 to 1957). Indeed, at a total of nearly fifteen years,[2] Field Marshall Pibulsonggram became the longest serving Prime Minister in Thai political history.

In 1958, after about four months of civilian government, two back-to-back military dictatorships (those of Field Marshal Sarit Dhanarajata and, then, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachon assumed political power) and endured for a combined total of fifteen years, without any brief moments of democratic respites in between. The military arrogated to itself the role of final arbiter of which expressions of democratic governance were acceptable, and which ones were not. In total, thirteen military regimes came, and went, during this stage of the country's political history, each time with government bureaucrats playing a decisive role. The primarily means of changing the government was mostly bloodless coups – with the result that in the seventy five years since the establishment of the constitutional monarchy, there had been ten successful seizures of power (excluding that of 1932), nine abortive coup d'etats, and eighteen constitutions.

Such instability and extra-legal seizures of state power essentially all but removed opportunities for citizen participation. Further, as will be discussed later, these realities tended to reinforce deep-seated cultural norms and values that, in themselves, placed limits on the levels of participation that citizens expected and desired.

"Bureaucratic Policy": The Outcome of Instability

From the outset of the establishment of the constitutional monarchy, bureaucratic agents, not citizens, became the most important (non-military) actors in Thai politics. This was because, some have argued, democratic political concepts were novel abstractions, with no prior institutionalized existence. From the outset of the shift to constitutional democracy, the average Thai understood little of the abstract concepts of equality, popular sovereignty, and the like – not the least because such concepts had little basis in their previous national experience.[3] Hence, into the void stepped the bureaucratic agents, often serving as the intermediaries between the centers of political power (e.g., the military dictatorships) and the citizenry, and not infrequently wielding political power of their own by virtue of their ability to dispense (or not dispense)

public resources. Some have dubbed this era – one that held sway until the early 1980s -- as the era of the "bureaucratic polity." [4]

During the Vietnam War period, intellectuals and students arose in opposition to the Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachon government. The 1973 student-led democracy movement, commonly referred to as the 14 October 1973 Uprising, succeeded in liberating the country from military government, with Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn's resignation. However, three years later the military ended the nascent reforms in a massacre on October 6, 1976, in which hundreds of students were tortured and killed and the constitution was suspended. After that, thousands of people, mostly students and intellectuals, fled joined the Communist Party's insurgent forces or left the country. Political instability continued for decades.

However, the brief experience in democracy in 1970s resulted in the growing of civilian democratic political institutions and the weakening of the "bureaucratic polity". In 1988, the first democratically elected prime minister in more than a decade assumed office. Although another bloodless coup removed this elected government three years later, it was by then much more difficult for the coup leaders to stay in power. The coup leaders' attempt to resume power resulted in the Black May 1992 (phruetsapha thamin), the public uprising against a military-dominated government.

The winning coalition from the general election in March 1992 appointed coup leader General Suchinda Kraprayoon as Prime Minister, prompting hundreds of thousands of people to join the protest demonstrations in Bangkok. When military units tried to suppress the demonstrations (leading to a massacre and riots), His Majesty the King summoned the two main protagonists, Prime Minister General Suchinda Kraprayoon and the demonstration leader Major General Chamlong Srimuang. The outcome of the meeting, which was broadcast via Thai television channels, was the resignation of Prime Minister Suchinda. There were no coups in the intervening fourteen years -- until the latest one in 2006.

Values and Norms: Impediments on the Cultural Front

While Thai history was replete with poignant examples of activists periodically pushing for democracy, administrative decentralization, social justice and civic rights, such individuals and groups had remained marginal to the system of governance and largely unrepresented in the centers of political power. Equality before the law, though an *espoused* concept, remained a weakly developed, as did the concept of human rights, which was only vaguely understood.[5] Public opinion still carried

little political weight. Citizen participation in political affairs suffered as a consequence.

Yet, while the responsibility for the failure of these concepts to take firm root could be – and frequently had been -- laid at the doorstep of the bureaucratic polity and their allies elsewhere in the society, at least some part of the failure of participation to take root could be traced to several long-held societal norms, values and expectations. In particular, as noted by scholarly observers of Thai culture, the cardinal values of respect for seniority, gratefulness for benefits, and recognition of obligation -- these values, when operationalized in the context of a democratic polity, tended to contrast starkly with democratic participation doctrines holding, for example, that all men are created equal, have rights vested in their being human, and should be judged according to the same standards. Thus, on the basis of their own experience as framed and informed by deeply held traditional culture, many Thais found notions such moral equality and citizens' responsibility for the public interest extraordinarily difficult abstractions to grasp.

Several additional cultural artifacts tended to militate against the expectation of and desire for active political participation. First was the emphasis on the *practical* and on *immediate* benefits. These values made possible vote buying by political parties because many people were more concerned with immediate benefits instead of long-term benefits that would be realized from having a good political system. Further, since Thais were not much given to explorations of the abstract, the concepts of democracy and dictatorship were notions largely beyond the concerns of ordinary citizens. The lack emphasis on abstract principles,[6] accompanied by a fixation on the practical and on immediate benefits, easily provided fertile ground for dictatorial regimes.

Second was the widespread acceptance of the superior-subordinate pattern of relationships (a corollary of Thais' respect for seniority) – a cultural norm that translated into a relative tolerance, indeed *preference,* for strong leaders, including dictatorial regimes. Indeed, strong leadership was easily confused with dictatorship. With the concepts of democracy and dictatorship being abstractions beyond the concerns and direct life experiences of ordinary Thai citizens, it was a relatively small step, for example, for many to view protestors *not* as citizens exercising their democratic right to express their views, but rather as an immoral force threatening the order and hierarchy of society.[7]

Finally, there was common belief that politics was "dirty" and that getting involved in it would only contaminate the participant. This belief was aided by the lack of awareness among ordinary people of their *rights* to receive public service under the concept of modern administration. Not being aware of these rights, ordinary people were not moved to assert themselves to protect their rights.[8]

For all these reasons, popular participation was limited, and political development had been slow. It was for this very reason that the Chulanont government proposed the creation of the Political Development Council. The Council was to be an instrument for overcoming the weakness of Thais' democratic values and, among other objectives, spearhead the strengthening of democratic participation throughout the society.

However, for the Drafting Subcommittee to devise a model that could deliver on this expectation, the Subcommittee would also need to understand the mindsets or "world views" of a number of players in the Thai political arena. That is, an effective model for the PDC could not be devised in the abstract. It had to take into account the players on the field – their beliefs, orientations, biases, and perceived interests.

Understanding the "Actors" on the Thai Political Stage

To understand the nature and degree of Thai participation in politics, it was necessary to understand the basic posture or orientation of several influential "actors" on the Thai political scene. These were the *general public,* the *government,* the *military,* the *business community,* and various *non-governmental organizations*. While the exact nature of their involvement in the shaping of the proposed PDC could not be known at the outset of the Drafting Subcommittee's deliberations on the PDC model, it was all but certain some of these actors had the potential, and possibly the motivation, to play a decisive role.

The General Public

Notwithstanding the aforementioned long tradition of indifference, even aversion, to political participation on the part of the typical Thai citizen, there were signs in 2007 that the old political culture was gradually changing in both the urban and rural settings. In the urban areas, the rapid growth of the educated middle class was accompanied by increasing interest in political participation, as this expanding socioeconomic segment sought to assure and protect their socioeconomic status in society. In this connection, the 1997 Constitution of the

Kingdom of Thailand (abrogated 19 September 2006 and replaced by the 2006 Interim Constitution)[9] was deemed a major assist, in that it conferred greater power on the Thai people than had ever been granted before.[10] In its promotion of democratic development and increased political stability by emphasizing human rights, empowering and protecting citizens politically, it hinted at a gradual maturing of Thai civil society.

Similarly, a growing number of villagers in the rural areas were slowly awakening to the potential benefits that could accrue from greater involvement in the political activities, particularly with respect to those public policies and actions that directly impacted their lives and livelihood. Especially among those who had taken part in community improvement projects, and had tasted the fruits of their participation, a growing sense of pride and self-confidence could be observed – outcomes that augured well for their increased participation in development activities in the future.[11]

Yet, against these signs of greater interest in democracy and political participation, there continued a strong undercurrent of indifference, abdication, and even aversion to the notion of political engagement. A common belief, particularly among citizens of lower socioeconomic status, was that politics was the province of the politicians and the ruling or elite classes.[12] In this mode of thinking, political participation was not something in which the average person should engage.[13] Thus, the fact that the Constitution allowed political activities (within certain limits) did not mean that those engaging in such activities enjoyed public acceptance and respect. Indeed, it was often the case that those who chose to engage in political activities were viewed with suspicion by members of the public at large. Political demonstrations – e.g., street protests – invariably provoked expressions of disapproval from one segment of the citizenry or another. While complainants frequently cited traffic congestion and reduced business activity as the reasons for their disapproval, some observers held that the *real* reason was the deep-seated public aversion to activities that evidenced sociopolitical disharmony and conflict *or* that might engender such disharmony. This lack of tolerance for political demonstrations manifested itself in the public's tendency to support the actions of strong leaders in suppressing or corralling political demonstrations.[14]

It was the view of some knowledgeable observers that the opinions and views expressed by ordinary citizens rarely had much effect – regardless of whether the views were expressed political demonstrations, signatures

on petitions to the Crown, or public statements concerning a particular political issue or situation.[15] Public opinion, some observers had noted, did not carry much political weight in Thai political society. The reason, according to one commentator, could be attributed to the fact that Thailand remained a society stratified by socioeconomic status.[16] With status being a derivative of power, lower-status groups of citizens (i.e., many ordinary Thais) were without much power to advance their views and make them impactful in the corridors of political power. It could thus be said that while the Constitution granted citizens the *right* to engage in political activities, it did not – and could not – ensure that citizens' views thus expressed via political participation would actually influence and shape the decisions and actions of those who wielded the instruments of political power.

The basic posture and orientation of the Thai public as a whole included acceptance of authoritarianism and a superior-subordinate (hierarchical) pattern of relationships, an emphasis on person instead of principle, a high value on stability and compromise, and a strong bent toward independence, conservatism, and apathy (mixed with an element of limited self confidence). However, some differences among sub-segments in the society could be identified. Members of the Thai teaching profession, for example, were a mixture of those who gravitated toward democratic and autocratic political cultures. Members of the middle class, however, tended to be imbued with an orientation toward democratic values, arguably as an outgrowth of their exposure to higher levels of higher education. Similarly, students tended to exhibited high political participation, as did youth as they absorbed increased levels of education. Indeed, it could be said that education had influence on ideology and political participation. The higher education led to more political participation.[17]

By contrast, government and elected officials had been immersed in autocratic political culture. Thus, their orientation tended toward authoritarianism. However, it had been noted that both increased educational levels and the influences of globalization had been pushing members of this segment toward increased acceptance of democratic principles. Traditionally, social elites also exhibited authoritarian orientations, perhaps largely grounded in a strong desire to preserve traditional Thai respect for seniority and hierarchical relationships embedded in a chain of command or line of authority.

Clearly, then, the PDC – whatever its ultimate structural configuration – would have its work cut out for it. It would not only

have to, among other things, encourage and nurture greater political participation among a public not altogether inured to the idea of engaging in activities deemed to be the prerogative of the political elite, but in addition overcome the perception of a large segment of the citizenry that participation was, in the final analysis, ineffectual in terms of having their voices and views "heard" in the corridors of political power.

The Government

Traditionally, the primary orientation of the Thai political system had been on the maintenance of stability and the preservation of traditional values. The government had not been expected to promote citizenry involvement in political activities. Neither had it been expected the citizenry to play a strong role in society. [18]

Indeed, even as Thailand began adopting select Western political and legal institutions and practices after 1932, the primary orientation of the government remained geared toward stability and preservation of traditional values. Notwithstanding the fact that policies of decentralization and popular participation were introduced in the Fifth National Development Plan (1981-1986), there was little evidence that such policies had been successfully implemented in rural Thailand, due in part to the resistance of political elites and state bureaucracies.[19] By and large, the government continued to regard its mission as a paternal one of leading the people – with little or no need of, or desire for, the citizen assistance, participation, or involvement.

Thus, up until the 1997 Constitution, there had been little or no government effort to initiate any form of participation – and certainly not any forms of self-initiated or authentic participation in which citizens assumed greater responsibility for assessing their own needs and in finding their own solutions through the mobilization of local resources. The government's view was that the citizenry could not and should not be given the space in which to assume responsibility for the maintenance of local problem-solving institutions, or for initiating local development programs, or for taking control over resources and institutions that had heretofore been under the government's control. As one observer commented, "Many governmental programs are initiated from above and as such may only be seen as being able to encourage *pseudo* participation." [20]

The highly restrictive attitude with the government continued to view political participation was summed up in this way:

> *Political activity outside the Parliamentary arena has generally been regarded as something that should take place within carefully prescribed and centrally controlled organizations such as village and tambon councils. Indeed, for the most of the post-1932 period popular participation in the political process has been regarded with grave suspicious by successive administrations. Trade unions, wider political activity and the media have been heavily controlled; indeed, the activities of organized labour have been illegal for most of the modern period, and only in the brief, relatively more 'liberal' interludes (1932-4, 1944-7, 1955-7 and 1972-6), has there been substantial activity (Brown and Frenkel, 1993). (Dixon, 1999: 259) (Note: Tambon is larger than village but smaller than district.)*[21]

The then military governments' violent responses to civilian uprisings in the 1976 and 1992 massacres clearly illustrated a strong aversion to citizens' right of peaceful protest. This aversion extended to some civilian governments, also -- as is evident in the following account of a protest against a Thai-Malaysian gas pipe project in Chana District of Songkhla Province in the South during the government of former prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra.

Background on the Project

According to the 1996 agreement initially made between Thailand and Malaysia, the pipelining of the gas would be done directly to each destination country without any trans-border pipeline transport. This project was controversial from the beginning since government made this decision without participation from the people living in the project area and the general public. Although an indisputable violation of the 1992 Environment Act, the government approved the project before the environmental impact assessment could be completed report and approved by the Office of Environmental Policy and Planning (OEPP). The Senate, the National Human Rights Commission, and two government-commissioned study reports by Chulalongkorn and Burapa University researchers – all suggested that the government review it.[22]

Impacted Citizens Seek to Exercise Their Right of Protest

The people organized to submit a petition to the Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra during the Thai Cabinet meeting at J.B. Hotel in Hat Yai District of Songkla Province on 21 December 2002. The meeting point was be held at a small park near the J.B. Hotel parking lot. Arriving in Hat Yai at around 8.00 p.m. on 20 December 2002, the people could not reach that small park because the police had closed the area for security reasons. Thus, the people stopped 350 meters away from the hotel and sought to negotiate with the police.[23]

Reaction of the Police Force

However, the police violently dispersed them at around 9.00 p.m. resulting in injuries of several and the arrest of twelve NGO members. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) investigated and found that the force used by the police to disperse the crowd was disproportionate and unjust. Moreover, the twelve detainees (later charged with several criminal offences) were not allowed to meet with, consult or have their lawyers attend interrogations. Nor did the police officers inform the detainees relatives of the place of detention or allow them to visit.[24]

The Position of the Civilian Government

The NHRC proceeded to open a hearing into the matter. On 27 August 2003, the ruling Thai Rak Thai Party accused the NHRC of violating its constitutional mandate asserting that the NHRC had no mandate to intervene in the matter. On 10 September 2003, the issue was put to vote in the House of Representatives in the form of a motion to ask the Constitutional Court to make a ruling on the legitimacy of the NHRC report. The ruling Thai Rak Thai party with absolute majority in the House won the vote. Opposition and NGOs condemned it as a move to evade the checks and balances that independent agencies provide.[25]

The Judgment of the Administrative Court

Finally, when the Administrative Court viewed the video tape record (VCD) accompanying the NHRC report, it concluded that the police had acted to disperse the demonstration at the point that some protesters had begun Islamic acts of worship and while other protesters were simply scattered about. Thus, the Court adjudged that the violent dispersion of the peaceful and unarmed assembly by police force violated the Constitution and ordered the Royal Thai Police to indemnify each sufferer in the amount of 10,000 Baht per person.[26]

The Military

The overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932 -- actually a military coup planned together with government officials -- had a lasting impact on the Thai military mindset. From the beginning of democracy in Thailand, the military maintained a cooperative relationship with the bureaucracy. It enjoyed a decisive role in politics. It directly entered politics as democratic force in support of democracy. With this mindset, the military has not hesitated to intervene in the political arena. At times, its intervention has taken the form of a refusal to obey an order of the government in power, such as in 1973 when the army commander refused to support the Thanom military dictatorship in suppressing demonstrators. Prior to the events of October 1973, the military governed for extensive periods of time whenever it seized control of the government; but, since 1973 the military has not governed without an elected parliament for much more than a year at a time.[27]

The point of view of Thai military leaders was also central to an understanding of Thai politics and the recent governmental objective of greater political participation. Perhaps the most salient aspect of the military's point of view was its rather narrow construction of the definition of politics, or more accurately, *legitimate* political activity. Specifically, the military tended to view politics as a limited activity which centered on the parliament.[28] Outside pressure group politics were not deemed legitimate political actions. Hence, political participation in the form of mass instigation or peaceful demonstrations was viewed as "irresponsible forces" that could be neither accepted nor tolerated.[29] Some students of Thai politics have attributed this attitude to the attacks that the military sustained from such pressure groups and demonstrators during the period of "open politics"

(1973-1976). Some scholars have likened the ideals of open politics to certain ideals of libertarianism and green politics, in that it was consistent with, and encouraged, participatory and deliberative democracy, decentralization of authority, equality of opportunity; and diversity of thought.[30]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the military's more restricted view of "legitimate" political activity in the context of an aspiring democratic society was a source of friction and sometimes conflict. That is, by virtue of their view of democracy as primarily, even solely, as a means to promote national stability and security, the military – as the chief institution charged with ensuring stability and security -- necessarily assumed a dominant role in the political area. Consequently, voluntary associations and pressure groups, under constant surveillance, found it very difficult to move independently in the political process, as conveyed in the following quote:

> *As the [Thai] military gradually recovered from the defeats of mid-1992, military ideologists opposed the growth of NGOs and attempted to brand certain NGOs, if not the movement as a whole, as a resurgence of 'communism.' They pointed out that many ex-activists and 'jungle graduates' had joined the NGOs. They drew attention to the NGO's overseas funding. They suggested that NGOs served as a conduit for foreign elements to influence Thai politics with cash and ideas.*[31]

During open politics period, there was the emergence of left-wing political parties, labor unions, and radical student group that caused military distress since the military saw such emergence as evidence of the growth of communism. The military fears were exacerbated when students began to organize workers and peasants outside the political system. As the military thought communists should be suppressed, there was a massacre of "communist" students by military-supported paramilitary forces and border police armed with heavy weapons at Thammasat University in 1976.[32]

Beginning with a 1980 Prime Ministerial Order (Number 66/2523) to the effect that the best way to fight communism was through democracy, the military bought into the belief that suppression of armed insurgents had to be accompanied by political development. The Communist Party of Thailand was eventually defeated. However, in so doing, democracy became viewed by the military as a mere policy with which to win a war.

Thus, its importance in the mind of military was subordinated to counterinsurgency. Two coup attempts in the 1980s served as eloquent testimony to the fact that military "conversion" to the notion of democracy as a desirable state of affairs *in its own right* had been incomplete.

The military mindset that extra-parliamentary expressions of dissent and protest were dangerous and not be tolerated manifested itself not only in the 1976 massacre but also continued throughout the 1980s and the 1990s.[33] For example, in the aftermath of elections following the February 1991 military coup, when peaceful street demonstrations arose to protest coup leader General Suchinda Kraprayoon's designation as prime minister, the military, finding the demonstrations embarrassing and provocative, responded with force. Heavily armed soldiers were called out to disperse the crowd in the early morning hours of May 18, 1992, and when protesters refused to disperse, the troops opened fire. The shooting continued for three days as demonstrators repeatedly gathered again when the firing paused. The violence that caused forty four civilian protesters death and another thirty eight missing stopped only after His Majesty the King intervened with a call for an end to it.[34]

Again, in Tak Bai incident on October 25, 2004 in Tak Bai District of Narathiwat Province in the Deep South, military action against demonstrators demanding the release of six local men (who had been arrested) ended up causing the deaths of at least 85 persons. The demonstrators had thrown rocks and attempted to storm the police station, which prompted the police to call in army reinforcements. Around 1,200 protesters[35] were arrested, had their shirts taken off, bound with their hands tied behind their backs, made to lie face down on the ground, and then kicked and beaten by soldiers. Soldiers stacked the men five or six deep in the trucks. By the time the trucks reached an army camp in the next province three hours later, seven had died as a result of gunshot wounds, and the rest were believed to have died either from suffocation or the earlier beatings. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra defended the army's actions, asserting that the men died because they were already weak from fasting during the month of Ramadan. It took Prime Minister's successor, Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont, to issue a formal apology for the incident on November 2, 2006.[36]

Nevertheless, in the fourteen-year period between 1992 (when the military regime of General Suchinda Kraprayoon was forced from office in a popular uprising) and 2006 (when despite repeated assurances to the contrary, the military rose up and ousted the government of former

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra), the military's direct role in politics had been limited and restrained. With General (ret.) Chulanont's installation as prime minister in 2007, the government was restored to civilian control. Whether and for how long civilian control would endure was unknown. But, few observers of Thai politics over the past three-quarters of a century were willing to completely negate the possibility of future military intervention.

The Business Community

The private sector was a relatively new actor in the political system. Historically, most Thai businesses had been on the small side, with their owners being mostly apolitical, limiting their activities to the economic system. Until the 1980s, business interests had acquired remarkably little direct political power.[37] Some observers traced this relative lack of political clout to the influence of the universities from which many Thai businesspeople gained their graduate degrees. Unlike their counterparts in many other societies around the globe, where universities were frequently hotbeds of political socialization, Thai universities had typically steered clear of such political ferment.[38] As one observer explained it, "It can be said [that] in spite of campus activism by some groups of students, most Thai academia and undergraduates remain apolitical and conservative."[39]

The apolitical nature of the business community, however, began to change in the period, 1980 through 1991, along with the considerable development of civic society in Thailand.[40] The development was propelled by the long period of uninterrupted constitution-al rule and economic growth. General (ret.) Prem Tinsulanonda's Administration emphasized democratisation and was also the beneficiary of the accelerating South-East Asia economic revolution. During his eight years (1980-1988) in office, the Indochina wars also ended, export and tourism became a major revenue earners for the economy, and Thais' standard of living improved significantly. The communist insurgency also ended.[41] In 1988, the former General Chatichai Choonhavan became the prime minister, pursuing successful policies of improved relations with Cambodia and Laos and accelerating international trade. [42]

Particularly in the aftermath of the forced resignation of the General Suchinda Kraprayoon in 1992, and the subsequent fading of military influence in political affairs, the involvement of the business community gained momentum. At first, there were just a few highly successful

businesspeople who became active and direct participants in the Thai political system. Prominent among this early group were business tycoons such as Suriya Jungrungreangkit, Vikorn Aisiri, and now-deposed former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Business community involvement gathered steam in the aftermath of the 1997 economic crisis, when business organizations such as the Thai Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Thai Industries, and the Thai Bankers' Association – among others – became active commentators and advisors on the economic situation.

The "Sondhi phenomenon" starting in Bangkok in 2005 provided an extreme example of businesspeople involvement in Thai politics. The television show, "Muangthai Rai Sapda" (Thailand Weekly) was withdrawn in September, 2005 by the MCOT, broadcaster of Channel 9. Thai media magnate, Mr. Sondhi Limthonkul, the owner of that television program and also of a local newspaper called "Phujatkarn," had attacked then Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Throughout late 2005 and early 2006, Mr. Limthonkul revived up his anti-Thaksin rhetoric and activities, arranging political seminars and demonstrations in various places, such as Thammasat University, Lumphini Park, and Sanam Luang. Soon he joined forces with other anti-Thaksin activists, becoming one of the leaders of the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD). The PAD's growing demonstrations and supporters were a pressure factor – among others – in the February 2006 dissolution of Parliament, the nullification of the April 2, 2006 election in Thailand, and then the September 19, 2006 coup that removed Prime Minister Thaksin from office.[43] Clearly, "the genie was out of the bottle" in terms of business community involvement in the Thai political arena.

Non-Governmental Organizations/Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit, non-governmental organizations – commonly referred to as "NGOs" in Thailand and elsewhere around the world – were the newest actors on the Thai political scene, although many had been in existence for more than three decades. There were many NGOs in Thailand and there were many ways to categorize them. From the standpoint of focal issues and populations targeted, there were at least thirteen categories of NGOs – i.e., education and children, hill tribes, the disabled, women, workers, HIV/AIDS, medical help, elderly, environment, anti-drug campaigns, community development, animals, and media.[44]

The NGOs were organizations committed to the development of society through human development and people participation. They could be either legally registered or non-registered. In case of non-registered NGOs, there had to be a committee to responsible for the appropriate operations. They were autonomous organizations with continuous activities aimed at not for profits.[45] As of 2007, there were more than three hundreds NGOs in Thailand, both registered and non-registered.

Notwithstanding their mission, NGOs were not uniformly accepted or appreciated by all of Thai society. Indeed, many Thais viewed them quite negatively. To them, NGOs were seen as forces of division and conflict in society, as agents of foreign funding sources aimed at sabotaging Thai national security, and as protestors-for-hire in political demonstrations. A very common view was that they were "addicted" to protest and opposition to government projects, thereby obstructing the country's development.[46]

The NGOs, on the other hand, attributed the public's negative views of them to certain attributes of Thai culture. Chief among these attributes were: The value place on acceptance of and cooperation with one's superiors, the aversion to conflict (especially when conflict was seen as emanating from lower-status groups of citizens), and the belief that social changes should come about only through the established formal channels, not other means.[47]

In the majority of cases, NGOs came into being not only to deliver various kinds of services, but also to advance their particular interests in the public policy arena.[48] For example, civic nonprofit organizations (e.g., the Thirty Anti-graft Organizations Network, Transparency Thailand, and Foundation for Consumers) were concerned with the structures of collective decision making and how to ensure more effective and responsive government. Policy advocacy nonprofits (e.g., the Parent-Youth Network, FTA Watch, and Alternative Energy Networks) were concerned with the enactment of particular policies that they championed. Policy-implementing NGOs (e.g., service-delivery nonprofits and policy implementation monitors) were involved with the carrying out of public policies.[49]

Some observers have advanced the view that the strengths and weaknesses of governmental and non-governmental organizations complement each other.[50] In this view, government was seen as having the capability to generate a more reliable stream of resources, set priorities based on a democratic political process (instead of the wishes of only the

wealthy), offset paternalism by making access a right instead of a privilege, and improve quality via the institution of quality-control standards. NGOs, on the other hand, were seen as having the capability to personalize services, operate on a smaller scale, adjust care to the needs of clients (rather than to the structure of a government agency), and permit a degree of competition among service providers. Thus, there existed the potential, at least, for the two types of entities to complement each other's service activities.

In line with recommendations made by scholarly commentators, the notion of popular participation had been adopted by Thai NGOs and even increasingly in government policy and planning documents. On the NGO side, the thinking was that the inclusion of elements of popular participation in the projects they sponsor would both help ensure that the projects did not unduly favor elite groups within the local society and promote local management of the programs.[51]

The degree to which well-organized and effectively run NGOs could play a decisive role in the political process was perhaps nowhere better shown than in a recent endeavor undertaken by Thai Holistic Health Foundation, an NGO engaged in anti-graft activities with Ms. Rosana Tositrakul as its secretariat. In 2003, this organization sued Mr. Rakkiat Sukthana, the then Public Health Minister, for taking a bribe. On Sept 30, 2003, the Supreme Court found Mr. Rakkiat guilty not only of taking a five-million-baht bribe from a drug firm but also amassing unusual wealth. The Court sentenced him 15 years in jail and ordered the seizure of 233.88 million Baht worth of his assets. He was the first minister in Thai history to be imprisoned because of corruption.[52]

With the tireless populist firebrand, Ms. Rosana Tositrakul at the helm, the Thirty Anti-graft Organizations Network resolved in eight months to contest the move under way by the Thaksin Shinawatra government to privatize the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT). Ms. Rosana Tositrakul and her fellow opponents of the privatization endeavor believed strongly that the intended transformation of EGAT from a state-owned enterprise into a private enterprise with the sole objective of earning profits was not in the best interest of Thai society due to the suspected conflicts of interest, insufficient public hearings, and the question of the legality of land expropriation concessions proposed for a privatized EGAT.

Despite this opposition, the Thaksin government forged ahead with its plans and ultimately succeeded in winning parliamentary approval,

followed by the promulgation of a royal decree authorizing the privatization. With this accomplished, the privatization proponents doubtlessly believed that they had performed a *fait accompli*. How wrong they were.

The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand was transformed to EGAT PLC in June 2005. Some NGOs -- including the Thirty Anti-graft Organizations Network and the Foundation for Consumers and some Union members led by Ms. Rosana Tositrakul -- filed a petition with the Supreme Administrative Court.[53] This movement was supported by many others including Kanin Boonsuwan, a drafter of the now defunct 1997 constitution, Lawyers Council of Thailand, Four Regional Slum Network, Democracy Organization, Parent-Youth Network, Labor Union, and Alternative Energy Networks.[54]

On 23 March 2006, the Court ruled against the privatization of EGAT PLC. The reasons were threefold. The first one was conflicts of interest. A board member of PTT (a Thai state-owned Stock Exchange of Thailand – listed oil and gas company formerly known as the Petroleum Authority of Thailand) and Shin Corporation (both business partners with EGAT) was on a committee involved in the legal preparation for EGAT's privatization. Moreover, the chair of the public hearing panel on the EGAT listing also was a Vice Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment. The second reason was public hearing irregularities since there had been only one public hearing for employees, of whom only 1,057 attended. The third reason concerned the continued right to expropriate public land. According to privatization plan, the EGAT PLC was to continue to have the right to expropriate public land to build power plants and transmission lines. The Court ruled, however, that such right was reserved for the state only.[55]

As suggested by the above-cited example, NGOs, with their commitment to popular participation, had the potential to marshal considerable public support for their policy or policy implementation agendas. To some extent, however, their full potential had yet to be realized due to the scarcity of *permanent groups* in Thai society. ("Permanent groups," referred to group members who had long-term, regular relationships with each other. Such long-term commitment, mostly absent in Thai culture, increased social capital.) Nevertheless, some observers believed that so long as no oppressive forces re-entered the political scene and quashed them, NGOs would likely play an increasingly visible role in the public arena in the resolution of various issues of importance to them and those who supported their agendas.

The Making of the PDC Model: The Mandated Process

Shortly after their appointment in January 2007, the twenty-one members of the Drafting Political Development Council Subcommittee convened the first meeting at the Manangkasila Mansion in Bangkok to begin deliberating on alternative models for the PDC.

The twenty-one-member Drafting Political Development Council Subcommittee was comprised of the following persons: Advisor - A former dean of Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Political Science and a senator in the National Legistative Assembly; Chairperson – A dean of Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Political Science; Affiliated Scholars – Drawn from various universities (e.g., National Institution of Development Administration, Thammasat University, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, and Walailak University); Two Independent Scholars; Two Soldiers; Government Officials – Including one person from the Office of the Election Commission of Thailand; Representatives – Drawn from non-governmental organizations and the business community. The secretary and secretary assistants were staff personnel from the Prime Minister Office.

The Drafting Subcommittee was one of six subcommittees comprising the Drafting Political Development Council and Political Development Plan Committee. The remaining subcommittees were the Drafting Political Development Plan Subcommittee, the Legal Subcommittee, the Public Relations Subcommittee, the Data-gathering Subcommittee, and the Coordination Subcommittee.

Information provided by another subcommittee that had been charged with data gathering constituted the focus of their discussions. From the Data-gathering Subcommittee, the Drafting Subcommittee was able to avail themselves of an abundance of documents chronicling the results of thirty-two forums involving nearly 3,500 citizens around the country. A researcher earlier hired by the Drafting Subcommittee to participate in the data collection process and perform data analyses was charged with devising the initial PDC model for consideration by the Drafting Subcommittee. The researcher gathered information from relevant documents, attended some hearing forums organized by the Data-gathering Subcommittee, joined with nine political party representatives in a seminar organized by the Coordination Subcommittee, interviewed twelve resource persons and attended the workshops with all six subcommittees comprising the Drafting Political Development Council and Political Development Plan Committee.

The mandated process for the development of recommendations for the PDC specified that once the Drafting Subcommittee approved a particular model, the model had to be approved by all remaining five subcommittees comprising the Drafting Political Development Council and Political Development Plan Committee, which was the committee responsible for making arrangements for establishing the PDC and drafting the political development plan. Once this had been accomplished, the approved PDC model was to be passed to the National Legislative Assembly for consideration and, if approved, for incorporation into Thai law.

A complicating factor in this mandated process was the National Constituent Assembly's concomitant work on a new Thai Constitution to replace the 1997 Constitution that had been abrogated by the military after its ouster of the Thaksin Shinawatra government in September of 2006. Not only did the PDC model-under-development have to avoid conflict with the new Constitution-under-consideration, but the new Constitution would have to emerge successfully from a national referendum before the National Legislative Assembly could pass it. These parallel sets of deliberations and approval processes necessarily added a layer of uncertainty to the task before the Drafting Subcommittee because they could not know in advance whether any particular model that they might devise and recommend would prove compatible with all the provisions of the Constitution-under-consideration.

Among other things, this uncertainty led to some discussion within the Drafting Subcommittee as to what course of action to follow. One possible tack that emerged from these discussions was the thought of taking steps to ensure that the establishment of the PDC was incorporated into the language of the new Constitution-in-the-making, so that its existence was guaranteed. However, these discussions proved inconclusive when the focus turned to considerations of the exact content of such incorporation language and the process by which the Drafting Subcommittee could achieve incorporation of the PDC into the new Constitution. Moreover, as the Drafting Subcommittee's deliberations progressed, it became clear that the essential features of the PDC model would need to be settled before the final draft of the new Constitution was placed before the voters in a national referendum.

As the members of the Drafting Subcommittee knew only too well, completing the development of the PDC model before the referendum on the new Constitution would be no easy task. Multitudinous perspectives and ideas from all stakeholders would have to be weighed, sifted, and balanced.

With so many areas of disagreement among stakeholders (e.g., regarding PDC structure, secretariat, sources of income, roles, and activities), achieving a consensus on the contours of the PDC model would be exceedingly difficult.

Developing the PDC Model in a Crowded Space: Voices of the Stakeholders

With the exception of the Military and the Business Community (representatives of which were included on the Drafting Subcommittee), preferences for PDC models were gathered from all majority stakeholder groups. These preferences are chronicled below.

Voices of the General Public

Despite the traditional reluctance, and sometimes aversion, of many Thais toward politics and political activity, a number of ordinary citizens participated in the forums that were held around the country by the subcommittee charged with collecting information on the public's views on the proposed new PDC. It was found that the majority of the citizens who participated in the hearing forums, seminars, workshops, and interviews were highly enthusiastic about the PDC concept and indeed hopeful that the proposed PDC would usher in a new era of citizen involvement in policy decisions that affected their lives and livelihood.

First and foremost, they voiced the desire that the PDC not only support public participation, but also be an effective *people's organization* endowed with real power to monitor and control the behaviors of politicians and public servants. In their view, the PDC should have the legal right to summon before the Council suspect politicians, public servants, and other relevant persons to respond to questions concerning their activities and conduct. Further, they articulated the desire that the PDC be empowered to take before the courts those so summoned who could not, or would not, provide satisfactory explanations concerning their actions and conduct. In essence, then, the consensus view among those members of the general public who participated in the data-gathering forums was that the PDC should be designed and empowered to perform the "check-and-balance" function that, in their view, had not been effectively performed by existing institutions. A properly designed and empowered PDC, they believed, would be an *autonomous* entity free of political pressure and influence.

Voices of the Non-Governmental Organizations

Generally, the views of the representatives of the NGOs who participated in the data-gathering process mirrored those of the general public, albeit with less unanimity on select issues than the general public had exhibited. For example, while some strongly concurred in the general public view that the PDC should be legally empowered to examine the exercise of State power at all levels, others were not as insistent that the PDC be invested with such unprecedented authority. Despite such divergences in views, the NGO representatives were of one mind with members of the general public in the belief that the government's PDC initiative represented a golden opportunity for a fundamental change in the course of Thai politics. Indeed, the new Constitution under development, as well as the current receptivity of the National Legislative Assembly to the idea of political development, augured well, they believed, for a fuller blossoming of democracy – with the new PDC playing a vital role.

Voices of Select Segments of the Government

During the data-gathering phase of the PDC model development process, the voices of two segments of the government were especially noteworthy. First were the personnel from the Secretariat of the Prime Minister, most of whom were working as secretaries for the Drafting Political Development Council and Political Development Plan Committee and various subcommittees that had been appointed to bring the Prime Minister's vision of the PDC to reality. It was widely expected that some of this group would eventually be seconded or transferred to the PDC secretariat once the new entity received the necessary approvals and began operation. As a group, they were committed to doing all those coordinative and facilitative activities necessary to accomplish the mission of ensuring the timely development of the PDC model and Political Development Plan. Although the group was not given to expressions of strong opinions concerning any ideas regarding the proposed PDC, it had come to be known that they were not particularly enthusiastic about the pro-spect of the PDC's becoming a part of the National Economic and Social Advisory Council (NESAC) or the King Prajadhipok's Institute (KPI). This was because the PDC idea was initiated in the Prime Minister Office. If it were to become part of some other institution, the personnel of that other institution would probably become the core staff of the new PDC.

The other salient segments of government during the data-gathering process were the public servants in the Interior Ministry -- none of whom were supportive of the idea of a PDC. In their opinion, the PDC would be redundant and therefore a waste of public funds. They pointed out that institutions and organizations already existed that could easily perform the function intended for the PDC. One such extant institution, they argued, was the Department of Local Administration (Ministry of the Interior), with participation structures built into its Local Councils. Another was the Community Organizations Development Institute (Ministry of Social Development and Human Security), with participation opportunities available through its Community Organization Council and several similar structures. It simply made no sense, in the view of Interior Ministry public servants, for the government to establish a new participation structure when existing structures within various venues of the government could easily and effectively assume the role planned for the PDC.

Voices of the Politicians

Like the Interior Ministry officials, none of the politicians who were interviewed or who joined workshops during the data-gathering phases of the PDC development process were enthusiastic about the PDC. Their opposition centered on a couple of objections. First, they averred, the various political parties already supported, and provided for, political development, political education, and political participation on an ongoing basis and as a matter of course. Thus, the PDC would be redundant. Second, they deemed it inappropriate for the PDC to be assigned a check-and-balance function because the existing check-and-balance system was, in their view, already working quite well. Thus, they opined, the PDC would be a "solution" to a non-existent "problem."

However, keen to not be left outside in the event that the PDC idea could not be derailed, the politicians then asserted that *if there must* be a PDC, its activities should encompasses political education *only*, and then only with representation of the political parties on the PDC board or council. As for political development activities, it was the politicians' view that the PDC should altogether stay away from it. *But*, if the PDC were determined to engage in political development, such undertakings should be undertaken only with the politicians' active participation.

Voices of the Professoriate

The professorial community was not of one mind regarding the establishment of the PDC. Those who supported the idea of the PDC did so in the belief that it was necessary to create one autonomous organization with specific responsibility for the political participation and development mission. Otherwise, they believed, the mission would never receive the full attention required to enable its accomplishment. The existing entities with varying degrees of responsibility for facilitating greater political participation did not, in the opinion of this group of academicians, take the mission seriously – if indeed if they cared at all.

By contrast, those who opposed the creation of the PDC put forth a couple of reasons. First, echoing the views of the Interior Ministry's public servants and the political parties' representatives, they argued that the PDC was simply not necessary. Existing structures within several ministries and/or political parties could easily be configured (or reconfigured) to accomplish the mission intended for the PDC. Second, they contended, political development was not a task that any organization can cultivate. It must emerge freely and naturally from the people themselves. The government's championing of the concept of the PDC would simply result in two inevitable outcomes: The politicians would conspire to find ways to defeat the creation of the PDC, or – failing that – simply maneuver to subvert or undermine real political development. Should the latter outcome come to pass, the academic opponents predicted that the PDC would end up becoming an *obstacle* to real political development, in that the citizenry would have great difficulty fighting with a PDC that was being manipulated behind-the-scene by powerful politicians. Thus, the academic opponents concluded, establishment of the PDC would be a waste of time and effort.

Sorting through Diverse Perspectives and Ideas

Sorting through this thicket of diverse and conflicting perspectives on the proposed PDC was, in the first instance, the task of the Drafting Political Development Council Subcommittee. Its recommendations concerning the PDC's structure, secretariat, sources of income, role and activities would ultimately be placed before the National Legislative Assembly for final approval and passage into law. As the Drafting Subcommittee's deliberations progressed, it became apparent that there were several options from which to select in configuring each component of the PDC's design.

Organization Structure

The two basic design options were a *mechanistic* organization with a vertical structure or an *organic* organization with a horizontal or flat structure. Ample evidence existed in the literature on organizations and their functioning that the choice of the PDC's "macro" structure could have a potentially determinative impact on its ability to accomplish its mission with the desired levels of efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and transparency. While it was widely understood and accepted that there existed no "ideal" structural configuration that would be applicable in all situations, the Drafting Subcommittee was also aware that some structural choices were likely to be more appropriate than others, depending upon the a number of contingency factors in the overall situation. Thus, in making a decision on structure, the Drafting Subcommittee would have to examine the two basic structural options from the perspectives of, among other factors, the PDC's task environment, coordination and control mechanisms, chain of command, information and communication flow patterns, and decision-making processes.

The Secretariat

Here the basic choice was that of either a brand new secretariat or the super-imposition of a secretariat from an already established organization. The choice of a completely new secretariat would entail either the hiring of new staff or the transfer of existing staff from offices such as that of the Secretariat of the Prime Minister. The possibility of assigning an existing institution's secretariat to also serve as the secretariat for the PDC immediately focused attention on two longstanding organizations as the "logical" choices. These were the National Economic and Social Advisory Council (NESAC) and King Prajadhipok's Institute (KPI or Institute).

Established under the 1997 Constitution as a constitutional body, the NESAC had the responsibility for providing the cabinet with advice and recommendations on social and economic problems and issues. In this connection, the national development plans, as well as other plans as required by law, had to be submitted to and reviewed by the NESAC before their adoption by the government. (See Figure 1 for a depiction of the structure of the NESAC secretariat.)

The other alternative was to have the secretariat of the KPI serve concurrently as secretariat for the new PDC. Established as a section under the Secretariat of the House of Representatives of the Thai

Parliament, KPI's operations (authorized by the Institute Regulation on Administration and Education of 1995 as announced by the Parliament) were initially overseen by two parliamentary committees, i.e., the King Prajadhipok's Institute Committee and the King Prajadhipok's Institute Academic Committee. The Institute's mission encompassed organizing training, seminars, and academic meetings on matters of governance in democracies; undertaking work concerning legislation contemplated by the Parliament; developing various kinds of documents, materials and technology pertaining to its basic mission; developing the Institute so that it could be upgraded to a department-level organization; and, performing such other functions and tasks as it might be assigned from time to time. In 1998, KPI's status was changed to that of a juristic person under the supervision of Parliament. (See Figure 2 for KPI's revised organization structure.)

Sources of Operating Income

The two basic options for securing resources with which to fund the PDC's operations were annual government budgetary allocations approved by the Thai parliament or an ongoing and fixed proportion of some form of tax revenue. If the latter option were selected, the targeted tax could be what was known as "sin taxes" – i.e., those taxes typically levied on certain generally socially proscribed goods such as alcohol and tobacco. This option would entail funding the PDC via participation in one of the three departmental sources of Thai government revenue -- i.e., the Excise Department, the Revenue Department, or the Customs Department. [For a fuller exposition of the array of funding possibilities, see the website of the Ministry of Finance (http://www2.mof.go.th), where there was displayed a plethora of information on government finance, revenue, expenditure, public debt, and so on.]

Organization Roles and Activities

The basic choices regarding the PDC's roles and activities could be characterized as *narrow* or *broad*, or something combination of the two. A narrow range of roles might embrace activities such as providing political education and encouraging and supporting citizens in participating in politics. A broader range of roles could entail activities that extended much farther. It could encompass empowering the PDC to examine the exercise of State power at all levels and perform a check-and-balance role – e.g., summoning politicians and government officials to answer

questions concerning their actions and conduct and even suing them in the courts on behalf of the Thai citizen.

Options Aplenty, But Where To from Here?

Amidst the vast number of design permutations and combinations suggested by these options, the Drafting Subcommittee's task was to divine that particular configuration of design elements that would maximally satisfy the often conflicting expectations of a diverse group of stakeholders *and* maximize the PDC's prospects for successful accomplishment of its mission. The recent around-the-country data-gathering forums, workshops, and interviews had piqued the interest levels of key stakeholders, both proponents and opponents of the establishment of the PDC. The commissioning official, the Prime Minister, was awaiting their recommendations. The time was now upon the Drafting Subcommittee to begin making the design choices that would constitute the PDC model.

Addendum of Exhibits

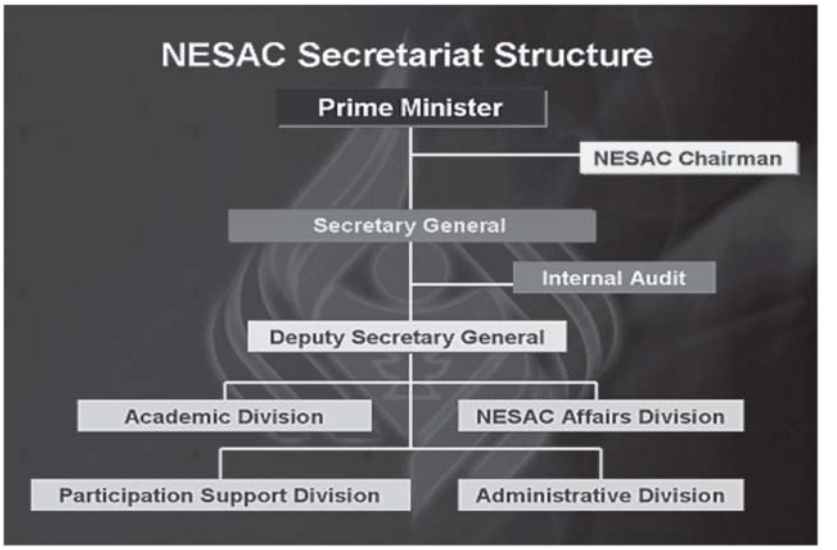

Figure 1: The NESAC secretariat structure

Source: http://www2.nesac.go.th/english/nesac_info/nesac_office.html

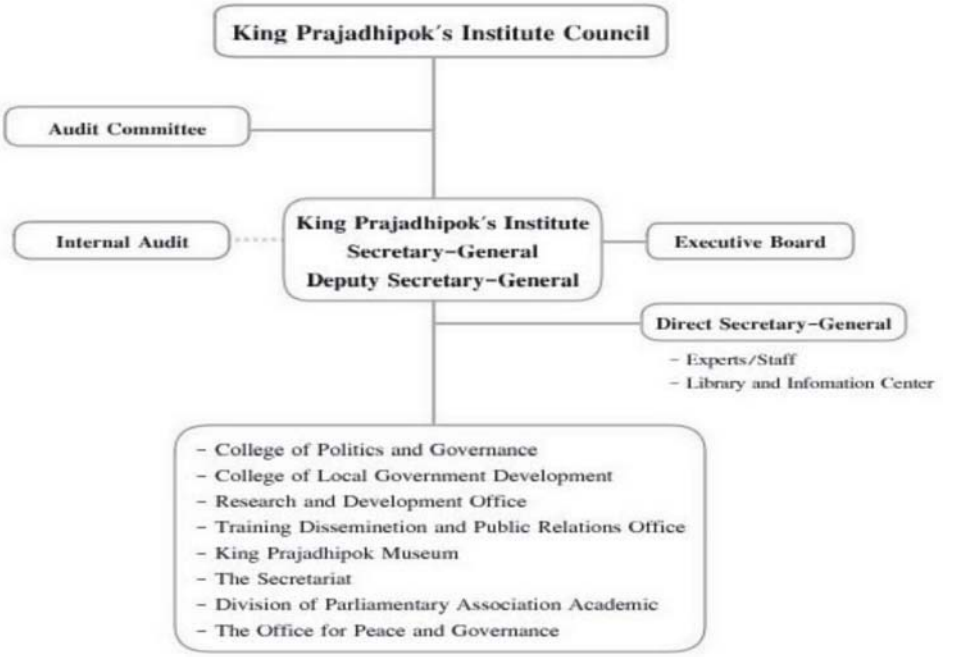

Figure 2: The KPI structure

Source: http://www.kpi2.org/kpien/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=23&Itemid=9

Table 1: Comparison Graph: Government Revenue from Customs, Excise and Revenue Department in January 2009

Millions of Baht

Department	Revenue (Current Month)	Revenue (Current Month - Last Year)	Estimation (Current Month - Current Year)
Revenue Department	75,147.19	81,993.38	85,981.01
Excise Department	16,540.00	24,552.00	26,413.00
Customs Department	6,135.22	8,433.68	8,250.00

Source: Excise Department, Revenue Department and Customs Department
Data as of: 6 Feb 2009 15:11:34

Endnotes

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