

IDEOLOGIES IN THAI POLITICS

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Abstract

This discussion paper aims to collect ideologies regarding rhetorical criticism in Thai politics, specifically relating to addresses given through radio and television nationwide. This article continues the discussion of ideologies in Thai politics by separating ideologies into three categories: (1) political ideology, (2) economic ideology, and (3) social and cultural ideology. In the category of political ideology, four political ideologies were found, including (1) authoritarianism, (2) monarchy, (3) nationalism, and (4) democracy. In the category of economic ideology, three economic ideologies were found, including (1) capitalism, (2) materialism, and (3) self-sufficiency economy ideology. In the category of social and cultural ideology, three social and cultural ideologies were found, including (1) feudalism, (2) patriarchy, and (3) Buddhism. Drawing on ideological insights from Thai politics, this article can further be utilized to investigate rhetorical strategies and ideological criticism in future Thai politics and other nation's politics.

Keywords: Thai politics, Rhetoric, Criticism, Ideology, Values

Introduction

Information on Thai political ideologies have been sparse; therefore, this discussion paper has gathered ideologies according to Foss' ideological framework. The framework is applied in the field of Thai politics. This discussion paper focused on ideologies distributed by

politicians of Thailand, explicitly related to addresses given through national radio and television, as radio and televised broadcasts have been prevailing avenues for political ideologies.

Many Thai politicians employed radio and television as mediums to communicate with the public because of the ability to reach the masses of people with political propaganda. Key political ideologies, such as justice and freedom, are smoothly distributed to the general public, which influence people's thoughts and belief systems (Hall, 1976). The enforcement of political ideologies structures individual's reality into a certain way, and it has great impact over an individual's beliefs, thoughts, conversations and behaviors (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001). By revealing political ideologies distributed by Thai politicians, the study reveals beliefs, values, and attitudes of people toward the political realm in society (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). In academic settings, politicians who distribute political ideologies through speech are considered rhetors, referring to a person who employs language as symbols in an effort to communicate or persuade others (Brummett, 2015). Rhetors are governed by particular ideologies, which limit one's social realities and shape the way each rhetor portrays the world mechanism (Sillars & Gronbeck, 2001). Most of the time, rhetors persuade others to believe what they want them to believe by distributing sets of ideologies through speech or rhetoric (Brummett, 2015). In this article, four major topics are discussed to provide perspicuous detail on political ideologies in Thai society. The first part of the article is the topic of Thai political history, the second part is televised addresses in Thailand, and the final part is the ideologies and values in the Thai political realm.

Thai Political History

Thailand was governed by the system of absolute monarchy for over 7 centuries prior to June 24, 1932. Thailand's governing system has since then been replaced by a constitutional monarchy, a system of government where the monarchy's power is limited by a constitution (Bunbongkarn, n.d.; constitutional monarchy, n.d.). Thailand has faced political instability, such as changes of governments and coup d'états, throughout its democratic history ("An Overview of Politics and Government in Thailand", n.d.). Coup d'état, a seizure or appropriation of a country by the military, has been a continuing force in Thailand's political record since the Siamese coup d'état in June 1933 (Panda, 2016). The latest coup in Thai history was in 2014. However, the problem started when political turmoil was caused by the

intense clash between the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's supporters and the royalists (McNeill, 2010; Panda, 2016). To understand the background of Thailand's rival camps, it is important to acknowledge the two important political figures: Thaksin Shinawatra, the sponsor of the Red Shirts, and Thailand's exiled former prime minister who was on duty between the years, 2001 and 2006, and Sondhi Limthongkul, the leader of the Yellow Shirts, who had triggered the 2006 army coup that toppled the former premier, Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra (McNeill, 2010; Pongsudhirak, 2008). The two political camps played important roles in Thai politics, which turned Thailand into a political battlefield.

Yellow Shirts' Camp

The Yellow Shirts' camp, consisted dominantly of royalists, nationalists, and the urban middle class whom later called themselves the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD). Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra initially instigated the unification of the Yellow Shirts' camp, as the people of the Yellow Shirts' camp emerged to oppose Mr. Thaksin. The Yellow Shirts protest led up to the military coup of September 2006, which forced Mr. Thaksin out of office with the accusation of corruption and abuse of power (Stout, 2013). By having Mr. Sondhi as their leader, Yellow Shirt protester rumblings began once again when Mr. Thaksin's allies won the post-coup elections in December 2007 and formed a government. The pro-Thaksin governing party was banned for alleged electoral misdemeanors, thus a new Democratic Party government under Abhisit Vejjajiva took office in December 2008. On September 6th of 2016, Mr. Sondhi, the leader of the Yellow Shirt group, was "convicted of falsifying documents used for a 1.08-billion-baht fraudulent loan" (Bangkok Post, 2016, p.3). Therefore, Mr. Sondhi was sentenced to a twenty-year prison sentence due to the violation of the Securities and Exchange Act.

Red Shirts' Camp

The Red Shirts, a group of supporters of Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra, were formally known as the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) (The Guardian, 2010). Supporters of the Red Shirts were mainly workers from rural areas outside Bangkok. However, the Red Shirts also included students, left-wing activists and some people of the working classes "who discern attempts by the elite and military to control Thai politics as a threat to democracy" (BBC, 2012). The Red Shirts became discontent when Mr. Thaksin was ousted as prime minister

by a military staged coup on the grounds of corruption (BBC, 2012). Even though several encounters between the protesters and the military forces occurred, a general election was held. Yingluck Shinawatra, Mr. Thaksin's sister, who led the Pheu Thai party to a landslide victory in July 2011, became Thailand's first woman prime minister and the 28th Prime Minister of the country (BBC, 2012). Even though Mr. Thaksin had been exiled from Thailand, he was continually a paramount patron of the Red Shirts, as he had been very resourceful at exerting a full-spectrum of influence over the Red Shirts (Reuter, 2015).

Televised address in Thailand

A televised address is a tool employed by many powerful public figures, especially in the field of politics, where political ideologies are prevalent (Welch, 2003; Baum & Kernell, 1999). Due to its strong potential, televised addresses grant rhetors the power to influence public opinion, as it is an “ultimate political weapon in shaping the national agenda, mobilizing public opinion, and building support for themselves and the issue positions they espouse” (Welch, 2003, p. 374,). In other words, broadcasted addresses have the opportunity to access every home’s radios and televisions across the nation.

Many Thai politicians employ televised addresses as a medium to communicate with the general public. For instance, Thaksin Shinawatra had a weekly hour-long program entitled “Thaksin Pob Prachachon” also dubbed as “Thaksin meets the people”. Another former Prime Minister who employed weekly televised addresses was Samak Sundaravej, who had a weekly program named “Sonthana Prasa Samak” also dubbed as “talking with Samak”. Abhisit Vejjajiva, the 27th Prime Minister of Thailand also had a weekly program called “Chua Mun Prated Thai Gub Na Yor Abhisit” dubbed as “Be Confident in Thailand with Prime Minister Abhisit” (McCargo, 2003). Due to the 2014 coup, General Prayut Chan-o-cha, the 29th Prime Minister of Thailand, employed weekly televised addresses as a medium to announce the government’s weekly achievements (Royal Thai Government, 2017; Mission Statement and Policies of the Head of the NCPO, 2014).

Ideology

The majority of the people who live in a society are subjected to ideologies, as ideologies are instilled by institutions, for example schools, religions, families and media, through ordinary activities and practices, for instance attending schools, listening to music,

reading newspapers or magazines and watching television (Lippi-Green, 2004; Althusser, 2006). Ideology has a great influence over how people think, act, and speak as it refers to beliefs that have the capability of influencing an individual's consciousness, shaping an individual's perception, and dominating how a person interprets individual personal experiences (Althusser, 2006). Hegemony refers to a privileged ideology. The term constitutes a social control and a form of domination by more powerful ideologies over the less powerful ideologies. When an ideology becomes hegemonic, the ideology will be very powerful so that it could control what people should see as natural or obvious through the establishing of norms (Foss, 2009). The result of an ideological hegemony is that a culture has the dominant way of seeing the world in a certain domain, in which a certain group of people are benefitted (Sillars & Gronbeck, 2001). Since dominant ideologies direct how an individual judge or perceives what is real and natural, oppositional ideologies are marginalized.

According to Foss (2009) dominant ideology relates to power and control. Dominant ideologies are created by the upper echelons of the administrative class or the elites, to gain self-benefits and maintain their superior status, power and domination (Molyneux, 2006). Dominant groups of people distribute dominant ideologies to control beliefs, morals, attitudes and values of the mainstream in a society. Upper administrative classes employ ideology as a mechanism to facilitate social control using institutions, such as religion, education system, family, law, politics, press and culture, to persuade members of the society to adopt and support the dominant ideology, while oppressing or marginalizing less popular ideologies (Clarke, 2015). Social organization is considered a facet that grants titles and classifies an individual into different social classes, which causes oppression and discrimination towards a group of people who are not able to cope with the established ideologies (Molyneux, 2006).

Ideologies in Thai Politics

In Thailand, Thais are also influenced by distinct sets of ideologies and values shown through their attitude and behavior. Ideologies found in the Thai political realm are not only limited to political ideologies. Instead, the ideologies can be separated in three categories, namely political, economic, and social and cultural ideologies (Chutong, 2016; Steger, 2008; Panda, 2016; Vanijaka, 2017).

Political ideology

Political ideology is a set of related beliefs, which shape the political perspective of an individual and hierarchy of social class (Seliger, 1977). Since political ideology explains the way a society works, every individual in a society must possess political ideology with or without notion (Foss, 2009; Nilsson & Erlandsson, 2015). In Thai society, four political ideologies were mentioned, namely authoritarianism, monarchy, nationalism, and democracy.

Authoritarianism is a form of government that has strong central power, where freedom of the people is limited. Monarchy, similar to an authoritarian form of government, has high respect towards the monarchy, where kings and queens rule the kingdom and possess the status of the suzerain of a country. Nationalism, however, is a set of beliefs which promotes the greatness of being unified as a nation, the quality of wholeness, and fostering the love and reverence for the country. Lastly, democracy is a governing system that emphasizes equality, rights, freedom, and respect for the majority of the population.

Authoritarianism and monarchy have been the dominant ideologies influencing Thailand's governing systems. The deep-rooted political ideologies have effectively been creating an authoritative class, where the absolute power is based on arbitrary use of power (Vanijaka, 2017). Dhammaraja, the concept which the king must rule his country according to the teachings of the Buddha, is considered a solid link connecting politics with religion in Thailand (Vanijaka, 2017). However, the status of the king remains the same, where absolute loyalty is expected from his subjects, as in return, the king will protect the people and maintain peace in the kingdom (Chuatong, 2016). In 1932, the system of absolute monarchy was overthrown and the institution's significant power was plundered. With King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the monarch was considered an essential institution within the constitutional monarchy system. In spite of the monarchy not having political or administrative powers under the system of constitutional monarchy, the monarchy had great influence over Thailand's political realm (Maisrikrod, 1992). Moreover, King Bhumibol Adulyadej was crucial for the country's political stability, and had been the symbol of the foremost institution of the nation and the people, especially during times of political crisis.

While Western society went through the Age of Discovery, the Age of Reason, the Age of Enlightenment, etc. to achieve democracy, "Thailand went straight from absolute monarchy into democracy, bypassing periods of liberalization, reason, and enlightenment that are the logical steps to arrive at humanistic democratic ideals" (Vanijaka, 2017, p.3). Thailand

completely changed its administrative ideology to democracy in 1932, however, at the time, the structure of Thai society was insufficiently prepared for the change, resulting in the newly installed democracy to frequently fail. The democratic failures proved that authoritarianism and the monarchy, which had embedded themselves deeply into the Thai society, had triumphed over democracy. Throughout Thailand's political history, it seemed to be that Thais only understood and implemented democracy at the surface level and were yet to understand the core of democracy (Chuatong, 2016). Democracy is highly related with equality, rights, liberty and various types of freedoms, for instance freedom of expression and speech. Conservatism, which refers to a political philosophy that favors traditional beliefs and customs and seeks to preserve the status quo, is considered an obstacle to democracy dominating the upper ranks of the social and economic structures (Vinijjukul, 2008).

The rise of nationalism was estimated to begin during the reigns of Kings Rama V - VII, when aristocrats attempted to create the essence of "Thainess" and the Thai nation, by instilling cultural values using national arts and cultures, such as Buddhism, Thai language, and Thai culture (Hutt, 2016). Nationalism, still co-existing with the transition, was considered as a tool, enabling other nations to acknowledge Thainess and Thai culture (Panda, 2016). The reinforcements for the love of the nation had made Thai people proud of their nationality and later developed into ego and broadened into discrimination (Hutt, 2016). Unfortunately, nationalism among Thais had created unfavorable characteristics such as a discrimination against neighboring countries which are still present in the current Thai society (Stueber, 2006).

Economic Ideology

The second type of ideology found in the Thai political realm is economic ideology. Economic ideologies have played crucial roles in the evolution of Thai society's perspectives on capitalism, materialism, and the self-sufficiency economy ideology (Chuatong, 2016; Melé, 2014; Shrum et al., 2013).

Capitalism and materialism are the most influential economic ideologies in Thai society (Chuatong, 2016). Capitalism is an economic system that focuses on profit and the ownership of capital goods. The free market mechanism, one of the prime objectives of capitalism, is intended to impart individuals with their own profit. It may be said that "capitalism is the only system that led to the freedom of slaves, the end of feudalism, the equal rights of all individuals, regardless of race, color, sex, etc." (Whipple, 2014, p.6). Materialism is a form of

philosophical monism, where the supreme value lies upon material wealth rather than spiritual, intellectual, and cultural wealth. The core of capitalism and materialism is comparable, as both prioritize the possession of wealth and revolve around materialistic concerns (Melé, 2014).

Even though capitalism generates prosperity within a society and allows individuals of the society to have rights to freely own products, services, labor, and physical assets, it also bolsters discrimination and inequality within a society (Melé, 2014). Capitalism is seen as a cause of materialism, and “materialism has caused people to judge themselves based on others and judge their own greatness based on how much noticeable wealth they have acquired,” (Whipple, 2014, p.6). The rise of capitalism in Thailand escalated during the Bowring Treaty. The friendship between the Kingdom of Siam and the British Empire was the origin of international free trade, the use of currency, and the beginning of the great influence of capitalism in Thailand (Settho, 1989). The economic system of capitalism greatly influenced Siam to develop its industrial systems and infrastructures, however, advancement, which was not evenly spread, created economic inequality and revenue gaps (Koizumi, 2008). Evidence of capitalism’s impact over Thai society and economy are the stigma of corruption among Thai politicians and the inconsistent value of Thai currency over the past decades, which has significant influence over the country’s economy, the growth of the Thai private sector, and the significant increase of investment by foreign investors within the country. This has led to a materialistic lifestyle for Thais, who are now “using material goods in excess to essentially try and buy their way to happiness. The statistics of the happiness index by the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board indicated that 62.42% of Thai families were broken families and that their members were miserable because of materialistic lifestyles (Chalapati, 2008). Therefore, it may be said that material wealth and happiness have been highly related in Thai society.

The ideology of a self-sufficiency economy opposes the ideology of materialism. The concept of the self-sufficiency economy was first introduced as an economic approach by the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej on December 4th, 1997 (Chalapati, 2008). The philosophy was considered a happiness development approach that underlines sufficiency, which means living with moderation, being self-reliant and frugal. Since Thailand has been through many economic crises and recessions, the government has heavily promoted the self-sufficiency economy ideology among Thais by discouraging Thais from relying excessively on conventional

economic theories; nevertheless to adapt a more sustainable and effective economic strategy as an alternative (Chalapati, 2008). The sufficiency economy philosophy became an ideal guide, mentioned and linked, repeatedly by Thai politicians, to beneficial outcomes for the development of the country and its people.

Social and Cultural Ideology

Social and cultural ideology is represented by advancements of mankind, as it refers to a system upheld by a society. Changes in the social environment have been great contributors to the evolution of cultural aspects, which are discernable from certain societies (Chuatong, 2016). In Thailand three major social and cultural ideologies have been prevalent, feudalism, patriarchy and Buddhism (Chuatong, 2016; Settho, 1989).

Feudalism refers to a social system that defines individuals' rights, roles, duties, and statuses. Within feudal mechanics, an individual is categorized at birth into a certain status, defining specific authority, responsibility and benefit. The ideology of feudalism in Thailand originated around 1448 to 1488. King Borommatrailokkanat or King Trailok, reigned during this period, formalizing and centralizing the Sakdina governmental system, the hierarchy based on social and cultural order (Chuatong, 2016). The system clearly created a division between two classes: the nobles and the commoners, categorized by birth, family names and parents. As the strict hierarchical social order defined each individual's status, worth, rights and amount of privilege each individual deserved in the society, each position in the hierarchical order also determined how an individual should behave in a society. Even though feudalism had been employed mainly as a social ideology in Thailand centuries ago, it still resonates in Thai society, as it lies deep in Thai culture (Vanijaka, 2017).

Patriarchy refers to the social structure and procedures where males are the dominant gender, having more authority and roles of social importance than the female gender. In Thailand, patriarchy has played a great role in the society for a long period of time. Despite Thailand's official monogamy law being adopted on October 1st, 1935, Thailand continues modernizing its laws in accordance with the European standard where inequalities between men and women still exist (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2014).

Buddhist beliefs include the rule of karma, the inequality of blessing, the circle of suffering, reincarnation, and merit collection. For over seven centuries, Buddhism has been a vital ideology in Thailand, as it has played a crucial role in supporting institutions including the

political institution (Plamintr, n.d.). Religious institution maintains its relevancy with the political institution, particularly the fact that religion enhances the relations between the ruler and the citizen, while supporting the ideology of the ruler, for instance the Dhammaraja concept (Settho, 1989). Political institutions often provide assistance to religious institutions, for instance land donations that can be used to expand a temple's territory and indirectly increase its influence. The term civil religion has been introduced to Thai society. This ideology upholds the nation, religion and monarchy; as a result, monks provide political security and ideological support to the three principal institutions by spreading the ideology (Komin & Samakkarn, 1979). Karma is a belief under Buddhist doctrine, used to explain the inequality among the people regarding different classes, physical appearance and economic status. Buddhists believe that an individual inherits a karma legacy from previous existences, which result in an inequality of current existence, and not an aggregation of individuals (Settho, 1989).

The 29th Prime Minister of Thailand, General Prayut Chan-o-cha, introduced national core values to be recited every morning by children in every public and private school nationwide, as fundamental beliefs which every Thai must adhere to (NNT, 2014). The national core values could be categorized under politics, economics, and social and cultural categories of ideology. For instance, being respectful of laws, elderly and seniority, and being grateful to one's parents, and teachers derived from feudalism. Meanwhile, maintaining morality, having a sense of shame over guilt and sins, and upholding the Buddhist religion, formulated three main pillars of the country, manifested from Buddhist ideology. Moreover, understanding the true essence of democratic ideals with King as Head of State, being conscious and mindful of action in line with the King's royal statements, and upholding the monarchy as one of the three main pillars of the country are examples of the monarchy ideology. In sum, it is impossible for political, economic, and social and cultural ideologies to be separated in an isolated element, as the ideologies are intertwined with one another in the social system. Some ideologies have a long history of existence and continue to influence present society as a result from its original purpose of perpetuating control. Ideologies and values are profoundly imbedded in Thai behaviors and other social and cultural processes, especially language use.

Three main categories of ideologies are found in Thai politics. The major categories are political, economic, and social and cultural ideologies. Exploring ideologies in the Thai political realm has led to a better understanding of specific persuasive strategies hidden within

speeches of Thai political figures. This collection set can further be utilized to investigate rhetorical strategies and ideological criticism in future Thai politics and other nation's politics.

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