

Itthiphon and Amnat: An Informal Aspect of Thai Politics

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In the study of Thai politics, the bureaucratic polity model formulated by Fred W. Riggs more than two decades ago remains the dominant conceptual framework [Neher and Bidhya 1984: 1]. Riggs [1966: 396] defined a bureaucratic polity "in terms of the domination of the official class as a ruling class." It was the weakness or absence of extrabureaucratic forces capable of controlling the bureaucracy effectively that gave rise to the phenomenon of the bureaucratic polity [Riggs 1966: 131; Girling 1981: 10]. It is widely recognized, however, that significant changes have occurred in Thailand since the Sarit regime (1958–63) that now challenge the model. The present king has gradually emerged as a significant political institution. Rapid economic development has given rise to another important extrabureaucratic force, i.e., political parties supported by businessmen who once were characterized as politically powerless "aliens" and "pariah" entrepreneurs by Riggs [1966: 251–252]. Businessmen's increasing political role is evident from the number of MPs and cabinet ministers with business backgrounds [Pisan and Guyot 1986: 30–36].

Were businessmen really so politically powerless before the recent development of representative democracy? Without electoral poli-

tics, were they as powerless as farmers? It does not seem plausible. Bureaucratic polity theorists, especially Thai scholars, seem to make too much of the institutional or formal aspects of Thai politics, perhaps because they overestimate the idea of *amnat*, which usually means power. However *amnat* also means authority which derives from any official position or is sanctioned by law. More important is that the Thai usually use this word without clearly discriminating between power and legal authority. They often think of power as something derived from official authority. The word of "power" invokes among the Thai the image of those who hold an official position and are given a certain authority by law. Thus, for the Thai, a man of power is man of *amnat*. Government officials (civil bureaucrats and military officers) head the ranking, followed by politicians (cabinet ministers, members of parliament, provincial assemblymen, and municipal councilors), with *kamnan* (commune chiefs) and village headmen in the third place.

On the other hand, the power which a man in authority exerts beyond his authority or which a man without an official position exerts is called *itthiphon* rather than *amnat*. For example, the top military brass often intervene in politics, even under a civilian government. Insofar as their intervention is not based on law, they use *itthiphon* rather than *amnat*. A businessman

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who gives financial support to a political party or military leader in order to influence the decision-making of the government is not a *phu-mi-amnat* (a man of amnat) but a *phu-mi-itthiphon* (a man of itthiphon) because he has no official position. Power has a strong connotation of amnat or legal authority. While it is not easy to discriminate strictly between amnat and itthiphon, they are not identical. In a sense, amnat is formal power and itthiphon is informal power.

This distinction has implications for the study of Thai politics. It must be quite easy for the Thai to accept the bureaucratic polity theory just because, according to Thai idea of amnat, bureaucrats have power a priori. The simple dichotomy of the model that government officials are politically powerful and the nonofficial are powerless coincides with the Thai conception of power. A man with an official position has amnat but a man with no position can have only itthiphon.

Riggs [1966: 339-346] rightly emphasizes that influence (itthiphon) is very important within the bureaucracy. Nevertheless, he does not mention that the nonofficial can have itthiphon and exert it over the official. Such itthiphon often emerges in the form of a personal relationship. The clientelist framework often used in the study of Thai politics has the critical weakness that it assumes that bureaucrats are necessarily the patrons.¹⁾ If we pay more atten-

tion to itthiphon, it will become clear that bureaucrats are not always patrons.

There are various types of itthiphon and *phu-mi-itthiphon*. *Phu-mi-itthiphon* try to exert itthiphon on *phu-mi-amnat* (government officials) in order to pursue their own interests. This may be called politics of itthiphon, which is quite different from capital city politics (i.e. coups or parliamentary politics), which is run by people striving for amnat. Among *phu-mi-itthiphon*, businessmen are most prominent.²⁾ Businessmen have the most important source of itthiphon, i.e., economic power, and can exert itthiphon over almost any bureaucrat at any level. They usually do so covertly, which makes it difficult to perceive. However, the itthiphon of the owner of illegal business over provincial or district officials, who are field officers of the national bureaucracy and come into contact with local people daily, is comparatively easy to detect.

politically powerful and thus useful to their Chinese friends" [Coughlin 1976: 138]. Moreover, businessmen were not so weak that they could not manage their business without this relationship. Not all businessmen resorted to it. There were few Chinese firms which went into bankruptcy when their Thai partners suddenly lost power in 1973. On the contrary, businessmen were willing to enter into a close relationship with Thai officials just because they could derive various privileges from it. For example, Sungsih [1980: 154] quotes a famous economist's words: "[These] companies would not pay more than what was due to them, so that they could receive a net benefit from the protection." Such a relationship does not point to businessmen's powerlessness.

1) The larger Chinese businessmen maintained a symbiotic relationship with the Thai elite from the 1930s to the 1970s. Generally, this relationship is thought to have resulted from the businessmen's powerlessness and defensive motives. But they were not at the bureaucrats' mercy. Thai officials could serve on the boards of Chinese firms "only so long as they remained

2) The ministry of interior has considered local *phu-mi-itthiphon* dangerous to social fairness and order. It has advocated that they be suppressed and once classified them into 13 types, most of which were businessmen [*Thai Rat* August 6, 1985].

A study of businessmen's *itthiphon* over provincial and district officials (including the police) will serve to give a clear understanding of the importance of *itthiphon*, as distinct from *amnat*, in Thai politics. I believe it will become clear that businessmen are far from politically powerless, and that their power does not necessarily derive from their significant role in electoral politics.

Economic *Itthiphon*

There is a wide gap in income between businessmen and bureaucrats. A comment made by a businessman in a small town points to the gap. "I want my children to receive a higher education to win respect. I want them to be merchants rather than bureaucrats because there is a wide gap in income between merchants and bureaucrats. One day's income for a merchant may be comparable to one month's salary for a bureaucrat" [Wanphen 1983: 69-70].

Bureaucrats can, however, supplement their low salary with money and services provided by businessmen. When a businessman wants a bureaucrat to discharge his official duties swiftly, he needs to offer a bribe as lubricating oil (*yot namman*).³⁾ Bribery of this type is so widespread that a newspaper calls the bureaucracy a commercial company collecting

lubricating oil on the authority of approval and license [*Sayam Rat* July 22, 1985]. It is not easy, however, for bureaucrats to compel an ordinary businessman to pay more than lubricating oil. Although the owner of an illegal business needs protection and is liable to extortion, he is usually willing to pay more without compulsion. Capitalizing on bureaucrats' avarice, he tries to make them collaborators in his illegal business by providing them an economic interest. That many officials readily accept bribes is apparent from many cases where bureaucrats have connived to help or helped businessmen pursuing illegal interests. For example, officials of the Department of Customs have assisted smugglers [*Thai Rat* May 24, 1985]; officials of the Departments of Land, Local Administration and Forestry have assisted in the illegal acquisition of title deeds [*Dao Sayam* June 9, 1985; *Su Anakhot* July 27, August 11, 1985]; officials of the Department of Forestry have cooperated with sawmill owners in the illegal lumbering of forests [*Thai Rat* February 10, 1985; *Ban Muang* February 14, 1985; *Daily News* October 12, 1985]; officials of the Ministry of Defense have helped those eager to escape conscription [*Matichon* April 3, 1985; *Naeo Na* May 3, 1985; Neher 1969: 319]; and officials of the Department of Religious Affairs have helped a businessman dig and steal the earth in the compound of an uninhabited temple [*Matichon* June 15, 1984]. Some businessmen with illegal businesses go farther, offering regular rather than one-off bribes, and paying protection money to the police in order to escape raids on their businesses. Typical cases involve the owners of casinos or brothels and managers of illegal lotteries [*Thai Rat* April 14, September 8, 1985; *Matichon Sutsapda* April 22,

3) Riggs [1966: 249-254] explained the flow of wealth from businessmen to bureaucrats in the 1950s and 1960s in terms of extraction or squeezing (*rit-thai*). But the flow is not only the result of squeezing, and can be classified into several types. Simply, these are lubricating oil, open bribery (*sinbon*) and donation (*borijak*) from the standpoint of businessmen. From the standpoint of officials, they are squeezing and soliciting (*riarai*).

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Cases where bureaucrats are bribed by businessmen and cooperate with them in an illegal business are too numerous to list. A bribed bureaucrat can enrich himself and divide some of his bribes among subordinates to enhance his authority. Although he is a beneficiary, he must comply with bribers' various demands and, in fact, gives in to bribers' economic *itthiphon*.

This phenomenon would, of course, disappear if bureaucrats did not take bribes. But even unselfish bureaucrats tend to give in to economic *itthiphon* when they receive a donation from businessmen. It is also difficult for bureaucrats to manage without receiving donations. For example, provincial bureaucrats must hold a lavish reception or farewell party when a colleague is transferred or a senior official of the central government visits their province. In many cases, government funds and their own spare money are insufficient to pay for the party and they must therefore ask local people for their cooperation [*Sayam Rat Sapdawijan* October 6, 1985; *Matichon Sutsapda* May 27, 1990]. Another good example is public construction projects. When bureaucrats plan a construction of a road, a bridge, or a school and ask the central government for funding, the central government does not always allocate enough funds. A bureaucrat who is eager for rapid advancement must then raise funds for the project locally. If he succeeds in soliciting contributions and carrying out the project with no or little expense to the government, he rises in the estimation of the central government [Haas 1979: 73; Krom Kanpokkhong 1979: 80-86].

In soliciting these contributions, a bureaucrat

cannot expect much of farmers, who usually are poor and can contribute only voluntary labor. So he asks help of wealthy businessmen residing in a city or town and who are easy to contact. In response to his request, businessmen contribute money, land or construction materials, accommodate automobiles or construction machinery, and, in the case of hotel or restaurant owners, provide services at special prices or free of charge [Preecha 1980: 93-94; Wanphen 1983: 68].

Businessmen make generous contributions largely because they expect reciprocation from the bureaucrat concerned.⁴⁾ The bureaucrat feels *bunkhun* (a debt of gratitude) and *namjai* (thoughtfulness, in this case, of the businessman toward himself) when he receives an indispensable contribution. If he materializes his gratitude for their favors, businessmen will contribute more; but if he does not, they will show a negative attitude. Therefore he must repay their favors if he wants to solicit contributions on future occasions. A generous contributor will receive prompter service when he visits a district office to apply for or register something. In addition, bureaucrats often bend the regulations and overlook dubious activities by contributors. According to Haas [1979: 79], businessmen "are glad to purchase it [the good will of the district officer] for a few thousand baht in aid to the district's work rather than risk

4) There are various reasons why businessmen contribute resources to the government. These are 1) religious merit-making; 2) social fame, especially the prestigious decorations the king grants to generous donors; 3) benefits expected to result directly from the planned project; 4) reciprocation from the officials concerned. However, these contributions will decrease if officials do not reciprocate.

having to pay several times the amount in taxes if they are investigated." When bureaucrats purchase or construct something at government expense, they may select contributors as contractors.

More important is that giving to bureaucrats helps businessmen build a close relationship (*sensai*) with them, especially such high officials as district officers and provincial governors. Such relationships are significant because the subordinates of the official concerned must avoid letting their superior lose face and therefore may not disclose illegal activities of those close to their superior. This means that illegal businesses or other activities by those who have established close ties with high officials are overlooked as long as the high officials themselves do not take a strong objection toward them. For example, an acting police inspector could not arrest a constructor using illegal lumber because a provincial governor asked him for special treatment [*Thai Rat* October 21, 1984]. There are frequent cases where a suspect about to be arrested manages to avoid arrest by claiming close ties with district or provincial high officials, military officers or politicians. A photograph taken with a high official or the official's calling card with signature is evidence of a close relationship and often functions as a useful talisman.

Although contribution is less binding on bureaucrats than bribery, it is an expedient means for businessmen to buy a close relationship with high officials. Firstly, they can offer contributions openly because contributions lack apparent illegality. Secondly, the recipient of contributions is a high official who is responsible for various projects and functions. Lastly, a high official receiving repeated con-

tributions assumes a debt of gratitude and will hesitate to expose or suppress irregularities on the part of contributors, even though he may not actively cooperate in them. Contribution is a safe and easy way to build a close relationship with a high official. Once a businessman succeeds in this, he can invite high officials to private family functions, such as funerals, weddings or birthday parties, and to an inauguration ceremony of his business. Also he may be invited to various functions and parties held by the high officials. These are good opportunities to show his close relationship with high officials and to discourage their bureaucratic subordinates from meddling in his illegal activities. If a subordinate meddles without his superior's permission, his superior loses face and may retaliate against him angrily [*Matichon Sutsapda* June 10, 1984; *Matichon* September 27, 1984]. Moreover, a businessman can use this close relationship as a channel for bribery. If he succeeds, the lured official will become an active cooperator with the businessman in pursuing illegal interests.

Former prime minister Prem Tinsulanon said in 1978 when he was the deputy minister of interior: "Corruption for the most part results from groups of *itthiphon* and bureaucrats yielding to them" [Krom Kanpokkhong 1979: 15]. In this speech he admonished bureaucrats of the ministry of interior against receiving economic benefits from those pursuing illegal interests and yielding to their *itthiphon*. The government has given warnings like this repeatedly. Moreover, the government provides that bureaucrats cannot remain at the same post for more than four years, partly to prevent them from yielding to *itthiphon*. But a wealthy Chinese businessman boasts: "There is nothing

impossible in Thailand as long as dogs [= bureaucrats] continue to eat [excrement, i.e., small sums of money]" [Sawaeng 1971: 225]. McVey [1984: 119] is right in observing that "the visible symbiotic relationship between district officials and Chinese merchants (the former providing protection and permission, the latter cash) showed that at the urban elite level people were divided between those who could be bought and those who did the buying." Businessmen who exert economic *itthiphon* over bureaucrats and use them as collaborators in pursuing interests will not disappear as long as bureaucrats need bribes and contributions. To be sure, not every businessman pursues his interests in this way; and not every bureaucrat yields to economic *itthiphon*. But businessmen who can use bureaucrats as accomplices in illegal activities are widespread in most parts of the country. This shows at least that businessmen are not the powerless subjects of bureaucrats' *annat*.

Political *Itthiphon*

Businessmen can reinforce economic *itthiphon* with political *itthiphon*. Here, the political *itthiphon* of businessmen means that businessmen can utilize the *itthiphon* of politicians, especially MPs, over bureaucrats.

Bureaucrats fear politicians as the disbursers of reward or punishment. They can expose a bureaucrat's irregularities in parliament [*Daily News* August 27, 30, September 7, 21, 1985; *Ban Muang* September 20, 1985] or a provincial assembly *Matichon* May 9, 1985; *Daily News* September 7, 1985]. As we have noted, many bureaucrats are involved in corruption. And in order to avoid exposure, they try to

cultivate good relationships with politicians.

Secondly, a member of parliament can sometimes have a say in the promotion or demotion of a bureaucrat [*Lak Thai* October 8-14, 1990; *Matichon Sutsapda* October 7, 1990]. As for senior officials of the central government, it is said that "officials who are not close with politicians cannot get posts, and those who are not obedient to politicians cannot get power. . . . An official who is not close to or has no *sensai* with politicians cannot become director-general" [*Matichon* October 7, 1984]. Intervention by MPs in personnel administration is not limited to the appointment of senior officials of the central government. Thai bureaucracy is highly centralized and senior officials of the central government have the authority to appoint officials at provincial and district level. So an MP can put pressure on these senior officials to promote or demote local officials [*Matichon Sutsapda* March 25, 1984]. A policeman said: "I ordered my men to inspect a tax evasion. Later I knew that a powerful politician was involved in this case. . . . My three subordinates were dismissed from office . . . at a high official's request" [*Sayam Rat Sapdawijan* July 7, 1985]. MPs cannot always promote or demote bureaucrats as they please, because the bureaucracy does not welcome outside intervention. But it seems that the potential ability to reward or punish bureaucrats is awesome enough to make them obedient.

Thirdly, politicians frequently meet with high officials and can build close relationships with them comparatively easily. Therefore bureaucrats are afraid of politicians and dare not prevent their illegal activities. For example, when an exceptionally honest provincial chief of police ordered his men to arrest an MP who gambled

illegally at his house, some of his men disobeyed the order for fear of revenge, preferring to be transferred to another province rather than make the arrest [*Matichon* December 12, 1984]. This case shows well how bureaucrats are afraid of politicians.

A businessman can use politicians' *itthiphon* in two ways other than by lobbying politicians. He may himself run for election and be elected, or he may play a critical role in an election campaign. Many businessmen are elected to parliament [Anek 1988: Table 1], a provincial assembly or a municipal council [*Hsing-hsien Jih-pao* August 5, 6, 9, 31, September 9, 1985] because of their economic power.⁵⁾ In Thai elections, people called *hua-khanaen* (electioneers commanding a number of votes) play an important role because of the rarity of block votes of interest groups or political parties. Those who by some means can control the electoral decisions of many people become *hua-khanaen*. Kamnan, village headmen, teachers, landlords, *nak-leng* (tough guys who are kind to their friends and cruel to their enemies) can become *hua-khanaen*. Candidates must compete for able *hua-khanaen* because the result of an election depends on them so heavily, in fact, that some of them are murdered during election campaigns. Besides persuasion and/or intimidation, candidates' money to buy *hua-khanaen* and

to facilitate their gathering of votes is critical in the struggle for *hua-khanaen*.

However, most businessmen do not stand for election. Many provide candidates with election campaign funds in order to build close relationships with them. Some are also able to be *hua-khanaen* who command a large vote. A typical case is that of a trader of agricultural products in a town [Preecha 1980: 216–219]. He tries to buy crops in large quantity by getting as many as possible of the farmers who feel obligated to him, mainly because of economic dependence, to sell crops to him. He may well own several hundred *rai* (1 *rai*=0.16 ha) of agricultural land with many tenant farmers. At the same time, poorer farmers must rely on him for money, seeds, fertilizer, rice, medicines and transport facilities. Thus, he can easily mobilize tenant or indebted farmers in elections. Moreover, he uses people in a village as his agents and facilitates their buying of agricultural products by providing them with capital, information and other services. These agents can also be mobilized with their dependent farmers. As about 70% of labor force is engaged in agriculture, the ability to mobilize farmers is very important. Siri [1985: 20] points out that: "Candidates in elections either to parliament or a provincial assembly will have a stronger possibility of being elected if they can get local middlemen [agricultural traders] as their *hua-khanaen*."

If a businessman successfully plays a critical role in an election campaign, he can form a good relationship with the politician concerned and use his political *itthiphon*. Above all, a sponsor or *hua-khanaen* of MPs can exercise a great *itthiphon* over bureaucrats. For example, an owner of a large-scale rice mill, who is an

5) Most of these elected businessmen are ethnic Chinese. Since the revision of the immigration act in 1950, which reduced the annual quota for Chinese immigration drastically, "many Chinese businessmen and industrialists have become Thai citizens through the process of nationalization, while many more, as time passed, have departed or retired due to old age" [Pisan and Guyot 1986: 22]. Thus most businessmen enjoy suffrage, although some whose father is a foreigner are still subject to a few minor restrictions.

immigrant Chinese without political rights, summoned an honest policeman to his house and demanded that he apologize for having fined a truck driver of his mill for violating the traffic law. The policeman refused the demand because he had done nothing wrong. The owner got angry and threatened to have the policeman transferred to another province. His threat came true shortly after, when a deputy minister of interior who owed much to the mill-owner for his election ordered the transfer. This case shows vividly how a businessman can use political *itthiphon*. It is natural that bureaucrats are afraid of businessmen who have close relationships with politicians. For this very reason, some businessmen try to use politicians' *itthiphon* to the full. They run their clients, who are often obscure persons, in a general election and get them elected to parliament under their own auspices. These MPs are at their beck and call. Businessmen nicknamed Sia Leng, Kammnan Po, the late Sia Yae and Sia Jiu are most well-known among them.

To be sure, some businessmen refrain from intervening in politics because open political activities may make them enemies and affect their business. Some have no interest in political *itthiphon*. However, a lot of businessmen supplement their economic *itthiphon* with political *itthiphon*.

Politics of *Itthiphon* and Electoral Politics

General Chawalit Yongjaiyut [1985: 7], a former army chief, referred to businessmen's *itthiphon* in 1981: "[Some] capitalists are *hukhaen* of MPs or cabinet ministers. They patronize government officials with whom they

have direct or indirect relationships. To sum up, . . . [they] are nothing but owners of sovereignty pursuing interests with selfish politicians and bureaucrats as their representatives." Businessmen have such strong *itthiphon* over bureaucrats at the local level as to give a leading military officer cause for concern. There are some businessmen whom even a provincial governor, who is thought to have the biggest *amnat* in his province, cannot match.⁶⁾

Undoubtedly, the *itthiphon* of businessmen has been augmented remarkably by the economic development since the Sarit regime, which has widened the income gap between them and bureaucrats. Wealthy businessmen have proliferated almost everywhere, even in

6) A columnist of the most popular newspaper in Thailand quoted a remark made by a provincial governor of Uttaradit province. "A provincial governor is no more than a spokesman for his province. He cannot match local *phu-mi-itthiphon* in *barami* (grandeur) and power. They fell trees in the forest without authorization. They kill anyone who obstructs them. Nevertheless, they are socially prominent. Government officials visit them when the need arises. Officials ask them for financial supports, borrow automobiles, ask them to be sponsors of a welcome party for senior officials from Bangkok, and lastly ask them to procure girls for attendants to the senior officials. Their cooperation becomes *namjai* and *bunkhun* which officials should repay but cannot do completely. Many high officials in the province become decorations and servants of *phu-mi-itthiphon*. For example, these officials are obliged to attend opening ceremonies of their shops or funerals of their parents as main guests. They become big bugs in the province. Moreover, in Thai society wealthy people can buy greatness by donating money to charity. They become famous and respected by donating only 10 or 5 thousand baht to someone. In addition, they become close with people with high position and increase their *barami* by donation [*Thai Rat* July 18, 1985].

small towns. Akin [1983: 47] notes: "Recent changes within the last one or two decades have affected the relationship in a number of ways. First, status of merchants which once was low has made a substantial gain. Wealth even without bureaucratic status has come to be accepted as the source of power. With wealth as the sole resources, the capitalist magnates can even become the patron of the bureaucratic elites who are underpaid. It is the exchange between wealth and power of making public decisions."

However businessmen's *itthiphon* does not seem to have arisen only within past one or two decades. It has always derived from their wealth. Coughlin [1976: 136] conducted field research in Thailand in the 1950s and reported: "It is commonly said that the Chinese can buy their way around almost any restrictions." Bureaucratic corruption and the close relationship between bureaucrats and businessmen, both of which were indivisibly related to latter's economic *itthiphon*, were even observed in the nineteenth century [Kanjani 1976] and are not new phenomena.⁷⁾ Rather, they have become increasingly conspicuous as a result of recent

economic growth.

Businessmen's political *itthiphon*, on the other hand, has been augmented greatly because political parties supported by businessmen have, since the mid-1970s, gained sufficient power to compete with the military. MPs under military or military-dominated governments had far less *itthiphon* than now. But this does not mean that MPs, provincial assemblymen and municipal councilors had no *itthiphon* at all. It was still better for bureaucrats not to come into conflict with them. More importantly, at this time, businessmen could use the *itthiphon* of military officers stationed in various districts. Businessmen could mobilize material interests to build personal relationships with these officers and deploy their strong *itthiphon* over civil officials [Matichon 1984: 26-32]. Therefore, it should not be thought that businessmen have acquired both economic and political *itthiphon* over bureaucrats only in recent years. They have continuously strengthened their *itthiphon* through untiring efforts for many decades.

In the study of the political role of businessmen in Thailand, most scholars tend to focus

7) For example, Luang Norakitborihan [1977: 19-25] who later became director-general of the department of local administration referred to a businessman of *itthiphon* in his memoirs. In 1927 when he was a district officer of Bangphli district, Samutprakan province, a police inspector of the district was shot. The suspect was a wealthy Chinese who owned a market and a rice mill in the town. He was a *kamnan* and the leader of an *ang-yi* (Chinese secret society). Because the suspect had a strong *itthiphon* over officials of the district, Luang Norakit could not arrest him at once. Luang Norakit had to communicate with senior officials of the central government secretly, bypassing the provincial governor, to transfer a few district officials before he

could arrest the suspect with the help of 24 policemen sent from Bangkok. In order to escape conviction, the suspect bribed witnesses and tried to offer the district officer a bribe of as much as 20 thousand baht. Failing in this, he undertook a campaign for the transfer of the district officer. When the minister of interior visited the district, he firstly tried to offer the minister a gift in order to secure an audience with him to ask for Luang Norakit's transfer. Secondly he mobilized many people in the town to petition the minister for his transfer by slandering him. Although this attempt failed too, this incident shows clearly that a wealthy businessman could exert *itthiphon* over bureaucrats at that time.

only on their direct participation in electoral politics or trade associational activities. Bureaucratic polity theorists overestimate bureaucrats' amnat and argue that this should be limited by parliament, political parties or interest groups. They make too much of the formal or institutional aspect of Thai politics and pay less attention to its informal aspect. Even those who use the clientelist framework tend to commit the error of regarding bureaucrats a priori as patrons of businessmen. Businessmen with close ties to bureaucrats are seen as the powerless who beg favors of the bureaucrats. For example, Jacobs [1971: 48] writes: "At best, a private individual who believes he has a political grivance or interest to pursue can only hope to establish some personal, individual (i.e., patrimonial) patron-client relationship with an official to insure that authority will not operate to his disadvantage, especially at a time when he is least prepared to deal with it." Yet how can those businessmen who exert *itthiphon* and manipulate the bureaucrats at will be powerless? If they cooperate with bureaucrats because of political powerlessness, the increasing power of political parties supported by businessmen must decrease their cooperation. On the contrary, the development of parliamentary democracy has added fuel to the fire. The emergence of political parties as a significant political force has encouraged businessmen to exert *itthiphon* over bureaucrats more frequently and strongly. This means that businessmen's use of *itthiphon* does not result from their political powerlessness at all. Rather, their *itthiphon* is a sign of their political powerfulness. They are the privileged class and are often patrons of bureaucrats.

It may be argued that businessmen exert

itthiphon mainly at the stage of policy implementation rather than policy making, that they influence policy making only to a limited extent, and that direct participation in parliamentary politics is more effective. However, *itthiphon* at the implementation stage is no less important for businessmen who wish to protect and further their interests politically, for at least four reasons.

The first reason is that government officials at the local level do not necessarily implement policies or orders of the central government faithfully and often mutilate them. Riggs [1966: 361] notes: "It was only the formal authority structure that was highly centralized in the Thai bureaucratic polity. To a considerable degree, each of the subordinate agencies of the government was relatively autonomous in actual operations. The effective control of the center over its subordinate operating units was not very large. In other words, the real pattern of power distribution was highly equivocal." The implementation of government policies is relatively uncertain because of such autonomy on the part of bureaucrats, their delinquency, their self-interest, or, in some cases, the infeasibility of the policies. "So basic a governmental function as law and order is personal and not universal: it is extra clout that is made available to those who have access to (for example) the chief of police. The idea of 'rule of law' is not natural to Thai society; laws are seen merely as descriptive decrees, and to activate them one must have a specific arrangement, effectively a contract between an individual and an officer or official" [McVey 1984: 116]. Even Sarit, who is famous for exercising the most authoritarian and centralized rule in modern Thailand, could not control the bureaucracy completely. For

example, he ordered the metropolitan police commander and all provincial governors to suppress hooligans (*anthaphan*). Thousands of hooligans were arrested and many of them were sent to a reformation center in Bangkok. However some of them were not hooligans. Moreover, several provinces defied the order and did not send hooligans to the center [Sapha Wijai 1964: 96]. We can conjecture that, under other prime ministers, there must have been ever more room to bend state policies at the implementation stage.

The second reason is that the politics of itthiphon waged between puh-mi-amnat (mainly bureaucrats) and phu-mi-itthiphon (mainly businessmen, but also others) is fairly stable. The famous vicious circle of Thai politics—a coup, a dissolution of parliament, a new constitution, a general election, and another coup—has shaken parliamentary politics seriously. But it has neither engendered an extensive reshuffle of the civil bureaucracy nor greatly affected local officials or the politics of itthiphon. Moreover, the transfer of all officials of a province or district to another place at one time, which would surely undermine the politics of itthiphon, is inconceivable in any circumstances.

The third reason is that the politics of itthiphon is accessible to many people. It develops at every level of the bureaucracy. In some cases businessmen must bargain with permanent undersecretaries or director-generals of the central government. But policy implementors at the provincial or district level tend to cooperate with businessmen because of their self-interest and because they are more vulnerable to itthiphon than their counterparts in the central government. Therefore, many people can readily participate in the politics of

itthiphon, according to the size of their itthiphon. In addition to wealth, information, sensai with a high official, an ability to mobilize a number of people, or even violence can be an effective source of itthiphon.

The fourth reason is that bureaucrats respond immediately and certainly to successful wielders of itthiphon. The size of benefits that can be achieved through the politics of itthiphon is usually smaller than that through parliamentary politics. However, policies and laws formulated in parliament must await implementation and may not be implemented to the letter. Thus, as a way of pursuing interests, the politics of itthiphon can be said to exceed parliamentary politics in stability, accessibility, immediacy and sureness.

Businessmen can translate their wealth into political power through the politics of itthiphon, and as such constitute a significant part of Thai political elite. That they are among the political elite is evident when we compare them with farmers, who have little resources for itthiphon over bureaucrats. The politics of itthiphon makes bureaucrats very partial and widens the gap between the rich and the poor. The politics of itthiphon does not obviate the need for electoral politics for phu-mi-itthiphon: they can pursue more interests through parliamentary democracy. But it should be noted that they can exert itthiphon even without parliament and even under a seemingly bureaucratic-authoritarian regime. They can dispense with parliamentary democracy. The politics of itthiphon is a significant reason why a Thai political system characterized by weak legislature has survived. Under such a system the military and civil bureaucracy may monopolize political amnat. However, they are not, as many

bureaucratic polity theorists argue, strong enough to monopolize political power because they must share it with phu-mi-itthiphon.

Furthermore, it is difficult to be optimistic about the democratization of Thai politics, because it is these participants in the politics of itthiphon who are the main supporters of increasingly powerful political parties. It is unpleasant for those enjoying various privileges through the politics of itthiphon to endorse the further development of representative democracy or the realization of politics which can reflect the interests of the powerless masses who are unable to participate in politics of itthiphon.

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