

บทบทวนระบอบทักษิณ: การเมืองของระบอบประชานิยม แบบครองอำนาจนำ

Revisiting Thaksinism: The Politics of Hegemonic Populism

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิชาการฉบับนี้มีเป้าหมายเพื่อทบทวนระบอบทักษิณซึ่งเคยอยู่ในฉากทัศน์ของการเมืองมาหลายทศวรรษ และความสำคัญที่มีต่อการเมืองไทยร่วมสมัย บทความนี้อาศัยกรอบแนวคิดทางทฤษฎีว่าด้วยประชานิยม พร้อมกับการสำรวจวรรณกรรมผ่านงานเขียนทางวิชาการ วารสารวิชาการ และข่าวเพื่อทำความเข้าใจระบอบทักษิณและผลพวงที่เกิดขึ้น บทความนี้ได้แบ่งการนำเสนอออกเป็นสามส่วนหลัก ได้แก่ ภูมิหลังของทักษิณ ชินวัตรกับเส้นทางการเมือง ระบอบประชานิยมของทักษิณและสถานะการครองอำนาจนำ และองค์ประกอบหลักสามส่วนของระบอบทักษิณ บทความชิ้นนี้พบว่า ถึงแม้ว่าการกำหนดนิยามของคำว่าระบอบทักษิณเป็นที่ถกเถียงมาโดยตลอด แต่บทความชิ้นนี้ต้องการนำเสนอว่า ระบอบทักษิณเป็นระบอบ 'ประชานิยมแบบครองอำนาจนำ' ซึ่งนำโดยทักษิณ ชินวัตร ระบอบที่วางนี้สะท้อนให้เห็นถึงการผสมผสานขององค์ประกอบหลายด้านตั้งแต่พื้นที่ทางการเมืองในฐานะเครื่องมือที่ก่อให้เกิดสถานะของการครองอำนาจนำ การส่งเสริมการเติบโตทางเศรษฐกิจภายในประเทศควบคู่ไปกับการยกระดับการแข่งขันในหมู่ผู้ประกอบการรายใหม่ และการสอดแทรกเข้าไปยังทุกมุมของพื้นที่ทางสังคมผ่านโครงการจัดระเบียบสังคม เพื่อบรรลุภารกิจดังกล่าว ระบอบทักษิณได้รับการพิจารณาในการเป็นโครงข่ายอันสลับซับซ้อนของความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างพรรคไทยรักไทย กลุ่มธุรกิจขนาดใหญ่ สื่อมวลชน และกองทัพที่สำคัญที่สุด ชุดนโยบายประชานิยมทางเศรษฐกิจเป็นกลไกหลักของระบอบทักษิณในการส่งผ่านทรัพยากรไปยังท้องถิ่นและชาวรากหญ้าได้โดยตรง นโยบายประชานิยมเหล่านี้เปิดโอกาสให้ทักษิณ

จักรี ไชยพินิจ

สามารถควบคุมความไม่พอใจในการเมืองไทยไว้ได้สำเร็จ จนกระทั่งในที่สุดผลักดันให้เขากลายเป็น
นักการเมืองที่สามารถครองอำนาจนำได้ในช่วงต้นศตวรรษที่ 21

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Abstract

This academic article aims to revisit Thaksinism which had been occupying the Thai political scene for decades and its importance toward the contemporary politics of Thailand. The article employs theoretical framework on populism, with literature surveys through academic publications, journals, and news to understand Thaksinism and its implications. The article has been divided into three main parts: the background of Thaksin Shinawatra and his political career; Thaksin's populism and its hegemonic position; and the three core elements of Thaksinism. The article finds that though making the definition of Thaksinism has witnessed a controversial, this article contends to argue that Thaksinism was the 'hegemonic-populism' regime led by Thaksin Shinawatra. The regime had reflected the mixing up of multifaceted elements ranging from the political arena as the mechanism to propose the hegemonic status, the promotion of economic growth domestically twinned by the enhancement of competitiveness among the new class of entrepreneur, and the penetration into every corner of social fabric through the social order campaign. To achieve the mission, Thaksinism had been envisaged as the complex web of connection among the Thai Rak Thai Party, big businesses, mass media, and military. Most importantly, the populist economy scheme was the major mechanism of Thaksinism in directing resources to the locals and grassroots. Such populist policies allowed Thaksin to successfully contain dislocations in the Thai politics, and eventually supported him toward the hegemonic politician in the early of 21st century.

Keywords: Thaksinism, Populism, Thaksinomics, Thai Politics

I. Introduction

This academic article has been originated from two main reasons. To begin with, a few years ago, while teaching politics in a classroom, I started asking my students whether they know a politician named “Thaksin Shinawatra”. Their answers appeared in a similar way that “... *we are familiar, we used to hear this name, but we do not exactly know who he is...*”. Such answers surprised me a lot and realized me to explain them that, in understanding the contemporary Thai politics, it is necessary to trace back to 2001 at least, the year that Thaksin began his office as a Prime Minister. The second reason for writing this article is when the application named “Club House” launched, Thaksin registered his accounts with “Tony Woodsome”. He had employed this platform as a public sphere to express his idea, to show his vision, and to offer solutions on several problems in Thai society, particularly in the vague period of the Covid-19 era. Not surprisingly, Thaksin’s dialogue had exotically impressed many young generations. Many of them compared him with the current prime minister’s capabilities. Some of them were keen to start studying political history a few decades ago. Since Thaksin’s name has been highlighted during this period, revisiting Thaksin’s political regime should then be interesting for the contemporary Thai politics. In the other words, Thaksinism which had been occupying the Thai political scene during 2001-2006 remains crucial and indispensable to understand the contemporary politics of Thailand. Then, my problematique is that which dimensions I should pick up to introduce young generations getting to know Thaksin in common. I therefore decide to discuss the so-called “populism”, in which such idea had laid down in Thaksin’s policies and had been being a core idea of the political economy apparatus of Thai politics in his period.

Historically, since his first day in the office as the Prime Minister of Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra has been prospered several questions among academics, policy makers, and even common people for the whole period of his office. As we have witnessed, Thaksin is a representative of the nouveau riche Sino-Thai business elite, given to the flaunting of wealth and high-flying consumption (McCargo and Pathmanand, 2005, p. 1); in the same time, he signaled a benign scheme for caring the poor through several populist campaigns, the representatives of the Forum of the Poor, a grassroots organization protesting on a range of environmental and livelihood issues. This was followed by the friendly-and-sympathetic meal with taxi drivers at the Government House (ASEAN Now, 2004), as well as protestors against the construction of Pak-

Moon Dam at their shelters. This prompted difficulties in explaining his intentions. Some believed that what he had done were sincere actions aiming for a sake of helping the poor enhancing their livelihoods; whereas, many argued that he intended to distract public awareness from the interests of wealthy cronies. In this article, I contend to argue that Thaksin had designed his policies to blend interests of both sides together. That the purpose of sustaining and accumulating more wealth and power cannot be achieved unless the poor's fates are satisfied. In order to prolong the wealthy, the poor must be carried well enough over their dislocations. Due to such complexity, while some might be familiar with the terms "Thaksinocracy", or "Thaksinomics", in this paper, the term, "Thaksinism", will be employed instead.

In terms of structure, I have divided my presentation into three main parts. Firstly, I will show the basic-but-important background of who Thaksin Shinawatra is, how he embarked into the full-fledge political career, and why he was regarded as the hegemonic leader. Secondly, a notion of populism and its evolution will be discussed. It is important to argue that Thaksin's populism was not theoretically the original version, but the neo version for promoting his hegemonic position. Thirdly, most importantly, Thaksinism will be elaborated into three aspects: those are comprised of: 'Thaksinocracy' as the domination of political supremacy; 'Thaksinomics' as the economic-growth promotion in sense of nationalism and neo-developmentalism; 'Thaksin Way' as the penetration of social fabric and the manipulation of people's minds. The article will conclude with some foresight discussions on the next decade of Thai politics though such dialogues are debatable.

II. Who is Thaksin Shinawatra?: From Tycoon Businessman Toward Hegemonic Politician

To deepen an analysis on Thaksinism, it is essential to explore Thaksin Shinawatra, the center of the systemic political regime. This section will elaborate on how Thaksin turned his role from a full-time businessman to embark on the full-fledge political career. Moreover, getting to know his cronies' businesses and how linkage to the political arena is vital to understand of how he was regarded as the hegemonic politician. Before the breakout of the WWI, we used to see the centrism of Bismarck and his ability in linking public diplomacy with providing the first mandatory in health insurance scheme for low paid workers. The role of Thaksin might be arguably

compared to what he had been doing in his office, particularly the social security policy in allocating the basic needs for the retired, unemployed, or disabled citizens (Satidporn, 2014, p. 53). This also included the welfare packages for the poor and grassroots which were known as populism.

When tracing back to the former Prime Ministers of Thailand during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, although, a new generation of Sino-Thai politicians has been witnessed and gained economic success; for example, Anand Panyarachun (former ambassador), Chuan Leekpai (lawyer and professional politician), Banharn Silpa-archa (provincial construction contractor), or Chavalit Yongchaiyudh (former army commander), we shall see that no one of them had come from the big Chinese families successfully dominating Bangkok's business community, or was a representative of the country's nouveau riche entrepreneurial class. By 2001, Thaksin's arrival in the Government House proves that the Sino-Thai clan can further step up to deepen more interests and sustain his money empire in the political arena. As Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand put it, the arrival of Thaksin reflected the culmination of the two-decade political scene that had been overwhelmed by the Chinese influenced (McCargo and Pathmanand, 2005, p. 4).

In considering how Thaksin came to power, it would be crucial to start with the 1997 Economic Crisis in Thailand, known as '*Tom-Yum-Kung Crisis*', the financial crisis triggering the economic recession in Southeast Asia region. The failure of the preceding governments in coping with the crisis, frustrations of people over the bureaucracy, and the desire for economic revival led to the rise Thaksin to political power (Teehankee, 2007, p. 9). Apparently, such severe recession prompted Thaksin into his exceeding power later since the crisis had ruined the wealthy of almost banker-capitalism groups, finance-capital groups, construction-industry groups, and other big business groups. Therefore, conservative politicians financed by these capital groups were much weaker than they used to. In contrast, capitalists; particularly, Shin Corporation, Thaksin's business empire, and businesses surrounding the *Thai Rak Thai* party had become wealthy, and then, seemed to be going to seize the political power (Tejapira, 2004, p. 227). The interesting question here is that why Thaksin's businesses and his cronies' which also hugely involved in the financial sector faced with less effect compared to those other big business groups. To answer this question, Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker point out that Thaksin has

a close relationship with Thanong Bidhya and Phokin Pollakul who, at that time, took a seat in Chavalit's government. This is meant that the agenda to float the Baht value on July 2, 1997 might be probably leaked to Thaksin, and that enabled him to prepare his telecommunication business ready for the coming recession (Phongpaichit and Baker, 2004, pp. 57-58). According to McCargo and Ukrist, it was rumors that, shortly, before the devaluation of Baht on 2 July 1997, Shin Corp. paid considerable amounts of foreign debts before the due time. That was the key factor distancing Shin Corp from affected with the float rate system of Thai Baht. Some anticipated that Thaksin's close relationship with the cabinet of the Chavalit's government allowed him to obtain the information inside, so that he could avoid the severe effects from foreign debts as other business did face (McCargo and Pathmanand, 2005, p. 42).

Initially, to expand his business empire, Thaksin's business strategies have long related to the political structure. After resigning from the police, from 1989-1991, Thaksin had won many significant concessions in which he could construct and monopolize a new market; especially, cable TV (IBC), pagers (Digital Paging Services), datanet (Shinawatra Telecom), card phone (AIS), mobile phone (AIS), phone point (Fonopoint), and satellite (Shinawatra Satellite). (Phongpaichit and Baker, 2004, pp. 45-46). It can be noticed that the prices of these telecommunication goods were not as strictly regulated as other goods; thus, these corporate could set the price with few competitors. As we had seen, the prices of mobile phone and their services fees have been placed at the high rate until the big-name DTAC, TA Orange, and Hutch were launched to compete with AIS in 2000, 2002, and 2003 respectively. However, with the first comer of the market, AIS won the market share amidst other competitors. Despite the telecommunication choices, the figure of mobile phone customers of AIS remained high (Phongpaichit and Baker, 2004, p. 204).

Eventually, he stepped into the full-fledged political arena himself. This movement differed from other big businessman like Tanin Jiavaranon (of CP) who remained relying on the close connections with the political stage, rather than embarked on the politics himself. At the first step of political career, he started joining the Palang Dharma Party and was appointed as foreign minister during 1994-1995. When Chuan Leekpai dissolved the parliament in May 1995, following a no-confidence debate and the resignation of the Palang Dharma Party from the coalition, Thaksin assumed the leadership of the party. However, under the Banharn's government, he was

assigned merely a deputy prime minister position which was usually for the senior who regarded as insufficient enough to lead a ministry. With pledging to solve the traffic problem in Bangkok, he, however, failed to improve the traffic condition. Similarly, in the 1996 general election, the Palang Dharma Party won only a single seat (by Sudarat Kaeyurapan), and this brought to an end of the party when he decided to formally dissolve Palang Dharma Party. The successor government of both Chavalit and Chuan are undermined by the 1997 Asian crash. Thaksin finally learned that he needed to shape his own term for political career, rather than subordinating his own position to the needs of others. That was the prime reason for the foundation of *Thai Rak Thai* Party, the new vehicle of him driven in the Thai politics (McCargo and Pathmanand, 2005, pp. 9-11). In the same time, he remained prolong the relationship with his cronies; particularly CP, as the supporters. In the 2001 general election, he won the landslide victory, and was repeated in the 2005 general election (Reuters, 2011). The result of both elections illustrated the feelings of people who felt bored and upset with the ineffective performance of Chuan Leekpai government. Thaksin seemed to be the best alternative at that time when lots of populism packages had been promoted since the election campaign. Moreover, because of his successful rich-business image, most voters fairly trusted him that the corruption would never happen, together with his pledge to wipe out all ways of fraud, the new political screen driving Thailand more developing is what people was thinking.

In his rhetoric, Thaksin bound up people's minds with the national identity starting from the very big name of his party to the powerful promote of pay debt back to IMF. Apparently, the name of the *Thai Rak Thai* Party was meant to "Thais love Thai", in which it explicitly reflected the notion of nationalism. The Party's name become a signal of nationalism under Thaksinism, particularly the repayment of the final installation of Thailand's debt to IMF before the deadline. Aftermath, he criticized the IMF for its loan conditionalities damaging Thai economy, declared the victory, and pledged Thai people that the economic crisis would never reappeared (Greenfield, 2006, Online). When considering back to the nationalism scheme of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, many people might compare Thaksin with Sarit's version of nationalism. However, substantially, Thaksin's way was more complex and comprehensive since his policy packages had covered a wide range of social attentions, particularly politics, economics, society, and even monarchy. Whereas Sarit hardly promoted the welfare aspect, but instead largely involved in social control

measures, and the construction of national identity, known as ‘nation, religion, and king’, as the central platform of the anti-Communism struggle (McCargo and Pathmanand, 2005, p. 6), Thaksin had shown his hegemonic tools more subtle. Such idea can be best exemplified from the famous rhetoric known as “a country is a company”. With this rhetoric, “...*A company is a country. A country is a company. They are the same. The management is the same...*” (Phongpaichit, 2004, p. 1; Phongpaichit and Baker, 2004, p. 101), he pledged to run Thailand based on business principles, thinking, and acting in a new way that was quick, decisive and effective in a CEO style (McCargo and Pathmanand, 2005, p. 5). In this sense, the PM is the CEO who runs Thailand Corporation. From the top-down perspective, coupled with the welfare promotions to win people heart, Thaksin deeply penetrated the social fabric and public thinking.

To conclude this forefront section, as Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand put it, there were five steps of how Thaksin had taken his power and wealth. To begin with, as I mentioned above, that his successful management in surviving during the 1997 economic crisis amidst the failure of other businesses had enabled him to rank the first position in wealth. He could start stepping into the political arena and sustain his money empire. Without the 1997 economic crash, for me, Thaksin would have never differentiated himself from other businesses. Secondly, that he successfully set up a political party, Thai Rak Thai Party, as a new actor was his tool in eclipsing all other parties, and soon becoming the dominant force in Thai political order. Furthermore, he created a strong group of allies in both private business as well as military cadet which prompted him to be supported and protected without anxiously. Fourthly, he reaches the channels to wide-range voters through radio broadcasting, media manipulation, or friendly relationship with the lower-class citizens. These actions were hardly seen from other previous PM or Thai elites. Finally, he was very flexible in linking his business, party, military, media, and other connections together in elaborating the web of connection regarded as “a new kind of political economy network” (McCargo and Pathmanand, 2005, p. 248). The next section will show of how and why hegemonic idea and populism are linkage components and profoundly interdependence.

III. The Evolution of Populism: The Core Idea of Thaksinism

After discussing Thaksin's first step into the politicians, I intend to show, in this section, that the term "hegemonic" and "populism" are closely linked in their definitions under the umbrella of Thaksinism. Even though we might recognize the different of these two terms theoretically, it can be argued that both terms are compounded in Thaksinism. More significantly, populism leads to hegemonic condition by means of people mostly giving their collective consent to the outstanding leader, not institution but a sole leader. In this sense, the cabinet could be anyone but the prime minister must be Thaksin who was at that time sitting in people's minds. In the other words, hegemonic status quo of Thaksinism had reinforced populism by its available power to impose any policies that both satisfy voters and intimidate dissidents at the same time.

To deeply consider the components of Thaksinism, I strongly believe that getting to know the evolution of populism as the key element of Thaksin's policies should be prior. Rather than the single face of populism that most people have reckoned this word as the tools of leaders to appease people, the meaning of this word has long been varied and historically differed from time to time. Theoretically, there are four dimensions of populism: those are, radical intellectuals' movement, radical farmers' movement, populist dictatorship, and populist economy. The last one had been laid down in the Thaksinism's notion.

The first era of populist concept is a "radical intellectuals' movement" aiming to construct an agrarian socialism by praising a farmers' and rural people's way of life (Nogsuan and Tangsupvattana, 2003, p. 251). The idol of this period of populism broke out in Russia by radically intellectual groups called "*Narodnichestvo*", which means "Populism". During the Russian revolutionary movement between the late 1850s to the 1860s and 1870s, populism is the grand term generally used to describe the ideology of Russian radicalism emerged in this period though, in the first place, no one actually used the term "Populism" in this inclusive way (Lavrin, 1962, pp. 307-308). On 1874, the peak point of the Russian revolutionary movement came. Having been incited by radical intellectuals for a period of time, lots of youngsters and adolescence went ahead to rural areas and injected the idea of commune and socialism to locals without the fear of being arrested (Nogsuan and Tangsupvattana, 2003, pp. 251-252). This was followed by the radical movement of grassroots peasants to liberate themselves from the domination of elite class. Because of this, it is my contention that this first era of populism is the "Root of Marxist's movement" since it reflects the attempt of a leader or the intelligentsia, denying the progressive

character of capitalism, and idealizing the natural economy and the spirit and institutions of the Russian peasantry, collected people with the belief that its time for revolutionary action was coming (Anselmi, 2018, p. 25). In sum, the first period of populism means the roots of revolution.

Likewise the first era, the second period of populism remains involving with the radical movements, but the focus was instead transferred from intellectuals to farmers, in a so-called “radical farmers’ movement”. In the 1980s, there were poor farmers, particularly in the Western and the Southern part of the US, forming a group called “People’s Party” whose purposes were to lessen the impact of the downturn economy, and also alleviate their suffering from poor. Their main target was to protect the interest of retail agriculturalists by opposing the dominant big businessmen and the increasing number of immigrants. (Hofstadter, 1955 cited in Nogsuan and Tangsupvattana, 2003, p. 250). This second era, thus, of populism mainly focused on the need to survival of farmers against the financial and monopolistic dynamics (Anselmi, 2018, p. 18). Sometimes, they called themselves as “the Populist”, or “the progressive movement” (Nartsupa, 2536 cited in Nogsuan and Tangsupvattana, 2003, p. 251). Moreover, they are nowadays conducting movements in the US, on the standpoint that the people’s power is more vital than that of corporations (Bainbridge, 2019, p. 556).

The third era of populism, known as populist dictatorship, have been still widespread in Latin America. Its focus was greatly shifted from focusing on locals or farmers toward the leader gaining overwhelming supports from masses or unorganized groups through the political mobilization, without caring much on institutions of democracy. In this aspect, they sometimes challenged norms of state, and hindered the old, privileged class (see also Roberts, 1995 and Nogsuan and Tangsupvattana, 2003, pp. 252-253). With this framework, the third populism had no precise political ideology since it can be either leftist or rightist. In the other words, either Maoism or Fascism can be considered populist (Anselmi, 2018, p. 33). Examples are Argentina under Juan and Eva Peron, Mexico under Cardenas, Brazil under Vargas, and Peru under Haya de la Torre. The leaders of these countries possessed strong desires to drive their countries take off to the industrialized zones. This prompted to the move of rural people to urban area and, in turn, became the mass base of the leader by promoting to provide them bread and circuses. The idea of “Nationalism” was employed by the leaders, together with the state centrism, and political parties and labor unions as tools to instigate and collect mass for their own purposes. They were

further instilled by the feeling of “charismatic” of leaders that brought about both the fear in leaders’ power as well as the sentiment of affection, faith, and admiration in their leaders. Because of this, the populist leaders can achieve their goals and eliminate dissidents without limitation (Canovan, 1987, p. 190). For those attentive readers, then, it is noteworthy to contend that the meaning of populism has long been controversial and differed on the purpose of users. Populism might reveal the idea of leftist in protecting the interests of the poor and calling for the even and justice of people. In the other side, this term can also be utilized by the right-wing technocrat to tame the rising tide of left-wing political party in Latin America. The use of the word ‘populism’ is thus interesting depending on who uses it.

The last evolution of populism here is what we called “populist economy”. The meaning of populism in recent decades tends to be focused on economic determination emphasizing on the growth rate of economy and short-term redistribution of resources by abandoning the long-term in macroeconomic equilibrium (Nogsuan and Tangsupvattana, 2003, pp. 253-254). To elaborate my discussion on Thaksinism, I intend to draw this kind of populism as the central component of Thaksinism. Unless considering the legacies of populism under Thaksinism, we cannot thoroughly understand Thaksinism. Therefore, due to the fact that there are also some common features of the populist dictatorship and the populist economy, I will bring some elements of the third evolution of populism to analyze Thaksinism by further consider on this ground of populist economy. The three common features are as followings. Firstly, the populist leaders, not entire institutions, gained the popular legitimacy from their citizens reflecting in parading on streets, welcoming leaders’ visits, broadcasting their sympathy when being criticized, or voting in elections. Secondly, the leaders will impose top-down policies served by officials, operatives, or civil servants take them for granted. And thirdly, because of the need to gain mass supports, the leaders have to regularly satisfy their citizens in order to enable them easily running their business and affairs without, or least, objection.

To apply this framework to analyzing Thaksinism, the underlying reason why Thaksin had treated his policies as a package in that the new policy will suddenly and frequently be launched as soon as the old ones are outdated or lack attention from people. His legacy remains appeared in the Yingluck Shinawatra government, Thaksin’s sister, in which several new policies signaled short-term political benefits to the government than the craft of the long-term

development (Asia Sentinel, 2013). When considering the content of the fourth era of populism together, we shall see that Thaksin had been launching series of policy packages, particularly the agrarian moratorium, village funds, OTOP, or 30-Baht scheme health care, and so on. These policies required a large budget that violated the monetary discipline. Paying all remaining debts to IMF was therefore prior necessary. This action was conducted deliberately in nationalism scheme. Once the austerity restriction had been abandoned, the populism packages could then be delivered to appease citizen and make them satisfaction with the seemingly re-distributive policies. Supplementing with social and political approaches from the third era of populism, the populism policies with social control had brought about the social order policy, war on drugs, and war on mafia. These topics will be elaborated in the following section.

To clarify more on the implications of Thaksin's populism toward the Thai contemporary politics, during 2001-2006, the populism packages had been aroused as the central component of Thaksinism. Moreover, it is apparent that the use of 'populism' in Thai politics during the Thaksin era has remained providing the legacy for the successive governments after the 2006 military coup in imposing the identical style of policies. The populism and welfare-scheme policies had laid down the consensus among Thai people that has obliged the Thai leaders to meet the need of people. For example, the 30-Baht healthcare policy has still appeared in the present government. For decades, the Thai politics has witnessed with the series of populism in exchange for the political popularity. The programs to provide healthcare, education, pensions, allowances, and other such welfare benefits have been imposed from time to time amidst the conflicts and debates between stakeholders in the implementation process, particularly taxpayers and the elite (Bureekul, Sangmahamad and Moksart, 2021, p. 121). These mean that the leaders of the government who aim to win the mass has been required to impose the populism strategy, or, at least, insert the populist elements into their policies, as Thaksin did. As Kasian Tejapira put it, Thaksin had achieved in mixing up both Grassroots Keynesianism and Capitalist Populism together (Tejapira, 2004, pp. 144-152). Rather than the sole market mechanism, Thaksinism employed the state mechanism to function and support populist style. In addition, Pasuk pointed out that the Thaksin government's so-called "populist" schemes are easily misunderstood as similar to Latin American welfare populism. With the exception of the cheap health scheme, this is not the case. The Thaksin schemes are mostly about stimulating entrepreneurship by increasing

the access to capital (Phongpaichit, 2004, p. 3). To conclude this section, the version of populism nowadays has been historically developed and significantly differed from the past. Populism with hegemonic structure was the central mechanism in prompting Thaksinism successive resulting in the landslide victory of his two general elections in 2001 and 2005 respectively. The next section will illustrate readers on the complex components of Thaksinism.

IV. Understanding Thaksinism: A Definition and Components Analysis

After discussing the evolution of populism and its central idea in Thaksinism, Thaksin Shinawatra, his businesses and cronies provided the foreground toward the political arena and his hegemonic status. This section is designed to elaborate on explain and understanding Thaksinism and its definition and components. In the light of academic aspects, defining the term so-called “Thaksinism” by deploying populism here is not easy. As discussed in the previous section, although it is controversial to make a clear-cut single definition in explaining the politics of Thaksinism which was exceptionally complex, we might have to start proposing some definitions for revisiting Thaksinism. This brings me to my argument in this article that **“Thaksinism was the ‘hegemonic-populism’ regime led by the premier leader, Thaksin Shinawatra, that had put a constant effort to sustain his own and cronies’ ‘money empire’ by means of mixing up all elements as followings: dominating the political stage to boost up his image as well as pave the way to his goals, stimulating an economic growth via imposing nationalism, penetrating the every corner of social fabric to manipulate people’s minds. These components were the controlling of the political economy in the context of capitalism”**.

According to this definition, there were the mixing up of multifaceted elements in Thaksinism. Several reasons of why the definition of Thaksinism is mentioned above can be elaborated. First of all, I use the word “mixing up of multifaceted elements” because Thaksin’s actions were clear in sense he could do everything he reckoned suitable. He did, in the same time, emphasis all elements: political stage, economic promotion, and social control. We cannot accomplishedly understand Thaksinism unless all elements are discussed. Second, some academics overlooked the entire system of the regime by stressing much on one aspect; like politics, economics, or social issues by abandoning the connection of all contents. This definition can fill this gap. Finally, the populism led by Thaksin was not the simplistic version. In contrast, it intended to construct the hegemonic system by satisfying the lower-class people and letting the

upper class citizen scoop up wealth as much as desire. This version of populism was more explicitly driven for the sake of hegemony.

A. Thaksinocracy: The Domination of Political Supremacy

In understanding the political elements of Thaksinism, the concepts provided by Pasuk Phongpaichit in explaining the prime minister as CEO and Teerayut Boonmee in constructing a so-called Thaksinocracy are beneficial. Also, surveying the military connection and some political discourses of the regime are crucial. Lastly, getting to know how Thaksin benefits from entering into the political area himself is indispensable in elaborating political conditions of Thaksinism.

In her seminar named “Statesman or Manager? Image and Reality of Leadership in SEA” held on April 2, 2004 as well as in her famous publications, “Thaksin”, Pasuk interestingly quoted the spoken sentences from Thaksin’s speech: “...*A company is a country. A country is a company. They are the same. The management is the same...*” (Phongpaichit, 2004, p. 1; Phongpaichit and Baker, 2004, p. 101). The underlying notion of the sentences reflected his perspective that he envisaged the prime minister position as a chief executive officer, or CEO, of the big corporate. With such perspective, it did mean that CEO can solely run his business without challenging employees. Once applying this model, the prime minister could therefore run the country without focusing much to their citizens’ dislocations, in which it sounds like an authoritarian regime. This contention is supported by the quotation from Thaksin that “...*Democracy is a good and beautiful thing, but it’s not the ultimate goal as far as administering the country is concerned... Democracy is just a tool, not our goal. The goal is to give people a good lifestyle, happiness and national progress...*” (The Nation, 2003 cited in Phongpaichit, 2004, p. 5). In a comprehensive outlook, although it might be persuasive that the prime minister can run the country without taking his citizens into account, I would like to point out that Thaksin had achieved an exclusive domination of the country, whilst satisfying the poor in order to avoid the anti-systemic mass movement. Such strategy was important in boosting up the legitimacy from the public and allowing him to advance his accumulation from the business empire.

Furthermore, the so-called “Thaksinocracy” as defined by Teerayut Boonmee was consisted of three principal elements as the followings (see also Boonmee, 2004). Firstly, the regime tended to centralize the power and monopolize the connection between the central government and the local administrative by cutting off the roles of old politicians and delivered

benefits directly to locals via populism scheme packages. In this manner, the power of the grand old party would be gradually reduced, and the new politician could have a chance replacing the old ones. Also, the roles of old-fashioned technocrats and conservative intellectuals were set aside. Instead, Thaksin preferred a small group of economic experts and active intellectuals advising him. Secondly, due to his political supremacy, the size of political agents would be steadily expanded; whereas, that of social sectors and community's would be less accounted. Lastly, since the roles of NGOs were also neglected, the accountability from the social sector would be lessened. These were compounded into the components of Thaksinocracy. In addition, the Thaksin government appeared to completely change the orthodox policy-making system to the institutional reform that supported his 'Prime Ministerialization', along with famous and notable policy advisors had been invited formally and informally to join in several committees (Akira, 2014, pp. 310-313).

In addition, the connection with military was one of the crucial political elements within Thaksinism itself. Not only did Thaksin graduate from the Armed Forces Academy, in securing supports from the military, he also appointed no less than 53 Army Generals to his office as advisors to the prime minister. Most of them were mainly based on the connection of Ban Phitsanulok. Indeed, regarding to the Thai political context, appointing several senior figures upon largely advisory positions was standard means to establish patronage networks and to secure support among elite groups. To be mentioned here, what Thaksin had benefited from creating a network of supporters within the armed forces by increasing the military spending was that he could influence personals in uniform serving his office. The control over the Royal Thai Army Radio and the Royal Thai Army Television Channel 5 had enabled Thaksin to gain support from the public through the Army's communications in promoting and broadcasting the Thaksin government's policies (McCargo and Pathmanand, 2005, pp.154-155). Furthermore, unlike other PMs and politicians, Thaksin possessed an ability to understands the markets, media, and language in constructing the political discourse to people (McCargo and Pathmanand, 2005, p. 166). With his weekly radio program on Saturday, he could catch the demands of consumers; at the same time, he had employed this channel to inject the idea and sets of discourse to citizen. Eventually, he achieved a domination over the political stage to boost up his image as well as pave the way for his political goals successfully.

To summarize this section, Thaksinism political aspects had succeeded political supremacy via dominating the direct channel between him and locals by cutting off the roles of technocrats, old politicians, and NGOs. Thaksin had shown the comprehensive perspective in dominating various social forces and satisfying masses. Moreover, he could maintain connections with the military, and constructed political discourses to citizens. These were the political element of Thaksinism in which “Democracy” was treated as a mere tool providing legitimacy, mechanism, and image to him. His decision to fully join in the political scene seemed to benefit him more than the previous status as an influence businessman.

B. Thaksinomics: The Promotion of Economic Growth with Nationalism and Neo-developmentalism

In analyzing the economic aspects, many might have been familiar with the popular term called “Thaksinomics”, in which the word was derived from “Thaksin” and “Economics”. For Pasuk and Baker, there are several facets of Thaksinomics: those were stimulating demand; directing credit; nurturing competitiveness; deepening capitalism; financing Thaksinomics; going dual track; promoting regionalism; and facing realities (see also Phongpaichit and Baker, 2004, pp. 99-133). In this article, I generate the three principles laid down in Thaksinomics as the followings: stimulating inside markets, imposing dual track policies, and investing in the infrastructures to expand and deepen capitalism. For stimulating inside markets, Thaksin had enhanced the purchasing power of citizens through many stimulus programs allowing citizens to buy commodities. In the name of so-called “War on Poverty”, the programs, for examples, the village funds, SMES loans, OTOP, or the three-year debt moratorium for agriculturists had enabled the government to inject more capitals into locals. These programs were allocated with the 30-Baht healthcare coverage scheme that reduced the citizens’ burdens in their public health. These programs allowed the capital allocation distributed more or less among grassroots.

For imposing dual track policies, Thaksin convinced the foreign direct investment into Thailand. As Pasuk and Baker put it, such policy was designed to create the new class of entrepreneur in Thailand (Phongpaichit and Baker, 2004, p. 113). For domestic sphere, Thaksinomics aimed to prompt citizens for the market system. Rather than drawing outside credits that mostly went to speculation, with few on real sectors as used to happen in the 1997 Economic Crisis, the inside economic strength might lead to preparedness of competitiveness for Thai

economy. While focusing on the internal development, Thaksinomics also apparently emphasized an important of high-level export. These policies reflected the World Bank promotion on the export-oriented industries (EOI). It was obvious that Thaksin was trying to encourage the notion of privatization in some government enterprises (Hewison, 2005, pp. 310-330).

For investing in the infrastructures to expand and deepen capitalism, Thaksin launched the mega infrastructure projects that he reckoned them as the way to stimulate further investment domestically and internationally. For instances, the new city project at *Nakhon Nayok*, *Khlong Prapa* elevated roadway, *Laem Pak Bia* Bridge across the Gulf of Thailand, high speed railway expansion projects, expressways and outer ring roads and connecting roads, 11 projects on new canal and river routes, 4 projects on *Chao Phraya River* bridges, and 10 projects on Motorways (Phongpaichit and Baker, 2004, p. 128).

Along with the three principals of Thaksinomics above, the other two important elements in Thaksin's economic strategies were nationalism and neo-developmentalism. In terms of nationalism, it is meant to the roles of government in promoting internal development. In promoting OTOP, for example, Thaksin employed the nationalism tone to locals that Thai people should have produced the Thailand's best products that substituted the import goods. At the same time, these products had enough quality for exporting. Moreover, the notion of economic nationalism had supported the so-called "Neo-developmentalism" (Phongpaichit, 2004). For the orthodox version of developmentalism, particular states like Japan, Korea, and Taiwan were designed to force-feed domestic capitalism by imposing directed credit, industrial policy, protective and promotional measures for selected sectors or firms, and control of labor. While, Thaksinomics' neo-developmentalism was significantly different. Thailand under the Thaksin administration had obviously pursued the trade liberalization and later the financial liberalization. The political economy structure was highly opened and externally oriented. Thaksin argued that Thailand was entering the age of transnational production networks, so that external competition would prosper Thailand's capability amidst transnational production chains. Nevertheless, some might argue that particular sectors in Thailand, particularly media, telecommunications, agricultural products, were protected from foreign competitions. This was true and paradox in itself that the liberalized economic market was intervened by the state to protect some businesses. I contend to argue that it was what we called "neo-developmentalism", in which the role of government had been

changed in sense that some big businesses might be protected whilst the poor were also facilitated from the government.

To sum up this section, Thaksinomics' idea was to manage the parallel track of economic plan. The first track was designed to create high paying jobs among Thai labors, while the second track was well planned to pursue a gradual shift of Thai economy from exporting-oriented dependencies toward greater reliance on the more controllable domestic market. This prompted the government's actions to stimulate domestic demands in the short run through increased government expenditures on various social programs, encouraged the competitiveness of the new class of entrepreneur in the long run (Looney, 2004, p. 71). The next section will deal with the attempt to control public dissidents during Thaksin's administration.

C. Thaksin Way: The Manipulation of Public Dissidents through Carrots and Sticks

After discussing the political and economic sphere from the previous sections, Thaksinism also reflected many aspects that showed an attempt to penetrate every corner of social fabric. Thaksin had imposed many social policies to manipulate people's minds ranging from convincing opinions, constructing a set of truth, and imposing carrots and sticks. According to many social policies of the Thaksin government, he intended to construct a single set of truth and monopolize it. For instances, once he argued that the free trade agreement should be pursued, he expected no opposing idea against his policies. No matter how adverse effects from the trade liberalization, those who opposed what he offered might be meant to the opposition of state development. These were reasons of several times he criticized NGOs and civil society as a handful people who resisted the national development (Phongpaichit and Baker, 2004, p. 144). This is a condition called a "binary opposition" when one people has just two choices. He/ she has to decide either A or B only. That was why we sometimes heard the prime minister blamed academics, technocrats, or dissidents who criticized as "too little to understand", "misunderstood", or "lack of knowledge". This indirectly forces citizens to censor themselves.

In terms of social policies, Thaksin usually imposed both hardwood and softwood methods, or carrots and sticks, in coping with different situations and time. For stick, or hardwood, it was kind of violence frequently imposed for the civil society, NGOs, media, or academics. Lots of strong measures were employed by the gung-ho leader starting from the lowest to the hardest; those were blaming, criticizing back, intimidating, and carrying. One of the most well recognized

case, for example, was “War on Drugs”, in which the policy led to 2,873 Thais dead during three months from February to April 2003. While some victims were whole families, women, children and old people, some bodies were left out and opened in a public display, public photographs, and local press (Bangkok Post, 2013). In contrast, the second one as softwood methods, or carrots, was providing welfare for locals and the poor who were mass-based voters and supporters of the party. Many policies were consistently launched as if a package from the company for complimenting their customers. There were, for example, the 30-Baht healthcare coverage scheme cares, the village fund, or OTOP. These were the social contract that the government intentionally provides to their people as the basic function of any effective governments (Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, 2004, pp. 135-139). In the other words, these social measures achieved in taming the mass not to become an anti-movement opposing the interests of elite.

Money was also another kind of carrots. Thaksin’s managerial style relied heavily on his populist policies that had earned him constant loyalty among lower income people (BBC News, 2014b, Online). Wherever dislocations erupted, money-given would be imposed there. This sounded like the CEO managing the company and spending money to appease his dissident employees in order to settle problems. In case that money enticement was not effective, the hard measures would then be taken later. In case of corporate, the disobedient or indisciplined employees may be fined, or dismissed. Any disturbance will finally be solved. Supposing it was in a private company, whenever employees feel unhappy with their CEO, increasing salary or welfare, or even intimidating, might be the powerful methods in lessening their dislocations. However, in case of state, the situation will not be the same. I strongly believe that the philosophy of CEO-style management was fairly ineffective and severely dangerous when applied to some particular cases. The problem in the Far South of Thailand exemplified well. It had long been proved for decades that the notion of carrots and sticks was not effective ones since the problem has long been sparked by the style of management, as well as the misunderstanding in Muslim culture. In these circumstances, money was just the scratch on the hard skin; while, violence could be escalated. As Surat Horachaikul put it, when it came to the complex and profound case in the Far South of Thailand, “money and violence” philosophy was not entirely workable (Horachaikul, 2003, p. 143).

The manipulation of media was another example of carrots and sticks. As having mentioned above, Thaksin had created a mutual connection with the military group. Because of this, he could easily influence the army's channel; the Royal Thai Army Radio and the Royal Thai Army Television Channel 5. Besides, with his gigantic and expansive networks, Thaksin influenced lots of mass media; like, satellite, weekly radio broadcasting, ITV channel, UBC channel, telecommunications, and mobile phones. Also, he had a close relationship with the Maleenon family whose business was one of the biggest multimedia companies in Thailand when one member of Maleenont family was appointed as Thaksin's cabinet members (Crispin, 2003). Moreover, in an attempt to tame these medias, Thaksin mainly based their way on the mixture of law, regulation, and buying. For example, iTV Channel, formerly Thailand's only independent television station was bought at a majority stakeholder by Shin Corporation. The TV programs were turned to the pro-Thaksin after that (Crispin, 2003).

The last point in this section was that the comprehensive policies in social control, particularly, the "social order" campaign promoted by the government as means to cope the bad youth. The measures; like a pub curfew, a notion of virginity, and the serious attempt to wipe out drugs, had been widely and strictly imposed. Bangkok, for example, which had long been well known for the 24-hour party center, was imposed "the entertainment zoning area". Some areas were allowed to open until 2 a.m., while others were allowed to open until 1 a.m. sharp. Such campaign was aimed to clean up the country's scandalous image and freeze the moral decay among youth and young generations (The New York Times, 2006). Supposed that we regarded the welfare scheme for locals and the poor as the measures for taming the mass, these social order packages came to serve a so-called "family jigsaw" in which the middle class, and the riche upper class could be guaranteed that their children would be warmly saved in the Thaksin's government's hand.

Successfully, he could tame the every classes of society ranging from the poor at lower class, to the middle class, and the upper class. This situation led to what we called a "great dilemma" for the middle class, and perhaps the upper class that mostly devoted their time in earning and running businesses.

V. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations: What We Have Learnt After The September 19, 2006 Coup

As we have been discussing and analyzing the term “Thaksinism” above, this paper is divided into three main parts. The first section discusses on the background of Thaksin as a changing role from the successful business tycoon into the full-fledge political career. He was remarkably remembered for a landslide victory in the 2001 and 2005 general elections. Both elections enabled him to become the hegemonic status before the coup on September 19, 2006. The second section discusses a notion of populism and its evolution. Thaksin’s populism, known as “populist economy,” enabled him to gain tremendous support from mass and grassroots. Populist scheme packages with the hegemonic status was the central idea of Thaksinism. The last section deals with the analysis of the three components on Thaksinism comprised of: ‘Thaksinocracy’ as the domination of political supremacy; ‘Thaksinomics’ as the economic-growth promotion in sense of nationalism and neo-developmentalism; and ‘Thaksin Way’ as the manipulation of people’s minds through using carrots and sticks strategy.

Before ending up this article, I aim to provide some epilogue and what we have learnt after the Thaksin government was overthrown by the September 19 Coup in 2006. It is interesting to illustrate that the 2006 military coup against Thaksin were not necessarily anti-democratic but counter democratic. Even though the 1997 Thai Constitution was formed by the consensus of civil society reformers, the Left, and the Bangkok middle class, the 2006 coup marked the greatest setback in efforts at democratic consolidation of Thailand. Subsequently, the coup against the government of Thaksin Shinawatra signified the re-entry of military intervention in Thai politics (Teehankee, 2007, p. 8). Since 2006, the Thai politics has been on verge of unstable. We have witnessed the several sentences from the Constitutional Court to dissolve the political party. It might be argued that most dissolved party had a good relationship with *Thai Rak Thai* Party. Moreover, the attempt to hold an election was blocked. Even the election finished, the street demonstration opposing the election results persisted. This was because the 2007 new constitution protected and promoted the interests of the military. Then, the Thai politics had been overwhelmed with the two opposing groups, Red Shirts vs. Yellow Shirts, in which both groups, often violently, represented the pros and cons against Thaksin and his political brand (Jha, 2011, p. 325). The protest came up with the political tragedy when the world has witnessed the deadly

attack on Thai protest camp in Bangkok in 2010. Over 90 demonstrators of the pro-Thaksin groups were killed from the government suppression (BBC News, 2014a). Eventually, bringing back the vicious cycle of Thai politics, the failure to peacefully contain the protest paved the way for the May 22, 2014, Coup led by General Prayuth Chan-O-Cha.

Since then, Thai politics has signaled a fracture of political groups, with a frustration of public awareness in the ability of government. From 2006 to the present, the Thai politics has been journeyed with several crises: six governments for both civilian and military cabinets, two military coups in 2006 and 2014, and numerous street fights. Based on Gramsci's perspective, Watcharabon argued that Thailand has been facing with the crisis of hegemony, in which social disparities are on a rise (Buddharaksa, 2019, pp. 47-48). More interestingly, what we have learnt from the nearly two decades from (2006-2022) is that Thaksin's name has remained at the centre of Thailand's continuing political development. His most notable contributions that has long been embedded among Thai politics are the idea of state welfare. The succeeded governments have regarded welfare as inevitable devices for winning political support and gaining legitimacy from the mass and the grassroots. Among elite, neither political parties, governments, bureaucrats, nor military can ignore the power of the masses in their electoral power. Their consent toward the government, either the elected regime or the authoritarian regime, are obliged to those in power, not just simply controlling them (Hewison, 2010, pp. 130-131). Because of the need to implement the welfare scheme policies, the Thaksin governments and his cabinets had endorsed several social safety net policies during 2001-2006. However, rather than employing the shared universal idea of welfare as with the global civil society movement and the left-wing perspective, Thaksin's versions of welfare policies had explicitly spined the liberal-conservative philosophy as its core idea. This is because the purpose of Thaksin's welfare was not particularly on reducing gap, alleviating the poor, or prospering the justice on standard of living. Instead, the series of social safety net implements had a mere reflection on political tools supporting the hegemonic status in the democratic regime. This is meant that the meaning of populism historically varies based on who delivers, on which purposes, and on whose benefits.

To finish this article, I would like to suggest some recommendations toward the new elected government are as the followings. Firstly, the construction of 'otherness' in Thai politics must not be employed. Those who supported Thaksin, his sister, or the allied parties does not

mean they oppose the government. Instead, their opinions should be included to enhance the political development of Thai politics. Creating of the enemies should not be utilized as a device to protect the interests of elites (Chachavalpongpun, 2011, p. 1019). To achieve this mission, the new elected government should more listen to press, academics, and NGOs with sincere, not just a campaign, illusion, or etiquette. The sole action, with the single perspective from top-down evaluation might be failed. Instead, the bottom-up perspective might be needed to stabilize Thai politics. Secondly, we have learnt that no government can settle down the chronic violence in the Far South of Thailand. The bombing incidents are persisting. The new elected government should take this problem as an urgent matter. The best solution might be to broaden their minds in listening to Muslim locals, academics, technocrats, and NGOs more willingly. The basic reason behind this recommendation is that Thaksinism had tried to reduce the insurgencies with directing the welfare policies to locals, but it was failed. Therefore, it would be useless if the indignant feeling of the Muslim people remains existed. Thirdly, the new government should have tried to find revenues to compensate loss during the Covid-19 pandemic. The 'future money' that had been allocated to heal people during a few years should be filled. At the same time, the new government should stop spending money for the sake of populism. Rather, the comprehensive welfare, with the progressive tax should be implemented. Lastly, the new elected government should sit and talk with the gigantic corporate in Thailand to plan and design the new reform program. The new economic plan should be concerned on both the competitiveness and a promotion of social benefit and public goods. If the gap of the 'have' and the 'have-not' is still existing and widening, the long-term political economy structure cannot be stable.

Considering the Thai political scene of contemporary period, it is crucial to note that many progressive Thai and foreign scholars, especially 2005-2006, had regularly criticized Thaksin on his policies, hegemonic status, scandals, or even ideologies. Thaksin's main critiques were on the use of populism in enhancing his hegemonic status. However, the situation has gradually changed during 2014-2019 when the 2014 military coup led by General Prayuth Chan-O-Cha erupted. The democratic-supported movement has inverted to the period of Thaksin administration. The breakout of the Covid-19 has firmly indicated the ineffective approach of the present government in dealing with the zero income of people during the lock-down policy, the slow pace of vaccines distribution, and the concrete plan to raise national revenue. Such failures

have disclosed the class structure of Thailand where the gap between elite and the poor are widening. The more failures of the Prayuth government in dealing with the economic and social malfunctions, the more popularity of people who desire Thaksin, at least his proxies, to govern. This analysis can be exemplified well from the phenomenon that Thaksin supporters have desired to lure votes to the *Pheu Thai* Party, which has built up from the former premier's popularity and financial expertise (Nikkei Asia, 2021). At the time I am writing this paper, there is rumor that Thaksin plans to come back to Thailand amidst the panic of the conservative elite. This rumor has been intensified from an opening of Paethongtan Shinawatra, Thaksin's daughter, fielding for the premiership of the next election (Bangkok Post, 2022). There is anticipated that the Prayuth government might be dissolved sooner or later, and the general election might be hold in the following year. I recommend all of us to closely follow the reason and result of this action, and mutually participate the new chapter of Thai politics.

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