ร้อยเอก สรศักดิ์ งามขจรกุลกิจ | กองวิชาประวัติศาสตร์ ส่วนการศึกษา โรงเรียนนายร้อยพระจุลจอมเกล้า

The Seri Thai Movement:
A Prosopographical Study

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้เสนอมุมมองใหม่ในเชิงความรู้ทางวิชาการเกี่ยวกับขบวนการเสรีไทย คือแทนที่จะอธิบายผ่านขบวนการใต้ดินต่อต้านญี่ปุ่นในระหว่างสงครามโลกครั้งที่ 2 อย่างที่นิยมกันตลอดมา ผู้วิจัยกลับพิจารณาขบวนการนี้ ในบริบทการเมืองภายในของไทยเองในฐานะเป็นพันธมิตรแรกของการต่อต้านลัทธิเผด็จการทหารนิยมในประวัติศาสตร์การเมืองไทยสมัยใหม่ คือเป็นผลสะท้อนของความขัดแย้งและการต่อสู้ที่ต่อเนื่องค่อนข้างยาวนานภายในกลุ่มผู้นำนับตั้งแต่หลังการเปลี่ยนแปลงการปกครอง พ.ศ. 2475 เป็นต้นมา

การวิจัยนี้ใช้วิธีการ Prosopography เป็นวิธีวิทยาในการศึกษาภูมิหลังของผู้นำไทยจำนวน 600 คน ประกอบด้วย กลุ่มเจ้านาย 100 คนกลุ่มขุนนางเก่า 128 คนกลุ่มคณะราษฎร 114 คนและที่เหลือคือกลุ่มผู้นำท้องถิ่นที่ได้รับเลือกตั้งเป็นสมาชิกสภาผู้แทนราษฎรและผู้นำทหารอื่น ๆ เช่น คณะรัฐประหาร

2490 วิธีการ Prosopography เป็นเครื่องมือวิจัยทางสังคมศาสตร์และมนุษยศาสตร์ที่มีประสิทธิภาพในการศึกษาพฤติกรรมทางการเมืองของกลุ่มผู้นำ และได้รับความนิยมนำมาประยุกต์ใช้วิจัยอย่างแพร่หลายในโลกวิชาการตะวันตกตั้งแต่ปลายทศวรรษ 1920 เป็นต้นมา ด้วยวิธีการนี้ผู้วิจัยเห็นว่าจะให้คำอธิบายอย่างมีน้ำหนักได้ว่าอะไรคือปัจจัยหลักในความขัดแย้งภายในกลุ่มผู้นำไทย

ผลการศึกษาแสดงให้เห็นคำตอบทางการเมืองในระดับพื้นฐานว่า ผู้นำไทยจำนวน 600 คนนั้น มีความแตกต่างกันอย่างมาก ทั้งในด้านสถานภาพทางสังคม ฐานะทางเศรษฐกิจ และสำนักความคิดทั้งในเรื่องที่เกี่ยวกับประชาธิปไตยและแนวทางการพัฒนาประเทศ ความแตกต่างกันนี้เป็นผลโดยตรงมาจากตัวแปรภูมิหลังทางเศรษฐกิจ สังคม วัฒนธรรมและประสบการณ์ของแต่ละกลุ่ม และจะกลายเป็นปัจจัยที่สำคัญในการรวมตัวหรือเกาะกลุ่มในความขัดแย้งและการต่อสู้ทางการเมืองภายในกลุ่มผู้นำ

ไทยภายหลัง พ.ศ. 2475 เรื่อยมา โดยเฉพาะในช่วง
การก่อตั้งขึ้นของขบวนการเสรีไทย เมื่อกองทหาร
ญี่ปุ่นบุกรุกเข้ามาในประเทศไทย และการสลายตัว
ไปของขบวนการนี้หลังการรัฐประหาร 2490

Abstract

This study argues that the Seri (Free) Thai
Movement during the Second World War was
the first alliance of anti-military authoritarianism
in Thai domestic politics. It was not as much
an underground anti-Japanese occupation as
normally understood. The movement was in
fact a continuing dynamism of factional poli-
tics since the coup in 1932. This research is
the prosopography of the 600 leading mem-
bers of the four elite groups in Thai politics
since 1932 until the post-war period: the royal
family, the aristocracy, the new elite, and the
Isan leaders. Consulting several kinds of sources,
including parliamentary archives, cremation
volumes and interviews, the study collects in-
formation on who they were, their family back-
grounds and connections, careers, statuses,
business, wealth, friendship circles, and so on.
This study, then, analyses every group by vari-
ous criteria relevant to each group to discern
its sub-division, the relationship between so-
cial backgrounds and their politics, schools of
thought, and eventually, factionalism. This fac-
tionalism, this study suggests, was the force
behind Thai politics since 1932, in the pre-war
period, through the entire war time including
behind the Seri Thai Movement, and eventu-
ally was the factor for the rise and fall of the
Seri Thai in domestic politics until 1947 when it
was crushed by a military coup group that
brought Thailand into the early Cold War.

Introduction

The first alliance against military
authoritarianism in modern Thai history occurred
in the form of an underground resistance during
the Second World War when Japanese troops
entered Thailand on 8 December 1941. After
some token skirmishes against the Japanese
to vindicate the country's honor, the military
regime under Phibun allowed Japanese forces
through Thai territory and then joined Japan
as an ally in the war. Phibun hoped to save
the army and the country, at least its formal
sovereignty, and to escape the ravages of
Japanese conquest. This action, however,
paved the way for his rivals to set up an
underground movement against him as a
collaborator and dictator.

The Thai resistance movement against
the Japanese presence and Phibun's war policy
started shortly after the outbreak of the war
in the Pacific region. The movement was first
organized by various groups both at home
and abroad. Banding together as a united
front under the dynamic and charismatic lead-
ership of Pridi, it became known as the Seri
Thai movement. Although this movement ap-
peared in the form of an anti-Japanese resis-
tance, as is often claimed, its activities were
in fact more a response to the domestic poli-
tics than to the war or the Japanese occupa-
tion. The Seri Thai movement, in fact, was a
result of factional conflicts among the four
Thai elite groups: the royal family, the aristoc-
racy, the new elite and the local elite led by
the Isan leaders. The movement, therefore,
was a significant chapter in the domestic Thai

politics during the wartime and the early post-war eras.

The conventional history of modern Thailand, however, suggests that the Seri Thai movement was an underground operation primarily in response to the Japanese occupation during the war.[1] Contrary to the conventional history, this study argues that we should consider it as an alliance of those who opposed Phibun's military dictatorship in the context of Thai politics from the 1932 coup to 1949. In this brief period of modern Thai history, the first coalition against the military regime was formed, but shortly was destroyed due to the weakness of the alliance itself. It is clear from those events that the emergence of the movement and its dissolution were interwoven with Thailand's domestic political conflict rather than the war and the Japanese presence. The movement was born out of the ongoing political conflict and changes stemming from the 1932 coup, which had overthrown the absolute monarchy and replaced it with a constitutional system. Although democratic at first, by the late 1930s the new regime became dominated by the army under Phibun, initiating a period of a successful military dictatorship just prior to the outbreak of the war.

The war produced a dramatic impact on the military authoritarianism. But since it was temporary, it is hard to discern significant lasting effects on Thai politics. In many respects the case of postwar political life in Thailand would not readily support Harry J. Benda's transformation school, "that the war resulted in new generations of elite."[2] In fact, the war years in Thailand, unlike few other parts of Southeast Asia, did not create new elite.[3] Thai elite who became dominant during the war years already had influence in the decade before the war. In other words, Thai elite experienced neither significant power shifts nor starting transformations; rather there was continuity, resembling Alfred W. McCoy's "elite continuity thesis."[4] The Japanese presence only hastened and united those who had opposed the military regime together under the guidance of Pridi. At first Pridi lacked clear command of the Seri Thai movement, but by the end of the war he had established control over the organization through his rela-

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[1] For example, see John B. Haseman, **The Thai Resistance Movement during the Second Word War.** (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1978); and Thamsook Numnonda, **Thailand and the Japanese Presence, 1941-1945,** Research Notes and Discussion no.6 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1977).

[2] For the transformation school, see Harry J. Benda, "The Japanese Interregnum in Southeast Asia," in **Imperial Japan and Asia: A reassessment,** ed. Grant K. Goodman (New York: Columbia University, 1967); and **Continuity and Change in Southeast Asia** (New Haven: Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, no. 18, 1972); and Josef Silverstein, ed., Southeast Asia in World War II: Four Essays (New Haven: Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, no. 7, 1966).

[3] See Alfred W. McCoy, " Introduction," in **Southeast Asia Under Japanese Occupation,** ed. Alfred W. McCoy New Haven: Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, no. 22, 1980), 1-8.

[4] McCoy, Southeast Asia, 5-6.

tives, friends, trusted men, followers, and allies. More importantly, he had managed to use his intimacy with university professors and students as well as his loose connections with the navy faction and the Isan leaders to assert his leadership over domestic politics.

After the war ended, Pridi and his allies continued to manipulate the Seri Thai underground organization to establish a postwar parliamentary democracy. In 1947, however, they failed to prevent a military comeback. The 1947 coup marked the Seri Thai's sudden political decline and signaled the return of the military to the dominant position it had occupied for most of the period since 1932 and would occupy until 1973. The ending of the movement as an active political force was also a result of internal conflicts, a result of the 1947 coup leaders' crackdown, particularly after Pridi's aborted revolt in early 1949.

The major turning point in modern Thai politics, unlike that of Southeast Asia, thus was not the result of the Japanese presence itself, but the consequence of domestic politics during the war years and especially after the war from 1947 to 1949. Both English and Thai studies of the wartime era neglect this crucial point. Even though conventional historians have factored the Seri Thai movement and its actors into the wartime picture, domestic and factional politics are still remarkably absent in modern Thai history of the period.

This is the study of domestic, factional politics and its impact on Thailand and the region during the war. In other words, it is a history of the Second World War in Southeast Asia from the perspective of domestic politics instead of a Japanese occupation or from the opposite end of the Japanese presence. More specifically, the study is an attempt to reassess the most fundamental premise about the Seri Thai movement and about the wartime period posed by the conventional historians and Benda's transformation school. In addition, the present study also attempts to evaluate certain hypotheses which many bureaucratic scholars have proposed to explain Thai political phenomenon.

In order to better understand the Seri Thai movement and its role in a broad political context, a new method and model are required. First of all, I would argue that we should consider the movement from its origin to its dissolution as part of Thai domestic politics going back as far as in 1932 or before. In this way, we will seek the roots of its political actors: how and why the four elite groups were different in their socio-economic backgrounds as well as their political intentions, how and why they later managed to come together in an alliance that ultimately led to the overthrow of the military dictatorship, but failed to establish a democratic government. Despite being the main historical actors of national politics, the four elite groups, as the

major political factions during that time, 1932-1952, are overlooked. No one has yet systematically analyzed them as a group in terms of their different social origins, cultural and political experiences, and ideologies or schools of thought.[5]

Methodology

To explain the dynamic of factional politics during the Seri Thai period, I applied one of the most important methods of quantitative history, namely prosopography or collective biography, as the method of interpreting this history. This method, according to Lawrence Stone, who made a survey of its literature in 1971, works best under three conditions: when it is applied to easily defined and fairly small groups over a limited period of not much more than a hundred years, when the data is drawn from a very wide variety of sources which complement and enrich each other, and when the study is directed to solving a specific problem.[6] It has been employed regularly by historians since about 1930, in particular by political historians such as Sir Lewis Namier, and is increasing in popularity because it lends itself to computerization.

The study of this method, usually but not necessarily a biography of the elite, is the investigation of the common background characteristics of a group of actors in history by means of a collective study of their lives.[7] For example, those of the elitist school have been concerned with small-group-dynamic, power elites such as Roman or United States Senators, or English MPs or cabinet members, or assemblymen in developing countries.[8] But the same process and model can be and have been applied to revolutionary leaders, professional groups such as lawyers and military groups, and women studies as well.

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[5] No scholars have studied Thai elite by prosopography. There are a few who have studied members of the National Assembly. Yet virtually all of the studies of the Assembly to date have focused on only elected members and have been based on a few easily quantifiable variables like occupation, educational qualifications, age and fathers' professional titles. For instance, see Vichai Tunsiri, **"The Social Background and the Legislative Recruitment on the Thai Members of Parliament and their Political Consequences"** (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1971); David Morell, **"Power and Parliament in Thailand: The Futile Challenge, 1968-71"** (Ph. D. diss., Princeton University, 1974); and James Soren Ockey, **"Business Leaders, Gangsters, and The Middle Class: Societal Groups and Civilian Rule in Thailand"** (Ph. D. diss., Cornell University, 1992).

[6] Lawrence Stone, **"Prosopography,"** Daedalus 100 (1971): 69. Stone's work is still the most important article on the prosopographical method.

[7] Ibid., 46. Elite, in the sense of power holders, have been the main object of prosopographical research, but it has never been denied that the possibilities of the prosopographical method are much wider.

[8] Ibid., 47. After Stone reviewed the historiographical prosopographers in 1971, there are still many scholars using or applying this method to study elites in Europe, American, and developing countries. For example, see William Stanley Langston, **"Coahuila in the Porfiriato, 1893-1911: A study of Political elites"** (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1980); and Gilbert M. Bogner, **"Knighthood in Lancastrian England: A prosopograhical approach"** (Ph.D. diss., Ohio University, 1997).

My method for analysis of individuals is primarily based on a combination of both classical and modern collective biographies which, I hope, reveals the web of socio-cultural ties that bind the Seri Thai factions together. This study will try to keep carefully collected data on the minutiae of political interest in balance with the evidence of the beliefs that swayed men's minds and the larger allegiances that overrode the ubiquitous factions. Thus, while Namier and most classical prosopographers confine themselves primarily to a socioeconomic analysis, the present study moves close to that of the modern perspectives, which focus on idea, ideology and culture, and also have developed their techniques and models out the history of eighteenth-century England.

Most of modern studies shift their methods from the emphasis of the earlier classical works to the modern ones, but their main focus is economic determinism of Marxist thought. Their modern methods and models, however, are not applicable in the case of the Seri Thai movement. Although Thai society might be viewed in terms of social classes, Thailand cannot be said to have had a class system in the traditional European sense of the term. The traditional Thai social structure emphasized a consciousness of status rather than class, and there is no evidence of the kind of social unrest which would indicate class conflict.[9]

In the case of Thailand without class contention, Max Weber's paradigm of social interaction is a more useful model.[10] Admittedly, political struggle in Thai society was not class conflict, although there was conflict between commoners and princes before and after the 1932 coup. The four principal contending Thai elite groups within society were somewhat separated by a considerable gulf, a gulf created not by class per se, but by a combination of status, wealth, political experience and ideology. In other words, the divisions among these four elite groups were deeply rooted in terms of socioeconomic backgrounds, culture and schools of thought.

Thai politics should be regarded as conflict between the four elite factions, not as deep-seated conflicts between classes. The conflict between the royal family and the aristocracy led by Phya Mano's group and Pridi's civilian faction over the economic plan in 1933, for example, became a battle of rhetoric and ideology, but with no class content. This is so because those who were involved in the conflict came from every class, and they were really motivated by a combination of status, wealth, and ideology. Both sides consisted of members from the royal family, the aristocracy, and the new elite. But while Phya Mano's royalist-conservatives tended to be higher status, wealthier, and more traditional view; the Pridi camp tended to be lower status, poorer people, and more pro-

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[9] David A. Wilson, **Politics in Thailand.** (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), 51.

[10] Form the perspective of the present inquiry, the more multivariate model of social interaction proposed by Max Weber is probably more useful than that of Marx and Engels. For more details of Weber's ideas, see H.H. Gerth and C. Mills, ed., From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (London: Kegan Paul, 1947).

gressive ideology. Instead of a class struggle, this conflict was similar to that between the deputies of the third estate and members of the nobility during the Revolutionary period in France. Political struggle among the Thai elite thus was not as the Marxists characterized it, one of class conflict; rather, it was one of "wealth, status and culture" which is offered by Timothy Tackett who has studied the French Revolution.[11]

The prominent scholars who have studied the history of the French Revolution include Georges Lefebvre, George Rude, and Timothy Tackett. Lefebvre and Rude focus on a socioeconomic analysis in their studies of the political elite and of the collective psychology of the peasants and the urban masses.[12] But while applying the ideas of Lefebvre and Rude, Tackett also adopts the perspectives of the cultural history. Tackett's main question is not to answer what caused the French Revolution, but how and when did men become revolutionaries? To solve this puzzle, he has recourse to historical prosopography. He has conducted extensive research on the revolutionary experience of the specific individuals who participated in the Revolution. He based his research on a painstaking collective biography of 129 deputies, or about 10 per cent of the twelve hundred elected to the Estates-General in 1789.

Yet Tackett, unlike Namier, focuses not only on what men did but what they said, wrote, and thought as well. He argues, "If we are to grasp the full reality of the delegates' pre-Revolutionary experience, we must broaden the inquiry to include not only their social and geographical origins, their careers, and their economic situation, but also the far more difficult and complex problems of their values and political culture."[13]

Tackett's method and model fit well with the politics of the Seri Thai movement and Thai political life since 1932 in general. Because the Seri Thai movement lacked a broad political base, family ties and business-interest connections, its nature did not seem to function as described by the classical school. Furthermore, even though Thai elite as individuals acted in accordance with their interests, they could do so only because they had schools of thought or culturally and ideologically acquired ways to think about what their interests were, what ends would best serve those interests, and what strategies were available for achieving those ends. More remarkably, members of the four elite groups tended to be moved by a convergence of constantly shifting forces, a cluster of influences such as status, kinship, friendship, economic interest, ideas, ideologies, political principle, schools of thought, and so on, which all play their vari-

[11] Timothy Tackett, **Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789-1790).** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[12] Georges Lefebvre, **The Coming of the French Revolution.** (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1947); George Rude, **The Crowd in the French Revolution.** (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

[13] Tackett, **Becoming a Revolutionary.** 19.

ous parts and which can usefully be disen-
tangled only for analytical purposes.

By applying the prosopographical ap-
proach, I have paid close attention to the
history of the parliament and its actors based
on the biographies of members who sat in
the house during the period, 1932-1952. I have
included all members of the Assembly. This
means that the study covers appointed mem-
bers or the Senators although they were largely
controlled by the government. The analysis
will be conducted at the levels of the indi-
vidual actors, of the group formed by them,
and of the Seri Thai activities as a political or
socio-cultural phenomenon. The analysis on
level one and two will be based heavily on
the methods of prosopography. The focus is
thereby not only on the biographical data,
but more on the collective characteristic of
the groups, in order to understand the history
of these groups as effective elements in politi-
cal and social history.

This is the first study on Thai history that
employs prosopography. The names of ap-
proximately 1200 Thai elite have been col-
lected. Approximately half of them involved
in the political struggle during 1932-1952 and/
or the Seri Thai activities. The portraits of Thai
elites presented in these pages are constructed
from those 600 or so men. Of these, about
100 men came from the royal family both
senior and junior princes, 128 from the senior
officers and officials of the aristocracy, 114
from the new elite. The rest were elected
members or the local elite, businessmen, and

prominent military members of the 1947 Coup
Group, which replaced the new elite in 1947
and lasted in power until the early 1970s.

Sources for conducting a prosopographical study of Thai Elite

Naturally the raw materials from which
the collective biographical studies are con-
structed are mostly full biographical dictionar-
ies which had been in progress in European
countries for a very long time before Namier's
name appeared on the scene.[14] Yet there is
no dictionary of national biographies nor any
private document collections of collective bio-
graphical dictionaries in Thailand in traditional
or modern written forms. In undertaking such
a task, I had to rely on a variety of redundant
and diffuse sources, autobiographies and bi-
ographies, contemporary memoirs, newspa-
pers, books, periodicals as well as archival
material and government records.

Fortunately, sources for conducting a
demographic study of all members who sat in
the house during the 1930s-50s now abound.
Except for income data such as inherited
economic position and source of personal
wealth, much biographical data--about births
and deaths, marriage and family, social ori-
gins, education, religion, and occupation--have
been published by local and Bangkok jour-
nalists, historians, antiquarians, private publish-
ers, parliamentary officers, members of the
House themselves, and so on. Most of them

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[14] Stone, **"Prosopography"**. 48-50.

are held in the National Assembly library, the National Archives, and the National Library in Bangkok.

In addition, some Thai elite biographical data are provided by diplomats from the US and the UK and in the O.S.S. reports. In the United States, fairly comprehensive records of the State Department are held in the National Archives, Washington D.C. The General Records of the Department of State (Record Group 59), Records of Foreign Service Posts (Record Group 84), and the World War II Records of the Department of State (Record Group 226) have been helpful in filling the gaps remaining in Thai documents, and in grouping the members of the house, particularly during and after the war. In England, British Foreign Office documents at the Public Record Office (FO 371) also have been helpful in disclosing new information about the political factions/the members of the house, especially regarding leaders of the royal family, of the aristocracy, of the local elite, and of the People's Party, along with other prominent personalities. Japanese sources have interesting data as well, but I was able to access them only through English and Thai research.

The Seri Thai Movement as the first Alliance against Military Authoritarianism in Modern Thai History.

The goal of the present work is to trace the development of the Seri Thai movement, which represented the long term conflict and changes of Thai politics since 1932. Exploring the composition and experience of the Seri Thai is also crucial for our understanding of the origins and early formation of the first alliance against military authoritarianism in modern Thai society. I believe that through a new and productive approach, we will understand the significance of the Seri Thai movement in domestic Thai politics. Consequently, we will also understand the roots of political action and the characters of Thailand's ruling elite and its role in modern politics, particularly the uncovering of the deeper interests and ideologies that are thought to lie beneath political rhetoric.

Though much of the book is organized in chronological fashion, it should not be conceived as a political narrative in the traditional sense. It makes neither pretense of covering all aspects of the Seri Thai movement, nor of providing a comprehensive treatment of war events in Thailand. It focuses rather on the collective actions of the four elite factions of central participants. The main question that this study deals with is how to explain the outbreak and development of 'factional constitutionalism' among members of the royal family, the aristocracy, the new elite and the Isan leaders in politics of the post-1932 coup, particularly the Seri Thai movement as the first alliance against military authoritarianism in modern Thai history.

Conclusion

Based on a close examination of the backgrounds of Seri Thai leaders, the present study provides the detailed analyses of the conduct and impact of the movement on domestic politics, especially its early formation

as the first spirit and alliance against the military authoritarianism in modern Thai history. Most importantly, the study challenges the hypotheses and conventional wisdom of many historians, the transformation school and bureaucratic scholars have proposed to explain the Seri Thai movement, the impact of the war and/or of the Japanese presence on Thailand, and Thai political phenomenon.

One of the main principles of the conventional school is that the Seri Thai movement was a large mass movement opposing the Japanese presence, an anti-Japanese underground operation primarily in response to the war. The evidence explores here, however, does not support the conventional argument that the war and the Japanese presence were fundamental to the elite groups' actions on the eve of the Seri Thai movement. Instead from the beginning until the end, the Seri Thai political target was the military government rather than the war or the Japanese presence. In fact, the movement was an alliance of the four elite groups with sharp differences in socioeconomic and ideological backgrounds in the context of domestic politics. It was born out of the ongoing political conflict and changes stemming from the 1932 coup. Most importantly, the evidence explore here also do not support the Benda transformation thesis nor the contention of several bureaucratic scholars that Thai politics since the 1932 coup has centered around the power struggles of small military-bureaucratic cliques, and that political competition has been confined to a narrow, fairly homogeneous elite with few ideological or policy differences.