

**Protest, Participation and Profits:
The Redshirt Movement in Thailand, 2010-
2016**

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Declaration

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the Redshirt movement in Thailand between 2010 and 2016. Challenging Bangkok-centric and top-down analyses, the thesis attempts to provide a critical explanation of the Redshirt movement from the perspective of Redshirt local leaders and supporters. The thesis shows that after the severe 2010 military crackdown, the Redshirt movement shifted their orientation to Isan — the Redshirts' stronghold and a territory with a long history of resistance against the Thai nation-state. The original contributions of the thesis rest on its systematic study of the Redshirt movement based on the use of primary and secondary documents and extensive fieldwork, including participant observation and numerous interviews with Redshirt leaders and villagers in three major Isan provinces, namely Udonthani, Khonkaen and Ubonratchathani.

The core chapters of this thesis demonstrates that the Redshirt village movement emerging in late 2010 provided a new mechanism to revitalise the Redshirt movement which had undergone a leadership and morale crisis. Redshirt villagers had continued their challenges against the traditional elites by protesting for participation in Thai politics, characterised by political equality and electoral rights, but also protesting against political injustice, especially for Redshirt political prisoners. Most importantly, the Redshirts reinvented the movement by changing their strategies from street rallies in Bangkok to territory control in the provinces. However, the thesis argues that the emergence of Redshirt villages critically revealed existing cleavages within the red camp, and further generated conflicts with other Redshirt factions. Redshirt protesters are rich, if finite, political resources with which various different Redshirt factions and political entrepreneurs attempted to engage. Such internal conflicts revolved around leadership contention, mobilisation competition and quasi-ideology contestation.

The thesis argues that these internal conflicts explain why the Redshirt movement, despite its massive size and sophistication in terms of members, areas and methods of mobilisation, has not been able to achieve their demands and to pose resolute and resilient challenges against the traditional political establishment. As succinctly evidenced in the absence of the Redshirts' demonstration against the military junta in the post-2014 coup period, the thesis concludes that unless the movement is overhauled to address such internal conflicts, the Redshirts will unlikely be able to reunite the movement or pose resolute and resilient challenges against their opponents.

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Abbreviations

BMA	Bangkok Metropolitan Administration
CDA	Constitutional Drafting Assembly
CDRM	Council for Democratic Reform under Constitutional Monarchy
CNS	Council for National Security (the successor of the CDRM)
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
DP	Democrat Party
ISOC	Internal Security Operations Command
NACC	National Anti-Corruption Commission
NCPO	National Council for Peace and Order
NESDP	National Economic and Social Development Board
NESDP	National Economic and Social Development Plan
NRC	National Reconciliation Commission
PAD	People's Alliance for Democracy (Yellowshirts)
PAO	Provincial Administrative Organisation
PDRC	People's Democratic Reform Committee
PPP	People's Power Party (TRT's Successor)
PTP	Pheu Thai Party (PPP's Successor)
PTV	People Television (pro-Thaksin television channel)
TAO	Tambon (sub-district) Administrative Organisation
TRT	Thai Rak Thai Party
UDD	United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship

Notes on Language, Transliteration and Dates

The Thai names are cited by the given name following convention. The thesis uses commonly recognised transliterations for names of individual people, such as public figures and movement leaders, when such transliterations exist. The Thai words used are transliterated into roman characters, following the guidelines of the Royal Institute of Thailand outlined in “Principles of Romanization for Thai Script by Transcription Method” (1999). The guidelines make no distinction between long and short vowel forms, and tones are not represented. The system used in this thesis is slightly different and simplified from the Royal Institute system in some aspects. The transliteration system here is based on language pronunciation, rather than spelling. “*Ch*” is used for the Thai consonant “*cho chang*”, and “*j*” for “*jor jan*”, not “*ch*”. Thus, farmer is transliterated as “*chaona*”, and professor is transliterated as “*ajarn*”. The transliteration of Isan language is identified with “Isan”; otherwise, the vernacular specifically referred to is Central Thai. Following Naruemon and McCargo (2011), the term ‘redshirt’ here is spelled as Redshirt, instead of ‘red shirt’. The names of provinces are spelled according to Thai words; for example, Udonthani, and not Udon Thani, is used. This thesis provides Christian era (CE) dates for the cited Thai sources which are published according to the Buddhist era (BE), which is CE plus 543. This means, for example, that 2006 CE is 2549 BE.

Romanisation Table for Thai

consonant	Romanisation		Vowels and Diphthongs			
	Initial and medial	Final	Vernacular	Romanisation	Vernacular	Romanisation
ก	k	k	อะ, อ	a	อ้าวะ	ua
ข, ก, ฃ	kh	k	อา	a	อ้าว, าว	ua
ง	ng	ng	อำ	am	ไอ, ใอ, อัย, ใอย	ai
จ	j	t	อิ	i	อาช	ai
ฉ, ช, ฅ	ch	t	อี	i	เอา	ao
ญ	y	n	อึ	u	อาว	ao
ด, ฎ, ฑ	d	t	อึ	u	อุช	ui
ต, ฏ	t	t	อุ	u	โอย	oi
ถ, ฐ, ฑ, ฒ, ฑ, ฒ	th	t	อู	u	ออย	oi
น, ฌ	n	n	เอะ, เอะ	e	เอช	oei
บ	b	p	เอ	e	เอ็ช	uai
ป	p	p	แอะ, แอ็	ae	อาช	uai
ผ, ฝ, ภ	ph	p	แอ	ae	อิว	io
ฟ, ฝ	f	p	โอ, โอ็	o	เอ็ว	eo
ม	m	m	เออะ	o	เอว	eo
ย	y	-	ออ	o	เอ็ว, แอว	aeo
ร	r	n	เออะ	oe	เอ็ชว	iao
ล, ฬ	l	n	เออ, เอ็	oe	ฤ(รี)	rue
ว	w	-	เอ็ช	ia	ฤ(ริ)	ri
ซ, ฌร, ฌ, ฆ, ฌ	s	t	เอ็ช	ia	ฤ(เรอ)	roe
อ	o	-	เอ็อะ	ua	ฤ	lue
ห, ฮ	h	-	เอ็อ	ua	ฤา	lue

Glossary

<i>Ammat</i>	Aristocrats
<i>Amnat</i>	Power
<i>Amphoe</i>	District
<i>Bannok</i>	Hillbillies
<i>Barami</i>	Charisma
<i>Baht</i>	Thai Currency
<i>Huakhanaen</i>	Vote Canvasser
<i>Isan</i>	Thailand's northeast
<i>Kamnan</i>	Sub-district Head
<i>Khwamdi</i>	Goodness/ virtue
<i>Lukthung</i>	Folk Songs (Music of the Fields)
<i>Mae</i>	Mother
<i>Muang</i>	City
<i>Muban/Ban</i>	Village
<i>Na</i>	Paddy fields
<i>Palat</i>	District Chief Assistant
<i>Pho/Pholuang</i>	Father/King Bhumibol
<i>Phuyaiban</i>	Village headman
<i>Pratya settakit phophiang</i>	Sufficiency Economy Philosophy
<i>Siam</i>	Thailand's Former Name
<i>Tambon</i>	Sub-district
<i>Thansiang</i>	Electioneering base

Map of Thailand



Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis critically examines the Redshirt movement (*khabuankan khonsuedang*) and the challenges this movement posed to the Thai nation-state during the period of colour-coordinated conflicts that followed the 2006 military coup. The Redshirt movement, Thailand's largest political movement, is crucially significant for understanding contemporary Thai politics in this highly contentious context, punctuated by two military coups and seven prime ministers since 2005 (Hewison 2015:52). The thesis specifically investigates the transitional period of the movement after the Redshirts established Redshirt villages in mid-December 2010 until the constitutional referendum in August 2016. In this regard, the thesis attempts to reveal a level of nuance concerning the "red zone" in Thailand that no previous studies have provided. The thesis argues that the post-2010 Redshirt movement is characterised by internal conflicts, including leadership contention, mobilisation competition and quasi-ideological contestation. Such internal conflicts stemmed from the demands to control the movement's most significant resources – Redshirt supporters – by various Redshirt factions and political entrepreneurs, and critically affected the Redshirts' challenges against their opponents.

Emerging in late 2006, the Redshirts are a pro-Thaksin Shinawatra movement which later broadened their agenda to protest against the coups d'état and to demand electoral democracy. Former Prime Minister Thaksin (2001-05), a billionaire tycoon-turned-politician who founded the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party, is a formidable but very divisive figure. Thaksin, currently living in self-exile, was the first elected Prime Minister who served a full four-year term in Thai political history. Due partly to the stipulations of the 1997 constitution that encouraged a strong executive, Thaksin never faced a no-confidence motion during his term, rendering his premiership exceptionally powerful. At the beginning of his second term, however, Thaksin encountered a series of political impasses, beginning with the almost daily anti-government demonstration spearheaded by the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), commonly known as the Yellowshirts due to their protest dress code. The Yellowshirts, who drew much of their support from the royalist conservative Bangkok middle class,

charged Thaksin with corruption, power abuse and, most importantly, disloyalty to the monarchy (Kasian 2006:7-9). Thaksin then faced a “judicial coup”, formally described as the process of judicialisation of politics (*tulakanphiwat*) (Thongchai 2008:32), when his political party won a snap election in April 2006, following an attempt to use that election to overcome his opponents. The election result, however, was invalidated by the Constitution Court on 8 May 2006. Eventually, the Thaksin government was toppled in a coup d'état by the Royal Thai Army in September 2006.

Thaksin remains very popular and influential, especially among voters in the north and northeast (henceforth Isan) of Thailand. His supporters were infuriated when the Thaksin government was challenged by traditional political forces. Therefore, the Redshirts staged a series of street protests in Bangkok from 2006 to 2010 to support Thaksin, protest against the coup and demand a general election. Over this period, the Redshirts' rallies became increasingly entrenched as they expanded their demands to protest against political injustice and protest for electoral democracy. Such demands derive from the fact that Redshirts' political votes and voices have been symbolically and literally nullified. The political parties aligned with the Reds and pro-Thaksin parties – which won four successive general elections in 2001, 2005, 2006, and 2007 – were either removed from power or dissolved by the judiciary.

The Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT) led by Thaksin was found guilty of bribing small political parties in the 2005 general election and was dissolved in 2006. The People's Power Party (PPP) – the TRT's successor – was also dissolved in 2008 by the use of judicial power (Cohen 2012:219). By contrast, their opponents, like the Yellowshirts who seized and closed down the Bangkok International airport in 2008, or the Prachathipat (Democrat) Party, the main party opposing Thaksin and of whom there was comparable evidence of electoral fraud and other crimes, have never been found guilty by the courts. This predicament also led the Redshirts to describe their movement as a struggle against double standards (*songmatrathan*) or political injustice in Thailand.

At the pinnacle of their street protest in March 2010, known as the “One Million March”, the Redshirt movement constituted the largest movement Thailand has ever witnessed, with protestors numbering between 250,000 to one million (Sopranzetti 2012:5). The uprising of the Redshirts was also an opposition movement constituted mainly by marginalised people, such as villagers, who challenged the Thai political establishment – a dominant force in Thai politics. Despite their large number and firm commitment to the cause over a prolonged period, the Redshirts were usually classified as the rural poor, and their demonstrations were dismissed as a mere collection of “hired protesters” (*Prachatai* 14 May 2009). The Redshirts were also negatively portrayed and even demonised as “terrorists” or “germs” by the anti-Thaksin movement (*New Mandala*, 3 May 2010).

This view is opposed by scholars such as Naruemon and McCargo (2011:995), who contend that the Redshirt movement is “no simple matter” and cannot be so easily reduced to such an explanation. According to Apichat, Yukti and Niti (2013), the Redshirt movement is not a monolithic or singular rural mass of Thaksin supporters. In fact, the Redshirts are socially diverse, composed of different shades of ideas, motives and backgrounds, ranging from former communists to liberals, rightists to social activists, and even academics (Apichat et al. 2013:37-39). The Redshirt movement was composed of a constellation of various internal groups and components in Bangkok and various provinces. In stronghold areas of the movement, especially in the north and Isan, internal groups were created at provincial, district and sub-districts levels (Pinkaw 2012:40).¹ Major local factions which played a significant role in their 2010 rallies included Chak-thong-rob (lit. Hoisting the Battle Flag) in Ubonratchathani and Chomrom-khon-rak-Udon (henceforth People-love-Udon Club) in Udonthani.

The Redshirts’ street protests were brutally ended by a military crackdown in May 2010, resulting in at least 92 casualties and 1,489 injuries

¹ In her study on Redshirt groups in the northern province of Chiangmai, Pinkew (2013:4) notes that there were at least six sub-groups in the province, namely UDD Red Chiangmai, Chiangmai 51, Chiangmai Turn-left, Sankhampaeng-love-democracy club, Doisaket Redshirts, and Fang-Maeeye-Chaiprakan group.

(Naruemon and McCargo 2011:993). As yet, there has been no effective legal investigation into the crackdown and killings (People's Information Centre 2017:3). Following the violent suppression of these protests, Redshirt supporters created a new mechanism at the local level to revitalise the movement by proclaiming a number of villages as "Redshirt villages", originating in Isan and rapidly spreading to all other regions of Thailand (*The Nation*, 2 January 2013). The emergence of Redshirt villages and these proclamations not only revived the Redshirt movement after the 2010 military crackdown, but also aimed to demonstrate Redshirt unity through collective activities and to create an everyday mode of continued protests against the Thai traditional elites.

"Redshirt villages" are politicised spaces declared by the Redshirts over existing geographical villages of the Thai state to express their political ideas and identity. At the pinnacle of the Redshirt village movement, approximately 15,000 to 20,000 villages – or a quarter of the total number of villages in Thailand – were proclaimed as Redshirt villages. Redshirt village proclamations were elaborate rituals that involved different layers of activities and processes. On the surface, a proclamation was performed by demonstration and decoration of red flags, pictures, and other symbols of Thaksin and the Redshirts in the village (*Financial Times*, 16 February 2012). On a deeper level, village proclamations also involved inauguration ceremonies or statements of allegiance to the wider Redshirt movement as well as to Thaksin and pro-Thaksin political parties.

Most importantly, the Redshirt transformation to proclaiming Redshirt villages was a shift from staging temporary rally-type spectacles to asserting enduring power and long-term territorial claims. The emergence and expansion of Redshirt villages led to two significant tendencies. On the one hand, as having been highly popular among Redshirt supporters, the proclamations increasingly induced involvement from various Redshirt leaders, pro-Thaksin politicians and political entrepreneurs. Such involvement increased especially when Yingluck assumed power after the last validated general election in July 2011. Nevertheless, the involvement of different Redshirt actors and political

entrepreneurs generated internal contestation within the Redshirt movement and affected their challenges against opponents.

On the other hand, in transferring the Redshirt movement from national to local arenas, Redshirt villages also generated significant challenges to state-village power relations in Thailand. In essence, the Thai state has long been highly centralised and villages subjected to control by the state. Thai society is also hierarchical and villagers are conventionally considered inferior in the societal hierarchy. The state has governed villagers through various administrative measures, development projects and the triad conventional ideology of “nation, Buddhism and king” (*chat, sat, kasat*). The Redshirt village proclamations were aimed at creating new “red” village identities while making territorial claims that village lands “belong to the Redshirts”, thereby challenging the Thai nation-state – its authority, projects and ideology. By aligning themselves with the Redshirt movement on the basis of the electoral mandate given to pro-Thaksin parties, villagers felt empowered and challenged the Thai political establishment in new ways.

Such a scale of proclamation led to new national anxieties among the Thai traditional elites and was treated as a threat to national security and territorial integrity among the security forces. As a senior military officer who was a former Deputy Director of the National Intelligence Agency commented on the establishment of Redshirt villages: “There are only 2-3 people thinking that it [the Redshirt village movement] is a successful mass mobilisation...They will be targeted (*phengleng*), similar to when students supported communism” (Nantadet 2012:40).

The involvement of various areas, especially Isan, in the expansion of Redshirt villages also caused such security suspicion, as Isan was the main strategic location of previous resistance against the Thai state – namely the millenarian rebellion in the 19th century and the Communist movement in the 1970s. Isan has 20 provinces (out of Thailand’s 77 provinces) and is the largest and most populous region encompassing approximately one third of both

Thailand's total territory and population.² The majority of Isan people are ethno-linguistically Lao or Thai-Lao, who are socio-politically marginalised (McCargo and Krisadawan 2004:220). The Interior Ministry officials who had authority over the villages usually viewed Redshirt villages as a threat to the central bureaucratic hierarchy. Therefore, the Thai state responded to these Redshirt village inauguration ceremonies by representing them as a form of secessionism (*The Nation*, 7 March 2014). Such securitisation was especially tightened when the Thai military staged the latest military coup d'état in May 2014 – the 19th coup to take place in Thailand. Undoubtedly, the Redshirts remained the prime target of political and military suppression.

Existing Studies on the Redshirts

The existing literature on the Redshirts can be categorised into three main themes: socio-economic transformation, class struggle and social movement, and grassroots-driven and elite-manipulated approaches.

Socio-economic Transformation

The main body of literature focuses on “structural approaches”, especially socio-economic factors, as an explanation of the emergence of the Redshirts (Walker 2012; Prapart 2011; Nidhi 2008). This group argues that the Redshirts are a new socio-economic echelon that has emerged from socio-economic transformation and economic growth over the last two decades in Thailand's rural areas (Walker 2012:5). Based on this new economic classification, the Redshirts can be defined as “grass tips” (Prapart 2011), “middle-income peasants” (Walker 2012) or “lower middle classes” (Nidhi 2008). According to this approach, the Redshirts are also those who received economic benefits from Thaksin's populist policies (Nidhi 2008). Such socio-economic transformation led to political awareness of “the necessity in participating in policy decision-making” (Nidhi 2008).

² Based on the last formal census, Isan is home to 18.97 million people, while the total population of Thailand is 65.98 million (National Statistical Office 2010). However, the total population of Isan and Thailand have increased and Thailand's population is estimated to be recently around 70 million.

This approach is useful in providing an understanding of the Redshirts' identity as opposed to the conventional way of representing them as poor farmers. However, this approach also faces difficulties at both factual and explanatory levels. On the factual level, Nidhi (2008), a pioneering scholar, for instance, classified the poor, the lower middle class and the middle class as those who have a daily income of 34 baht, 68-136 baht and more than 136 baht respectively. However, this criterion is still problematic because it does not include other non-money forms of "income". On the explanatory level, socio-economic transformation does not necessarily lead to the participation of the Redshirt protesters, since improvement in their socio-economic conditions should create satisfaction rather than frustration. A socio-economic approach is not sufficient in explaining the emergence and mobilisation of the Redshirt movement which were not driven by economic demands, like previous livelihood and environmental movements (Pinkaew 2013:7). Instead, the Redshirt movement emerged from political aspirations and grievances, especially those related to electoral politics and political injustice. Moreover, this socio-economic transformation approach is not sufficient in explaining non-materialist aspects of the Redshirts, such as their ideas and identity, and ignores the "agency approach" or accounts based on individual experiences and perspectives to the Redshirt movement.

Class Struggle and Social Movements

Another group of scholars explain the emergence of the Redshirts as a class war (Giles 2010; Glassman 2010; Kengkit 2010). According to Glassman (2010), the Redshirt movement frequently associated themselves with left-wing activists of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), which operated from 1973 to 1976. Although Glassman (2010) also points out that there is a difference between the Redshirts and the CPT movements in the sense that the Redshirts come from what he calls the "peri-urban periphery", while the communist movement after 1976 gained support from university students in Bangkok. Glassman (2010) tends to emphasise the connection between pro-Thaksin forces and ex-communists and activists, indicated by what has been called "Thaksinomics", or the pro-poor economic policies of the Thaksin government. In a similar but more radical argument, Giles (2010:9) contends that coloured-coded politics is

“a serious class war between the rich conservative elites (royalist “Yellow shirts”) and the urban and rural poor (pro-democracy “Red Shirts”)”. This approach views colour-coded politics as class conflict, and tends to explain the Redshirt mobilisation as a classic Marxist revolution since “the Redshirt movement is the proletariats’ class struggle which cannot be compromised” (Kengkit 2010). Nevertheless, the Redshirts also include members of other economic classes. In his study on the Redshirts who participated in a protest in 2010, Uchane (2011) showed that the Redshirt protesters included white-collar workers and bureaucrats. Uchane (2011:128) also argued that state enterprise workers and private company workers constituted the majority of his samplings up to 34.8 per cent and 20.8 per cent respectively. Reducing the Redshirts to a class conflict, therefore, cannot capture the diverse nature of the movement.

Transcending the class struggle lenses is another body of related research which employs social movement theory to explain the Redshirts (Ekkapollanut 2013; Ubonphan 2010). Ubonphan (2010:14-5), for instance, argues that the Redshirt protests – which require sacrifice and resources, like time, expenses and commitment by a number of protesters – can be viewed from the social movement theory, especially through the concept of resource mobilisation. Similarly, Prapart (2011:127) explains the mobilisation methods of the Redshirts, arguing that the Redshirts had protested in rotation, by taking turns to travel from the provinces and staying up to two weeks in Bangkok, rather than remaining at protests continuously. This framework is significant in analysing the Redshirt movement during their street demonstration, especially in the pre-2010 crackdown period. However, this framework is relatively limited in explaining the post-2010 crackdown movement, during which the Redshirts did not organise mass street protests.

Grassroots Movement and Elite Machination

This approach suggests that the Redshirt movement is a post-Thaksin movement or a movement which is not mobilised by particular individuals or personal interests (Somchai 2012:124). For Kasian (2010:96), as they struggled against the “aristocrats”, the Redshirts should be broadly explained as a movement independent from the Thai bureaucracy, as he notes the Redshirt

movement is a “mass movement which emerged and exist independently from the bureaucratic state”. This approach argues that the Redshirts are a movement driven by ordinary people who become politically active citizens, and that the Redshirts are not hired protesters. This argument is important in explaining the Redshirts’ political agency. Nevertheless, it has not provided a clear explanation as to how the Redshirts, as a grassroots movement, have mobilised themselves without the leadership of Redshirt leaders and Thaksin. More importantly, this approach seems to reject or ignore the influence and power of the Redshirt leaders and Thaksin on the movement.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, another set of literature argues that the Redshirts is a top-down movement, emerging mainly from elite machination and voter manipulation. This perspective contends that the Redshirt movement was created and mobilised by Redshirt leaders and politicians, especially Thaksin. Uchane (2011), for example, argues that the Redshirt movement is closely connected with Thaksin and that the relationship between Thaksin and the Redshirts is the most important factor in motivating them to participate in protests. According to Uchane, this relationship were not constrictively defined in terms of membership of pro-Thaksin parties as 68.4 per cent of his samplings claimed they were not members of pro-Thaksin parties. Such Thaksin-villager relationship is broadly defined. Central to this relationship, however, is the fact that the majority of the protesters voted for pro-Thaksin parties (87.6 per cent of his samples). Besides, up to 79.5 per cent of his samplings said that the repeated “injustice” against Thaksin and the pro-Thaksin parties made them decide to join the protests. This evidence led Uchane to conclude that it is misleading to argue that the Redshirts have transcended Thaksin (Uchane 2011:133-134). However, this argument ignores the political agency, roles and ideas of those Redshirt protesters who remained politically active and organised several activities without any instructions from either the Redshirt elites or Thaksin. In fact, the the Redshirt protests were “calculated between two broad set of interests” between the lower and middle income people and Thaksin and his supporters, which benefited from each other (Forsyth 2010:465).

These different perspectives are a significant starting point and contribute to the understanding of the Redshirt movement. While there are several approaches in coming to terms with the Redshirt movement and how the Redshirts operated, these different analyses show that the relevant academic landscape, like the Redshirt movement, can also be a critically contested space. Nevertheless, the existing body of research does not provide the full account of the Redshirt movement, and there are three general limitations. Firstly, most existing studies focus on the Redshirt movement prior to the 2010 crackdown. Very little empirical research has been systematically conducted on the post-2010 period. Secondly, earlier literature has been mostly restricted to attempts to answer who the Redshirts are, by explaining their socio-economic background and the reasons underpinning their emergence, rather than analysing the Redshirts' challenges against their opponents. Studies examining the Redshirts' challenges, on the other hand, are only concerned with the Redshirts' street demonstrations in Bangkok. They tend to neglect different forms of challenges posed by the Redshirts, especially in local settings. By focusing on Bangkok, these existing studies also fail to explain the Redshirt movement in Isan, which is the bedrock of the movement, as evidenced by the rise of the Redshirt village movement in the post-2010 period. Lastly, the pioneering works are prone to treat the Redshirt movement as homogenous and monolithic. These studies do not take local Isan Redshirts into consideration. They neglect internal relations and diversity within the Redshirt movement and fail to understand how such relations and diversity affect the Redshirts' challenges against their opponents. These limitations present academic lacuna and an opportunity for fieldwork research on the Redshirts and their political mobilisation in Isan against the parameters of political crises and upheavals in Thailand since 2010.

Thesis Aims and Research Questions

The primary purposes of this thesis are threefold. Firstly, it aims to capture the complexities within the "red zone", especially on the leadership and agency issues within the movement after the 2010 military crackdown. The thesis specifically aims to chart out the complex interplay among different Redshirt

factions. Secondly, this research attempts to demonstrate the subtleties of the Redshirts by taking into account spatial aspects of the movement. In this regard, the research shifts the orientation from Bangkok to Isan – the region which not only is the Redshirts’ stronghold but also has a long history of resistance. By focusing on the post-2010 crackdown period, the thesis also takes into consideration distinct temporal dimensions based on different mobilisation phases of the movement. Lastly, based on the analysis of these complexities and subtleties, the research will illustrate the nuance of the Redshirts’ challenges against the Thai nation-state, by attempting to challenge the conventional explanations of the Redshirt movement based on premises of state-village binary opposition. The thesis also aims to explain why, despite their massive movement, Redshirt protesters did not take to the streets to protest against the recent military coup in 2014.

In examining the Redshirt movement, the thesis aims to contribute to the knowledge of contemporary Thai politics, which cannot be fully understood until we can explain why so many ordinary people challenged the Thai political establishment. As a study of marginal people, in this case villagers who declared themselves “exceptional” and “independent” from traditional state-village power relations, this thesis also aims to contribute to a broader understanding of opposition movements and the notion of a state of exception.

In order to achieve these purposes, the thesis is directed by the following primary research question: how has the emergence of Redshirt villages challenged state-villager relations in Thailand? It is further guided by the following secondary research questions:

1. How have the Redshirt movement and Redshirt villages changed since 2010?
2. What is the power relations between the state under the Pheu Thai government and Redshirt villagers?
3. To what extent, and how far, did Redshirt villages challenge state ideologies and projects?
4. What repercussions did the 2014 coup have for Redshirt villagers?

5. To what extent, and how far, have Redshirt villagers resisted the post-coup suppression?

Conceptual Framework

Mainstream Studies on Thai Villagers

Thai villagers and their relations with the state have been an important subject in agrarian studies in Thailand (Rigg 2001; Chatthip 1999). Thai state-village relations are often studied under two competing perspectives: the Community Culture School and the peasant rebellion paradigm. While these competing analytical lenses share the same view of villagers as economically exploited and politically dominated by the state through taxes, corvée labour and conscription, they offer different explanations of the reaction, responses and resistance of villagers to the state authority. These differences need further consideration.

The Community Culture School

The first perspective is the Community Culture (*watthanatham chumchon*) School created in the 1980s by Chatthip Nartsupha and his followers. This perspective gained dominance in Thailand for more than three decades (Attachak 2010:2). The stated aim of the Community Culture School was to study village culture and values by applying indigenous knowledge from within rural communities, rather than knowledge emanating from the “official state and bureaucracy”, in order to solve problems in rural Thai society – especially poverty (Chatthip 2003:3). Poverty is believed to be the root cause of “ignorance” which allegedly plagues rural inhabitants in Thailand and undermines “development” (*kanpattana*) and democracy (Attachak 2010:4). By using a local language of “*chumchon*” (community), this perspective argues that Thai villagers have their own form of indigenous knowledge known as *phumpanya* (knowledge), while traditional values, like familial kinship, and lineage are highly respected (Choosit 2003:68). According to Chatthip (2003:3), “[T]he crucial significance of the village community was at the heart of Thai society and culture”, and such indigenous “genuineness” constitutes a general commonality of Thai villages irrespective of regional differences.

Hence, the proponents of this school not only seek to rediscover a “genuine” Thai economic system and culture, but also aim to revive and encourage villagers to continuously maintain such economic and cultural practices. For the Community Culture scholars, to fully establish economic development and political advancement is to understand and maintain the roots of the Thai people as villagers. In searching for knowledge within rural communities, this school essentialises and institutionalises the image of rural villages, by drawing from ideas on village institutions, production and rituals. The Community Culture School portrays Thai villagers as living a peaceful way of life. Rural villagers are characterised by self-sufficiency and subsistence needs, and economic and exchange systems in rural areas are motivated by *namjai* (generosity or kindness) (Chatthip 2003:4). The state and capitalism are generally depicted to be alien to village life (Choosit 2003:69). Villagers can use ‘generosity’ to form networks based on mutual reciprocity, while these networks will enable villagers to become more self-sufficient and subsistent in isolation from the state and capitalism (Chatthip 2003:11).

The ways villagers react and respond to the Thai state or state authority are subsequently characterised by subordination acceptance. According to Chatthip (2003:10-11), Thai villagers rarely harbour defiance to the state since they still benefit from rich natural resources. Villagers are also portrayed to be satisfied with their isolation from the state and “outside” world. The view led to the arguments that villagers are politically passive and when villagers have to deal with authority, they will not challenge power holders but rather accept subordination. The Community Culture School is very popular among some non-governmental organisations (NGOs), like the Thai Community Foundation (*munlaniti chumchon Thai*) led by MR.Akin Rabhibhat, which depict Thai villagers as passive and helpless victims of state development projects. Market economy and modernisation are not what villagers need. According to these NGOs, state development projects have depleted local resources to develop urban areas and damaged valuable culture in rural areas. Capitalism which encourages self-interest and competitiveness are defined as opposite to the character of Thai villagers. Encroached upon by state projects and capitalism, village life is depicted as being on the verge of collapse. The solution, thus, is to revive the

cultural roots of Thai villagers and to prevent the encroachment of the state and capitalism into villages.

The presentation of villagers and village life promoted by the Community Culture School may have helped shed light on agricultural practices, but it raises several questions. In the quest for authenticity, it suggests that village culture, values and traditions can remain untouched by the “outside” world. The state and market economy are viewed as a source of unwanted immorality which not only dominates and exploits rural people but potentially damages cultural systems and values in rural areas, especially “generosity or kindness”. Many anthropologists have problematised this portrayed process of ‘legibility’ which appears in several South East Asian countries. Peluso and Vandergeest (2001:762), for example, demonstrated that the demarcation of ‘customary rights’, both territorially and legally, in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand is a historically constructed process. Walker (2012:17) challenges the Community Culture School’s notion of Thai village culture. According to Walker, the measurement of “genuineness” of village life as provided by the Community Culture School was ill-defined. He argues that the state and capitalism are not outside entities, but closely intertwined with present village life. In order to substantiate their arguments, community culture proponents embarked on an ironic quest to identify signs of authentic village culture in various “Tai ethnic” communities beyond Thailand’s borders, in Laos, Burma and China (Walker 2012:17). Hirsch (2002) similarly criticises the attempt to discover the “genuineness” of Thai villages. For Hirsch (2002), village life and socio-economic aspects are dynamic, malleable and contingent. He argues that rather than seeking the notion of “being” villagers, it is more important to understand the “becoming” of villagers. As he notes: The “more worthwhile project is to de-essentialise our notion of village that the village exist as discourse [...] we should be looking at what the village means” (Hirsch 2002:265).

Chatthip and his followers also tend to idealise and romanticise Thai rural villages: Thai rural communities are depicted as free from conflict, in contrast to any real political community where conflict always exists. Villagers were characterised as those who live close to nature, in a rather peaceful

habitus and generous manner. This rather static, essentialised approach is inclined to overlook rural people as political actors who have their own sense of agency and self-determination to engage with politics and the state. Indeed, for Attachak (2010), the study of Community Culture School serves the elite's politics to disparage rural society, maintain the status quo and obstruct political change.

The Peasant Rebellion Paradigm

The other perspective concerning state-village relations holds the view that such relations are exploitative and hostile (Seri and Hewison 2001; Preecha 2003). Similar to the Community Culture School, villagers are portrayed as a peasant class who is politically dominated and economically exploited by the state. However, this paradigm sees villagers' reaction, response and resistance to state power in different ways, and emphasises the possibility that villagers will stand up against their oppressors. According to Seri and Hewison (2001), villagers do not simply remain passive in the face of domination and exploitation, but frequently confront state agents by organising protests, revolts and rebellions.

This explanation has been especially applied to Isan. Since the 19th century, there were several peasant rebellions in Isan, and these rebellions had strong socio-cultural roots in Millenarianism, a belief that "men having Buddhist merit" (*phumibun*) would eventually emancipate Isan people from the oppressive and exploitative control of the Thai state. Seri and Hewison (2001) argues that there were at least nine rebellions staged by the Isan people since the 17th century, including the Bunkwang rebellion in 1699, the Chiangkeo Rebellion of 1791, the Sa-Kiad-Ngong Rebellion of 1820, the Sambok battle of 1895, the Phumibun Rebellion of 1901-1902, the Nong Makkeo Rebellion of 1924, the Maw Lam Noi-Chada Rebellion of 1936 and the Sila Wongsin Rebellion of 1959 (Seri and Hewison 2001:71-78). For some critics, these socio-cultural roots are still profoundly influential, and "rebellion" legacy has lasted until present (Keyes 2014:47).

After the consolidation of the modern Thai nation-state, the peasant rebellion paradigm continues to be partly used to explain several peasant

movements, such as the Assembly of the Poor, the Assembly of Small-scale Farmers of the Northeast, the Isan Farmers Assembly, and the Peasants' Federation of Thailand. In a similar analytical approach, Preecha (2003:135) argues that the pattern of resistance in the northeast explains why Isan was an operating area of the *Seri Thai* (Free Thai movement), led by former Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong, and why numerous Isan people joined this movement which fought against the Japanese invasion during the Second World War. Preecha contends that this involvement was because Isan people changed from being people led by "men of merit" to those led by "men of wisdom" (Preecha 2003:135). Although Preecha (2003) presents Isan villagers as more rational actors, he still sees villagers mainly as having a confrontational inclination against oppression.

The peasant rebellion paradigm provides useful historical background and analysis of radical protests. However, it tends to rigidly explain protest movements in Isan as peasant uprisings based on the premises of class struggle to overthrow the state. Although comprised largely by people from rural Isan areas, the Redshirt movement does not seek to subvert, but demands to be part of the Thai state. Moreover, unlike previous movements from Isan which only demand the government to address their economic grievances, the Redshirts struggled to establish their own government, by firstly demanding their own political agency, rights and equality. This peasant rebellion paradigm also tends to ignore other forms of challenges, for resistance can take different forms, varying from organised and confrontational, such as peasant protests and rebellions, to less elaborate but still direct challenges, such as peasants petitioning authorities to meet their demands (Kerkvliet 2009:233).

Therefore, both dominant perspectives – the Community Culture School and peasant rebellion paradigm, which view rural areas and villagers with static, essentialised identity – are problematic in explaining the dramatic rural and agrarian transformations that have been taking place in the Isan in economic, social and political terms which provided the context for the emergence of the Redshirt movement. Moreover, these mainstream perspectives which explain villagers' resistance based mainly on subordination

acceptance or confrontational rebellions are limited in explaining more subtle and nuanced resistance conducted by Redshirt villagers.

Everyday Politics

In order to reconceptualise the state-village relation and to capture the unprecedented complex challenges of villagers who are conventionally considered subordinate to the dominant Thai nation-state, this thesis *partly* employs a framework informed by the concept of everyday politics.³ Although there are several points of disagreement and “unresolved issues” among scholars who employ this concept, the general rubric of everyday politics problematises those studies of resistance of subordinate people that focus mainly on riots, rebellions and revolution, instead emphasising small-scale, non-confrontational and less-coordinated forms of resistance.

Adas (1981), a prominent pioneering scholar of this approach, challenges the received view of resistance as “direct, often violent, confrontations between the wielders of power and dissident groups” (Adas 1981:217). He studied peasant protests in pre-colonial Burma and Java, which he characterised as “contest states”. According to Adas (1981), central to this form of political entities is rule by a king or emperor who claims a monopoly of power and authority but whose effective control is severely restricted in reality by rival power centers among the elite, by weaknesses in administrative organisation and institutional commitment of state officials, by poor communications, and by a low population-to-land ratio. These conditions gave rise to a constant struggle between the ruler and the nobility, between factions of the elite at various levels, and between village elite groups and village notables and peasants for the control of labor, agricultural production and revenue which formed the basis of these agrarian state (Adas 1981:218). As he argues, “even the most powerful monarchs were unable to maintain effective control over more than just the capital city and the heartland areas of the kingdom which surrounded

³ This thesis does not employ the notion of “social movement” since the social movement theories can be more suitably applied to explain the Redshirt movement during their street demonstration in Bangkok. In the post-2010 crackdown period, the Redshirts engaged in a different method of protest in their natal villages, which cannot be fully explained by social movement theories.

it”, while further away from the state’s core areas, “the power of the ruler diminished perceptibly and that of the regional lords became increasingly evident” (Adas 1981:221).

These rivalries and conditions made possible for the peasants to develop and employ a wide range of techniques to defend themselves and their interests against their oppressors (Adas 1981:223). Adas argues that the forms of challenges adopted by rural peasants against the state are diverse in scale, degree and kind. Such techniques of resistance encompassed collusion between village notables and the state's revenue collectors, underreporting and embezzlement of tax collection, hiding harvested crops, banditry, and evasion. Evasion or what he has termed “avoidance protests” – the way by which “dissatisfied groups seek to attenuate their hardships and express their discontent through flight, sectarian withdrawal, or other activities that minimize challenges to or clashes with those whom they view as their oppressors” – was not only classified as a means of resistance, but also one of the most often practiced modes of protest (Adas 1981:217).

Adas argues that the most common mode of avoidance protest in the precolonial era involved the peasants' transfer of their allegiance and services from lords whose demands were felt to be exorbitant to other patrons from whom they hoped to receive better treatment. As he notes, peasants could seek “passive withdrawal” or a “search for alternative sources of patron-client relationship in order to protest excessive exactions and draw attention to elite misrule, maladministration and to force reductions in tribute demands or the dismissal of overly rapacious lords” (Adas 1981:229). Avoidance protest were closely related to longstanding defense mechanisms developed by peasant communities to buffer elite demands on village production and manpower. Such peasant grievances and this fabric of resistance could be found in cultural expressions, like mystical and magical orientations, such as folk songs and popular stories (Adas 1981:236). Therefore, for Adas, rather than riot or rebellion, “peasants preferred a wide variety of alternative modes of protest that minimized direct confrontations with those viewed as oppressors” (Adas 1981:227-8). Southeast Asian peasants could express their discontent and

evade state agents, corvée labour, military conscription and tax collectors by several forms, including institutional forms such as bribes, embezzlement, underreporting and day-to-day forms such as evasion and patron shifting (Adas 1981:222-230).

A leading scholar who helped develop the concept of everyday politics was James Scott (1976; 1985; 2010). Scott is partly influenced by a Marxist conceptual framework and draws primarily from peasant studies in southeast Asia, especially where peasant life is too precarious, as he notes: “[T]here are districts in which the position of the rural population is that of a man standing permanently up to the neck in water, so that even a ripple is sufficient to drown him” (Scott 1976:1). But he demonstrates that a new perspective on how peasants resisted domination can be understood through a multi-layered analysis, as opposed to confrontational, coordinated forms, like riots, rebellion and revolution. His research provides a nexus between daily life and domination resistance, and opens for meaningful discussion of different forms of challenges which initially seems trivial and insignificant.

In his well-known book *Weapons of the Weak*, Scott (1985) studied a Malaysian village called Sedaka, a community of 74 households (352 people) located in the rice-producing area of the peninsula. Based on paddy-land ownership and farm size, village stratification has produced two main groups – poor and rich farmers. In 1979, the poor villagers owned only three per cent of the paddy land and farmed (including land rented in) 18 per cent of the cultivated paddy land. Income made from farming, thus, just provided a minimum standard of living to their family, and over half Sedaka’s households have income below the government-established poverty line. At the other end of the stratification, the ten best-off households owned over half the paddy-land. Rich farmers not only constituted the economic elite of the village, but also dominated the quietly contentious political life of the village.

The major change in the economic and social life of Sedaka was the so-called “green revolution” from 1971, beginning with the introduction of an irrigation scheme, double-cropping, and the mechanisation of the paddy especially the use of combine-harvesters (Scott 1985:59). Double-cropping –

including transplanting and harvesting the crops, was source of a “boon” to all stratification of village. While landlords received double rents, tenants increased their annual profits, and a substantial share of their income prospered as never before. Heads of households who earlier had left to find work elsewhere in the off-season could remain at home and had enough rice to feed their family the year round. However, there were other consequences of double-cropping which undermined gains made by poorer villagers, especially the employment of combine-harvesters. By 1980, huge western style combines owned by syndicate of business replaced manpower and were harvesting roughly 80 per cent of the rice acreage (Scott 1985:75).

Such a transformation created impacts on the distribution of rural income, and discontent among the poor farmers. In this light, Scott explores the resistance of peasants, and shows that the relatively poor, powerless farmers do not simply accept the negative impacts created by this socio-economic transformation and the domination of their richer counterparts. These forms of resistance were non-confrontational and poorly-organised. In this light, Scott’s analysis brings out the political significance of what he calls “weapons of the weak” which appear in “everyday politics,” including foot dragging, pilfering, false compliance, feigned ignorance, feigned incompetence, flight and other “everyday forms of resistance” (Scott 1985:34).

Scott also argues that the weak resist domination and exploitation through a “war of words”, such as verbal remarks, villagers’ negative descriptions of their superiors, and people’s recollections of past events. Political language, both texts and talk, are important for the subordinate to express their subversive messages under inferior power relations and to deny cultural marginalisation (Saowanee and McCargo 2016:228). For Scott, such wars of words thus reflect another terrain of ideological resistance which means “thinking, consciousness and what meaning they give to their acts” (Scott 1985:39). As Scott explains one of the purposes of his study: “To locate in an analysis of conflict of meaning and value, because thinking leads to behaviour. The elites control culture, education, religion and media, and thus they can define what is true, beautiful, moral fair and legitimate, build symbolic climate

that prevents subordinate classes from thinking their way free” (Scott 1985:39). In this regard, Scott examines “the subculture of the subordinate classes” – their offstage comments and conversation, their proverbs, folksongs, and history, legends, jokes, language, ritual and religion, in order to determine to “what degree, and in what ways, peasants actually accept the social order propagated by elites” (Scott 1985:41). Hence, Scott’s conception of everyday forms of resistance is highly useful for examining the subordinate classes, showing how actions and ideas which are usually taken for granted, can be read as nuanced modes of resistance.

In another influential work, Scott (2010) analysed the highland peoples in Burma, whom he argued were not ‘uncivilised’ peoples, but those who had retreated to upland areas as zones of refuge from state power. “The hills, however, are not simply a space of political resistance but also a zone of cultural refusal” (Scott 2010:20). More importantly, practices of hill peoples, such as slash and burn agriculture or oral culture, often considered as backward and uncivilised are actually socially advantageous and strategically practised (Scott 2010:221). Compared to wet rice agriculture and writing cultures which the state can relatively easily appropriate and control, swidden agriculture and oral culture are more difficult for states to suppress. In this sense, Scott shares a similar perspective to Adas in disputing the assumption that flight or avoidance should be simply considered as ways of surrender. For them, acts of evasion can be read as modes of resistance rather than forms of cowardice.

Adas (1981) and Scott (1976; 1985; 2010) are highly useful for this thesis in creating theoretical space for meaningfully analysing and understanding challenges in different forms. They encouraged scholars to pay attention to marginalised peoples as well as to actions and ideas that are usually understudied. However, they tend to be restricted by class-oriented explanations of peasants, and production relations analyses, such as the extraction of labour, corps, rent and taxes. They are not very useful for explaining villagers’ characteristics and power relations in Thai rural areas, which have undergone dramatic rural transformation and agrarian change in recent decades (Rigg and Vandergeest 2012:5). Moreover, Adas and Scott also

consider everyday politics as distinctly separated from different types of politics and neglect the possible connections between everyday politics and politics in other realms.

Although similarly focusing on peasants, Kerkvliet (2009:227) studies everyday politics in different contexts, and similarly argues that political issues permeates everyday life. Borrowing from Lasswell (1958) the notion that politics is about “who gets what, when, and how”, Kerkvliet (2009:227) argues that “politics is about the control, allocation and production, and use of resources and the values and ideas underlying those activities”. Kerkvliet (2009) separates power into three types, namely official power, advocate power and power in an everyday form. While official power is executed by state authorities and advocate power is by non-state organisations, everyday politics involves non-organisational forms, power in everyday forms usually appear in taken-for-granted situations in which individuals resist domination. Kerkvliet argues that resistance can vary from organised and confrontational forms, such as peasant demonstrations and rebellions, to less elaborate but still direct and confrontational action, like petitioning authorities to meet their demands, to subtle, indirect, and non-confrontational behaviour. These non-confrontational behaviours are what he calls “everyday forms of resistance” (2009:233). However, for Kerkvliet (2009:241) these three types of power can merge together and overlap in reality. This thesis uses Kerkvliet’s perspective in considering everyday politics of Redshirt villagers and does not ignore the intersection between everyday and institutional politics – especially electoral politics.

Another significant contribution on the rubric of everyday politics as explored by Adas and Scott was rendered by Turton (1986). Turton explores the experiences of poor farmers in Thailand in the 1970s in their efforts to organise themselves defensively and more assertively on issues of livelihood and social power. These peasants’ experiences included mobile and widespread peasant movements, their defeat, disbandment and subsequent smaller-scale, more localised efforts. Turton problematises the distinction between what is classified as ‘active’ and ‘passive’ forms of resistance. For him, the act of ‘resisting’ can appear in forms of ‘apparent non-resistance or acquiescence’

(Turton 1986:36). Besides, unlike Adas (1981) and Scott (1985), Turton argues that subordinate people not only resist the extraction of their economic surplus, but also struggle for 'dignity' and 'human value' (Turton 1986:37). Turton encourages scholars to closely examine the fuller connotations of resistance, including the subjects of resistance – by gender, age, ethnicity and culture. By examining the subjects of resistance, we can determine the scale of collectiveness as well as the scope of leadership, encouragement or support of acts of resistance (Turton 1986:37).

For Turton, thus, the notions of resistance in the Thai context shares meanings with many related concepts, such as insubordination, protest, opposition, struggle, rebellion, revolution or negation (Turton 1986:38). He argues that these meanings resonate with the Thai term *totan khatkhwang*:

to – stand against, fight, contend, resist;

tan – stop, resist, oppose, strive against, withstand, counter.

khat – block, choke, clog, hinder, obstruct; stop, prevent, resist, retard, oppose, deny, interfere, object, refuse, disagree, conflict;

khwang – lie athwart, get in the way, restrain, hinder, prevent, oppose (Turton 1986:38).

In addition to the subjects and notions of resistance, Turton contends that we cannot fully understand everyday forms of resistance unless we can identify or explain 'everyday forms of domination' or what the subordinate people resist against. As he argues: "Everyday forms of resistance are thus to a large extent responses to 'everyday forms of oppression or domination'" (Turton 1986:37). After conceptualising the 'limits- the extent, extremities and limitations – of domination', we can identify and assess 'past achievement and present potentialities of popular struggles and acts of resistance' (Turton 1986:40). According to Turton, forms of oppression or domination range from economic exploitation, infliction of pain and suffering, coercion, bullying, intimidation, indignity, intolerance, bigotry, corruption, immorality, injustice mechanism of fear and surveillance (Turton 1986:38-43).

In this regard, Turton is highly significant for the examination of power and the techniques of both more 'physically coercive forms of domination' and more 'ideological or discursive forms', and the relations between the two

(Turton 1986:39). As he notes: “[A] physical concern with connections between more and less physical means of coercion, between physically violent and ideological techniques of domination, between force and consensual norms, and a better theoretical understanding of the inadequacy of these dichotomies, should help us to conceptualise and evaluate the dialectics of resistance. Mental and physical, ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ techniques are not so distinct in practice either” (Turton 1986:42). More importantly, Turton’s analysis provides an approach which links between regime and resistance.

These theoretical insights into everyday politics provided by different scholars are useful in creating a framework for explaining and understanding marginalised groups, such as Redshirt villagers, and their ‘small’ acts of resistance. By way of analytical summary, it can be argued that everyday forms of resistance require three definitional criteria. Firstly, everyday forms of resistance are not open or well-coordinated confrontation. Rather, they usually involve “self-help” or individualistic resistance that is not only non-confrontational and ill-organised, but also appears constant, normal and routine in everyday life. Secondly, the act must be directed towards ‘superiors’, not equals or subordinates. Lastly, a deliberate intention to resist is crucial (Scott and Kerkvliet 1986:2). In applying this framework, the thesis gives an account of Redshirt villagers who might seem politically insignificant in the Thai polity, and explains how Redshirt villagers challenge state-village power relations in ways that have been by and large ignored. The thesis argues that in their struggle Redshirt villagers partly used their everyday resistance against the Thai state. In proclaiming Redshirt villages, Redshirt villagers not only seek refuge from the state in villages, but also use these spaces as a basis for expressing their political agendas in a search for greater recognition, rights and redistribution from the Thai state. The thesis aims to demonstrate that Redshirt villagers’ subtle physical, verbal, ideational reactions to political repression or even flight from the military regime can be read as forms of resistance. While these everyday forms of resistance are shaped by everyday forms of oppression and vice versa, the purpose of practicing their everyday politics is to participate in, rather than oppose, the Thai state and formal, official power, as especially characterised by their demand for electoral politics.

Research Methodology and Settings of the Research

In order to understand “how” the emergence of Redshirt villages have challenged state-village power relations in Thailand, the thesis seeks not only to explain the politics of “colours”, but also to incorporate “voices” of the Redshirts. This research, thus, employs methods with qualitative orientation, including semi-structured interviews and participant observation, to focus on the narratives and stories of Redshirt supporters on the ground. As noted by Berg and Lune (2012), compared to quantitative approaches which tends to focus mainly on measureable data, figures, and amounts, qualitative data collection focuses on meanings, characteristics, concepts and definitions. Qualitative methods pay significance to “essence” and “ambience”, as well as employ “discrete but intertwined ways” to interpret data collected through interviews, participatory observation and ethnography (Berg and Lune 2012:15). To this end, the thesis draws from a primary set of information from a year-long period of fieldwork conducted in Isan between September 2014 and August 2015.⁴

Fieldwork Sites

In order to provide a representative overview of Redshirt villages in Isan, fieldwork research was conducted in three Isan provinces, namely Udonthani, Khonkaen, and Ubonratchathani.⁵ These sites are significant for several reasons, and the rationale for selecting these provinces as fieldwork sites are threefold. Firstly, these three provinces are major “Redshirt heartlands”, where the collective activities of the Redshirt movement and Redshirt villages were politically and prominently active. A large number of Redshirt protesters in the 2010 mass rallies in Bangkok came from these provinces. The three provinces also significantly reflect the state of contemporary Isan. While there has been a high degree of modernisation and development, such as economic growth,

⁴ Although fieldwork research was additionally conducted in January 2017, the primary timeframe of the thesis is between 2010 and 2016.

⁵ Udonthani is 550 kilometres northeast of Bangkok, while Khonkaen and Ubonratchathani is 450 kilometres and 592 kilometres northeast of Bangkok respectively. Regarding the distances between the three provinces, the shortest is between Udonthani and Khonkaen (115 kilometres); the distance between Khonkaen and Ubonratchathani is 282 kilometres; and the longest is between Udonthani and Ubonratchathani (401 kilometres).

urbanisation and infrastructure improvement, the majority of the population in these provinces still retains their ethno-linguistic heritage as Laos or Thai-Laos who have long been excluded and marginalised by the nationalist policies of the Thai nation-state.

Secondly, the selection of these three provinces is for the purpose of comparison. In this regard, the main focus of this research is to deeply engage with Redshirt villages and villagers to reveal the subtleties of each case study and to demonstrate the implication of Redshirt villages for wider political issues of state-village relations. The three provinces selected for study are where different local Redshirt factions mobilised and demonstrated distinct characteristics. Udonthani is considered by many Redshirts to be the capital city of their movement. The province is also the place where the Redshirt village movement first emerged, and is home to the prominent local Redshirt group called the People-love-Udon Club. Yet, Udonthani is also a province where the Thai state has a strong presence. In the Cold war era, the province was a strategic site of the Thai-US army in their battles against communism and their “Vietnam War”, as demonstrated by a large army base in the province. Udonthani is also home to the temple of Luang Ta Mahabua, one of the most revered Buddhist monk among the Yellowshirts and a number of Thais (*Nation Weekly*, 21 February 2011, 25). Luang Ta Mahabua, who led a campaign to help Thailand during the 1997 financial crisis, allegedly criticised Thaksin for claiming to solve the crisis by himself, and for “attempting to be a president” (Kasian 2007:4). More recently, Udonthani is the place where Princess Bajrakittiyabha, King Vajiralongkorn’s daughter, “determined” to work as a provincial state prosecutor (2007-2008).

Khonkaen, which is situated in the centre of Isan, is another province where pro-Thaksin political parties have won all parliamentary seats since 2001. Khonkaen also has a high concentration of Redshirt protesters and Redshirt villages, while the role of the UDD was relatively prominent compared to other local factions. This concentration was partly reflected when Khonkaen Provincial Hall was burnt in the 2010 crackdown aftermath. In the 2014 coup, Khonkaen experienced heavy state repression, evidenced by the so-called Khonkaen Model prisoners (which will be explained in Chapter Six). The

province is a university city in which economic growth is partly driven by economic activities of students and the middle class. Khonkaen is the mobilisation area of one of the most high-profile anti-coup student protesters called Dao Din. Ubonratchathani, one of the largest Isan provinces, served as the mobilisation area for another prominent Redshirt group called Chak-thong-rob led by the vocal local Redshirt leader Pichet Tabudda. Having a long tradition of resistance against Bangkok characterised by holy men rebellions in the past, Ubonratchathani still retains the “Isan” identity. However, Ubonratchathani had a very strong anti-Thaksin movement and was one of the four (out of 20) Isan provinces in which the Democrat Party won MP seats in the 2011 general election.⁶ Therefore, in conducting research in these three provinces, this thesis attempts to compare and contrast the selected case studies of the Redshirt movement in Isan.

Lastly, in selecting three out of the twenty Isan provinces, the thesis aims to avoid generalisability. According to Yin (2009:59), optimal case studies provide a more authoritative claim to subtleties and understandings of the case study selected, while using multiple case studies increases the tendency toward generalisability. Hence, this research did not examine other Redshirt provinces, like Roi-et and Mahasarakham, which witnessed Redshirt activities but had no prominent local Redshirt factions. By contrast, this thesis was not designed to study a single case or a particular village, as practiced by sociologists or anthropologists. Such a sociological and anthropological approach is important to the detailed characteristics and in-depth knowledge of a particular community (Walker 2012:5). But this approach was very limited in explaining political phenomena and power relations which transcended one particular site, village or province. In other words, such a sociological approach would prove relatively less useful in a research designed to capture how different Redshirt factions related to one another across geographical boundaries and belonging of

⁶ The Ubonratchathani Democrat MPs included Wutthipong Nambutra, Supachai Srila and Issara Somchai. It is noteworthy that the Democrat Party won only 5 MPs seats out of 123 seat in Isan in the 2011 election.

a particular site, village and province.⁷ Thus, by conducting fieldwork in these three provinces, the thesis provides comprehensive features and greater nuanced understanding of Redshirt villages in Isan, while avoiding claims to produce a universalistic or particularistic treatment of Isan Redshirt villagers.

In this light, the comparative study of the three provinces in the Redshirts' stronghold in Isan creates an optimal medium between a single and a multiple case study examination. While they significantly represented Isan and Redshirt, in a nutshell, the selected provinces provide an exceptional fertile fieldwork sites, characterised by the coalescence of several significant elements, like relatively high economic growth and agrarian change (in comparison to several other Isan provinces), and the presence of traditional forces and popular religion. The three provinces selected for study are the sites of the complex interplay between a long tradition of resistance, rapid urbanisation, growing economies and Redshirts' stronghold on the one hand, and the military, popular religion and the monarchy on the other. Thanks to these reasons of location, population, political orientation and unique Redshirt characteristics, the three Isan provinces constitute a significant representation of the Redshirt movement in Isan.

Interviews⁸

Conducting fieldwork research between 2014 and 2015 under the Prayuth regime was a very difficult task in at least two main respects: accessibility to the Redshirt informants and the risk of regime punishment. I benefited from having already contacted some Redshirt village leaders and visiting some Redshirt villages before the coup was staged. This pre-coup connection played an important part in gaining trust from some key informants. However, several

⁷ This sociological approach was also very limited for engaging with the Redshirts who usually worked outside village during the day. However, during the fieldwork period I was hosted by a district chief assistant in the border district of Mahasarakham and Roi-et (close to Ubonratchathani). The main reason was that he owns a guest house/motel called Piamsuk, in addition to personal connection before the 2014 coup. Staying with him was also initially to save my travelling time before interviewing his senior officials – Muang district chief and deputy governor in Roi-et. The period of my stay was one month during which I had to move in and out depending on when the room was needed.

⁸ Ethical review number AREA 13-172.

difficulties still emerged during fieldwork. Apart from the informants whom I had already contacted, only a few “Redshirts” or even villagers were willing to discuss their political opinions, especially during the first two months. However, in the subsequent period, informants were more accessible and willing to share their political opinions.

The fieldwork did not always go according to plan. For example, on 14 March 2015, I travelled more than 100 kilometres from my main sites in Warin Chumrab district to a border district called Khongjiam, Ubonratchathani, to attend a seminar on “Two decades of Pakmun Dam” organised by environmental NGOs and grassroots villagers, in order to ask some participants if they might want to comment on Thai politics. That very morning, the event was suddenly cancelled by the military officers and no one was allowed to gather at the seminar site. By contrast, the unexpected events led me to meet student protesters Dao Din at the Khonkaen military camp on 19 November 2014 after they staged a flash protest in front of the 2014 coup leader Prayuth Chan-o-chao, which is just one example of the rich data and observations that I was able to make by virtue of being in the field for a sustained period of time.

To manage the difficulties of qualitative research in Thailand required an appreciation of positionality and adaptability in the field. The challenges of positionality include the identity of the researcher and the ability to gain trust from the informants, while adaptability involves making calculated plans to avoid risks for both the informants and researcher. In terms of positionality, in addition to my own background of growing up in the northeastern province of Khonkaen, I presented myself as a Thai PhD student from the University of Leeds. The main language I used for interviews was Isan, rather than Central Thai, to demonstrate some shared socio-cultural understandings and to facilitate the conversations with villagers.

Shared Isan identity at times apparently led to bias among some informants who perceived me as a Redshirt sympathiser. Such bias was demonstrated by the fact that some Redshirts, without fully learning about my identity, were willing to express their opinions which were often hostile towards the military and, thus, risked regime punishment. However, such

shared identity did not always generate bias for the researcher. For their safety, most informants sought further clarification of my identity, and interviews were mostly made possible by suggestion and introduction from previous *trusted* informants. Before giving interview consent, some informants used further means to verify my identity, ranging from double-checking with the informants who provided their contact, to immediately calling in front of me the phone number which I gave to verify if my personal details was trustworthy, to requiring me to drink home-made 40-degree liquor in a glass already used by a number of villagers to test my sincerity.⁹ Thus, the purpose of this study as an academic research had to be explained before any interview could begin.

This research also attempts to minimise bias from the side of the researcher who shares Isan identity. Such bias inevitably occurred especially in circumstances where certain informants had experienced ill-treatment, harassment and violence from state authorities. However, this bias was controlled by the research design that examines the internal complex interplay among the Redshirt factions as well as how the Redshirt movement has challenged the Thai nation-state. In order not to compromise with objectivity, the researcher's bias was also constrained by being aware of and not dependent on particular Redshirt factions and their political motivations. Through such methods, the researcher's bias was reduced by exploring the Redshirts as the movement *is* rather than what the movement *ought to be*.

According to standard ethical procedures, all informants gave full consent to be interviewed and observed. In terms of risk avoidance, I put in place safeguards for the interviewees and the researcher. For instance, most interviews took place in private venues, like the house of the interviewees, rather than in public places. One particular informant in Ubonratchathani asked to be interviewed in his parked car. Appropriate safeguards were also adopted in accordance with the changing situation on the ground by constantly

⁹ This requirement to drink liquor occurred in Ubonratchathani on 15 March 2015, when I was attending a merit-making ceremony of a group of Redshirt villagers. Offering food and drinks, especially liquor, is a way to offer friendship and sincerity in Isan villages. Such offering is usually made with a common glass. To comply with the ethical procedure, I provided an excuse not to drink by mentioning the necessity to drive a long distance. But I had at least to smell the liquor.

monitoring the situation and responding accordingly. The most imminent threat I experienced was when I observed the detention of the Dao Din, the most high-profile student protesters in the post-2014 period, in a military camp on 19 November 2014 after they staged a flash protest in front of the junta leader Prayuth Chan-o-cha. A senior military officer who handled the case told me: “If [you] wrongly reveal information, I will kill you (*ku ao tai*)”. However, this was only a verbal threat. In addition to safeguard measures, I may have benefited from what Connors (2011:660) described as the “good fortune” of not being important enough in the political establishment’s eyes to arouse unwarranted suspicion.

In addition to group interviews, this thesis draws mainly from 78 in-depth interviews (61 informants). Among these, interviews at 6 different research sites were conducted with my co-supervisor Duncan McCargo, including interviews with ex-prisoner A and his wife, with Chailap Uthitphan and his group, and with Tuk (pseudonym) and her group on 9 June 2015 in Khonkaen; and with Khwanchai Sarakham, with Arnon Sannan and with Khamsaen Chaithep on 10 June 2015 in Udonthani. My starting point was Nonghuling, Udonthani, known as the original Redshirt village. A wider circle of the informants was accessed by relying on snowball effects and connections. Key informants and some informative villagers were visited on more than one occasion in order to clarify the information and gain in-depth understanding of the movement. The average duration of interviews was one hour. The shortest was half an hour, and the longest was two and a half hours.

The interviews were semi-structured which involved both prepared and impromptu questions that arose during the interviews (Berg and Lune 2012:108-114). The reason for not conducting surveys with unalterable questions is that a more fluid and flexible approach allows researchers and interviewees “to develop unexpected themes” (Mason 2002:62). During the interviews, while I particularly looked for the perspectives, expectations and ideas of the Redshirts, I had to adapt to specific interviewees, flexible contexts and different factions. Local Redshirt leaders and villagers are the main source of information as they played a vital role in the Redshirt movement in Isan. As

they seldom feature in the Thai mainstream media's news coverage, this research attempted to incorporate their normally marginal voices to challenge the silence and exclusion imposed by the state power and state authorities. In order to fully understand the Redshirts, this research also emphasised information from non-Redshirt informants. Another set of information was drawn from some elite informants, like Ministry of Interior officials, Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) officers, and scholars who conducted relevant research.

Interviews provided useful information otherwise unavailable or undocumented in secondary sources and rendered original insights into the largely understudied Redshirt villages. Information from interviewing thus enables the thesis to engage with the Redshirts beyond the superficial and often on a hidden level. Although this thesis attempts to present Redshirt villagers' voices which are usually suppressed and censored, in sensitive cases (especially in Chapters Six), the names of the villager participants will be anonymised for safety reasons. Villagers are often the victims of state violence and sanction, as Haberkorn (2011:6) shows in her study on a history of the Farmers' Federation of Thailand (FFT), there were as high as 33 FFT members assassinated and 8 seriously injured in the period of five years between 1974 and 1979. At present, the main safety reason arose from the fact that Thailand is under the control of the military regime, although no villagers have been "killed" by the security officers in Isan since 2014 and the restricted situation has been partly lessened.

Participant Observation, Documents and Video Recordings

Another set of data in the thesis is drawn from participant observation in the three Isan provinces. Given that the nature of state repression shapes the forms of resistance that arise and vice versa (Slater 2010:5), participatory observation was especially useful in examining the ways in which Redshirt villagers were suppressed by the military and, how they resisted the military regime. In this regard, the thesis particularly draws from the observation in the military's One Thai One Heart Project and certain politico-cultural ceremonies organised by the Redshirts, such as merit-making ceremonies, birthday events, and funerals.

In addition to fieldwork information, this thesis also relied on documents which embraced primary and secondary sources as well as academic and non-academic literature, like novels and press releases. These documents were valuable both in understanding the main original political activities and ideas as well as interpretations of such activities and ideas. In the highly polarised context of Thailand's colour-coded politics, the researcher was aware that sources could be biased based on the political viewpoints of individuals and institution. Therefore, rather than consulting Redshirt-produced materials such as *Thai Red News*, *Truth Today*, *Mahaprachachon*, *Red flag*, *D- Magazine* and *Red Power*, this thesis relied mainly on 17 printed newspapers collected from newspaper archives. The newspaper sources included *Bangkok Post*, *Ban Muang*, *Daily News*, *Khao Sot*, *Krungthep Thurakit*, *Matichon*, *Matichon Sutsupda (Matichon Weekly)*, *Naeo Na*, *The Nation*, *Nation Sutsupda (Nation Weekly)*, *Phujatkan Raiwan (Phujatkan Daily henceforth Phujatkan)*, *Pim Thai*, *Post Today*, *Thairath*, *Than Sethakit*, *Thai Post*, and *Wattajak*.¹⁰

In consulting these newspapers, the thesis aimed to create a balance between Redshirt informants and more politically "neutral" sources. Moreover, as Somchai (2006:22) argues, the benefits of consulting documents, like newspapers, is that they usually provide more accurate information, namely dates and places, of relevant events to which interviewing might not be able to pinpoint. By consulting different data sources, the research also attempted to mitigate the weaknesses of each data source and also provide "multiple measures of the same phenomenon" (Yin 2009:116-117). In the event of conflicting information, I attempted to settle the matter by cross-checking two or more different sources to avoid referencing mistaken information.

The thesis also uses speech transcripts of Redshirt leaders from videos which were previously broadcasted through radio channel or internet satellite televisions. While such media is one of the Redshirt's predominant means to disseminate their political discourses, it also played a vital role in creating networks and providing common space for mobilising the Redshirt movement.

¹⁰ While the thesis also benefited from online version of these newspaper, it used other online independent newspaper and sources, especially *Prachatai*, *New Mandala* and *iLaw*.

The radio has been one of the main media of information consumption of villagers in Thai provinces, given that, among other things, it is relatively more convenient and economically accessible compared to television. The radio stations played a leading role in mass mobilising on two particular occasions: the protest of the Redshirts against the Constitutional Court in 2013 and the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) in 2014. In contrast, such media became the means of struggle for Redshirt local leaders against other internal factions. In local areas, Redshirt radio hosts have their own “fan clubs” or mass supporters; this increases their calibre in challenging state authorities, but also makes them compete with other Redshirt leaders. In consulting the Redshirts’ version of new media, which was partly enabled by modern and globalised technologies, the thesis challenges the representation of the Redshirts as “backward and isolated” rural villagers. More importantly, as the Redshirts were subject to the military suppression, unlike written documents, video recordings provided information, captured political events and escaped censorship by the military regime. In this regard, I also used my video recordings recorded during participant observations.

Thesis Structure

This thesis comprises eight chapters. Chapter One presents the thesis’s introduction – its goals, means, and outcomes. Chapter Two contains a literature review. The main purpose is to provide the context of Thailand’s polarised politics and to examine the existing debates and discussions of the Redshirt movement. Chapter Three commences to analyse the way in which the Redshirt village movement has posed challenges against and reconfigured state-village power relations. It begins by investigating the emergence and expansion of Redshirt village movement, arguing that this movement posed a challenge to the Thai nation-state in terms of laying ownership to territory, as opposed to occupying public streets, places and building practised by the UDD and by anti-Thaksin movements, like the Yellowshirts and the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC). This chapter, however, also shows that the emergence and expansion of Redshirt villages have led to complex interplay within the Redshirt

movement characterised by internal conflicts and leadership contention between existing and emerging Redshirt leaders.

Chapter Four examines the mobilisation of the Redshirt village movement in electoral and post-electoral contexts, particularly after July 2011 when the pro-Thaksin Yingluck government took power. The chapter shows that the relationship between the Thai state and Redshirt factions in this period was not necessarily positive and symbiotic. The inserted Redshirt identity and exerted mobilisation of the Redshirt village movement despite the fact that Pheu Thai was the government, generated mobilisation competition to gain political roles and influences. Chapters Three and Four also argue that Redshirt villagers were the rich resources for which different factions, including Redshirt leaders, political entrepreneurs and pro-Thaksin politicians, compete to expand their mass supporters and hegemonic role and influence within the pro-Thaksin forces. Chapter Five illustrates that, in addition to challenges in terms of laying ownership to physical territory, Redshirt villagers also critically challenged state dominant ideology – nation, religion (Buddhism) and monarchy. By framing such dominant state ideology into components of Thai-style democracy, royal sufficiency philosophy, Thai conventional nationalism and state security, the chapter explains that Redshirt villagers challenges such dominant ideology by conjecturing alternative ideas, such as *ammathayathipatai*, Thaksin-associated populism, Isan ethno-regionalism and anti-militarism. This chapter, however, argues that the Redshirts' ideational challenges to the state ideology, policies and agency were not resolute and resilient. It shows that such ideational challenges were undermined by another forms of internal conflicts – ideological contestation – when different Redshirt factions contended that other factions lacked “ideology”.

In Chapter Six, we will discuss the scenario after the 2014 military coup when the Thai nation-state under the military regime used measures of coercion and control against Redshirt villagers. Such measures comprised various powerful techniques, namely suppression, surveillance, indoctrination and moralising. In effect, Redshirt villagers have experienced the state of fear, censorship, ideological and moral control. Chapter Seven explores Redshirts' resistance in the post-2014 period. Drawing from the concept of weapons of the

weak and the notion of passive resistance, the chapter analyses how the Redshirts resisted the military junta in their “everyday” activities which were usually taken for granted. These forms of passive resistance include the demand for an Isan utopia, network maintenance and symbolic protests. This chapter argues that despite having been severely suppressed and strongly controlled by the military measures, epitomised by Redshirt political prisoners, most Redshirts still maintain their political ideas and identity. Chapter Eight concludes the thesis. It briefly revisits the original contributions and findings of the research. The chapter then discusses the research limitation, future research avenue and the prospects for Thai politics.

Chapter Two: Background to Thailand's Polarised Politics

Before investigating the challenges to state-village power relations precipitated by Redshirt villagers, it is important to first contextualise the Redshirt movement within Thai politics in order to see the development of current political conflicts. This chapter intentionally reviews key political contexts with an emphasis on state-village relations, particularly after the 1932 revolution. It provides an analysis of the confrontational context between the traditional elites and the network Thaksin, and the emergence of colour-coded politics. In the last context, the chapter investigates the Redshirt movement to illustrate their previous major actions and components which are crucial to understand their post-2010 mobilisation.

The 1932 Revolution

Since the bloodless revolution of 1932, carried out by a group of civilian officials and military officers, Thailand has theoretically been a constitutional monarchy (Girling 1985:19). But over the subsequent eight decades, Thailand has experienced different types of political regimes, including "bureaucratic polity", authoritarianism and "semi-democracy". The country has also experienced many periods of military rule, exemplified by the ordeal of 19 military coups (12 successful and 7 failed) and 20 constitutions.¹¹ Attempts to consolidate the constitutional regime which developed under the reign of King Bhumibol (Rama IX), Thailand's longest-serving monarch (1946-2016), was further eclipsed by the royal power and prerogative.

By the 1960s, the traditional elites, especially the royalists, had returned to political domination. Elite domination over the Thai populace came about through several methods, beginning with primary education and reinforced by everyday practices (Nidhi 2014:40). Crucial to these methods is the creation of a royalist historiography which argues, rather vaguely, that national progress will be achieved only through royal grace and wisdom (Thongchai 2001). Among the

¹¹ The number of military coups in Thailand is a subject of debate, depending on the criteria used. Nevertheless, the figures demonstrate that military putsches in Thailand are among the highest in the world.

most frequently recounted narratives is that Thailand (formerly Siam) was able to escape Western colonial rule because of the grace and wisdom of the kings, especially King Rama V, ignoring the fact that the country was actually used as a buffer zone between imperialist countries (Thongchai 2001:57-58). King Bhumibol in particular commanded so much power and respect that he could intervene directly in the political process regardless of constitutional provisions (McCargo and Ukrist 2010:10). Major explicit interventions, for example, took place during the student uprising in October 1973 and the anti-coup demonstration in May 1992.

Thailand's administrative system is generally classified into two main levels – the centre (*suanklang*) and the regional administration (*suanphumiphak*) (Nelson 1998:32). Within the regional administration, there are four hierarchical tiers: provinces (*changwat*), districts (*amphur*), sub-districts (*tambon*) and villages (*muban*). Power concentrates and centralises in the centre (Bangkok) in which all ministries are located. Provincial governors, heads of districts, sub-district heads and village headmen are appointed from the centre to oversee these tiers.¹² Bureaucrats are influential in public affairs, and this is especially true of “senior bureaucrats in the Interior Ministry, who exercise considerable power over local and provincial government” (McCargo 1997:6).

The state has a direct role in providing welfare and development projects to the people, but also in controlling and monitoring security-related matters. Several development projects have been implemented at the village level, such as healthy villages and anti-drug villages (*muban sikhao* lit. white villages). Implementation of these projects usually involves a top-down system of command and control — from the state to the villages. State authorities, including military officers and officials from different ministries, are involved in village life (Attachak 2010:12). However, each ministry, especially the Interior Ministry, the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperative, and the Ministry of Defence, also has their own policies implemented as well as agencies to monitor the implementation process deeply at the village level. The lack of integration at

¹² At present, village headmen are elected.

times results in overlapping functions and authority among different ministries while crippling the locality's ability to manage local affairs.

After the 1970s, Thailand witnessed some periods of civilian governments. These governments, however, were kept weak and short-lived. Politicians are generally regarded as unprofessional, corrupt and immoral; political parties have not been institutionalised and often riddled with 'internal factions' (*mung* lit. mosquito nets). These political factions usually bargain for power or ministerial positions and can split from one party to form a new one or join existing parties, depending upon material benefits rather than political ideologies (Kasian 2006:16). Popular participation is limited, weak and poorly institutionalised. The middle class is able to wield a "disproportionate influence upon the political process, since their liberal values are popularised by the mass media, and absorbed by a wider public" (McCargo 1997:8). Elections are allegedly plagued with vote-buying, fraud and manipulation mainly by politicians and the rural electorate (Prajak 2015:66). Hence, as it is associated with politicians and the rural electorate, electoral politics is portrayed by the traditional forces as a negative political system.

Thai society is hierarchical and Thais are considered unequal by the traditional elites, ranging from the King as the highest entity and villagers as the lowest group. Ordinary Thai villagers have traditionally been regarded as peasants and members of the rice-growing societies, as Chatthip notes (1999:9): "the common elements of the culture of Thai people is cultivating paddy in low land". Politics is normally considered a matter that should not concern villagers. Until recently, there has been little public space for villagers' voices and narratives, while local histories are subsumed under the official national "history". Political power has been almost constantly penetrated by bureaucratic domination and military intervention which are, in turn, "servants of the crown" (Girling 1985:19).

Villagers, in contrast, are portrayed as rural people in an agrarian economy focused on subsistence. Economic activities are not meant for profits and produce only marginal surpluses. Thai villagers are often represented as economically poor and politically passive. One of the earliest accounts of this

mode of rural life is provided by Phraya Anuman Rajadhon (born in 1888), the foremost scholar of Thai culture of his time (Keyes 2014:185). Phraya Anuman gave an account of the northeast province of Khorat, as vividly associated with the image of backwardness, a lack of progress and far outside the world of urban people. He wrote: "Life in the city (*naimuang*) and life in the country (*nokmuang*) offer sharp contrasts. One is close to nature; the other is remote from nature. One is the source of food and health; the other is a place where people gather to share their food and disease germs... Actually if one were to speak of the good points, the city has many advantages over the country, because the centre of *khwamcharoen* is the city" (cited in Keyes 2014:184). This image of rural villagers is still held by many Bangkok middle-class people today. Thus, villagers who are the majority of voters are instructed to live a subsistence lifestyle and develop self-sufficiency, not "greed and competition for prosperity" (Prem 2006:96).

The promulgation of the 1997 Constitution significantly reconfigured the Thai political landscape and introduced a number of reforms. Under the 1997 constitution, which was regarded as the "people's constitution" due to its highly liberal provisions and drafting process involving several societal sectors (Sangsit 2006:15), political participation was broadened and increased. Thailand also began a decentralisation process which involved consolidating and restructuring the role and significance of local governments, including Provincial Administrative Organisation (PAOs), Municipalities, and Tambon Administrative Organisations (TAOs). While these local entities are legally enfranchised to gain more authority, responsibilities and budgets from the state, rural people have been empowered to choose local representatives and manage their own affairs, although the decentralisation process is far from complete due to continuing state dominance. The number of nongovernmental organisations, interest groups, business associations and media outlets which emerged especially since the 1970s also proliferated.

Nevertheless, the first general election under the 1997 Constitution witnessed the electoral rise of Thaksin, the most powerful yet controversial elected political figures in contemporary Thailand. Thaksin Shinawatra brought

a number of changes to the Thai political landscape, and his rise to power has affected the prospects for Thai democracy more than any single individual (McCargo 2002:115). Parliamentary politics has changed, along with the character of public policies and the reconfiguration of voters. With the ascension of Thaksin also came a new leadership and political regime.

The Thaksin Era

Born in 1949 to a well-to-do Sino-Thai family from the northern province of Chiangmai, Thaksin Shinawatra began his career in the national police force and later earned a doctorate from a university in the United States (McCargo and Ukrist 2010:7). In 1987 he left the police force to focus on his businesses, involving computers and telecommunications, including pagers, mobile phones and Thailand's first satellite, which had all really benefited from government licenses and concessions. With economic know-how and political know-who, Thaksin became one of the leading entrepreneurs during the country's boom years of 1986-1997 (Kasian 2006:23-24). After the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, Thaksin entered politics with various motives, one of which was to protect his own businesses from political and economic impacts.¹³ In 1998, he founded the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party by combining influential local politicians, enthusiastic social activists and affluent businessmen (Baker and Pasuk 2005:258). With Thaksin's capability and money to "recruit" politicians from other parties in "strategically important provinces" into his new party, the TRT won the 2001 general election – the country's biggest electoral victory thus far with 248 out of 500 seats of the House of Representatives.

The contributing factors behind this triumph include the aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the innovative policies of TRT and, most importantly, the new political landscape under the 1997 Constitution (Kasian 2006:24). Thaksin's telecommunication empire, built through domestic market monopoly, emerged relatively less damaged and was used as resource to take state power (McCargo and Ukrist 2010:36). As reflected in the new TRT Party name (Thais love Thais) and nationalistic slogans and campaigns such as "think new, act new

¹³ Thaksin Shinawatra previously took over the leadership of the Palangtham Party of Major General Chamlong Srimuang who later turned Thaksin's arch opponent.

for every Thai,” Thaksin turned the crisis into an opportunity for appealing to the post-crisis Thai society (Baker and Pasuk 2005:258). TRT slogans and campaigns were welcome by large sections of the population, especially those who were disillusioned with the performance of the previous government (under the Democrat Party) and concerned over regional issues like poverty and state security in Isan (Keyes 2014:101).

The final factor that led Thaksin to power was the innovations of public policies, including populism (Taylor 2012:125). Thai political parties have typically competed mainly on the basis of candidates’ personality and networks rather than party policies and campaigning. During the 2001 election, however, the TRT’s “brand new” policies, such as “thirty baht per a hospital visit”, “village fund”, “one district one product” and “debt moratorium” for small-scale farmers, almost immediately appealed to a large number of voters (Sangsit 2006:14). These policies and programmes led Thaksin and the TRT to achieve unprecedented popularity.

However, the 1997 Constitution favoured strong executive power to redress political instability. The Constitution rendered a hybrid electoral system which combined electoral district representatives with those from a “party list” to create a balance between politicians who were local strongmen and more educated and capable candidates (Kasian 2006:22). During his time in power between 2001 and 2005, Thaksin made full use of his electoral mandate and the pro-strong-government Constitution to launch policies and programmes that restructured the country. Thaksin further strengthened his power through electioneering and the introduction of an aggressive CEO-style administration.

Following his election victory in 2001, Thaksin began to carry out dual-track economic policies by encouraging protectionism for large Thai corporations from foreign competition and implementing populist policies (Pasuk and Baker 2004). A number of government projects, such as universal health care, debt moratorium, village fund project, houses for the poor, or even computers for the poor, were implemented (Sangsit 2006). After the formation of the government, almost all campaign pledges became official policy, and they were effectively implemented within one year. Most significantly, the Thaksin

government “was the first in Thai history to deliver on its dramatic campaign promises” (Kriangchai 2012:166-7). Ten of his policies promised more than 10 billion baht for each major project. Populist policies require budget allocations and came to approximately 15.1 per cent of the total budget, which was previously consumed by current expenditures with a small portion for capital investment, particularly in Isan (Kriangchai 2012:169).

These populist policies won enormous support from the people, particularly in the north and northeast, who had long been left behind by state developmental projects. According to some commentators, like Pasuk and Baker (2004), “Thaksin is simply the best premier Thailand has ever had” for a number of Thai electorate (Pasuk and Baker 2004:vii), since “people want someone to serve them and work for them, not some pure, unsullied angel who would rule and lord over them” (Pasuk and Baker 2004:3). In the 2001 election, Thaksin won 130 out of a total 138 seats in the northeast (McCargo and Ukrist 2005:85). Combining the post-crisis nationalist climate, electoral strength and his own calibre, Thaksin was the first elected prime minister who completed a full four-year term in Thai political history.

The next general election held in 2005 not only proved Thaksin’s and the TRT’s popularity, but also resulted in another landslide electoral victory with 375 seats out of 500 seats (accounting for 60.7 per cent, compared to 96 seats for the Democrat Party). This victory prompted some critics to question the Thaksin government concerning its public policies and exercise of power. Thaksin cabinets allegedly lacked good governance, especially transparency and accountability: for critics like Sulak Siwalak, “morality has never been in Thaksin’s perspective” (Sulak 2005:50). The media as well as institutions such as the Election Commissions (EC), National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC), and National Human Right Committees faced interference from Thaksin’s power, while the police force and state-owned banks were used for his political purposes (Sangsit 2006:63). Under Thaksin’s premiership, corruption, cronyism and conflicts of interest were rampant (Kasian 2006:30).

In January 2001 when Thaksin first took office he was accused of concealing assets worth billions of baht. For many, in Thaksin’s Thailand, “these

two spheres between profit and power, big money and high politics and country and company are joined at the hip, like Siamese Twins” (Pasuk and Baker 2004:7). Civil society was harassed, political opposition was silenced and human rights violated. Most blatant was the use of state violence, such as the “war on drugs”, during which more than 2,000 people said to be involved in drug dealing were extra-judicially executed (Nostitz 2009:2). Thaksin’s government irreversibly mismanaged policies towards the country’s Malay Muslim-dominated southern provinces, namely Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat, where insurgency and unrest were remarkably high and the security forces were heavily employed (Ukrist 2006:74). As with his business style, Thaksin pursued aggressive, action-oriented policies that often ignored local sensitivities.

Under the Thaksin regime, Thailand has also been torn between two competing power networks. The first and most established is what McCargo (2005) calls “network monarchy”. This includes the palace, the Privy Council, the military and judiciary, and has been dominant in Thailand since at least 1980. King Bhumibol occupies what Connors (2011:663) describes as “near god-king status” in Thailand. Commenting on the monarchy in Thailand is prohibited, and the King is protected by *lèse-majesté* laws. After 2001, however, a second network known as “network Thaksin”, consisting of pro-Thaksin parties emerged to challenge the “primacy of palace-based networks” (McCargo 2005:500). Thaksin left little space for rival players and systematically set about dismantling the political network loyal to Prem Tinsulanond, the President of Privy Council, in a wide range of sectors, aiming to replace them with his own supporters (McCargo 2005:512). Towards the end of Thaksin’s first term in power the conflict between the two leading networks continued to escalate.

It was during Thaksin’s second brief term in office that criticism, resentment and dissent exploded onto the streets of Bangkok. The anti-Thaksin movement gathered momentum, led by media tycoon Sondhi Limthongkul, whose public television’s programme was banned by Thaksin government because it criticised the government’s performance (Kasian 2006:24). Sondhi mainly attacked Thaksin with regard to Thaksin’s loyalty to the monarchy. The last straw in toppling Thaksin came from the trading of Shin Corporation’s

stocks of 7.33 trillion Baht to the Singaporean Temasek Company. The transaction brought Thaksin another acute allegation of “disloyalty to the nation” (*khaichat* lit. sell the nation) (Sangsit 2006:16). After facing the near daily street protests, Thaksin dissolved parliament on 24 February 2006, aiming to secure another landslide election victory that would silence anti-government protesters. Although Thaksin’s political party won, its government and the snap election were nullified by the Constitution Court in April 2006.

On 19 September 2006, after fourteen years without an outright military intervention, another coup d’état was staged by the Royal Thai Army, forcing Thaksin into self-exile. Thailand had its eighteenth coup, equivalent to the number of the country’s constitutions (Thitinan 2008:526). This military intervention reaffirmed the observation long made by critics in reference to the bloody coup in 1976 and student massacre at Thammasat University that coups are “typical” to Thai politics, which returns to normalcy after an “unsuitable flirtation with democracy” (Anderson 2002:139-140). Surin Pitsuwan argued that the 2006 coup was a “necessary coup” since it brought to a halt the Thaksin’s government and a leader who “misled the country for five years and made the country lose the democratic process” (*Bangkok Post*, 22 March 2012). The 2006 coup makers appointed General Surayud Chulanont, a Privy councillor, the new premier, and other figures close to Prem and the palace took various political positions in the post-2006 coup regime. Thus, it can be argued that while the pretext to overthrow Thaksin was generated by the Yellowshirt demonstrations, it was the royalists, the judiciary and the Royal Thai Army that eventually toppled Thaksin. Yet, like its predecessors, promising to end the ongoing political “problems”, the 2006 coup created another political problem – the colour-coded politics that had convulsed Thailand for a decade.

Colour-coded Politics

Since early 2006, Thai politics has been depicted by regular mass street protests by colour-coded groups aligned with different political factions (International Crisis Group 2010). In its appearance, colour-coded politics has usually been defined as the politics of mass protesters symbolically identifying themselves

with a specific colour. These social forces were the pro-coup royalist Yellowshirts and the anti-coup pro-Thaksin Redshirts.¹⁴ In its essence, colour-coded politics stands to be defined as the contestation between the conservative ideas and the revisionist demands defined in a wide variety of ways, usually as support for electoral democracy and political equality in Thailand.

The Yellowshirts, composed mainly of the middle class from Bangkok and the upper southern region, demanded the removal of Thaksin in roadshow-style and non-stop demonstrations.¹⁵ The Yellowshirts called for Thaksin's replacement with a so-called non-partisan prime minister appointed by the King (Kasian 2006:7-9). They occupied key business districts, political landmarks and created an atmosphere that significantly paralysed both the Thaksin government and the capital Bangkok. Thaksin was accused of performing roles previously reserved for the King, and presiding over merit-making ceremonies at the Emerald Buddha Temple, the country's holiest site (Kasian 2006:7). Thaksin's visits to remote areas were alleged in repetition of activities of King Bhumibol who travelled to different provinces to win popular support during the Cold War era. Among Thaksin's most prominent trip was his visit to At-samat district, Roi-et, to demonstrate his comprehensive solution to poverty. While this five-day trip was aired twenty-four hours a day, it was later dubbed a reality show in which Thaksin attempted to gain popularity in competition with King Bhumibol who was highly revered by most Thais.

The Redshirt Movement

Following the challenge to his premiership, groups of supporters organised to protect Thaksin. These pro-Thaksin protesters, who eventually became the

¹⁴ The anti-Thaksin side has found itself in several colours – originally yellow, then in multi-coloured spectrum. The multi-coloured shirts was led by Tul Sitthisomwong, an activist doctor, claiming to represent not only one colour or group in the society but various colours or groups as its name “multi-coloured shirts” suggest. However, they have become active in protesting against the pro-Thaksin political parties, groups and individuals. In this light, they can be defined as the successor of the Yellowshirts.

¹⁵ Together with media tycoon Sondhi Limthongkul, the Yellowshirts are comprised of NGOs, activists, labour leaders and mass leaders. Prominent among these are Major-General Chamlong Srimuang, former mentor of Thaksin, ex-governor of Bangkok and leader of the May 1992 uprising against military rule.

Redshirt movement, mobilised in three main phases between 2006 and 2010: protests against the Yellowshirts and the 2006 coup, demonstrations to support pro-Thaksin governments, and protests against the Abhisit government.

Protesting against the Yellowshirts and the 2006 Coup

After Thaksin dissolved parliament in 2006, the Yellowshirts continued to demand his resignation as caretaker prime minister. Pro-Thaksin groups, namely the Caravan of the Poor (*kharawan khonjon*) and taxi and motorcycle taxi drivers' groups from different provinces and Bangkok, began their mobilisation in March 2006 to protest against the Yellowshirts and to protect Thaksin. However, these Thaksin supporters did not *publicly* define themselves as the Redshirts. The leaders of the Caravan countered the Yellowshirts with similar attacks, accusing Sondhi Limthongkul of *lèse-majesté*, while issuing a four-point statement, including supporting the Thaksin government's poverty-solving plan, protecting Thaksin, supporting peaceful conflict resolution based on electoral democracy, and supporting national reconciliation in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of King Bhumibol's ascension to the throne (*Thaipost* 20 March 2006:12). This anti-Yellowshirt movement was later supported by small groups in Bangkok, namely the People's Democracy group and the May 1992 Will Network.

These anti-Yellowshirts protesters, however, failed after the main opposition Democrat Party boycotted the general election which was held on 2 April 2006. The pro-Thaksin movement was further undermined in this period when the 2006 election was nullified by the Constitutional Court after King Bhumibol's speech (Kasian 2006:36) calling on judges to play a role in Thai politics. This speech later became known as the beginning of judicialisation of Thai politics (*tulakanphiwat*) (Thongchai 2008:32). In this context, Sonthi Limthongkul attempted to revive the royal prerogative of the king while playing down the importance of democracy and the electoral politics. He stated at one Yellowshirt protest:

In the past, Thai people ate with bare hands. When King Chula [Rama V] travelled to Europe and saw that the European ate with spoons, knives and forks. Upon his return he wanted the Thai

people to eat with cutlery. But he applied to use spoon, rather than forks because that was *farang*.¹⁶ This was a mix with Thai habits. Democracy is the same. It does not mean that one man one vote because over the past period, there was a war between two sides between the good and the bad [between the Yellowshirts and Thaksin network] (cited in Prajak 2015:26).

The 2006 coup was a significant turning point: it toppled the most popular elected premier and played a vital role in shaping the Redshirt movement. Shortly after the coup, small groups in Bangkok, led by the 19 September Network and the Anti-coup Saturday People staged short marches and organised protesting stages. On 23 March 2007, the presenters of People's Television (PTV), led by Veera Musikapong, Jatuporn Promphan, Jakrapob Penkair and Kokaew Pikulthong – who were direct pro-Thaksin supporters or politicians – organised the first anti-coup activity at the Royal Plaza in Bangkok (Uchane 2011:142). These sub-groups then campaigned together against the draft constitution in the 2007 constitution referendum. It was during this period that Sombat Boonngamanong began to campaign for the use of the colour red as the signature for the whole movement, beginning as a symbol for “vote no” in the 2007 constitution referendum. Due partly to the lack of cooperation and leadership among these small groups, the campaign against the 2007 draft constitution was not effective.

After the Constitutional Court ruled to dissolve the TRT on 30 May 2007, the PTV leaders became the leaders of these small groups to protest against what they called an “authoritarian regime” (*rabob phadetkan*). With the participation of pro-Thaksin politicians from the provinces, such as Nisit Sinthuprai, Pheu Thai MP from Roi-et, this pro-Thaksin movement began to expand and recruited a large number of protesters from the provinces to protest in Bangkok. Among their high-profile protests in this period was a demonstration in front of the house of Prem Tinsulanond, Privy Council President, where Redshirt protesters openly accused him of being behind the 2006 military coup. After a series of clashes with the riot police, the Redshirts'

¹⁶ *Farang* refers to Western Foreigners.

mobilisation was eventually dispersed on 22 July 2007, and the protesters retreated to their previous protest site – the Royal Plaza.

Protecting pro-Thaksin governments

Mass pressure and compromise among the political elites led to a general election in 2007, in which the People's Power Party (PPP), which was a TRT successor, won with another landslide victory and newly appointed PPP leader, Samak Sundaravej, became prime minister. But the post-2007 election turned out to be another episode of the Redshirt movement. In May 2008, the Yellowshirts resumed their demonstration to protest against the Samak government, arguing that Samak was Thaksin's nominee, and also against a constitution amendment under the Samak government. As a response to the Yellowshirt movement and to protect the Samak government, the Redshirts resumed their mobilisation. In July 2008, the PTV presenters launched a television programme called "Truth Today" (*khwamjing wann*) on a state-controlled channel to oppose the Yellowshirts, who later escalated their mobilisation and captured the government house. Amidst the chaos, the Constitutional Court ousted Samak, citing conflict of interest as the reason because the Prime Minister was hosting a private television cooking programme.

After Samak was removed from office, Somchai Wongsawat, Thaksin's brother-in-law, was chosen to become the new premier. His tenure, however, proved to be one of the shortest in Thai history when the Yellowshirts prevented him from giving a policy statement to parliament on 7 October 2008 (Keyes 2014:181). After 11 October 2008, to protect the Somchai government, the UDD organised several "mobile" protest stages called "the Family of Truth Today" in Bangkok. On this occasion, according to Uchane (2011:144), the UDD declared the colour red to be the symbol of the Redshirt movement. This kind of protest stages continued to be organised in different provinces. From calling for an end to "injustice" (*songmatrathan*), the pro-Thaksin movement soon turned to demanding political enfranchisement and electoral democracy. The pro-Thaksin protests eventually culminated in the formulation of the National United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), which ever since has

played a leading role in organising and mobilising the Redshirt movement. On 2 December 2008, shortly after the Yellowshirts had captured Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport, the Constitutional Court dissolved the People's Power Party, further deepening the frustration and resentment of the Redshirt protesters.

Protesting the Abhisit Government

The dissolution of the PPP and the power play of traditional elites paid off for the Democrat Party (DP), despite the fact that the DP had not won a single election in the last twenty years. Shortly after the dissolution of the PPP, a group of PPP MPs and a former coalition party called Bhumjaitai switched their support to Abhisit, the DP leader, to form a government. The Redshirts were outraged, calling the Abhisit government illegitimate and accusing the traditional elites, the military and the judiciary of supporting this unlawful government (Hewison 2012:144). It was during the Abhisit administration (2008-2011) that the Redshirts' mobilisation was most prominent. The Redshirts' mobilisation in this period had two main purposes: to topple the Abhisit government and to protest against the traditional elites' political intervention. The Redshirts submitted their demands to Abhisit, calling for the removal of Kasit Piromya, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, filing legal charges against the Yellowshirts, demanding the 1997 constitution back into effect, and calling for parliamentary dissolution. On 26 March 2009, the Redshirts organised protests known as "Red in the Land" (*daeng tang phaendin*), before eventually escalating their protests to occupy areas around the Government House. On 8 April 2009, the Redshirts pressured Prem and Abhisit to resign as Privy council President and Prime Minister respectively. However, this protest resulted in another episode of violent crackdown in April 2009.

From March to May 2010, the Redshirts resumed their mobilisation. In this period, the Redshirts organised their biggest mass rallies in Bangkok, known as the "One Million March" (Sopranzetti 2012:2). As the Redshirt protesters were mainly from the provinces and protested in Bangkok in rotation, the real number of the protesters might be less than one million. However, as attracting a large number of protesters, the Redshirt movement in this period

also encompassed various internal groups. According to Nidhi (2010:10), the Redshirt movement is defined by a wide array of social compositions, and these compositions are not coherent and monolithic but characterised by diverse “backgrounds” (*phumlang*), “aims” (*watthuprasong*), and “desires” (*khwamtongkan*). From an organisational perspective, while all Redshirts were subsumed under the leadership of the UDD which is led by the president and different tiers of leaders, in practice, the Redshirt factions and protesters could operate separately and independently (Naruemon and McCargo 2011:997).

The majority of the Redshirt protesters are from Isan, which traditionally has been perceived as an area plagued by poverty, hardship and underdevelopment. This led their opponents, like the pro-Yellowshirt station ASTV, to label the Redshirts with deprecating comments as poor farmer or “buffaloes” (Taylor 2012:132). For some critics, like former senator Jermsak Pinthong, the rural populace’s participation in the 2010 protests in Bangkok has no political meaning because they were hired protesters. He argues that the rural Redshirt protesters wanted to have “a chance to see the capital city Bangkok for the first time with pocket money” (cited in Natdao 2013:13; Apichat et al 2013:59).

During their protests the Redshirts were associated with several negative labels, from terrorists to arsonists, and were even accused of disloyalty to the King (Soprancetti 2012:2). Redshirt supporters were also called “red germs” which not only invaded the Thai moral-political body but also spread hatred and hysteria throughout the capital city, as Thongchai captured the sentiment of Bangkokians: “Rural folks, get out” (*phuak bannok okpai*) (*New Mandala*, 3 May 2010). Eventually, on 19 May 2010, the Abhisit government deployed the army to “tighten and reclaim spaces” (*khokhuen phuenti*) from the protest site (Buchanan 2013:60). The 2010 Redshirt demonstration was dispersed by the military, resulting in almost one hundred deaths and almost two thousand injuries (Keyes 2012:186).

The Redshirts allegedly fought back by setting fire to some key landmark buildings, including the provincial office buildings in Udonthani, Ubonratchathani, Khonkaen, Mukdahan in Isan and the Central World Plaza in

Bangkok, the second largest shopping mall in Southeast Asia (Keyes 2012:172). The damaged landscape in Bangkok was described as “giving unmistakable concreteness to what looks like an apocalyptic movie” (Sopranzetti 2012:2). According to the International Crisis Group (2010), colour-coded politics not only engendered physical destruction but also sparked “the most violent political confrontations in recent times” and inflicted “deep wounds on the national psyche”. The toll of casualties and injuries and the destruction of buildings culminated in what Montesano et al. (2012:3) call “the worst civil violence in Thailand’s history”.

Who are the Redshirts?

Economic Aspects

Several scholars have criticised the representation of the Redshirts as poor farmers and hired protesters. Various conceptual terms and analyses regarding the Redshirt identity have been proposed, including studies of “middle-income peasants” or “political peasants” (Walker 2012a), “grasstops” movements (Prapart 2011), “political entrepreneurs” (Patana 2010), “cosmopolitan villagers” (Keyes 2014) and “urbanised villagers” (Naruemon and McCargo 2011). Walker (2012) and Prapart (2011) contend that the emergence of the Redshirts is the direct result of dramatic changes in the Thai economic and social structures over the last 20 years. Between 1960 and 1997, the economy of Thailand grew by an average of more than 7.6 per cent per year, with double-digit growth in the period between 1987 and 1990 (Keyes 2014:135). Between 1981 and 2008, Thailand’s GDP per capita increased by 224 per cent in real terms (Walker 2012:37). Although the primary beneficiaries of economic growth were the expanding Bangkok middle and upper class, Keyes (2014:135) notes that the economic transformation also had profound effects on the rural society of Thailand, especially those in Isan. Consequently, the majority of rural households in Thailand now fall in the middle-income range (Apichat et al. 2013:95).

Based on one study informed by interviews and questionnaires from 400 Redshirt protesters, 42 per cent of Redshirt respondents had an income of more

than 10,000 baht (£200)¹⁷ per month and 16.4 per cent earned above 30,000 baht (£600) per month (Naruemon and McCargo 2011:1017). Such an increase in average income is partly because rural people now work in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. While their income from the non-agricultural sector has become more important and supplementary to the primary agricultural sector, many villagers still feel economically insecure since these non-agricultural sectors are informal and not covered by formal social welfare (Apichat et al. 2013:95). The perceived insecurity and welfare demand are important factors which explain why the Redshirts took to the streets to protect the pro-Thaksin governments and their policies.

Redshirts protesters were “villagers” who usually work in the capital city, often as informal labourers. Based on his fieldwork, Keyes (2014) suggests that in 1963 less than a quarter (22.5 per cent) of all villagers over the age of twenty had spent some time working in non-agricultural jobs in Bangkok. By the 1970s, however, at least half of the adult population of Isan, both men and women, had migrated to or were in Bangkok for temporary employment (Keyes 2014:149). This is partly because Thai villagers, especially Isan villagers, have been relatively left behind in comparison to other regions by uneven economic growth (Medhi 1996:309). For instance, in 2004, the average income for the whole northeast was 9,333 baht per month, in comparison with the national average of 14,778 baht per month and a Bangkok average of 29,696 baht per month (Keyes 2014:144). This view is shared by Naruemon and McCargo (2011:1017), adding that Redshirts are engaging in seasonal market-oriented farming, but also maintain part-time non-agricultural jobs. Nevertheless, despite living mainly in Bangkok and working in non-agricultural sectors, the Redshirts still tend to identify themselves as “villagers” (*chaoban*) or “farmers” (*chaona*) (Keyes 2014; Naruemon and McCargo 2011; Walker 2012).

Sociological Aspects

The Redshirts have been portrayed by mainstream media and the Bangkok middle classes as ignorant, unsophisticated and isolated from the outside world. As Walker observes this representation rendered by the Redshirt opponents,

¹⁷ 1 pound is equivalent to 50 baht (Average exchange rate of May 2014).

their alleged lack of outside understanding simply amounts to “stupidity” since farmers are usually portrayed as “rough, ignorant, parochial and easily led” (Walker 2012:327). Due to limited knowledge, the Redshirts are also said to be unready for democracy. Their collective actions are the result of deception and brainwashing (Sonthiyan 2011:196). The idea that rural people are intellectually incapable has been continually emphasised by the traditional elites in order to prevent them from engaging in political participation. This perception was well exemplified by the leader of the 2006 coup, General Sondhi Bonyaratkalin, who claimed that “many Thais still lack a proper understanding of democracy. The people have to understand their rights and duties. Some have yet to learn about discipline. I think it is important to educate the people about true democratic rule [...] democracy will thrive once the people learn its true meaning” (*The Nation*, 26 October 2006).

Keyes (2014) counters that the villagers are not ignorant and that this negative representation is aimed at depriving the Redshirts of their sense of agency. Based on his study in a village in the northeast province, Keyes suggests that villagers have undergone considerable socio-cultural transformation and achieved a “sophisticated understanding of the world,” resulting from work experience in Bangkok, elsewhere in Thailand or abroad, together with access to information through new media. Consequently, villagers have come to “see themselves as belonging to much larger worlds than those defined by the parameters of their home communities” and thus becoming what he terms “cosmopolitan villagers” (Keyes 2014:185-188). Keyes (2014:188) contends that the Redshirts protested in order to find their voice and they would be “no longer silent” or surrender to autocratic domination.

Urbanisation has also factored importantly in forming the identity of the Redshirts. While urbanisation is defined both physically and psychologically, it encourages villagers to aspire to live like urban dwellers as demonstrated by their demands for social mobility (Naruemon and McCargo 2011:998). According to Boccuzzi (2012), urbanisation in Thailand is twofold, including firstly the expansion of “urban hegemony” of Bangkok’s values and superiority and secondly the urbanisation of the countryside. Yet such urbanisation has also

resulted in economic migration from rural areas to Bangkok because jobs are more readily available in Bangkok and economic opportunities in the newly urbanised countryside are limited. As a result, migration to Bangkok increased over the period of rapid industrialisation from a rate of 2.6 per cent in 1965-1970 to 5.8 per cent in 1975-1980, and to 7.4 per cent in 1985-1990 (this is a measured rate per 1,000) (Boccuzzi 2012:13).

This signifies that, in reality, rural people have been living in urban areas but retain their familial ties in the villages. The continuation of rural ties also results from the fact that not every migrant will be successful in finding jobs or sufficient earnings. The failure in adapting themselves to the cities, especially Bangkok, can result in a sense of social alienation and nostalgia for rural life. A number of migrants, nonetheless, have to continue searching for jobs in Bangkok. Boccuzzi (2012:3) very incisively sums up this situation, stating that Bangkok-bound migrants are subsequently bound by Bangkok as “the city forges ties that hold them to it, changing who they are and defining the bounds of a new identity, one that will always be both rural and urban”.

Political Aspects

It is believed that vote-buying has been the root cause of the Redshirt demonstration (Theerayut 2013:71). However, scholars such as Apichat et al. (2013) contended that such argument is not supported by strong evidence. By contrast, Noppon (2013:74), who conducted fieldwork in the northern province of Chiangmai, points out that some female Redshirt merchandisers in a rural area sacrificed monthly income of around 6,000-10,000 baht (£120-200) to participate in a protest in Bangkok. For Noppon (2013), it was the strong demand for political participation, rather than material gains, of small people that led to the Redshirt movement. Therefore, the Redshirt movement emerged not because of vote-buying by politicians but because of vote-depriving by coup-makers (Apichat et al. 2013:59). In this light, the Redshirt movement was a reaction to the country's political rigidity which does not correspond to the socio-economic transformation in rural areas.

By contrast, the Redshirts are those who protest for benefits they received from Thaksin's political policies, such as the universal healthcare

programme (thirty baht per hospital visits) and village funds (Walker 2012:6). Many villagers have benefited from such public policies, which none of the previous governments have ever provided (Pinkaw 2013:11). Thaksin's ability to carry out election promises – partly because his party held an absolute majority in the House of Representative – was unprecedented for the Thai voters. This policy implementation generated loyalty among the Redshirts.

The Redshirt uprising was also associated with the democratisation and decentralisation launched by the 1997 Constitution, one of the most democratic constitutions of Thailand. These legal platforms were catalysts that significantly acquainted villagers with politics and electoral democracy (Pinkaw 2013). For instance, in a northern province between 2004 and 2006, there were eight local and national elections, including Members of Parliament, senators, members of provincial Administration, head of provincial administration, members of sub-district administration and head of the sub-district administration, sub-district head (*kamnan*) and village head (*phuyaiban*) (Walker 2008:85).

With fiscal and political decentralisation since 1997, local elections have proven to be important arenas where villagers have learnt not merely that politics involves their everyday lives, but that their political rights can make a difference on policies. As there are 77 provincial administration organisations (PAOs) and 7,775 sub-district administration organisations (TAOs), villagers have opportunities to vote for local candidates in government offices which were previously controlled by bureaucrats sent from Bangkok (Apichat et al. 2013:111). This idea is echoed by Naruemon and McCargo (2011:1017), suggesting that the Redshirts saw elections as a means to empower themselves, particularly in relation to central bureaucrats. However, despite the increase in the number of elections, both national and local, the rural voters have been constantly denied their electoral rights.

Conclusion

Although Thailand has been a constitutional monarchy since the 1932 revolution and undergone a process of democratisation, the people, especially villagers, are still not politically empowered. By some measures, villagers in Isan

occupy the lowest strata in Thai society and their sense of agency appears to be weak. Although there have been attempts to demand more political rights, participation and equality, such demands have usually been suppressed. The traditional elites have used both ideological instruments and more coercive methods to suppress and control villagers' rights and participation as well as to maintain their superior position in power relations with villagers. The Redshirt movement is a recent attempt to defy the status quo of the Thai political elite. In this transitional political landscape, the Redshirt village movement, particularly the village proclamations in the post-2010 crackdown period, have created new dimensions of political contestation in Thailand. While observers have studied Redshirt politics at the national level, and some have even focused on local dimensions, there has yet to be a comprehensive analysis of the Redshirt village movement in Thailand, and so the following chapters of this thesis respond to this analytical gap.

Chapter Three: The Emergence of Redshirt Villages and the Redshirt Movement

Introduction

This chapter addresses the first secondary question (RQ1): “How have the Redshirt movement and Redshirt villages changed since 2010?”. Existing literature on the Redshirt movement, such as Ekkapollanut (2013), Sopranzetti (2012) and Ubonphan (2010), mainly analyses the Redshirts’ challenges to the Thai state through their street demonstration in Bangkok in the pre-2010 crackdown period. Only a few scholarly works, like Wipawadee (2012) and Pruek (2010), analyse the post-2010 Redshirts and explore Redshirt villages. However, these works are incomplete because they narrowly focus on a single Redshirt village or a single activity of Redshirt villagers. They fail to provide a broader explanation of the Redshirt village movement beyond a particular village or activity and, more importantly, do not explain how the emergence and expansion of Redshirt villages affected power relations among Redshirt factions.

This chapter bridges these gaps by investigating the Redshirts’ challenges which were transferred from Bangkok to Isan provinces, characterised by the emergence and expansion of Redshirt villages. While the proclamation and proliferation of Redshirt villages were a response to the detention of Redshirt political prisoners, it was also a result of the leadership crisis within the Redshirt movement. This chapter also aims to problematise the simplified binary opposition explanation of the state versus Redshirt villagers (Nostitz 2014; Apichat et al. 2013), by demonstrating the internal complexity within the Redshirt movement. The chapter demonstrates that Redshirt villages became rich political resources, inducing engagement from different Redshirt factions and leaders. Such engagements led to the expansion of Redshirt villages, but also caused a wide array of fractious power and leadership struggles among Redshirt political entrepreneurs. Instead of promoting political participation for villagers, these Redshirt villages became political opportunities in which various Redshirt factions attempted to gain control.

The Emergence of Redshirt Villages

A clenched right fist was raised against the sky.

“Fight or not fight! Fight or not fight! Fight or not fight!”

Cried a man in front of the villager crowd.

“Fight! Fight! Fight!”.

Answered scores of cheering villagers, all dressed in red T-shirts.

“Who do you love?”

“Thaksin!”.

“Who do you love?”

“Thaksin!”.

“Who do you love?”

“Thaksin!”.

The man and villagers shouted alternately.

Then, pointing to the crowd, the man loudly concluded:

“Hereby we have proclaimed a Redshirt village!”.

This scene is the pinnacle of the proclamation rite of a Redshirt village created and recalled by Arnon Sannan, one of the Redshirt village founders.¹⁸ The word “fight” well encapsulates the political conflicts and the contentious political landscape in the country. The apparent will to fight emerged from the Redshirts’ earlier experience during the April-May 2010 crackdown when their mobilisation was countered by military force. According to the People Information Centre (2011:14), the Redshirt demonstration was suppressed by “the most violent dispersal in Thai history” in May 2010, in which the Royal Thai Army employed more than 50,000 men, used approximately 100,000 bullets as well as spending 1.3 billion baht. Despite this “costly” experience, many villagers did not abandon the Redshirt identity, but moved to demonstrate their explicit defiance by proclaiming Redshirt villages.

The original Redshirt village was proclaimed at *Ban Nonghuling*, Udonthani, on 15 December 2010, with a moderate political mandate and a loosely defined plan.¹⁹ The Redshirt village founders comprised a provisional

¹⁸ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

¹⁹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

coalition of local Redshirt supporters: Kamonsin Singsuriya, a former policeman and the head of a local Redshirt group “Udonthani Redshirts” (*khonsuedaeng Udon*); Kongchai Chaikang, the village head of Nonghuling; Petsak Kittidutsadikul, an entrepreneur and a financial supporter of the Udonthani Redshirts; and Arnon Sannan, a former member of the local Redshirt group “People-love-Udon”.²⁰ This provisional coalition eventually declared the newly formed group as the “Federation of Redshirt Villages for Democracy of Thailand”.

The first Redshirt village proclamation involved a few simple ceremonies, beginning with a short march from the village entrance to the house of the village head and finishing with a short speech. The event was attended by approximately 50 Redshirt villagers, many of whom were outsiders. Although attendees were waving red flags and using other protest symbols commonly associated with the Redshirts nationwide, the main signs and banners used in the first Redshirt village proclamation were the symbols of the Udonthani Redshirts. Kamonsin Singsuriya, who was locally well regarded and previously a vote canvasser, was selected as the new leader of the Redshirt Villages for Democracy. Arnon Sannan, who knew Kamonsin during the campaign for local politicians in Udonthani in 1996, was appointed the group’s secretary.²¹ The most substantive part of the event was a speech delivered slowly but suggestively by Kamonsin in a mixture of Thai and Isan languages to chart the purposes of the proclamation. The main elements of the speech were as follows:

Now my fellow Nonghuling villagers. ‘Today’ (*mueni* Isan), a Redshirt group from Udonthani city came to visit and had a meal together with you. Papaya Salad and grilled meat. I felt they were very, very ‘delicious’ [*saeb* Isan]. Coming to visit today is to persuade you to stand up to demand from and fight with the [Abhisit’s] government. We want the government to release the Redshirt leaders who have been imprisoned both in the provinces

²⁰ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²¹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

and Bangkok. We also want the government to put the 1997 constitution back at work. At present, there is no justice because the government has committed 'double standards' (*songmatrathan* CT). Whatever the Redshirts did was wrong. Whatever our opponents did was never wrong. Right my fellows? Now will you fight with the Redshirts?²²

From the first proclamation speech, the establishment of the original Redshirt village seems to maintain and reinforce the same demands for justice and political rights that the Redshirts have been making since their street rallies. However, unlike the UDD, which originally emerged as an opposition to the protests of their arch rival the Yellowshirts in late 2008 (Naruemon and McCargo 2011:995), the original Redshirt village was established for two reasons. Firstly, the original proclamation was a reaction to the detention of Redshirt political prisoners after the 2010 crackdown. This was substantiated by the first two purposes written in the "Redshirt village Handbook" produced by the Federation of Redshirt Villages:

1. Demand the release of the imprisoned Redshirts leaders
2. Demand the release of the imprisoned Redshirts members
3. Demand the right and "**complete**" democracy [emphasised in original]
4. Protest against the coup and authoritarian power
5. Bring home Thaksin Shinawatra

In the aftermath of the 2010 suppression, several Redshirt protesters in Bangkok and Isan were detained. In Bangkok, the national Redshirt leaders, namely Veera Musikapong, Jatuporn Promphan, Nattawut Saigua, and Weng Tojirakarn, were arrested and imprisoned (Human Rights Watch 2011:120). In Isan, while local leaders were similarly arrested and imprisoned, the military closely monitored and arbitrarily detained a number of the Redshirts who were allegedly involved in the protests. Among the noted local leaders imprisoned were two influential local Redshirt leaders: Khwanchai Sarakham (known as

²² Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015. The video was retained by Kongchai.

Khwanchai Priapana), a community radio host in Udonthani and the leader of the People-love-Udon, and Pichet Tabudda (a.k.a. Ajarn Toi), a community radio host in Ubonratchathani and the leader of Chak-thong-rob Group.²³

A number of ordinary Redshirt supporters were also arrested. At least 417 Redshirts were charged for allegedly violating the emergency decree: 80 cases in Udonthani (the highest), 29 cases in Ubonratchatani, and 6 cases in Khonkaen (Human Rights Watch 2011:125). Charges varied but included arson, trespassing, trespassing with weapons, emergency decree violations, curfew violations, possessing drugs or in a group intending to do harm (Human Rights Watch 2011:125). Among these charges, the most severe punishments entail 33 years in jail.²⁴ However, Pheu Thai politicians did not strongly respond to these sentences and failed to help the prisoners. The national UDD was also passive in mobilising the movement after the 2010 crackdown. Thus, the establishment of the original Redshirt village, as claimed by the founders, represented a new mechanism not merely to build a bottom-up approach for Redshirt villagers but also to renew the 'unity and solidarity' (*khampen peukphaen*) of the weakened Redshirt movement nationwide.²⁵

Secondly, the birth of the original Redshirt village resulted from a leadership crisis in the Redshirt movement after the 2010 crackdown. The imprisonment of UDD icons and of local leaders like Khwanchai prompted the Redshirt village founders to seize the opportunity to create their own means of mobilisation. Indeed, previous mobilisation methods, such as community radios, satellite TVs and publications, were all censored or made inaccessible by the emergency decree that came into effect between 10 April and 22 December 2010 (Human Rights Watch 2011:143-5). Such censorship made it difficult for previous generation leaders to maintain their role. The Redshirt village founders, whose role was previously imperceptible, used this opportunity to emphasise the necessity of creating new leaderships. Arnon asserted in his criticism of the earlier Redshirt movement:

²³ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015; interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

²⁴ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

²⁵ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

After 19 May [2010], people were afraid of wearing a red shirt. But we needed new ‘fighters’ (*naksu*). Like boxing. So far we’ve trained many boxers, but they all stopped ‘fighting’ (*tosu*). There remained only the cheering crowd who didn’t know how to fight. We would be dead.²⁶

Arnon also argued that the Redshirt village movement was a more robust and effective mechanism compared to previous strategies. Thus, the founders sought a distinction from the mobilisation of the Redshirts’ old generation by arguing that Redshirt villages were a strategy to declare to their opponents that not only the “Redshirts never die” but the “new-born” (*koetmai*) Redshirts would be “bigger than ever” (*yaikwakaao*).²⁷ While proclaiming villages as Redshirt villages was to continue the movement, it also marked a new transition for Redshirt mobilisation.

The Challenges of Redshirt Villages

The emergence of Redshirt villages posed a significant challenge to the Thai state. In declaring Redshirt villages, Redshirt supporters laid “ownership” to a territory, as opposed to merely occupying public places, streets or buildings as the Yellowshirts or the UDD did. It entailed a proclamation that the Redshirt village is exceptional from the general rule of the Thai state governed by the Abhisit government and dominated by the traditional elites. Perceiving Abhisit’s rule as politically illegitimate, Redshirt villagers argued that they had the right to declare themselves “independent” from that illegitimate sovereign power and jurisdiction.

Although this declaration was not a form of secessionism, it radicalised the Redshirts’ demands and turned them into a security issue since laying ownership to public spaces was illegal under the Thai law. According to the Local Administration Act of 1914, which stipulates State’s authority on *muban*, *tambon*, districts and provinces, the lawful ‘establishment’ (*jattang*) of any new villages must comply with the law and take into consideration the necessity, appropriateness and effectiveness of the administration. The Local

²⁶ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

²⁷ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

Administration Act was amended on 14 May 1996 to further state in Section 3 on the establishment of villages that:

Villages are separated into two categories, namely villages as officially established and villages as temporarily established.

Officially established villages must be established by Provincial Proclamation, under the following regulations;

- 1). A congested community or a community with at least 1,200 people or 240 households.
- 2). If establishing a new village, must have at least 600 people or 120 households.
- 3). A newly established village must be approved by village committees, *tambon* councils, the TAO councils and the meeting by senior district officials.

The aim of the law is to make villages liveable for villagers who might have differences, such as origins, background and opinions. In this respect, a village proclaimed by the Redshirts violates state authority as newly established villages must be approved by the Ministry of Interior and proclaimed by the province.²⁸ Although there are some “villages” created over the existing state’s villages despite the fact that their creation was not approved by the Local Administration Act, like “white villages” (*muban sikhao*) or “anti-drug villages”, such villages are all the state’s projects. Moreover, the proclamation violated the liveable conditions of the village for non-Redshirts. The establishment of Redshirt village which also set up a Redshirt *puyaiban* and 15 committees (Khaosot, 16 October 2011:16), infringed the authority of state *puyaiban* and *kamnan* as provided by the Local Administration Act. Therefore, governors of some provinces, such as Mahasarakham, demanded that all Redshirt villages be removed otherwise the existing state *puyaiban* and *kamnan* might be charged with malfeasance and neglect of duty according to Section 157 of the Criminal Code (*Matichon Weekend*, 16 September 2011:89).

²⁸ Interview with Worawit Pongngam (District Chief Assistant), Ubonratchathani, 30 May 2015.

The expansion of Redshirt villages across Isan escalated security concerns for the state authorities. With a history of insurrection against Bangkok's domination (Keyes 2014; Somchai 2006; Suthep 2005), Isan has continued to draw suspicious concerns among the Bangkok political elites. In the past, the most acute Isan insurrection occurred in at least two episodes during the power centralisation of Bangkok in the late 1900s and the Communist insurgency particularly between the mid-1960s and 1980. In the Chakri dynasty's formation of the Thai modern state, the Thai political nobles introduced various governing measures, including taxation, conscription and replacement of local elites. According to Suthep (2005:162), these measures amounted to concealed "internal colonialism", which eventually led to widespread discontent among Isan people and many millenarian rebellions. Similarly, Keyes (2014:101) notes that in the different context of the Cold War "*Panha Isan*" (Northeast problem) proved to be the main security concern for the Thai state. At that time, the Thai rulers were fearful that the Isan region might be incorporated into Communist-dominated Indochina, due mainly to Isan ethno-regionalism and economic underdevelopment.

Hence, the proclamation and proliferation of Redshirt villages were portrayed as another potentially separatist rebellion against the Thai state. During the Abhisit government (2008-2011), Redshirt villages were accused of harbouring communist, secessionist and "anti-monarchist" (*lomjao*) sentiments.²⁹ Such sentiments were most clearly echoed by Phumrat Thaksadipong, a former National Intelligence Agency Director, who argued that Redshirt villages "defy state power and national security because they violate Section 1 of the [2007] Constitution which reads Thailand is one and indivisible Kingdom" (*Phujatkan*, 18 June 2011). Although Redshirt villages posed significant challenges to the Thai nation-state, such an accusation, epitomised by Phumrat, created a public misunderstanding about Redshirt villages and aimed to distort the demands of the Redshirts.

²⁹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

The Expansion of Redshirt Villages

Established after the military crackdown, Redshirt villages were not expected to have a significant impact on the Redshirt movement. According to commentators like Wipawadee (2012:42), “the original Redshirt village was not expected to create tangible impacts by both their opponents and Redshirt internal factions”. Nevertheless, the idea of Redshirt villages soon proved very popular among Redshirt supporters. In January 2011, a second Redshirt village was proclaimed in another village in Kogsanga, Pen district, Udonthani.³⁰ Redshirt villages then rapidly gained popular support from local Redshirts and spread widely to other districts in the province. The main reason was that many, if not most, Isan villagers were already sympathetic to the Redshirts. The involvement of pro-Thaksin politicians was also a key factor in gaining villagers’ participation.

Pro-Thaksin politicians first became “formally” associated with the Redshirt village movement through the involvement of Somchai Wongsawat, Thaksin’s brother-in-law and the most recent pro-Thaksin prime minister (September 2008-December 2008). On 11 April 2011, Somchai was invited to preside over another proclamation in Pen district, Udonthani.³¹ The popularity of Thaksin was the most important factor contributing to the expansion of Redshirt villages. During the proclamations, the most significant red signs deployed were standardised banners of Thaksin’s smiling face across a red background (two metres long and eighty centimetres wide). One of the former premier’s hands gestures a hand signal of love, presumably signifying the former name of his political party Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais). The text “Redshirt Villages for Democracy” also appeared on the banners, which were subsequently mass produced for use in all Redshirt villages’ identical proclamation rites: the only variation in the design was the name of the village concerned.

However, it was Prime Minister and Democrat leader Abhisit who significantly catalysed the expansion of the Redshirt village when he dissolved

³⁰ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

³¹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2010.

parliament on 10 May 2011 and declared a general election on 3 July 2011 (*Thairath*, 10 December 2013). In an attempt to compete for MP seats, pro-Thaksin politicians became highly interested in the Redshirt village proclamation for they wanted to use the villages as a basis for electioneering. In the run up to the 2011 election, several Pheu Thai politicians became supporters of the Redshirt village proclamations. Participating pro-Thaksin politicians included former Minister of Labour Prasong Boonpong, former Minister of Finance Suchart Thadathamrongvech, Khonkaen MP Cherdchai Tontisirin, and Udonthani MP Surathin Pimanmekhin.³² Their participation in the project significantly contributed to Redshirt villages' publicity. For villagers, the proclamations created opportunities to make politicians and political activists more accessible and accommodating to their demands.³³ The involvement of these politicians boosted Redshirt village proclamations and activities which rapidly spread to other areas in Isan.

Another turning point was after the 2011 general election when Pheu Thai won and became the government. The Redshirt Villages for Democracy was able to consolidate as a large-scale movement. On 5 October 2011, Redshirt villages were collectively formalised as the "Federation of Redshirt Villages for Democracy". Thanks also to the involvement of pro-Thaksin politicians, the number of Redshirt villagers markedly increased through collective proclamations to save time and to demonstrate their strength in numbers.³⁴ One of the largest proclamations was held in front of the Udonthani Provincial Hall on 19 February 2012, in which 1,000 villages were collectively proclaimed as Redshirts' (*Matichon* 19 February 2012).

Apart from their proliferation, Redshirt villages also expanded in terms of types and activities. Shortly after the 2011 general election, the UDD leader Thida Thavornseth created the official UDD's own brand of Redshirt villages called "Redshirt Villages for Democracy (of UDD)" (*muban sueadaeng sangkat no-po-cho*). The first proclamation of the UDD Redshirt villages was on 8 August 2011 in Kalasin, where the representatives of 300 villages attended the

³² Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2010.

³³ Interview with Chailap Uthitphan, Khonkaen, 9 June 2010.

³⁴ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

proclamation (Thida, 2012:35). One of the largest UDD proclamations was held in Chaiyaphum on 24 March 2012 in which 1,000 villages were proclaimed (*Phujatkan*, 26 March 2012: 11).

In addition to Redshirt villages, the Federation of Redshirt Villages scaled up its ambitions by proclaiming Redshirt sub-districts and districts. The first sub-district was proclaimed on 24 April 2011 at *tambon* Nongnakham, Udonthani, and the first Redshirt district was proclaimed in Prajaksinlapakhom district, Udonthani, on 9 October 2011 (*Prachatai* 4 October 2011). The proclamation of Redshirt sub-district was also the first time that one of the UDD leaders – the extremely popular Jatuporn Promphan – was invited to preside over the proclamation organised by the Federation. Jatuporn’s participation in the project greatly boosted the credibility and popularity of Redshirt villages in Isan.

Another factor that led to the expansion of Redshirt villages was the introduction of political activities and speeches after the formal proclamation.³⁵ While these speeches were mostly lengthy monologues, certain issues were also raised, such as the creation of “Redshirt village cooperatives”, to attract villagers’ attention. This proposed project aimed at improving the well-being of proclaimed villagers by channelling state funds into Redshirt villages through the Cooperative Act of Thailand (*Prachatai*, 9 August 2012). The Redshirt village founders also introduced a Redshirt “SML” (Small Medium and Large) village loan project.³⁶ As the Redshirt village movement expanded, additional ceremonies were also added. While these ceremonies usually involved local cultural elements, at the end of the proclamation the Redshirt village founders would use a hammer to nail the Redshirt village sign, symbolically meaning building a new village.

In May 2011, for the first time, Arnon and his team were able to organise a proclamation ceremony in the South, in the overwhelmingly Democrat-controlled Trang province, the home province of Chuan Leekpai, the Democrat chief advisor (*Matichon* 9 June 2011:15). After January 2012, Redshirt villages

³⁵ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

³⁶ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

took a new turn when the proclamations was organised in non-Redshirts' stronghold regions in a large pattern when Arnon and his team were able to provide a proclamation ceremony in another Southern province of Satun.³⁷ In May 2012, 14 Redshirt villages were proclaimed by UDD leader Thida Thavornseth in the southernmost province of Narathiwat (Thida 2012:239). In an attempt to expand Redshirt villages into "less red" areas, Redshirt village leaders used religion to persuade villagers to participate in and facilitate the proclamation ceremonies.³⁸ Between 2013 and mid-2014, the Redshirt village founders increasingly used religious sites, such as mosques in the south and temples in the Isan province of Buriram as proclamation sites.³⁹ Redshirt village proclamations peaked in 2012, and the last Redshirt proclamation was held in Buriram in early 2014. Movement activities continued until the middle of 2014.⁴⁰

The number of Redshirt villages

While proclaiming Redshirt villages helped to continue the Redshirt movement, it also marked a new mode of mobilisation. When the project was in operation between late-2010 and mid-2014, Redshirt villages were inaugurated in several parts of Thailand, ranging from the northernmost to the southernmost provinces.⁴¹ However, no source with strong solidity is available on the precise number of Redshirt villages. The founders claimed that, in their heyday, Redshirt villages numbered around 20,000 villages, with the pre-2014 coup intention to achieve a total number of 30,000 villages.⁴² But such numbers can be problematic, and the real total number of Redshirt villages is difficult to ascertain for two important reasons. Firstly, as an opposition movement, the number of Redshirt villages was not systematically documented for fear of persecution. In fact, as the state had attempted to suppress Redshirt villages, proclaimed villages were unlikely to admit that they were Redshirt villages in

³⁷ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

³⁸ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

³⁹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁴⁰ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

⁴¹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁴² Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015. Also *Phujatkan*, December 2011:15.

the post-2014 coup period. Moreover, many villagers proclaimed their villages as Redshirt villages without using the proclamations provided by the original founders (Fieldwork, 21 January 2014). In this regard, the number provided by the leaders may not be accurate. Secondly, apart from the Redshirt village founders, there were many Redshirt entrepreneurs and factions competing to register their own Redshirt villages. This resulted in the same villages being proclaimed and registered more than once. Thus, although Isan contains 30,411 (and the North 11,324) of the total 75,547 villages of the country, the figure claimed by the founders appears too high.

An assessment based on “written” evidence suggested that Redshirt villages could number between 15,000-20,000 villages. While the number of 20,000 was provided by Arnon, the number of approximately 15,000 villages was suggested by a main organiser of Redshirt village proclamations – Prasong Boonpong, Pheu Thai MP and former minister of labour (*Matichon*, 9 August) – and the Redshirts’ opponents – the Yellowshirts, exemplified by *Phujatkan* newspaper.⁴³ From the written documents, there is evidence that proclaimed Redshirt villages were mostly found in Isan, as claimed by the movement’s founders. The proclamations increased remarkably in 2011, and the largest number of Redshirt villages was proclaimed in 2012. The majority were proclaimed in groups, and the largest group proclamation involved around 1,000 villages (*Matichon* 19 February 2012; *Phujatkan* 6 April 2012:11). The expansion and different registration of Redshirt villages also indicated the fact that while the emergence and expansion of Redshirt villages were engaged by different Redshirt factions, the Redshirt village movement was a new method that affected the movement as a whole. More importantly, this evidence suggests that not only did the proclamations of Redshirt villages exist, the number of proclaimed villages was tentatively high, especially compared to traditionally state-promoted village project.

In considering the possibility of the expansion of Redshirt villages by province, the pattern seemed to be in provinces where the emergency decree

⁴³ Please see appendix for method of preliminary calculation based on 17 newspaper in Thailand.

was declared by the Abhisit government in 2010, which were mostly in Isan and the north (Hewison 2012:155). The provinces where Redshirt village concentrated included Udonthani, Khonkaen, Ubonratchathani and Chiangmai, Lampang and Prae. In other regions, the proclamation tended to be initiated in areas won by pro-Thaksin parties (Pasuk and Baker 2010:23-24). But, what is specific about the Redshirt village movement was attempts to proclaim villages in areas that were not natural Redshirt territory, such as Songkhla, Phitsanulok, Rayong and Phuket. This gave the Redshirts a sense of triumph and occupation, while the local people felt the Redshirts were encroaching on their areas. Nonetheless, this emergence and expansion of Redshirt villages as well as the accusation from state authorities critically generated leadership contention and internal conflicts within the Redshirt movement.

Arnon Sannan and the Original Redshirt Village Founders

Arnon Sannan

Born in 1974, Arnon Sannan grew up in a local village in Udonthani.⁴⁴ Although both his grandfather and father were village headmen, Arnon was interested in journalism and communication technology. Rather than continuing the family tradition, he began his career as a journalist at the state-run television station Channel 9. Arnon worked at the television station for almost ten years and was able to develop some public relations skills as well as practical technological know-how. After Thaksin became prime minister in 2001, Arnon became interested in politics out of his admiration for Thaksin as reflected in his political ideas and news coverage. In 2008, Arnon lost his job due to a combination of his pro-Thaksin news reporting, intense peer pressure and a reduction in the size of the channel's workforce.

Upon returning to his home in Udonthani, Arnon founded a local newspaper *Siang Isan* (Isan Voice) and was introduced by his father to Khwanchai Sarakham, the leader of the pro-Thaksin People-Love-Udon Club and a popular community radio host. He was soon employed as Khwanchai's technician due to his media skills.⁴⁵ Arnon continued to work at Khwanchai's

⁴⁴ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

⁴⁵ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

community radio station, 97.5 MHz, for two years. At the radio station, the former Channel 9 journalist gained first-hand political experience from Khwanchai as well as from hosting political shows during the breaks from *lukthung* (folk song) programming – the station’s main content.⁴⁶ At this point, Arnon was still an unknown even among other journalists and nobody expected him to become a local Redshirt leader.⁴⁷

It was after Khwanchai was arrested and imprisoned between 13 May 2010 and 22 February 2011 that Arnon suddenly became a political activist in his own right.⁴⁸ Arnon quit Khwanchai’s faction to join another group called the Udonthani Redshirt group led by Kamonsin.⁴⁹ The Udonthani Redshirts were attempting to reach out to their members and resume their role, which had been severely affected by the 2010 crackdown.⁵⁰ The first activity of the coalition was a one-day event “Campaigning for the Release of Redshirt Prisoners”, in which participants took to the streets of Udonthani demanding the release of the Redshirt prisoners in November 2010. Arnon was initially recruited as secretary of the group mainly because of his skills in communication technology and public relations.

However, Arnon saw this as an opportunity to increase the role of the coalition as well as his own. Arnon argued that the previous Redshirt movement was highly centralised and dominated by older generation leaders, particularly the UDD leaders. Under the UDD, the Redshirt’s organisational structure was very rigid and new leaders were not allowed to emerge and lead. He puts it as follows:

The Redshirt movement then was not strong. Our main weakness was there was no permission for other people to do the job. In the PDRC [an anti-Thaksin movement], most of the people attending had a chance to go on the stage and to speak. They also had several ‘leaders’ (*phunam*). But everyone was a ‘leading actor’ (*pra-eak*,

⁴⁶ Interview with Thanradi Sarakham, Udonthani, 13 June 2015.

⁴⁷ Interview with Neeranuch Niamsub, Ubonratchathani, 28 May 2015.

⁴⁸ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁴⁹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

⁵⁰ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

literally a main actor). That was not the case for the UDD. If you weren't their people, you wouldn't have a chance.⁵¹

And "[T]hose who were close to the UDD leaders got promoted on stage. They had opportunities to hold the microphone. Then they went to the Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of Agriculture..."⁵²

It was the desire to create new leaders who could play a starring "*pra-eak*" role that led to the coalition's second activity in mid-December 2010, when the group decided to organise a project which significantly changed the Redshirt movement by proclaiming "the original Redshirt village" and a number of other Redshirt villages which "were not under the UDD's command".⁵³ However, after the establishment of the Redshirt village movement, the *pra-eak* role and opportunities to make appearances and speeches on Redshirt stages were still limited to certain leaders. The main reason was that opportunities to make public speeches on political stages not only made the speakers popular among Redshirt supporters but also allowed the Redshirt village movement leaders to achieve prominence among pro-Thaksin politicians, which could prove politically rewarding.

The Separation of the Founders

Redshirt village proclamations attracted interest from different groups of Redshirt supporters as the popularity of Redshirt villages increased. But the increasing role of the Redshirt village movement led to different opinions and conflicts among the founders. Despite his official role as 'secretary' to the coalition, Arnon became the most famous founder of the Redshirt village project due to his communication and public relations skills. In every Redshirt village, not only did he actively keep recording evidence of activities, but also systematically publicised such evidence through various media – on Redshirts' digital television channels, social media, radio channels or in newspapers.⁵⁴ Publicity for these Redshirt activities depended on Arnon's discretion, and he

⁵¹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁵² Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁵³ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁵⁴ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

was the person who had most control of the public relations work of Redshirt villages and other credits of their activities.

His ability to control public relations made Arnon the most well-known among the Redshirt village movement leaders. Arnon gradually gained sole credit for ownership of the Redshirt village movement's activities.⁵⁵ As a result, he increasingly became the only founder invited to lead proclamation ceremonies in other places. His proclamations, participation and speeches were usually published. Most importantly, it was his key role at the conclusion of each proclamation rite that led to his emerging leadership. In this regard, while Arnon criticised the UDD for controlling the Redshirt stages and protest sites, it was precisely his control of the publicity of the Redshirt village movement or the ability to "hold the microphone" that led him to become the Redshirt village leader. In addition to Redshirt strongholds, Arnon was subsequently even invited to make proclamations in other regions where the Redshirt movement was less prominent, especially the South.⁵⁶ Thanks to his media skills and the support of Pheu Thai politician Prasong Boonpong, Arnon and his followers grew so popular that they travelled for several months in mid-2012 without once returning home, initiating proclamations in various provinces under constant police escort.⁵⁷

From serving as Khwanchai's unknown assistant, Arnon established himself as a Redshirt leader in his own right. For Arnon, this enhancement in his role led to the increase in his charisma, as attested by his ability to invite many senior Pheu Thai politicians to preside over the proclamations and provide financial support.⁵⁸ As he gained more prominence in his role as Redshirt village leader, Arnon began to create a standard format for the proclamations. Any village seeking to be proclaimed Redshirt must satisfy the criteria stipulated in his Handbook. According to the Handbook, at least 60 per cent of the total population had to be Redshirt before the village could be proclaimed a Redshirt

⁵⁵ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

⁵⁶ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁵⁷ According to Arnon, his team was under constant police escort "since Songkran." "Songkran" is a Thai New Year, celebrated between 12-15 April. Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

⁵⁸ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

village. In 2012 when Redshirt villages were at the height of their popularity, Arnon strongly believed that he was the only person who could provide “genuine” proclamations.⁵⁹ When other proclamations were made without him, it was his duty to make a re-proclamation. In effect, Arnon set himself up as the sole arbiter of what constituted an authentic Redshirt village. Arnon contended:

Other groups which did proclamations they hammered on the Redshirt village signs by a single nail. Those were not ‘real’ (*jing*). Other groups and Dr.Cherdchai [Khonkaen Pheu Thai MP] had attempted to imitate me. But he didn’t have the ‘spirit’ (*jitwinyan*). So, I had to go back [to Khonkaen and Ubonratchathani] to do several proclamations again. In the real proclamations, the villagers would gain moral support that lighted up their spirits. This is the fact that kept me doing the job continuously.⁶⁰

Due to Arnon’s charisma: “The villagers who attended the proclamations I provided would have ‘goose bumps’ (*khonluk*). The events were full of the spirit. There was no ‘fake setting’ (*jattang*) between me and the villagers”.⁶¹ The argument that only his proclamations were authentic aimed to discredit other leaders and prevent them from engaging with the Redshirt village movement. Ironically, in this respect, Arnon has become very much like the “elitist” UDD leaders when he claimed complete ownership of creating Redshirt villages.

Arnon’s increasing role resulted in intense criticism among other founders. Kongchai, for instance, argued that Arnon monopolised all the ‘credit’ (*phonngan*) of the Redshirt village creation, despite the fact that various leaders and villagers contributed to the emergence and expansion of these villages, and used Redshirt villages to increase his own ‘benefits’ (*prayot*).⁶² As his hold on the proclamation activities grew stronger, Arnon’s proclamations became less transparent. Some of Arnon’s other activities in the movement, such as the Redshirt cooperatives, were tarnished by corruption allegations.⁶³ In the

⁵⁹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁶⁰ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁶¹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁶² Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

⁶³ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

Northern province of Lampang alone, Arnon was sued for defrauding villagers' money to the tune of 3 million baht (*Prachatai*, 1 December 2012). This contention eventually led to the separation of the original founders into two groups in November 2012: the Kamonsin-led "Federation (*sahaphan*) of Redshirt villages for Democracy of Thailand" and the Arnon-led "Assembly (*samatcha*) of Redshirt Villages for Democracy of Thailand".⁶⁴

This division soon led to further conflict among the Redshirt village founders. Each group not only competed to provide proclamation rites but also claimed that only their proclamations were authentic and they were the real Redshirt villages.⁶⁵ However, the Kamonsin-led Federation was lesser known. The Federation was weakened when it was incorporated into the UDD's domination.⁶⁶ By contrast, Arnon's group was able to resist the control of the UDD by relying upon their connections with politicians and also by redefining their activities to cooperate with different Redshirt factions, such as former members of the Communist Party of Thailand.⁶⁷ Arnon maintained Redshirt village activities until the military coup of May 2014, but the number of activities had already begun to decline in 2013.

The National UDD Leaders and the Trio

The emergence and expansion of Redshirt villages had also generated leadership contention and conflicts with the national UDD. From an organisational perspective, all Redshirts were subsumed under the leadership of the UDD which is led by the president and different tiers of leaders. However, in practice, the so-called "trio" (*samkloe*) – Veera Musikapong, a veteran politician and the first UDD president,⁶⁸ Jatuporn Promphan, a Pheu Thai MP, and Natthawut Saikua, a former government spokesman, were prominently dominant (Naruemon and McCargo 2011:997). Due to their charismatic *naklaeng*-type leadership and public speaking skills, the trio secured Thaksin's

⁶⁴ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

⁶⁵ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

⁶⁶ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

⁶⁷ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

⁶⁸ After his imprisonment in 2010, Veera Musikapong was known as Veerakan Musikapong.

endorsement from the beginning of the formation of the UDD and were given decision-making powers and the opportunity to dominate the protest stages.

Next to the trio are circles of second-tier leaders, including Weng Tojirakarn, a physician and former October 1976 activist; Arisman Pongruangrong, a singer and former May 1992 activist; Suporn Atthawong (a.k.a. Rambo Isan), a Redshirt hardliner and Pheu Thai MP; Chinnawat Habunpueng, a leader of People's Radio for Democracy; Nisit Sinthupai, a UDD School director; and Yosawarit Chooklom (a.k.a. Jaeng Dokjik), a comedy actor. During their 2010 mass rallies, the UDD had also cooperated with several local Redshirt leaders, notably Khwanchai Phraipana of Udonthani and Pichet Tabudda of Ubonratchathani. However, Naruemon and McCargo (2011:997) argue that these tiers of leaders coexisted within a loose structured network organisation, "allowing the movement to expand organically and opportunistically". The UDD also mainly functioned without "clear lines of command and accountability among the leaders" (Naruemon and McCargo 2011:1000).

After the 2010 crackdown, Veera Musikapong, Jatuporn Promphan, Natthawut Saigua, and other leaders, such as Weng Tojirakarn, were arrested and imprisoned (Human Rights Watch 2011:120). Thida Thavornseth, an activist-turned-academic, was arguably appointed as interim UDD president mainly because the UDD leaders aimed to create a more moderate image of the movement after the radicalised March-May 2010 period. Thida was a former left-leaning activist who played an active role in the student movement during the 1970s. After the student massacre on 6 October 1976, Thida remained a political activist. Following the 2006 coup, Thida organised a group called the Assembly of Democracy to protest against the military. Thida subsequently became a UDD member, and the Assembly of Democracy was incorporated into the UDD and placed under its leadership (Ubonphan 2010:39). It seemed Thida was appointed to be the second president of the UDD due to her experience and skills in mass mobilisation. Her appointment, however, was also partly because, as Weng's wife, she was trusted by other UDD leaders, and her appointment was made without the participation of Redshirt supporters.

Contesting UDD Domination

The appointment of Thida was criticised by local Redshirt leaders as undermining the whole Redshirt movement. For local leaders, Thida lacked ‘capability’ (*khwamsamat*) and ‘mass supporters’ (*muanchon*).⁶⁹ She had little popularity in the north and Isan, and was not a charismatic speaker. Therefore, she was typically seen as a Bangkok intellectual who was out of her depth in the UDD role. Rejection of Thida’s leadership especially occurred among local leaders who felt that they had greater mass following and better mobilisation skills.⁷⁰ The emergence of Redshirt villages partly stemmed from the rejection of UDD’s power under Thida’s leadership. After the crackdown, local Redshirt leaders criticised the national UDD for lacking political initiative and concerns for ordinary Redshirts. In particular, they contended that the UDD did not provide adequate measures to help Redshirt political prisoners who had been imprisoned since the 2010 incident.⁷¹

Thida also caused more discontent by attempting to reengineer the whole Redshirt movement after assuming the UDD presidency. For Thida, it was important to centralise power into the national UDD in order to revive the Redshirt movement and create effective mobilisation (Thida 2012:14). The centralising of power into the UDD made local leaders feel their participation and significance was undermined. Due to their discontent, the Redshirt village founders never invited Thida to their proclamations. Instead, they attempted to assert the movement’s independent role to show that while Thida was leading the UDD: “Redshirt villages were not under the UDD’s command”.⁷² However, the original founders invited several prominent UDD leaders to participate in and preside over the proclamations partly to boost the credibility and popularity of their activities. In inviting other UDD leaders, the Redshirt village leaders not only overlooked, but also challenged Thida’s leadership.

⁶⁹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁷⁰ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁷¹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

⁷² Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

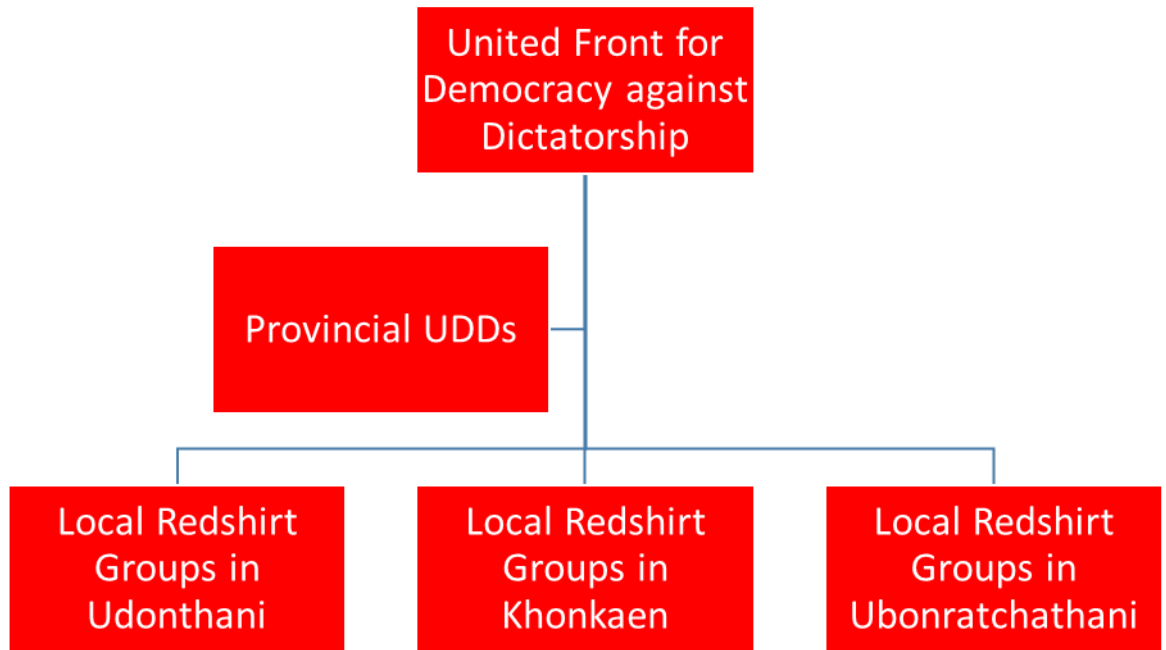


Diagram 1 Thida's Vision of Hierarchical Redshirt Movement

Controlling Redshirt Villages

Before August 2011, the UDD under Thida did not pay much attention to the emergence of the Redshirt village movement, nor perceived it as a threat to her leadership. Instead, Thida suggested that Redshirt villages were 'admirable' (*nacheunchom*) because the proclamations were initiated from below by the mass (Thida 2012:36). She also conceived of Redshirt villages as being instrumental in weakening Khwanchai in Udonthani, and thus strengthening the UDD leadership.⁷³ Additionally, her studied neutrality towards Redshirt villages was because many pro-Thaksin politicians and UDD members informally supported the Redshirt village proclamations. Thus, initially, the creation of Redshirt villages seemed to generate a mutually beneficial relationship between the UDD and Redshirt village leaders.

As it gained popularity, however, the expansion of the Redshirt village movement led to conflicts with Thida who viewed the movement as a challenge to the UDD leadership. For the UDD president, the main weakness of the pre-2010 crackdown Redshirt movement was the incoherent nature of the

⁷³ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

Redshirts. As Thida puts it, “The weakness of leadership is that it is overly individualistic. This creates ‘individual heroism’ (*wirachon eakkachon*), the lack of discipline and controllability. These are the lessons to reduce the weakness to improve the movement” (Thida 2012:14). Thus, after achieving a permanent (*tuajing*, literally “real”) role of president, Thida deployed a different leadership style by eschewing the Redshirts’ loose structure, contending to create the movement ‘unity’ (*khwamsamakki*) and eliminate internal conflicts. In this regard, Thida seemed influenced by her past experience.

But Thida’s “Marxist” ideological ideas and academic criticism of strong leadership sat uneasily with her desire to dominate the Redshirt movement. Although the UDD organisation was loosely structured, the national UDD had already proven highly centralised and exclusionary in practice. According to Arnon, the organisation’s centrality and exclusivity were particularly reflected during the mass rallies in the pre-2010 crackdown period, when every single proposed activity needed “permission from the centre”.⁷⁴ Arnon described:

The national UDD leaders controlled everything. Like ordinary people, Redshirts had conflicts concerning money and power. The UDD leaders allowed only a few of us to speak on the stages. Those who had a chance only had two minutes to do so.⁷⁵

Thida did not accept the problem of over-centralisation and indeed attempted to further centralise the Redshirt movement in a different direction. Thida restructured the UDD by establishing UDD branches in different provinces for the purpose of redressing previous mistakes and rendering effective mobilisation.⁷⁶ She also set up UDD provincial committees to provide connections between the national leaders and local Redshirt protesters. Within the UDD’s provincial committees, district committees were also created and placed under the UDD’s command. According to the estimation of one informant, the UDD created up to 38 provincial branches.⁷⁷ These committees

⁷⁴ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁷⁵ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁷⁶ Interview with Pruettipong Khampangmun (a UDD guard leader in Khonkaen), Khonkaen, 20 August 2015.

⁷⁷ Interview with Pruettipong Khampangmun, Khonkaen, 20 August 2015.

were arguably meant to revive the mission begun by the “UDD schools” (*rongrian no-po-cho*), set up in the pre-2010 crackdown period. Prior to the 2010 Redshirt protests, there were at least 450 UDD schools nationwide and, in the schools, “Red Shirt supporters received an intense one-day course on the UDD’s version of how to achieve democratic governance” and learnt how to establish “real democracy” (Human Rights Watch 2011:42).

However, several provincial UDD leaders appointed under Thida were not well recognised locally. Many prominent local leaders did not wish to assume the responsibility assigned by the UDD and preferred to maintain their independent role.⁷⁸ Consequently, the hierarchical restructuring of the UDD carried out by Thida proved unsuccessful. Unlike the UDD provincial branches, Redshirt villages grew and expanded due to the pragmatic methods of mobilising for villagers who preferred Redshirt leaders, together with politicians, to hear their demands in their locality.

Competing with Redshirt Villages

After failing to contain the original Redshirt village movement, Thida set out to launch a rival movement. In early August 2011, the UDD launched its official Redshirt village brand “The Redshirt Villages of the UDD” (Thida 2012:35). This attempt was not to promote the Redshirt village movement as originally created, but to exploit the popularity of Redshirt villages among villagers and undermine the credibility of the original Redshirt movement. Thida contended that these proclamations were done not on the UDD’s command but by demand from the locality. According to her, “unlike other Redshirt village brands the UDD Redshirt village project was a bottom-up approach since the demand for the proclamation was initiated by the villagers” (Thida 2012:181). Therefore, the creation of the UDD Redshirt village was consistent with her attempt to create internal unity.

However, in creating the UDD Redshirt villages, Thida seemed to put more focus on undermining potential challenges to her leadership than creating

⁷⁸ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

internal unity, as reflected in her declaration of the purpose of the UDD Redshirt village project.

First, there were intense conflicts between different proclamation providers and provincial Redshirt leaders who felt their areas were encroached by the Association [Federation and Assembly] of Redshirt Villages. Second, there were rampant conflicts among different proclamation providers who attempted to demonstrate their 'greatness' (*khwamyingyai*). This frequently resulted in high competition for support from local politicians, leaders and villagers. Last, the emergence of Redshirt villages was vulnerable to accusations from the Redshirts' opponents, including the Democrat Party, the traditional elites and the security forces which viewed Redshirt villages as a security threat. For example, according to the Democrat Party, Redshirt villages would bring 'fearful' (*nasaprunghlua*) social division to Thai society (Thida 2012:182).

Instead of bringing unity and solidarity to the movement, Thida decided to become yet another proclamation competitor. To demonstrate their higher credentials, the UDD also created its own criteria which differed from those originally laid out by Arnon. According to Thida, for any village to be proclaimed a UDD Redshirt village, at least 70 per cent of the total population must be Redshirt supporters. Following the proclamation period, UDD Redshirt villages must establish a committee consisting of a leader and members similar to the UDD provincial branches (Thida 2012:183). More importantly, all Redshirt village committees served as "direct networks to the central UDD and truly worked as mass coordinators for the UDD" (Thida 2012:36). Although UDD Redshirt villages were proclaimed in different provinces, including Khonkaen and Ubonratchathani,⁷⁹ the attempt to promote a hierarchical structure within the Redshirt movement was not successful.

⁷⁹ Interview with Chailap Uthitphan, Khonkaen, 9 June 2015.

The Trio and Redshirt villages

Unlike Thida, Jatuporn, one of the popular UDD trio speakers, was regularly invited by the original Redshirt village founders to give proclamations.⁸⁰ According to the Redshirt village leaders, by inviting Jatuporn they were trying to demonstrate that the Redshirt village movement did not cause internal division but provided a new method to reunite the Redshirt movement. Arnon attempted to explain as follows:

I invited Jatuporn to preside over proclamation ceremonies twice. I wanted to show that there was no 'division' (*khwamtaekyaek*) between the UDD and Redshirt villages. But, Thida criticised us saying that Redshirt villages caused division. She called us communists. There had been at least three times in her column in the UDD newspaper when she argued that Redshirt villages caused division.⁸¹

The founders also invited the national Redshirt leaders to participate in the proclamation rites to increase the legitimacy of the Redshirt village movement. Jatuporn's participation was important in boosting the popularity of the Redshirt village project.⁸² Another reason was that, compared to Thida, Jatuporn was deemed more accommodating towards different methods of mobilisation.⁸³ For Jatuporn, his participation was also an opportunity to revive the Redshirt movement after the crackdown and his own role after being released from prison on 2 August 2011. The involvement of Jatuporn in the Redshirt village proclamations generated a complex situation within the UDD and made Thida hesitant in her attempt to control and suppress Redshirt villages. As a result, the Redshirt village movement was able to expand by using the popularity of Jatuporn to both promote their project and prevent the UDD from blocking the Redshirt village movement.

⁸⁰ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁸¹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁸² Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

⁸³ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

Thaksin Shinawatra

Ex-premier Thaksin Shinawatra has mostly lived in self-imposed exile since the 2006 coup and no longer travels on a Thai passport (Plate 2014:147).⁸⁴ He nevertheless remains politically influential and is often accused of being the sole mastermind behind the Redshirt movement. The 2010 Redshirt protests, especially, were allegedly staged as a reaction to the seizure of Thaksin's assets by the Thai courts in February 2010. These accusations forced the UDD leaders to insist that their movement was not organised for the benefit of any particular individual but to campaign for social justice. As Nattawut declared, "The root cause of the problem is not about who the Prime Minister or who the opposition leaders are. But it is about class conflicts and social inequality in the Thai society" (Farung 2011:39). Commentators, such as Somchai (2012:124), similarly argues that Thaksin is no longer relevant to the demands of the Redshirt movement, and that "the emergence of the Isan Redshirts has transcended Thaksin (*kaokham Thaksin*)".

However, the emergence and expansion of Redshirt villages suggests that Thaksin still had an indispensable and influential role in the post-2010 crackdown mobilisation of the Redshirts. According to Arnon, besides the fact that Thaksin's influence was evident in the banners of Redshirt villages, the Redshirt village movement was a "struggle for Thaksin to return not only to Thailand but to the premiership" because "Thaksin is the logo of Redshirt villages, and the Redshirts considered Thaksin a hero, like Mao [Zedong], Ho Chi Minh and [Mahatma] Gandhi".⁸⁵ Originally, the emergence of Redshirt villages seemed far from Thaksin's expectations. In an interview he gave after the 2010 crackdown, Thaksin conjectured that any form of opposition movement after a military crackdown would be guerrilla warfare. As Thaksin put it on 19 May 2010: "There is a theory saying a military crackdown can spread resentment and these resentful people will become guerrillas" (Tarrant, 2010). After the crackdown there were arson attacks in some Isan provincial halls, including in Udonthani, Khonkaen, Ubonratchathani and Mukdahan, presumably caused by

⁸⁴ According to Plate (2014:147), while Thaksin did not provide the number and countries of his nationalities, he has at least 80 passports of these nationalities.

⁸⁵ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

frustrated Redshirt protesters (Human Rights watch 2011:23).⁸⁶ But the violence did not escalate into a guerrilla war, and the Redshirt protesters in Bangkok were all sent back home defeated. The emergence of Redshirt villages in a distant area of Isan initially did not seem to hold much promise for a new mobilisation method for Thaksin after the suppression of the Redshirt movement.

It was only when Redshirt villages started to gain more currency across various districts of Udonthani that Thaksin first acknowledged the founders' contribution to the whole movement. For Thaksin, the expansion of Redshirt villages offered an attractive means of revitalising the movement, during the period when local leaders, especially Khwanchai, were imprisoned and unable to mobilise the Redshirts. Thus, in early March 2011, Thaksin sent his son Phanthongtae to visit the original Redshirt village. The main purpose of Phanthongtae's visit was to pass on his compliments and to convey moral support from Thaksin to Redshirt villagers.⁸⁷ As Phanthongtae said at one point, "I would like to thank you everyone for always helping my father. Thank you the Udonthani Redshirts for creating the Redshirt village project. My father was recently informed".⁸⁸ For villagers, Phanthongtae's visit made them 'proud' (*phumjai* Isan) as it was deemed a privilege to meet one of the direct representatives of Thaksin.

For Redshirt village founders, Phanthongtae's visit helped inspire a pledge to expand the Redshirt village idea across "all villages, sub-districts, and districts" in Udonthani.⁸⁹ Apart from moral support and compliments, Phanthongtae's visit also came with financial and technical assistance. The Redshirt village founders were provided with a brand new radio station, vehicles and other public communication facilities worth millions of baht.⁹⁰ These facilities not only made the founders felt privileged, they also increased

⁸⁶ It should be noted that there have been many arguments made by the Redshirts that the arson attacks on provincial halls had been caused by the security forces. See also People's Information Centre (2012:15).

⁸⁷ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

⁸⁸ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015, with his video recording.

⁸⁹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

⁹⁰ Interview with Anon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

their capacity to expand the Redshirt village project. The Phanthongtae story was spread across many villages and promoted through Redshirt media. After Phanthongtae's visit, Thaksin endorsed some politicians who already had a connection with Arnon to support the Redshirt village movement. The most prominent among these politicians was Prasong Boonpong, a Pheu Thai MP and former Minister of Labour, who together with Arnon have travelled to meet Thaksin abroad at least twice.⁹¹

The Redshirt village movement proved significant for Thaksin especially during the transitional leadership of the UDD. Unlike Veera, the new UDD president Thida had no background in pro-Thaksin parties which considerably weakened Thaksin's ability to dominate the UDD. Thaksin's support for the Redshirt village movement was therefore part of a divide-and-rule strategy to keep the UDD in check. Supporting the Redshirt village movement allowed Thaksin not to depend either on the UDD or on local leaders, like Khwanchai. The balance of power among different internal factions was a significant element in maintaining Thaksin's influence over the Redshirt movement and Thai politics more generally.

However, in playing off different Redshirt factions against one another, Thaksin never fully made public his support for Redshirt villages. The main reason was that Thaksin still had a close connection with Khwanchai, a prominent local leader in Udonthani, who had opposed the Redshirt village movement from the beginning. After his release from jail in February 2011, Khwanchai was furious with Redshirt villages proclaimed in Udonthani. As Arnon was his former assistant, Khwanchai perceived these proclamations as a challenge to his leadership. Khwanchai then urged Thaksin as well as the UDD to stop the Redshirt village movement.⁹² But, Thaksin ignored Khwanchai's requests and took no action against Redshirt villages. Indeed, in the early phase of the Redshirt village movement, Thaksin asked Khwanchai not to thwart the movement since it was also a Redshirt movement. Khwanchai recalled his impression during a meeting with Thaksin in Cambodia on 18 September 2011:

⁹¹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

⁹² Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

“Thaksin must like them [Redshirt villages] because the ‘master’ (*nai*) benefited from both sides”.⁹³

Yet, the more popular Redshirt villages became, the more pressure Khwanchai put on Thaksin to stop Redshirt villages’ expansion and declared himself not cooperating with the Redshirt village movement.⁹⁴ Eventually, Thaksin called for a meeting between Khwanchai and Arnon to find a solution⁹⁵, but Khwanchai insisted on halting the Redshirt village project and rejected any compromise with Arnon. For Thaksin, not only was Khwanchai a highly influential leader of the movement, but he had also sacrificed himself for the ousted premier when he was arrested and imprisoned for leading the pro-Thaksin rallies in 2010. Eventually, Thaksin sided with Khwanchai and told Arnon in late 2012 to stop the Redshirt village movement.⁹⁶ As Redshirt villages had become very popular among a number of villagers, this call greatly disappointed Arnon. However, after a period of reluctance, Arnon decided to continue with the Redshirt village movement, despite being told by Thaksin to stop. He argued that the proclamations were not about himself but were demanded by villagers.⁹⁷

In this light, for Arnon, the proclamations of Redshirt villages had “transcended” himself. As Arnon replied to Thaksin, his “hero” and the symbol of Redshirt villages: “I wasn’t the one who wanted to proclaim Redshirt villages. The villagers asked me to do. So, I did. Redshirt villages had gain ‘currency’ (*titlom*) and the villagers didn’t stop”.⁹⁸ What Arnon said may explain how Redshirt village activities could continue until mid-2014. Another possible explanation may lie in the fact that Thaksin did not really demand that the movement stop: he still benefited from the project. Arnon claimed that he and Thaksin still retained good relations and they met again to discuss about the Redshirt village movement in May 2014.

⁹³ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁹⁴ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

⁹⁵ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁹⁶ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁹⁷ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁹⁸ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

Local Redshirt Leaders

The emergence of Redshirt villages caused the most explicit conflict with two existing local Redshirt leaders in Isan, Khwanchai Praipana and Pichet Tabudda, which will be examined below.

Khwanchai Praipana

Khwanchai, born in 1954, began his career as a radio presenter of Isan folk songs (*pleangluktung*, lit. music of the fields).⁹⁹ His early career was not successful, and he derived his main income from a few small businesses advertising through his radio programmes. He was not a well-known radio presenter and could only appeal to a specific audience.¹⁰⁰ After Thaksin became prime minister, however, Khwanchai began to gain more attention thanks to his pro-Thaksin radio programmes. Among Thaksin's supporters, Khwanchai was unusual in his appeal to Isan listeners. His main strategy for garnering support was using Isan folk songs to attract followers. Isan folk song performers, like *molam* (a similar Isan performance), usually have mass followers and were used in the past as the main medium of the millenarian revolts during the early stage of Isan incorporation by Siam (Somchai 2006:28).

However, Khwanchai's popularity seemed to derive mainly from Thaksin's popularity among villagers. Khwanchai began to organise political activities to support Thaksin. These activities were usually made spectacular to gain public and Thaksin's attention. Khwanchai recalled, for instance, his first political activity when he led a number of villagers on a long journey, travelling many days and nights across different regions to present gifts to Thaksin. This became one of Khwanchai's favorite self-repeated stories and nicely demonstrated his way of thinking:

On 29 December 2005, I took an eighteen-wheeled truck and a ten-wheeled truck¹⁰¹ of villagers and gifts to present to Thaksin. I heard that Thaksin would pass through Uttraradit [a northern province].

However, one of the tires was burst at Nong Bualampu [an Isan

⁹⁹ Interview with Thanradi Sarakham, Udonthani, 13 June 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Thanradi Sarakham, Udonthani, 13 June 2015.

¹⁰¹ In Thai, trucks are referred to by the number of wheels they have.

province]. But we still went onwards. It was really mountainous also. I again heard that Thaksin went to Prae [another northern province] already. So, we had to keep following him. I contacted Sermsak Pongpanich [a former Deputy Interior Minister], telling him that we would like to give things to the Prime Minister. Sermsak replied okay. Eventually we met Thaksin at ten o'clock the next day. I was tired but very happy.¹⁰²

This staging of a one-off spectacle perfectly illustrates the preferred *modus operandi* of Khwanchai. After that episode Khwanchai became increasingly politically active. After Thaksin was challenged by anti-government Yellowshirts and ousted in the 2006 coup, Khwanchai set up a local Redshirt faction – the People-Love-Udon Club – on 4 July 2007. He also organised a fund-raising campaign to build the Club's headquarters on a 40 rai plot of land worth dozens of million baht.¹⁰³ On 24 July 2008, Khwanchai also proved his loyalty to Thaksin by leading the Redshirts to clash with the Yellowshirts in Udonthani. Thanks to these spectacular activities, the radio presenter became a well-known local Redshirt leader in Udonthani. It was in the 2010 Redshirt demonstration that Khwanchai became arguably the most prominent local Redshirt leaders who played a very significant role in recruiting villager protesters from Udonthani and other Isan provinces to protest in Bangkok. However, Khwanchai was arrested and imprisoned during the 2010 demonstration; following the 2010 crackdown, he was further charged with cases related to terrorism. While Khwanchai was serving his jail term of 9 months, the original Redshirt village was established by the Udonthani Redshirts and Arnon Sannan. According to Khwanchai, his discontent mainly revolved around two aspects of Redshirt villages: their authenticity and vulnerability.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

¹⁰³ Interview with a female informant, Udonthani, 13 June 2015. One rai is 1,600 square metre.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

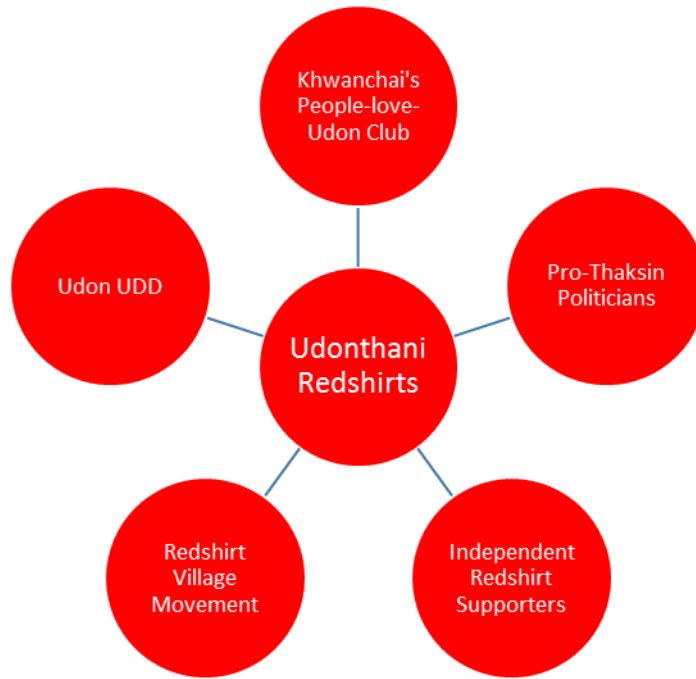


Diagram 2: Redshirt Groups in Udonthani

“Artificial” and “Authentic” Reds

Khwanchai argued Redshirt villages were created by “artificial Redshirts” (*daengtiam*) who had sought to make profits from villagers. The Redshirt villagers who were proclaimed by the Redshirt village movement were therefore not “authentic Redshirts” (*daengtae*). Khwanchai stressed:

When they [the Redshirt village founders] claimed that they had proclaimed 200 Redshirt villages, there were only 500 people in attendance. They also provided buses for Redshirt protesters but there was no one getting on. Khwanchai is the ‘real one’ (*khongjing*). Redshirts in Redshirt villages were not real. But Khwanchai is real. They are ‘artificial reds’ (*daengtiam*).¹⁰⁵

Khwanchai’s discontent and opposition to Redshirt villages can be analysed as a result of his loss of authority in controlling his area. He was also furious that Thida as the UDD leader did not stop the creation of Redshirt villages in his area (Thida 2012:184). For Khwanchai, their allowing Redshirt

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

villages to be established without his consent signified that the UDD leaders did not respect his role and importance.

Moreover, Thaksin also supported the Redshirt village movement by asking Khwanchai not to be in conflict with Arnon. Khwanchai's diminished role and authority after the emergence of Redshirt villages became evident when many Pheu Thai politicians went to Udonthani for mass activities and political campaigns, using Redshirt village connections instead of those of Khwanchai.¹⁰⁶ This was very important for Khwanchai for visits by prominent political figures demonstrated and enhanced his personal charisma and prestige, which increased his negotiating power with the UDD, Pheu Thai politicians and even Thaksin.

Vulnerability

Khwanchai also argued that Redshirt villages were highly vulnerable.¹⁰⁷ For Khwanchai, Redshirt villages were prone to attacks and accusations by the opponents. Such vulnerability would undermine the Redshirt movement. He contended:

Nowadays, I still disagree with Redshirt village project. If someone dislike us and create a situation by putting drugs, weapons or other illegal things inside a [Redshirt] village and then calls the police to arrest the villagers, what will happen? Whatever we do we had to be 'prudent' (*robkhob*).

However, Khwanchai's argument that Redshirt activities needed to be "prudent" was not consistent with his own strategies. For someone who advised others to exercise prudence, Khwanchai had many ideas for organising spectacular, if not controversial, events. For instance, he proposed to bring Thaksin back to Thailand by encircling Thaksin with hundreds of Redshirts and entering Thailand through a Thai-Laos border to prevent the ex-premier from being arrested by the military.¹⁰⁸ In January 2012, Khwanchai ordained 999 Redshirt monks in Isan and tried to arrange for them to travel to Bangkok at the

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Wanchai Sinsirawat, Udonthani, 10 May 2015.

Emerald Buddha Temple in the Grand Palace, the most revered site in the country which was closely associated with the royal family (McCargo and Saowanee 2015). Khwanchai seemed willing to undertake provocative and “imprudent” activities when it suited his own agendas and priorities. In this regard, his attempting to stop the Redshirt village movement could be because the movement affected his claim to all the ‘credit’ (*phonngan*) from Redshirt activities he had previously monopolised in Udonthani.

In retrospect, it is clear that Khwanchai’s activist role peaked in the 2010 Redshirt mobilisation. He played a leading role in taking the Udonthani villagers who were arguably the largest group of Redshirts to protest in Bangkok. Khwanchai often related stories concerning the capacity and efficacy of his mobilisation:

For example, on 12 March 2010, I took 200 pick-up trucks and 47 buses of Redshirts to Bangkok. Whenever the People-love-Udon went back home, it was time things were over.¹⁰⁹

And when asked how long it usually took in mobilising his supporters, Khwanchai illustrated his calibre by citing his activity on another occasion as follows:

It took only one and a half hours. I was prepared to go to Bangkok. I submitted a petition to the Supreme Court. I campaigned between 7.30-9.00 am. I received 800,000 baht and 26 buses. Some people gave me 1,000 baht. Some 4,000 baht. The meeting point was at the Srimuang Park [a public park in Udonthani].¹¹⁰

Khwanchai considered his People-love-Udon Club to be the most important in contributing to the Redshirt movement, not only in Udonthani but also nationwide. It didn’t come as a surprise, therefore, when Khwanchai prohibited his followers from attending Redshirt village proclamations and activities. For instance, he barred his supporters from attending and participating in one of the largest village proclamations in Udonthani, in which

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

1,000 Redshirt villages were proclaimed in front of the Udonthani Provincial Hall, even though that kind of action could have had a positive impact on the unity of the Redshirt movement as a whole.¹¹¹ In his efforts to stop the Redshirt village movement, Khwanchai tried to pressure Thaksin and asked the ex-premier to put an end to the project on the grounds that the movement created internal conflicts among different Redshirt groups.¹¹² Khwanchai also argued that the Redshirt village founders, especially Arnon, were personally disloyal to him.¹¹³ But the real reason behind his attempt to stop the Redshirt village movement was that the movement challenged his role and authority in Udonthani. Khwanchai egocentric leadership focused attention on himself and his achievements while discouraging the emergence of a new generation of local Redshirt leaders. Khwanchai's attempt to sterilise potential local leaders led the Redshirt village founders to argue that Khwanchai did not genuinely struggle for the ordinary people. Such arguments culminates in one Redshirt leader's conclusion: "Khwanchai was an aristocrat (*ammatt*) Redshirt".¹¹⁴

Pichet Tabudda

Pichet (a.k.a Ajarn Toi), born in 1955, was born and grew up in Ubonratchathani,¹¹⁵ but he had spent almost twenty years working as a transnational migrant in several countries, including Israel and Brunei. After returning to Ubonratchathani, Pichet became a radio presenter and vote canvasser for local politicians. Pichet became a political activist after the 2006 military coup. In 2007, he founded a local Redshirt group called "Chak-thong-rob", which subsequently played an active role in protesting in Ubonratchathani against the 2006 coup-makers. Pichet also established the 91 MHz radio station to mobilise Redshirt supporters.¹¹⁶ The role of Chak-thong-rob increased considerably during the 2010 Redshirt demonstration not only in Ubonratchathani but also in Bangkok.¹¹⁷ Thanks to its mobilisation efforts,

¹¹¹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

¹¹² Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

¹¹³ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Saksit Kingmala, Ubonratchathani, 5 February 2015.

Pichet's faction became the biggest 'autonomous Redshirt group' (*daengitsara*) in Ubonratchathani operating independently of national UDD control.¹¹⁸

Pichet was a radical Isan ethno-nationalist, claiming to inherit this view from his grandfather who was one of the holy man (millenarian) rebels of the early twentieth century. He was also an admirer of the 1789 French Revolution.¹¹⁹ This claim was partly reflected in the décor of his radio station, which featured a gigantic Isan-style buffalo bell, along with a copy of Eugène Delacroix's painting "Liberty leading the People". Unlike Khwanchai, Pichet conducted his radio programmes mainly in Isan language: his political commentaries proved highly popular among Redshirt supporters.¹²⁰

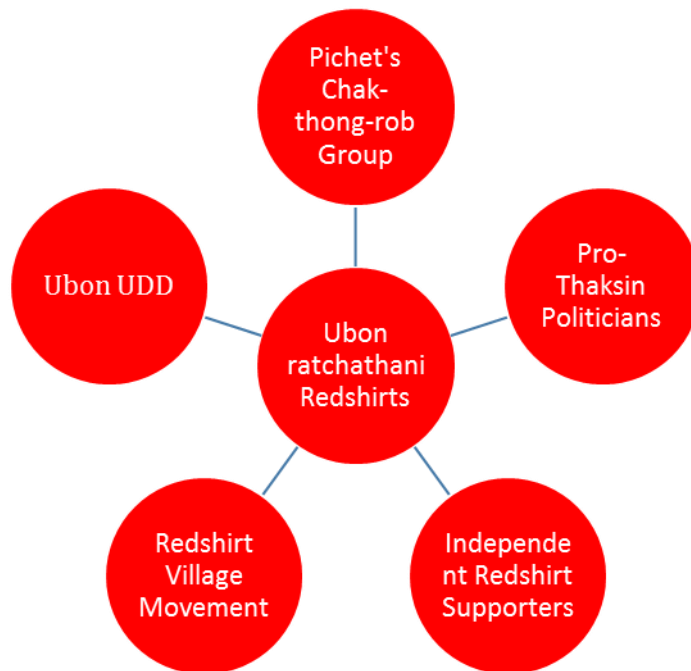


Diagram 3: Redshirt Groups in Ubonratchathani

Exclusive and Inclusive Redshirts

The role and influence of the Chak-thong-rob faction suffered irreparable damage during the 2010 crackdown. Pichet was convicted and subsequently imprisoned for leading the arson attack on the Ubonratchathani provincial

¹¹⁸ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

¹²⁰ Interview with Saksit Kingmala, Ubonratchathani, 5 February 2015.

hall.¹²¹ After two years in prison, Pichet was released on temporary bail, only to witness the proclamations of Redshirt villages in many areas of Ubonratchathani. As a local leader who had a prominent role in 2010, Pichet also found the Redshirt village project unacceptable. Pichet pointed out great differences between the strategies of his faction and those of the Redshirt village movement. He also argued that Redshirt villages undermined the whole Redshirt movement because they led to adversarial relationships rather than creating partnerships for the Redshirts. For Pichet, Redshirt villages would make Redshirts lose not only “external” but also “internal” alliances. As he contended by referring to “foe” and “friend” making:

It [the Redshirt village movement] created hatred among Redshirt groups. I think the point is to win friends, rather than excluding other people from Redshirt villages. Sometimes, village headmen couldn't enter the village, if they didn't participate in the proclamations. To win more friends is more significant for the Redshirt movement now.¹²²

However, this argument also reflects Pichet's dissatisfaction with the Redshirt village movement which he viewed as encroaching on his area of influence. This discontent was evident in the fact that although he disagreed with an “exclusivist” mobilisational approach centring on reified Redshirt identity, Pichet's own approach reflected attempts to assert a parallel exclusivism that drew on Isan ethno-regionalism. The most prominent example was his use of narrations of millenarian revolts to mobilise his supporters.¹²³ When asked about the main contents of his radio programmes, the leader of Chak-thong-rob stated as follows:

I talked about Isan history. I wanted to inform people who probably didn't know about Isan history. I told them that we [Isan people] have long been suppressed. In the past, there were millenarian rebellions. But they were all suppressed by Bangkok rulers,

¹²¹ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

¹²² Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

¹²³ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

accusing the millenarians of 'secessionism' (*baengyaek dindaen*)...Our culture was intruded in several ways. They also made local women their wives. In general, I had tried to waken up people's consciousness. I wanted to make them more concern about 'Isanness' (*khwampen Isan*). Not many people dared to talk about this. Isan people have been disdained. Prince Damrong [King Rama Fifth's brother] looked down on Isan people.

In 2010, Pichet did not favour building external alliances as he usually adopted confrontational approaches to deal with the Redshirts' opponents. This approach was evident when Pichet led several villagers to protest against Democrat politicians in Ubonratchathani by burning tyres and coffins on Ubonratchathani streets.¹²⁴

The conflict between Pichet and the Redshirt village movement, therefore, seemed to derive from a contention for local leadership and contention for local mass supporters in Ubonratchathani. As the Chak-thong-rob faction was the most prominent local faction in the pre-2010 crackdown period, Pichet seemed to feel threatened by the growing Redshirt village movement in his area. As Pichet himself contended: "There was politics inside Redshirt villages. The proclamations were disrespectful for other leaders".¹²⁵ Chak-thong-rob lost a number of mass supporters after the crackdown and had not yet been able to galvanise the same number of followers. In this light, Pichet's unhappiness with the Redshirt village movement could be understood as an attempt to prevent emerging Redshirt leaders and the new type of leadership from undermining his faction. Pichet referred to his ability to mobilise protesters in the past even in a difficult situation:

There were more than ten of thousand listening to my radio program. As far as Srimuangmai District [a border district with Loas], the River Mun Delta Association of that area would come for a protest if I called them. For example, when Abhisit government did not care about those 99 bodies and more than a thousand

¹²⁴ Interview with Phon Chaorai (pseudonym), Ubonratchathani, 4 March 2015.

¹²⁵ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

injuries after the [2010] crackdown, we were quick to mobilise people to Bangkok...¹²⁶

Thus, Pichet's unease with the Redshirt village movement also reflected unease at his own growing marginalisation. His mobilisation ability had been significantly tarnished since the 2010 crackdown. Several members of the group faced legal charges which undermined their ability to mobilise mass supporters. Also, Pichet tended to isolate himself from his former collaborators following accusations that he was indirectly responsible for the death of many Redshirt protesters. As Pichet recalled one of the hardest times in his struggle:

It was in April 2010. It was about 11-12 April 2010. I can still well remember it. There was a saying that I brought people to be killed. It was a wound in my heart. On 10 April, the military had killed many Redshirts. How could I tell people in Natan [a district of Ubonratchathani]? A taxi driver who died was also from Warinchamrap [another district of Ubonratchathani]. We saw bodies and debris on the ground. Suddenly, we started to cry. I was curious if the killers would be able look into the eyes of others.¹²⁷

This marginalisation was also evident in his unsuccessful campaign for the presidency of the Ubonratchathani provincial administrative organisation in mid-2012. After this election, Pichet continued to be further marginalised, which made Chak Thong Rob increasingly less likely to mobilise against the Redshirt village project in Ubonratchathani.

There were both similarities and differences between Pichet and Khwanchai. Both were prominent local leaders who used radio stations as the means of mobilisation. They were affected by the Redshirt village movement which was a new mechanism emerging after the 2010 crackdown. However, compared to Khwanchai's, the role and leadership of Pichet was more critically affected by Redshirt villages. This was because of two reasons. Firstly, as Ubonratchathani is a geographically much larger province than Udonthani and

¹²⁶ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

¹²⁷ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

is very politically diverse, it was much more difficult for Pichet's faction to gain a dominant role in the locality. The incomplete dominant power in Ubonratchathani made the Chak-thong-rob faction less assertive in opposing the Redshirt village movement. Secondly, Pichet neither had as close a connection with Thaksin, nor as much financial resources as Khwanchai. This lack of connections and resources affected his negotiating power with different Redshirt factions.¹²⁸ As a result, Pichet's attempt to control the Redshirt village movement in Ubonratchathani proved weaker than Khwanchai's in Udonthani.

Chaoban (Villagers)

Open Defiance

After the 2010 crackdown, the Redshirts returned to their villages and kept a low profile. No Redshirts wanted to declare that they were Redshirts because doing so would risk being interrogated or charged by the state authorities. During that time, the Redshirts did not have rights and voice. After the emergence and expansion of Redshirt villages, however, villagers began to join the proclamation to openly demonstrate their defiance – or what they called “openly fighting” (*poetnasu*, lit. fighting with the revealing face) – against a repressive regime in which freedom of expression was violated.¹²⁹ The Redshirt village movement, thus, gave reassurance and support to the villagers. One informant recalled her decision to participate in the Redshirt village proclamation as follows:

I liked the Redshirts since the 2006 coup because the Redshirts really fought for democracy. After the Thaksin government was ousted, there have been no governments which really work for the people. No other governments is as capable as the Thaksin government. We want only the Thaksin government. The Redshirts were ‘victimised’ (*kratam*). Villagers were ‘bullied’ (*rungkae*) by state authorities because all villagers are the Redshirts. So, the villagers could bear it. [We] didn't want to hide. Proclaimed

¹²⁸ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

¹²⁹ Interview with Saksit Kingmala, Ubonratchathani, 5 February 2015.

ourselves Redshirts so that they didn't have to ask us or try to find us.¹³⁰

Villagers' open defiance in their own locality took much more courage than protesting in Bangkok where their identity was concealed among the crowd.¹³¹ Given the severity and ruthlessness of the crackdown, which resulted in hundreds of deaths and almost two thousand injuries, proclaiming themselves as Redshirts was an obvious and courageous challenge to the authority.

Chaoban and Thaksin

Another main reason explaining the participation of villagers in Redshirt villages was their affection for Thaksin. Such emotional connections prompted villagers to proclaim themselves as Redshirts to protect Thaksin and attest their loyalty to the Redshirt movement. Underpinning this affection was the admiration to Thaksin's premiership and his policies, such as the universal health care programme (the 30 Baht program), microloan program for villagers (the One Million Baht Village Fund programme), and marketing of products made locally (One Tambon One Product programme). As 47-year-old woman in Khonkaen province called Lek Pubpha explained why she had voted for a pro-Thaksin party and became a proclaimed Redshirt villager:

I like Thaksin because he helped villagers very well. He did many things to help us. Nobody told me. I consider what he did by myself...I voted for Pheu Thai Party because I liked the Thirty Baht Project. For the rich they can go to a private clinic. It is faster and better. Sometimes, I went to a private clinic. I know. But for people like us we have to save the money. The Thirty Baht Project made us spend less money. Many people don't have money.¹³²

Isan people have been deeply affected by the socio-economic transformation in recent decades. Far from living in a "subsistence economy", an

¹³⁰ Interview with Juraiwan Phansatornkun, Udonthani, 27 December 2014.

¹³¹ Interview with Thongbai Phakprom, Khonkaen, 22 May 2015.

¹³² Interview Lek Pubpha, Khonkaen, 22 May 2015.

increasing number of villagers are earning extra income from off-farm activities. This view is echoed by Thongbai Phakprom, a 44-year-old local woman who runs a small shop selling cook-to-order dishes. Thongbai, who decorated her house with red flags in the pre-2014 coup period,¹³³ points out the significance of Thaksin's policies in daily life:

The One Million One Village [The Village Fund Project] is really good. My husband who formerly was a carpenter is now a furniture maker thanks to the Fund. We've been able to 'make a living' (*tangtua*). In a good year, we made a profit of more than one hundred thousand baht [£2,000].¹³⁴

Lek Pubpha, on the other hand, told of her endeavour to boost rice production and crop yields and her disappointment with rice farming, which could no longer sustain the family in subsistence:

My family rent some land to increase the amount of rice produced. Altogether we work on 22 rai. It costs us around 80,000 to 100,000 baht each year. But we have to rely considerably on the mercy of the land lord. Each rai will yield 20 buckets of rice. The rice yielded will be divided into three parts. We will give one portion to the landlord and keep two. One portion is high because we invested everything, including rice grains used as initial crops. Because the income is not sufficient my husband also works in a nearby foundry. He had got paid 300 baht a day [£6].¹³⁵

The Redshirt village project was not the main reason leading villagers to proclaim themselves as Redshirts. Despite their claims, the Redshirt village founders took advantage of villagers' affection for Thaksin's policies without creating their own substantive and sustainable policies. The demand for Thaksin's policies which served their interests and desire to protect such interests already existed among villagers before they proclaimed themselves as

¹³³ I had observed Thongbai's house in the pre-2014 coup period on 21 January 2014.

¹³⁴ Interview with Thongbai Phakprom, Khonkaen, 22 May 2015.

¹³⁵ Interview with Lek Pubpha, Khonkaen, 22 May 2015.

Redshirt villagers. By contrast, while many villagers have not benefited from Redshirt villages, some were negatively affected by the proclamation.

Conflicts within Villages

The proclamation of Redshirt villages gave rise to conflicts between Redshirt supporters and non-Redshirt villagers. According to the Handbook of Redshirt Villages, every proclaimed Redshirt village must satisfy the prerequisite criteria, namely *first*, at least 60 per cent of the total population of a given village have to be Redshirts; *second*, villagers have to fly a red flag in front of their houses or in the village streets; *third*, all Redshirt groups in a given village must unite; *fourth*, the villagers had to love (*rak*) democracy; and *fifth*, villagers must love Thaksin. However, these criteria were neglected in practice. There have been no public hearings conducted for villagers to decide whether or not 60 per cent of the villagers were Redshirts.¹³⁶ Even in the original Redshirt village, no public hearing was conducted before the proclamation was organised.¹³⁷

The proclamation of Redshirt villages were mostly organised without consulting villagers and usually held outside the village.¹³⁸ This fact also goes to explain why several factions opposed at what they perceived as an encroachment by outsiders. The majority of Redshirt villages required the participation of only a certain number of village representatives, rather than the total populations. The possibility of organising referendums on the proclamation was further reduced during the heyday of Redshirt villages due to the competition among different brands of Redshirt villages, which resulted in collective proclamations of large numbers of Redshirt villages away from the villages (usually in front of provincial halls).

Moreover, the political and civil rights of non-Redshirt villagers were usually ignored and their opinions were disrespected. Neutral villagers, or even some Redshirts, who opposed the proclamation because they believed it would create tension and conflict in their community were often ignored. As Nongnuch

¹³⁶ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

¹³⁷ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

¹³⁸ Please see appendix.

Boonkrai said in an interview at one Redshirt village proclamation in Udonthani in 2011:

In our village, only 2-3 houses are Yellow. The Yellowshirts they don't get involved with us. When we organise activities, they didn't get involved. We won't get involved with them either. We respect each other. We are neighbours. But don't 'find fault' (*raran*) or 'pick fight' (*harueang*). We have different ideologies (*Nation Weekly*, 21 February 2011:25).

At times, Redshirt supporters, who often outnumbered non-Redshirt villagers, would openly criticise and label those who opposed the proclamation as diehard "Yellow".¹³⁹ This kind of intimidation and harassment caused fear among non-Redshirt villagers. One Yellowshirt village headman, whose husband is a soldier, briefly recalled her feelings:

It was hard to behave. Going here and there in the village was difficult because the villagers were Redshirts. Even when I went to buy food at the 'flea market' (*talatnat*) and met with villagers, they would often look at me negatively. But if they had chased me to live somewhere else, I wouldn't go. This is my village. I like the Yellowshirts, if we organised activities, just let us do it. Don't 'intervene' (*rukran*).¹⁴⁰

In contrast, the Redshirt village proclamations met strong opposition in some places, which often resulted in violent confrontation as evident in Buriram, Phitsanulok, Phuket, Songkhla and Rayong.¹⁴¹ The most violent clashes following a proclamation took place in Phitsanulok and Phuket where petrol bombs were hurled into proclaimed villages and the Redshirt village signs and banners were burnt down.¹⁴² As Arnon admitted, a proclamation could potentially lead to clashes between different colour-coded groups within village communities:

¹³⁹ Interview with Chareon Kittikulprasert, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Pranisa Wisertsri, Udonthani, 28 December 2014.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

¹⁴² Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

On 10 December 2013, I went to make proclamations in Buriram province. I also went to proclaim in Phitsanulok. But there were violent incidents. Bombs were exploded in the [proclaimed] villages. Our opponents said that Redshirt villages were 'bad' (*leo*) villages. So, I told the villagers [who wanted the proclamations] that I could make the proclamations but they would be the ones who lived there. In the villages, there were also 'neutral villagers' (*phuborisut* lit. innocent people).¹⁴³

Thus, the proclamation ceremonies of the Redshirt villages became increasingly ironic. On the one hand, Redshirt supporters became red because they were deprived of electoral rights and excluded from political participation until the 2010 crackdown. In the post-crackdown period, The Redshirts had been prohibited from expressing their political ideas and identities. On the other hand, the village proclamations excluded other villagers because of their different opinions. In other words, in order to exert their right to political participation in the general public, the Redshirts have precluded other villagers' rights in the villages. Indeed, the existence of village conflicts caused by the proclamation was also explained by the fact that the Redshirt village leaders usually began their activities by giving donation to the village temple and organised their activities in the temple area which is considered a public place. As villagers would not prohibit anyone from making merit, they would not easily reject these proclamations. According to Arnon, he had visited around 200-300 temples nationwide during his proclamation period.¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the ways in which the Redshirt movement and Redshirt villages have changed since 2010. It found that the existing Redshirt literature (Ekkapollanut 2013; Sopranzetti 2012; Ubonphan 2010) focuses on Bangkok and neglects the post-2010 crackdown period, while Wipawadee (2012) and Pruek (2010) focus only on one single Redshirt village or a single Redshirt activity. This chapter provides a more complete explanation of the Redshirt

¹⁴³ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

village movement, including an original analysis of the internal dynamics of the movement. The original Redshirt village emerged from a sense of frustration among Redshirt supporters over the issue of political prisoners who were detained after the 2010 crackdown. But it was also a reaction to political inactivity of the national UDD and the Pheu Thai party, and the resulting leadership crisis generated by the imprisonment of previous local Redshirt leaders. The proclamations of Redshirt villages were well accepted among Redshirt supporters, beginning from Isan and then traversing to other regions. The formulation of Redshirt villages also signified a shift from street rallies and spectacle performing to claiming territory, which challenged the authority of the Thai state. Nevertheless, in expanding the number and types of Redshirt villages, these proclaimed villages became rich political resources with which different Redshirt factions desired to engage. Such engagement precipitated leadership contention and internal conflicts among Redshirt supporters, like villagers, but also among different political entrepreneurs, namely the Redshirt village founders, the UDD leaders, Thaksin Shinawatra, and local leaders.

On the one hand, the Redshirt village founders like Kamonsin, Petsak and especially Arnon argued that the previous structure of the Redshirt movement was highly centralised and dominated by the UDD. On the other hand, these political entrepreneurs tried to claim the credit for Redshirt village creation and marginalised other founders. The UDD leaders initially viewed Redshirt villages as an alternative method of mobilisation and then attempted to co-opt the popularity of Redshirt village. However, when Redshirt villages became increasingly strong and apparently out of control, the UDD leader, Thida Thavornseth, changed her strategy to compete with the Redshirt village founders by launching her own Redshirt village brand and accusing the original brand as creating internal division and harbouring communist sentiments.

Thaksin, who benefited from the political activities of both sides, also participated in the Redshirt village movement. While the ex-premier benefited from competition between internal factions to continue to give him more control over the Redshirt movement, he had to balance power among different groups and mitigate internal conflict to prevent the movement from destroying

itself from within. Local Redshirt leaders, like Khwanchai Sarakham and Pichet Tabudda, were significantly affected by the emergence of Redshirt villages. In the pre-2010 crackdown period, they played dominant leadership roles in their respective areas. But in the post-2010 crackdown period, they were critically challenged by the emergence and expansion of Redshirt villages. The Redshirt village movement undermined their role and significance, causing them to feel marginalised and resentful. Khwanchai, who was criticised for being an “aristocrat Redshirt”, argued that the proclaimed Redshirt villages were created by artificial Redshirts and, thus, not authentic. Meanwhile, Pichet emphasised that Redshirt villages were exclusivist and caused conflicts with local leaders.

Despite the positive picture painted by Arnon and other founders, villagers participated in the project mainly out of defiance against the Abhisit government’s suppression of the Redshirts’ identity and their affection for Thaksin. The proclamations of Redshirt villages also generated intra-village conflicts between the Redshirts and non-Redshirts. While the Redshirts emerged from a situation where they were politically excluded, in proclaiming villages Redshirt, they have excluded the right and voice of non-Redshirts. Enforced proclamations led to confrontation with local opposition, or even resulted in violence at times and in some areas, as evident in Burrirum, Phisanulok, Phuket, Songkhla and Rayong.

Chapter Four: Redshirt Factions in Electoral and Post-electoral Contexts

Introduction

This chapter explores RQ2: What were the power relations between the state under the Pheu Thai government and Redshirt villagers?. Though the Redshirts' long-denied demand – a fresh general election – was finally addressed in July 2011, Redshirt village leaders insisted on the need to continue their political struggle and retain their Redshirt identity despite the predictions made by some commentators about their collapse. Nidhi Eoseewong (2012:155), for example, argued that should an election take place, “the Redshirts would go back to live a normal life,” which means they would stop wearing a red shirt and presumably abandon the cause. According to Redshirt leaders, the reason the Redshirt village movement had to continue was that their goals had been redefined. They publicly claimed that the movement was to ensure that the 2011 election would be “fair” (*yuttitham*) (*Post Today*, 16 April 2011:6). In the post-electoral context, despite the Pheu Thai Party (PTP) assuming political power, these leaders still asserted that the Redshirt village project was an “iron wall” (*kamphaenglek*), implying that Redshirt villages must be maintained in order to protect the Yingluck government.¹⁴⁵ For them, “the more Redshirt villages expanded, the more ‘stability’ (*sathianraphab*) the Yingluck government would achieve” (*Phujatkan*, 3 October 2011). Thus, the Redshirt village movement must not be abandoned because it is still relevant and much needed.

This chapter explores Redshirt factions in the 2011 general election and the post-electoral contexts. In doing so, the chapter particularly analyses four key developments in which the Redshirt mass mobilisation was extensively involved, including the general election in 2011, the flood crisis in 2011, community and development projects, and the local elections in 2012. Through these four events, this chapter demonstrates that the relations between the Redshirt village movement and the PTP were best described as complex or antagonistic. Such complexity or antagonism arose from the necessity of network Thaksin to maintain methods of mass mobilisation despite the growing

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

salience of parliamentary politics. The PTP could not formally acknowledge its relationship with the Redshirt village movement for fear of discrimination allegations. The chapters then elaborates on how the Redshirt village leaders exploited this ambiguous situation, while adopting different mobilisation strategies to justify the existence and expansion of their project.

In doing so, this chapter also engages with Walker's (2012) study, which explores the dynamics and complexities of elections in Chiangmai. Walker (2012) argues that several factors, like localism, resource support to communities through state projects and the administrative capability of the candidates were determining factors considered by the electorate in voting for candidates from *different* parties and played a vital role in determining the outcomes of the elections. However, Walker (2012) fails to address how such factors may also contribute to internal contention within the *same* political party, especially a pro-Thaksin party, rather than strengthening competitiveness against rival parties, when different candidates compete for endorsement as candidates of the same political party. The chapter demonstrates that the entrenched mobilisation and asserted identity of the Redshirt village movement has led to internal conflicts and mobilisation competition with other Redshirt factions. The chapter maintains that the Redshirt villagers are rich resources that political entrepreneurs exploited for their own political advantage, be it protests or parliamentary politics. Instead of promoting partnership, the mobilisation which revolved around political struggles and reasserted identity within the Redshirt village movement caused further partisanship across the broader Redshirt movement in both electoral and post-electoral contexts.

The 2011 General Election

The 2011 Election: Violent or Peaceful?

On 11 March 2011, Prime Minister Abhisit publicly announced that parliament dissolution would take place on 10 May, and a general election would be held on 3 July 2011 (*Bangkok Post*, 11 March 2011). This announcement, however, was received with widespread pessimism, as the country was still engulfed in conflict after the 2010 crackdown. According to an ABAC Poll, 63.9 per cent of respondents believed the 2011 election would be violent and the result would not be accepted by the losing party (*Matichon*, 27 February 2011). Such pessimism led Prajak Kongkirati to conclude that the 2011 election was among the most risky elections in Thai political history (2013:43). According to Prajak (2013:43), the underlying reason was that the election was to be held despite the fact that “truth” and “justice” concerning the 2010 crackdown had not been provided; hence, “conflicts and violence could potentially be transferred from streets into ballot boxes”. The contentious nature of this election was confirmed by the unprecedented number of 132,695 police officers deployed to monitor all 90,728 polling stations nationwide (Prajak 2013:48).

Nevertheless, the 2011 election was warmly welcomed among Redshirt factions. The fact that pro-Thaksin parties had been undefeated in all general elections since 2001 (Connors 2008:483) led Redshirt supporters to feel confident of victory. The popularity of previous populist policies and expectation of new ones also contributed to the activeness of the Redshirt factions. Due to the high number of MP seats (126) in Isan, the party which wins the regional vote there is very likely to win the general election overall. Parts of Isan were also a strong election base for the Bhumjaithai Party led by the controversial politician Newin Chidchob, who had defected from the pro-Thaksin side in 2008.

Although Pheu Thai had gained the majority of Isan MPs seats in the previous three general elections in 2001, 2005 and 2007, some constituencies in southern Isan provinces, especially Buriram, remained a stronghold of the Bhumjaitai Party. Newin himself had always been elected as a Buriram MP since 1986 (*Thairath* 5 July 2017), due to his family patronage network and the ability

to draw public projects and funds into Buriram. These state projects and his involvement in bureaucratic affairs generated several corruption allegations against Newin.¹⁴⁶ In addition to competition between parties, there was competition among politicians who wanted to be the candidate of the same party, which led different Redshirt groups in Isan to adopt different electoral strategies in this general election. These strategies resulted in conflict and competition among Redshirt factions.

Redshirt Villages

Shortly after Abhisit's announcement of the house dissolution, Redshirt village leaders began using their proclamations for marketing and electoral campaigning for PTP politicians. Kamonsin Singsuriya, a Redshirt village founder, declared in Udonthani on 15 April 2011 that, at the local level, the "Redshirt villages would help all Pheu Thai politicians in Udonthani win the election", and at the national level, "Redshirt villages would work in parallel with the Pheu Thai Party by collecting information of the Redshirt's problems to inform the Party" (*Post Today*, 16 April 2011: 6).

In order to achieve these goals, the Redshirt village movement employed two main electoral strategies: campaigning in villages and threatening to protest if the election result was distorted. Some feared that Thailand's conservative elite would try to manipulate the election results to favour the Democrat Party and block pro-Thaksin forces from returning to power. To prevent such manipulation, the first measure involved conducting electoral campaigns within proclaimed Redshirt villages and, occasionally, in other villages.¹⁴⁷ According to Arnon, this measure involved Redshirt village committees consisting of 10 to 15 volunteers who worked like vote canvassers to campaign for the PTP.¹⁴⁸ Suebsakul (2013:184), who observed a similar electoral campaign in Northern Redshirt villages, notes that in their attempt to persuade villagers to vote for PTP politicians, "Redshirt village headmen and

¹⁴⁶ The most recent scandal included the appointments and transfers of provincial governors in 2009 (*Prachachat Thurakit* 27 January 2009).

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

committees (*phobandaeng*) walked from door to door to distribute brochures of Pheu Thai politicians, gave red flags to villagers as well as persuaded villagers to hang the flags in front of their houses, village streets or the entrance of villages". Most important was the use of Redshirt village proclamations to attract attention from the electorate. The main purpose of this measure was to create the impression that Redshirt villages were the PTP's 'core vote areas' (*thansiang*).

As the majority of villagers were already pro-Pheu Thai, the Redshirt village leaders argued that their red flags and banners were aimed to encourage voter turn-out among villagers.¹⁴⁹ Since pro-Thaksin parties have won all the general elections since 2001, the leaders were concerned that Redshirt supporters would be overconfident and the turnout would be low. In order to expand their mobilisation during the electoral period, the Redshirt village movement also exploited the anti-vote buying discourse promoted by the Election Commission (EC). According to Kongchai and Khamsaen, red banners and flags were intended to discourage vote-buying because candidates from other parties would recognise the symbols and would not "waste time buying votes in these villages".¹⁵⁰ The rather questionable argument that red flags and banners were used to encourage vote turn-out and discourage vote-buying also proved acceptable to state officials.¹⁵¹

The second electoral strategy used by the Redshirt village movement was threatening to stage a mass protest if the 2011 election was interrupted or distorted. As Kamonsin argued:

When there is an election, we'll campaign for the Pheu Thai Party to be able to form a government (*tang ratthaban*). If other parties win the election by a majority we'll accept and won't protest. But if the Pheu Thai Party wins and the runner-up challenges to form the

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang and Khamsaen Chaithep, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Kongchai and Khamsaen Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015

¹⁵¹ Interview with Worawit Pongngam (District Chief Assistant), Ubonratchathani, 30 May 2015.

government, we cannot accept that. We have to come out (*Matichon*, 9 June 2011: 15).

The threat to protest or “come out” if the 2011 election result was not observed well resonated with the sentiment of the majority of the Redshirts. The main reason was that in 2008 the Democrat Party, which was backed by the army and the Bhumjaithai Party, formed a coalition government despite having lost the 2007 general election. After the Somchai Wongsawat government was toppled by the constitutional Court in 2008, Newin led the MPs in his faction to defect from Phalang Prachachon government, a move that enabled the Democrats to form a new government without having to hold another election.

Newin previously worked for Thaksin after the 2005 election and played an important role in organising mobs to oppose the Yellowshirts in 2006. Newin’s defection caused outrage among the Redshirts, who felt “betrayed” (*haklang*) by Bhumjaithai.¹⁵² Their rage translated into action when Redshirts surrounded the house of Bhumjaithai politician Prajak Kaewklahan during the violence following the 2010 crackdown.¹⁵³ Until the time of writing, Redshirts continued to be furious with Newin, seeing him as a corrupt opportunist willing to use every means to advance his own political interests. In this regard, the Redshirt village movement proved beneficial for other Redshirt supporters who wanted to express their animosity towards the Democrat and Bhumajaitai parties. This mobilisation role provided an opportunity for the Redshirt village movement to assert its continuing salience during the electoral period.

The 2011 election was also an opportunity for the Redshirt village leaders to increase their role and influence within the locality and the network Thaksin. This goal was well reflected in Kamonsin’s injunction that “to work in parallel with the Pheu Thai Party and to collect information of the Redshirt’s problems”. This injunction implies that not only was there a gap between the party and the people which the Redshirt village movement could fill, but also a necessity for leaders to increase their role. In fact, campaigning for the PTP arguably provided an opportunity for the Redshirt village leaders to exploit the

¹⁵² Interview with Tak (pseudonym), Khonkaen, 26 May 2015.

¹⁵³ Interview with Tak, Khonkaen, 26 May 2015.

popularity of the PTP for their own projects. Such electoral campaigning also increased publicity and a focus on their 'performance' (*phonngan*) for the Redshirt village movement.

Confronting Opponents

Since April 2011, various groups of Redshirt supporters, frustrated by the 2010 crackdown had demonstrated their fierce resistance to Democrat politicians who came to campaign in their areas. Abhisit, who was the obvious target of this fury, had been subject to threats and intimidation from frustrated Redshirts on several occasions. Those opposing his 2011 electoral campaign posed provocative questions to Abhisit such as "Who ordered the killing of the people?" and dubbed the Oxford-educated orator "Only good at talking" (*Naew Na*, 10 June 2011:6). The resistance was stronger in many Redshirt villages, where politicians from the Democrat and Bhumjaithai Parties were barred from campaigning by the Redshirts.¹⁵⁴ Encountering such obstacles, Abhisit argued that Redshirt villages were signs of division and claimed that the reconciliation agenda proposed by the PTP was illegitimate. As he put it: "When we need to bring politics back to the parliament, encouraging people to intimidate and obstruct like this is not democratic. There is no use to talk about reconciliation" (*Khaosod*, 10 June 2011:14). Nevertheless, there was no evidence that Abhisit attempted to campaign in Redshirt villages in Redshirt stronghold provinces.

Moreover, during the 2011 election, Redshirt villagers similarly demonstrated their frustration at the military. The most acute incident was in a Redshirt village in the Central province of Nonthaburi in which Redshirt villagers blocked soldiers who were on duty and claimed to be "investigating drugs" in the area from entering the village (*Naew Na*, 10 June 2011:6). General Prayuth Chan-o-cha, then the Commander-in-chief, responded with severe criticisms against the Redshirts and threatening to use force against the villagers who blocked the soldiers. As Prayuth put it: "If a small number of soldiers were prevented from entering by the Redshirts, then fifty or a hundred of soldiers will be sent to the area". Prayuth went on to state as follows:

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Kongchai and Khamsaen Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

You created villages in this colour and that colour. But Thailand has only one colour which is the colour of the national flag. The colour of nation, religion and king. Because you separated the colour, the situation is 'bad' (*leorai*) like nowadays. There must be no colour. No anything. I think there must be only one colour of 'unity' (*khwamsamakki*) and 'loyalty' (*khwampakdi*) [to the king] (*Thai Post*, 10 June 2011:6).

These confrontations led to some legal cases being brought to the EC against the Redshirt village movement during the 2011 election. However, the EC ruled that the electoral campaigns of the Redshirt village movement were not illegal and therefore could continue (*Thairath*, 12 June 2011:15). The EC decision was based on the argument that Redshirt villagers had the right to freedom of expression and could dress in red during the election. As Election commissioner Wisut Phothitaen suggested, "The principle is whether there are law violations in those villages. If people do not violate the law, they can dress in any colours because it is their right to freedom of expression". Despite the decision of the EC, the electoral campaigns of the Redshirt village movement continued to attract severe criticisms and allegations of unlawful campaigning activities from their opponents since, according to the election law, creating obstructions to electoral campaigning was illegal, which was also implied in the EC ruling.

The UDD and Electoral Neutrality

Amidst increasing confrontations, the national UDD took a "neutral" strategy towards the 2011 election. The UDD refrained from canvassing during the early phase of the campaign for fear that their electoral campaigns for the PTP could be used by the opponents to nullify election results, or even as a pretext to dissolve the PTP. Nonetheless, as the 2011 election approached, the competition among political parties became very intense, and Thida eventually sought to distance the Redshirt villages' electoral mobilisation from the UDD, arguing that the Redshirt village movement was not related to the UDD. Thida gave an interview in response to Prayuth's comment about unity and loyalty, stating

that “We did not tell them to create the Redshirt village project. It was their own idea” (*Matichon*, 10 June 2011:15).

Thida further contended that the Redshirts should not mobilise during the electoral period to prevent the opponents from using such mobilisation as a pretext to disrupt and distort the election. The UDD’s “anti-mobilisation” approach centred on discouraging Redshirt identity performing during the electoral period. Thida preferred to represent the UDD as a “neutral” organisation. Significant to this neutrality was the establishment of the “UDD Election Commission” (*ko-ko-to no-po-cho*) (*Matichon*, 10 June 2011:15). The purpose of the UDD Election Commission was to monitor the 2011 general election to ensure that “the election would be free and fair” from 26 June 2011 until 3 July 2011. Despite the fact that all polling stations would be monitored by the police and guards, the UDD Election Commission planned to send volunteers to “stay” with the ballot boxes in all 375 electoral constituencies twenty-four hours a day for seven days. The main role of these volunteers was to be election “observers” and to ensure that there was no fraud and misconduct on the election process and results (*Matichon*, 10 June 2011:15). As the term “*ko-ko-to*” is generally referred to electoral neutrality, such an initiative was clearly to differentiate the UDD’s electoral activities from Redshirt villages’ electoral mobilisation which was based mainly on asserting Redshirt identity.

Thida’s initiative was also an attempt to centralise the leadership into the UDD and to downplay the roles and influence of the Redshirt village movement. According to Thida, the Redshirts should not assert their partisan identity during the 2011 election. Thus, Thida argued that the UDD Election Commission volunteers were firstly trained at sub-district, district and province levels but “the training must be conducted as non-campaigning. No pictures, numbers and sign of any party would be demonstrated during the training” (*Matichon*, 10 June 2011:15). However, the majority of the UDD Election Commission volunteers who monitored the 2011 election were recruited from among Redshirt supporters, while the UDD Election Commission was also dubbed the “Red Election Commission” (*Matichon*, 10 June 2011:15). In his study on electoral violence, Prajak (2013:59) estimated that the UDD deployed up to

90,000 Redshirts to act as its volunteers. Therefore, Thida's action was not only to ensure that the 2011 election would be free and fair, but also to centralise power and undermine the Redshirt village movement, as evidenced from her deployment of "Redshirt" volunteers.

Pheu Thai Party and Reconciliation Approach

The main approach of Pheu Thai politicians towards the electoral campaigns of the Redshirt village movement can be divided into two distinct forms – informal and formal. Informally, Pheu Thai politicians were involved with Redshirt village proclamations with the expectation of using Redshirt villages as their 'electioneering bases' (*thansiang*). PTP politicians played an important role in the expansion and increasing scale of the proclamation rites, usually by providing incentives for the proclamations. According to Arnon, during the proclamations presided over by Worawut Auapinyakul, formerly a minister in the Prime Minister's Office:

The Redshirt village signs were provided by Pheu Thai politicians...They made the proclamations more spectacular. They came to give the signs to the villagers with some other things. When the villagers were given the signs with the money they would take better care of the signs.¹⁵⁵

The use of these signs were aimed to demonstrate the solidarity the Redshirt village movement and to boost the popularity of the project, but also to use the popularity of Thaksin to solicit support for pro-Thaksin politicians from villagers. The popularity of the PTP also led to a belief that any PTP candidates would win the 2011 election played an important role in driving politicians to be extremely active. As one village headman in Khonkaen opined: "If a Pheu Thai candidate is an electricity pole, it will get elected".¹⁵⁶ The 'electricity pole' expression was used to suggest that a Pheu Thai candidate will win the election without lifting a finger.¹⁵⁷ At the same time, the one district, one member

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Ritthinan Jansoda, Khonkaen, 26 May 2015.

¹⁵⁷ This Thai expression means those who do nothing are standing still as if they were electricity poles.

electoral system and the decrease in the number of MPs in Udonthani, Khonkaen and Ubonratchathani, as stipulated by the 2007 constitution, made the competition to become PTP candidates intense. These aspects encouraged MPs to become involved in political activities, including the Redshirt village proclamations during the election period.

As the election approached, the number of politicians involved in the Redshirt village proclamations also increased. Apart from ex-premier Somchai Wongsawat, Prasong Boonpong, Cherdchai Tontisirin, and Worawat Auapinyakul, the politicians involved included Jakarin Unnopporn in Khonkaen, Surathin Pimanmekhin in Udonthani, Sergeant Prasit Chaisuriya, and Chuwit Pitakpornphanlop in Ubonratchathani as well as a group of local politicians who wanted to be selected as PTP candidates.¹⁵⁸ According to Juraiwan, the headman of the Third Redshirt village, the most prominent among all were Kamonsin and Petsak, who had founded the Redshirt village movement. The two founders also competed to stand for the 2011 election as PTP candidates.¹⁵⁹ In this regard, the establishment of the Redshirt village project was itself an attempt by the founders to achieve official political roles for themselves.

The PTP formally denied the involvement of mobilisation of the Redshirt villages during the 2011 election. From the beginning, the PTP declared its first and foremost electoral strategy as “to resolve, not to revenge” (*kaekai mai kaekhaen*) which mainly signified that the Party had no intention to “take revenge” against its opponents or even those responsible for the 2010 crackdown, and only stood to “resolve” the country’s problems. Thus, to publicly support the Redshirt villages during the 2011 election would be contradictory to its reconciliation proposal. Similarly, to support the Redshirt villages during electoral season would cause discontent from Khwanchai’s faction, which the PTP deemed more influential in the area. On 7 June 2011, Yingluck travelled to campaign in Udonthani, using Khwanchai’s network.¹⁶⁰ As it turned out, Khwanchai had organised a campaigning stage in a nearby area and invited only

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Tak, Khonkaen, 26 May 2015; Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015; Phon Chaorai, Ubonratchathani, 28 May 2015.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Juraiwan Phansatornkun, Udonthani, 11 May 2015. Juraiwan was also a vote canvasser for Surathin and Kamonsin.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

members of his Redshirt circle, such as Wichian Khaokham, later elected as a Pheu Thai MP.

Moreover, as the Redshirt village movement had been increasingly subject to allegations and suspicion, the Party publicly distanced itself from Redshirt village mobilisation during the 2011 electoral period. This alienation was echoed by Yingluck during her electoral campaigning, who denied any involvement with the Redshirt village movement:

I don't know that there were Redshirt villages. But the Pheu Thai Party will keep up with the policies we promised. I think the Redshirts are the people who fight for democracy. Meanwhile, we'll do our duty our best (*Matichon*, 9 June 2011:15).

Moreover, to avoid criticisms, the PTP did not select candidates who were strongly associated with the Redshirt village movement. As a result, both Kamonsin and Petsak failed in their bid to be selected as PTP candidates. Another reason behind this selection seemed to be the relatively new faction of the Redshirt village movement which discouraged the PTP from selecting the original founders of the Redshirt village movement. Although the public denial by Yingluck was aimed at reducing suspicion towards the PTP and the Redshirt village movement, it also highlighted the complex relations between the party and this relatively new Redshirt faction. During the 2011 election, PTP politicians informally benefited from the Redshirt villages' electoral campaigns; however, due to their publicly proclaimed reconciliation policy, they formally denied involvement with the Redshirt village movement to avoid suspicion.

Discontent with the Party

The EC released the 2011 election result on 4 July 2011: the PTP had won with a majority of 265 seats (Election Commission 2011), which confirmed that the electoral defeat of the DP had continued since 1992. Commentators, like Suebsakul (2013:166), suggested that the reasons underlying Pheu Thai's victory were the sustained popularity of Thaksin, a new set of populist policies, and the opportunity for Thailand to have its first female prime minister. The first Yingluck cabinet was announced on 9 August 2011. Several leaders from

the UDD were appointed as consultants and secretaries to the newly appointed ministers.¹⁶¹ Apart from the trio, the UDD figures who were promoted with political posts included Aree Krainara, Jatuporn's personal security guard, and Nisit Sinthuprai, the UDD School Director, who became secretary to the interior minister.

By contrast, no Redshirt village leaders were promoted to political posts.¹⁶² The selection of ministers and advisors was a disappointment for the Redshirt village leaders who used their Redshirt identity to campaign for the party during the election. From their perspective, the Redshirt village leaders argued that the Redshirt village movement was the most significant faction in campaigning for the PTP.¹⁶³ Therefore, the movement deserved a cabinet post. Arnon stated at length:

If there was no election, we [the Redshirts] would have been stronger. Everyone wanted to play an important role. Everyone wanted to have a political post. People started to make comparison. They said that person was promoted to become that minister. But there were many more who were not promoted. And they were the real fighters...These cases made us felt that we didn't receive justice. It seemed as if we were fighting for nothing. But for those who were 'stage Redshirts' (*daeng wethi*) and 'TV Redshirts' (*daeng torathat*), they fought for few minutes and went back home, they got many things. In comparison, we had helped campaigning in villages. But the UDD took control after the election. Even when there were reshuffles of the [Yingluck] cabinets, we didn't get any [cabinet] seats. We had a potential candidate too, like Dr.Prasong.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ After the cabinet reshuffle in 2012, UDD leader Nattawut Saigua was promoted with a deputy Minister of Commerce.

¹⁶² Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

¹⁶³ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015. Prasong Boonpong, a former chief advisor to Chavalit Yongyaiyuth (prime minister from 1996-1997), joined the Redshirt protesters in the 2010 demonstration and was one of the most important supporters of the Redshirt village movement.

The 2011 election seemed to have aggravated the internal conflict and deepened the division among the Redshirts. For Arnon, the Redshirt village faction was undermined by PTP politicians in the post-electoral period, despite the fact that Redshirt villages were used for their campaigns. Although the mobilisation of the Redshirt village movement caused no conflict with the UDD and the PTP in the early period, as the election approached, allegations from the Redshirt's opponents led to contention among Redshirt factions over the role of Redshirt villages in the electoral campaign. The UDD leaders and Pheu Thai politicians feared that it would be regarded as a violation of the election law and could potentially lead to clashes with opponents.

By contrast, the promotion of certain UDD leaders to political posts was seen by the Redshirt village leaders as the UDD benefiting at their expense. Significantly, this was the first time that Redshirts' discontent was directed against a pro-Thaksin government. The demand for justice which was normally used against the Redshirt opponents had been ironically turned against their own government. Yet, the argument that it would have been better if there were no 2011 election drove the Redshirt village movement to continue its mobilisation capacity, although a pro-Thaksin government had already assumed power. This was especially evident during the 2011 flood crisis.

The Central Plain Flood in 2011

From Natural to Political Crises

Among the first tasks of Prime Minister Yingluck was to deal with the 2011 flooding crisis that occurred between late July 2011 and January 2012. Although floods (and droughts) have been common in Thailand, and deforestation has usually been blamed for such environmental problems (Walker 2011), the 2011 flood was among the most severe natural disasters Thailand has ever experienced. According to the World Bank (2012:2), this flooding affected at least 13 million Thais and caused damage of approximately 1.43 trillion baht (£35.6 billion), which made this crisis "Thailand's worst floods in half a century". Particularly affected by this crisis was the Thai Central Plains where much heavy industry and economic activity were located (Pavin 2011:66). In an

attempt to manage the rehabilitation and reconstruction programme, and also to put in place prevention measures, the Yingluck government allocated a budget of 120,000 million baht (£2,400 million) for its flooding management scheme (*Matichon*, 17 August 2012:15). Due to the scale and scope of damage and money allocation, the 2011 natural catastrophe was widely politicised by anti-Yingluck forces, whose efforts were countered by the Redshirts.

Implicit Anti-Yingluck Mobilisation

From the beginning, the government's opponents attacked Yingluck's capacity to cope with the crisis (Walker 2011). For them, Yingluck was incompetent and became Prime Minister due mainly to Thaksin's name. Some critics resorted to misogyny, arguing that the 2011 catastrophe occurred because it was the first time Thailand had a female Prime Minister, which was the cause of national misfortune (*The Nation*, 26 October 2011). Additionally, several institutions in the hands of anti-Thaksin forces, like the Democrat-dominated Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and the Royal Thai Army, while competing with the government to undertake crisis alleviation, also aimed to use the 2011 crisis to discredit Yingluck (Pavin 2011:68).

The Redshirts' opponents aimed to use the 2011 floods as an example to invoke conflicting approaches between the network Thaksin and the network monarchy. Such conflicts have appeared in the differences among the two networks in administering the country. A prime example was Thailand's southernmost insurgency. Thaksin's hawkish measures towards the southernmost provinces were criticised for violating King Bhumibhol's approach "understand, access and develop" (*khaojai, khaothueng, patthana*) towards the people in the Southernmost provinces (Askew 2011:82). The Southernmost situation proved to be "Thaksin's Achilles' heel" (Ukrist 2006:73) and significantly delegitimised Thaksin's political power.

In the 2011 flood crisis, many royalists tended to repeat the same conundrum by contrasting King Bhumibhol's supposed water management expertise with the inexperience of the country's first female prime minister (Montesano 2011). According to Pavin (2011:66), "Yingluck was viewed as lacking knowledge and ability to learn from the King. It is commonly known in

the Thai society that the King has profound interest in water management". In other words, for her opponents, Yingluck's ability to manage the 2011 flood crisis was arguably not as important as her loyalty to the palace, which could be symbolically shown in the adoption of the King's water management scheme. However, given the scale and scope of the 2011 flood, this strategy proved difficult, if not impossible, for the Yingluck government. For some critics, Yingluck premiership would not last long, as the government was likely to fail both in coping with the crisis and in adopting the King's water management conception (Chaleomchai 2011:5).

Redshirt Village Mobilisation

The 2011 floods were highly politicised by the Redshirt village leaders. The fact that previous pro-Thaksin Prime Ministers were easily removed by the anti-Thaksin forces also generated profound concerns among the leaders over the Yingluck premiership.¹⁶⁵ Samak (January 2008-September 2008) was removed by the Constitutional Court over a conflict of interest for hosting a commercial television cooking show while serving as Prime Minister (Beech 2008), while the Somchai premiership (September 2008-December 2008) lasted merely three months after one party executive member was found guilty of violating the election law – the case ultimately led to the dissolution of the PPP (Pavin 2010:47). This perceived vulnerability directed the Redshirt movement leaders to contend that the 2011 natural crisis would potentially become Yingluck's political disaster.¹⁶⁶ Thus, it was deemed necessary to mobilise the Redshirt masses to support the newly formed Yingluck government.

The mobilisation of the Redshirt village movement involved two important strategies, and these strategies were implemented in August 2011.¹⁶⁷ First, the leaders initiated mobilisation for flood relief donation. Central to this method was the organisation of charity concerts in Udonthani. Mainly featuring in the concerts were *lukthung* singers. These concerts proved to be highly

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015; Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

effective fundraisers. Second, a number of Redshirt villagers were sent as volunteers to donate and distribute the donated goods and money in Bangkok.

The 2011 flood presented an enticing prospect for the Redshirt village leaders. Compared to other factions, the Redshirt village movement was less influential as evidenced in the 2011 election. Thus, to appeal for the support of Thaksin and villagers, it was necessary to further demonstrate their mobilisation power and loyalty to the Yingluck government. For the Redshirt village leaders, the 2011 crisis was also an opportunity to use the popularity of the Yingluck government and the Redshirts to increase their role and influence. In this respect, given that the Redshirt village movement was a relatively newly established faction, it was able to raise very large donations. In one of the largest donations on 23 October 2011, the leaders raised as much as 400,000 baht (£8,000).¹⁶⁸ Moreover, on 24 October 2011, in their largest concert, the Redshirt village movement was able to attract several high-profile Redshirt figures and PTP politicians to attend, namely UDD leader Jatuporn Promphan and Mahasarakham MP Suthin Khlangsaeng.¹⁶⁹ Consequently, their mobilisation, which claimed to support the Yingluck government, simultaneously expanded the role and influence of the Redshirt village movement. The fund-raising activities illustrated an ironic situation since the people from Isan were conventionally portrayed as poor farmers. In 2011, it was these poor farmers who were raising money to help people in Bangkok.

Competing with the National UDD

The national UDD led by Thida also shared the view that the 2011 floods could be exploited by opponents to topple the Yingluck government. This concern was clearly expressed in Thida's comparison of the 2011 disaster and the 1997 financial crisis:

The financial crisis previously toppled the Chavalit government. We are waiting to see whether this flooding crisis will topple the Yingluck government? 'Mechanisms' (*konkai*) of the aristocracy

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

have begun to reveal themselves, like the army and the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA). They have showed that water management could not be 'united' (*eakkaphab*) (Thida 2012:83).

However, in order to protect the Yingluck government from "mechanisms of the aristocracy", the UDD used a different mobilisation strategy from the Redshirt village movement. Initially, Thida took a "passive" strategy which continued to de-emphasise the Redshirt identity during the flooding crisis. Thida argued that mobilisation in the name of the Redshirts would engender discrimination allegations against the Redshirt movement (Thida 2012:84). More importantly, such allegations could potentially lead to the toppling of the Yingluck government. Thus, for Thida, although "the UDD is strong enough to support operation for solving the flooding crisis", the Redshirts' operation in the flood relief must be provided on behalf of the government, not the Redshirt movement (Thida 2012:86). Thida was also concerned that mobilisation during the crisis could be misused by the opponents to accuse the UDD of using state funds, rather than donations, to gain their own 'benefits' (*phonprayot*) and 'credits' (*phonngan*) (Thida 2012:86).

UDD leaders considered the mobilisation of the Redshirt village movement during the 2011 flooding crisis as operating out of the control of the UDD. For Thida, moreover, the mobilisation of the Redshirt village movement had not merely signified internal competition, but weakened cooperation within the Redshirt movement. As Thida argued at one point concerning the flood relief and fund-raising campaigns by the Redshirt village movement:

Most importantly, there have been 'impediments' (*kankhatkhwang*), 'competition' (*kanchingdichingden*) and 'accusations' (*kanklaoha*). There were no constructive criticisms. Therefore, the cooperation has been weakened and the work does not get done (Thida 2012:84).

Redshirt village leaders viewed the passive strategy of the UDD during the flood as instances of UDD 'inactivity' and 'inability' (*maimee*

khwamsamat).¹⁷⁰ Arnon argued that the main reason why the UDD under Thida's leadership had not mobilised to raise donations or to demonstrate support for the Yingluck government during the flood was because Thida had no followers.¹⁷¹ Besides, for Arnon, to anonymously provide donations to help the government solve the crisis was to give all the credit to the UDD.¹⁷² Thus, for the Redshirt village leaders, Thida was not to be obeyed, and their mobilisation should be continued.¹⁷³

In an attempt to restore order and regain control of the Redshirt movement, the UDD had to switch strategy to campaign for flood relief donations from September 2011 until January 2012 (Thida 2012:86). Unlike the Redshirt village movement, the UDD mobilised for its flood relief programme through Redshirt radio stations, TV stations and other media. Through the UDD's flood relief campaign, "dozens of million baht" were raised on 14-15 October – the largest donation raised by the UDD – and this amount of money was handed over to the government (2012:86). Thida further claimed that,

If considering from the [UDD] system we could have done better if we did not give to the government. But we didn't want criticisms of discrimination to happen...This was not to create 'performance/publicity' (*ao-na* lit. gaining face) (Thida 2012:86).

The meaning of Thida's argument was twofold. First, it was aimed to criticise the mobilisation of the Redshirt village movement during the crisis as an attempt to gain publicity. Second, if the UDD under her leadership had openly campaigned on behalf of the UDD organisation rather than the government, the UDD would have raised more donations. In short, Thida was accusing the Redshirt village movement of mobilising for support in the name of the Redshirts and campaigned for their own ends, but their mobilisation achieved nothing like the amounts of donations raised by the UDD. Instead of protecting the government, the mobilisation of the Redshirt village movement induced

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

¹⁷² Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

¹⁷³ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

conflicting and competing mobilisations within the Redshirt movement. Thida claimed the mobilisation of the Redshirt village movement during the flooding crisis was for their own “face” or performance/publicity, and for increasing their own role and influence. While the contention that the Redshirt village movement would bring stability to the Yingluck government remained unclear, the increasing role and influence of the Redshirt village movement had generated partisanship with the UDD.

Competing with Khwanchai

Since his own mass mobilisation methods had long been centred on campaigning for donations, Khwanchai naturally mobilised his followers for flood relief donations in 2011. For Khwanchai, flood relief provision functioned on two levels. Firstly, the donation created an opportunity to demonstrate his mobilisation power in terms of numbers. Besides, donations for the 2011 flood allowed Khwanchai to exploit both the popularity of the PTP and the sympathy of villagers towards the flood-affected people. Secondly, having himself been adversely affected by various legal charges and allegations, Khwanchai arguably found an opportunity to convert his image from a “villainous” Redshirt who was allegedly “behind” colour-coded violence in Udonthani, to a “good” person who contributed to society.

Donating to Bangkokians also provided an unprecedented opportunity to overturn power relations between Bangkok and the provinces. Traditionally, it was Bangkokians who were perceived as superior and supposed to be donors to rural people. As Arghiros (2001:185) observed, a flood donation or what he called “ritualized acts of giving” made by Bangkokians to rural people was clearly only a gesture. Arghiros (2001:185) adds that “each bag had only enough rice and tinned food for one or two meals and contained nothing of any lasting use, such as water-purifying tablets to prevent the spread of gastric illnesses, for example. As one villager commented to me, the event resembled ‘giving alms to beggars.’” Thus, donating to the Bangkok people was to upset the power relations between Isan Redshirts, especially Khwanchai’s faction, and their opponents to show that both sides were equal. In this light, the fund-raising

campaign was used to increase his status in relation to both non-Redshirts and other Redshirt factions.

Another main mobilisation strategy employed by the People-love-Udon Club was the project “One million bottles, one million ‘*namjai*’ (generosity)”, a project to donate bottles of drinking water to flood-affected people in Bangkok.¹⁷⁴ In this regard, on four different occasions, Khwanchai travelled with a large group of his supporters to make donations in Bangkok in person.¹⁷⁵ For example, on 8 October 2011, Khwanchai took 16 buses of his Redshirt followers to Bangkok to donate 700,000 baht to the flood relief efforts. While such donations were intended to demonstrate his mobilisation power, they were also designed to create the perception of his “outstanding” role and influence, featuring elements of performance and political theatre.¹⁷⁶

Khwanchai’s mobilisation for flood relief donations also involved charity concerts.¹⁷⁷ Professional and amateur *lukthung* singers, such as Luknok Pornpana who were trained at his radio station, attracted large local audiences and performed practically all night to raise donations.¹⁷⁸ While the Redshirt village movement used very similar techniques, Khwanchai did not view the Redshirt village’ concerts as supplementary mobilisation to his own methods. Rather, Khwanchai was extremely unhappy with the Redshirt village movement mainly because he believed the Redshirt village leaders were challenging his role and competing with him to raise donations.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, for Khwanchai, the participation of Jatuporn in the Redshirt villages’ charity concerts was calculated to overshadow his own fund-raising campaign, thereby reducing his importance. Khwanchai, hence, barred his followers from attending Jatuporn’s public speech during the charity concert on 24 October 2011, and organised

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani 10 June 2015.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Thanradi Sarakham, Udonthani, 13 June 2015.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

another concert stage right in front of the Redshirt villages' concert stage in the same area of Udonthani's public park.¹⁸⁰

This competition was well captured when Jatuporn, instead of addressing his own audience, turned to the other nearby stage at one point and declared, "We really have true democracy, don't we? It's 'strange' (*plaek*) that we have two stages. We the Redshirt must be 'generous' (*aeafuea*), we shouldn't be 'narrow-minded' (*jaikaeb*) and accept other types of leadership".¹⁸¹ While having two stages with two different sets of performers at the same fund-raising event might have generated confusion among local Redshirt supporters in Udonthani, it clearly indicated internal conflicts among Redshirt factions. By inviting Jatuporn to participate in their fund-raising event, the Redshirt village movement seemed to have disregarded Thida's attempt to de-emphasise the Redshirt identity in the flood relief efforts. Meanwhile, Khwanchai perceived Thida as the UDD president as trying to alienate his group and undermine his role. Khwanchai attacked Thida: "Thida attempted to convince the UDD leaders to hate me. It was the time when Bangkok was flooded. She was jealous that I was able to campaign for Yingluck's support".¹⁸²

During the 2011 flooding crisis, Redshirt village leaders set out to protect the Yingluck government by organising charity events and raising donations for flood relief. Their efforts had instead generated more conflict with the national UDD and Khwanchai. The flood relief efforts turned into a mobilisation competition among Redshirt factions, while the donations became a way to measure and demonstrate their power and mass support. However, fund-raising activities by Redshirt villages during the flooding crisis has helped to significantly raise their profile within the Redshirt movement. This more prominent role of the Redshirt village movement attracted the attention and involvement of some PTP politicians who sought to boost their influence. This involvement, in turn, resulted in a complex relationship concerning community and development funds.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015. With his video recording.

¹⁸² Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

Community and Development Funds

The Redshirt village movement had been constantly criticised by sceptics for the privileges it had tentatively received from Thaksin's patronage. Although the Yingluck government had publicly denied all allegations, the criticism that pro-Thaksin politicians had used state resources to informally support the Redshirt village project often resurfaced. In early 2011, as questions were raised regarding the connection between state funds and the Redshirt village project, Thaksin directed the founders to rename the movement from "Redshirt Villages for Democracy" to "Redshirt Villages for Democracy against Drugs."¹⁸³ According to Kongchai, the main purpose of this move was to justify the existence of Redshirt villages and to prevent sanctions from security officers.¹⁸⁴ However, the name change – a reference to Thaksin's controversial war on drugs policy which was funded by the state budget – also raised questions and concerns over the Yingluck government's attempts to legalise mechanisms to channel state funds to their political supporters.

Redshirt Villages: Small, Medium and Large

On 15 August 2011, the Yingluck government announced the policy statement of the cabinet and proposed an annual budget of 2.4 trillion baht in order to bring these policies into effect (*Matichon*, 17 August 2012:15). While this was the largest annual budget ever proposed, a large proportion of the budget was allocated to populist policies newly formulated under Yingluck's premiership. Closely related to the village level, the most prominent policy was the "Village and Urban Community Development Fund" (*khongthun patthana sakkayaphab muban lae chumchon muang*) – commonly known as the "SML Fund".¹⁸⁵ The SML Fund was an extension of the highly popular "Village Fund Project" introduced during the Thaksin premiership in 2001 (*Antika* 2007:13). Yet, unlike the Village Fund, the SML fund was not designed to provide low-interest loans for its members.

¹⁸³ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

¹⁸⁵ Another important policy initiated by the Yingluck Government was the Fund for Women Development in which each province was provided 100 million baht (*Matichon* 12 September 2011:15).

According to the SML Fund Manual, the Fund was to be used as a financial resource to develop the “potential” (*sakkayaphab*) of rural villages and urban communities. The project separated villages and urban communities into three sizes, namely small (S), medium (M) and large (L), based on the population of each village or community. Small villages were those with less than 500 people; medium villages had between 501 and 1,000 people; and large villages had at least 1,001 people. These village sizes determined the financial support each village would receive from the government in order to develop their potential: 300,000 for small villages, 400,000 baht for medium villages and 500,000 for large villages (SML Manual 2012:1). The Fund was used to create different projects in different villages, including small irrigation projects, small roads, sewing groups, and fertiliser projects.¹⁸⁶

Channelling State Funds

Based on the Manual, the SML Fund aimed to impartially provide financial support to all rural villages and urban communities. However, in practice, the Yingluck government was accused of being biased in favour of Redshirt villages while discriminating against others. Central to the allegation was the role played by Suchart Thadathamrongvech, a PTP MP and former Minister of Finance during the Somchai government. On 21 August 2011, Suchart presided over the Redshirt village proclamations in Sangkhom District, Udonthani. Suchart was criticised for mentioning the SML Fund during the proclamation ceremonies as an incentive to persuade attending villagers to proclaim their villages as Redshirts. Suchart allegedly promised to give 1.5 million baht for each village proclaimed Redshirts’ on a “first-come-first-served basis” (*makon daikon*) (*Post Today*, 22 August 2011:A5).

Suchart later denied the allegation, arguing that he had never promised to give the state funds to Redshirt villages, though accepting that he had presided over several Redshirt village proclamations in Isan, including the one in Sangkhom District, Udonthani. Suchart also admitted that he discussed the SML Fund during the Redshirt village proclamation ceremonies over which he presided (*Phujatkan*, 24 August 2011:11). Suchart explained that the main

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Saneh Ponyiam, Udonthani, 27 December 2014.

reason for discussing the SML Fund was that he saw in the SML Fund a real opportunity for “improving villagers’ life” (*Phujatkan*, 24 August 2011:11).

Despite Suchart’s denials, the implementation of the SML Fund under the Yingluck government arguably contained special benefits for Redshirt villages. Firstly, apart from providing proclamations for Redshirt villages and discussing the SML fund during the events, Suchart personally presided over a conference on 23 December 2011 entitled “Preparation for the Warm Hug of SML” (*triamkhwamprom su omkot unoboun khong SML*). While the conference was facilitated by state officials like the Udonthani Muang District Chief and was organised at the Udonthani City Hall, the main purpose of this conference was to offer a so-called “academic lecture on the SML Fund” for the public.¹⁸⁷ Yet, the organiser of the conference in preparing different villagers for the SML Fund was the Federation of Redshirt Village Leaders, including Kamonsin and Petsak. Furthermore, nearly all villagers who participated in the conference were asked to dress in red. This rendered the conference almost impossible for non-Redshirt villagers to attend.

Secondly, according to the SML Manual (2012:1), in order to successfully establish a SML Fund in a particular village or community, one of the most important criteria was the “readiness” of the inhabitants of that village or community. A village would be provided with a budget from the Fund as soon as it reached a state of readiness. Yet, while readiness was vaguely defined by the National Village and Urban Community Office in the manual, in practice, the main criterion to define such readiness depended on state agencies, like the District Chiefs.¹⁸⁸ Thus, being able to invite the District chief to preside over the conference created the perception that Redshirt village leaders had the authority to allocate the SML Funds.

Moreover, those who were trained in the conference were likely to be appointed as the “SML committees” in their villages since they would be deemed

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015. With his video recording. A similar version is Dr. Suchart created conditions giving SML Funds negotiating Redshirt village proclamations. Udonthani. 23 December 2011. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5vdIFXxwH0>.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Saneh Ponyiam, Udonthani, 27 December 2014.

to have the relevant skills and knowledge.¹⁸⁹ Based on the SML Fund Manual, the committees were allowed to keep three per cent of the fund allocated by the government as their administrative and ‘managing cost’ (*khaborihanjatkan*). Each development project usually cost not more than 200,000 baht and there were 15 committees in each village.¹⁹⁰ Therefore, each committee would receive approximately 1,000 baht per project.¹⁹¹ However, to become committee members in their villages, many villagers had to attend activities organised by Redshirts to learn about the SML Funds. Thus, the organisation of the conference at the Provincial Hall and attended by the District Chief made it clear that Redshirt villages were both prepared and prioritised to be ready for the SML Fund.

According to Saneh Polyiam, a president of village headman club in Udonthani, in several villages where the majority of the population were the Redshirts, those who knew the Redshirt village leaders were apparently given privilege to be the committee members.¹⁹² Moreover, due to the Redshirt network in some villages, the SML committees usually created programmes based mainly on their interest which were not “cost-effective” (*khumkha*) and not demanded by the villagers.¹⁹³ For instance, the committees in one village used the Fund to build a big water filter worth nearly THB 200,000 baht, which was rarely used by villagers.¹⁹⁴ The SML Fund was used at times to create a project of little economic value and purely for the committees’ gains. A good example is where many villages used SML Fund to create a fertiliser project mainly because the committee members insisted on using the sugarcane remains from their own farms to produce fertiliser. However, the projects proved uncompetitive with nearby private fertiliser factories, which were run at lower production costs and higher efficiency.¹⁹⁵ Consequently, the villages’ fertiliser projects were abandoned shortly after being created.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Saneh Polyiam, Udonthani, 27 December 2014.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Saneh Polyiam, Udonthani, 27 December 2014.

¹⁹¹ Interview with Saneh Polyiam, Udonthani, 10 May 2015.

¹⁹² Interview with Saneh Polyiam, Udonthani, 10 May 2015.

¹⁹³ Interview with Saneh Polyiam, Udonthani, 10 May 2015.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Saneh Polyiam, Udonthani, 10 May 2015.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Juraiwan Phansatornkun, Udonthani, 27 December 2014.

Thirdly, the connection between Yingluck's community and development projects and Redshirt villages was raised in a parliamentary no-confidence vote held in mid-June 2012. The Yingluck cabinet was accused of allocating the government's budget to fund Redshirt villages for political purposes. Worawat Auapinyakul, an MP from Phrae Province and a Prime Minister's Office Minister, was a subject of scrutiny. Assuming a ministerial post in the quota informally controlled by Thaksin's sister, businesswoman-turned-powerbroker Yaowapa Wongsawat, Worawat's Prime Minister Office was allocated the annual budget of 25 billion baht (*Matichon*, 17 August 2012:15). However, his budget administration raised questions about transparency, particularly over two budget items: the 306 million baht budget allocated for Phrae Province, and the 900 million budget baht allocated for the "Urbanisation Fund" (*kongthun patthana chumcho muang*). Questions were raised concerning allegations that the Urbanisation Fund was used to finance Redshirt villages:

The 900 million budget under the Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, there were no project details and no spending methods as to for who would be particularly responsible. Is this budget 'responding' (*tobsanong*) to political purposes or not? 'Resonating' (*sotkhlong*) with Redshirt villages or not? (*Matichon*, 17 August 2012:15).

Worawat was unable to answer questions, or clarify the budget details concerning the spending methods or the budget recipients. Instead, in his response speech, Worawat simply replied that he was not corrupt and his policies were not to provide privileges for Redshirt villages. Worawat declared his innocence by resorting to superstition, by putting his palms together in front of his chest to make a gesture of *wai*¹⁹⁶ and simply answered "I swear that I am not corrupt" (*Matichon*, 17 August 2012:15). Worawat then further added to his short answer that if the opposition politicians were not convinced they could check with the Phrae people and the Phrae PAO head that he was not corrupt and did not allocate the budget based on political networks.

¹⁹⁶ Wai is a Thai way of showing respect.

However, as it turned out, the budget allocations were highly concentrated in pro-Thaksin areas. In Phrae alone, 200 million baht was used to purchase farm equipment and machinery, like backhoes, excavators, caterpillars and water tankers in order to achieve “urbanisation” in villages (*Matichon*, 17 August 2012:19). Furthermore, according to Arnon, Worawat was another high-profile politician who had supported Redshirt villages in order to increase his popularity. Not only did Worawat preside over the proclamations for many Redshirt villages, but he also provided other forms of support, including 10,000 baht to the Redshirt villages he proclaimed.¹⁹⁷ Nonetheless, the Pheu Thai government and Worawat succeeded in defeating the parliamentary no-confidence motion, simply because Pheu Thai controlled the majority of votes. Worawat’s proposed yearly budget was also never fully revealed, on the basis that it was an ‘official secret’ (*khwamlab tang ratchakan*) (*Matichon*, 17 August 2012:19).

In this regard, in presiding over Redshirt village proclamations and providing a SML preparation conference exclusively for Redshirt villagers, Suchart created the perception that the Yingluck government was biased towards Redshirt villages and potentially used state resources to fund its political bases. Moreover, Worawat’s inability to answer questions put to him in parliament as well as the provision of funding for Redshirt villages undermined the Yingluck government’s claim that it had never used state resources to maintain its political bases. At the same time, the SML Fund and other development policies, like the Urbanisation Fund, was used to strengthen political bases for pro-Thaksin politicians at the village level. Not surprisingly, villagers at times referred to the SML Fund as “Yingluck’s Fund”, similar to the way the Village Fund was occasionally called “Thaksin’s Fund”.¹⁹⁸

For the Redshirt village leaders, the SML Fund proved to be an opportunity to establish or strengthen political connections with high profile politicians from network Thaksin. These exclusive connections and resources not only nourished their group but served to materialise the Redshirt village project. However, granting these special privileges made the Yingluck

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Saneh Pomyiem, Udonthani, 27 December 2014.

government more vulnerable to allegations made by its opponents, as demonstrated in the case of Worawat, and potentially led to dissatisfaction among other villagers who were unable to access the same level of funds, as argued by Saneh. However, this vulnerability was quickly “solved” by Yingluck’s Second Cabinet in January 2012. In that reshuffle, Worawaut was removed from his ministerial post and replaced by Suchart Thadathamrongvech (*Matichon*, 18 January 2012).

Redshirt Cooperatives

On 9 August 2012, the Redshirt village movement created another community and development project called “Redshirt Cooperative” (*Post Today*, 10 August 2012:9). The project which was formally launched in Udonthani under the name “Redshirt Villages Nationwide” (*daengtuathai paikub muban sueadaeng*) was attended by several Redshirt leaders, namely Arnon Sannan, Prasong Boonpong, Atthachai Anantamek (an actor-turned-activist), and Phantiwa Bhumipratet (a.k.a Tom Dundee, a singer-turned-activist). According to the organisers, the purpose of Redshirt Cooperatives was to create jobs and increase income for Redshirt villagers as enshrined in the event slogan: “Creating Jobs, Increasing Income and Establishing Redshirt Cooperatives” (*Phujatkan Weekly*, 25 August 2011:53). The initial Redshirt cooperatives were established in three Isan provinces; Udonthani, Buengkan and Sakonnakorn, and three Northern provinces; Chiangrai, Phrae and Phitsanulok.

According to Prasong, the Redshirt cooperatives could raise funds through four main channels, including share sales, donations, external low-interest loans, and state funds (*Post Today*, 19 August 2012:9). Arnon argued that the local government organisations have a duty to provide financial support for local cooperatives,¹⁹⁹ and the benefits of cooperatives was that they do not have to pay taxes.²⁰⁰ The main channel was share sales to member villagers. Villagers were allowed to buy shares at the price of 10 baht per share from the Redshirt cooperative in their village. Prasong further contended that since the main financial method was from the villagers, although outsiders were also

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

²⁰⁰ Interview with Arnon Sanan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

allowed to buy shares, the advantage of Redshirt cooperatives lied in its commitment to prevent outside domination (*Post Today*, 19 August 2012:9).

Furthermore, for Arnon, Redshirt Cooperatives were potentially conducive to local development because they adhered to the principles of socialism. As Arnon admired the 1932 revolution,²⁰¹ he also argued that his socialist principles were partly inspired by Pridi Banomyong, one of the revolutionary leaders.²⁰² Born into a middle-class farming family, former Prime Minister Pridi had struggled to promote democracy, equality and allegedly left-leaning policies (Sulak 2014:279). Arnon's claim concerning his socialism was ostensibly further substantiated when his Redshirt cooperative project was joined by Phanthiwa Phumipratet. While pursuing his studies in France on a government scholarship in 1981, Phanthiwa was partly inspired by a meeting with Pridi who was then in self-exile due to conflicts with the army and the royalists (*Prachatai*, 20 May 2015). The emphasis on socialism was seemingly embedded in the idea of equality provided by the Redshirt village leaders in the proclamation of their cooperative project:

The Redshirts must continue to be strong. So far, we have demanded for democracy. But my fellows, today your stomach must be full first in order to continue fighting for democracy. The Redshirts must establish cooperatives so that every baht and *satang*²⁰³ will be distributed among our fellows. Cooperatives work like banks, so we do not have to depend on banks and informal loan providers. The situation now is that there is a concentration of wealth. We have to negotiate with the capitalists and encourage villagers to be self-reliant (*Phujatkan Weekly*, 25 August 2011:53).

Although there has been relatively little evidence that the creation of Redshirt cooperatives was inspired by Pridi's socialistic convictions, for villagers, Redshirt cooperatives seemed to promise an opportunity they had rarely received in post-electoral periods. The participation of villagers in

²⁰¹ This admiration was partly reflected in a written script at his office which was previously served as a radio station and a cooperative centre.

²⁰² Interview with Arnon Sanan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

²⁰³ 100 satang is equivalent to 1 baht.

Redshirt cooperatives also reflected their dissatisfaction with previous state-led projects, like the “Sufficiency Economy Village” and the “Golden Land” projects (*phaendintham phaendinthong*).²⁰⁴ Nonetheless, there were several limitations of Redshirt cooperatives. After the fanfare of the opening ceremonies, little was done to sustain them.²⁰⁵ Even in the original Redshirt village or at Arnon’s own office, the cooperatives seemed long defunct (fieldnotes, 15-16 May 2015). Moreover, according to Prapart (2012:19), cooperatives in Thailand have been over-bureaucratized, and lack professionalism. Prapart argued that there have rarely been any examples of innovation which enabled Thai cooperatives to endure challenges and become sustainable. As a result, the bureaucracy had delayed the legal processes of cooperative establishment in rural areas.²⁰⁶ Most importantly, these slow legal processes had further been suspended by the unclear policies of the Yingluck government towards Redshirt village cooperatives, which in turn resulted in a lack of progress.²⁰⁷ Therefore, the original aim of the Redshirt village movement to create 15,000 cooperatives nationwide (*Post Today*, 10 August 2012:9) failed to materialise.

Competing with Redshirt SMLs

According to Prasong, the main purpose of Redshirt villages was to emancipate Isan villagers from the domination of traditional political elites in Bangkok. He elaborated with a comparison, “Like India which was colonised by Great Britain. This struggle is a struggle for independence from long-time oppression” (*Post Today*, 19 August 2012:9). For Prasong, in order to achieve independence from this “long-time oppression”, there was a need to provide “education” for villagers through Redshirt village activities, including the cooperative projects. However, there is little evidence that the creation of Redshirt cooperatives was based on an active concern for the villagers’ well-being. Rather, the purpose of these cooperatives was to build a political image, strengthen power and promote publicity for the cooperative founders. Instead of promoting the Redshirt movement as a whole, these agendas of personal advancement had

²⁰⁴ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

²⁰⁵ Interview with Khonchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²⁰⁶ Interview with Saneh Polyiam, Udonthani, 28 December 2014.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

induced internal conflicts and competition within the movement. The most prominent conflict and competition were between Arnon and other Redshirt village founders.

To establish himself as a “real” leader of the Redshirt village movement, Arnon needed financial resources to support his activities. Since he was constantly being invited to preside over proclamation ceremonies, his travel costs and other expenses for the ceremonies had also risen considerably. At times, in order to make ceremonies more attractive or convincing, Arnon had paid for the ‘time’ (*khasia wela*) of famous speakers who attended his activities from his own pocket.²⁰⁸ The costs of transport, ceremonies and speakers altogether could be as high as 20,000 baht per event – at the height of the movement, he was presiding over several proclamations each week.²⁰⁹ To maintain the pace and quality of his proclamation activities, Arnon was in need of considerable financial backing.

Another driving force behind the creation of Redshirt cooperatives was arguably Arnon’s attempt to imitate his former mentor Khwanchai. Having worked with Khwanchai in the past, Arnon recognised Khwanchai’s independent financial base as the strength of the People-love-Udon Club, which has been able to sustain Khwanchai’s faction amidst political turbulence. Khwanchai’s cremation association comprising approximately 10,000 members generates an income of at least 200,000 baht each month.²¹⁰ Apart from the income generated by the cremation association, the People-love-Udon Club now owns several companies in different businesses, including advertisement, cosmetics, food and drink.²¹¹ Thus, Arnon came to see the creation of Redshirt cooperatives as a path to leadership.

Similarly, for Prasong, Redshirt cooperatives and Redshirt villages as a whole were arguably mechanisms to increase his performance, and arguably to

²⁰⁸ According to Arnon, one speaker whom he had to pay for transport and time was Atthachai. Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

²¹⁰ My own calculation from the deposit of 20 baht each month by every member of Khwanchai’s cremation. Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

²¹¹ Interview with Thanradi Sarakham (Khwanchai’s daughter), Udonthani, 13 June 2015.

regain his ministerial post. As demonstrated in the case of Suchart, who was rewarded with a ministerial post after having supported the Redshirt SML Fund, mass supporters were a clear and calculable indicator in measuring political capability under the Yingluck government. This combination of factors drove Arnon and his group to attempt to create Redshirt cooperatives to advance their political ends. However, the promotion of Redshirt village cooperatives in the early phase was organised in the name of the Federation of Redshirts without consent from other leaders.²¹² On 9 August 2012, at the launch of the Redshirt cooperatives, Arnon also used the name of the Federation to invite the Director-General of the Cooperative Auditing Department to give an exclusive consultation on law and regulation concerning the establishment of cooperatives in his event (*Phujatkan*, 10 August 2012:7).

In the eyes of other leaders, like Kamonsin, Petsak and Kongchai, Arnon used the name of the Federation for his own interest.²¹³ The Kamonsin-led Federation declared their opposition to the creation of cooperatives (*Phujatkan*, 16 August 2011:53). Moreover, due to a lack of transparency, the practice of some Redshirt cooperatives gave rise to corruption allegations against Arnon (*Manager*, 9 August 2012). The Federation led by Kamonsin eventually declared that Arnon's activities were not related to the Federation, and Arnon was pressured to cease his Federation role and remove his projects from the Federation.²¹⁴ The conflict over the Redshirt SMLs and cooperatives played a vital part in explaining the separation of Arnon's faction from the Federation and the establishment of the Assembly as his own Redshirt village movement in November 2012.

Local Elections in 2012

Local elections held in 2012 were principal sites in which Redshirt factions mobilised to compete with one another. This particularly unfolded in the Provincial Administrative Organisation (PAO) elections for the post of the PAO chief executive or head (hereinafter PAO head) and PAO members (Piyamart

²¹² Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²¹³ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²¹⁴ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

2004:43). The local Redshirt leaders who felt threatened by the expansion of the Redshirt village movement had played a prominent role in driving this kind of internal competition. While these local leaders aimed to regain their role and influence, they attempted to convert their mass resources into official power. Moreover, in the PAO elections, the PTP had proved unable to significantly control this internal competition among Redshirt factions, which led to troubled relations within the red camp. As McCargo and Ukrist (2005:103) long ago observed, “local elections not only pose more of a threat than an opportunity for Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai (TRT), but potentially generated conflicts between the party and its constituency MPs”. This section demonstrates that the PTP, a reincarnation of the TRT, had continued to encounter similar difficulties. Such competition had centred on the contention to become the “authentic” candidates of the Redshirts and the PTP, and their different strategies to manipulate the Redshirt electorate in Ubonratchathani and Udonthani.

Ubonratchathani

The PAO election of 2012 in Ubonratchathani was held on 3 June. There were 1.2 million registered voters, and the Ubonratchathani PAO comprised 42 PAO members from 25 districts (Nirat 2013:121). Four candidates stood for this 2012 PAO election: Pornchai Khosurat, a construction businessman; Pichet Tabudda, a politician canvasser and radio presenter; Somsak Jantaramai, a radio presenter and small construction businessman; and Wilasinee Sritanyalak, an independent candidate (*Thairath*, 23 April 2012). The media initially anticipated that second term incumbent Pornchai Khosurat, head of the Ubonratchathani PAO, would comfortably win without strong challenges (*Thairath*, 12 May 2012). However, as Ubonratchathani was a Redshirt stronghold, local Redshirt leaders expected to win this 2012 election by appealing to their Redshirt supporters. Due to the PTP’s ineffective mechanisms for recruiting candidates, this local election generated internal competition in which two prominent candidates claimed to represent the Redshirts stood against one another.

The most prominent candidate claiming to represent the Redshirts was the well-known radio station host and Redshirt organiser Pichet Tabudda.

Arguably, Pichet, who had been significantly affected by the expansion of Redshirt villages, attempted to use the PAO contest to demonstrate that he was still powerful and his role was still influential among the Redshirts. As the leader of the Chak-thong-rob group and formerly a vote canvasser for several pro-Thaksin politicians, including Kiang Kantinan, Somkit Cheukhong and Panya Jintavet, Pichet was confident that he would win the election.²¹⁵ In his campaign, Pichet claimed he had formulated policies drawn from his experiences abroad.²¹⁶ These policies aimed to emulate the PTP's populism at the provincial level. Among other things, Pichet promised to create a debt moratorium fund, increase local rice production, create a "one sub-district one doctor" project, and establish a multi-lingual school in Ubonratchathani (Nirat 2013:200). In order to achieve the post, Pichet also attacked the incumbent PAO head Pornchai and promised to deliver public good:

If you don't vote for me, you won't have the opportunity. Let's ask yourself my brothers and sisters. For many years, what have you got? Roads? Wealth? If I am the [PAO] head, you will get everything you want.²¹⁷

Competition from a Redshirt Candidate

Pichet was challenged by another candidate who also claimed to be *the* representative of the Redshirts, Somsak Jantaramai, the Ubonratchathani UDD leader. Despite his unpopularity among the Ubonratchathani Redshirts, Somsak was appointed as the Ubonratchathani UDD leader partly because of his close connection to Thida, thus claiming to secure the UDD support for the election.²¹⁸ As the UDD had no significant presence in Ubonratchathani, Somsak's leadership was rather notional. In order to win the election, Somsak also directly appealed for the support from the Redshirt electorate. Despite the fact that the Redshirt movement emerged as a response mainly to national politics, Somsak deliberately used symbols and slogans of the Redshirts not only to

²¹⁵ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

²¹⁶ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

²¹⁷ The debate was organised on 25 May 2012 at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Ubonratchathani Rajabhat University, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7Lvh7CzKNU> [accesses 15 March 2016].

²¹⁸ Interview with Saksit Kingmala, Ubonratchathani, 28 February 2015.

invoke local support, but to be more “red” than Pichet. Central to his campaign was the use of the UDD name and symbols. Somsak named his group “Ubonratchathani Prai”,²¹⁹ arguably to borrow from the national UDD’s notion of *prai* (commoners) who fought against the *ammatt* (aristocrats). Somsak also used red T-shirts as a signature for his campaign. His intention to use the UDD discourse in local politics was well reflected in an interview in which Somsak appealed to his electorate by creating a comparison between *prai* of the UDD and the PAO head. Somsak argued that the PAO head was a servant of the Ubonratchathani people.²²⁰

While both groups claimed to be the Redshirts’ representative and dressed in identical red shirts,²²¹ the only way for Somsak to differentiate himself from Pichet was to promise policies that were seemingly more attractive for the Redshirt electorate. Therefore, Somsak promised, among other things, to create community radio stations in all districts, to increase the salaries of the government officials at the village level, to establish a centre for selling local products, and even declared that he would distribute a big piece of land on the way to Warin Chamrab (a district of Ubonratchathani) owned by a business company to landless villagers.²²² The national UDD had never publicly support or deny Somsak’s claims to be the UDD representative.

Pichet was highly frustrated by Somsak’s candidacy, believing himself to be more popular in Ubonratchathani with a much larger number of followers.²²³ Pichet called Somsak an opportunist who claimed the Redshirt movement for his own interest. According to Pichet, Somsak had no real protest experiences, never made any sacrifice for the Redshirt movement, and, therefore, was not an ‘authentic Redshirt’ (*daengtae*).²²⁴ In contrast, for Pichet, an authentic Redshirt

²¹⁹ Interview with Worawit Pongngam, Ubonratchathani, 30 May 2015.

²²⁰ “*Kotit lueaktang Ubon*” (Following the Ubonratchathani’s Election), Ubonratchathani, 4 June 2012, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7Lvh7CzKNU> [accesses 15 March 2016].

²²¹ Interview with Worawit Pongngam, Ubonratchathani, 30 May 2015.

²²² “*Kotit-lueaktang-Ubon*” (Following the Ubonratchathani’s Election), Ubonratchathani, 4 June 2012, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7Lvh7CzKNU>.

²²³ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

²²⁴ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

must assume the role of what he called a “fighter” for democracy. During the election, Pichet referred to his group as follows:

The Ubonratchathani’s Power group (*klumphalang Ubon*) asks for an opportunity [to become the PAO executives] and justice. We will create and implement policies. All the people admired me that I am a real fighter. Ubon [Ubonratchathani] is famous because of me. I have fought continuously for democracy since 2006. I have fought in court. I donated money for the Redshirts for 4-5 hundred thousand baht. I had been imprisoned for 15 months and 3 days. I am the one who has the mass.²²⁵

According to Pichet, by proving himself as a fighter in the street rallies, in court or in jail, it was he who was *the* authentic representative of the Redshirts. However, Pichet’s allegation led Somsak to respond as follows:

We were criticised that we are ‘artificial Redshirts’ (*daengtiam*). But we aren’t. What we hate most is the Democrat Party and Bhumjaithai Party. They killed 92 people and many more were dead after being thrown in jail. If you like the Democrat and Bhumjaithai Parties that means you are fake Redshirts. In contrast, you also need to look at my team as well. I have never mobilised the Redshirt people to face danger.²²⁶

Neither candidate directly claimed to have the support from the PTP.²²⁷ Similarly, although Ubonratchathani witnessed Redshirt village proclamations, there was no candidate who claimed to be a representative of the Redshirt village movement. This was arguably because the Redshirt village idea originated in Udonthani, and Redshirt villages in Ubonratchathani were mostly

²²⁵ “*Kotit-lueaktang-Ubon*” (Following the Ubonratchathani’s Election), Ubonratchathani, 4 June 2012, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7LvH7CzKNU>.

²²⁶ “*Kotit-lueaktang-Ubon*” (Following the Ubonratchathani’s Election), Ubonratchathani, 4 June 2012, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7LvH7CzKNU>.

²²⁷ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

proclaimed by pro-Thaksin politicians and the UDD.²²⁸ This resulted in the lack of effective mobilisation of Redshirt village movement in the province.

Redshirt Defeat

According to the Ubonratchathani EC, the vote turn-out was 57 per cent of the total eligible electorate in 2,984 polling stations (*Manager*, 4 June 2012). The results showed that Pornchai won with 510,216 votes, followed by Pichet with 129,331 votes, whereas Somsak and Wilasinee received only 31,231 votes and 25,257 votes respectively (*Manager*, 4 June 2012). Although the victory of Pornchai suggests that local elections in Thailand are still mainly dominated by “construction contractors”, or local bosses and businessmen (McCargo and Ukrist 2005:104), for Pichet, the defeat was mainly because he had only 26 days to campaign for the election which proved too little time.²²⁹ The result also clearly showed that Pichet and Somsak had no chance of winning the election against a well-established incumbent who had considerable patronage powers. While Pornchai was more eloquent and coherent than the rival candidates, he presented himself as “pink”,²³⁰ appealing across the colour-coded spectrum in Ubonratchathani, a province which was politically diverse and regularly returned both pro-Thaksin MPs and Democrat MPs to parliament.

Table 1 the Results of the PAO Election in Ubonratchathani in 2012

Candidates	Votes
Pornchai Kosurat	510,216
Pichet Tabudda	129,331
Somsak Jantaramai	31,231
Vilasinee Sritanyalak	25,257

Source: Ubonratchathani Election Commission (cited in *Phujatkan*, 4 June 2012).

²²⁸ Interview with Phon Chaorai, Ubonratchathani, 28 May 2015.

²²⁹ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

²³⁰ Pornchai used the pink colour as the main theme of his campaign.

The defeat of Pichet also suggested that his role and influence had been limited to the areas where his radio station was popular.²³¹ The election results revealed that the mobilisation skills of the Redshirt leaders did not translate into the campaign skills for an election. The Redshirt leaders were unable to convince the Redshirt electorate that, based on their protest experiences, they could run the provincial administration. For the local electorate, the Redshirt leaders apparently did not have the right personal qualities to win the election and were too polarising and aggressive for most voters. Thus, campaigning for the local election as a Redshirt could prove a liability rather than an advantage: Pornchai's fuzzy "pink" stance and insistence he could work with all sides was a better electoral strategy. However, Pornchai was himself removed from the post by the 2014 coup leader.

The 2012 election results significantly portrayed the internal competition among Redshirt factions that both claimed to be *the* representative of the Redshirts. While these factions did not accept the leadership and role of other factions, this internal competition affected the electoral competency of the Redshirt groups, resulting in the split of votes among the Redshirts. Redshirt candidates at times even had to contend with their own local supporters, such as a group led by radio operators from the 100.25 MHz station which mobilised its followers to oppose the two Redshirt candidates and support Pornchai, arguing that they wanted to demonstrate that the Redshirts really promoted election competition (*Komchadluek*, 14 May 2012). While mass mobilisation created an unprecedented opportunity for Redshirt leaders like Pichet and Somsak to stand in local elections, the 2012 Ubonratchathani PAO election clearly demonstrated that mass mobilisation of different factions could simply result in heightened internal competition within the movement, and a split in the Redshirt vote.

Udonthani

The Udonthani PAO election was held on 17 June 2012. Across the 20 districts of the province, there were 1,134,823 registered voters (*Thairath*, 17 June 2012). According to Kongchai, after the PTP witnessed the negative consequences of

²³¹ Interview with Worawit Pongnam, Ubonratchathani, 30 May 2015.

internal competition among Redshirt factions in Ubonratchathani, it decided to directly intervene in the Udonthani election to prevent similar conflicts.²³² Another reason for the intervention of the PTP in this local election was because of its defeats in other local elections, such as in Pathumthani and Chiangrai, to the Democrat and Bhumjaithai Parties (*Matichon*, 22 April 2012). Thus, the PTP became convinced that it had to engage with the Udonthani PAO election more directly since Udonthani was considered the “Redshirt capital”.²³³

To prevent internal competition and to win the election, the PTP passed a resolution, clearly identifying the Party’s chosen candidates for PAO head and members (*Thai Post*, 8 May 2012:10). Wichian Khaokham, a party list MP and Udonthani native, was nominated for PAO head because he was very popular in the province. Wichian was supported by other Udonthani MPs, like Thongdi Manitsan and Kriangsak Faisingam and Anan Sriphan (*Matichon* 14 May 2012). As Wichian was a party list MP, when he resigned to contest in this election, the PTP would not lose one of its MP seats; the next party list candidate would automatically become an MP in his place.²³⁴ In return, Wichian gained permission from the PTP to send his wife to run for the next general election in Udonthani.²³⁵

Nevertheless, the most important reason for the selection of Wichian by the PTP was because of his intimate connection with Khwanchai, who might otherwise run for election himself, or put forward his own candidate for PAO head.²³⁶ Thus, nominating Wichian to stand for the election effectively blocked competition from Khwanchai’s faction. As a former MP supported by Khwanchai, Wichian appeared a promising contender who could not only win the election for the PTP, but also prevent conflicts and competition among Redshirt factions. Khwanchai actively supported Wichian and declared his

²³² Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²³³ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²³⁴ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²³⁵ Interview with Juriwan Phansatornkun, Udonthani, 11 May 2015.

²³⁶ Interview with Thanradi Sarakham, Udonthani, 13 June 2015. Moreover, based on my own observation, Wichian Khaokham was the only PTP MP who was present at Khwanchai’s birthday event on 13 June 2015.

confidence that a pro-Pheu Thai candidate would win this local election.²³⁷ As Khwanchai stressed: “It must be Wichian Khaokham who is a Redshirt and fighter on Redshirt stages. This will meet the need of the Redshirt grassroots. I’m confident that all the Redshirts’ll vote for him” (*Thairath*, 8 May 2012).

Competing for the PAO Head

Despite the PTP’s resolution, Surathin Pimanmekhin, a former police officer and PTP MP,²³⁸ who had actively supported the Redshirt village movement, decided to support another candidate to stand for PAO head. Surathin sent his own daughter Kiratikan, a former PAO member, to compete with Wichian, despite the fact that Kiratikan had already been put forward by the PTP to contest for the post of deputy PAO chief. Surathin declared that the reason he violated the Party mandate was because he represented the Redshirt village group (*Thai Post*, 8 May 2012:8). More importantly, according to Surathin, a number of Redshirt villagers who were his followers did not like Khwanchai because Khwanchai was constantly calling for the closure of Redshirt villages (*Thai Post*, 8 May 2012:8). To allow Wichian, who was considered Khwanchai’s candidate, to stand unopposed for the seat on behalf of the Redshirts, would cause considerable discontent among Redshirt villagers.²³⁹ On the other hand, for the Redshirt village leaders, Surathin was an MP who had constantly and significantly supported their movement. Thus, Kiratikan’s candidacy would be supported by the Redshirt village movement.²⁴⁰ As a result, both Wichian and Kirathikan claimed to represent the Redshirts in their rival bids for Udonthani PAO head in 2012.²⁴¹

But the Redshirt village leaders then decided that their group should not violate the mandate of the Party because it would negatively affect the Redshirt movement as a whole.²⁴² Eventually, the Redshirt village leaders withdrew their endorsement of Kiratikan, arguing that the Redshirt village movement did not

²³⁷ It is noteworthy that PAO candidates do not formally run under party banners.

²³⁸ Surathin Pimanmekhin was a Police Lieutenant Colonel and a PTP MP in the one district one member system.

²³⁹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²⁴⁰ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2016.

²⁴¹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²⁴² Interview with Arnong Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

support a particular PAO head candidate.²⁴³ According to the leaders, all candidates were allowed to campaign in Redshirt villages.²⁴⁴ Arnon argued that Redshirt villages were neutral, and promoted internal ‘unity’ (*khwamsamakki*) during the 2012 election.²⁴⁵ Yet, as the PAO election was approaching, the Redshirt village leaders announced through the media, brochures, banners and other sources that Redshirt villages supported *all* Redshirt candidates. This change in their approach was later justified as an attempt to prove that the Redshirt village movement could ‘cooperate’ (*ruammue*) with different Redshirt groups.²⁴⁶ The Redshirt Village signs produced during the Udonthani PAO election in 2012 captured this contradictory approach of the Redshirt village movement and the internal competition among the Redshirt factions:

The Redshirt Villages for Democracy support the Udonthani PAO election. All candidates and all numbers are Redshirts. [We] want the people to vote for a good person who will really work for the public benefits. Please use your own decision to vote for a good person who really has ‘*phonngan*’ (profile) and will really do the ‘work’ (*thamngan*).



Picture: Election Campaign Sign of the Federation of Redshirt Villages in Udonthani (used with permission)

²⁴³ Interview with Saneh Polyiam, Udonthani, 10 May 2015.

²⁴⁴ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²⁴⁵ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²⁴⁶ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

Locating itself in this ambiguous position and supporting all candidates arguably allowed the Redshirt village movement to stay aloof from direct conflicts in local struggles for power. By declaring themselves willing to embrace partnership, the Redshirt village leaders were also able to align their movement with the PTP. However, this strategy was not really about partnership *per se*. In fact, the underlying reason driving the Redshirt village movement to play an “unbiased” role was politically motivated, since certain members of the Redshirt village movement also aimed to stand for the Udonthani election in 2012, especially for PAO membership. A prime example was the case of Kongchai’s wife, Khamsaen Chaithep.

Competing for PAO Membership

Both Kongchai and Khamsaen had proved to be highly loyal to the Redshirt movement and the PTP. They attended all the major national Redshirt protests, including the March-May 2010 protests, Rajamangkhla Stadium and Aksa Road.²⁴⁷ Following the March-May 2010 incident, during which they experienced state violence at firsthand, their son was also arrested and sentenced to 20 years in jail after being found guilty of burning the Udonthani Provincial Hall.²⁴⁸ But, despite their fierce loyalty, they were never promoted politically. Other Redshirts argued that the couple, especially Khamsaen, were poorly educated and, thus, unsuitable for any official post.²⁴⁹ Having received only a primary education, Khamsaen herself usually cited her lack of a college degree as the main obstacle to her career path and political role.²⁵⁰

In the Udonthani PAO election in 2012, the education issue played a vital part in initially preventing Khamsaen from being selected as a PTP candidate.²⁵¹ Moreover, there were two other Redshirt candidates who wanted to stand for the PAO membership in her area.²⁵² According to Khamsaen, those Redshirts also had potential to be selected as the candidate of the PTP because both were

²⁴⁷ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²⁴⁸ Interview with Khamsaen Chaithep, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²⁴⁹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

²⁵⁰ To remedy such critiques, Khamsaen is now pursuing a Bachelor Degree in Political Science at Sriprathum University, Udonthani campus. Interview with Khamsaen Chaithep, 15 May 2015.

²⁵¹ Interview with Khamsaen Chaithep, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²⁵² Interview with Khamsaen Chaithep, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

endorsed by Khwanchai and Surathin respectively.²⁵³ During the candidate recruitment process, Khwanchai thus attacked Khamsaen via his radio programmes as an “unauthentic” Redshirt who had joined the movement for political purposes.²⁵⁴ In response, Kongchai and Khamsaen replied by citing their creation of the Redshirt village movement, arguing that that their village was the original Redshirt village. Kongchai and Khamsaen also attacked Khwanchai by alluding to his political inactivity after the 2010 crackdown; they sharply remarked that the Redshirt village project was active even when “no Redshirts dared to wear a red shirt”.²⁵⁵ Thus, the couple argued, Khamsaen’s loyalty to the Redshirts as well as the Party was authentic.²⁵⁶

After the Redshirt village movement declared its “neutrality” and gave permission allowing all candidates for the Udonthani PAO election in 2012 to campaign in Redshirt villages, Khamsaen was endorsed by several PTP MPs in Udonthani to stand for PAO membership.²⁵⁷ Another reason for the Redshirt village leaders to maintain neutrality was because Hanchai Thikhathananun, a former PAO head who also contested in this election, was actively helping the Redshirt village movement during its 2011 flood relief concerts. Yet, significantly, while Kamonsin had sided with Surathin, it was Petsak and Kongchai who directed the movement to declare “neutrality”. Therefore, as Kongchai’s wife, Khamsaen had overcome the other two Redshirt rivals to become a party candidate for the PAO membership in her area.

The PTP’s endorsement of Khamsaen reflected its attempts to promote loyalty and prevent internal conflicts among the Redshirts. Khamsaen was duly elected as a PAO member in her district with 6,103 votes. Meanwhile, due to the support of the PTP and Khwanchai, Wichian became the PAO head, winning with 376,856 votes out of a 644,794 turnout (Udonthani Election Commission 2012), whereas Hanchai, Kiratikan and Surachat received only 182,239 votes, 40,281 votes and 13,602 votes respectively.

²⁵³ Interview with Khamsaen Chaithep, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²⁵⁴ Interview with Khamsaen Chaithep, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²⁵⁵ Interview with Khamsaen Chaithep, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²⁵⁶ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²⁵⁷ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

Table 2: the Results of the 2012 PAO Chief Executive Election in Udonthani

Candidates	Votes
Wichian Khaokham	376,856
Hanchai Theekathananont	182,239
Kiratika Pimanmekhin	40,281
Surachat Chamnansil	13,602

Table 3: Results of the PAO Member Elections in Udonthani in 2012

Candidates	Votes
Khamsaen Chaitep	6,103
Jarunee Pimpeng	5,286
Thangbai Uppahad	2,806
Boonchuay Worawong	1,088

Source: The Province Election Commission of Udonthani²⁵⁸

In return, members of Khwanchai’s faction were rewarded with political positions. Khwanchai’s assistants – Prasit Wichaiwat (alias D.J. Cho Jai Diew) and Jakapong Sankham (D.J. Kong) – were appointed as Wichian’s advisors.²⁵⁹ Moreover, after the 2012 election, Khwanchai had gained trust from the PTP and was able to send his wife Arporn to run for the Udonthani Senate seat in March 2014.²⁶⁰ Arporn won the 2014 senate election and became a senator with 382,019 votes.²⁶¹ But the Senate contests were soon annulled by the courts, while the May 2014 coup-makers halted senatorial elections thereafter.

²⁵⁸ Available at

https://www.ect.go.th/udonthani/ewt_news.php?nid=93&filename=index [accessed on 15 March 2016].

²⁵⁹ Interview with Thanradi Sarakham, Udonthani, 13 June 2015.

²⁶⁰ Khwanchai argued that his decision was because “We cannot depend on politicians. I have helped campaign for PTP MPs until they won. Politicians when they took office, they had never cared for the Redshirts. Hence, I decided to send my wife to run for the Udonthani senator. I want to have a representative who will protect the Redshirts” (*Komchadluek*, 8 October 2013).

²⁶¹ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

The victory of the Redshirt candidates in these local elections also confirmed that the Redshirts have been a valuable resource in electoral politics for which several candidates competed. Although the victory of Wichian, who was an ex-Pheu Thai MP, also derived from the party's popularity, he had crucially benefited from Khwanchai's support. The attempts of political entrepreneurs to claim connections with the Redshirts in order to win local elections was captured well by one observer: "Whoever wanted to 'compete' (*khaengkhan*) in local elections, if they wanted to get elected, had to say that they were Redshirts. But some candidate had never 'participated' (*khaoruam*) in the Redshirts' 'protests' (*prathuang*)".²⁶² However, based on the PAO elections in Ubonratchathani and Udonthani in 2012, different Redshirt factions had arguably used their Redshirt identity for their own political advancement, precipitating internal competition and conflicts. Such competition and conflicts had revolved around the claims to be "authentic" Redshirts. While Pichet and Somsak each claimed to be *the* representative of the Redshirts in Ubonratchathani, Wichian and Kiratikan were competing with each other in a similar fashion in Udonthani.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the power relations between the state under the Pheu Thai government and Redshirt villagers. It showed that such relations were complex or adversarial due mainly to the ambiguous approaches of Pheu Thai towards the Redshirt supporters in the electoral and post-electoral periods. In these contexts, the Redshirt village leaders had retained their mobilisation based on asserted Redshirt identity, arguing that their movement was to ensure the election in 2011 would not be disrupted or distorted by the opponents. According to the leaders, Redshirt villagers were urged to campaign for PTP politicians, and to prepare to engage in protests if the party won the election but was unable to form a government. In the post-electoral context, the Redshirt village leaders redefined their movement as the Yingluck government's "iron wall", to protect the Yingluck government during different political crises.

²⁶² Interview with Saneh Polyiam, Udonthani, 27 December 2014.

The chapter showed that the Redshirt village project remained a rich political resource which different political entrepreneurs sought to exploit in the electoral and post-electoral contexts. While Suchart controversially used the Redshirt village project to promote the SML Funds, Prasong established Redshirt cooperatives to increase his personal popularity and political role. Yet, the involvement of PTP politicians was disguised under the complex connections between the Redshirt village movement and the PTP, which formally denied but informally nurtured such relations. Similarly, in the Udonthani local election in 2012, while Surathin sent a candidate to stand for the PAO Chief Executive by claiming to represent the Redshirt village movement, Khamsaen also achieved a prominent political role from her linkages with the original Redshirt village.

This chapter also argued that the continued activities and asserted identity of the Redshirt village movement created internal conflicts best described as mobilisation competition among the Redshirt factions. These mobilisation differences occurred in situations where other pro-Thaksin forces, like the UDD and PTP, publicly resorted to non-Redshirt mobilisation, as demonstrated during the 2011 electoral campaigns. In the 2011 flood crisis, while protest stages had been turned over for charity concerts used for flood relief donation campaigns, different Redshirt faction leaders had turned the crisis into an opportunity to extend their mobilisation power against one another. The mobilisation competition also explained why Arnon had created the Redshirt cooperatives. While these cooperatives could potentially channel state funds into Arnon's group, they were aimed to compete with the Federation's SML Funds. This competition, however, eventually forced Arnon to resign from the Federation of Redshirt villages for Democracy.

The chapter then illustrated that local elections were principal sites in which Redshirt factions competed with one another. This competition revolved around the mobilisation to claim the authenticity of Redshirt identity of individual candidates. It was both Pichet and Somsak who claimed to be *the* representative of the Redshirts in Ubonratchathani, while they ran for the PAO Chief Executive. In the Udonthani PAO election in 2012, Wichian was challenged

by Kiratikan who claimed that her candidacy was dictated by a number of Redshirt villagers who opposed Khwanchai. While such mobilisation differences had further weakened internal relations among the Redshirt factions during the 2011 electoral and post-electoral periods, they also generated fragmentation within the Redshirt movement which, in turn, had significantly undermined the movement's capability to challenge its opponents.

Chapter Five: State Ideology and Redshirt Counter-ideologies

Introduction

This chapter explains to what extent, and how far, the Redshirts challenged state ideology and projects (RQ3). The purposes of the chapter are threefold. Firstly, it examines the Thai state's dominant ideology and the policies which related to the Redshirt movement. Secondly, the chapter explains the ways the Redshirt "counter-ideologies" posed challenges to state ideology and policies. Lastly, it assesses these challenges of the Redshirts based on internal Redshirt fragmentation as illustrated in the previous chapters. The existing literature mainly focuses on material aspects, economic development and agrarian transformation in rural areas of Thailand as the defining causes of the emergence of the Redshirt movement (Somchai 2016:504; Walker 2012:5; Prapart 2011:17). Though these explanations are undeniably relevant, they rely largely on frameworks of economic determinism and tend to analyse the Redshirt movement from a class-oriented perspective, while the non-material factors of the Redshirts remain understudied. These explanations also face difficulties in providing a more complete analysis as to why other villagers from different occupational and socio-economic background joined the movement.

The present chapter bridges this gap, arguing that ideological elements also played critical roles in the complex power relations between the state and the Redshirt movement. The chapter comprises four sections. The first section investigates the Redshirts' deployment of the notion of aristocracy to counter the state's discourse of Thai-style democracy. Secondly, it examines the collision between royal sufficiency philosophy and Thaksin-associated populism in Isan provinces. Thirdly, the encounter between Thai nationalism and Isan ethno-regionalism will be considered. Lastly, the contestation between state security and the Redshirts' anti-militarism will be examined. Through these sections, the chapter argues that the emergence of Redshirt villagers challenged state

ideology, namely nation, religion and king (the ideological triad), which have been dominant in Thai villages since the Cold War era.²⁶³

The chapter demonstrates that there is a significant change in Isan villages in terms of ideological orientation, and argues that Redshirt villagers critically challenged the state's ideological domination. In this light, the chapter examines ideological change in fieldwork sites in which state ideology might have appeared dominant, including a village designated for veterans in the War against Communism in Udonthani, a sufficiency economy village in Khonkaen and a Democrat-dominated district in Ubonratchathani in order to unravel the Redshirts' related challenges. This chapter also argues that the challenges of the Redshirt movement are not confined to an ideological struggle against the state, but are informed by a politics of identity as characterised by the notion of ethno-regionalism. Since the rise of the Redshirt movement is about more than just ideas, an understanding of the identity politics within the Redshirt movement will help explain why Isan became a bedrock of Redshirt support.

This chapter does not attempt to examine whether Redshirts' "ideologies" are genuine ideologies.²⁶⁴ Rather, it shows that the Redshirt's "ideologies" are not coherent and may be classified as ideational elements. It also demonstrates that internal fragmentation critically undermined the Redshirt' challenges to the state ideology and state apparatus. Due mainly to their fragmentation and "ideological" differences, the Redshirts were never sufficiently robust to pose a radical challenge to the state. Such fragmentation and differences, moreover, potentially exacerbated internal conflicts and contestation within the Redshirt movement when different Redshirt factions

²⁶³ In the 1970s, right-wing groups, namely the Nawapon, Redguars and the village scout movement, supported by government officials, justified their participation in the massacre of left-leaning, progressive students in Bangkok by reference to the need to protect Nation, Religion and King (Anderson 1997:14; Bowie 1997:2).

²⁶⁴ According to Tan (2012:33-8), "ideology is a critically contested concept in the Thai context" because it was imported. The term can mean several meanings depending on the people who use the term. These meanings include stance, principle and idea. Tan argues that ideology is a combination of ideal and action. Thus, rather than attempting to investigate whether Redshirts' ideologies are *genuinely* ideologies, this chapter employs and discuss to term mainly based on the fact that all Redshirt factions claimed their struggle is informed by ideologies as opposed to profits. The purpose is to show that there are "ideological" differences and incoherence within the Redshirt movement.

contended that their own struggle was informed by “ideology,” and typically criticised other factions for “lacking ideology” (*maimi udomkan*). Hence, exploring the Redshirts’ ideological dimensions is not only crucial in analysing the challenges the Redshirts posed against the Thai state, but also in rendering a level of nuance that goes beyond most existing studies on the Redshirt movement.

Thai-style Democracy and Aristocracy

Thai-Style Democracy

“Thai-style democracy” (*prachathipatai-baeb-thai*) is an ideological conception imposed by the Thai ruling elites. This ideology posits that the Thai polity is unique and different from Western polities (Hewison 2015:52). According to Thak (2007:9), it was under the Sarit Thanarat regime (1957-1963) that formal rationalisation of the concept of “democracy in the Thai context” emerged. Having no ideology in common with the People’s Party which overthrew the absolute monarchy in 1932, Sarit saw Western values, ideas and democracy as incompatible with Thai politics. For Sarit, Thailand was amenable to absolute power and strong leadership to maintain national “unity” (*khwamsamakki*) and “order” (*khwamriabroi*) in the Cold-war period. Yet Sarit also portrayed himself as a benevolent leader acting as a “father” who provided social welfare and economic well-being for the citizens or “his children” (Thak 2007: 107-120). In this sense “Sarit’s despotic regime could proclaim itself ‘democratic’ in a Thai political and cultural context” (Hewison 2015:55). Central to Thai-style democracy was the role of the monarchy. Overthrowing the political system structured by the People’s Party, Sarit not only revised but also promoted the role of the monarchy in unprecedented ways (Thak 2007:82). While monopolising all power in his own hands, Sarit used the monarchy to bolster his political legitimacy (Hewison 2015:54). With the support from the military, the role of the monarchy, initially that of the King and Queen, grew markedly more pronounced.

Another political figure who significantly promoted Thai-style democracy was MRS. Kukrit Pramoj (Hewison and Kengkit 2010:183). Kukrit

rendered ideological substance to Thai-style democracy by portraying the 1932 revolution as premature partly because most Thai people were then uneducated and, hence, unready for democracy. Their lack of democratic values resulted in chaotic parliamentary politics and corrupt politicians (Saichon cited in Hewison 2015:55). By contrast, Kukrit proposed that there was no need to import foreign democracy into Thailand because the Thai polity already has “democratic principles” indigenous to its own culture. For this ideological framework, the best form of government is one governed by *thammaraja*, the righteous king acting in accordance with Buddhist beliefs. The king is superior to “self-interested politicians and chaotic parliamentary politics” (Saichon cited in Hewison 2015:55). As Hewison notes, Thai-style democracy is a regime in which “the king operated as a watchdog over government, maintain the nation’s and the people’s best interest” (Hewison 2015:55). Accordingly, the Thai polity should be governed according to its own political ideology and, in this polity, the king is the sovereign and the people are constantly subject to his political tutelage.

Royal Interventionism

According to some proponents of Thai-style democracy, the king is expected to lead or even intervene into politics during crises or “unusual” situations. In the context of colour-coded politics, this expectation was clearly expressed by the Yellowshirts who took to the streets in 2006 to beseech the King to intervene into politics by using his royal prerogative (Hewison 2015:58). The Yellowshirts argued the Thaksin government was illegitimate since it was an example of parliamentary authoritarianism. More importantly, it was also anti-royalist because Thaksin disregarded royal prerogatives. Thus, the Yellowshirts demanded for a so-called “democratic regime with the King as head of the state”,²⁶⁵ and the implementation of the Article 7 under the 1997 constitution. Article 7 reads:

Whenever no provision under this Constitution is applicable to any case, it shall be decided in accordance with the constitutional

²⁶⁵ “*Rabob prachathippatai unmi pramahakasat pen pramuk*”.

practice in the democratic regime of government with the King as Head of the State.

Article 7 is indeed aimed for solving political problems where there are no constitutional provisions specifically applicable, and the “constitutional practice in the democratic regime of government with the King as Head of the State”. Although the definition of such “practice” is never clearly provided, this Article was interpreted by some royalists as an opportunity for King Bhumibol Aduljadej to execute his power by directly appointing a Prime Minister. These royalists argued that, as bestowed by the King who is a symbol of unity and morality, a “royally-appointed Prime Minister” (*nayok praratchathan*) is a “non-partisan/outsider prime minister” (*nayok khonklang/khonnok*) and, thus, is morally superior to a popular-elected Prime Minister. Historically, the King appointed “non-partisan” Prime Ministers on two occasions. Former judge Sanya Thammasak was royally appointed as Prime Minister after the October 1973 incident, while former diplomat Anand Panyarachun became PM after the May 1992 incident. In the post-2010 crackdown period, although Thailand was governed under the Abhisit government, similar claims persisted that Thai people were unready for democracy and that there were demands for a royally-appointed Prime Minister. Such demands resurfaced in late 2013 during the Yingluck period.

Aristocracy

In the post-2010 crackdown period, the Redshirts had adopted the notion of aristocracy (*ammathayathipatai*), which had been extensively used during the 2010 protests, to oppose their opponents. The Redshirts’ deployment of the rhetoric of aristocracy aimed at criticising senior bureaucrats, especially the military and judiciary who intervened in electoral politics. The etymological root of the term “*ammathayathipatai*” derived from Fred Riggs’ notion of “Bureaucratic polity.” Riggs (1966) observed that the post-1932 revolution Siam was predominantly controlled by circles of bureaucrats, both active and retired, while democratic principles were neither observed nor implemented.

The Redshirts revisited this term and reinterpreted it in their own connotation to challenge their own opponents. In the Redshirts’ version of

ammathayathipatai, they invoked notions of the *ammāt* (aristocrats) and the *prai* (subjects/commoners) from Thai feudalism (*sakdina*) which predated the post-1932 revolution. The Redshirt argued that they were *prai* who were politically discriminated despite constituting the majority in the country, while contended that the *ammāt* signified privileged bureaucrats who took away political rights and equality (*khwamthaothiam*) of the *prai*. This discrimination also precipitated another critical aspect of the Redshirts' notion of aristocracy - "injustice", or what the Redshirts have called "*songmatrathan*" (double standards).

After the 2010 crackdown, the Redshirts continued to employ the notion of aristocracy to oppose their opponents, while this notion became a unifying ideology among the Redshirts. All Redshirt factions in Isan expressed their hostility towards the *ammāt*, and the majority of the Redshirts considered the *ammāt* as their enemies. For the Redshirt village movement, their mission was to continue the struggle of the Redshirt movement against the *ammāt* who undemocratically intervened in politics. The main overt target of this critique was still General Prem Tinsulanonda, the President of the Privy Council, who was first criticised by Thaksin on 29 June 2006. Thaksin publicly stated as follows:

There is chaos in society because charismatic people and some organisations outside those sanctioned by the constitution are trying to overthrow the government, rule and law, constitution and democracy... (*Banmuang*, 30 June 2006:6).

"Charismatic people" were widely interpreted as meaning Prem, while this statement became a basis of the ideological foundation of the Redshirt's critique of aristocracy. For the Redshirt village movement, Prem was the mastermind of the 2006 military coup and subsequent undemocratic interventions that culminated in Abhisit Vejjajiva's rise to power.²⁶⁶ Criticism of the *ammāt* was widespread in all Isan provinces. In Udonthani, according to Arnon, the Redshirt village movement claimed to continue to challenge

²⁶⁶ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

undemocratic interventions into politics by charismatic figures.²⁶⁷ In the struggle, Arnon also adopted the notion of aristocracy, as he delicately commented that the Redshirt village movement aimed to fight “Ploy’s husband”.²⁶⁸ In Ubonratchathani, Pichet was another local leader who continued the struggle against the *ammatt*. Pichet challenged the Thai-style democracy proponents, arguing that democracy is not alien to Thai political culture. Instead, it exists and evolves within the Thai polity. He referred to the election of village headmen as an example of democracy. Pichet stated: “Democracy and aristocracy: what do you choose? The majority of the people [we] must ask them what they want. Must listen to them. Thailand has this principle already. We choose our own village headman. They say that we follow *farang* [foreigners]”.²⁶⁹

In the post-2010 period, in addition to Prem, the connotation of *ammatt* was also expanded to include political parties, especially the Abhisit-led Democrat Party and Newin-led Bhumjaithai Party. For the Redshirts, Abhisit was their enemy mainly because his premiership derived from military support.²⁷⁰ Moreover, the Redshirts insisted that despite being responsible for the 2010 crackdown, the Abhisit government had stayed in power without facing punishment.²⁷¹ Nevertheless, as suggested in the nuanced meaning of Arnon’s comment, there existed unequal power relations between the Redshirt village movement and their opponents the *ammatt*. Such strategic use of assumption echoed what Saowanee and McCargo (2016:225) describes as “intertextuality and presupposition” to “encode their subversive messages in their daily-life conversations” about those they perceived to be exploitative or misery powerful. Hence, according to Arnon, the struggle against the *ammatt* was more a responsibility of the UDD, meanwhile the Redshirt village movement was to mobilise in local areas because of financial limitations. Arnon stated:

²⁶⁷ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

²⁶⁸ Ploy is a character in Kukrit’s royalist novel “Four Reigns;” Ploy’s husband is called Prem.

²⁶⁹ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2014.

²⁷⁰ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

²⁷¹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

While the UDD had fought with *ammats* like Prem Tinsulanond, we fought with economic means to create well-being. For villagers, making a living is an important issue. We can't fight without ways of looking after ourselves.²⁷²

Consequently, the outright challenge against the *ammats* posed by the Redshirt village movement was limited in the post-2010 crackdown. In this regard, there was a significant difference between the national representation of the *prai* against *ammats* and the local village movement. The Redshirt village movement did not offer any substantive challenge to the *ammats*.

Demanding Justice

A more prominent challenge to the *ammattaiyathitai* by the Redshirts was the protest against injustice (*songmatrathan*, lit. double standard). In the post-2010 period, the protest for political equality was less emphasised, and the Redshirts usually deployed the notion of *songmatrathan* to demand greater political justice. Following the 2010 crackdown, the emergence of the Redshirts village movement was characterised not only by the demand for justice for political prisoners charged for participating in the 2010 protests but also the demand for the enforcement and progress of the legal process concerning those who should be held accountable for the military crackdown. As Arnon stated the Redshirt village movement emerged because “there has been no progress on legal process concerning the Redshirts who were killed”.²⁷³

Moreover, according to Kongchai, the quest for justice was to clarify that the Redshirts were not hired demonstrators but protesters who were committed to an “ideology”. Kongchai contended that, as significantly exemplified by the proclamation of the original Redshirt village and subsequent activities happening after the 2010 brutal suppression, the Redshirt protesters showed their adherence to the Redshirts’ ideological principles because the protesters had lost resources or even lives which could not be bought by money. Kongchai explains as follows:

²⁷² Interview with Arnon Saenan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

²⁷³ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

Proclaiming the [original] Redshirt village required ideology. If we were hired, there was no way we would risk our lives. But we stayed with our 'hearts' (*duayjai*). When we protested we had to treat our fellow Redshirts with food. When we went to protest, we finished all our rice, even though we brought with us a hundred or two hundred of kilograms of rice. Tobacco finished. Money finished.²⁷⁴

This demand for justice defied previous tradition in Thai politics in which Thai villagers were afraid of bureaucrats and generally passive in protecting and demanding political equality/justice. The protest also showed the Redshirts' challenge to injustice created by the *ammattayathipatai*. This protest also led to the proclamation and expansion of Redshirt villages. Moreover, the demand for justice led to a campaign for the release of Redshirt prisoners. In August 2011, shortly after Pheu Thai became government, the Redshirt village movement together with Pheu Thai politicians called for bails for Redshirt political prisoners in different Isan provinces, especially the major provinces of Udonthani, Khonkaen and Ubonratchathni. For example, in Ubonratchathani, UDD lawyers prepared to ask for bail for 20 Redshirt prisoners by using the positions of Pheu Thai MPs from Ubonratchathani, Surin and Srisaket (Phujatkan 19 August 2011:4). In Khonkaen, Pheu Thai MPs, including, Cherdchai Tontisirin, Yaowanit Phiangket, using their MP positions to successfully bail four Redshirt prisoners, while attempting to help all 74 prisoners charged with cases related to the 2010 arsons (*Dailynews* 24 August 2011:14). They attempted to bail out all the Redshirt prisoners, in conjunction with a national UDD's campaign led by Jatuporn, which proposed compensation of 10 million baht for each Redshirt who died during the 2010 crackdown from the Yingluck government (*Matichon* 16 August 2011:15). However, this compensation campaign caused pro-Thaksin forces to be severely criticised for using money to solve conflicts and to promote superficial reconciliation, while failing to bring the 2010 crackdown perpetrators to justice.

²⁷⁴ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

Compromise with the *Ammat*

The Redshirts' challenges, which were different at national and local levels, against the aristocrats were critically undermined by ideological incoherence among Redshirt factions. Different factions had different interpretations and approaches towards the *ammāt*. Under the Yingluck government, this ideological incoherence occasionally surfaced and undermined the Redshirts' challenges towards the so-called aristocrats. The proposals of the 2013 amnesty bill were the most contentious issue among the Redshirts in this regard and was the main obstacle to the Redshirts' challenges against the *ammāt*.

The 2013 Amnesty Bill

In November 2013, the Yingluck government attempted to pass an amnesty bill in the parliament. Before this legislative process, at least ten different amnesty bills were publicly proposed and three versions proposed by the government or by Pheu Thai politicians, namely Worachai Hemma's version, Chaloeam Yubamrung's version, and Sondhi Boonyaratklin's version (*Prachatai* 21 July 2013). While Worachai's version gained the most public support since it attempts to provide remedies for ordinary protesters while excluding leaders from both sides of the colour-coded conflict (iLaw 26 July 2013), the government formally supported Sondhi's version to be considered in parliament on the grounds that an amnesty bill introduced by the 2006 coup leader would not be perceived as biased towards pro-Thaksin forces. The main purpose of the Sondhi-led amnesty bill was to achieve reconciliation and overcome colour-coded politics. However, the bill was opposed by the public, many of whom viewed it as an attempt to reach a compromise only among political leaders and ignore the plight and pain of ordinary people involved in colour-coded conflicts (*Prachathi* 2 November 2013).

The main criticism was the Sondhi's amnesty bill was that it gave immunity to all parties and partisans who had been involved in colour-coded politics since 2006, as well encapsulated by Article 3:

All actions (*kankratham*) of individuals or people that were involved with political protests, political expression, political conflicts, or accusations by any parties or organisations that were

established after the coup on 19 September 2006, including parties or organisations related to the process of those actions between 2004 and 8 August 2013, no matter what status (*sathana*) of the actors (*phukratham*) – be they the leaders, the supporters, the employers, the employed- if those actions were illegal, will be acquitted from all wrongdoing and accountability.

The actions according to section 1 do not include actions in Article 112 of the Criminal Code.

This bill—which was later dubbed “blanket amnesty bill” (*maokheng/sutsoi* lit. all-in) due to this broad compromise—should have satisfied all parties concerned. In reality, the legislative process of the amnesty bill induced severe criticisms from almost all sides. For the Redshirts’ opponents, the most controversial element was the proposal to provide impunity for ex-premier Thaksin. Should the legislative process pass this Amnesty Bill, it would pave the way for Thaksin to return to Thailand, and all allegations against Thaksin would be discharged. Thus, these provisions were unacceptable to the Redshirts’ opponents. This opposition was first evident when Democrat politicians caused chaos during the bill consideration in parliament in May 2012 (*Phujatkan* 8 June 2015) and have continued to violently oppose the bill since then. In November 2013, yet another opponent of the Redshirts – the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), took to the streets to protest against the Amnesty Bill. It turned out the PDRC protest was only a pretext since protests continued long after the Bill was dropped. The PDRC escalated their protest to demand a royally-appointed Prime Minister to replace Yingluck (*Post today* 11 December 2013:A8).

On the other hand, many Redshirts also opposed Sondhi’s amnesty bill since it would effectively acquit the perpetrators in charge of the 2010 military crackdown, including former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, former Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban, Commander-in-chief General Anupong Paojinda, and Deputy Commander-in-chief General Prayuth Chan-o-cha. In this respect the Bill seemed to exemplify what Thongchai calls “Thai-style reconciliation” in which Thai politics is only about a deal struck between the

government and the political elites, while ordinary people have simply to accept the outcome.²⁷⁵ In providing this “Thai-style” reconciliation, the 2013 amnesty bill ignited contention among the Redshirt factions that contested with one another over the best way to approach this bill and their *ammatt* enemy.

Contesting over the Bill

Apart from certain Pheu Thai politicians, Khwanchai was the most outspoken supporter of the Amnesty Bill. Although Khwanchai joined in the protests against the PDRC, and declared that the People-love-Udon would give 500,000 baht to those able to capture Suthep,²⁷⁶ Khwanchai’s protest against the PDRC was based on his support for the amnesty bill. According to Kwanchai, the most important step to take to transcend the conflict and to truly reach reconciliation was to forgive all sides.²⁷⁷ More importantly, he believed that the reconciliation process would be achieved only on the condition the Redshirts was the first side to take action. Thus, Khwanchai argued “the Redshirts should forgive their enemies and forget their loss and suffering because the Redshirt are always the ones who sacrifice (*phusaisala*)”.²⁷⁸ In order to transcend the current conflicts and achieve reconciliation, the Redshirts must be the ones to take action and accept the amnesty bill.²⁷⁹ By contrast, Redshirts who did not accept the bill were perceived as lacking true ‘loyalty’ (*khwampakdi*) to the movement since this proposal was deemed to help Thaksin.²⁸⁰ Therefore, Khwanchai’s protest against Suthep was to support the bill.

²⁷⁵ Thongchai explains his idea of Thai-style reconciliation as follows: “For reconciliation ‘Thai-style’ is like the father who tells his children to go to bed and get some sleep after brutally punishing them for disobedience. The crime was a family matter. Good children are not supposed to cry for being abused” (Haberhorn 2011:x).

²⁷⁶ This amount of money was claimed to derive from a donation of villagers; one baht from each villagers. Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

²⁷⁷ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

²⁷⁸ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

²⁷⁹ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

²⁸⁰ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015. Thaksin himself earlier suggested this compromise approach in a video call to the Redshirt gathering on 19 May 2012 in commemoration of the 2010 crackdown that: “Fellows (*pi-nong*) have already done so much. But at one point, if I am to go ashore (*khuenfang*), fellows have paddled a boat bringing me to the shore. When arriving at the shore, I have to climb up a mountain. Fellows, why do you carry the boat while climbing the mountain. It is time for me to take a lift up to the mountain. I have never forgotten the boat paddlers, but the situation has changed. The [political] development has changed. Hope fellows

This was not the first time Khwanchai attempted to compromise with the Thai political establishment. Previously, not only did the People-love-Udon club attempt to compromise with the traditional elites, but it also showed loyalty towards them. Khwanchai argued that it was necessary to present themselves as “royalist Redshirts”.²⁸¹ While the monarchy has been more than ever manipulated to legitimise attacks on the opposing factions in the Thai polity (Han 2011:204), the “institution” has been widely used as a political weapon against the Redshirts. The fear of such allegations was rampant within the Redshirt movement. According to Khwanchai, the creation of royalist Redshirts would enable the movement to avoid “anti-monarchy” (*lomjao*) criticism since it was the main impediment of the Redshirt movement. This allegation made the movement vulnerable and many Redshirts had been accused, detained and even imprisoned on *lèse-majesté* charges.

In overcoming this vulnerability, Khwanchai argued that it was necessary for the Redshirts to perform their loyalty to the monarchy.²⁸² Khwanchai’s attempts to be royalist were most clearly demonstrated in the funeral of the highly-revered Buddhist monk Luangta Mahabua in Udonthani in March 2011.²⁸³ The funeral was presided over by the Queen. Khwanchai explains:

I was prepared to call for royalist Redshirts to come out. Previously we didn’t have good deeds with us. Actually we always do good things. Here the Queen came to visit Laungta Mahabua cremation. Thaksin told me to make the masses silent. It was brought to the attention of the palace that we removed pictures of the Queen. Isan people are the prime target. The military officers came when the

understand today we have done our duty to the end of the road” (*Phujatkan*, 21 May 2012). For Thaksin, the Redshirt should stop “paddling” or mobilising because reconciliation would be more difficult to achieve. By contrast, to climb up the mountain was a metaphor referring to the aristocrats with whom Thaksin had to climb up to negotiate. In this situation, Redshirt masses proved relatively unnecessary.

²⁸¹ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

²⁸² In Thailand, loyalty to the monarchy is performative. This is the reason why a number of rural villagers spectacularly decorated the entrance of their natal villages with the pictures of the King, Queen and the royal family members. While this decoration used resources, the decoration was meant to demonstrate to outsiders, rather than inside villagers. Loyalty unperformed can be interpreted as disloyalty (Fieldwork note 9 June 2015).

²⁸³ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

Queen came to bestow the royal fire. Wichian [Kaokham] had brought the body of the revered monk Mahabua. Thaksin told me there must not be a protest of any kind. I told him there would definitely be no protest. I would not be able to touch the issue. Abhisit was here. After the mission accomplished, the policemen came to eat at my house, though many groups had in their minds that the Queen bestowed flowers at Nong Bow's funeral.²⁸⁴

Nevertheless, Khwanchai's royalist approach was an anathema to most Redshirts. A number of Redshirts also opposed the reconciliation process initiated by the 2013 bill which would pardon the 2010 military crackdown perpetrators, especially Abhisit and Suthep. The most prominent group of this view was the national UDD. For UDD leader Thida, the Bill betrayed the Redshirts who had lost their lives in the 2010 crackdown because the law compromised with the *ammatt* who prevented the legal process concerning the 2010 suppression. Thida argued:

This is not real 'reconciliation' (*prongdong*). It is a reconciliation among the 'rulers' (*phupokkhrong*), not reconciliation between the people from the democratic side and the rulers who do not want to return power to the people...The Redshirts are not satisfied with the reconciliation with the 'aristocrats' (*ammatt*) before the society knows the truth and punishes the perpetrators (Thida 2012:233-4).

For the UDD, real reconciliation would have to be based on truth, and "without truth the reconciliation process will further exacerbate the conflicts" (2012:235). Thus, the priority of the Yingluck government should have been "truth finding" and "to rapidly put on trial the wrongdoers who killed the people" (Thida 2012:236). Consequently, the UDD did not support the compromise with the *ammatt*. Despite disagreeing with the Bill, the UDD under Thida's leadership took no action against the Yingluck government. Nor did they

²⁸⁴ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015. Bow or Angkhana Radappanyawut died during a Yellowshirt protest on 7 October 2008 after the Yellowshirts clashed with the police (*Prachatai* 12 August 2010). A number of Redshirts dubbed the funeral event after the royally-bestowed flower as "eye-opening" (*tasawang*) event.

take to the streets to protect the government from the PDRC protesters. The inactivity of the UDD was well explained by Anuwat Thinarat, the leader of Isan UDD, who suggested that the UDD in all twenty Isan provinces would stay at their ground to see how the PDRC's protest unfolded because the UDD knew that the PRDC was attempting to provoke them into violent action (*Post Today* 10 December 2013:A8).

The Redshirt village movement also opposed the Amnesty Bill. Arnon agreed with pardoning Thaksin since Thaksin was deemed the best Prime Minister and the "prophet" (*sasada*) of the Redshirt village movement.²⁸⁵ Unlike the UDD, Arnon did not criticise Pheu Thai or the PDRC, but he opposed the Amnesty Bill because it granted impunity to the *ammats*. As Arnon stated: "We didn't agree to include the *ammats*. Their hands were soaked with blood. They killed the people".²⁸⁶ The goal of Redshirt village mobilisation was to protest against the PCR and their demands for a royally-appointed Prime Minister. Arnon argued: "non-partisan Prime Ministers are not royally-appointed, but come from an election by the people", and the demand for a royally-appointed Prime Minister was undemocratic.²⁸⁷ In this mission, the Redshirt village movement also cooperated with Adisorn Phiangket, a Khonkaen Pheu Thai MP, and Suporn Atthawong (a.k.a. Rambo Isan), Pheu Thai MP in Korat.²⁸⁸ Thus, on 10 December 2013, Arnon organised a gathering of around a thousand Redshirt villagers in Buriram, demanding the PDRC cease their protest and arguing that "the Redshirts cannot accept [the demands of the PDRC] because it was unconstitutional and illegitimate" (*Post Today*, 11 December 2013:A8). Eventually, the protest of the Redshirt village movement against the demand for a royally-appointed Prime Minister culminated in street rallies in Udonthani and parts of Bangkok in late 2013.²⁸⁹

Another example of a Redshirt faction which opposed the Amnesty Bill was the Chak-thong-rob group in Ubonratchathani. Initially, Pichet supported the Bill mainly because "[t]he only hope is amnesty," after his

²⁸⁵ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

²⁸⁶ Interview with Arnon sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

²⁸⁷ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

²⁸⁸ Interview with Arnon sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

²⁸⁹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

charity concert to support the Redshirt political prisoners were banned.²⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Pichet later opposed the Bill because of two reasons. Firstly, the Amnesty Bill over-emphasised Thaksin's interests. For Pichet, the Redshirts had to transcend Thaksin and even criticise Thaksin. As he argued: "For example, I proposed that we should criticise Thaksin. Now all the Redshirt leaders "flattered" Thaksin. Thaksin is not our father, but our friend. So, he must listen to us". Thus, an Amnesty Bill which favoured Thaksin was unsuitable since the opinions and demands of ordinary Redshirt villagers would be ignored. Pichet continued in his criticism:

Politics in the past was all about compromise between elites. We know that they confiscated our power. They won't return it to us. The new generation won't accept that easily. But the Amnesty Bill spoiled things. It was criticised by the progressive. The Bill was to cooperate with the Democrats. They [Pheu Thai and Democrats] have recruited only the rich to become MPs. It was just using money to buy them. All were the same. Whoever. Old bureaucrats. Prem or Thaksin. All were the same. They were just dragging and buying time. The 'reconciliation process' (*prongdong*), for example, it was just a dragging process to buy time. Things are very ugly. I don't have to say.²⁹¹

Such anti-Thaksin ideas, as expressed by Pichet, demonstrates that the Redshirt movement was not monolithic and readily masterminded by Thaksin. This anti-Thaksin idea within the movement was known as 'anti-Thaksin red' (*daengmaiao Thaksin*) and was usually suggested by Redshirts who were progressive activists, intellectuals or those without any Pheu Thai background (*Prachatai* 31 March 2017). This strain of anti-Thaksin Redshirts grew stronger after Yingluck assumed power, fueled by the fact that the Yingluck government did not prioritise helping Redshirt protesters affected by the 2010 incidents over advancing Thaksin's personal agenda. According to Pichit Likitkijsomboon, a former Thaksin

²⁹⁰ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

²⁹¹ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

government advisor-turned-Redshirt intellectual,²⁹² the proposal of this Redshirt fraction, therefore, were to rise above Thaksin's private issues and to "criticise Thaksin who betrayed the people and used the people to compromise with their opponents" (*Prachatai* 31 March 2017). But this anti-Thaksin ideational strain never gained traction within the Redshirt movement and was not widespread among villagers who constituted the majority of the Redshirt supporters. Redshirt villagers still by and large admired Thaksin and wanted Thaksin not only to return to Thailand but also resume his premiership.²⁹³

Such different ideational strains made the Redshirts' challenges to the aristocrats become irresolute. Central to these differences were the different approaches and interpretations towards the *ammāt*. For many Redshirts, the amnesty Bill suggested that the Yingluck government paid more respect to the establishment, rather than to their concerns. For Pichet, Thaksin himself was an *ammāt*. Especially after November 2013, Redshirt attempts to oppose Thai-style democracy and undemocratic interventionism by their opponents were clearly undermined by the amnesty bill proposal. Although the Redshirts were successful in opposing a royally-appointed Prime Minister, their demand for justice saw no progress. In this respect, the amnesty bill not only critically eroded the Redshirts' challenges to the *ammāt*, but led to internal contestation among Redshirt factions. Such ideational differences caught the Redshirts in a dilemma and further weakened their unity.

Sufficiency Philosophy and Populist Policies

Royal Sufficiency Philosophy

Another ideological tension which the pre-2010 crackdown street rallies of the Redshirts did not critically reveal was between the sufficiency philosophy and Thaksin's populist policies. The transfer of the Redshirts' challenges from Bangkok to Isan villages illuminated this tension. Royal sufficiency (or

²⁹² Pichet was an advisor to Surapong Suebwonglee, deputy minister of public health (2001-2).

²⁹³ Interview with Kulyarak Samuntaphan, Khonkaen, 19 August 2015.

sufficiency economy) is an initiative of King Bhumibol which was strongly promoted after the 1997 financial crisis (Walker 2011; Ivarsson and Isager 2011). Sufficiency philosophy posits “greed” and “lack of moderation” as the root causes of economic crises and problems (Apichai and Titiporn 2004:16). To overcome such crises and problems, this philosophy encourages “moderation and appropriateness” which will lead to Thai society in which “people are not greedy and do not take advantage of others” (Apichai and Titiporn 2004:16). Although promoted after the 1997 crisis, sufficiency philosophy also draws substantively from the “charisma” and “moral authority” of King Bhumibol. Throughout his reign, the King has endeavoured to establish himself as “a charitable developmental king who tirelessly and selflessly seeks to improve the livelihood of his subjects” (Ivarsson and Isager 2011:20).

Under the King’s royal patronage, the most commonly known development projects are “the Royally-initiated Projects” (*khlongkan nai praratchadamri*), which began in the 1970s and later grew into thousands of projects (Chanida 2011). Thanks to such “endeavour” and “projects”, King Bhumibol achieved unprecedented popularity. Underlying these developmental project initiated by the King is another ideational foundation of sufficiency economy: “New Theory Agriculture” (*kaset thitsadimai*). First introduced in 1994, New Theory Agriculture is an integrated farming programme designed to overcome water shortage and market vulnerability (Ivarsson and Isager 2011:227). As Walker explains, “New Theory Agriculture” which is influenced by “self-reliant agriculture” advocates creating “model farms” for Thai villagers. Based on the model farm, agricultural land is allocated between fish ponds, rice growing areas and crops/fruit cultivation, while villagers are projected as “hard-working subjects settling in small-scale communities characterised by mutual compassion and self-sufficiency” (Walker 2011:242).

Although some elements of the philosophy draw upon internationally promoted themes and inspiration,²⁹⁴ sufficiency economy proponents stress

²⁹⁴ According to Ivarsson and Isager (2011:231), sufficiency economy is partly influenced by the Kibbutz movement in Israel. In 1967, the King created a “village farming cooperative” modelled on an Israeli kibbutz in a village near his Hua Hin residence. While the project was assisted by Israeli businessman Shoul Eisenberg, its

that the philosophy is already embedded in Thai society, as defined by moral principles, Buddhist beliefs and communitarian ideals. According to this framework, the modern economy overvalues economic growth, which can generate extravagance and greed (Walker 2011:242). Consequently, sufficiency philosophy advocates propose to look back to Thai traditions as a means to achieve economic development. This traditional revitalisation culminated in the King's birthday speech in 1997 in which the King commented on the country's ambition to become a newly industrialised country (NICs), "being a tiger is not important. What is important is to have an economy which provides enough to eat and live". He further emphasised:

If we can change back to a self-sufficient economy, not completely, even not as much as half, perhaps just a quarter, we can survive. [...] But people who like the modern economy may not agree. It's like walking backwards into a *khlong* [canal]. (Royal speech 1997 cited in Ivarsson and Isager 2011:226).

This combinations led Ivarsson and Isager to conclude that "sufficiency economy aims to create a new economic man who lives a moderate, self-dependent life without greed, uncontrolled cravings and overexploitation" (2011:223). Nevertheless, a clear definition as to what constitute "moderation" or "sufficiency" has never been established, and most proponents who claim to admire this philosophy do not actually follow it. Despite such ambiguity, royal sufficiency is highly regarded by the Thai public and held as a "philosophy" applicable for people at various economic segments and different economic situations. As Medhi Krongkaew notes, "Sufficiency Economy is a philosophy that guides the livelihood and behaviour of people at all levels, from the family to the community to the country, on matters concerning national development and administration" (2003).

Royal Sufficiency and State Agencies

Since its formal inception after the 1997 crisis, the promotion of royal sufficiency of the Thai state is drawn from a "very substantial amount of public

aim to be applied to a larger-scale rural development projects (Isager and Ivarsson 2011:231).

and private resources” and extensively disseminated by various state agencies, including the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Education and the Crown Property Bureau. (Isager and Ivarsson 2011:232). From this early stage of the promotion, the most important institution in advocating sufficiency economy is arguably the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), Thailand’s most dominant economic body. The NESDB put sufficiency economy into implementation in the Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006), and the philosophy was adopted as an “economic life guiding principle”. This adoption was clearly expressed through the NESDB’s statement which defined sufficiency economy in terms of morality, rather than economic rationality. According to the statement, “sufficiency means moderation and due consideration in all modes of conduct, [...] At the same time, it is essential to strengthen the moral fibre of the nation, so that everyone, particularly public officials, theorists and businessmen, adheres first and foremost to the principles of honesty and integrity” (cited in Isager and Ivarsson 2011:228). The political implication of this definition was to draw contrast and contradiction between royal sufficiency and Thaksin’s populism. Royal sufficiency was portrayed as morality (honesty and integrity), while populism was represented as immorality (greed).

It was after the 2006 coup that the promotion of the sufficiency economy took a crucial turn. Sufficiency economy was explicitly endorsed by the 2006 coup-makers (Ivarsson and Isager 2011:21). According to Walker (2011:241), “the coup makers and their appointed government presented their politics within a package of royalist sufficiency in order to draw a clear contrast with the so-called populist policies of the overthrown Thaksin government”. This contrast was made clear by Surayud Chulanont, the post-2006 coup Prime Minister, when outlining his policies:

[...] the new government will uphold market mechanisms in its economic policies, but good governance will be instilled under the philosophy of sufficiency economy to ensure economic fairness and minimise conflict of interest as well as personal interests (*The Nation*, 28 October 2006).

Underlying this statement was an attempt to delegitimise the Thaksin government which was conventionally perceived as plagued with conflicts of interest. Consequently, the Surayud government oversaw sufficiency economy further adopted in the Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2007-2011) and the 2007 Constitution. The Section 78(1) of the 2007 Constitution stipulates:

The State shall act in compliance with the State administration policy as follows: (1) carrying out the administration of State affairs with a view to establish sustainable development of social, economic and security of the nation and strengthening an implementation of the sufficient economy philosophy with due regard to general benefits of the nation materially.²⁹⁵

Subsequently, the Surayud government introduced various related schemes.²⁹⁶ At the village level, Surayud implemented sufficiency ideology through the so-called “Sufficiency Economy Village Project”.²⁹⁷ According to the handbook titled “Leaders and the Expansion of the Sufficiency Economy Village Model with Community Capital” (2014), there were 160 village models nationwide as of 2009.²⁹⁸ Ivarsson and Isager (2011:235) describe such political reconfiguration as “sufficiencracy” or “sufficiency democracy”, in which politics is disciplined by sufficiency and electoral power is constrained. Hence, since the 2006 coup, state agencies not only attempted to draw a sharp contrast between royal sufficiency and Thaksin’s populism, but also clearly promoted sufficiency as the state ideology.

²⁹⁵ Another provision of the 2007 Constitution mentioning sufficiency economy is section 83 which similarly and clearly reads: “(T)he State shall encourage and support implementation of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.”

²⁹⁶ At the national level, sufficiency projects introduced included the Happy Living Project and Community Development Project under the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, the Centre of Poverty Eradication under the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy (Ivarsson and Isager 2011:234).

²⁹⁷ *Khlongkan muban setthakit popiang*.

²⁹⁸ A similar project existed during the fieldwork was called “Land of Justice and Land of Gold Project” (*khlongkan phaendintham phaendinthong*).

Thaksin-Associated Populism

Despite the fact that Thaksin's populism was portrayed as immoral and the state engaged in relentless propaganda about the sufficiency philosophy, Redshirts villagers challenged royal sufficiency in two respects: their admiration for Thaksin and their lack of engagement with royal sufficiency. Villagers' affection for Thaksin was expressed in two main ways. The first way was villagers' preference for Thaksin-associated populist policies. Most informants in the provinces studied stated that they benefited from and preferred Thaksin's policies, which explaining why so many Isan villagers became Redshirt supporters. For the Redshirts, Thaksin' populism was consistent with their economic desires and livelihood. As an informant in Khonkaen explained: "Thaksin's policies take care of us from when we were born until we are dead".²⁹⁹ The commonly cited policies among the Redshirt villagers were the Universal Health Care Program, Education Fund, OTOP and the Village Fund. Another informant in Ubonratchathani, born in 1933, who was among the eldest informants in his own village, similarly agreed and suggested that the reason he liked Thaksin because, unlike all previous government he had seen, the Thaksin government could implement policies as promised before the elections.³⁰⁰

Redshirt villagers believed that Thaksin-associated policies led to economic growth, development and job creation.³⁰¹ Prominent perception towards Thaksin's populism was that his policies were 'eatable' (*kindai*) which also led to the perception that the Thaksin regime was 'eatable Democracy' (*prachathippatai kindai*) among the Redshirts. The popularity of Thaksin's policies among villagers were clearly expressed by another informant as follows:

I think villagers want to return to their well-being, like under the Thaksin government. Before Thaksin's premiership, there were no village funds. Now we have village funds, thanks to Thaksin. His policies were 'tangible' (*jabtongdai*) and 'eatable' (*kindai*). There

²⁹⁹ Interview with Viman Phanthukot, Khonkaen, 3 April 2015.

³⁰⁰ Interview with Sod Sungupun, Ubonratchathani, 4 March 2015.

³⁰¹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

were many policies. Now we aren't having them...Oh difficult! We need democracy. We need development. We need the country to be as developed as other countries. Nowadays we are 'retreating backwards' (*thoilang*). Thaksin's policies created jobs. There were several policies...³⁰²

Nevertheless, the Village Fund project was the policy which brought Thaksin and the Redshirts into collision with royal sufficiency. The Village Fund Project provided each village with one million baht (£2,000) and other budgets, such as membership fees from villager members, to be used as micro-credit (Antika 2007:186).³⁰³ This micro-credit would be used to solve the difficulty villagers often experienced in accessing loans from formal financial institutions. Villagers who took out loans would get around 10,000-20,000 baht (£100-200) depending on the size of the village.³⁰⁴ The villagers who took loans had to repay the money lent with interest; thus, each year the Village Fund received back the money lent out and made a profit. In her study of two villages, Antika showed that after one year the first village made total profits of 111,962.65 baht or 11.11 per cent, while the other made 117,400 baht or 10.5 per cent (Antika 2007:187-8). In this regard, based on its accessibility and profits, various Redshirt villagers expressed their admiration for the Village Fund project. As an informant in Khonkaen explained how she had benefited from a loan of 20,000 baht from the Village Fund project to become a grilled chicken and papaya salad seller:

[I] Like the Million Baht Project. Previously, we 'villagers' (*thaiban* Isan) went to make loan. Nobody gave us. They required a guarantor. But when the [Village Fund] project came, it created a lot of benefits. Although some people misused the funds, there were lots of good people who benefited from it. Like me, I borrowed to

³⁰² Interview with Chareon (pseudonym), Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

³⁰³ Thus, the amount of money allocated by the Fund is actually much more than one million.

³⁰⁴ Interview with Saneh Polyiam, Udonthani, 27 December 2015.

set up a papaya salad and grilled chicken kiosk. On days that I sold well, I sold up to 50 dishes. 30 baht a dish. I could rarely sit down.³⁰⁵

The second factor underlying the popularity of Thaksin's populism was their affection for Thaksin himself.³⁰⁶ This reason was often mentioned by the Redshirt village movement which viewed Thaksin as the "logo"³⁰⁷ of the movement. The affection for Thaksin which also led to the rise and growth of the Redshirt village movement was related to the perception that Thaksin was a capable, but also caring Prime Minister. Thaksin was perceived as a leader who had a particular concern for the poor—the majority of the country. This perspective was well reflected by Kongchai:

The reason for creating the [original] Redshirt village was because firstly [we] love Thaksin. There are a lot of poor people. Prime Minister Thaksin helped the poor. Previously, the poor were 'looked down on' (*duthuk*). Whatever number it is, we will cast [the ballot paper] correctly. Thaksin made the people better off; the economy better off; the economy grew; and the country developed.³⁰⁸

The opinion expressed above echoed the sentiment of many Redshirts. More importantly, while this perception earned Thaksin widespread admiration, it also created loyalty to Thaksin among Redshirt villagers. Thanks to his policies and personality, the Redshirts would continue to vote for pro-Thaksin parties. On the other hand, the loyalty to Thaksin among the Redshirts led to the rejection of similar populist policies executed by non-Thaksin governments. For the Redshirts in general, non-Thaksin governments' populism was not preferable or "proper populist" policies. According to Pichet, policies which were executed by Democrat governments would never change villagers' views towards Thaksin. Commenting on the populist policies under the Abhisit

³⁰⁵ Interview with Phen Promrudee, Khonkaen, 22 May 2015.

³⁰⁶ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015; with Arnon Sanan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

³⁰⁷ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

³⁰⁸ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

government, which provided free education, free electricity and free transportation, Pichet argued that: “[T]he ideas were stolen from Thaksin”.³⁰⁹

Populist policies by post-Thaksin governments were all perceived as imitations of Thaksin’s policies, and so inadvertently gave more credit to Thaksin. The consistency with villagers’ livelihood and economic desire went to explain why pro-Thaksin governments won all elections by a landslide in Isan following the inception of the Thai Rak Thai Party. Nevertheless, the rise in affection for Thaksin’s populism and Thaksin himself paralleled the decline in villagers’ interest in the state’s ideologically-driven emphasis on royal sufficiency. The main reason was that the Village Fund provided financial opportunities to villagers to pursue other interests, as opposed to being satisfied with moderation as instructed by royal sufficiency.

Sufficiency Economy “Very Insufficient”

The toppling of Thaksin and the subsequent introduction of royal sufficiency generated opposition among Redshirt villagers. Redshirt villagers viewed the sufficiency economy as irrelevant to their economic desires and livelihoods, a view shared by all Redshirt factions in Isan. These objections were mainly based on the impracticability of royal sufficiency. For Redshirts, the first and foremost reason underlying their opposition was they cannot be satisfied with their existing economic conditions: making a better living is an important issue. Accordingly, royal sufficiency ideology was considered merely as state propaganda. Few Redshirts believed that royal sufficiency was genuinely practiced even by those among the philosophy’s promoters.

A prime example was Nongklan in Ubonratchathani, who came closer than other informants to a sufficiency lifestyle.³¹⁰ Despite having a house in a nearby village, Nongklan lived in her shack in the middle of paddy fields without electricity, explaining that she wanted to conserve her expenses. Her land is divided into a fish pond, ricefield area and cash crops. Her farm was highly sustainable and sufficient. She fed chicken with her rice and used chicken excrement to feed fish in the pond, while Nongklan either consumed or sold her

³⁰⁹ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

³¹⁰ Interview with Nongklan, Ubonratchathani, 15 March 2015.

fish depending on her circumstances. However, the time came when Nongklan ceased to be sufficient. She wanted a Japanese *khwailek*,³¹¹ the down payment on which would cost her all her chickens (around a hundred).³¹² More importantly, she did not know how to operate the *khwailek*. Nongklan, however, went to buy one simply because she wanted it (*yakdai* Isan), and this machine showed her improving status in other villagers' eyes. While Nongklan lived close to sufficiency principles, she was also unable to control her economic desire or what sufficiency advocates called "greed". To lead a life close to sufficiency was almost impossible in rural Thailand at present.



Nongklan in Uonratchathani (fieldwork 15 March 2015)

Apart from farmers, a Redshirt village headman also claimed that living according to sufficiency principles was almost impossible. In Khonkaen, a village headman, whose house was close to a community market, sold liquor every evening.³¹³ His secret was to provide pieces of mangoes or other sour fruits as a side dish to his clients. Apparently, his tricks worked really well and sold 10 baht a glass, and made profits for a hundred per cent from a bottle of liquor which normally cost around 40-50 baht (£1). According to him, being a village headman receiving a salary of 7,000-8,000 baht was not sufficient, and "there

³¹¹ *Khwailek* is a type of small Japanese tractors which is popular among Isan farmers.

³¹² See appendix.

³¹³ Interview with Chuang Chaitham (born 1964), Khonkaen, 7 April 2015.

were many social costs, like donating and merit making”.³¹⁴ Thus, he had to find additional jobs, and selling liquor easily earned him money. But, as a village headman, he was supposed to promote the state’s sufficiency philosophy for which selling liquor is considered immoral.

Another factor that caused such objection among Redshirt villagers was their belief that the sufficiency philosophy was proclaimed only by the rich to create a better public image for themselves. The view that sufficiency economy was incompatible with their economic desires and livelihood was shared by a number of other Redshirt villagers, including a Khonkaen couple who had lived and worked in the Southern Province of Suratthani for 26 years and used to vote for the Democrat Party.³¹⁵ Both had become Redshirts. They explained the reason they rejected royal sufficiency was mainly because they, like other villagers, could not live in sufficient isolation and needed to depend on the external and monetary world. They argued the proclamation of sufficiency was only for the rich, but for the poor the sufficiency philosophy was simply “insufficient”. As they explained at length in reference to their common meal “Indian Mackerel”:

They [the Redshirt opponents] said that we are backwards, unable to getting what is going on. Farmers should be farming. But everything is not like that in the past (*boran*). In the days of our father and mother, it was liveable in ‘sufficiency’ (*phophiang*). Those who are already rich can say that, but how can the poor say such a thing? We don’t even have enough to live and eat. If the government improves different things, like irrigation, in order to make us live in sufficiency and grow rice. But I am asking where the ‘Indian Mackerel’ (*plathu*) are from? Are they from our paddy fields?..Now, villagers work outside the village. They don’t even know that we use running water anyway.³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Interview with Chuang Chaitham (born 1964), Khonkaen, 7 April 2015.

³¹⁵ Interview with Nai (born in 1959), and Kong, (born in 1957), Khonkaen, 6 April 2015.

³¹⁶ Interview with Kong and Nai, Khonkaen, 6 April 2015.

Embedded in this explanation was another reason that led to the objection of the inculcation of royal sufficiency among Redshirt villagers: the migration of rural villagers to live and work in more urban areas. The best example is the original Redshirt village in Udonthani. According to Kongchai, 30 per cent of the 320 households of the village were living and working outside the village, both in the city of Udonthani and in other provinces.³¹⁷ According to Naruemon and McCargo (2011:1002), working and living in urban areas for Redshirt migrants has already become a rule rather than an exception in Thailand. While the struggle to work and live in other places meant dissatisfaction with village life,³¹⁸ this migration and economic desire presented an entirely different view from the portrait of rural villagers leading a subsistence lifestyle in a “small community” as depicted by the sufficiency philosophy.

The opposition to the sufficiency philosophy and the struggle to achieve economic betterment was confirmed by the case of a Redshirt village called Ban Pangtui in Khonkaen (fieldwork note 12 May 2015). According to the Ministry of Interior (2010), Ban Pangtui was established in 2010 as a sufficiency economy model at the “sufficient to live and sufficient to eat” level. A key informant, Chareon, born in 1944, was one of the eldest in the village and had witnessed changes and development of Thailand’s countryside.³¹⁹ Chareon still called himself a farmer; his 20 rai of land was divided into three parts, including rice paddy field, cash crop and fish pond. However, Chareon did not want his two children to be “farmers” like himself: the eldest is a *kamnan* and the other a primary school teacher. Chareon wanted to improve his living standards and did not operate at a sufficiency level. The majority of his cash crops, palm trees, was intended for the market, rather than for the consumption in his household. Chareon also went to several seminars to learn more about agricultural business. More recently, he has been growing the so-called “*Dao Inca*” beans

³¹⁷ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

³¹⁸ Interview with Phon Chaorai, Ubonratchathani, 28 April 2015.

³¹⁹ Interview with Chareon, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

(scientifically known as *Sacha Inchi* originally from South America), the price of which is relatively high in Isan.³²⁰

Despite living in a sufficiency village project, Chareon often participated in Redshirt protests.³²¹ Ironically, Chareon's village actually became a Redshirt village.³²² He explained that the reason he became a Redshirt was because he wanted development. When asked what kinds of development he wanted to see most, he replied: "I will demand a high speed train. I would like to give an Isan lunch to my son in Bangkok daily".³²³ Chareon's statement seemed to be a demand for development of his province, including connectivity with the external world and, arguably, equality with Bangkok which was opposite to the aspirations informed by royal sufficiency.³²⁴

Such loyalty to Thaksin's populism and the rejection of sufficiency economy led to the creation of the Redshirt village project after the 2010 crackdown as echoed by Arnon:

We don't live in 'sufficiency' (*phophiang*). We used to have 300 baht a day. These days, people think getting paid 150 baht [a day] is alright. So, this is the reason I support the mushroom farm. Mushrooms are more competitive. I benefited from Thaksin's SME program. I've sold regularly. Altogether, I've already sold 500 bags. I've just ordered two tons of materials to produce more. My intention is within 4-5 years I'll promote it to become a SME.

Since the idea of sufficiency could not be followed, commercially viable alternatives had to be created. Most importantly, this competition was made possible by Thaksin's associated populist policies. Thus, the attempts to instruct villagers to live in their natal village and work in the agricultural sector were

³²⁰ While Dao Inca beans were introduced by the business network in which Chareon was involved, their price was high compared to that of rice and palm tree, due mainly to the belief among the Thais that *Dao Inca* beans can cure several disease, like Diabetes.

³²¹ According to Chareon, he participated in every protests of the Redshirt's held in Khonkaen.

³²² Interview with Chareon, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

³²³ Interview with Chareon, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

³²⁴ In Thailand, only in Bangkok that public transport, like the so-called sky trains and metro, are provided. But these means of transport are different from high speed trains which, if constructed, will involve and develop transportation to other provinces.

usually viewed by Redshirt villagers as attempts to control the rural populace and keep them politically passive. This is why they consistently voted for pro-Thaksin parties and became increasingly disinterested in the royal philosophy. As one key informant argued:

The power holders who have held power for hundreds of years tell people to make their living in sufficient ways. People are in debts and landless. Thaksin was an inspiration. When some people say that Thaksin isn't good, villagers won't like that. So many people have turned to love Thaksin. Somebody else is jealous from their lost love.³²⁵

Challenges Undermined

The challenges against sufficiency philosophy posed by the Redshirts were significantly undermined due to two main reasons: the fear of *lèse-majesté* and internal contestation among rival Redshirt factions. At the village level, challenges towards sufficiency philosophy and its related policies, especially the Sufficiency Economy Village Project, were significantly contained. Redshirt villagers were highly sensitive in discussing, let alone criticising, the sufficiency philosophy. This concern is related to the royalist ideology which still dominates Thailand (Thongchai 2014). Article 112 of the Criminal Code has particularly been used for political purposes, preventing the public from openly discussing issues related to the palace. This concern was well echoed by Arnon who was intimidated by a *lèse-majesté* charge: "But I only talked about cooperatives, I was almost got charged by article 112". Despite the lack of interest in sufficiency economy among most Redshirts, they were unable to openly express their views. Moreover, as royal sufficiency was incorporated into the Constitution and implemented through various laws and policies, such as the Sufficiency Village Project, royal sufficiency continues to exist and is practiced by the state, without regard for villagers' economic needs and desires. For the Redshirts, challenges to this ideology were unsayable. As one informant

³²⁵ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

villager put it: “[We] dare not to ‘cheat’ (*nokjai*) the throne. We’re still sufficient. But...”³²⁶

Secondly, internal fragmentation also undermined the Redshirts’ challenges in this regard. Similar to royal sufficiency advocates’ claims about the need to control “greed” in order to suppress Thaksin’s populism, Redshirt factions accused each other of seeking benefits and interests from their political activities. Redshirt projects such as the SML Fund and Redshirts’ cooperatives which extended from Thaksin-associated policies were subject to criticism in this regard. While the SML funds were allegedly biased in favour of Redshirt villages and excluded non-Redshirts, the Redshirts’ cooperatives were plagued by personal interests of the Redshirt village leaders, especially Arnon’s.³²⁷ Besides, these SML funds and cooperatives failed mainly because they were unsustainable and often unsupported by follow-up measures. Therefore, these populist policies could not serve as a real challenge or an alternative to the royal Sufficiency Economy Village Projects.

A prime example of self-interest allegations against other factions was made by Khwanchai against Arnon. Khwanchai argued that Arnon had established the Redshirt village movement out of self-interest. As Khwanchai stated: “Arnon cheated money from villagers. Collecting 500 to 1,000 baht from them. I won’t forgive him. He is not trustworthy. He has no principles (*jutyuen*)”.³²⁸ On the other hand, Khwanchai who established a Redshirt cremation fund and a Redshirt radio station, which is also the centre of People-love-Udon club, was similarly criticised for seeking to fulfil his own private agenda. Kongchai expressed his view on this matter:

We think that Khwanchai makes money. He got sponsors. He got rich. He also organised donations by asking for one thousand to five thousand baht in each village. There were altogether 100 villages. But he used the money to build the [Redshirt] Empire.³²⁹ If we are

³²⁶ This is expressed precisely as “dare not to cheat” (*nokjai* usually used among lovers). Interview with Nai, Khonkaen, 4 April 2015.

³²⁷ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

³²⁸ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

³²⁹ The headquarter of the People-love-Udon Club is known as the “Redshirt Empire”.

to fight one another, it is because he built the Empire which should belong to all Redshirts, not his wife. Bought land for 17 rai worth 30-40 million. He has speaking skills. He also sold T-shirts for 200-220 baht each. Written in every single shirt was “Love Thaksin Love Khwanchai”.³³⁰

From Kongchai’s perspective, it was Khwanchai who was seeking for his own benefits and interests, while for Khwanchai, it was not ideology or “principle” that led to the mobilisation of the Redshirt village movement but the pursuit of benefits. Because of such internal conflicts, the Redshirts’ finger-pointing allegations of benefit-seeking often lacked credibility.

Thai Nationalism and Isan Ethno-Regionalism

Thai Nationalism

Thai nationalism is a political ideology introduced by King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) (Wyatt 2003:212). Thai nationalism demands all Thais to be loyal to the nation, religion and king, while the Thai nation is tentatively constructed through a common, continued history and shared Thai identity. However, despite the portrayal of a continuous history, the Thai nation is an imagined community whose history is newly invented (Thongchai 2001). Thai identity which is based mainly on “Thainess” (*khwampenthai*) is vaguely and narrowly defined, and Thainess predominantly values “Thai race,” (central) “Thai” language and Thai culture over other values. While Thai nationalism never acknowledges ethno-cultural diversity and difference, different ethno-cultural aspects are portrayed as “otherness” and subject to be suppressed under the Thai ‘*siwilai*’ (civility) (Thongchai 2000:57). The attempt to establish homogenised Thai nationalism led to an implementation of a series of internal colonialist and assimilationist policies. A result of the implementation of these policies were reactions from ethnic minority groups. Isan people is the largest minority who has been subject to internal colonialism and assimilationist policies, but also have presented “resurrections” against the Thai nation-state.

³³⁰ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

Isan Ethno-regionalism

The fact that Isan is the stronghold of the Redshirt movement means that the movement could potentially capitalise on or even resurrect Isan ethno-regionalism. In the past, there were at least two major episodes of resurrection based on Isan ethno-regionalism/nationalism, namely the millenarian rebellion and the communist movement. When Siam was reformed to establish a modern state under King Chula (King Rama V; 1868-1910) in the early nineteenth century, Isan was a prime subject of suppression (Keyes 2013:35). The main purpose of Bangkok elites was to gain direct control over the region and achieve an effective central administration. According to Pattana, the rigid control of “Isan” formerly reached only the nearest area of Korat province,³³¹ and indigenous political elites were free to exercise power within their local areas. Thus, before the Chakri reforms, what is now Isan identity was defined according to local ethnic groups, but also as closer to Vientiane than Bangkok (Pattana 2003:26-27). The “states” in the Isan area inherited political culture and tradition from Laos as confirmed by the name of the areas which were previously called “Northeastern Laos” for Ubonratchathani, “Northern Laos” for Nongkhai and “Central Laos” for Korat (Term 1987:333).

Moreover, Dararat argues that the ‘regions’ (*phak*) as a governing unit were created by the Thai modern state only in 1922 and the term “phak Isan” was used to call this region because of its location in relation to Bangkok (Dararat 2000:57). Therefore, Lao people and other ethnic groups were “the others” in the eyes of the Siamese government, and their ethnic identities must be diminished and made “Thai” in the Thai modern nation-state (Pattana 2003:32-34). Siamese reforms led to introduction of a national education system, modern transport, and the indoctrination of consciousness of Thai citizens as well as harsh taxes and conscription (Pattana 2003:26). However, this consolidation which amounted to internal colonialism and assimilation also generated dissent and frustration among the local people. This internal colonialism and assimilation resulted in rebellions, especially Holy Men revolts, against Bangkok rulers (Keyes 2014; Pattana 2003).

³³¹ Korat is currently known as Nakornratchasima.

The Cold War era was another context in which Isan ethno-regionalism presented a threat to Thai nationalism. According to Keyes, the “Isan problem” had been a great concern of the Thai nation-state and the American military due to its geographical location close to communist-occupied Indochina. While economic difficulties and the similarity between the Laos people and the Isan people contributed to this concern, the Isan problem derived significantly from a long history during which Isan was subject to Bangkok’s suppression (Keyes 2013:10). In contrast, Suthep (2005:14) argues that the Isan problem arose mainly because Isan people still harbored an antagonistic view against the Thai nation-state. The combination of suppression and antagonistic conditions in Isan led to a belief that Isan would soon fall into communism and would resist against Bangkok. The woes and sufferings of Isan are depicted by Nai Phi (lit. specter; a penname of Atsani Polajan), a lawyer and poet, in his famous poem “Isan”³³² which reads:

In the sky there’s no water	In the soil only sand
Your tears falling in lines	Dissipate and disappear
The sun strikes your head	The land cracks and splits
Your chest heaves and moans	Shifting apart year- round
The great lake is Nong Han	The Mun River passes like a ghost
Allowing life like the Chi River	Penetrating and waiting
Look around in amazement	So, Isan is like this
Thinking in your heart	Things aren’t so good, are they?
Dear brothers and sisters	Where is sympathy?
Standing motionless	What do you wish for?
They claim that we’re stupid	These, our, friends, you see
Love you lastingly	So why do they seem lacking...
They call honesty foolish	Who is so virtuous [...] ³³³

Nai Phi, who worked in Patani and Isan, witnessed firsthand the parallel between Isan and Thailand’s southernmost provinces (Thailand’s only areas

³³² Atsani Polajan spells Isan as “อีสาน” as against an official version of “อิสาน”, arguably to emphasise the local history of Isan as different from the conventional Thai history.

³³³ Nai Phi translated by Martin Platt in Platt (2013:106).

still defined as being in a state of unrest). While Nai Phi discusses the three major Rivers in Isan, including the Mun, Chee and Nong Han (which are now located in Ubonratchathani, Khonkaen and Udonthani respectively), he depicts Isan as an impoverished place which, more importantly, has long been neglected by Bangkok. Between 1960 and 1983, Isan served as the main operation zone of the Communist Party of Thailand (Suthep 2005:13). The Thai government under the guidance of the US had to invest a large economic and military budget in Isan to prevent the region from falling under Communist domination and to win the hearts and minds of the Isan people (Keyes 2013:10).

Redshirts and Isan Ethno-regionalism

In colour-coded politics, the Isan Redshirts presented yet another threat based on Isan ethno-regionalism. Isan people, the majority of whom are ethnically Laos—three times higher than the Lao population in Laos itself (Keyes 2013:10)—have never been fully assimilated by Thai nationalism and constantly portrayed as inferior to Thais. Although numbering around 20 million – one third of Thailand’s population (Saowanee and McCargo 2015:2) – the voices of Isan people have continued to be neglected, as exemplified by the removal of their preferred governments. Such condescension played a vital role in consolidating “Isan consciousness” and led to the deployment of Isan ethno-regionalism to challenge Thai nationalism by Redshirt villagers. There were rare cases where Isan Redshirt informants could say that condescension to Isan people generated no frustration for them. As a Redshirt informant in Khonkaen replied after being asked if she felt angry to a statement that Isan people are Laos and silly: “I don’t feel angry. It is their matter. I can’t change people’s ideas”.³³⁴

Several Isan Redshirts showed frustration against such condescension or opponents who subjected Isan people to derision and ridicule. In this respect, expressions of frustration, such as “Isan people were looked down on. They called us Laos,”³³⁵ characterised the Redshirt movement in Isan after the 2010 military crackdown. Isan-ethno regionalism also surfaced in various Redshirt

³³⁴ Interview with Viman Punthukot, Khonkaen, 3 April 2015.

³³⁵ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

villages. What seemed to upset Isan Redshirts the most was the view that they were ignorant. Redshirts' reactions ranged from sadness to anger. When asked about her opinion regarding this contemptuous view of Isan people, one female informant in Khonkaen simply broke out in tears as she replied: "We are not ignorant dok."³³⁶ Another male who was asked the same question in contrast said: "In fact, ordinary 'villagers' (*chaoban* Isan) went to protest. They didn't get anything, as some people thought. They were willing to go themselves because they didn't receive political justice. They similarly know about democracy or even more than those highly educated!"³³⁷

Another theme which seemed to inflame Isan Redshirts and invoke Isanness was their opponents' accusation that they were hired protesters. One interviewee simply but quickly replied that: "it was not necessary to hire the Redshirts. They went themselves. They served (*borikan*) food and transport. It was the other side who was hired". Another informant, born in 1969 in Udonthani, said: "I felt 'disrespected' (*noiniatamjai* Isan) by the condescension on Isan people. It occurred from the 'abnormality' (*phitpokkati* Isan) of the country which separated people. Where can the people who have different opinions live? It's not going to end".³³⁸

Prominent among Isan ethno-regionalist Redshirts was Pichet Tabudda. Pichet argued that his struggle was a struggle against the suppression of Bangkok and to preserve Isan identity and dignity.³³⁹ Pichet viewed Bangkok people as the enemy, as "Isan people were condemned by Bangkok people most".³⁴⁰ For Pichet, to demand Isan dignity included demanding recognition and respect for Isan identity and language. More importantly, dignity would increase political power for Isan people. Pichet argued that the struggle of his Redshirt faction would also compensate for the sufferings of Isan people in the past. Thus, Pichet demanded the revival of Isan history, culture and "Isan civilisation". Pichet stated:

³³⁶ "Dok" is an Isan postscript. Interview with Tuk, Khonkaen, 26 May 2015.

³³⁷ Interview with a male informant (born 1961), Udonthani, 10 May 2015.

³³⁸ Interview with a male informant, Udonthani, 10 May 2015.

³³⁹ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 2 March 2015.

³⁴⁰ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

The [Isan] people know what is what. I want to speak Isan in parliament. The bureaucrats who will be sent to Isan must learn the Isan language. If they don't accept the language how are they going to respect the people? What they did to us just like we are silly. We have *Pha Taem* [a pre-historical heritage in Ubonratchathani]. We are a great civilisation and will be forever. They must remain the Isan identity. Don't force us too harshly. Otherwise, let them look at the Southern region [the southernmost provinces]. There is a tendency if [the suppression] has been much accumulated. In the future, don't look down on the Isan people.

The meaning of Pichet's statement was twofold. Firstly, insults towards the Isan language signified an insult towards Isan people.³⁴¹ Pichet's demand seems to invoke the argument made by Saowanee and McCargo (2016:225) that "language is not only a means of communication, but also indexes power relationships, identity and conflicts". Thus, for Pichet, respect had to begin with not insulting people's language. Secondly, it was necessary to demand dignity for Isan people, as Isan not only constitutes its own "civilisation" but is actually superior to Bangkok. In addition, Pichet foresaw that the lack of respect and recognition for Isanness would inevitably generate an unrest situation which characterised the contemporary southernmost province of Thailand.

Isan Ethno-regionalism Neutralised

The challenge of Isan ethno-regionalism posed by the Redshirts was neutralised due to two main reasons: Isan ethno-regionalism was divided and was not prioritised by the movement.

Isan Ethno-regionalism Divided

The main problem affecting Isan ethno-regionalism was the same divide-and-rule technique employed by Thaksin to control the Redshirt movement. Thaksin used this technique for two reasons: firstly, it undermined the strength of

³⁴¹ I myself generated alienation from an Isan ethno-regionalist at Ubonratchathani University when I first encountered her and greeted her in Central Thai. Even though in an "official" area, she found it unacceptable.

Thaksin's opponents; and secondly, it turned former enemies into Thaksin's allies. Thaksin's use of divide-and-rule tactics during the colour-coded politics began in his supporting former Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej to assume leadership of the People's Power Party (PPP). To deflect allegations of anti-monarchism against him and to boost his party's royalist image, Thaksin supported Samak, whose ideological orientation was often described as "exceedingly far-right" (*khwatokkhob*) and whose record of loyalty to the throne was beyond doubt.

It was arguably the deployment of the trio – Veera Musikapong, Jatuporn Promphan and Nattawut Saigua — to initially become the main UDD leaders that neutralised Isan ethno-regionalism within the Redshirt movement. During the Prem premiership, Veera was appointed to ministerial posts on three separate occasions between 1981 and 1983, including Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Deputy Minister of Transport and Deputy Minister of Interior. Thus, employing Veera as a UDD leader was arguably aimed at partly reducing Prem's support and charisma. Additionally, the trio are all Southerners—like Prem, who is originally from Songkhla.³⁴² The deployment of Southerners as the leaders of the UDD might appeal to some voters in the Democrat-dominated South. Nevertheless, such deployment had the effect of undermining Isan ethno-regionalism: while Isan people constituted the largest group of Redshirt supporters, they did not exercise national leadership of the movement.³⁴³

Isan Ethno-regionalism at Last?

At the local level, Isan ethno-regionalism was not prioritised as a significant agenda by local leaders, especially Khwanchai Praipana and Arnon Saenan. Isanness was ostensibly recognised and advocated by Khwanchai, as exemplified in the names of his Redshirt factions: the People-love-Udon Club and the People-love Isan Club. The People-love-Isan Club, which Khwanchai established after the emergence of Redshirt villages, implied that Khwanchai

³⁴² Veera is from Songkhla, Jatuporn from Suratthani, and Nattawut from Nakorn Si Thammarat.

³⁴³ Although Jatuporn was often called an "Isan son-in-law" because his wife is originally from Kalasin, Jatuporn consistently identified himself as a Southerner both on protest stages and in parliament. Interview with Chailap Uthitphan, Khonkaen, 9 June 2015.

was concerned with Isan regionalist issues because the Club, which comprised 20 representatives from 20 Isan provinces, sought to promote solidarity among the Isan Redshirts.³⁴⁴ Moreover, Khwanchai criticised the UDD and argued that the UDD took over power in controlling the Redshirts from Isan people who constituted the majority of the movement. Khwanchai asserted:

Every single province in Isan had supported the UDD to be famous. But now we started to know the 'truth' [*thatthae*]. What is their ideology?...I have never accepted any political post. Villagers love me and have faith in me. The UDD in Bangkok stole [the movement] from us.³⁴⁵

According to Khwanchai, it was necessary to increase political power for Isan people who comprised the majority of the Redshirt protesters. This statement, thus, suggested he would negotiate with the UDD in Bangkok. Nevertheless, Khwanchai's main agenda seemed to be an attempt to increase the role and power of his factions within the Redshirt movement. Khwanchai never explicitly expressed Isan ethno-regional issues or sentiments. Originally from the central province of Suphanburi, he was unable to speak Isan and, more importantly, made no attempt to learn the language or the significance of Isan ethno-regional issues. This lack of interest in Isan ethno-regional issues also applied to all his entourage, including his children.³⁴⁶

For many Isan people, leaders should possess special attributes, especially 'charisma' (*barami*). This belief generated the common belief among Isan people that their leaders must not be the same as themselves, which ironically led "outsiders" to become leaders of Isan people. The belief in outsider leaders was well expressed by one female Isan informant, born in 1954, who travelled across many districts to attend Khwanchai's birthday event: "I think he [Khwanchai] has merit and charisma in this way. He can talk (*wao* Isan) people.³⁴⁷ Capable of creating (*huabhuam* Isan) faith".³⁴⁸ In this regard,

³⁴⁴ Interview with Khwanchai Praipana, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

³⁴⁵ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

³⁴⁶ Fieldwork note 13 June 2015.

³⁴⁷ The expression "*wao khon* (talk people)" signifies the ability to communicate with, but also convince the listeners.

Khwanchai was exceptional in embracing Isan culture and translating faith into figures as demonstrated in his mobilisation for donation, merit-making and votes. Yet despite all his talk, an Isan ethno-regionalist Khwanchai is not.

Similarly, Arnon is not an Isan ethno-regionalist. According to Arnon the Redshirt village movement continued from a long tradition of fighting against Bangkok, and Isan people have been the ones who spearheaded the struggle.³⁴⁹ Arnon also argued that the Redshirts inherited a legacy of resistance from their Isan predecessors who fought against Bangkok rule before him. As Arnon stated:

Look at history. This was the region which opposed the power of Bangkok. Like the 66/23 order [known as the 66/1980 order], it suggested that it was not because we couldn't fight. There was the 7 August incident that marked the beginning of war between the Communist Party of Thailand and the Thai state. There were people who don't like Bangkok in Isan provinces. The fighting between the CPT and the Thai state ended in 1983. The Free Thai Movement also came to this area...Isan people had long suffered. They fought wars with people in Bangkok. But power is still with the *ammāt* and the king. Khrong Chandawong said that if the people are not yet the power owners, we still have to fight. Power belongs to the people.

However, Arnon never identified himself directly with Isan. He often mentioned that his ancestors came from the Northern province of Nan. The best evidence that Isan ethno-regionalism had never been significantly prioritised within the Redshirt village movement was the fact that every single proclamation ceremony conducted by Arnon was done in central Thai, supposedly on grounds of "convenience".³⁵⁰ As Arnon put it: "[T]he Isan people have been looked down on. They [the Redshirt opponents] call Isan people Laos. We played some Isan music in the proclamations. But I had to make

³⁴⁸ Interview with a female informant, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

³⁴⁹ Interview with Arnon Saenan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

³⁵⁰ Interview with Arnon Saenan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

proclamations in central Thai because it was easier”.³⁵¹ Nonetheless, even when proclamations were made in the Isan region, Arnon still used central Thai as the main language in the ceremonies.³⁵² Consequently, Pichet’s call for the revival of Isan ethno-regionalism was disregarded among more prominent local Redshirt leaders in Isan, such as Khwanchai and Arnon. Owing mainly to the internal fragmentation caused by divide-and-rule tactics and lack of interest among prominent local leaders, the Redshirt’s Isan ethno-regionalism against Thai nationalism was not radicalised, both at the national and local levels, in the post-2010 period.

State Security and Anti-Militarism

State Security

In their promotions of state ideology, security forces often invoke the necessity to protect “state security”. While the Thai military portrayed itself as a protector of state integrity and sovereignty against external forces, it was also concerned with the preservation of nation, religion and especially monarchy against internal threats. Among the most active organisations involved in such propaganda activities is the Internal Security Cooperation and Command (ISOC) and the Border Patrol Police, which are responsible for implementing policies and dealing with the masses. The most prominent security policy executed at the village level was the Village Scout Project, first implemented in rural villages in Isan during the Cold War era (Bowie 1997:105).

This project was an impeccable combination of the Thai ideological triad. According to Kawirat (2007), the village scout project aimed to create “mass ideology” (*udomkan muanchon*) to unite the Thai people regardless of differences in social status, classes, gender, civilian or military. While villages were selected for project participation on the basis of their propensity to be recruited by the Communist movement, the participants came together to preserve good Thai traditions and culture by creating “unity” (*khwamsamakki*), “good people” (*khondi*) and loyalty to nation, religion and king (Kaweerat 2007:

³⁵¹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

³⁵² Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

185-186). The fear of Communism escalated even further in Bangkok after Laos fell into Communism. Eventually, the Thai political elites supported right-wing groups, namely Village Scouts, to suppress the left (Kaweerat 2009:190). The necessity to maintain the institution of “nation, religion and king” was used to underscore the suppression of the communist movement. While the left were depicted as the enemies, the military and the state-sponsored right-wing groups were portrayed as the protector of the state security.

In the context of colour-coded politics, the Redshirts were similarly conceived as a “threat to state security” (*pai khwammankhong*).³⁵³ The clearest evidence was the redefined role and responsibility of the Internal Security Cooperation Command (ISOC) by the 2006 coup leader Sonthi Boonyaratklin (Han Krittian 2011:205). Established in 1965 under the support of the American CIA, the ISOC was designed to fight “communism” in the Cold War era.³⁵⁴ According to Han Krittian, “the biggest changes in ISOC’s post-Cold War organizational structure, however, took place after the 2006 coup in order to pave the way for the military’s re-entry into politics”. On 13 November 2006, Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont appointed General Sonthi as ISOC’s director.³⁵⁵ “[M]ost importantly, the work of the ISOC now covers the entire country with the military overseeing the entire operations”, and commanders of military 14 regions are placed in the position of ISOC regional directors overseeing all the country’s 76 provinces” (Han Krittian 2011:206). In the post-2010 period, in addition to deaths and injuries, a number of Redshirts were

³⁵³ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

³⁵⁴ Under the Chuan Leekpai government (1997-2001), despite the absence of Communist threat, the missions of ISOC were redefined and even expanded to embrace border security, narcotic suppression, minority issues, illegal immigration and the Southernmost insurgency (New ISOC 2007).

³⁵⁵ Among the most outstanding structural change was the increase in the number of ISOC deputy directors to nine; six of them are full generals, one police officer who was holding the position of Deputy Director-General of the Royal Thai police, and the other two were deputy secretaries of the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice. One police officer holding the position of Deputy Director-General of the Royal Thai police, and the other two were deputy secretaries of the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice. (Han Kritian 2011:206).

arrested and imprisoned by these security officers on charges related to security issues, especially *lèse-majesté* and terrorism.³⁵⁶

Anti-Militarism

The Redshirts rejected the representation created by the Thai security forces that they were a threat to state security. By contrast, they argued that their own security and civil rights were severely violated by the 2010 crackdown and subsequent military operations, which claimed the use of force was necessary for protecting state security.³⁵⁷ Anti-militarism became another ideological element unifying all Redshirt factions in the post-2010 crackdown period. The Redshirts challenged militarism in two critical aspects: disrupting military claims about state security and integrity and invoking Communist ideology.

Disrupting State Security and Integrity

After the 2010 crackdown, many Redshirts were imprisoned due to their participation in the protests. At least 22 Redshirts in Udonthani were arrested on charges concerning their protest.³⁵⁸ Redshirt villagers denied allegations that they were terrorists, insisting that they were protesting for political rights and participation. For the protesters, thus, such protests were not security issues. The original Redshirt villages emerged partly to challenge state claims that suppressing the Redshirts was necessary to secure the Thai state. Their priority was to demand for the release of “ordinary” political prisoners charged with terrorism.³⁵⁹ The Redshirts argued that their personal security was more important than state security. In this regard, Redshirt villagers defied state orders to stop their movement. For them, the proclamations expressed and represented their concern for the well-being of their fellow Redshirts.

The concern for Redshirts’ “human security” was also echoed by other Redshirt factions, especially Pichet, who was allegedly involved in the burning down of the Ubonratchathani provincial hall. Pichet argued that the reason why the provincial halls were burnt down was because the Redshirts were furious at

³⁵⁶ Another legal case in which the Redshirts were charged with *lèse-majesté* .

³⁵⁷ Interview with Pichet Thabutda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

³⁵⁸ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

³⁵⁹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

the state. The burning was meant to provoke public attention and to avenge the killings of Redshirts in 2010. Pichet argued:

The people own public property. The people should be entitled to [public property]. They asked me whether I am 'sad' (*saijai*) that I burnt the [Ubonratchathani] Provincial Hall. But I want to ask them are they sad that they killed people. They killed the Redshirts. Those who ordered have power and money, so they could get away with it. In the court, there were 4 soldiers, 80 riot policemen and attorney listening. The lawyers told us to accept. But I wanted to tell that it was the soldiers who started shooting first.³⁶⁰

For Pichet, the burning of state buildings not only represented the Redshirts' frustration but involved rejecting state's claims about security after the 2010 military suppression. As Pichet himself again concluded: "[W]e set fire at 7 points simultaneously in Ubonratchathani because we wanted them to listen to us".³⁶¹

Closely related to the security issue was the Redshirts' challenge to state integrity. The village occupations by Redshirt villagers challenged territorial integrity which has constantly been a great concern of the Thai state. Proclaiming villages without the state's authorisation can also be regarded as a violation of sections 113-118 of the Criminal Code concerning the Internal Security of the Kingdom, including treason against the state.³⁶² Conducting such ceremonies without pictures of the king and queen was a further element of provocation.³⁶³ This conjunction of legal violations and the absence of loyalty was deemed a threat to state integrity. The resulting state of anxiety among security forces led to allegations that the Redshirt village movement was seeking to overthrow the Thai polity itself. As Kongchai explained:

The fact that we had a picture of Thaksin sized 2.20x2.40 metres made them fearful. So, we put it in front of our house. Then, we also

³⁶⁰ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

³⁶¹ Interview with Pichet Thabutda, Udonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

³⁶² Interview with Worawit Pongngam, Udonratchathani, 30 May 2015.

³⁶³ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

put a picture of Yingluck. Our opponents, especially the bureaucrats, said we favoured a 'republic regime' (*rabob satharanarath*).³⁶⁴

Security concerns among the state agencies increased following the emergence of signs in March 2014 calling for the creation of the Democratic Republic of Lanna (*so po po Lanna*) which threatened to create a secessionist movement (*Phujatkan* 2 March 2014). State agencies made their concerns extremely clear. According to Arnon, the District Chief of Muang District in Udonthani called in the Redshirt village leaders for interrogation and demanded that Redshirt signs and pictures be removed.³⁶⁵ The ISOC also alleged Redshirt villages were a safe haven for terrorists and "mafias".³⁶⁶ However, Redshirt villagers refused to follow these commands. For the Redshirts, the village proclamations represented their right to protest. Kongchai recalled:

The district chief asked us to put down the signs and pictures. He called me to visit him at the district hall and ordered us to take down all signs and pictures, saying a redshirt village was a 'state within' (*rathson*). The ISOC officers said a redshirt village was a safe haven of 'mafias' (*klumitthipon*). However, we refused to put down flags and pictures, arguing such symbols were only a symbolic protest and fight against what we found unjust. It was a peaceful means.³⁶⁷

Communism

In 2013, the Redshirt village movement took a new turn that challenged state security agencies. On 2 March 2013, Arnon made a public declaration in Udonthani that the Redshirt village movement would cooperate with the so-called Fellow Developers of the Thai Nation (*Nation Weekly*, 11 March 2013:25). The Fellow Developers of the Thai Nation (hereinafter *pho ro tho* or Fellow Developers)³⁶⁸ were former members of the Communist Party of Thailand or *pho kho tho* who were granted amnesty due to the 66/23 Order promulgated by

³⁶⁴ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

³⁶⁵ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

³⁶⁶ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

³⁶⁷ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

³⁶⁸ *Phuruam pattana chat Thai*.

the Prem government.³⁶⁹ Featuring in this declaration of cooperation were Sakchai Promtho, the *pho ro tho* leader; Parot Chaloesaen, the Secretary of the People's Party of 2013; and the co-developers from 20 Isan provinces (*Nation Weekly*, 11 March 2013:25). Arnon argued that the purpose of the cooperation between the Redshirt village movement and the former CPT members was a pre-emptive measure against militarism. According to him, "the army is really afraid of us because we cooperate with former communists. They said that we are Thaksin's army".³⁷⁰

It was not until late 2013 that the cooperation between the Redshirt village movement and the former CPT members was crucially consolidated. This consolidation was a reaction of the Redshirt village movement to the PDRC which had started to occupy Bangkok since November 2013. Arnon was highly frustrated by the PDRC's mission to "shutdown Bangkok". For Arnon, the PDRC was "protected" by the military and, therefore, was hard for the Yingluck government to control.³⁷¹ During this period the Redshirt village movement was assisted by radical CPT members. The leading figure was Surachai Saedan, a staunch Communist who had been imprisoned for "half of his life" due to charges related to Communism and other security issues – most recently on 112 charges.³⁷² Arnon highly admired Surachai and compared Surachai with leading activists in the past, namely Tiang Sirikhan, Khlong Jandawong and Jit Phumisak.³⁷³

Arnon particularly praised Surachai for his ability and skills in public speaking, which later proved crucial to the expansion of the Redshirt village movement. For his part, Surachai apparently considered the Redshirt village movement as similar to the CPT's means of mass mobilisation. The participation of Surachai in several Redshirt village proclamations significantly boosted Redshirt morale. As Arnon put it: "Surachai Saedan came to help me in 2013. He has the spirit. At some ceremonies where there were only 20 villagers attending,

³⁶⁹ According to the 66/23 law, the conflicts between the Thai state and the Communist Party of Thailand was to be solved by political means in place of military means.

³⁷⁰ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

³⁷¹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

³⁷² Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

³⁷³ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

he still spoke for two hours. And the villagers always felt encouraged (*huekhoem*)".³⁷⁴ This cooperation between Arnon and the former CPT members not only allied the Redshirt village movement with new forces but also strengthened Arnon's faction. More importantly, this cooperation presented new challenges to the state security apparatus.

Anti-Militarism Undermined

The challenges against the discourse of state security posed by the Redshirts in the post-2010 period were eroded by three ideational elements including communism without ideological essence, the distortion by the state security apparatus, and the challenge posed by other Redshirt factions.

Communism without Essence

The incorporation of communism into the Redshirt village movement lacked any real ideological substance, and the so-called communist element within the Redshirt village movement was extremely small. The main reason driving Arnon to cooperate with the former CPT members derived from two factors. Firstly, the cooperation between the Redshirt village movement and the former CPT members came about because the embattled Arnon needed new allies: Arnon's faction (the Assembly of Redshirt Villages) had fallen out with other original Redshirt village leaders (Federation of the Redshirt villages). Hence, this cooperation was Arnon's attempt to expand and strengthen his faction, rather than reflecting any personal communist convictions on his part.

Secondly, this cooperation was driven by the fact that the remedial programme for the *pho ro tho* was revived by the Yingluck government. While this programme was presided over by Deputy Prime Minister Chaloe Yubamrung, it was first put into effect by Suporn Atthawong on 21 February 2013 with five former Communists groups (*Nation Weekly*, 11 March 2013:25). Arnon's cooperation with former communists—which resulted in the establishment of a group called "the Assembly of the *pho ro tho* of the Thai Nation"—can thus be viewed as an attempt to use state funds to strengthen his Redshirt village faction and increase his own power. At the same time, this

³⁷⁴ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

cooperation also signified frustration with Pheu Thai's lack of action to combat the PDRC movement. In this respect, the emergence of a so-called communist strand within the Redshirt village movement had no real substance.

Distortion

Despite the fact that there was no real substance to the idea of communist Redshirts, the state security forces treated this cooperation between the Redshirt village movement and former communists as a serious threat. The "Communists Redshirts" were actually demanding the protection of an elected government, rather than seeking to seize state power. However, the ISOC and Ministry of Interior officials proceeded to visit Redshirt leaders and "invited" them to undergo interrogation. The allegation of a Communist threat to the nation's security was exaggerated because the main purpose of the state security forces was to delegitimise the Redshirt village movement. While Khwanchai's People-Love-Udon Club is the prime target of the security forces,³⁷⁵ several other leaders, namely Pichet and Kongchai were verbally accused of being Communists by members of the security forces or Ministry of Interior officials.³⁷⁶ The army used these pretexts to revive its counter-insurgency mission: for the military, communist threats arguably never die. As a result, the Redshirts were now portrayed as a threat to state security, much like the Communists of previous decades. The prime evidence is the state order issued to the ISOC to deal with the Redshirt movement.³⁷⁷ Arnon explained:

When Abhisit was Prime Minister, Redshirt villages were faced with several allegations, including having an 'army' (*kongthap*) and being communists. They also said we were 'anti-monarchists' (*lomjao*). Similarly, the army accused us of being secessionists. Our villages were overlapping with the 'Thai jurisdiction' (*pokkhong thabson*). The ISOC officers and the police have made several inspections at Redshirt villages in Rayong [an eastern seaboard province].

³⁷⁵ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

³⁷⁶ Interview with Pichet Thabutda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

³⁷⁷ Interview with Sompong Chanpuang, Ubonratchathani, 4 March 2015.

These charges against the Redshirt leaders proved effective in suppressing the Redshirt's challenges against the military.

Internal contestation

The challenge to military influence by the Redshirts was also undermined by internal contestation among Redshirt leaders. The most contentious issue was the way the Redshirt leaders use "militarism" to verify what they called "ideology" or commitment and loyalty to the movement. While the experiences of encounter against the military proved precarious, these experiences proved to be a threshold to prevent emerging Redshirt leaders. Those Redshirts who lacked experience in "fighting" against the military or had not encountered violence might be ironically classified as "fake" Redshirts or lacking in "ideology". Various Redshirt leaders had experienced violence and military suppression during the street protests, and these experiences were used as proof of ideology and loyalty to the Redshirts. In this regard, Khwanchai might be said to have both ideology and commitment as he narrowly escaped an assassination in 2014:

On 18 December 2008, I was severely hit; almost died. On 22 January 2014, I was shot; almost died. If I hadn't done any good things, I wouldn't be able to survive from getting shot...Then the 9 Regiment Army which acted as security guards of the PDRC on Changwattana Road. These soldiers were deployed from Kanchanaburi Province. They were hired 2,000 baht a day. The gunmen who fired gun shots at me were from Yala Province [a Southernmost Province of Thailand]. They were professional.

Similarly, Kongchai referred to his protest experiences as proof of his ideology and loyalty:

We 12 people went together in a van. They hit and damaged our van. The one before us was set on fire. I was thinking; I was going to die. There were bombs throwing at us. They said when seeing us, they would shoot us. Many elderly got injured. We used to hit the PAD, but we never thought that we would kill them. But as soon as

they called us Redshirts, they shouted “get them get them”. We had to run for our lives in different directions with my wife. My shoe was lost. [Laughs]. Luckily, there was a nice taxi driver coming nearby. I got only 20 baht in my pocket. I said “Brother this is what I got. Please take me to another place”. There were a hundred people running after us. They treated us as if we were not human beings. Look at us. The average age was 60s or 70s. Even running we almost lost consciousness.

However, the main target of this contestation was Arnon because Arnon became a Redshirt leader only after the 2010 military crackdown when several prominent leaders had been arrested and imprisoned. Due to Arnon’s lack of experience of violence at the hands of the military, Khwanchai argues that Arnon was only an opportunist and, hence, lacked ideology.³⁷⁸

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the Redshirts’ challenges to dominant state ideology and policies. It showed that there was disillusionment among Redshirt villagers concerning state ideology. To investigate the ideological challenges facing the Redshirt village movement, the chapter draws from the Redshirt leaders, village headmen as well as Redshirt villagers in exceptional spaces. These exceptional areas include a village designated for veterans in War against Communism, a sufficiency economy village, and a Democrat-dominate district. While these Redshirt villagers and exceptional spaces were once caught under the ideological spell of the state, they have switched allegiance to Redshirt protestors or supporters.

In the first section, this chapter explained how Redshirt villagers challenged Thai-style democracy. This section showed that in the post-2010 military crackdown, the Redshirts continued to adopt the notion of *ammattayathipatai* to challenge their opponents. While the Redshirts demanded justice for political prisoners and those who lost their lives in the military crackdown, the Redshirt village movement particularly staged protests

³⁷⁸ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

against the royalist demands for a royally-appointed Prime Minister. Nevertheless, due to internal fragmentation, the Redshirt challenge to the aristocrats was weakened. The attempt to compromise with the *ammatt* and to create an “elite consensus” eventually undermined the Redshirt’s challenges in this regard. The 2013 Amnesty Bill proposed by Pheu Thai critically caused frustration among the Redshirts who defied the aristocrats.

In the second section, the chapter investigated the Redshirts’ affection for Thaksin’s populism and their objections to the royalist philosophy of sufficiency economy. Most Redshirt informants expressed their preference for Thaksin’s populist policies, especially the Village Fund project, and many personally admired Thaksin as a capable and caring Prime Minister. For many Redshirt villagers, populist policies gave them better access to loans and helped some of them build their own businesses as small entrepreneurs. By contrast, most of the interviewees objected to the state’s ideological rhetoric on the sufficiency economy. There were two main issues underlying this objection. Firstly, the royally-guided sufficiency economy is impractical and inconsistent with their economic desires and livelihoods. A prime example is Chareon who lives in a designated sufficiency economy village. Although still identifying himself as a farmer, Chareon cultivated diverse cash crops to sell in the market rather than to consume in his household. Chareon simply had no interest in sufficiency economy. A similar view was shared by a couple who had lived in a southern Province for 26 years and used to vote for the Democrat Party, but are now Redshirts; they contended that the instruction to live sufficiently was a propaganda of the rich. For the poor, sufficiency is insufficient. The necessity of connecting with the external world and increasing economic desires also led Redshirt villagers to object the sufficiency economy.

The third section examined Isan ethno-regionalism within the Redshirt movement against Thai nationalism as emphasised by the establishment. It showed that Pichet is the most vocal Isan ethno-regionalist who usually evokes Isan independence history and its rebellious legacy throughout his movement. Pichet also demanded more political power for Isan. Similar ideas were expressed by some Redshirt supporters arguing that the Thai nation does not

include them. However, Isan-ethno-regionalism is mild within the movement as a whole. Firstly, the idea was impeded by Thaksin's divide-and-rule strategy which employed a trio of southerners as the leaders of the UDD. While the trio proved significant in separating Prem's network, Isan ethno-regionalism was not a significant political agenda for the trio and, thus, the UDD. At the local level, the struggle for recognition for Isan identity was further exacerbated by both Khwanchai and Arnon. Although Khwanchai understood Isan culture well and deployed Isan cultural elements in his mobilisational methods, exemplified by his mobilisation for money donation for merit, for all his talk, Khwanchai is from a central province of Suphanburi and, more importantly, showed no interest in performing Isan identity. Similarly, Arnon has never portrayed himself as an Isan descendant, making all proclamations in central Thai. Due to these factors, Isan ethno-regionalism was mild despite having the potential to erupt since Isan was the Redshirts' stronghold and the demand was raised by Pichet.

In the last part, the chapter explored state security which was usually invoked by the state to suppress the Redshirt dissidents. Redshirt villagers argued against the allegation that the Redshirts were a threat to state security. For the Redshirts, the provocation of state security was aimed at suppressing their opinions and voices, while legitimising militarism. The Redshirts' view of the military was highly negative. They considered military domination and post-2010 operations as violating their rights and security. Local leaders, namely Khwanchai, Pichet and Arnon were subject to military harassment, apart from facing legal charges. Yet, the Redshirts' anti-militarism was undermined by the lack of substance in their "ideological" challenge, the distortion by security officers and internal contestation among Redshirt factions. Nevertheless, the presence of the Redshirts' challenges prompted a virulent backlash from the military following the May 2014 coup, comprising both outright coercive methods and ideological re-indoctrination and moral teaching deployed against the Redshirts.

Chapter Six: The 2014 Military Coup and Redshirt Villagers

Introduction

This chapter answers the secondary research question: “what repercussions did the 2014 coup have for Redshirt villagers?” Although a body of literature has recently attempted to shed light on Thailand’s 2014 coup, including a special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, a fuller understanding of this latest military putsch is still needed. Baker (2016:393), for example, explains the 2014 coup from a broader historical perspective but tends to ignore accounts from individuals who were critically affected by the incumbent military regime. Similarly, Veerayuth (2016:487) analyses the emergence of the coup but focuses instead on the connection between the 2014 putsch and the “rise of a professional and official elite”. According to Veerayuth, Thailand’s latest coup occurred mainly because this elite bloc desired to reconfigure the Thai polity, to control politicians’ rent-seeking behaviours, and to pursue “reign-seeking” or appointments of unelected agencies. However, for Chambers and Napisa (2016:425), the 2014 coup was not only incentivised by material interests but also connected to the Thai monarchy since this latest military putsch was also driven by ideology, ritual and other underlying processes – what they called a “monarchised military”. While this literature significantly contributes to our understanding of the 2014 coup, it largely explains the coup from a top-down, Bangkok-centric perspective, leaving out perspectives from Isan, the Redshirts’ most significant stronghold, and from other regional Redshirt groups which were critically affected by the 2014 coup.

The present chapter bridges this gap by examining the repercussions of the 2014 coup on Redshirt villagers in Isan. The chapter draws mainly from interviews with Redshirt political prisoners, particularly the so-called Khonkaen Model prisoners, and observations of the military One Thai One Common Heart Programme – a programme designed to indoctrinate Redshirt villagers with state ideology. This chapter illustrates the diverse techniques employed by the military regime to suppress Redshirt villagers in the aftermath of 22 May 2014. It shows that the Thai army not only used conventional means of coercion, such

as arrests, imprisonment, intimidation and harassment, but also employed more nuanced tactics of control, such as indoctrination and morality-based propaganda. These measures of coercion and control functioned to weaken the Isan Redshirt movement, and dismantle the connection between villagers and Thaksin's forces. The chapter argues that the main aim of the junta's policies and practices towards Redshirt protesters was to exclude rather than include them politically — this was not really about 'reconciliation'.

This chapter begins by illustrating the divide-and-rule methods used by the military. As demonstrated in the case of Khonkaen Model prisoners, the junta punished a group of villagers to create a demonstration effect which, in turn, would serve as a deterrent to other Redshirt villagers and separate the Redshirts from network Thaksin. In the second section, the chapter shows that the junta further exacerbated conflicts and cleavages within the Redshirt movement in Isan by co-opting selected individuals, while treating the majority of hardline Redshirt dissidents harshly. This tactic created discontent among some local leaders. The third and last sections explore the junta's deployment of more subtle psychological techniques, such as "nationalist" indoctrination and "royalist" morality, to control Redshirt villagers. The underlying goal was to silence and subordinate Redshirt villagers. While these techniques could function individually, they were closely interrelated in dismantling and disabling the Redshirts. Redshirt villagers were systematically suppressed by fear and subjected to censorship and depoliticisation. Before embarking on the first section, a brief review of the ostensible reasons for the 2014 coup will help to set the scene.

Pretexts for the 2014 Coup

From early November 2013, in the wake of the proposed Blanket Amnesty Bill, the Yingluck government encountered near daily protests by the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC).³⁷⁹ Veteran Democrat politician Suthep Thaugsuban had resigned as an MP to lead the PDRC demonstrators, comprising mostly former Yellowshirts, members of the Bangkok middle class and upper

³⁷⁹ Formally known as the People's Committee for Absolute Democracy with the King as Head of State.

southerners, to oppose the Blanket Amnesty Bill in Bangkok (Pavin 2014:171). On 9 December 2013, after months of intense pressure, Yingluck dissolved parliament and called for a snap election (*Matichon* 9 December 2013), aiming to use popular support to regain political power. But the PRDC were not satisfied and escalated their protests. As Sopranzetti argues, “[T]he conservative mobilization had demanded the deposition of elected Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra”, and also “the complete dismissal of the Thaksin system [...]” (Sopranzetti 2016:299). The PRDC protesters claimed that the reason they continued the struggle despite the proposed Amnesty Bill being dropped was because they were fighting for ‘political reform’ (*kanpatirup*). The PDRC proceeded to disrupt the snap general election held on 2 February 2014 and create political chaos, apparently aiming to provoke a military intervention. As Pavin observes, “[I]t is clear that the protestors worked closely with the military to disparage electoral politics” (2014:171). Working closely with the PDRC, the opposition Democrat Party also boycotted the February polls, claiming that the ruling Pheu Thai government abused the electoral principles and was concerned solely with Thaksin’s interests.

The February 2014 election was substantively disrupted by the PDRC protesters. On 2 February, the voting day, voting were disrupted in 127 of Thailand’s 375 constituencies (McCargo 2015:342). There was no disruption in the north and northeast. Electoral disruption was caused mainly in parts of Bangkok and the upper southern provinces; no polling took place in nine southern provinces, all in Democrat heartlands.³⁸⁰ According to Prajak (2016:468), the PDRC’s electoral disruption created a significant change in the pattern of electoral violence in Thailand. Unlike targeted killings of political entrepreneurs such as politicians, candidates and vote canvassers, which are more common in Thai electoral politics, the PDRC was the first violent mob to openly disrupt electoral processes and institutions. The election was yet again nullified by the Constitutional Court on 21 March 2014 (*Prachatai* 21 March

³⁸⁰ These provinces included Songkhla, Trang, Phatalung, Phuket, Suratthani, Ranong, Krabi, Chumphon and Phang-nga. Moreover, in an attempt to boycott the 2014 election, no candidates registered to run for the election in twenty-eight southern constituencies (McCargo 2015:341-342).

2014).³⁸¹ On 20 May 2014, in order to restore “peace and order”, the Royal Thai Army imposed martial law on Thailand (*Matichon* 20 May 2014). Led by General Prayuth Chan-o-cha, the Commander-in-chief, the military invited representatives of the four conflicting sides, namely the Redshirts, the PDRC, Pheu Thai and the Democrats, to the negotiation table in order to find solutions and solve disagreements among them (Sopranzetti 2016:299). The bogus negotiations proved to be part of a camouflaged coup: the invitation was designed to neutralise possible resistance to a military power seizure (Wassana 2014:181). Eventually, on 22 May 2014, the Royal Thai Army led by Prayuth staged the twelfth successful coup (and the nineteenth coup attempt) since the abolition of absolute monarchy in 1932 (Suthachai 2014). Contending that no agreement could be reached and that there were no other solutions, Prayuth abruptly declared, “Therefore, from this minute. I must seize the power to govern the country” (Wassana 2014:191). While the abrupt coup declaration violated the military’s previous public posture that coups were obsolete and inappropriate, it also made the Redshirt leaders invited unable to mobilise immediate resistance.

Unfinished Project

After the 2014 coup, the army heavily consolidated its power through the implementation of force and “law” with very rare exception. Unlike previous coups, including its 2006 predecessor, the 2014 putsch did not follow the conventional coup practice in Thailand. According to McCargo (2014), recent Thai military coups have traditionally involved a short-lived military junta followed by the appointment of an interim government, usually headed by a military General or highly respected person. Then, a new constitution was drafted and finally an election would be held. McCargo (2015:344) argues that the 2014 coup-makers, ‘had torn up the script’ and instigated a series of actions which diverged from the conventional process of coup staging. Unconventional process elements included silence from the palace, sustained security, clampdown on dissidents and centralisation of power under Prayuth and heavy

³⁸¹ The February 2014 poll was found unconstitutional by 6 judges (out of 9) of the Constitutional Court.

repression. The main reason for this consolidation was that pro-Thaksin's influence had not been significantly removed by the 2006 coup and pro-Thaksin parties were able to return to power after the 2007 and 2011 elections. Thus, the Army believed that this time harsher measures were needed. Another reason concerned an off-limits question which, at that time, potentially divided the nation: the uncertainty surrounding the royal succession and the subsequent political transition. The traditional elites, including the military, found it necessary to stage a coup to take full control of power during the transitional period of the Thai monarchy. As Pavin (2014:171) notes, "the recent putsch [2014 coup] was primarily a scheme to ensure that the military and the traditional elite would dominate the royal transition; yet, it was carried out in the name of protecting democracy" (Pavin 2014:170).

Unlike the 2006 coup-makers who swiftly set about preparing a new constitution, installed an interim government, and transferred power to neutral/independent figures or bodies, the Prayuth-led junta concentrated power within the military and initially suspended all other conventional processes (McCargo 2015:344). Moreover, to ensure its power, the NCPO announced a "Road Map" plan for Thailand (*Prachatai* 31 May 2014). The plan was supposed to reform Thai politics and pull the country out of the cycle of conflict, and was divided into three stages. The first stage is the coup period and the subsequent enforcement of the orders of the coup-makers. The second stage is the establishment of the "National Legislative Assembly" (NLA), the cabinet and National Reform Council (NRC). After reaching the first and second stages, the third stage would involve the holding of an election and the formation of an elected government. In reality, these proclaimed processes provided excuses for the Prayuth regime to solidify its power. A prime example is while the NLA comprised 200 members to oversee the drafting process of a new "permanent" constitution, 106 of the 200 members were serving or retired military officers (Pavin 104:172). The same NLA then approved Prayuth to become the 29th Prime Minister of Thailand. When the junta's cabinet was formed, it became clearer that both the traditional elites and the military aimed to completely eradicate the influence of their arch enemy – Thaksin Shinawatra (Baker

2016:388). It was within this context that the Redshirt village network was critically suppressed by the military's coercive measures and nuanced control.

Suppression

The 2014 coup-makers created one of the most repressive regimes Thailand has experienced. According to Thongchai, after the 2014 military putsch was staged, "Thai democracy is gone but won't return anytime soon". This latest military regime is most comparable with those that followed the 1957 and 1976 coups, which are considered to be the most authoritarian in Thailand's history (cited in Drennan 2014). The reason provided by Prayuth was the need to restore peace and order after an extended period of "unsolvable conflicts" (Wassana 2014:186). Prayuth also insisted that the NCPO had no policy to support "any kind of abuses against the people, crimes against humanity, to cause humiliation against human dignity, or to use murder, torture or rape against its opponents" (Pavin 2014:176). Nevertheless, Redshirts' accounts revealed abusive conditions under the Prayuth regime. By branding the 2006 coup as "too soft" (*nomnaem*) (Wassana 2014:167), Prayuth justified his heavy-handed regime by arguing that strong power was necessary otherwise Thailand would fall back to the same colour-coded conflicts in the past. Prayuth employed different measures in order to solidify his power and suppress dissidents.

Nationwide, the 2014 coup-makers closed down public spaces right after the coup was staged. The 2007 Constitution was shredded, and civil and political rights were suspended. Political gatherings of more than five persons were outlawed. Media broadcasting criticisms of the government were shut down, and freedom of expression was severely restricted. According to the Thai non-governmental organisation Thai Netizen Network (2014), which monitors freedom of expression on cyberspace, 219 websites that criticised the junta were totally closed down or partly blocked within the first week after the coup.³⁸² The 2014 coup-makers filed legal charges against dissidents based

³⁸² The websites affected included the transnational media CNN, Human Rights Watch and the domestic media *Prachatai*.

simply on criticisms made on social media.³⁸³ The main targets of the 2014 coup-makers were Thaksinite political figures. Among the most prominent figures arrested and detained were those who were invited to the negotiations on 21 May 2014 and again on 22 May 2014, from Pheu Thai politicians, such as Yingluck Shinawatra, to prominent UDD leaders, such as Thida Thavornseth, Weng Tojirakarn, Jatuporn Promphan and Nattawut Saigua. Due to the highly centralised and top-down structure of the movement, the Redshirts were critically affected and paralysed by the arrest of the national UDD leaders. The Redshirts' ability to stage protests was immediately crippled when the coup occurred.

Apart from Pheu Thai politicians and UDD leaders, the junta also arrested and detained a number of individuals, and the main targets were the Redshirts. The military stripped away the Redshirts' basic rights, with the rampant use of "legal" charges, arrests, and imprisonment. As of 30 April 2017, there have been at least 159 law cases brought by the NCPO, and at least 494 people were charged with, *inter alia*, lese-majesté, illegal political protests, instigator to violate Constitution (Article 116 of the Criminal Code) or illegal public assembly (Thai Lawyer for Human Rights 2017:5-6). Several Redshirts were detained for interrogation for up to seven days,³⁸⁴ and upon release these individuals were forced to sign an agreement not to mobilise their followers or engage in politics (Pavin 2014:173). Those who refused or failed to report themselves to the military after being summoned could face up to two years of imprisonment, or up to 40,000 baht (£800) of fine (Pavin 2014:172).³⁸⁵ The

³⁸³ A prime case was the arrest of Sombat Boonngamanong (also known as Nu Ling), the leader of the Red Sunday group, based on his Facebook criticism against the coup-makers (*Thairath* 5 June 2014).

³⁸⁴ It is noteworthy that although all detainees were detained by the NCPO for up to seven days, which is not "long" according to the international standards, the sustained and widespread suppression under the Prayuth regime is unprecedented and more severe compared to other coups. Besides, many detainees were arrested on more than one occasions and some were further "legally" charged often with retrospective charges. A good example is Prasit Chaisrisa, a Pheu Thai Surin MP and Redshirt leader, were charged with *lèse-majesté* and imprisoned for two and a half years (*Post Today* 26 March 2016).

³⁸⁵ Most of the individuals who were summoned are afraid of legal charges and reported themselves. However, there are at least 6 cases of such punishment, and the

repressive nature of the regime was also reflected in the crackdown on Redshirt sympathisers or coup critics, many of whom had to flee as far as Europe, Australia, the United States and Japan (Sopranzetti 2016:304).³⁸⁶ Those who could not flee surrendered, were arrested and forced to sign an agreement that they would refrain from involvement in politics (iLaw 2016). Primarily out of concern for their safety, most former detainees refrained from opposing the coup, publicly criticising the junta or participating in political activities after their release. These coercive measures proved critical in suppressing the Redshirt movement.

Isan Redshirts

Isan Redshirts were the main target of the military's suppressive measures both extensively and intensively. Unlike the post-2010 crackdown period during which Isan offered numerous oppositional spaces, as demonstrated in the emergence of Redshirt villages, the 2014 junta has extensively closed the local areas of the Redshirts in Isan. All Isan Redshirt factions were suppressed, and every local leader was arrested and detained almost immediately after the coup occurred.³⁸⁷ In Ubonratchathani, Pichet abandoned his initial plan to take refuge in Laos and turned himself in out of concern for his family's safety.³⁸⁸ In Udonthani, the three top local Redshirt leaders, namely Arnon, Kongchai and Khwanchai, were prime targets of the military, although the suppressive tactics towards them were different. In pursuing Arnon, who also had a plan to escape to Laos, the military forced Arnon not to resist and to give himself up by threatening to detain his father.³⁸⁹ In a similar manner, Kongchai the village headman of the original Redshirt village was forced to remove pictures of

fine varied from 500 to 20,000 baht. For example, Sombat received a fine of 3,000 baht and 2 month imprisonment for not reporting to the NCPO (iLaw 2017).

³⁸⁶ An example is an anti-royalist critic Somsak Jiamterasakul who is in self-exile in France.

³⁸⁷ Otherwise they had to escape to other counties. Interview with Tuk, Khonkaen, 26 May 2015.

³⁸⁸ Interview with Pichet Thabutda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

³⁸⁹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

Thaksin, red flags and symbols associated with the Redshirt movement and threatened with prosecution.³⁹⁰

In order to suppress Redshirt leaders in Isan, the military also used divide-and-rule techniques. The prime example was the case of Khwanchai. Khwanchai was “invited” for interrogation at the Udonthani military camp on 22 May 2014, the very day of the coup.³⁹¹ Khwanchai was relatively co-operative, arguably because he had been injured in a bungled assassination attempt on 22 January 2014, and he was entangled in various legal cases. The army from the Udonthani Military Camp took control of the People-Love-Udon headquarters: the compound containing Khwanchai’s office and his home was occupied by around 100 soldiers for several months (*Komchadluek* 26 May 2016). However, the difference in the treatment meted out to Khwanchai in May 2014, compared to the post-2010 crackdown period when he was immediately legally charged and imprisoned, was arguably a ploy by the military to destroy the solidarity and morale of the movement. The military wanted to demonstrate to other leader and villager Redshirts that their most prominent leader in Isan had surrendered and cooperated with the military. By arresting and detaining local leaders, the military was able to suppress the Redshirts in Isan region. Bereft of any leadership, local Redshirt factions did not stage any public protests against the 2014 coup.

Villagers and the Khonkaen Model

In suppressing Redshirt villagers, the military employed tactics of selective repression, targeting certain groups and individuals to create a demonstration effect. While this tactic created a climate of fear among villagers, the underlying reason arguably was an attempt to destroy morale among Redshirt villagers and undermine the connections between Redshirts villagers and pro-Thaksin alliances. Among the most severely affected victims of the military’s repressive measures were those associated with the so-called “Khonkaen Model”. The term Khonkaen Model had two different meanings. The original meaning referred to

³⁹⁰ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

³⁹¹ Interview with Thanradi Sarakham, Udonthani, 13 June 2015.

the Redshirts who staged protests against the military in late April 2010.³⁹² Their main protest action was blocking a train transporting soldiers, allegedly from Isan to Thailand's southernmost provinces, which some Redshirts suspected was actually being used to transport soldiers to Bangkok to suppress the ongoing demonstrations (*Phujatkan* 22 April 2010). On 10 April 2010 Redshirt protesters clashed with military forces, resulting in 27 deaths (22 civilians and 5 military officers) and 863 injuries (519 civilians and 344 officers) (*Matichon* 14 September 2014).

To prevent a potential crackdown, a group of Redshirts decided to block the train from transporting soldiers at two stations in Khonkaen.³⁹³ According to a leader of Khonkaen UDD guards who participated in the event, the train blockade was mainly to ensure that there would be no military coup or crackdown on the Redshirts, and was by no means aimed to harm the soldiers.³⁹⁴ If there was a likelihood of a coup or crackdown discovered, they could inform the Redshirt leaders in Bangkok in advance.³⁹⁵ Moreover, to reduce tension and confrontation between the military and protesters, female Redshirts were asked to lead the train-blocking mission. A female participant recounted as follows:

We were trying to block soldiers from going to kill our friends in Bangkok. We blocked the train at Ban Pai [district]. We asked them [the soldiers] what they were up to and where they were going? They answered the South [the southernmost provinces]. But we didn't believe them. So, we searched the train. We thought there must be weapons used for killing people. We searched everything. [Laugh]. To be sure, we also asked some [Redshirts] men to accompany them [soldiers] and travel with them. We wanted to make sure the soldiers were going to the South. As soon as our colleagues (*phakphuak*) arrived in the South, they got off the train and gave us in Khonkaen a call. When our colleagues said okay the

³⁹² Interview with Tuk, Khonkaen, 26 May 2015.

³⁹³ The two stations were the Muang District and Ban Pai District stations. Interview with Pruetthiphong Khamphangmun (alias Baowi), Khonkaen, 20 August 2015.

³⁹⁴ Interview with Pruetthiphong Khamphangmun, Khonkaen, 20 August 2015.

³⁹⁵ Interview with Tuk, Khonkaen, 26 May 2015.

soldiers didn't go to Bangkok, we felt relieved. Then the men could travel back.³⁹⁶

This train blockade was later celebrated among the Redshirts as a brave, triumphant action against the military. The military, which had been under criticism following the clashes on 10 April 2010, did nothing to stop the Redshirts from blocking the train. The inspirational example of these train blockade Redshirts was later dubbed by others in the movement as the "Khonkaen Model".³⁹⁷

Nonetheless, after the 2014 coup the term "Khonkaen Model" took on a very different connotation. On 23 May 2014, the military arrested a group of 22 "Redshirt villagers" at the Chonlapruek Hotel in Khonkaen.³⁹⁸ As this operation occurred on the very day after the coup, it demonstrated the military's paranoia and attempt to stage a show of force. According to the army, these villagers were arrested because they were planning to "cause violence in Khonkaen after receiving orders from the UDD leaders" (*Matichon* 26 May 2014:12). The military also claimed that they "found documents both revealable and unrevealable which suggested the country is still full of ill-intentioned people (*phumaiwangdi*) who are always thinking to create chaos all the time" (*Matichon* 26 May 2014:13). The arrested villagers were charged with, among other things, lese-majeste, terrorism, assembling forces and arms,³⁹⁹ as well as illegally possessing weapons, such as guns, bullets and grenades.⁴⁰⁰ Later, another four people were charged and imprisoned in the same legal cases, making the total number 26. This group of 26 prisoners was later referred to by the military as "Khonkaen Model". They were "formally" imprisoned on 24 February 2015, although having been detained in practice since 23 May 2014.⁴⁰¹

According to Watkomkrich Sriwarom, a Redshirt lawyer handling the case, these Khonkaen Model prisoners served an initial period of jail term

³⁹⁶ Interview with Tuk, Khonkaen, 26 May 2015.

³⁹⁷ Interview with Tuk, Khonkaen, 26 May 2015.

³⁹⁸ Interview with ex-prisoner B, Khonkaen, 6 April 2015.

³⁹⁹ "Assembling forces and arms" (*songsum kongkamlang lae awut*). Interview with ex-prisoner A, Khonkaen, 9 June 2015.

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with ex-prisoner A, Khonkaen, 9 June 2015.

⁴⁰¹ Interview with ex-prisoner A, Khonkaen, 7 April 2015.

between 5 and 9 months.⁴⁰² After this initial jail term, the prisoners were released on probation, although their cases were still in trial at the Khonkaen military court and they had to report themselves to the military and their lawyers on a regular basis.⁴⁰³ As their cases were tried by the military court, the prisoners' rights were severely limited: there is no appeal system and only one out of three judges is required to be trained in law.⁴⁰⁴ The term Khonkaen Model has now conflated the two different meanings – both the train blockade Redshirt group who dared to challenge the military but also people who were planning to “sabotage” the country.



Picture: Ex-Prisoner A, a Khonkaen Model Prisoner (fieldwork 7 April 2015)

Climate of Fear

The junta used the idea of the Khonkaen Model to achieve two goals. Firstly, the military used the supposed threat of the Khonkaen Model to justify their undemocratic intervention and their hardline security operations in Isan. Secondly, the military wanted to demonstrate that they could suppress the so-

⁴⁰² Interview with Watkomkrich Sriwarom, Khonkaen, 20 November 2014.

⁴⁰³ Interview with ex-prisoner B, Khonkaen, 6 April 2015.

⁴⁰⁴ Interview with Watkomkrich Sriwarom, Khonkaen, 20 November 2014.

called courageous elements among the Redshirts — this significantly “warned off” Redshirt protesters. In other words, the Khonkaen Model was used to create a climate of fear among Redshirt villagers, simply yet effectively by setting an example. Such a realm of fear was mainly built on arbitrary aspects of the military’s power. The arbitrariness was illustrated by the hasty arrest of the villagers at the Chonlapruek Hotel in Khonkaen. While the prisoners were accused of planning to sabotage the country, according to those interviewed, there was no investigation by the military and, in violation of the Criminal Code, the prisoners were not allowed to contact their families. As one prisoner put it: “I have seen some *farang* [Western] movies, if there is no evidence, the suspect must be released not arrested first”.⁴⁰⁵

The military’s claims concerning the Khonkaen Model were misleading for three reasons. Firstly, in terms of background, while the defendants’ careers were as diverse as policemen, local politicians, school teachers, security guards, workers and farmers, they were not necessarily from Khonkaen; many were residents of different provinces, like Korat, Chaiyaphum, and Kalasin.⁴⁰⁶ Secondly, although they admitted that they were Redshirt sympathisers, the prisoners were not members of the original Khonkaen Model group, nor did they have any connection with those who blocked the train that was transporting soldiers in 2010. More importantly, although the event at the Chonlapruek Hotel was partly organised by Redshirt leaders, it was a seminar on agribusiness — the defendants were there to learn about how to increase their income, rather than participating in political activities.⁴⁰⁷ The majority of the participants had never met one another before.⁴⁰⁸ As one of the Khonkaen Model prisoner narrated at length after being arrested by what he described as “hundreds of soldiers”:

Together with two friends of mine, I went to learn how to grow cash crops at the Chonlapruek hotel in Khonkaen. But, just shortly after I

⁴⁰⁵ Interview with ex-prisoner A, Khonkaen, 7 April 2015.

⁴⁰⁶ Interview with Watkomkrich Sriwarom, Khonkaen, 20 November 2014.

⁴⁰⁷ The seminar was led by Meechai Muangmontri and Pratin Janket local Redshirt leaders from Roi-et province. They were among those arrested. Interview with ex-prisoner C, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with ex-prisoner A, Khonkaen, 7 April 2015.

arrived, there were hundreds of soldiers surrounding the hotel. Then, they stormed into the hotel and the room where we were having a meeting, and arrested all of us. The soldiers confiscated our mobile phones, car keys and all our personal belongings. They searched my body; forcing me to stand against a wall and tying my wrists with a cable tie very tightly; pulling my arms to my back very closely. At the time, we didn't know why we were arrested. We just knew later that they called us the "Khonkaen Model". I kept questioning for several times that what is the Khonkaen Model? What is the Khonkaen Model? I am not one of the Khonkaen Model. But no one was listening. After quite a long period, the soldiers said they had found several illegal weapons, bullets and bombs. I kept saying, no, no, those are not mine. Those are not mine. But again no one was listening. We were then forced to get on a military bus departing to the Khonkaen Military Camp. I was unable to speak any more. I was thinking to myself that they were about to kill us. I have heard some stories after the crackdown in May 2010. But I didn't cry.⁴⁰⁹

These arbitrary arrests illustrated the military's attempt to use the Khonkaen Model to justify its repression of the Redshirts. The military's arbitrariness was also evident in their action following the arrest. Military officers went to inspect the prisoners' houses without a court warrant. Although in some cases the prisoners' family members were also interrogated, they usually were not informed about the charges or the prisoners' whereabouts.⁴¹⁰ As the wife of a prisoner narrated at one point:

He [prisoner B] didn't come home. I called [him] several times, but there was no answer. I began to think much and worried. Then, there were soldiers coming to my house. I don't know how many, but a lot of soldiers all around my house. They went into my house without saying anything, and started to search everywhere. They

⁴⁰⁹ Interview with ex-prisoner C, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

⁴¹⁰ Interview with ex-prisoner A, Khonkaen, 7 May 2015.

looked at all our papers. I could only say there were only debt receipts. They got nothing. So, they went back; didn't say anything. [Crying].⁴¹¹

The repercussions in terms of fear among Redshirt villagers was further shaped by their individual experiences in prison. According to the prisoners, the condition of Thai prisons was very harsh. While each provincial prison usually has the maximum capacity of detaining around 2,000 prisoners, in practice, they held around 5,000 to 6,000 prisoners.⁴¹² According to another prisoner who is a construction worker, they had to sleep next to one another in spaces less than a metre in width.⁴¹³ There are no air conditioners and only a few fans in a climate where the average temperature is between 30 and 40 degree Celsius.⁴¹⁴ Most importantly, prison heads, like senior officials in many other state institutions in post-2014 coup Thailand, were mostly PDRC supporters, which suggested the possibility of discrimination against the Redshirts. Prisoners believed that their "Redshirt" identity led to discrimination against them. One prisoner told about his illness experience in prison:

In jail, there was still division between colours. We were lucky to meet a Redshirt officer. We shall walk to democracy together, one officer told me. But, I heard that the head of the Khonkaen Central Prison is a PDRC member. I asked for a paracetamol, but it took 6 hours to get one. I asked at 9.00 a.m. but I got a couple of pills at 3 p.m. Besides, medicine could be requested only on Wednesday. If there had already been 20 prisoners asking for medicine, it was not

⁴¹¹ Interview with ex-prisoner B's wife, Khonkaen, 6 April 2015.

⁴¹² Interview with ex-prisoner B, Khonkaen, 6 April 2015.

⁴¹³ Interview with ex-prisoner A, Khonkaen, 7 April 2015.

⁴¹⁴ In addition, prisons are full of social problems, like bossism and mafia. As an informant narrated: "In prison, there are some other problems as well. There was a mafia boss. He was beating a man. I thought that man was surely going to die. He was kicked, punched and so on by the mafia boss and his followers. Later on, that poor man was 'told' (*bok* Isan) to hang his neck with a jail bar. The mafia said it, like it was a common matter. The man eventually did. We couldn't do or say anything. I was very sad. But luckily a prison staff helped the man before he suffocated to death." Interview with ex-prisoner C, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

allowed to get medicines on that day. I did not know what kind of rule was that. [...] ⁴¹⁵

This kind of harsh treatment was also reported by all Redshirt prisoners.⁴¹⁶ Another example is the treatment of female Redshirt prisoners. According to one informant, despite being political prisoners, female Redshirt prisoners were subject to “internal inspection” when they had to go to hear their case at court and go into the prison after hearing their cases. She described her experiences as follows:

When I was arrested and imprisoned for five months, I was subject to what they called “internal inspection”. Every time when I had to go to hear the case at military court or to meet with my lawyer, I was stripped and “inspected internally”. This is a true story. But there is no one really mentioning it. It did not become news (*krasae*). I had to face such a thing several times during five months. I felt so embarrassed until I got to the point I didn’t feel anymore (*chachin*). No one really came and ask me about this. Now, I have also to silence myself after I was bailed following a suggestion of my lawyer. They [the military] might withdraw my bail whenever they want to.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ Initially, the Khonkaen Model prisoners could be visited by their relatives or visitors twice a week. Then, the regulation was change: only registered relatives could visit them and the number of visits was reduced. Yet, many inmates reported that towards the later period of their imprisonment, they rarely had a visit from their family due to financial difficulties. Travelling back and forth between home and the prison meant extra expenses and costs. Thus, many prisoners had to be content with meeting their family only once before they went on trial at the Khonkaen Military court (Fieldwork note 20 November 2014).

⁴¹⁶ Given the poor, overloaded conditions of Thai prisons, this ill-treatment could be typical treatment for all prisoners. However, one of an in-depth studies which explores violence, sexuality, power and resistance in everyday life of general prisoners in Thailand (Saipin 2002), this ill-treatment was not documented. Moreover, according to Watkhomkrich, a Redshirt lawyer, although they were political prisoners, the Redshirt prisoners were not allowed to see a doctor outside the prison even in case of severe illness. Interview with Watkhomkrich Sriwarom, Khonkaen, 20 November 2014.

⁴¹⁷ Interview with ex-prisoner D, Khonkaen, 19 August 2015.

Prison staff claimed that the inspections were in accordance with the rules and regulation of prisons and imprisonment in Thailand⁴¹⁸ so as to prevent drugs, money and weapons trafficking, and all female prisoners are allegedly subject to these “internal inspections” in every prison’s “entering” and “exiting”.⁴¹⁹ Since Khonkaen Model prisoners believed that they have never done anything wrong made such experiences feel even more discriminatory and traumatising. One female prisoner described being charged with a politically-motivated charge as “bad karma” (*wenkam*) while the internal inspections were “hellish” (*toknarok*).⁴²⁰ The state of fear among the Redshirt prisoners was confirmed by the eldest among them, born in 1944.⁴²¹ Associating this fear with the military’s 2010 crackdown, he remembered that the hardest time during his imprisonment was when he regained consciousness not long after the arrest:

At 4 p.m. of the second day, we were taken from the Military Camp to somewhere we really had no idea of. I felt that the driver had made several turns as if they tried to make us lose direction. While many of us started to guess, I thought to myself that they were going to kill us again. Many ideas came to my mind. Was this Nam Pong district [a district of Khonkaen]? Was it Udonthani Province? Were they planning to have a third party trying to help the “hostages” and then used the opportunity to kill us with a sound reason? I knew that happened in the past. At that moment, I began to care less. What will be will be. But, I was also thinking that what they were doing to us was really unjust (*boyuttitham* Isan). It was so arbitrary. It was so incorrect. I am innocent. But what I was thinking didn’t happen. Arriving at the Khonkaen Military Camp again in the evening was lucky.⁴²²

⁴¹⁸ The prison staff who carried out the inspection were female.

⁴¹⁹ Interview with ex-prisoner D, Khonkaen, 19 August 2015.

⁴²⁰ Interview with ex-prisoner D, Khonkaen, 19 August 2015.

⁴²¹ Interview with ex-prisoner C, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

⁴²² Interview with ex-prisoner C, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.



A group of Khon Kaen Model Prisoner were eating food brought by their families (Fieldwork 26 November 2015)

The fabrication of the Khonkaen Model led to fragmentation among the Redshirt movement in Isan in two senses. The first aspect was fear and fragmentation among Redshirt villagers. This was demonstrated by the fact that the majority of Redshirt villagers interviewed usually denied that they knew about the Khonkaen Model, arguably because they were also fearful of the ramifications which might be arbitrarily brought against them. Even those who participated in the Redshirt rail blockade in 2010 strongly denied their connection with the alleged 2014 Khonkaen Model, arguing that those who were arrested by the military were not even Redshirts. For example, Baowi, a leader of the Khonkaen UDD guards, claimed that those villagers who went to the seminar in Khonkaen on 23 May 2014 were not Redshirts, nor were they even democracy supporters:

Khonkaen Model did a train blocking in 2010. Fought for democracy by using several means. We gathered a large number of people (*muanchon*) until it became the Khonkaen Model. We are an example before the Udon [Udonthani] Model of Redshirt villages. But in 2014, the Khonkaen Model which declared an emergency

plan at a hotel aimed to use Khonkaen as an example to oppose the military and further mobilise in Khonkaen and Kalasin. In fact, there were only a few Khonkaen people. It was not a fight for democracy. They were not fighters for democracy.⁴²³

From this interview, Baowi seemed to imply there was a real plot or model as formulated by the military. He also seemed anxious to distance himself from the Redshirt prisoners in 2014, emphasising the vast difference between them and his own train blockade model. Despite the fact that Baowi knew ex-prisoner D (who suggested I interview him), and both had participated in several Redshirt protests and activities together, the theme of “us” and “them” in the comments above symbolised the fragmentation the military created among Redshirts — the notion that they were on different sides and had no relations to each other. Similarly, Tuk, who participated in the 2010 train blockade, put distance between other Redshirts and the Khonkaen Model defendants. Tuk herself was also fearful of being arrested by the military and suggested that she was unable to adequately look after herself and her family, let alone others. To help the Khonkaen prisoners or to get involved could potentially cause problems for her. Tuk recounted:

We feel pity for them [the Khonkaen prisoners] but we can't do anything. We tried to organise a charity concert for them once, but soldiers didn't allow it. A brother who lived in Ban Daengnoi [the natal village of A] and a sister who live in Ban Fang [the natal village of D], I really feel pity for them. But I couldn't help even myself. I also feel fearful.⁴²⁴

The military's Khonkaen Model also led to fragmentation between Redshirt villagers and pro-Thaksin politicians. This fragmentation was created by a dilemma that confronted the prisoners who were Redshirt supporters. On the one hand, the prisoners felt frustrated and discontented that Pheu Thai politicians did not help them. On the other, they wanted to distance themselves

⁴²³ Interview with Pruetthiphong Khamphangmun, Khonkaen, 20 August 2015.

⁴²⁴ Interview with Tuk, Khonkaen, 26 May 2015.

from Pheu Thai for fear of being punished more severely by the military. As one informant stressed:

Jakkarin [Pheu Thai MP] used Pheu Thai to get a ministerial post. Thanik [Pheu Thai MP], himself a villager, used the UDD's popularity. All PAO members. All wanted benefits (*phonprayot*). They are all quiet now. They apologise to us [Khonkaen Model]. But they couldn't do anything. Tao [Jakkarin] or Thanik couldn't do anything. Their bank accounts were blocked. But if these people came to visit us at the prison, we would have been punished harsher. They all apologised to us. They are also facing hardship. Previously, we met at protest stages in Khonkaen. We felt that they came to us to be famous.⁴²⁵

The military's treatment of the Khonkaen Model seemed to suggest its limitation of dealing with differences in political society. Despite the groundless nature of the charges against them, these prisoners were used by the military to demonstrate its arbitrary power. The Khonkaen Model was a warning that being Redshirt villagers could have negative consequences. The military suppressed the Redshirts case by case, by making them face prosecution individually, and by breaking down their solidarity. The Redshirt inmates might be best described as experiencing "bare life" (Agamben 2005:120): they were stripped of their political and civil rights, and had been left in a fearful state of exception created by the arbitrariness of the junta.⁴²⁶ More importantly, such conspicuous examples of arbitrary arrest and imprisonment proved critical in discouraging both the Redshirt prisoners and other villagers from engaging in Redshirt or political activities in general, as demonstrated by the absence of mass protest in the beginning of post-2014 coup period.

⁴²⁵ Interview with ex-prisoner D, Khonkaen, 18 August 2015.

⁴²⁶ It should be noted that Agamben (2005:120) discusses about "bare life or "sacred life" in the context of "the radical transformation of politics into the realm of bare life in [concentration] camps", rather than military camps or prisons.

Surveillance

Besides their suppression measures, the 2014 coup-makers also intensively monitored the Redshirts. The level of surveillance created by the Prayuth regime was unprecedented both in form and quantity. The main surveillance method deployed was the so-called “attitude adjustment” (*prabthatsanakhati*) in which dissidents are summoned to a military camp in order to be interrogated by officers (Saowanee and McCargo 2015:6). While those summoned would be asked different questions, including questions about their backgrounds, according to the military this programme was to ensure that both the officers and the people summoned share common “attitudes”. After attending the programme, those who were summoned were forced to sign an agreement stating that they would not criticise the regime, and after being released they usually refrained from commenting on the junta or politics in general. The attitude adjustment programme was, therefore, an ultimate way to censor freedom of expression, by “retuning” individuals’ ideas and attitudes to fit the military’s image. It was this “doublespeak” method designed to create a language discourse and disguise its surveillance nature that led some dissidents to compare the Prayuth regime with the Orwellian dystopian *1984*, in which its subjects were monitored by “Big Brother” and were confused by false “truths”. For the junta, “Ignorance is strength” (Orwell 2003:6).

The number of individuals summoned to the attitude adjustment programme corresponded to the number of those who were intimately monitored. According to the Internet Dialogue on Law Reform (iLaw 2015), a Thai non-governmental organisation, the number of individuals who were summoned was very high, especially in the early period after the coup. Between 22 May 2014 and 22 May 2015, there were at least 751 people summoned and 424 people were classified as “deprived of liberty” (iLaw 2016). Although the figure of individuals summoned decreased in later phases, the overall number still increased. As of 30 April 2017 the Prayuth regime has summoned or “visited” more than 902 people (iLaw 2017). This measure and the large number of legal charges led some authors to argue that the main strategy of the

Prayuth regime was legal prosecution against its dissidents: “law” had become a battle ground. As Haberkorn concluded:

What is striking about the new [Prayuth] regime is that both the junta’s chosen forms of repression and the opposition to its rule are centred on the meaning and exercise of the law. This does not mean that there has been a complete absence of extrajudicial violence under the junta, but rather that much of the repression has involved the prosecution of those who dare speak out. To this end, the regime has relied on imaginative interpretations of the existing criminal code (Haberkorn 2015:241).

The fact that the Prayuth regime aims to invoke “law” to silence dissidents was supported in its proclamation of the martial law. Although the junta lifted martial law on 1 April 2015, it has continued to rule the country with the “sweeping” Article 44 of the interim constitution which provided exceptional power to the junta, including the right to take any actions deemed “necessary” to preserve security (Sopranzetti 2016:304). Article 44 states:

In the case that the NCPO leader sees the necessity for the benefits of reform and to promote unity and reconciliation of the people; or to prevent, stop or suppress actions which undermine national peace, order or security, the throne or national economy, whether such actions occur inside or outside the kingdom, the NCPO leader, with the agreement from the NCPO members, has the authority to issue any order or initiate actions. Whether such orders and actions are concerned legislative, administrative or judiciary power, such order and actions are legal, constitutional and final. After the issue of commands and initiation of actions, the NCPO leader must inform the legislative and Prime Minister.

In other words, Article 44 could be used as the ultimate weapon to silence critics.⁴²⁷ Under the Prayuth regime, different forms of surveillance were

⁴²⁷ Prayuth seems to consider Sarit as a role model (Surachat 2015:285), and Prayuth’s Article 44 was arguably developed from Article 17 under the Sarit regime in the 1960s.

also broadly expanded. As Sopranzetti observes, actions that counted as criticism and subjected to censorship have been widely expanded to include criticising the coup-makers, criticising its law, liking pictures on Facebook, and “mocking the king’s dog” (2016:304). The Prayuth regime closed down public spaces, prohibited freedom of expression and banned the right to assembly. The government employed various monitoring measures, ranging from simply monitoring the houses of dissidents to intimidating dissidents with prosecution. The magnitude of its paranoia was reflected in its prohibition of any activities deemed provocative, which at one stage included eating sandwiches in public areas (Haberkorn 2015:242). Unlike the 2006 coup-makers, the Prayuth regime also attempted to follow and intimidate those who had fled from Thailand and created specific policies to bring back critics to face punishment (Pavin 2014:173).⁴²⁸ Despite the fact that Prayuth often exercised a belligerent, ill-tempered and draconian rule, and that the NCPO’s surveillance regime usually involved intimidation, it is surveillance measures in unpredictably “banal” forms against different local leaders or provocative figures that were employed to monitor Redshirt leaders in Isan. The effect of these measures were to enforce censorship and engender paranoia among local Redshirt leaders.

Enforcing Censorship

Since the 2014 coup, the military regime has closely monitored the Redshirt in Isan. The main targets are the local leaders and certain Redshirts deemed provocative by the military. Surveillance measures were usually disguised in banal forms, while purporting to offer the Redshirts ‘benign’ treatment.⁴²⁹ The purpose of these surveillance measures was to silence local leaders and to prevent criticism of the junta. In Ubonratchathani, Pichet was intensely monitored since he was considered a radical Redshirt leader and had previously been charged in relation to the Ubonratchathani Provincial Hall burning. Pichet was also banned from public speaking, and his radio station was closed down

To demonstrate his absolute power, Sarit used Article 17 to execute several “wrongdoers”. While most of the execution were concerned with cases related to arsons, they were extra-judicially conducted in public areas.

⁴²⁸ One of these policies was to suspend its critics’ passports, thus, in a way, their citizenship.

⁴²⁹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthai, 15 May 2015.

after he was accused of broadcasting hate speech. To keep Pichet under their surveillance, the military also prohibited him from travelling to other provinces without permission. The 2014 coup-makers used a contract, widely dubbed MOU, signed by the military officers and the people summoned, as a common practice to silence the dissidents. The contract normally contains statements which the individuals who were summoned had to sign; for instance, “I was taken good care, was not harmed, and was not physically forced, intimidated, deceived tortured to accept the contract”. Before being released, the detainees must accept the following three conditions:

1. I will not travel abroad, except with the permission of the NCPO leader.
2. I will refrain from participating in all political movements or protests.
3. If I violate these conditions or become involved in politics, I accept to be to be legally charged or my financial transaction to be suspended.

Pichet’s house was also turned into a police checkpoint, purportedly to provide him with protection against “ill-intentioned people” who might exploit the opportunity to harm the Chak-thong-rob leader. As Pichet put it: “The policemen claimed that they wanted to provide me with protection. There are many opportunists and third parties”.⁴³⁰ On different occasions, the military changed issues to focus on the “safety” of his family, which made it necessary for officers to visit him regularly. As Pichet narrated at one point:

Take me as an example, they said to me that they just wanted to visit me. There was nothing to be fearful. They asked about my family. They also made several calls. But, they have transferred several policemen from the Thai-Khmer border to keep an eye on us in Ubonratchathani.⁴³¹

The intrusive monitoring system of the military fuelled Pichet’s frustration and trapped him into a state of paranoia. As Pichet recalled: “We have started to think too much (*khitmak*). The image of the Redshirts is not

⁴³⁰ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

⁴³¹ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

good. Even though we stand still, we are bad in their [the military's] eye".⁴³² Because of the military's monitoring measures, Pichet had censored himself out of concern for the safety of his family:

International organisations, like the Red Cross, visited me, but soldiers asked to join in the audience too. How could I say anything? There were limitations. I dared not speak. My son could not go to school for three years. The building where we are sitting is not my house.⁴³³

In addition to the already weakened condition of the Chak-thong-rob, this close monitoring made Pichet less vocal in comparison to the past. On 15 December 2015, Pichet's position was further undermined after the Appeal Court overruled the Ubonratchathani Court's decision and sentenced Pichet to life imprisonment on charges related to the 2010 arson of the Ubonratchathani Provincial Hall (*Prachatai* 15 December 2015).

In Khonkaen, the military used different surveillance tactics. As there were no prominent leaders, surveillance measures were conducted against potential dissidents in a more random way. For instance, according to one informant, a member of her group who was a school teacher and had attended only one Redshirt protest in the past was summoned to the Khonkaen military camp for interrogation.⁴³⁴ The aim was evidently to warn other Redshirt villagers that attending just one protest could still lead to punishment. In some areas, the military claimed to be inspecting "illegal" products in Redshirt villagers' houses.⁴³⁵

In other cases, monitoring measures were strictly implemented in more subtle, but rather banal forms. According to one informant, who is a TAO vice chief executive, his area *tambon* Dongkeng, Nongsonghong District, was closely inspected by security officers.⁴³⁶ The area encompassed the natal village of

⁴³² Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

⁴³³ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

⁴³⁴ Interview with Tuk, Khonkaen, 26 May 2015.

⁴³⁵ The most common claims were to inspect forest products. Interview with Chailap Uthitphan, Khonkaen, 25 May 2015.

⁴³⁶ Interview with Sawas Promrin, born in 1966, Khonkaen, 23 May 2015.

Kriangkai Reuntaisong, who joined Redshirt's protests in Bangkok and had been killed in the May 2010 incident. The military claimed they had to search the area because they "found" flyers:

They [the military] claim that they have to inspect because it is their duty (*thamnathi*). They do their job. At times, there were flyers (*baipliew*) criticising the monarchy (*sathaban*); the King and the Queen. Some [flyers] called everyone to go to Phon, Waengnoi or Muang districts [Khonkaen Province] to protest. Seven people in Khonkaen have been interrogated and detained for these flyers. I don't know where the flyers were from. If the Redshirts did this, there would be more than these flyers. The *tambon* has been turned to be a checkpoint. The officers came in uniform and in plain clothes as well.⁴³⁷

On another occasion, the military came to ask the same TAO to hire *luktung* singer Pornsak Songsaeng to perform a night concert for the villagers.⁴³⁸ Although the event was fully funded by the TAO, the event was attended by fewer villagers than the military expected.⁴³⁹ The military used the concert as an excuse to gather Redshirt villagers in one place and then harass them with questions like: "How are you? How is your family? Are you still mad at the military?". The mixture of these unpredictably banal tactics produced anxiety among the Redshirts and helped keep Redshirt villagers from mobilising.

In Udonthani, the military's surveillance techniques were also deployed to monitor local leaders. For example, the original Redshirt village Nonghuling had been frequently "visited" by military officers, especially in the period immediately after the coup.⁴⁴⁰ Kongchai and Khamsaen, in particular, were summoned to the Udonthani Military Camp every Monday for three months. But in carrying out this procedure, the military officers disguised this surveillance

⁴³⁷ Interview with Sawas Promrin, born in 1966, Khonkaen, 23 May 2015.

⁴³⁸ Interview with Sawas Promrin, born in 1966, Khonkaen, 23 May 2015.

⁴³⁹ Interview with Sawas Promrin, born in 1966, Khonkaen, 23 May 2015.

⁴⁴⁰ Thus, Kongchai had to remove his picture of Thaksin to hide in a room in his house. Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

technique as “benign” in nature. However, the effect was still a state of censorship among Kongchai and Khamsaen. Kongchai referred to his recent interrogation experience as follows:

We were asked questions, like if there are any matters that the military can do to serve us? If we want anything at all, just tell them, a senior military officer said to me. He continued that please tell villagers not to be involved in politics and listen to the ISOC. Otherwise, we cannot fight terrorism. Villagers must love the King. I said no, you are wrong. But we couldn't reply more. What they said, it is not such an outright intimidation to us. But we are still afraid of them.⁴⁴¹

In Udonthani, the military also mixed surveillance method with divide-and-rule tactics against the local Redshirt leaders, as seen in the contrasting treatment of Arnon and Khwanchai. The military inspected Arnon's radio stations – 100.00 MHz and 100.75 MHz, and banned these radio stations from operating immediately after the coup occurred.⁴⁴² Not only did they require Arnon to report himself at the Udonthani military Camp on every Monday, they also forced him to sign an agreement which had three regulations, including a prohibition from travelling to foreign countries, prohibition from staging protests or attending political activities, and prohibition of gatherings of more than five people.⁴⁴³ Additionally, “Then came the second MOU [agreement]. Now, I can't wear red; can't depart from Udonthani; can't attend a function; can't distribute anything to people; and can't allow more than five people to gather in this place [Arnon's house].”⁴⁴⁴

By contrast, the military treated Khwanchai better, perhaps because Khwanchai has a higher profile and could potentially organise protests against the 2014 coup. Shortly after the coup occurred, the military invited Khwanchai

⁴⁴¹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

⁴⁴² Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

⁴⁴³ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁴⁴⁴ This paranoid, restrictive measure of the military was further expanded. According to Arnon, not only could he not wear a red shirt, he could not wear a check shirt with red in the pattern. Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

to join their “reconciliation” projects,⁴⁴⁵ and he was given certain favours by the military. While other local leaders were ordered to report themselves in person at the Udonthani military Camp every Monday, Khwanchai was exempted and could send Thanradi Sarakham, his daughter, to report on his behalf. The military also gave Khwanchai permission to travel to other provinces. In addition, the military allowed him to hold a birthday celebration at his place, in which there were around five hundred villagers participating.⁴⁴⁶ The permission to organise a gathering was a very rare condition among other Redshirt leaders, including the UDD leaders.⁴⁴⁷ Most importantly, although Khwanchai was not allowed to talk about “politics” on his 97.5 MHz radio station, the station was allowed to reopen in February 2015. Khwanchai put it:

In February 2015, my radio station, 97.5 MHz, was reopened. But I am not allowed to talk politics. So, I have to talk about general nonsense topics. At least my followers (*luknong*) can have their jobs back. People thought that they [the army] would have been able to kill Khwanchai. I am alive, unlike the late Commander Daeng [Major General Khattiya Sawasdipol].⁴⁴⁸ [...] Villagers listen to the radio. You can shut the door; the iron door. Villagers will listen to the radio.⁴⁴⁹

The main reason behind Khwanchai’s good treatment was because of his health condition which was severely affected by an assassination attempt by military officers in January 2014.⁴⁵⁰ Thus, the military seemed confident that Khwanchai would not oppose the 2014 coup. Khwanchai was also subject to close surveillance and intimidation by the military. Khwanchai stressed: “They still monitored me. Intimidate me through phone calls, saying that if I mobilised

⁴⁴⁵ Interview with Thanradi Sarakham, Udonthani, 13 June 2015.

⁴⁴⁶ Interview with Thanradi Sarakham, Udonthani, 13 June 2015.

⁴⁴⁷ My video record on Khwanchai’s birthday event.

⁴⁴⁸ Major General Khattiya Sawasdipol was a hardline Redshirt leader. He was assassinated apparently by a sniper by being shot in the head on 13 May 2010 when he was giving an interview to the *New York Times* while leading the Redshirt protest.

⁴⁴⁹ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁴⁵⁰ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015. The assassins were soldiers from Narathiwat province. According to Madeunang Masae, one of the assassins, they were ordered by senior military officers and hired only 8,000 baht to kill Khwanchai.

people they will withdraw my bail. I was charged with an act of terrorism in 2010. They [the military] will ask about my life. They will always monitor me 'intimately' (*klaichit*). They have monitored my work place. Whatever I do, they will know everything".⁴⁵¹

But Khwanchai's former assistant Arnon complained that the military seemed to treat higher-profile Redshirts better than less prominent ones. As Arnon stated: "I heard that Khwanchai and Rambo [Suporn Atthawong – a former Pheu Thai MP] were arrested in Korat. Thida was sent [by the military] to Ratchaburi blindfolded. But their situations are better. Khwanchai could also go to other provinces. He went to make merit at several temples".⁴⁵² On the other hand, the purpose in inviting Khwanchai to attend certain functions was arguably to create an impression that the most prominent Redshirt leader in Isan was already subdued and had allied himself with the military. Such an impression would undermine the morale and solidarity among Redshirt supporters. Thus, based on these local leaders' accounts, the 2014 junta developed elaborate surveillance techniques that not only involved intimidation, but also a mix of different methods, ranging from random inspection to entertainment provision to feigning friendly relations, and divide-and-rule tactics. The results were twofold: suppressing activities of local leaders, while also further exacerbating the existing conflicts among them.

Indoctrination

According to the NCPO's three-stage Road Map plan declared on 27 June 2014, the second stage of their agenda is to reform Thai politics. This period, which was publicly proclaimed to last one year between September 2014 and September 2015 "depending on situations", was mainly marked by the establishment of a government, a legislative body and the National Reform Council (*Bangkok Post*, 19 November 2014). Closely connected to this second stage was the military attempt to promote political reform by promoting "unity" (*khammakki*) and preventing "division" (*khwamtaegyae*) (Reconciliatory Centre for Reform 2014:1). Central to this attempt was to invoke the

⁴⁵¹ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁴⁵² Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

significance of the state ideology, through the military's campaign of the so-called "twelve core values":

1. Upholding the three main pillars: nation, religion, and monarchy
2. Honesty, sacrifice, and patience with positive attitude for the interest of the public
3. Be grateful towards parents, guardians and teachers
4. Seeking of direct and indirect knowledge and education
5. Preservation of Thai traditions and cultures
6. Morality, integrity, considerateness, generosity, and sharing
7. Understanding and learning of true democratic ideals with His Majesty the King as Head of State
8. Maintaining of discipline, respectfulness of laws and the elderly
9. Being conscious and mindful of action in line with His Majesty's the King's royal statements
10. Applying His Majesty the King's Sufficiency Economy, saving money for time of need, being moderate with surplus for sharing or expansion of business while having good societal immunity
11. Keeping physical and mental strength, unyielding to the evil power or desires, having sense of shame over guilt and sins in accordance with the religious principles
12. Putting the public and national interest before one's own

While the promotion of the ideological triad, namely nation, religion and king, was prioritised to ensure that these core values were adopted by all Thais, the junta launched its propaganda on a number of media, government buildings and street billboards. In Isan, the military took the attempt to install the state ideology into villagers' mind to an indoctrination. The prime example was its implementation of the so-called "One Thai One Common Heart".⁴⁵³

One Thai One Common Heart Project

"One Thai One Common Heart" was a project executed by the NCPO in accordance with its second-staged plan to reform Thai politics. The Internal

⁴⁵³ "One Thai One Common Heart Project" (*khroṅkan khonthai huajai diewkan*).

Security Operations Command (ISOC) was the primary agency responsible for the project (*Manager*, 24 October 2014). In order to implement the project, the ISOC set up the “Reconciliatory Centre for Reform,”⁴⁵⁴ using its branches and officers situated at each provincial hall to implement the reform agendas in local areas. According to the project handbook,⁴⁵⁵ reform issues were divided into 11 topics, such as politics, administration, ethics, and the justice process.⁴⁵⁶ The second goal of the project was to organise public hearings in the local areas in order to bring feedback from villagers to the NRC. As the handbook (2014:1) states under its principles and rationale:

After the operation of the Reconciliatory Centre for Reform over the last period (June-September 2014) which emphasised the refrain from protesting and conflicts, creating the reconciliatory atmosphere in all sectors, and holding public hearings in order to be informed concerned the needs of the people as well as to inform the NCPO. This operation was to drive Thailand forwards through the second stage which is marked by the interim constitution of 2014, the National Legislative Assembly, the government, the National Reform council to reform and solve all the issues that all sides demand and accept, and the constitutional drafting committee. All of the process is expected to take one year, but longer or shorter depending on the situation. If the situation is normal, the reform is successful, reconciliation is created, and the people have love and unity, [the NCPO] will move to the third stage which is an election according to the absolute democracy.⁴⁵⁷

The implementation of the One Thai One Common Heart project in Isan followed these principles and rationale. According to an ISOC officer, who was responsible for the programme, the aim was to conduct the programme for all

⁴⁵⁴ “The Reconciliatory Centre for Reform” (*sun prongdong samannachan peua kanpatirup*).

⁴⁵⁵ The Handbook for Instructors of the One Thai One Common Heart (*kumue wittayakon krabuankan khrongkan khonthai huajai diewkan*).

⁴⁵⁶ The other seven topic are: Corruption, Education, Political, Economic, and Social Inequality, Economic Structure, Environment Management, Information, and Other issues. Other issues refer to those not included in the preceding ten issues.

⁴⁵⁷ The absolute democracy (*prachathippatai ti somboon*).

villagers across Isan.⁴⁵⁸ However, the main target were Redshirt villages, and the main goal of the military was an attempt to indoctrinate Redshirt villagers with the state ideology. The project was not a real stage for public hearings, but a platform to silence Redshirt villagers in the name of state ideology. Although the project was attended by Redshirt villagers, it aimed to exclude them politically.

*Silencing Redshirt Villagers*⁴⁵⁹

In practice, the military organised this project to be implemented at the sub-district level. Targeted villagers in a given sub-district would be summoned to the office of the Tambon Administrative Organisation (TAO). The event began with the ISOC officers holding a meeting at the provincial hall; usually the Ministry of Interior officials would also be “invited” to the meetings. Then *kamnan* and *phuyaiban* of the targeted area would be informed and told to find around 10 to 15 villagers from each village to participate in the project. Thus, one sub-district which normally has 7 to 10 villages would have at least 70 attending villagers.⁴⁶⁰ The event lasted all day, usually between 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. While attending villagers were prohibited from wearing red, they were encouraged to dress in purple – the colour of Princess Sirindhorn – to commemorate her sixtieth birthday.

The event was led by three senior military officers who also acted as facilitators, assisted by around 5 to 7 privates. In order to make the project “effective”, and the villagers “less afraid”, apart from the local administrative staff, other “professionals” were “invited” to attend the project.⁴⁶¹ While “other professionals” normally meant Ministry of Interior officials, in some cases university lecturers were also “asked” to attend.⁴⁶² The professionals who were

⁴⁵⁸ Informal conversation with Lt. Colonel Amorn Kaewmoon, Khonkaen, 30 April 2015.

⁴⁵⁹ The following parts are drawn mainly from fieldwork in three different sites in three districts of Khonkaen, including Ban Nongkung on 30 April 2015, Ban Non on 12 May 2015 and Ban Kham on 12 June 2015. The structure and activities of the programme in all sites were mainly similar to each other.

⁴⁶⁰ Some sub-districts have more than 10 villages.

⁴⁶¹ Informal conversation with Lt. Colonel Amorn Kaewmoon, Khonkaen, 30 April 2015.

⁴⁶² The observation in this part was made after careful help and plans from one Khonkaen University (KKU) lecturer whom I personally know. According to this lecturer, the military “asked” lecturers from one KKU faculty to participate in this

to attend the project had to travel together with a group of ISOC officers, while another ISOC group would travel to the targeted areas in advance to make sure that they were “ready”. The programme was divided into two main parts. The first part was the screening of a military video clip. Then, the attending villagers would be divided into five groups to discuss the 11 reform agendas, based on the main purpose of organising a public hearing on the reform issues from the attending villagers. As Lt. Colonel Amorn Kaewmun, the lead instructor, declared in the opening of the event held on 30 April 2015:

The One Thai People One Common Heart project has two purposes. First, to listen to people’s opinions before the national reform process and a general election begins, which I myself don’t know when. We don’t know either whether it will be a process of appointment (*sunha*) or elections. Secondly, the programme is to conduct a survey on villagers’ employment and village economy.

The declared attempt to organise a public hearing was confirmed by Seri Pijitsiri, a former Khonkaen Deputy Governor, who took part in the project organised in Khonkaen from the beginning. Seri stated as follows:

The holding of previous public hearing stages from the citizens who own this country reflected that participation of citizens is a main factor of achieving development of the country. In local areas, citizens all took part in deciding their own destiny. This is a reflection of how to plan the development approach of the country.⁴⁶³

In reality, nevertheless, the Redshirt villagers were “forced” to attend the event, and they had to lose an opportunity to work, which meant a loss of daily income. According to one informant who came at 6 a.m. to attend the event, he lost between 300 and 500 baht (£6-10) because he

project. I was able to observe the project on behalf of the KKU lecturer and the military conceived my identity as a prospective KKU lecturer. I myself then encountered the term “ask” from a military officer during participating in the project in a fuller sentence: “These days, whatever the military asks, [the military] must get it”.

⁴⁶³ Interview with Seri Pichitsiri, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

could not go to work that day as an air-conditioner repairer.⁴⁶⁴ Moreover, despite its declared purpose of “listening to villagers”, the main purpose of One Thai One Common Heart project was to silence and control Redshirt villagers. The main strategy used in the project was to invoke nationalism to silence Redshirt villagers’ real political demands.

A prime evidence was the highlight of the event, the screening of a video entitled “a History of Territorial Losses”⁴⁶⁵ in a room packed with Redshirt villagers. The main point of the video was to illustrate the areas and numbers of territories “Thailand” had lost in the past. In a solemn and outdated tone, it opened with a song called “*rak chat*” (lit. Love the Nation), the words of which include:

Love nation, Love motherland, Love in Thai spirit.

Still observe, still preserve Thainess.

Love nation, love motherland, treasure in land belongs to Thais.

Do help build the Thai nation to forever remain. [...] ⁴⁶⁶

Amid the playing music were moving pictures demonstrated one by one all the territory Thailand had lost; each lost territory was followed by another, then another and yet another. According to the video, Thailand lost territory 14 times:

Penang (now Malaysia) in 2329 B.E. (1786)

Myeik, Dawei and Tanintharyi (now Myanmar) in 2336 B.E. (1793)

Bantaymas (now Cambodia’s) in 2353 B.E. (1810)

Kengtung (now Myanmar’s) in 2368 B.E. (1825)

Perlis (now Malaysia’s) in 2369 B.E. (1826)

Xishuangbanna (now China’s) in 2393 B.E. (1850)

⁴⁶⁴ According to him, there was a rumour that the military would give money to the attending villagers. Interview a male informant, born in 1971, Khonkaen, 30 April 2015.

⁴⁶⁵ A History of Territory Losses (*prawat kansunsia dindaen*). My own video recording.

⁴⁶⁶ The song was co-composed by Naowarat Pongpaiboon and Kullasak Ruengkongkiat (alias Jin Kammachon). Jin Kammachon is now a Redshirt artist and activist, while Naowarat Pongpaiboon, a SEA write-recipient poet, is a PDRC supporter.

Six islands (now Cambodia's) in 2410 B.E. (1867)

Lai Chau (Now China's) in 2431 B.E. (1888)

The left side of the Salaween River (Now Myanmar's) in 2435 B.E. (1892)

The left side of the Mekhong River (now Laos's) in 2436 B.E. (1893)

Luang Phrabang and Champasak (now Laos's) 2446 B.E. (1903)

Battambang, Siam Reap and Sisophon (now Cambodia's) in 2449 B.E. (1906)

Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah and Perlis (now Malaysia's) in 2451 B.E. (1908)

The last one was in 2505 B.E. (1962)

As soon as the last territorial loss was mentioned, all the images of lost territories which appeared in "red" were sporadically withering away, leaving the remaining map of Thailand (the present map) which appeared in white to look alone. At the end of the video, a solemn voice-over called upon the audience to resist the trend of territorial losses:

It is a lesson for all Thais to learn and remember. Although at present the invasion of powerful nations might come in different forms, to solve the problems according to peaceful means is truly effective. All mass and all state officers must cooperate as one, support each other [...].

In the moments of silence that followed, among the audience who appeared provoked and stunned by what they just saw in the video, the former Khonkaen Vice Governor, who dressed in a purple shirt bearing a picture of a dinosaur, stressed in a solemn voice similar to the video clip⁴⁶⁷:

Thailand has never been colonised because of our ancestors. Thanks to our kings. We are always a sovereign nation, unlike our neighbouring countries, namely Laos and Burma. When we were at

⁴⁶⁷ While the dinosaur is a symbol of Khonkaen, it is ironically used to mock the traditional elites among some Redshirts protesters.

wars, we were the winner. In the past, Thailand had been governed under the *phopokkhrongluk* (patriarchy). When peasants had plight and pain, they could ring the bell to seek help from the kings. At present, it is impossible. Our King would be exhausted. If we had no kings, we would have lost the country. If we had no unity (*khwamsamakki* CT) or if we had division (*khamtaekyaek* CT), we would have lost more territory. We have lost territory 14 times. [...]

Then, the same instructor continued in a similarly solemn voice: “Do you love the nation?” (*rak chat mai?*). The attending villagers reluctantly but loudly replied “yes.” The instructor continued: “The last time, we lost Preah Vihear Temple. We have lost territory fourteen times. Do we want to lose again? Should we lose a fifteenth territory? Should we lose *Bannongkung* [the village in which the event took place]?” Before all the participating villagers finished their replies in stronger voices “No”, the instructor replied for them: “Each of us must help.” Then, the instructor concluded:

Nongkung was once a Redshirt area. Now it is not anymore. Please tell me what you want me to help. Come to see me. Thank you very much.

Although the instructors and the video did not make clear whether they equated the Redshirt movement with the Communist movement in the past, nationalist and royalist rhetoric which was previously deployed to oppose the Communist movement was clearly invoked throughout the project. As reflected in the video clip and the verbal conclusion of the instructors, the mind-set of the Thai officials was apparently still stuck in the Cold-war era. The underlying purpose of the project was arguably an attempt to inject a nationalist and royalist ideology into Redshirt villagers to silence their political demands and protests by forcing them to “love the nation”. It was also still unclear who the enemy of the Thai state was when the instructor mentioned the 14 losses: did they mean the Burmese, the Khmers or western imperialists? But, the phrase “each of us must help” in order not to lose the fifteenth territory can only be read as help to prevent the loss of territory from the “occupation” of the Redshirt movement and Thaksin’ allies in this context. Villagers must not be

Redshirts, for being Redshirts means being disloyal to the nation and the king. Proclaiming Redshirt villages meant the loss of Thai territories and, thus, being un-Thai.

The effects of this nationalist provocation were also reflected by the participants' reaction, although they appeared reluctant to come to terms with their opinions and feelings. Most participating villagers fell silent and looked stunned by the contents of the video clip and the instructions' conclusions. Some villagers who were asked for an interview after the session denied to comment on the video clip they had seen, for an apparent reason of participating in a military project. One female villager said that: "It [the project] made people love the nation more. It's good".⁴⁶⁸ However, one particular villager reflected his feeling towards the military' video screening differently and possibly revealing the gist of the effects created by the project. While appearing indifferent and bored in his reply, he made a point on the video clip:

I think the soldiers want the villagers to be like the Bangrajan villagers. It's good if everyone can be like the Bangrajan villagers. But the times are different. We don't ride buffaloes anymore.⁴⁶⁹

His answer was important in two regards. Firstly, this reply partly captured the essence of the military's attempt which successfully evoking a sense of nationalism among villagers. The story of the Bangrajan villagers are a main part of Thai national history and some versions of the story has been produced in movie form. The Bangrajan villagers were believed to have fought in the Thai-Burmese wars during the Ayutthaya period. Based on this history, all the villagers, both men and women, were depicted as extremely brave. In their last war, although short of weaponry as well as outnumbered and outperformed by the Burmese, they still bravely fought to protect their village and the land. According to the story, Bangrajan village was destroyed and all the villagers were killed. Their patriotism has become a legend. Thus, referring to the Bangrajan village partly reflected the success of the military in evoking nationalism among the participant villagers as "It's good if everyone can be like

⁴⁶⁸ Interview with Mae Noi, born in 1958, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

⁴⁶⁹ Interview with Chareon Srijanma, Khonkaen, 12 June 2015.

the Bangrajan villagers". Secondly, his reply suggested that the villagers were not readily convinced by the military. In the Bangrajan story, a main character, Thongmen, who displayed unsurpassed bravery, used an axe rather than a sword to fight against the enemy. More spectacularly, Thongmen rode not a horse but a buffalo to demonstrate his fearless masculinity and to frighten the Burmese. The respondent's dismissal of buffalo-riding illustrated his scepticism about the relevance of this patriotic story.

Excluding Redshirt Villagers

The One Thai One Common Heart Project was also an attempt to exclude Redshirt villagers from political participation. This was substantiated by the second part of the event which involved "public hearings". After the video presentation, villagers were separated into five groups according to reform agendas, including (1) politics and morality, (2) justice and corruption, (3) education and inequality, (4) natural resources, land and forestry, and (5) media and energy. Each group was facilitated by a military officer or a Ministry of Interior official. These groups were run simultaneously, next to one another. The fact that the One Thai One Common Heart project was not a space for public consultation was most evident in the group about the justice and corruption agenda, which was led by Lt. Colonel Amorn Kaewmun. While Redshirt villagers were included in the project, they were politically excluded as demonstrated in the following scene during which the group was discussing reconciliation:

The Lieutenant Colonel:

There are ways for reconciliation. First, we should do activities together, such as doing sports together. Second, we should promote local traditions. This will create local participation. At present, people still do not want to participate much. Last, we have to make law seriously enforceable. Now wrongdoers are able to run away and never held accountable. There is division (*khwamtaekyaek* CT) in the country. There is propaganda. There are many instigators (*phuakplukradom* CT). These were radio host people. Everything they talk about themselves was all good; the others were all bad. These are key to achieving reconciliation process.

Now, let's turn to problems and needs in the area. Electricity and running water should be available. More water reservoirs for agricultural purposes should be built. The prices of agricultural products are low. Fertilisers are expensive. Right!

"Are all these correct?"

Villagers:

"Yes".

The Lieutenant Colonel:

We should admire the intelligence of our King. He has solved a number of poverty problems as demonstrated by several dams. If we can channel water from the Princess Ubonrat Dam in Khonkaen to paddy fields, our life would be better off. MPs [Members of Parliament] never help. They are always corrupt. To solve corruption in Thailand, we have to first establish morality committees to monitor politicians.

Second, we have to promote legal knowledge.

Third, harder punishment for state officials who commit wrongdoings.

A villager:

We should not have a "double standard" (*songmatrathan*) in the legal process. We should have enforced the law equally.

At this point, the officer looked stunned and was staring at the speaker. However, the Lit. Colonel then turned away and laughed out loud.

The Lieutenant Colonel:

Hahaha again...again? We are now talking about reconciliation, aren't we?

While the officer was staring at the villager who spoke out, the atmosphere was abruptly silent.

Fourth, we should punish both the givers and receivers concerning vote-buying [the Lit. Colonel continued].

Fifth, there should be a special court on corruption.

Sixth, corruption charges should not have an expiry date. If any politicians are found guilty, they will be banned from politics for life.

Last, we should promote “good people” who have morality to rule. It has been known that going to red mobs would get money. Going to yellow mobs lost money. Red mobs in Bangkok were from Khonkaen the most. Right?

Everyone was quiet, while the Lieutenant Colonel turned to another topic.

This scene demonstrated that the public hearing organised by the military was a ritual, merely held among Redshirt villagers who were forced to attend the event. The refusal to listen to the villager’s point on “legal” equality seemed to suggest that Redshirt villagers’ voices are still neglected. A discussion among a group of villagers seemed to provide the nearest estimation of what the participant villagers had achieved from the process of public hearings. While sitting on their sandals on the ground and eating food given for free at the end of the event, one female villager began the conversation with two other villagers by repeating the point made by the instructor:

The price of rice was not good, but the fertiliser was thousand baht a sack. I will stop growing rice. Let’s grow something else. Let’s grow tobacco. There is enough water.

Another female villager sitting and eating nearby agreed with her:

Ah...yes, continue growing [rice] won’t get anything. Only the Chinese [rice merchants] will get richer. Doing anything is hard now.

A third female villager calmed her friends:

But coming here you don't have to bother cooking food at least.

Hurry up finish your food. Let's go back do something else.

The other discussants reluctantly laughed before pausing their discussion to eat (Fieldwork note, 12 May 2015).

The short discussion showed the villagers' real opinions. While they might perceive themselves as occupying a lower social status than the military in the military's project as they were sitting on the ground, their discussion which appeared to begin with the point raised by the instructor reached a different conclusion. Their discussion showed that the villagers paid scant attention to the instructions of the military who had no real knowledge about local conditions or needs. A "free" (late) lunch was the only benefit they received in compensation for their travel expenses and the lost opportunity cost to work.

The exclusion of Redshirt villagers was also confirmed in other areas of Isan. The original Redshirt village Nonghuling is a prime example. According to Kongchai, he was forced to participate in a similar project organised right after the coup was stage on 22 May 2015. However, the event he attended lasted seven days and had no particular name. Kongchai argued that his voice was similarly ignored:

The military officers who came asked us four main questions. Firstly, what should Thailand be like in the next ten years? Secondly, should there be a referendum on the draft constitution? Thirdly, is politics involved in everyday life, or are they separate matters? Lastly, what do you think about elections? But they did not seriously listen to what we have to say, anyway.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁷⁰ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

Kongchai continued:

There was a session for individual speaking, but talking on politics was not allowed. It was not like real talking. They [the military] wanted us to say only good things. They would ask if there are anything? Anything remaining? Or if there were people who are still angry at them. They told us to freely express our opinions on whether there was opposition to the military in the area.⁴⁷¹

Based on fieldwork observations of the One Thai One Common Heart project and Kongchai's account, villagers were included in the project which claimed to be a public hearing stage, but in reality they were excluded from political participation: the event was an empty ritual designed by the regime to lay claim to legitimacy. The only matter on which Redshirt villagers were encouraged to express their opinions freely was to report potential resistance to the military. Such engagement between the ISOC officers and Redshirt villagers illustrated the superficial approach of the Thai military in dealing with Redshirt villagers. By prohibiting the Redshirts from dressing in red, the military seemed to think that the Redshirt movement could be dismantled simply by banning a colour.

On the other hand, the project showed the junta viewed Redshirt villagers as sharing a similar status with Communism in the past. The ISOC which was then responsible for the "psychological operations"⁴⁷² against Communism was now responsible for Redshirt villagers. In this light, the junta's ideal Thai "villagers" are those who have nationalist and royalist loyalty, rather than those who function as active citizens. Thinking and acting outside military demands was to act provocatively and display disloyalty to the nation. In this regard, the Redshirts were also tacitly deprived of their sense of agency by being forced to think and act rigidly within this military framework.

⁴⁷¹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

⁴⁷² "Psychological operation" (*pratibatkan tang jitwitthaya*).

Moralising

Moralising Thai politics

The third step of the Road Map plan is to hold a general election. But before reaching this last stage the junta needs to “reform” Thai politics (ISOC 2014:1), which involved moralising Thai democracy. For the junta, electoral politics is normally plagued by corruption and vote-buying practices. The political reform, hence, must ensure that Thai democracy is not just about elections but a polity characterised by morality (*khunnatham*). This attempt to moralise Thai politics appeared in two of the highest legal documents draft under the Prayuth regime. The first example was the provisions of the failed April 2015 charter, the drafting process of which was led by the law professor Bowornsak Uwanno, an “ever-serviceable” professional constitution-drafter who serves many governments (McCargo 2015:351). Section 2 of the charter stipulated the creation of a National Morality Assembly (NMA), which was charged with “preparing and policing a code of ethics”. While this code of ethics was proposed to be applied for “all election candidates”, according to Article 73 of this charter, these electoral candidates “shall be good citizens: self-sacrificing, honest, and responsible in the performance of their duties to the country and the people, adhering to ethics and governance”.

The inclusion of moralist language in the draft constitution led McCargo to argue that “the 2015 draft constitution, issued on 17 April 2015, was the first Thai charter in which legal language was overtly overlaid with a discourse of moralism” (McCargo 2015:331). But, on 6 September 2015, arguably to extend their power control, the NRC voted 135 to 103 to reject the 2015 draft constitution (*Kaosod*, 7 September 2015). Under the provisions of the 2016 charter, which was passed in August 2016, the establishment of the NMA was not stipulated. However, the 2016 charter still emphasised the necessity of injecting morality into Thai politics. This emphasis was clearly demonstrated in the provisions underscoring the influential role of independent bodies, especially the National Counter-Corruption Commission (NACC). The NACC is charged with power to inquire into and decide cases related to “unusual wealth”

as well as to ensure that measures or approaches of its performance are “effective, speedy, honest and fair”, as stipulated in Article 234 (1) and 234 (4).

At the local level, the so-called Five-Precept Buddhist Village Project was created to promote morality among villagers. The project was created in June 2014 and responsible by the National Office of Buddhism, an independent department under the control of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Interior.⁴⁷³ This project was a deliberative response to the colour-coded politics and to moralise Thai villagers, arguably Redshirt villagers in particular. According to the prologue of the Handbook of the Five-precept Buddhist Village (2014:5),⁴⁷⁴ the project was in accordance with the reconciliation programme of the NCPO to dedicate merit to the Queen. The main purpose was to create reconciliation in villages nationwide by consulting Buddhist teachings “in order to achieve peace and unity”. The Handbook states:

Due to the situation in the past, Thailand had faced several problems, including law violations, crimes, environment destruction, drugs and gambling, divisions, the concern for self-interest over public interest, and the defamation of the monarchy. These problems were caused by the lack of consciousness, morality, and ethics which led to social division. The acting Supreme Patriarch Phramaha Ratchamangkajjan, thus, proposed to create reconciliation for Thais to achieve peace and unity by inviting Buddhists to practice the Five Precepts in everyday life. The project was in accordance with [the attempt] the NCPO had initiated to solve the conflict by asking all parties to cooperate in building reconciliation and to make Thais united, beginning with families, villages, sub-districts, districts and provinces (Handbook 2014:5).

The Five-precept Buddhist Village Project has a long-term target to be implemented in 90 per cent of all temples in Thailand by 2017 (Handbook

⁴⁷³ Interview with Phra Adisak Athicharo (Buddhist monk), Khonkaen, 8 April 2015.

⁴⁷⁴ The formal title is “the Handbook of the reconciliation promotion by using Buddhist Teaching “Five-precept Buddhist village”.

2014:6).⁴⁷⁵ Key parts of the project were also implemented in Redshirt villages. As of August 2017, it is claimed that 62.95 per cent of the total Thai population have submitted application to participate in the project (1,412,097 people in Udonthani, 1,241,481 people in Khonkaen and 1,112,207 people in Ubonratchathani; or 90 per cent, 70 per cent and 60 per cent of the total population of each province respectively).⁴⁷⁶ As this is a state-supported project, the number of applications could be overstated, and villagers could be forced to take part without their consent.

Depoliticising Redshirt Villagers

The Prayuth regime has also used morality campaigns to help control Redshirt villagers. While this tactic aimed at establishing legitimacy for the junta, which seized power through undemocratic means and lacked popular consent, it mainly involved a bombardment of moralist rhetoric without genuine contents or intention to moralise Thailand and its citizens. More significantly, morality campaigns partly reflected a more profound and longer attempt to shift political values and undermined the standing of elected politicians. According to Montesano (2014), the underlying attempt was to demarcate the relationship between monarchy, state and citizenry. As evident in the junta's repeated invocation of *prachachon* (the people) and the appropriation of its notion to be obligated with devotion to the monarchy, central to this attempt was the promotion of a "nakedly praetorian regime" or *ratchaprachasamasai*, a Thai traditional concept of king-people mutuality to prevent a threat and undermine legitimacy of actors coming between the king and people, allegedly including Thaksin (Montesano 2014:5).⁴⁷⁷ Thus, the morality campaign of the Prayuth government was partly an attempt to undermine the electoral politics from which Redshirt villagers' mandate derived and to fortify a government of the unelected from which the military and its allies benefit.

⁴⁷⁵ There are approximately 30,000 villages nationwide (Prawes 2015:3).

⁴⁷⁶ The Five-precept Buddhist village Project Website. Available at <https://www.sila5.com/report/index/getRank2>. [Accessed 10 September 2017].

⁴⁷⁷ Montesano derives this concept of *ratchaprachasamasai* from Connors who traces the origin of the term to the 1950s. According to Montesano (2014:6), such an employment of *prachachon* was previously invoked in the Thai state's counter-insurgency against communism in the Cold War era.

Delaying Electoral Politics

In its attempt to promote morality, the Prayuth government has never clarified what it means by “morality”. According to Davisak Puagsom, the “moral pattern” of political reform in Thailand became a cliché since the removal of Thaksin in 2006 (2014:105). However, in the subsequent period, there had been no further implementation in order to promote “morality” in Thai society. The lack of further plan was most evident in the lack of common definition and genuine effort to moralise Thai democracy was illustrated in a conference on 25-26 March 2015 organised by the Morality Promotion Centre, one of the most significant “pro-morality” institutions in Thailand.

While the conference was presided over by Tianchai Kiranun, the President of the NRC, it was mainly attended by priests from different religions.⁴⁷⁸ Prominent among all distributed conference documents was one called “Thailand-guiding Compass” published by the Morality Promotion Centre, comprising selected speeches by several of Thailand’s “high-moral” figures, namely senior citizen and physician Prawes Wasi, President of the Privy council General Prem Tinsulanond, former Prime Minister Thanin Kraivichian, well-known physician Kasem Wattanachai, former Prime Minister Surayut Chulanond, former ASEAN Secretary-general Surin Pitsuwan and former Chulalongkorn University Rector Tianchai Kiranun.⁴⁷⁹ The lack of a clear definition of morality or “goodness” is evident in all the speeches. A Prime example was the contribution by Prem Tinsulanond:

What is goodness (*khwamdi*)? It is really hard to answer what goodness is. Goodness is abstract, intangible, but could be felt by mind. If ones are to define goodness, ones can define as follows: goodness is what, if occurs, is useful for self, other people, environment, us, animals, man, non-living things. This is what ones can define, but it is still difficult to understand (Morality Promotion Centre 2015:22).

⁴⁷⁸ My own participant observation.

⁴⁷⁹ While Thanin Kraivichian, Kasem Wattanachai and Surayut Chulanond are also members of the Privy Council, Surin Pitsuwan is a former foreign minister and member of the Democrat Party. The only exception was a paper authored by Pongthep Thepkanchana, a former judge, Pheu Thai MP and ex-justice minister.

Prem then turned to the concept of “good people” as defined by the Thai Royal Society’s dictionary, which provides a circular definition of good people: “good people are those who has goodness, or those who has morality” (Morality Promotion Centre 2015:22). Although a clear definition of goodness is not provided, Prem argues that there are four types of good persons and three types of bad persons.⁴⁸⁰

Last is how to be a good person. I like to ask everyone to have a role model which means the person ones want to follow in his footstep. [The person] whom we love; whom we cherish; whom we want to be like as I use the term role model. The best role model is the King [King Bhumibhol]. Everyone in our country or in foreign countries all admires our King. You all must already know that the King has done everything for his subjects and never done anything for himself. Every time, he only thinks of his subjects, think of hardship, think of how he will help out by solving his subjects’ problems to make them sufficient and happy. Who has ever seen the King hit a mosquito? I have worked for him for decades. I have never seen him hitting a mosquito (Morality Promotion Centre 2015:27).

The lack of any clear definition of morality and the necessity to invoke the moral authority of King Bhumibol capture the essence of the morality program of the Prayuth regime. The main purpose was not to moralise Thai people or to encourage Thais to be “good”. Apart from its propaganda, the government did not advance any specific proposals to advance morality. Most importantly, it seems that morality based on this framework is not to help everybody to reach the same standard of moral behaviour. As King Bhumibol, the highest moral authority of this view, stated in one of his most cited speeches during the 6th Scout gathering in Chonburi on 11 December 1969:

⁴⁸⁰ According to Prem, four types of good persons include good persons of the family, good persons of the society, good persons of the nation and good persons of the world. The three types of bad persons include forgivable bad persons, unforgiveable bad persons and unforgiveable persons who must be prosecuted (Morality Promotion Centre 2015:23-25).

In the country, there are both good people (*khondi*) and bad people (*khon maidi*). No one can make all people become good. To make the country peaceful and ordered is not to make all people good, but to promote good people to govern the country and control bad people from gaining power and creating trouble and disorder (cited in *Fah Diew Kan* 2014:21).

The ability to achieve morality is especially impossible for Redshirt villagers who stand opposed to the Prayuth government. Although Redshirts may endeavour to do “good” and follow the practices mentioned by Prem, they will not be classified as “good”. Thus, the NCPO references to morality meant postponing a return to electoral politics by arguing that there remained a necessity to “moralise” the Thai polity. According to this framework, the morality-building is a process without end. The effect of moralising as promoted by the Prayuth regime was to make the Redshirts obedient and loyal to the royalists. Redshirt villagers were thus disempowered because their mandate derived from electoral politics rather than moral authority. This sentiment of feeling depoliticised was best summarised by Kongchai:

There is no election. For the referendum, they won't allow us to discuss anything. We can't voice our opinions. Why bother spending billions of baht to ask about the law they draft? If the constitution is passed, Thais will be reduced from being citizens to 'garbage men' (*manut khaya* Isan) for they don't want us.⁴⁸¹

Government by the good people

The Prayuth government invoked “goodness” in order to justify its power seizure. In the initial period, central to this claim was its military's propaganda to bring back “national happiness” to Thais, which was clearly concretised in Prayuth's weekly television broadcasts “Returning Happiness to the People in the Nation”, aired every Friday since 30 May 2014 (Montesano 2014:1). To make this campaign more resounding, Prayuth himself allegedly composed a song called “Returning Happiness to Thais” (*Manager*, 7 June 2014). However,

⁴⁸¹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

thanks to the military's limited policy menu, according to observers, like Pavin (2014:178), the junta could conceive of policies "ranging from offering free patriotic movie tickets, free broadcasts of the World Cup, free outdoor movies at Sanam Luang (to celebrate the two-month anniversary of the coup), as well as other smaller-scale entertainment performances throughout the country". In other areas, the return of happiness meant performances featuring male and female soldiers dressing in military uniform yet singing and dancing with tireless smiles (*Matichon*, 27 June 2014). Not only did these naïve forms of popular entertainment aim to temporarily create legitimacy for the junta, they also demonstrated a hidden agenda of the Prayuth regime. The real goal was to help Prayuth secure a more permanent hold on power.

Another prominent approach of the military was to portray itself as a government ruled by good people who could eradicate "immorality", mainly defined as corruption. However, despite the rhetoric of anti-corruption, there was ample evidence of the junta's corruption. The most notorious example was the Ratchapakdi Park, which cost millions of baht more than normal prices (*Prachatai*, 12 August 2015). Moreover, despite the fact that the Prayuth government slammed populist policies as a source of corruption, it executed such policies itself, imitating those of pro-Thaksin governments (Pavin 2014:177). The most prominent of these policies was the continuation of the rice pledging scheme, which was initiated by the Yingluck government in 2011 but later ruled to be plagued by corruption and still under investigation. While legal proceedings against Yingluck were still ongoing under his regime, Prayuth ordered the Government Bank to pay compensation of 2.7 billion baht to the farmers who participated in the policy (Pavin 2014:177).⁴⁸²

At the local level, the military also implemented returning-to-happiness projects. The original Redshirt village was a prime example. In June 2014, the Udonthani military built a house for a family in the original Redshirt village.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸² Another populist policies was a rubber subsidy project for 193 million, a satellite education project for 41 million, and a basic infrastructure and computers for students project for £46.2 million (Pavin 2014:177).

⁴⁸³ Kongchai called this military's operation as house building. However, the military, in fact, merely came to fix the house. Interview with Kongchai Chaiklang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

This project apparently imitated Thaksin's initiative in At-samat District, Roi-et province. Thaksin's house-building initiative was part of his then newly-initiated project called "War on Poverty". The most prominent part of the project was the "Poverty-solving Caravan" (*kharawan kae jon*) in which Thaksin travelled to different provinces of the country to learn about the problems on the ground and to demonstrate comprehensive solutions to solve poverty (Ministry of Interior 2006:1). Thaksin spent 5 days and nights between 16 and 20 January 2006, his longest stay in At-samat district, Rio-et, which was chosen as a demonstration area. This project was widely known as the "At-samat Model". For critics, the At-samat model was merely a "reality show" of Thaksin as it was aired 24 hours a day throughout the project and aimed to boost Thaksin's popularity (*Phujatkan* 23 January 2006). The project, however, resulted in the construction of a medium-sized, two-storey house, which was then given to a very poor family.⁴⁸⁴

The military appeared to have imitated Thaksin's At-samat model by building a house for villagers, although the military-built house was not as impressive: a very small one-storey house.⁴⁸⁵ The aim was to show goodness according to the dominant idea of paternalism in Thai society. However, the irony lies in the fact that this project closely resembled one of Thaksin's populist projects who the military severely criticised. More importantly, the military also gave money to the villagers: an example of the kind of corrupt populism the junta claimed to oppose. As Kongchai again pointed out: "The soldiers came to help with labour. They came to give money. They told the villagers to say that they won't protest. They wanted us to say about good things about them".⁴⁸⁶ While the house built was not initially wanted by the villagers, the project also imitated an initiative of Thaksin whom the regime criticised for using public money for his own interests. In this regard, "corruption" for the Prayuth regime seemed to function as a rhetorical enemy, rather like "communism" during the Cold War period. While corruption would never be solved or defeated, it could be invoked as an excuse to continue the junta's grip on power. As long as

⁴⁸⁴ Interview with Somkiat Rattanamethathorn (District Chief of At-samat in 2006), Rio-et, 6 October 2014.

⁴⁸⁵ My own observation, please see the difference between the houses in appendix.

⁴⁸⁶ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

corruption remains, “immoral” Redshirt villagers were subject to moralising programmes presided over by moral rulers to decide what is “good” for them.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that the 2014 coup-makers employed suppression, surveillance, indoctrination and morality promotion schemes both to coerce and control Redshirt villagers. While the first two military techniques discussed created repercussions for Redshirt villagers in terms of fear and censorship, the last two tactics led to ideological and moral control as well as political exclusion of the Redshirt villagers. Although Redshirt villagers were not brutally suppressed compared to the May 2010 crackdown, the repercussions of the Prayuth regime proved critical in preventing the Redshirt villagers’ resurrection. There has been no subsequent Redshirt movement emerging after the 2014 coup in comparison to the 2010 crackdown, which partly gave rise to the Redshirt village movement.

In the first part, this chapter examined the suppression deployed by the 2014 military regime against Redshirt villagers, as exemplified by the Khonkaen Model. This part showed that ordinary Redshirt villagers were subjected to the most suppressive measures. While this tactic created a climate of fear among the affected villagers, it aimed to demonstrate the wide-ranging power of the military. The chapter then showed that the military also used surveillance to monitor and silence the Redshirts in Isan. The prime targets of this military technique were the local leaders. While all local leaders were intensely monitored, this surveillance was executed in banal and unpredictable forms. This tactic resulted in paranoia and self-censorship among local leaders. The military also used a divide-and-rule technique in giving certain favours to Khwanchai Sarakham, which exacerbated his conflicts with Arnon Sannan. By treating Khwanchai differently in the early period of the 2014 coup, the military arguably also aimed to undermine solidarity among Isan Redshirts.

In part three, the chapter suggested that the Prayuth government used more nuanced form of control over Isan Redshirt villagers. This involved indoctrination using the state ideology, particularly nationalism and royalism.

While the Prayuth government claimed to promote “unity” and prevent “division” mainly through the so-called twelve core values in the second stage of its Road Map, the campaign of the state ideology was translated into a form of indoctrination in Isan. The best example was the One Thai One Common Heart Programme and the case of the original Redshirt village. Representatives of Redshirt villagers were forced to attend the programme and were instructed to give their loyalty to the ideological triad. This programme, thus, created a subtle form of ideological control over Redshirt villagers. The main attempt of the military was to invoke nationalism and royalism not only to embalm the state ideology, but to entomb the Redshirt movement. In this programme, while villagers were prohibited from dressing in red, the issues raised by some brave participants relating to the concerns of the Redshirt movement were buried in the name of nation and monarchy. Attempts to maintain Redshirts’ identity and ideas were portrayed as disloyal to the monarchy, while proclaiming a village as a Redshirt village was compared to the loss of Thai territory and un-Thainess. These misrepresentations were aimed at undermining the unity and resolving of Redshirt villagers.

The last strategy employed by the Prayuth regime was the morality promotion schemes. According to the junta, this strategy was to ensure that immorality – especially corruption – is purged from Thai politics. Nevertheless, the military’s emphasis on morality was merely propaganda rather than a concrete attempt to moralise Thai democracy. The strategy aimed to derail electoral politics and delegitimise the Redshirts who were allegedly plagued by their association with Thaksin’s corrupt network and vote-buying behaviour. The Prayuth regime also attempted to use “morality” to necessitate the need for good people to govern. This attempt was exemplified by provisions of the Constitution and the creation of The National Assembly of Morality. At the local level, the so-called Five-precept Buddhist Village concept was promoted to moralise villagers. However, the notion of “good” was never clearly explained and no follow-up measure was ever implemented by the junta. This limitation is demonstrated in its recourse to a religious (Buddhist) notion of morality as a reference of “goodness”. This concept of morality was also predominantly

drawn from the purported moral authority of the monarchy. Being good is to be loyal to the King, and being a royalist is good.

For the junta, political protesters were not necessarily dealt with by political means but rather by moral control, similar to controlling “desire” (*tanha*). National order and “peace” seems to mean the absence of protests. These techniques proved critical in disabling the Redshirts in the post-2014 coup period, especially given that the movement was highly centralised and top-down. Nevertheless, despite the resilience of these techniques after the 2014 coup, many Redshirts argued that they still define themselves as Redshirts and that their political identity and ideas cannot be purged by coercion or changed by control. The Prayuth regime also provoked frustration which, in turn, led to passive resistance and strategic patience among Redshirt villagers.

Chapter Seven: Redshirt Villagers and the Post-2014 Coup Resistance

Introduction

This chapter explores the question: “To what extent, and how far, have Redshirt villagers resisted the post-2014 coup suppression?” Scholarship which attempts to understand Redshirt villagers’ resistance to the incumbent junta is very limited (for a rare exception, see Saowanee and McCargo 2015). This lack of academic research reflects the fact in the post-2014 coup period there have been no open, organised Redshirt activities, especially street demonstrations and village proclamations. This “absence” seems to imply that the Redshirts have surrendered and the junta has decisively succeeded in its mission to make the Redshirts relinquish their movement. The acceptance of the military regime was seemingly affirmed by the constitutional referendum of 7 August 2016, when the majority of Thais (61.35 per cent) voted in favour of a new military-endorsed constitution which curtailed the political rights and power the Thai electorate had enjoyed under the 2007 constitution (*Prachatai* 7 August 2016). Although the 2016 draft constitution was rejected by the majority of voters in the Redshirts’ stronghold of Isan, it was by the very narrow margin of 51.42 per cent, compared with that of 62.80 per cent in the 2007 constitution referendum (*Prachatai* 7 August 2016).

Political commentators like Thitinan Pongsudhirak commented regarding the acceptance of the military’s constitution that “[T]he Aug 7 referendum result represents the first voter repudiation of the Thaksin camp in 15 years”, and “voter results this time were the Thaksin camp’s first-ever electoral defeat” (*Straits Times* 30 August 2016). Thitinan also argues that, although “the referendum was not free and fair, its results were clean and clear”, meaning:

Thai voters are trying to say something through the referendum. They want cleaner government, electoral democracy, peaceful royal transition, and ultimately compromise and reconciliation for Thailand to have both monarchy and democracy in the right mix.

Underlying Thitinan's argument was that pro-Thaksin forces had been "softened", as exemplified not only by the lack of street demonstrations against the 2014 coup, but also by their "first-ever electoral defeat". For Thitinan, the Thai political landscape had tentatively shifted from the colour-coded conflicts to a new context characterised by "compromise and reconciliation for Thailand". While this framework correctly explains how numerous Thai voters aligned themselves in the post-2014 coup period, it tends to overlook the opinions and voices of Redshirt villagers and fails to provide a more nuanced reading of political situations in Isan. This chapter problematises this apparent 'support' for the military, arguing that former Thaksin voters, particularly Redshirt villagers, still profoundly prefer a pro-Thaksin government and have not accepted the political legitimacy of the military.

Although their street rallies and village proclamations were substantively suppressed in the post-2014 coup period, and Thailand tentatively relapsed into business as usual defined mainly by "dictatorial administrative structures" (Sopranzetti 2014:2), beneath the regime's strict prohibition and punishment there has been continuing resistance by Redshirt villagers. Thus, the main purpose of this chapter is to engage with the terrain of resistance which, in turn, emerged to reflect the different effects of military measures. While such resistance has not been expressed in open, well-organised and substantive forms, compared to their pre-2014 coup resistance, numerous Redshirt villagers have remained determined to perform or retain their political ideas and identity through various strategies, namely imagining an 'Isan utopia', network maintenance and symbolic protests.

The chapter comprises three sections. The first section explores Redshirt villagers' frustration engendered by the early period of the 2014 coup. This section also examines why such frustration was not translated into mass demonstrations. The second part deals with Redshirt villagers' rejection of the state ideological indoctrination and moral inculcation. This section partly explains why the results of the second constitution referendum in August 2016 do not clearly equate with support for the NCPO. The last section examines Redshirt villagers' "passive resistance", which is fused with their "everyday

life”⁴⁸⁷ and bypasses formal politics, street protests or village proclamations. While such reactions among the Redshirts reflected their periodisation of the coup, beginning with the early phase of hard-line measures, the middle phase of consolidation and the third phase of firm control, this section demonstrates that the military measures have not been successful in eliminating Redshirt villagers. These forms of challenge demonstrate the resilience of Redshirt villagers in sustaining their political ideas and identity: through these three sections, I argue that the junta’s coercion and control measures have not successfully moved Thailand beyond “colour-coded” conflicts, despite claims to the contrary.

Frustration against the Military

In early 2014, the UDD-led Redshirts overhauled their organisational structure so as to suggest that, if another military coup occurred, confrontation would surely follow. On 23 February 2014, responding to the the PDRC’s protracted rallies, the UDD launched its combative campaign, “Thundering battle drums of the UDD” (*no-po-cho lankongrob*), calling for Redshirt protesters to protect the Yingluck government (*Prachatai* 23 February 2014). On 15 March 2014, Jatuporn Promphan, who was perceived as a “real” UDD leader because of his radical, masculine and *naklaeng* leadership,⁴⁸⁸ was nominated to become the third UDD president in place of Thida (*Kaosod* 15 March 2014). Shortly after assuming the formal leadership, Jatuporn threatened PDRC protesters’ demand for a royally-appointed prime minister, saying that “the appointment of a new prime minister could lead to a civil war that no one wants to see”, and firmly emphasising “we will stand up to fight” (cited in Peel 2014).

In addition to the UDD leaders, ordinary Redshirts argued they would not accept another undemocratic intervention and confiscation of their political rights. As Peel reported, the Redshirts “warned that they would fight what they see as an elite-orchestrated campaign to sweep away democracy [...]” (Peel 2014). Such statements by both leaders and ordinary Redshirts led some

⁴⁸⁷ The notion of everyday politics will also be discussed in more detail in the last section.

⁴⁸⁸ Jatuporn usually demonstrated such characteristics in his stage or media presentation. This type of “*naklaeng*-style leadership” is usually respected among Thais (Thongchai 2013:187).

commentators to predict that the Redshirt movement would stage major protests if another military coup occurred (Hockway 2014). Indeed, this likely “confrontation” between the Redshirts and the military could potentially escalate into a “civil war” (Peel 2014). Yet, contrary to these predictions, since the inception of the coup on 22 May 2014 there has been no confrontation between the military and the Redshirt movement. Furthermore, there have been no large-scale Redshirt protests and the majority of the Redshirts have stayed silent. The failure of the Redshirts to oppose the coup, as claimed, seemed to suggest that they had abandoned their movement.

Yet beneath the surface Redshirt villagers were extremely frustrated with the junta and sought to maintain their political beliefs and identity. This frustration was aroused by previous military interventions and operations, and expressed by both more radical and typical Redshirts, who believed that protest and confrontation were the best means to fight their opponents. Radical Redshirts often expressed aggressive emotions, and such feelings were expressed almost immediately after being asked about the military junta and why the Redshirts did not protest against it.⁴⁸⁹ Pichet Tabudda was a clear example in this regard. For Pichet, the military intervention not only violated democratic principles, but infringed the respect and dignity of the Redshirt movement, which mainly comprised Isan people. Thus, Pichet argued that the Redshirt movement still existed, and his faction was always ready to protest against the military in the post-2014 coup period. As Pichet stated to his followers:

For villagers, if I am to evaluate their mind. If asking them, whether “go [to protest] or not”, they will say “go!” But there has to be a well-prepared plan put in place. There is ‘anger’ (*khwamkrotkaen*) in their hearts. It is the same.⁴⁹⁰

The main reason for this frustration was the continuing sense of injustice the Redshirts had long felt: the military perpetrators had never been held accountable for the 2010 crackdown. Yet in the post-2014 coup period the sense

⁴⁸⁹ Or answering before much identity of the researcher introduced.

⁴⁹⁰ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2014.

of injustice was further exacerbated, since Prayuth, who had been in charge of the 2010 crackdown, became the 2014 coup leader and prime minister. Thus, for the Redshirts, their political rights and dignity were both neglected and nullified.

Another element provoking frustration among Redshirt villagers was the justification for the 2014 coup, whereby corruption allegations were used as a pretext to topple the Yingluck government. Although corruption allegations have been invoked by coup plotters throughout Thai political history (Hewison 2015:57), corruption among elected politicians is prominently highlighted, while that among the top brass and bureaucracy is usually neglected (Callahan 2005:113). Such corruption allegations by the military caused frustration among the Redshirts because they believed they were politically motivated. Cho Auan (born in 1964 as Saksit Kingmala), a local Redshirt leader and radio presenter in Ubonratchathani, expressed this frustration. After the coup occurred, Saksit was one of only five persons from the entire province who were constantly summoned to report every week to the Ubonratchathani Military Camp. In addition to his role as a local leader, the main reason was that Cho Auan refused verbally to surrender to the military after his summons. Despite the military's strong prohibition and threats of punishment, Saksit had still openly dressed in a red shirt every single day since the coup occurred in 2014.⁴⁹¹ His shop was still decorated with Redshirt banners, pictures and other signs demonstrating strong loyalty to the Thaksin network and profound antagonism to the *ammāt*: one banner declaring a "no-*ammāt* zone" (*khetplot ammat*) clearly hung in front of his house.⁴⁹² After quickly checking to verify my identity,⁴⁹³ Saksit vented his feelings in this regard:

From the bottom of my heart, I couldn't accept the 'robbing of power' (*kanplon amnat*). I don't accept the coup excuses claiming corruption. They [the military] usually say Thaksin cheats. This is

⁴⁹¹ Saksit appeared to be the only informant who insists on dressing in a red shirt every single day in Ubonratchathani, Udonthani and Khonkaen.

⁴⁹² Please see Appendix.

⁴⁹³ These checking methods included calling a number I gave him in front of me to see if the number was correctly provided. Then, Saksit was ready to express his antagonism to the military without fear of possible punishment.

unsound for me. Thaksin's 'victimised' (*tukkratham*). People have followed the situation. We think Thaksin has abided by the law.

Although Saksit's statement that Thaksin abided by the law remained a subject of debate, the allegations against the former premier generated further sympathy for Thaksin and animosity to the military. Closely associated with the corruption which led to frustration was the alleged vote-buying and vote-selling among Redshirt villagers, which was highlighted by the equally, if not more, corrupt junta. Although the discourse of vote-buying and vote-selling has dominated the portrayal of electoral politics in rural Thailand because "[V]ote-buying is closely associated with the patron-client relationship inherited from traditional agrarian society" (Anek 2009:23), over time it became predominantly used to attack the Redshirts. Redshirt villagers argued that, like the corruption allegations, these vote-buying allegations were used simply to delegitimise their political and electoral rights, because the military junta never proved the claim with concrete evidence.

Moreover, they argued that the discourse of vote-selling was an exaggeration and was abused by the traditional elites. Some Redshirt villagers pointed out that if the military used vote-selling allegations to suspend electoral politics, one ill-intentioned person's vote-selling behaviour could overthrow the electoral system.⁴⁹⁴ However, halting elections and thereby suspending the political rights of all citizens was unfair to those voters who did not engage in vote-selling or -buying. Saksit again vehemently expressed his feelings in this regard:

The people should have the right to vote. 'Vote-buying and vote-selling' (*suesit khaysiang*) are personal conduct. If there is punishment for wrongdoers, this should be on a case-by-case basis. It depends on persons. Some people may receive money. But some others may throw the money back in the faces of the vote-buyers!

⁴⁹⁴ Interview with Saksit Kingmala, Ubonratchathani, 5 February 2015.

[Miming the act of throwing money at the interviewer] It is not correct that the whole general election system was cancelled.⁴⁹⁵

Although examples of irritation, as expressed by Pichet and Saksit, were rare,⁴⁹⁶ even typical Redshirt villagers also demonstrated their frustration against the coup makers and the subsequent junta. While most ordinary Redshirt villagers appeared hesitant to express their true feelings for fear of harassment for being Redshirts, if asked to comment on specific types of topics which directly involved them, or if the Redshirt movement was already defunct, they would express their feelings of hostility.

The first areas provoking such feelings of frustration among Redshirt villagers were economic issues. Some Redshirt villagers argued that their income had greatly decreased, and the Thai economy under the junta is substantially worse than that under pro-Thaksin governments.⁴⁹⁷ This argument was reflected by the economic conditions of the country, indicated by macro-economic indicators. According to the Ministry of Finance (2014:4), under the Prayuth government, economic growth was 2.6 per cent, reduced from a forecast of 4 per cent (and less than that of 2012 under the Yingluck government, which was 7.2 per cent). The unemployment rate under the Prayuth regime also markedly increased from the Yingluck period. Comparing the rates after both governments had been in power for one year, the unemployment rate was at 0.26 in 2012 and 0.34 in 2015.

Table 4: Thailand's GDP Growth

	2012	2015
GDP (reference year 2002)	7.2	2.6

Source: Ministry of Finance⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁵ Interview with Saksit Kingmala, Ubonratchathani, 5 February 2015.

⁴⁹⁶ This is based on my fieldwork observations.

⁴⁹⁷ Interview with Tak, Khonkaen, 26 May 2015.

⁴⁹⁸ https://www.mof.go.th/home/Press_release/News2015/041.pdf [accessed 25 July 2017].

Table 5: Population, Labour Force, and Wage

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Population ⁴⁹⁹	63.88	64.8	64.46	64.79	65.12	65.73
Labour Force	38.64	38.92	39.41	39.38	38.58	38.55
Employed	38.04	38.46	38.94	38.91	38.08	38.02
Unemployed ⁵⁰⁰	0.40	0.26	0.26	0.28	0.32	0.34

Source: Bank of Thailand⁵⁰¹

One informant in Ubonratchathani criticised the junta for causing damage to the Thai economy because Thailand was diverted from cooperation with the US and EU to China, and because it was incapable of creating effective policies and stimulating the economy, as demonstrated by the fact that some companies moved their factories from Ubonratchathani to Vietnam.⁵⁰² By contrast, Redshirt villagers usually cited the populist policies from which they had materially benefited under pro-Thaksin governments.⁵⁰³ Among often-mentioned policies were the wage guarantee policy and the rice pledging scheme implemented by the Yingluck government.⁵⁰⁴ One Redshirt grandfather, born in 1944, also felt frustrated when questioned about the comparison between the junta and pro-Thaksin governments. He disliked the military not only because it always intervened in politics, but because it usually conceived of itself as having “the most intelligent people”⁵⁰⁵ and “the most capable” of administering the country.⁵⁰⁶

When asked about 2014 coup leader Prayuth Chan-o-cha, many Redshirt villagers would turn from a rather friendly to a more heated

⁴⁹⁹ Population at year-end.

⁵⁰⁰ ‘The unemployed’ refers to persons who did not work but were available for work.

⁵⁰¹ Available at <https://www.bot.or.th/Thai/Statistics/Indicators/Pages/default.aspx> [accessed 25 July 2017].

⁵⁰² Interview with Pon Chaoria, Ubonratchathani, 28 May 2015

⁵⁰³ Interview with Chailap Uthitphan, Khonkaen, 25 May 2015.

⁵⁰⁴ The wage guarantee policy provided a minimum daily income, normally 300 baht (£6) a day, and under the rice pledging scheme the state would buy rice directly from farmers at 15,000 baht (£300) per ton.

⁵⁰⁵ “The most intelligent people” (*khitwa tuaeang kengthisut*); “The most capable” (*kitwa tuaeang chalat thisut*).

⁵⁰⁶ Interview with Chareon (pseudonym), Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

manner, reflected in their verbal expressions and gestures. One Redshirt farmer in Khonkaen was a good example in this regard:

After the coup, we haven't been able to express our ideas. We don't like it. He [Prayuth]'s very impolite. His words are rude. He wants to be the prime minister, but he can't control his emotions. For example, when a journalist asked him about the rice pledging scheme, he said he doesn't grow rice and told farmers to stop growing rice. Grow vegetables instead, he said. Where [...] did he get the idea from!⁵⁰⁷

"I already didn't like him from the first words he spoke. He spoke fast, nonsense. His words are not polite".⁵⁰⁸ For her, as a person in a public position receiving a salary from taxes, the prime minister ought to show respect for the people. A Redshirt informant argued that such feelings were widely felt across Isan villages.⁵⁰⁹ The best evidence was when Prayuth appears on his television programme, "Returning Happiness", broadcast every Friday night,⁵¹⁰ during which he promotes tedious NCPO rules and arbitrarily discusses different topics on all television and radio channels, both state-owned and private. A villager reflected the sentiments in her village:

On every Friday, villagers turn off their televisions. They complained that they couldn't watch *lakhorn* (Thai soap opera). So, after the national anthem at 6 o'clock in the evening, we turn off the television...At least, we want our *lakhorn* back. Many villagers just said many rude words about him...They asked why he had to talk at all. Yesterday, there were talks by three people [in the programme]. Their talks were the same.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁷ Interview with Phen Promrudee, Khonkaen, 22 May 2015.

⁵⁰⁸ Interview with Phen Promrudee, Khonkaen, 22 May 2015.

⁵⁰⁹ Interview with Thongbai Phakprom, Khonkaen, 22 May 2015.

⁵¹⁰ This programme has been renamed "the King's Philosophy for Sustainable Practices" since October 2016.

⁵¹¹ Interview with Thongbai Phakprom, Khonkaen, 22 May 2015.

Due to their hostile feelings, numerous villagers chose to turn off their television or watch television programmes from Laos instead. “We saw [Prayuth] on television. We turned it off immediately. Can’t bear Returning Happiness. Says one thing and does another. We turned the television off from 6 p.m. until 7 p.m. We watched Lao Star [channel] which has both news and movies instead. But for Thai televisions, there is only one programme”.⁵¹² Turning to Lao Star became phenomenal among a number of Redshirt villagers.⁵¹³ Lao Star is a private online television channel broadcast from Laos via the Lao government-owned Lao Star satellite (*Komchadluek* 3 February 2017). The channel’s main programmes centre on the demonstration of the cultural and environmental abundance of Laos and the Lao people, through Lao language and music.⁵¹⁴ In parallel with attempts by several Isan Redshirts to escape to Laos after the coup occurred, this phenomenon partly reflected a sense of frustration and nostalgia among some Isan Redshirts who wanted their identity and voice to be respected and represented, or a contingent sense of belonging among those who felt they belonged less to Thai politics.

Frustration among ordinary Redshirt villagers was also created by the junta’s vow to provide “reconciliation” and the restoration of “peace and order”. Redshirt villagers contended that the junta does not genuinely pursue “reconciliation”. One Redshirt argued it was only the Redshirts who were subject to the military’s repressive measures, while the PDRC, by contrast, are protected and privileged by the regime. The PDRC had rarely been summoned by the military, and whenever they were, they would soon be released.⁵¹⁵ This frustration was affirmed by females whose expression of opinion is usually confined within the male-dominated Thai society. One Redshirt female pointed out regarding the post-2014 coup situation:

We had to come out to stop the PDRC before everything was destroyed and ‘swept away’ (*khwatlang*). So, they [the military]

⁵¹² Interview with Chailap Uthitphan, Khonkaen, 9 June 2015.

⁵¹³ Interview with Chailap Uthitphan, Khonkaen, 9 June 2015.

⁵¹⁴ Interview with Chailap Uthitphan, Khonkaen, 9 June 2015.

⁵¹⁵ Interview with Phon Chaoria, Ubonratchathani, 28 May 2015.

must control both sides. Everything has two sides. ‘Suppression’ (*kanprabpram*) should be equally done. But Prayuth never touches the other side. He only suppressed this side. We don’t have any hope whatsoever.⁵¹⁶

These feelings of frustration were even turned into hatred against the military among some villagers. As a village headman in Udonthani who participated in several Redshirt protests in the past explained, she hates her own nephew, who was a conscript and usually asked after her whereabouts and what she was up to.⁵¹⁷ The lack of justice created by “untrue” reconciliation led another Redshirt to believe that “peace and order”, as promoted by the junta, will never be truly achieved and the country will not transcend the conflicts which engulf it. As she concluded:

Talking about ‘reconciliation’ (*prongdong*), I think maybe our side has already reconciled. How about the other side? They have never really reconciled with us. I think it’s impossible to reconcile this way. Because this side’s ‘victimised’ (*thukkratham*). Doing just a very trivial thing’s going to be wrong. That side, whatever they do is right.⁵¹⁸

Based on these informants, many Redshirts were very frustrated after the coup. This was expressed by rare radical and other Redshirt villagers. This sense of frustration remaining among Redshirt villagers in Isan was nourished by illegitimate justifications of the coup and exacerbated injustice.

Quiet Frustration

The sense of frustration among Redshirt supporters was not translated into mass Redshirt demonstrations. The idea of organised open protest against the 2014 coup plotters and the subsequent junta failed to materialise for three main reasons: lack of leadership, concern for caution among the Redshirt protesters, and considering that protest was an ineffective means.

⁵¹⁶ Interview with Kulyarak Samuntaphan, Khonkaen, 19 August 2015.

⁵¹⁷ Interview with Juraiwan Phansatornkun, Udonthani, 10 May 2015.

⁵¹⁸ Interview with Phen Promrudee, Khonkaen, 22 May 2015.

Lack of Leadership

Several Redshirts argued that there has been no mass demonstration because there was no leadership for Redshirt protests. This lack of leadership was precipitated by two main issues, namely Thaksin Shinawatra and the contention between the UDD leaders and local leaders.

Thaksin Shinawatra. Thaksin had stated on a few occasions since the 2014 coup that he is attempting to reconcile with the traditional elites and will no longer 'get involved with politics again' (*mai yungkanmuang*). Such attempts were earlier illustrated by the employment of Yingluck as prime minister after two male pro-Thaksin prime ministers. The Yingluck premiership aimed to soften the tensions and improve relations with the traditional elites. On 10 February 2012, Yingluck clearly demonstrated an attempt to compromise with the royalists by inviting Prem to preside over a function organised to acknowledge her government's achievement in resolving the 2011 flooding crisis (*Prachachatthurakit* 10 February 2012). In her first year, 2011, Yingluck also increased the military budget, from 154 billion baht in 2010 under the military-backed Abhisit government to 168 billion baht (Ockey 2014:58). Yingluck rarely intervened in the promotion and transfer of the military. Although Thaksin at times criticised the junta, such criticism was rare. In one of his interviews two years after the coup Thaksin criticised the 2016 draft constitution:

I see [the country going] backward more than forward. So, this is why we start to worry. And when it comes to the draft constitution, [this] is the worst constitution ever. I think the situation will not allow them [the military] to enjoy power that much because of the way they run the country. Any regime that is careless about their own people will not last long... (Al Jazeera 24 February 2016).

Thaksin was also quoted saying that the 2016 draft constitution was not only a "bad constitution", but "I don't even know if we can compare [it] to North Korea" (Al Jazeera 28 February 2016). However, such mild comments were not serious enough to oppose the military and mobilise the Redshirt movement. The issue which sparked his criticism was the draft constitution rather than the 2014 military coup. Moreover, in a later

interview on the pursuit of corruption charges against his and Yingluck's governments by the incumbent junta, Thaksin invoked the famous words of Lord Buddha: "I have stopped; when are you [the junta] going to stop?" (*Matichon* 31 March 2017). From his interviews, Thaksin seemed willing to allow the military to run the country, and to wait for the next election, as long as the military stopped pursuing him and his network.

This argument was confirmed by two local leaders, Khwanchai and Arnon. According to Khwanchai, the main reason he had not mobilised his faction to oppose the 2014 coup was simply: "Thaksin told me not to protest".⁵¹⁹ Khwanchai did not go into detail in this regard, saying: "I will be the same", implying his relations with the pro-Thaksin network were still the same and nothing had changed, despite his not leading the Redshirts to protest.⁵²⁰ In citing simply that Thaksin did not want the Redshirts to protest against the incumbent junta, Khwanchai seemed to refer to his earlier argument that Thaksin was a "good" leader, proved by the fact that he always forgives everyone even though some have done him wrong.⁵²¹ Arnon also argued he would not lead his followers to protest against the incumbent junta, citing the same reason - that Thaksin personally and clearly told him that the Redshirts would not protest against the 2014 coup. As Arnon himself put it:

I went to see Thaksin on 14 May and returned on 16 May this year [2014]. I gave an interview to the media after arriving...Thaksin told us to fight using peaceful means. Stay at our 'ground' (*thitang*). Don't resist but don't support either. I met him in Hong Kong. He gave me these policies, telling us not to resist them.⁵²²

Based on the accounts of Khwanchai and Arnon, therefore, the main explanation for the Redshirts not staging protests were Thaksin's decisions and orders. Thaksin's attempt to compromise with the Thai elites evoked Slater's (2010:5) argument that it is almost impossible for an opposition movement to

⁵¹⁹ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁵²⁰ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁵²¹ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁵²² Interview with Arnon Saenan, Udonthani, 30 September 2014.

successfully challenge the existing regime unless it breaks the “protection pact”. According to Slater (2010:5), the protection pact concerns “broad elite coalitions unified by shared support for heightened state power and tightened authoritarian controls as institutional bulwarks against continued or renewed mass unrest”. In this sense, Thaksin has not attempted to challenge the traditional “elite coalitions” supporting the incumbent junta, but he is one of the coalitions of such elites.

Conflicts between the UDD and Local leaders.

Another important explanation of the lack of Redshirt leadership was conflict between the national UDD and local leaders. The military’s repressive and monitoring measures were undeniably involved in preventing Redshirt demonstrations, as prominent UDD and local leaders were subjected to military detention and repression after the coup occurred. Space for new leaders to emerge and lead the Redshirts was also extensively reduced, particularly compared to the post-2010 crackdown period. Khwanchai argued that the Redshirts did not protest because they sacrificed themselves in this mission to compromise with the traditional elites so that the country could truly ‘transcend’ (*kaokham*) the colour-coded conflicts.

However, absent from the account of Khwanchai and Arnon which stated that their decision directly derived from Thaksin was an issue which Khwanchai and Arnon were less willing to discuss – their conflicts with the UDD. In stating that they received orders directly from Thaksin, they not only affirmed Thaksin’s divide-and-rule tactics in managing the Redshirts, but also demonstrated that neither followed the hierarchy within the Redshirt movement, according to which the UDD was assumed to be the leading organ. Their bypassing the UDD revealed the degree of internal leadership contention and the lack of cooperation between the UDD and Redshirt groups in other provinces – a conflict which had existed long before the latest coup was staged. Even if there was a call for protests by the UDD leaders in Bangkok, local leaders might not have led their supporters to participate. The combination of the lack of leadership and internal conflicts played a significant part in leaving the Redshirts unable to mobilise in the post-coup period. As a result, several

Redshirt villagers who were frustrated and ready to protest were left directionless, and the possibility of protest by Redshirt villagers against the junta in the post-2014 coup period was minimalised.

Concerns about Consequences

The absence of mass Redshirt demonstrations was also caused by concerns about the possible consequences. The first kind of concern was primarily generated by fear of punishment by the regime. This applied especially to those who were facing legal charges or other forms of punishment. They were afraid that their protests would be distorted by the military to further accuse and punish them and other Redshirts with additional measures. They argued if the Redshirts protested, the junta would just have further opportunity and evidence to accuse them unfairly.⁵²³ As one informant, born in 1944, in Khonkaen stated:

I have several charges at the moment, such as terrorism, possessing illegal weapons and threats to the nation's security. I am wondering why they could come up with those ideas. I do not even know how to use all those weapons. Otherwise at least think about my age. I was only bailed on probation. I think I will not make any movement. If I do anything, the military is ready to distort (*bitbuen*) my intentions and actions. I and Redshirts will have more charges against us.⁵²⁴

Making an Exit

This sentiment led to a phenomenon Saowanee and McCargo (2015:1) described as "exit": flight from Thailand by certain prominent Redshirts. In all three Isan provinces, some Redshirt villagers considered fleeing to escape prosecution.⁵²⁵ At national level, several prominent leaders immediately escaped to different countries, including former Minister of the Interior Jarupong Reungsuan, former PTP MP Sunai Jullapongsatorn and hard-core Redshirt leader Wutthipong Kotchathamkhun (alias Koti). For ordinary people, the destination was usually a neighbouring country, especially Laos and

⁵²³ Interview with Chailap Uthitphan, Khonkaen, 25 May 2015.

⁵²⁴ Interview with ex-prisoner C, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

⁵²⁵ Interview with Tuk, Khonkaen, 26 May 2015.

Cambodia. However, fleeing for a sustained period seemed to be a difficult option not only because of financial issues, but because the Prayuth regime targeted the family members of the Redshirts to force them not to flee or resist. When it came to threats to punish their family members, most Redshirts would not resist.⁵²⁶

Parichat, Nongklan's daughter, explained that she actually escaped to Cambodia because her house in Dechudom district, Ubonratchathani, was relatively close to the Cambodian border. However, two months after escaping she had to come back because of concern for her mother. She narrated that upon her return, her friends said three soldiers had come to the village. "My friends said they [the soldiers] stood at the village entrance and seemed as if they were looking and waiting for someone".⁵²⁷ While fear drove the Redshirts to escape, their concern for their families' safety made them hesitant to stay away for a long period.

Many Redshirts also believed that mass protests would not advance their goals. Based on such concerns, some Redshirt villagers argued they would not participate in any new protests even if somebody emerged to lead them. Some Redshirts argued that no matter how massive and prolonged a protest was, the junta would not step down, and it would not return power to the people. Kongchai and Khamsaen were examples of leaders who believed that the Redshirts could not achieve their goals through mass demonstrations. They argued they would not lead Redshirt villagers to, or participate in, any protests after the Redshirt demonstration at the Ratchamangkha Stadium in November 2013.⁵²⁸ According to Kongchai, his group would protest only if safety measures were in place, and if the Redshirts were able to protect themselves. As Kongchai highlighted: "Many villagers, especially the hard-core ones, said that if they go 'normally' (*thammada*), they won't go. Only if they have guns, they will go".⁵²⁹ His main concern was that violent incidents, like the 2010 crackdown or the Ratchamangkha Stadium episode, would be recreated and the Redshirts would

⁵²⁶ Interview with Kulyarak Samunthaphan, Khonkaen, 18 August 2015.

⁵²⁷ Interview with Parichat, Ubonratchathani, 15 March 2015.

⁵²⁸ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang and Khamsaen Chaithep, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

⁵²⁹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2014.

suffer from the violence. Thus, Kongchai argued that his group would not yet be prepared to protest in the post-2014 coup period.⁵³⁰

Chailap Uthitphan, a Khonkaen local leader and school teacher who had joined several Redshirt protests in the past, was another leader who argued that he would not lead his followers to protest after the 2014 coup. For Chailap, protesting in Bangkok disadvantaged the Redshirts in terms of the location and strategies. Isan Redshirts had to travel a great distance, resulting not only in exhaustion, but exposure to danger.⁵³¹ Citing an article authored by General Adun Ubon, former Director of the Command and General Staff College, which described the 2010 crackdown as “shooting birds in a cage”,⁵³² Chailap was concerned that the 2010 crackdown would be brutally repeated. Thus, he emphasised: “To lead the comrades to face danger, I won’t go”.⁵³³ Protesting in Bangkok also caused the members of his group to lose income from casual work paid by the day. Most importantly, Chailap believed that Redshirt mass demonstrations could not topple the junta government, since the traditional elites already occupied all strategic positions, like the judiciary, bureaucracy or independent bodies. Although the Redshirts could protest and a pro-Thaksin party become the government, the traditional elites would use these mechanisms to undermine them.⁵³⁴

Lastly, some Redshirt villagers argued that they would not protest because of their frustration with higher-status pro-Thaksin cadres who had stayed silent and kept a low-profile. Such frustrations also resulted in a lack of “movement” against the military among pro-Thaksin forces.⁵³⁵ Some villagers at times expressed their frustration against the Redshirt leaders, for not leading any protests against the army,⁵³⁶ when even a small group of students had

⁵³⁰ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2014.

⁵³¹ Interview with Chailap Uthitphan, Khonkaen, 25 May 2015.

⁵³² This article was published in *Matichon Weekly* (7-13 March 2014) and *Kaosod*, 12 March 2014.

⁵³³ Interview with Chailap Uthitphan, Khonkaen, 25 May 2015.

⁵³⁴ Interview with Chailap Uthitphan, Khonkaen, 25 May 2015.

⁵³⁵ Interview with Kulyarak Samuntaphan, Khonkaen, 19 August 2015.

⁵³⁶ Interview with Tak, Khonkaen, 26 May 2015.

staged protests.⁵³⁷ Frustration was also generated by dissatisfaction over a longstanding problem within the movement: the voices of ordinary villagers were never properly heard. One Redshirt radio operator argued that, although she did not like the military because: “If you impose ideas on other people at gunpoint, it is definitely incorrect”,⁵³⁸ she would not protest and did not want the Redshirts to protest because the movement was plagued by opportunists and beneficiaries. She explained that the NCPO period was a good time for the Redshirts to strengthen and improve the movement, rather than take to the streets with frustration. As she commented at length:

There were only some parts of the Redshirts who were ‘good’ (*di*) and ‘pure’ (*borrisut*). A number of people came for benefits, like the protest at Aksa [Avenue].⁵³⁹ We knew both the positive and the negative. It is a fact without ‘addition and alteration’ (*prungtaeng*). If the Redshirts are one hundred per cent, opportunists may be up to fifty per cent. If they didn’t join, they couldn’t eat. They must join to take turns to get benefits. They got benefits but when there are troubles they are ‘detached’ (*loitua*) and run away. But we got [trouble]. Politicians came to use the ‘popularity’ (*krasae*). They’re selfish. Concerned only for their own survival. The UDD or the Redshirts in general were thinking about what they could get. They participated to use the popularity. Both the old groups and new groups all claimed to be aligned with the Party. But who were they? They had no ‘capabilities’ (*khwamsamat*). This is the loophole of the Party. We lost, but we didn’t regret it. We could reconsider ourselves. What is “careless” (*luam*) has no quality.⁵⁴⁰ During [the] Yingluck [premiership], things were really loose, particularly in Khonkaen. There were big budgets, but they hardly reached the

⁵³⁷ She referred to a group of students called Dao Din who protested against Prayuth in Khonkaen on 19 November 2014. After their protest at the Khonkaen Provincial Hall, the students were arrested and detained until 7 p.m. at the Khonkaen Military Camp.

⁵³⁸ Interview with Kulyarak Samuntaphan, Khonkaen, 19 August 2015.

⁵³⁹ The Redshirt leader argued that protesting at this venue, as opposed to the central location of Bangkok, made it easier to provide security to the protesters. Aksa Avenue is also located close to the palace of the Crown Prince, whom the Redshirts considered their preferred royal family member.

⁵⁴⁰ *Luam* literally means “loose”/“sloppy”.

people. It was really loose. The money mostly was at stages and never helped the people thoroughly. Thus, although we never trust the military, let them do it. There was a budget through the UDD, giving protesters 500 baht per head. But the people got only 200 baht, whereas MPs and MPs' assistants were getting richer and richer.⁵⁴¹

In this respect, many Redshirts were not only dissatisfied but deeply frustrated by the military intervention. Such frustration was still simmering in Isan villages during the fieldwork period. However, due to the lack of leadership, concern and internal discontent among Redshirt villagers, this existing frustration had not yet been galvanised into street rallies, and Redshirt villagers were unable to stage open, organised activities in the 2014-coup period.

⁵⁴¹ Interview with Kulyarak Samuntaphan, Khonkaen, 19 August 2015.



A group of the protested called the Dao Din arrested after protesting Prayuth in Khon Kaen. Picutre shows the students being interrogated and then detained at the Khon Kaen Military Camp (Fieldwork, Khon Kaen, 19 November 2014)

Rejection of the Imposed Ideology and Morality

The coup makers claimed that they were widely accepted by the Thai people, and the reason underlying this acceptance was that the national level of happiness increased after the military took power (Secretariat of the Prime Minister, 2015:22). This claim seemed to be affirmed by every poll conducted in the post-2014 coup period. For example, the Suandusit Poll, which surveyed 1,564 respondents nationwide between 27 October and 1 November 2014, suggested that a majority of 80.43 per cent of respondents had a positive perception of the NCPO, thinking that it worked “decidedly (*detkhat*), seriously (*jingjang*), determinedly (*mungman*)” to make the country peaceful and the Thais prosperous (*Thairath* 2 November 2014). Surveying the “Gross National Happiness of Thais under the NCPO”, the Master Poll similarly found that a majority, 80.8 per cent, of the respondents suggested that the level of their happiness had increased, while only 19.2 per cent felt the contrary. The rationale contributing to such an increase in happiness was the junta’s abilities in three regards, namely reducing division within society and increasing “love and unity” among Thais, solving economic problems and providing security for the people (cited in Secretariat of the Prime Minister 2015:22).

After forming a government in August 2014, the junta also claimed to secure public acceptance. The Suandusit Poll similarly suggested that as many as 66.56 per cent of respondents perceived that the “Prayuth government” had policies which effectively solved people’s social issues and problems, while 64.39 per cent perceived that the Prayuth government had “good, decisive, moral leaders” (*Thairath* 2 November 2014). This support for the junta government was also highlighted after their anniversary in power by the Nida Poll, conducted among 1,252 respondents nationwide. The Nida Poll revealed that as high as 38.80 per cent thought that the performance of the Prayuth government was “excellent”, whereas 46.50 per cent found the government’s performance “very good” and only 9.5 per cent chose “not so good” and a mere

0.10 per cent “not good” (*Matichon*, August 2015).⁵⁴² Such overwhelming acceptance led academics like Kitti Prasertsuk to argue the public had generally approved the junta government: “Meanwhile, at the end of the year, the popularity of the military junta has remained high, based on polls conducted by several universities. Though the polling methodology may be questionable, general public approval of the junta seems considerable, albeit probably not as high as the polls stated” (2015:206). In reality, this supposed support was incomplete and inaccurate. Missing from this view were the opinions of Thaksin supporters, including the Redshirts in Isan, and their consistent rejection, rather than approval, of the junta’s political schemes and legitimacy. Such rejection was especially expressed after the junta had established itself as a government and begun its political reform and constitution-drafting processes.



A billboard at the Khon Kaen Military Camp reads “Returning Happiness to the Country and the People Sustainably. Sorry for Inconvenience. The 23rd Military Region”.

⁵⁴² The same confidence among the Thai public was expressed by the Nida Poll after one and a half years of the military government. The support for the Prayuth government had “increased” figuratively. According to the Poll, 49.92 per cent were satisfied with the Prayuth premiership, while 29.68 believed that the government performance was excellent. Only 11.60 per cent opined that the government performance was not so good (*Matichon*, 24 February 2016).

Indoctrination and Inculcation

Redshirt villager informants interviewed rejected the ideological and moral programmes promoted by the junta. Although some Redshirt villagers claimed they obeyed the junta's political programmes, this was mainly because they were concerned that disobedience would suggest disloyalty to the ideological triad, especially the monarchy. One villager expressed her concern that she would be understood as disloyal to the king if she did not follow military instructions: "We listen [to the military]. It is not correct we don't listen. They [the military] are the 'master' (*nai*). They know better [than us]".⁵⁴³ Thus, if asked how they conceived of the nation, religion and king, Redshirt villagers would usually express their respect or affection. Another informant declared, after pointing a finger to the sky: "Whoever dares to 'insult' (*loblu*)..."⁵⁴⁴ and continued: "Love... they [the military] said we don't love. We also love",⁵⁴⁵ without naming the object of his love. For several Redshirt villager informants, being a Redshirt was not a clear-cut matter of choosing either King Bhumibol or Thaksin. They argued that they could be loyal to the king while being Redshirts. Such dual loyalty was symbolically expressed even before the 2014 coup when some Redshirt villagers decorated their house with red flags, but still retained yellow and blue flags which represented King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit respectively in front of their house (fieldwork note 21 January 2014).⁵⁴⁶

Nevertheless, Redshirt villagers still rejected the junta's ideological promotion, and this rejection centred on the junta itself and its methods. Redshirt villagers argued that the military's ideological promotion was not a genuine attempt to promote the national ideology, but a method to distort or silence their opinions and demands. One Redshirt informant, who is a deputy sub-district head in Udonthani, offered this explanation:

At present, we have one-way media. In my opinion, we are 'bombarded' (*yatyiat*) by propaganda. These values are old. We

⁵⁴³ Interview with Khamkan Fakkanpun, Khonkaen, 4 April 2015.

⁵⁴⁴ Interview with Sawas Promrin, Khonkaen, 23 May 2015.

⁵⁴⁵ Interview with Sawas Promrin, Khonkaen, 23 May 2015.

⁵⁴⁶ After the 2014 coup, these yellow and blue flags were financially and systematically provided to Redshirt villagers by their local *tambon* administration organisations. Interview with Juraiwan Phansatornkun, Udonthani, 10 May 2015.

were told by the state. But this time they are used to conceal information. Thai people have to learn about twelve core values in schools and villages. They have become our duties. But we have been severely threatened. We're told that the citizens' duty is to cooperate with the leader. Everyone already knows their duties [without being told]. We all attended school and helped out in a temple. In contrast, our voices need to be given some meaning, at least at the village, sub-district or district levels.⁵⁴⁷

Emphasised in this statement was a challenge to the ideational propaganda of the junta. In addition to viewing this as a form of control and censorship, Redshirt villagers also rejected the schemes because they believed that the repeated ideological propaganda was used to divert attention from the junta's administrative incapacity. For the Redshirts, ideological propaganda mainly served the undemocratic power capture of the military. Thus, Redshirt villagers argued they were not interested in the core values as constantly highlighted by the junta. As Pichet explained:

I have no interest in the twelve core values; how will they be 'conducted' (*tham*)? They [the military] have used deceiving polls. People hate them more every day. There have been various problems, Buddhism, rice, rubber. They [the military] won't be able to hold [on the problems].⁵⁴⁸

In a similar way, Redshirt villagers also rejected the moralistic teachings of the military. This rejection was exemplified by their rejection of the supposed 'goodness' (*khwamdi*) of the junta. Many Redshirts did not accept that the junta is a government by good people. They argued the notion of goodness is highly subjective. As the same Redshirt deputy sub-district head argued:

Another thing is what is good or bad comes from our experiences, learning process and knowledge. We have to experience and learn. We are educated by our failure. We don't learn what is good or bad from being 'forcibly told' (*bangkhab*). We have to think by

⁵⁴⁷ Interview with Wanchai Sinsirirwat, Udonthani, 10 May 2015.

⁵⁴⁸ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

ourselves. Those struggling to ‘make a living each day’ (*hachao kinkham*) are good people. They don’t cause any problems to anyone. They bully us by elevating their own people above citizens. They didn’t call villagers who demanded opportunities citizens.⁵⁴⁹

Moreover, for Redshirt villagers, goodness cannot be claimed simply by words, but had to be proved by actions.⁵⁵⁰ The criteria for determining whether a person is good or not cannot be self-claimed, but have to be decided by others.⁵⁵¹ Thus, when the junta leaders proclaimed themselves good people, the Redshirts did not believe them. As another Redshirt in Ubonratchathani stated:

I think nothing is certain. It depends on *phunam* (the leader; Prayuth). If the country’s administration is not good, there is no justice and there is no just/equal law enforcement, these issues will lead to rejection by the people. The issues will indicate whether the people will accept or not.⁵⁵²

The Redshirts also rejected the junta’s moral claim by contending that goodness cannot be attained by accusing other persons of being “bad”, as the junta does.⁵⁵³ They argued that the military tended to call the Redshirts immoral in order to elevate themselves as good. Some Redshirts also rejected the justification of the coup which claimed a necessity to eradicate corruption from Thai politics. While the junta has portrayed corruption as a bad aspect of Thai politics and asserts that it was necessary for the military to eradicate such political “badness”, Redshirt villagers argued that the military was among the most corrupt institutions in Thailand.⁵⁵⁴ According to one Thai non-governmental organisation, among the most notorious cases was the military’s purchasing of 836 bogus, non-functioning “bomb detectors” (GT200) between the 2006 coup and 2016 for 759 million baht, or 900,000 baht each, despite their estimated actual value of 250 baht each (Thai Publica 3 July 2016).

⁵⁴⁹ Interview with Wanchai Sinsirawat, Udonthani, 10 May 2015.

⁵⁵⁰ Interview with Saksit Kingmala, Ubonratchathani, 28 February 2015.

⁵⁵¹ Interview with Sutthipong Khampaengmun, Khonkaen, 20 August 2015.

⁵⁵² Interview with Saksit Kingmala, Ubonratchathani, 5 February 2015.

⁵⁵³ Interview with Sutthipong Khampaengmun, Khonkaen, 20 August 2015.

⁵⁵⁴ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

As one Redshirt said, comparing the military government and the Yingluck government: “What is different is that now the junta’s people have appointed their children and wives to become their assistants, paid by our taxes”.⁵⁵⁵ In this regard, although the Prayuth government had attempted to keep Redshirt villagers under its control and censorship by citing the monarchy, it still faced what Andrew Turton has called “limits of ideological domination” (cited in Tapp 2010:61). However, despite this rejection of the military’s ideological and moral teaching, as well as the junta’s political legitimacy, Redshirt villagers were not active in demonstrating their denial.

In Bangkok, some dissidents staged open protests by formulating small groups collectively reading George Orwell’s *1984* to demonstrate their rejection of and satire on the ideational control and censorship of the junta (*Prachatai* 27 May 2014).⁵⁵⁶ Some protesters also performed a three finger salute on the anniversary of the 2014 coup, meaning to demonstrate their disobedience to the junta’s orders (Janjira 2015:94). Unlike these open protests, the Redshirts have seemingly been passive and silent. Such “passivity” and “silence” may be viewed as acceptance of or submission to the military’s political schemes and legitimacy. Nevertheless, many Redshirt villagers still reject the junta in forms of “calculated conformity”.

Calculated Conformity

As primary targets of military suppression, Redshirt villagers could not afford to openly display their disobedience. Open discussions of the Redshirt movement or demonstration of being Redshirts were subject to prohibition and punishment.⁵⁵⁷ Thus, Redshirt villagers rejected the military mainly by conducting “calculated conformity”, demonstrating conformity physically, but

⁵⁵⁵ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

⁵⁵⁶ This form of dissent was staged mainly by university students in Bangkok on 27 May 2014 and 22 June 2014. The date of 22 June 2014 also aimed to mark a month after the coup.

⁵⁵⁷ A good example in this regard was an event organised to commemorate the Constitution Day of Thailand on 10 December 2014 at Khonkaen University. The event was attended by several groups of people whose rights were violated in different ways, including environmental or health issues. While even those who were HIV-affected, usually considered taboo in Thai society, were able to identify themselves, the Redshirts were not allowed to speak or identify themselves.

disobeying internally. In the parlance of some Redshirts, this strategy was termed “forced submission, but not surrender” (*jamyom mai jamnon*).⁵⁵⁸ The best evidence was provided by Redshirt individuals who were subject to the most profound ideological indoctrination – the original Redshirt village and the Redshirt political prisoners.

The Original Redshirt Village

Shortly after the 2014 coup, the combined forces of the ISOC and the Ministry of the Interior came to inspect the original Redshirt village in Udonthani. Following the inspection, the headman, Kongchai, was regularly visited by army officers and summoned to the Udonthani Military Camp. According to Kongchai, the combined forces also organised a “training camp” similar to what would later be called the One Thai One Common Heart Project, and similarly organised by the (Udonthani) provincial ISOC.⁵⁵⁹ The camp, which lasted seven days, was organised at Pansuk village. The attending villagers were allowed to stay home at night, but had to attend the camp the next morning.⁵⁶⁰ The main activities of the training camp which, as Kongchai put, “it was like scout camp”, were singing royal songs, and doing “good things for *pholuang*” [King Bhumibol]. Another major activity was what Kongchai called “returning happiness,” like partying and eating. In the camp, the military also documented the “socio-economic” details of the participating villagers, including family members, jobs and incomes.⁵⁶¹ The most important element of the camp was that the Redshirt villagers were forced to demonstrate their loyalty to the nation, religion and king.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁸ Interview with ex-prisoner D, Khonkaen, 19 August 2015.

⁵⁵⁹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

⁵⁶⁰ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

⁵⁶¹ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

⁵⁶² Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.



Picture: The Military Project at Pansuk village, Udonthani (used with permission)

Nevertheless, unlike the One Thai One Common Heart Project, the military took such demonstrations of loyalty to the level of pledging. Furthermore, knowing that rural villagers were traditionally religious people, the pledge had to be made in front of a Buddhist emblem. Thus, the combined force “asked” Kongchai to lead the attending villagers to take an oath following an ISOC-prepared script in front of a Buddha statue:

Your Majesty, I am pledging that “I, Khonchai Chaikang,”⁵⁶³ will behave as a good citizen, will be loyal to nation, religion and king; will be honest, disciplined and responsible for duties and unity; and be useful for the society. May it please Your Majesty.⁵⁶⁴

The principal theme emphasised during the activities exemplified by the oath echoed the indoctrination of the state ideology centring on nationalism and royalism. In forcing Redshirt villagers to take the oath the officers implied that they were not “good”, defined by the premise that they were “dishonest”, and particularly “disloyal” to the throne. It was only after taking the oath and refraining from being Redshirts that they could become useful to society. The main aim of the military in “asking” the villagers to take the oath in front of a

⁵⁶³ The participant villagers taking the oath pronounced his or her name.

⁵⁶⁴ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

Buddha statue was also to ensure that Redshirt villagers would act according to their pledge and cease to be Redshirts.

However, after the camp finished, Redshirt villagers still insisted that they were Redshirts. Although pledging loyalty to the ideological triad and promising to cease being Redshirts concerned them, the main reason for this was not the content of the promise, but rather that the pledging had been done in front of a statue of Buddha. They were worried that they might receive bad karma by lying. Thus, villagers argued that “Our mouth spoke, but our heart didn’t”.⁵⁶⁵ Moreover, despite having been visited by the military after the camp, the villagers still argued that they remain Redshirts, and they still criticise the military. As Juraiwan, headman of Pansuk village, said about Prayuth: “I think what he said is just wrong. Whatever he says, like the twelve core values or morality”.⁵⁶⁶ At her house, Juraiwan still displays Redshirt pictures and signs, including red water bowls and calendars allegedly given as New Year gifts by Thaksin Shinawatra. This rejection of the junta’s legitimacy was expressed after they had been forced to take the oath. The Redshirts’ ideological disobedience was affirmed by Kongchai, who also still criticised the military and remained determined to demonstrate his Redshirt ideas and identity. As Kongchai insisted when asked about the twelve core values:

Kindergarten children can conceive of something better than that. We don’t give value to it. Their value is zero. We don’t give ‘significance’ (*khwamsamkhan*) to them. They [the military] made [the core values] because they fear we’ll mobilise our ‘army’ (*khluanphon*).⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁵ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.

⁵⁶⁶ Interview with Juraiwan Phansatornkun, Udonthani, 10 May 2015.

⁵⁶⁷ Interview with Kongchai Chaikang, Udonthani, 15 May 2015.



Picture: Thaksin's Calendar at Pansuk Village

Political Prisoners

The rejection of ideological indoctrination by calculated conformity was also expressed by Redshirt political prisoners who were subjected to similar forced measures. In addition to imprisonment, Redshirt prisoners faced forced ideological instruction. According to ex-prisoner C, all prisoners were forced to demonstrate loyalty to the ideological triad every morning.⁵⁶⁸ All prisoners, not just Redshirt inmates, are required to practise the prison's "routine ritual"; paying respect to the national flag, singing the national anthem as well as the royal anthem, and reciting Buddhist prayers on a daily basis.⁵⁶⁹ Unlike other prisoners, however, the Redshirt political prisoners were also forced to recite the script of the twelve core values every day.⁵⁷⁰ In forcing the Redshirt prisoners to collectively recite the core values, the junta was attempting to instruct the prisoners that the national ideology was not a choice, but a necessity.

⁵⁶⁸ Interview with ex-prisoner C, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

⁵⁶⁹ Interview with ex-prisoner C, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

⁵⁷⁰ Interview with ex-prisoner C, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

Nevertheless, ex-Redshirt prisoners argued that they had no interest in the core values: they just read from a script which was written on the prison wall.⁵⁷¹ The text was meant to be temporary until they memorised the values, but since the Redshirt prisoners failed to memorise them, the text had to be left up.⁵⁷² The Redshirt prisoners simply read out the values without remembering them or taking in their meaning.⁵⁷³ The Redshirt prisoners' recital of the core values was calculated obedience and carried out only in order to escape further punishment in prison. After being temporarily bailed, all political prisoners interviewed argued that they had no interest in learning about the values.

Despite facing punishment, many who were Redshirt supporters before their imprisonment still remained loyal to the movement and antagonistic to the junta. As ex-prisoner C emphasised: "It seems to me that good people are only them [the military]. We are the bad ones. But they are good only at talking, not doing. Like the twelve values of the military, though we were forced to recite them in prison, nobody really had any interest".⁵⁷⁴ Despite facing possible punishment, Redshirts still rejected the military's attempts to change their political ideas and denied the military's political legitimacy. A similar rejection was expressed by another ex-prisoner informant who questioned the junta and its ideological promotion:

Prison is a real ideology. It is a testimony. Everything is equal, whether the facility, food. We have to rely on ourselves. The military is corrupt. We might become an underground movement. Isan people did not vote for Thaksin because we were bought. The soldiers are also human beings. Some are good, but some are bad. Can they act according to what they said? They said they won't be biased toward any side? We clearly see that the PDRC was behind them. We aren't silly. Are the military really neutral towards all sides?⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷¹ Interview with ex-prisoner C, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

⁵⁷² Interview with ex-prisoner C, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

⁵⁷³ Interview with ex-prisoner B, Khonkaen, 6 April 2015.

⁵⁷⁴ Interview with ex-prisoner C, Khonkaen, 12 May 2015.

⁵⁷⁵ Interview with ex-prisoner D, Khonkaen, 19 August 2015.

Moreover, the unsuccessful indoctrination and moral teaching of the junta was supported by the fact that political prisoners who were not Redshirts before their imprisonment argued that they have developed sympathy for the Redshirts rather than supporting the junta. Ex-prisoner A argued:

We don't 'learn/memorise' (*jam*), I'm telling you. The more they arrested, the more we felt angered. Imprisoned us. Every day gave us three boxes of food. The prison was so confined. They falsely charged us. I'm curious, [because of politics] they [the military] have to kill other people? If we were terrorists, we wouldn't let them arrest us so easily. We would have to fight to the death. We were innocent. It was all the military's doing. There were plenty of weapons, behind our pickup trucks. Who would dare to do that? They were all the military's. This way we even felt more 'empathy' (*khaokhang*) with the Redshirts. This suppression isn't correct.⁵⁷⁶

The Redshirts' obedience did not reflect their real opinion or motive. Their obedience was just a cautious reading of a script. Despite facing such forced measures, they did not accept the military scheme and legitimacy. Redshirt villagers and political prisoners remained loyal to the Redshirts.

Lack of Protest.

The Redshirts' rejection of the legitimacy of military also partly explained why they did not participate in the protests of other groups, such as the student and activist protests in Bangkok, and allowed the centre of resistance to shift away from Isan to other parts, especially to the southern region, and be defined by protests by environmental and livelihood groups. One reason for the lack of Redshirt protests was that they would by no means be tolerated by the military, and the Redshirts were not allowed to participate in the protests of other groups. According to the Dao Din, one of the most high-profile student protesters in the post-2014 period, they did not want to be associated with the Redshirts for fear of allegations of being involved with a pro-Thaksin network.

⁵⁷⁶ Interview with ex-prisoner A, Khonkaen, 7 April 2015.

However, the Redshirts' main reason for not participating in the protests of these environmental and livelihood groups was that they cannot dilute their demands for electoral rights to mere demands for help from a government they perceive as illegitimate. In refusing to ask for help from the junta, the Redshirts also challenged the representation of the rural electorate as "helpless villagers", as they are conventionally portrayed by the traditional elites. This is a major issue marking the difference between previous movements which asked for government's assistance and the Redshirts. The Redshirts demanded agency, not concessions.

Constitution Referendum.

Across Isan, the rejection of the political legitimacy of the military was best numerically expressed in the popular rejection of the 2016 constitution draft in the 7 August referendum. Despite the best efforts of the military, Isan collectively rejected the 2016 draft constitution (McCargo, Saowanee and Desatova 2017:84). Although the rejection was only by a margin of 51.42 to 48.58 per cent, it was still a serious challenge to the NCPO. While the results of the constitution referendum in Ubonratchathani and two other Isan provinces – which swung from voting No in the 2007 referendum to voting Yes in the 2016 referendum – seemed to suggest a softening of the Redshirt movement, it can also be read as a calculated strategy by the Redshirt villagers to bring on the next general election. Some villagers seemed to consider constitutions a mere game of elites; one that did not involve them.⁵⁷⁷ As the 2007 and 2011 election results showed, a pro-Thaksin party could still win power even after a referendum had approved a military-backed constitution.

Passive Resistance

Despite the repressive measures employed by the regime, resistance still existed. Indeed, the repressive measures of the regime can shape or even "encourage" the leverages of an opposition movement (Boudreau 2004). As Boudreau notes in his study on the relations between Southeast Asia repressive regimes and their opposing forces: "[T]he repressive activities of an active

⁵⁷⁷ Interview with Pichet Tabudda, Ubonratchathani, 3 March 2015.

authoritarian state's political context can broadly shape political contention" (2004:15). In order to see the post-2014 coup resistance of the Redshirt villagers, a more nuanced reading of their activities is needed since there were no open, organised and substantive protests. As Scott argues elsewhere:

(M)ost subordinate classes throughout most history have rarely been afforded the luxury of open, organized, political activity. Or better stated, such activity was dangerous, if not suicidal...(Scott 1985:xv).

For Scott, studies of large-scale resistance, like rebellions and revolutions, are "academic romance", which are rare and far removed. Thus, Scott encourages us to identify a broader notion of resistance in seeking what he has called the "weapons of the "weak", which embrace myriad patterns of resistance, including, but not limited to, arson, sabotage, boycott, disguised strikes, theft and imposed mutuality (Scott 1985:241). Thus, while this broader view of resistance opens space for exploring Redshirt activities, it also helps to understand that the "absence of mobilised confrontation" does not mean that Redshirt villagers relinquished their resistance or were ready to align themselves with the military government.

Moreover, Saowanee and McCargo (2015:8-9) argue that Redshirt villagers staged "passive resistance" in subterranean areas against the military. This concept urges ones to pay attention to a different kind of "resistance", which appears less formal and organised, and smaller-scale, because "[I]ndividuals might not be political only when they "jump into" political arenas" or could simply choose "not to be involved in politics" (Saowanee and McCargo 2015). While the concept enables one to understand political events which were usually taken for granted, I argue that Redshirt villagers in Isan conducted three forms of passive resistance in the post-2014 coup period, namely the aspiration for an Isan utopia called the Lao Civilisation era, the preservation of Redshirt networks, and symbolic protests.

Lao Civilisation Era

The first form of passive resistance conjectured by some Redshirt villagers was a radical notion of a different “imagined community”. This community, called “*yuk lao siwilia*” (the era of Lao Civilisation),⁵⁷⁸ aimed to challenge the Thai nation-state as emphasised by the political establishment. On the one hand, an aspiration for an alternative imagined community within Thai society had various precedents, notably after the 1932 revolution, when civilian revolutionary leader Pridi proposed reconstructing Thai society based on his vision of “utopia”. This utopia was largely influenced by a blend of Buddhism and socialism known as the *Phra Sri Arya Mettraya* or *Sassana Phra Sri Arya* (Kasian 2001:36). Thai society would reach perpetual prosperity, it was claimed, if Pridi’s vision successfully materialised, beginning by implementing his economic plan (also known as *samut poklueang* (literally, ‘yellow-paged book’)). According to Kasian, as in socialist programmes elsewhere, in Pridi’s utopia the state would be the dominant owner and entrepreneur, key economic resources would be collectivised, and market mechanism and private property would be limited (Kasian 2001:36).

However, unlike other socialist societies, if the *Phra Sri Arya Mettraya* was reached, all Thais, who were portrayed as equal, could also benefit from the “fruits of *Kalpa Phruksa* (Magic Wish Granting Trees)” (Kasian 2001:36). This magic tree would not only pull Thais out of poverty, but propel them to perpetual prosperity. While Pridi envisaged fully-fledged equality for all Thais in his “imagined community”, his idea challenged the traditional elites who had constructed the Thai nation-state as a highly hierarchical and exclusive society. The Thai traditional elites never imagined an ideal society in which the hope for political rights and inclusiveness of all Thais are included, as shown in the stipulations of a number of Thailand’s written constitutions, but these constitutions are disrespected and overruled by the “Thai Cultural Constitution” in which the monarchy has unwritten potent power (Nidhi 2003). As Pridi’s proposed plan affected their power and interest, the traditional elites eventually caused it to fail, by alleging it and Pridi harboured Communist motives.

⁵⁷⁸ Interview with Chailap Uthitphan. Khonkaen, 9 June 2015.

The idea of a different society among some Isan Redshirt villagers shared the quest for a utopia, indicated by a struggle for a “better” and “inclusive” society. Nevertheless, the Lao Civilisation Era was a different and, more importantly, radical imagined community in two respects. Firstly, Isan identity and dignity are portrayed as superior to those of Bangkok. Isan Redshirt villagers envisaged transforming the marginalised Northeast region into the centre of Thailand, with Khonkaen as the capital city of the country (Saowanee and McCargo 2015:1). The majority population of this community was the Isan people: their loyalty did not belong to the Thai nation-state, but to the Isan region. With the Lao/Isan language now the “central” language, Isan identity and dignity are not despised, but celebrated. The Lao Civilisation era is also depicted as a challenge to the political control and centralisation of Bangkok. This challenge was physically and symbolically exemplified by infrastructure concerning communication and transportation, which has been confined for decision of Bangkok. Among other things, the Lao Civilisation Era is said to be equipped with high-speed train and 4G phones.⁵⁷⁹

Secondly, before the Lao Civilisation Era could be born, the old Bangkok-dominant community must fall. Bangkok was described with negative images such as the era of “White Crows” (*yuk ka khao*), in which black is white, injustice is justice and bad is good.⁵⁸⁰ Unlike Pridi’s project, which was still Bangkok-centric, Redshirt villagers envisaged Bangkok being washed away by a tsunami or as a result of global warming. This dates back to the Ayutthaya era, in which Isan was not effectively integrated and a similar prophecy or “curse” was recited by subordinates against the powerful yet immoral king. As they were disproportionately powerless compared to the impotent Ayutthaya king, the subordinates had only prophecies or curses as “weapons”. For authors like Anderson, this “Prophetic Lament for Sri Ayutthaya” referred to a society best described as a “withdrawal symptom”, like the Thai society during the massacre at the Royal Plaza in 1976 as follows:

...And in those days all men and beasts

⁵⁷⁹ Interview with Chailap Uthitphan, Khonkaen, 25 May 2015.

⁵⁸⁰ Interview with Chailap Uthitphan, Khonkaen, 9 June 2015.

Shall sure be in mortal danger
For when the monarch shall betray
The ten virtues of the throne
Calamity will strike, the omens
Sixteen monstrous apparitions:
Moon, stars, earth, sky shall lose their course
Misfortune shall spread everywhere
Pitch-black the thundercloud shall blaze
With Kali's fatal conflagration
Strange signs shall be observed throughout
The land, the Chao Praya shall boil
Red as the heart's blood of a bird
Madness shall seize the Earth's wide breast
Yellow the colour of the leadening sky
The forest spirit race to haunt
The city, while to the forest flee
The city spirits seeking refuge
The enamel tile hall rise and float
The light gourd sink down to the depths (Anderson 1977:13)

This fantasy indicated that the military's claim that suppressive measures had united Thailand and restored peace and order were significantly wrong. Although this aspiration was mainly at the rhetorical level and had several constraints - there was no further plan for how it would be constructed - it demonstrated that the military's subsequent repressive measures rather invoked an aspiration for "separation" among the Redshirts. Moreover, this imagining of a different society was more fully developed than the Lanna Republic placards circulating in the Northern region in March 2014.

Maintaining Networks

Another form of passive resistance conducted by Redshirt villagers was their endeavour to maintain Redshirt networks. This endeavour directly responded

to the junta's prohibition of mass Redshirt gatherings and activities. While network maintenance was mainly conducted by the leaders, the methods employed to maintain each network varied in each case, and illustrated the subtlety of the Redshirts in exploiting the loopholes of the junta. The first group which was able to maintain its network was the Arnon faction in Udonthani. The main method was that Arnon turned his office, which had previously functioned as a community radio station used for communication with Redshirt villagers, into a small brand-new agricultural hub. This hub simply comprises five buildings, mainly made from bamboo and cogon grass, and its main activity is simply economic cultivation of three to four types of mushroom, including Oyster, Straw and Enoki.⁵⁸¹ As Arnon's bank accounts had been sequestered since the coup, the primary aim of the agricultural hub was to generate income for himself and his followers. However, in arguing that mushroom farming was his only means to earn an income, Arnon found a new method to network with his followers. Although subject to military restrictions and visits, Arnon began to organise activities in his office again, citing that the mushroom cultivation interested some villagers in economic activities.⁵⁸²

After Arnon was fully allowed to use the radio station area for "mushroom cultivation", not only did his business grow rapidly, but he was able to spread the news about his new activities to other villages. After he was established among villagers as an expert on mushroom cultivation, Arnon's fame and popularity also increased. This method allowed Arnon to gather more people at his place to participate in learning about mushroom production. He also took the opportunity to discuss politics, despite this being prohibited, while such "political" discussions were not long or substantive, and were mainly about the Thaksin premiership or how his projects benefited from Thaksin's policies.⁵⁸³ Such short discussions are commonly known among Redshirt villagers as a message to remind them that they are still Redshirt comrades and support the movement.⁵⁸⁴ After proving successful in selling his products, Arnon's activities became more famous, and there were many invitations for

⁵⁸¹ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁵⁸² Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

⁵⁸³ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

⁵⁸⁴ Interview with Arnon Sannan, Udonthani, 16 May 2015.

him to speak about “mushrooms” in other provinces. The military found it necessary to allow him not only to advise villagers on mushroom cultivation, but also to travel to other provinces. Therefore, by citing agricultural activities, Arnon’s faction has been maintained and found a means to network with villagers.

Another key faction which has been able to resist by retaining its network in the post-2014 coup period is the People-love-Udon Club. Khwanchai maintains his network through two main elements; his radio channel and religious-cultural activities. His freedom to operate his programmes was largely violated; the receiving areas are restricted to only six or seven districts of Udonthani and Khwanchai is prohibited from speaking politically. Nevertheless, the programmes proved very resilient in communicating with his followers and maintaining the network. The main method was to use his Isan cultural expertise, simply by running a series of Isan songs and operating mainly through the work of his assistants, especially Prasit Wichairat (alias DJ. Jo Jaidiew), also a consultant to the Udonthani Provincial Administrative Chief.⁵⁸⁵ The main purpose is simply to stay connected with his followers and retain what Khwanchai has called *krasae* (popularity) among them under the military regime.⁵⁸⁶

Khwanchai’s ability to maintain his faction was also evidenced in organised religious and cultural ceremonies. The prime example was his Birthday event on 13 June 2015. The event was organised in his radio station area and attended by approximately 500 participants.⁵⁸⁷ It included a Buddhist merit-making ceremony and attending villagers were asked to pay 100 baht for food. The event’s prominent theme was a series of Isan music performances featuring two personal singers of Khwanchai.⁵⁸⁸ The event was also attended by Wichian Kaokham, the Udonthani Provincial Administrative Chief and Khwanchai’s close friend and Pheu Thai politician.⁵⁸⁹ By organising affordable activities, like the Birthday event and merit-making ceremony, the Khwanchai

⁵⁸⁵ Interview with Prasit Wichairat, Udonthani, 13 June 2015.

⁵⁸⁶ Interview with Khwanchai Sarakham, Udonthani, 10 June 2015.

⁵⁸⁷ Interview with Thanradi Sarakham, Udonthani, 13 June 2015.

⁵⁸⁸ Participant observation with a video recording, Udonthani, 13 June 2015.

⁵⁸⁹ Participant observation with a video recording, Udonthani, 13 June 2015.

faction was able to maintain the network for the People-love-Udon Club. This network in turn proved to be a passive form of resistance by “cooperating” and “working” behind the junta, in place of staging mass protests. This ongoing “working” was evidenced in the climax of the Birthday event, a speech delivered by Wichian, which stated:

I wish to invite all the sacred entities to please bless brother Khwanchai to only be happy and healthy, and wish him a nice/warm family. To be the energy of fathers, mothers, brother and sisters forever. During this time, I and my team are working at the [Udonthani] PAO. Since they [the military] seized power, they have detained me for five days. They prohibited me from going to different places. I only can share ‘pain/suffering’ (*khwamtuk*) with brother Khwanchai. Each of us arises prohibited from doing anything. I have to apologise, brothers and sisters who wanted to invite us to go to some places; they [the military] prohibit it. If brothers and sisters have troubles or worries, you can come here to see brother Khwanchai, if you come here, brother Khwanchai will communicate [with me] through Jo Jai Diew because Jo Jai Diew is a PAO chief’s consultant. Or go to see me. If...if brothers and sisters have troubles or worries, rural, urban, road, water and wellbeing issues, go to see me at the PAO office. They have prohibited me from going to other places. So, you have to go to see me instead...When they [the military] will go, I don’t know. We must keep working. For brother Khwanchai, please take good care of your health in the meantime. I am asking brothers and sisters for your support. Last, apart from giving best wishes for brother Khwanchai, may I invite the sacred Buddhist triad and all the goodness which you all gave to Khwanchai please return to bless you all to be happy and healthy. Thank you. [Villagers applauded]⁵⁹⁰

Although the event was not attended by as many Redshirt participants as Khwanchai expected and the event had no substantive content, this example of

⁵⁹⁰ Participatory observation with a video recording, Udonthani, 13 June 2015.

Khwanchai's activity showed that his faction was far from relinquishing their Redshirt ideas and identity despite not staging protests against the coup. In this light, Arnon and Khwanchai shared a similar aim: to maintain their networks. The main purpose of such network maintenance was not to stage open, outright resistance, but to focus on retaining their Redshirt factions, rendering support to Redshirt villagers and, arguably, waiting for their opportunity.



Picture: the Birthday Event of Khwanchai Sarakham, the leader of the People-Love-Udon Club. (Fieldwork, Udon Thani, 13 June 2015).

Symbolic Protest

The last form of passive resistance practised among Redshirt villagers was symbolic protest. This involved Redshirt villagers' skilful use of "traditional" beliefs for their modern political struggle against the incumbent junta. While this use of traditional elements enabled them to stage symbolic protests against the junta without being prosecuted, it also included preventing bad spirits and merit-making in the name of Redshirts.

Preventing "Bad Spirits"

In a sense, the discussion of animism and superstition among Isan Redshirt villagers would highlight the prevailing belief among the Bangkok middle class that the rural electorate is not only silly but also irrational. Nevertheless, the

reference to bad spirits among Redshirt villagers as nonsense and silly is “misleading/reading”. Redshirt villagers employed this traditional belief to skilfully express their political ideas and identity. In some villages in Isan, Redshirt villagers were still able to organise symbolic protests against the Prayuth regime: red shirts were hung right in front of villagers’ houses, supposedly to scare away ‘widow ghosts’. Widow ghosts were widely believed to be the cause of unexplainable nightmarish deaths of people in Isan. As the dead were mostly men of working age and with no known illness, and they died in their sleep, it was believed among Isan people that the death was caused by a widow ghost taking the dead man as her partner.⁵⁹¹

According to Pattana Kitiarsa (2014), although this type of death among the Isan male population is still very “mysterious”, there are several explanations of the phenomenon. Citing the medical term “Sudden Unexplained Nocturnal Death Syndrome” (SUNDS), Pattana explained that the underlying factors of such an “unexplained death” include genetic disorder, stress, excessive work, unhealthy food consumption or drug use. However, as Isan men tend to work as labourers on domestic or transnational sites, the nature of their work means they endure physically difficult conditions. These types of work also tend to provide insufficient income, so the workers have to work extra hours, beyond what is healthy, often in bad conditions and with ill treatment. This combination can cause accumulative fatigue and lead to the syndrome. While SUNDS killed 407 Thai workers between May 1982 and July 1984 in Singapore, “around 600 Thai workers had died in similar circumstances in the Middle East” (Pattana 2014:121-122).

In Isan villages, these men are also husbands or fathers and leave to seek jobs, thus working and living in other provinces or countries over a sustained period. As a result, there are mostly elderly people, women and children in Isan villages. Thus, death among the relatively smaller male population at night leads many villagers to believe that SUNDS is caused by the haunting of a widow ghost, and the military usually allowed red shirts to be hung in front of houses for the purpose of scaring such ghosts away

⁵⁹¹ Interview with, Khamkhan Fakkanpun, Khonkaen, 4 April 2015.

Nevertheless, the prevention of widow ghosts by hanging red shirts in rural villages concealed a passive resistance to the military. Traditionally, the prevention of the widow ghost would be practised in winter, in which the weather in Isan is relatively cold and dry.⁵⁹² However, the Redshirts would hang out red shirts year-round, clearly for purposes that were not entirely connected with ghost repulsion. Secondly, to prevent widow ghosts from taking male lives, villagers traditionally asked their husbands and sons to dress in female “costume” (*phatung*).⁵⁹³ Some painted the nails of their husband and sons red, disguising them so they would be unharmed by the ghost as it recognised their husband and son as female.⁵⁹⁴ However, the most important preventive measure was the decoration of their house with *palatkhek*, artificial phallus-shaped amulets typically made of wood.⁵⁹⁵ It is believed among villagers that if they painted this symbol red, its preventive power would increase.⁵⁹⁶ However, many Redshirt villagers did not use wooden phallic symbols, but red shirts, arguing that they were similarly meant to prevent bad spirits.

Although various villagers in the three provinces studied insisted that the red shirts hanging outside their houses were solely meant to prevent bad spirits and had nothing to do with the Redshirt movement, using red shirts rather than other red objects was a means of showing their antipathy towards the junta. As McDaniel observed concerning the relations between Thai Buddhism, superstition and art in his study *Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk*: “Aspirations are interconnected with objects. Beliefs are articulated through objects. Objects are not empty signifiers onto which meaning is placed” (McDaniel 2011:162). In using red shirts to prevent “ghosts”, Redshirt villagers also arguably took the opportunity to display their prohibited political aspirations.

⁵⁹² The coldness and dryness is in comparison to other regions except the north, and according to Thai standards.

⁵⁹³ Isan garment which looks like a skirt. Interview with Khamkan Fakkanpun, Khonkaen, 4 April 2015.

⁵⁹⁴ Interview with Khamkan Fakkanpun, Khonkaen, 4 April 2015.

⁵⁹⁵ Interview with Khamkan Fakkanpun, Khonkaen, 4 April 2015.

⁵⁹⁶ Interview with Khamkan Fakkanpun, Khonkaen, 4 April 2015.

The claim to be repelling ghosts can be read as some Redshirt villagers skilfully playing powers against one another: the one of superstition and the other of the military. In this sense, many Redshirt villagers could perform their ideas and identity, compared to other Redshirt villages which were generally forced to remove flags, shirts and pictures related to the Redshirt movement. Redshirts in possession of red symbols of all forms were forced to remove them or face punishment. A prime example occurred in April 2016, many Redshirts were arrested because they had red bowls. These red bowls had been given by Thaksin as a Thai New Year present, and had Thaksin's picture on them. However, after being told that the red shirts were for the prevention of the "widow ghost", the soldiers, who were mostly male, left them intact; seemingly they too were fearful.⁵⁹⁷

Making "Merit"

Redshirt villagers also conducted symbolic protests through some religious and cultural ceremonies, like funerals and merit-making ceremonies. While the military regard the ceremonies as necessary, Redshirt villagers used such opportunities to maintain connections with each other. In this regard, a merit-making ceremony in Ubonratchathani is particularly illustrative.⁵⁹⁸ On 15 March 2015, a group of villagers led by Saksit Kingmala (alias Cho Auan) gathered in a village on the outskirts of Warin Chumrab district. The main purpose was to organise a Buddhist merit-making ceremony,⁵⁹⁹ by donating money to a temple nearby. The event appeared similar to other Buddhist merit-making ceremonies which were organised during the season in Isan. Food was served as normal to welcome those attending, while Isan music was played loudly. The fact that the

⁵⁹⁷ A good example is narrated by ex-prisoner A, who argued that after the military searched his house without a court warrant, the soldiers confiscated everything red from it, even a red radio receiver belonging to his old disabled mother. However, to his surprise, they left a red shirt intact since it was cited as being used for repelling a widow ghost. The fact that all red objects were strictly banned led ex-prisoner A to believe the soldiers too might be fearful of the widow ghost, and allowed his red T-shirt to be displayed despite knowing red shirts were the very symbol of the Redshirts. Interview with ex-prisoner A, Khonkaen, 9 June 2015.

⁵⁹⁸ Participant observation with video recording, Ubonratchathani, 15 March 2015. After I visited Saksit on two occasions, he visited me to take part in this event.

⁵⁹⁹ This ceremony is called *kanlon*.

participants dressed in various different colours made the event seem unlikely to be related to the Redshirt movement.⁶⁰⁰

Nevertheless, this event was not a typical merit-making ceremony, but a deeply symbolic protest of Redshirt villagers. The event began with a gathering at Saksit's house by Redshirt participants from different locations and backgrounds. While some travelled from nearby provinces, many were local community radio operators, factory workers, food sellers or farmers.⁶⁰¹ The house was already openly decorated with pictures of Thaksin and Yingluck, and with red objects, like red ribbons and even drinks.⁶⁰² The climax of this event was a donation of money to the nearby temple. Although the temple is located only a few hundred metres away, Redshirt villagers travelled in a procession including pickup trucks and some tuk tuks,⁶⁰³ while the majority walked, to attract more attention to their "merit-making" activities.

After arriving at the temple, almost all the Redshirt villagers changed into red shirts, making the procession appear highly synchronised. They then walked around the temple accompanied by loud music and energetic dancing.⁶⁰⁴ The procession was quite similar to a Redshirt village proclamation. The procession ended when three full circulations were made around the temple chapel, and the Redshirt villagers were blessed by Buddhist monks. Yet it was the end of the procession that indicated the event was not only intended for merit-making, but for staging a symbolic Redshirt villager protest. Shortly after the blessing there was another procession, carrying a large sign to be erected at a red kiosk providing free red drinks. The sign featured a picture of Thaksin smiling, with one of his hands making a sign of love, identical to the proclaiming sign of Redshirt villages. After the sign was erected, several villagers could not help smiling, while some laughed or cheered, seemingly with enjoyment.

⁶⁰⁰ One female participant was even dressed in a skirt with a military camouflage pattern.

⁶⁰¹ According to a Redshirt radio operator, he travelled from Yasothorn province, around a hundred kilometres from Ubonratchathani. Interview with Sing Num (pseudonym), 15 March 2015.

⁶⁰² Please see appendix

⁶⁰³ Thai-style auto rickshaw.

⁶⁰⁴ Participatory observation with a video recording, Ubonratchathani, 15 March 2015.



Picture: Saksit (alias Cho Auan) in Ubon Ratchathani (fieldwork 15 March 2015)

According to Saksit, his group had continued to conduct Redshirt activities since the coup occurred and had organised similar events three times.⁶⁰⁵ Several villagers appeared unconcerned about possible retribution by the military. As one participant put it: “Dead is dead. What we experienced in the past was worse”.⁶⁰⁶ For many Redshirt villagers, the ceremony provided a good opportunity not only to make merit according to a Buddhist belief, but also to retain connections with their Redshirt comrades. Despite being constantly visited by the military and summoned to the Ubonratchathani Military Camp, Saksit also argued that he was not afraid of punishment in leading villagers to stage this symbolic protest, and insisted that it was his right to express his ideas.⁶⁰⁷

Although Saksit’s group was a rare example which defied the junta by organising a Redshirt activity, the fact that Saksit was among the five Redshirts in Ubonratchathani who were closely monitored clearly showed that the junta was unable to eradicate the Redshirt movement in Isan. Similarly, for this group of villagers, if arrested, they could face charges or imprisonment which would

⁶⁰⁵ These activities were organised mainly in remote areas and usually very few “outsiders” were invited. I was invited after visiting him for the third time. Interview with Saksit Kingmala, Ubonratchathani, 15 March 2015.

⁶⁰⁶ Interview with DJ. Singha Num, Ubonratchathani, 15 March 2015.

⁶⁰⁷ Interview with Saksit Kingmala, Ubonratchathani, 15 March 2015.

lead to disruption in their work and family life. However, Redshirt villagers argued they remain red and resist the junta, even if their “fight results in death” (*tai pen tai*). After the event, Saksit invariably continued his Redshirt ideas and identity. Although there were concerns for Saksit’s safety, no group members or his relatives expected the tragic turn of events which transpired. On 23 February 2016, Saksit was pronounced dead from a haemorrhagic stroke in Ubonratchathani. His family believed that endless stress, pressure and intimidation by the military was the main cause (*Prachatai* 26 February 2016).

In addition to being forced to report to the Ubonratchathani Military Camp every week, Saksit had also been frequently visited and called by army officers. These military measures were particularly imposed when there was news of Redshirt mobilisation.⁶⁰⁸ Most importantly, it was after Saksit was summoned to the Ubonratchani Military Camp on 22 February 2016 that he suddenly suffered an acute headache and was admitted to hospital (*Prachatai* 26 February 2016). His group and family members were suspicious that the military measures played a role in his death. While left in sadness and shock, many members of Saksit’s group retained their Redshirt ideas and identity. This was exemplified by Saksit’s funeral. Unlike other funerals, where the participants dress in black, the majority of the attending Redshirts dressed in red to pay respect to Saksit and show their resistance to the junta, while the ceremony was decorated with pictures of Thaksin and Yingluck.⁶⁰⁹ It was not a funeral song, but the Redshirt movement song “A Dust Warrior” (*nuksu thuridin*) that was featured at his funeral (*Prachatai* 28 February 2016). Although concealed beneath merit-making events, the activities led by Saksit proved that Redshirt villagers did not relinquish their ideas or identity. They neither surrendered nor ran away.

⁶⁰⁸ Interview with Saksit Kingmala, Ubonratchathani, 5 February 2015.

⁶⁰⁹ Personal conversation with Phon Chaorai, 28 February 2015.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the Redshirts' resistance to the military regime in the post-2014 coup period. It demonstrated that such resistance was conducted mainly in passive forms which were developed as far as the street rallies or village proclamations which marked the Redshirt movement in the pre-2014 coup period. Nevertheless, the chapter also challenged the claims of the junta and conventional media that most Thais support the post-coup regime, and argued that Redshirts' voices were missing. To achieve a more nuanced understanding of Redshirt villagers and political situations in Isan, this chapter also examined patterns of challenges conceived and conducted by Redshirt villagers, including their frustration with the junta and their rejection of ideological indoctrination and moral inculcation.

Unlike the claims of each poll conducted in the post-coup period, which revealed high levels of satisfaction among the majority of Thais, the first section showed that several Redshirt villages evidently and profoundly reacted in frustration against the military, as shown by both radical and ordinary Redshirts. Such frustration ranged from verbal critiques to physical anger displayed towards the junta, particularly Prayuth. Nevertheless, this section also explained that due mainly to lack of leadership, concerns about caution among Redshirt villagers and internal distrust, this frustration was not translated into street protests. The section also partly showed the internal contentions which already existed within the Redshirt movement, as discussed in previous chapters and exemplified here by the lack of communication between the UDD and the leaders in Udonthani, which comprises the largest Redshirt factions in Isan, and which minimised the possibility of Redshirt challenges to the 2014 coup.

The second section looked at Redshirt villagers' rejection of the junta's ideological indoctrination and moral inculcation. This rejection was primarily directed against the twelve core values and the characterisation of the Prayuth regime as government by "good people". Most Redshirt villagers interviewed did not pay attention to the twelve core values. The Redshirt informants conceived that the junta's ideological promotion was really to silence their real

political demands, and straightforwardly contended that the junta are not good people. This rejection was expressed even by the original Redshirt villagers and Redshirt political ex-prisoners, who endured the most repressive measures. Although they had been forced to recite the oath or the core values, they argued that they still simply had no interest in the state's imposed ideology, and remained Redshirts after the camp or prison. However, this section explained that as they were unable to afford an open rejection of the junta's ideational control and censorship, the Redshirts had to obey military orders. Such obedience was, nonetheless, just calculated conformity, and their ideas remain Redshirt. This section partly explained that it cannot be claimed that Thailand's second constitution referendum, which was in favour of approval, supports the military. The main reason was that many Redshirts demanded an election be held as soon, even at the expense of the constitution.

By reading "resistance" in broader and deeper senses, the last section examined the extent of Redshirt villagers' passive resistance, including aspiration for separation, network maintenance and symbolic protest. While the regime suppression played a direct role in fuelling and fermenting such resistance, some Redshirt villagers felt they belonged less to Thai society after receiving a series of injustices and aspired for a separate imagined community in which they are counted. Other Redshirt groups also practised passive resistance mainly by retaining their network, focusing on uniting their factions rather than actively opposing the regime. Some Redshirts symbolically yet skilfully protested against the junta by citing religious and cultural elements, as shown in the "bad spirit preventing" and "merit-making" on behalf of Redshirts. Although less open, organised and substantive, these forms of resistance were resilient in allowing Redshirt villagers to both project and perform their political ideas and identity.

Through these three sections, I argued Redshirt villagers continue to resist the post-2014 coup regime. Despite being prohibited or punished, Redshirt villagers retain their political ideas and identity, which suggests that the military coercion and control measures are unable to decidedly eradicate Redshirt villagers, or force them to relinquish their ideas and identity. As one

informant concluded: “[I]f the military don’t get it, they won’t be able to solve the problem. Even if there were no vote-buying, we [the Redshirts] would still vote for Pheu Thai”.⁶¹⁰ Unless the root causes are politically solved, the “peace and order” the military claims to restore will be illusive, and Thai politics will not truly transcend the “colour-coded” conflicts. Then, the “Redshirt” movement may re-emerge, whether it be at electoral ballots, at street protests or concealed underground.

⁶¹⁰ Interview with ex-prisoner D, Khonkaen, 19 August 2015.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis set out to critically examine how the Redshirt village movement had challenged state-village power relations between 2010 and 2016. The Redshirt village movement which emerged in late 2010 marked a significant transformation of the Redshirt movement which had been severely affected by the April-May 2010 military crackdown. Crucial to this transformation was a move beyond protests that involved laying claim to territory and directly challenging state authority. Such transformation was also a shift from staging rally spectacles to asserting power. While influenced by the broader objectives of the Redshirt movement which protested for electoral democracy and against undemocratic intervention of the traditional elites (royalist, military and judiciary) commonly referred to as *ammāt* (aristocrats), the Redshirt village movement emphasised the demands for *khwamyuttitham* (justice), especially for Redshirt political prisoners who were affected by the March-May 2010 political incidents.

The emergence of the Redshirt village movement challenged the power relations between villagers and the state as dominated and controlled by the traditional elites in an unprecedented way. Previously, ordinary villagers had to keep their “heads down” and generally respect the ruling elites as reinforced by Thai political culture. Redshirt villagers, however, do not accept this political reinforcement as taken-for-granted political legitimacy, nor do they respect the *ammāt*. Such challenges and calls for democracy represent a significant transformation in Isan rural villages. The thesis also contended that such challenges to state-villager power relations cannot be investigated simply through a binary opposition approach which portrays the Redshirts as a “cohesive” force which entirely opposes the “monolithic” Thai state. Such an approach neglects the internal dimensions and important elements within the Redshirt movement.

The thesis illustrated that the emergence of the Redshirt village movement revealed the internal cleavages among various factions which had

different roles, approaches, “ideologies” and purposes, and further engendered internal conflicts within the Redshirt movement. Such internal conflicts critically affected the Redshirts’ challenges against state-village power relations and significantly explained why their challenges were not resolute and resilient. The thesis showed that such internal conflicts which occurred long before 2014 adversely affected the Redshirt movement and critically explained why the movement failed to stage open, organised mass demonstrations against the May 2014 coup. The task of this concluding chapter comprises four sections. The first section highlights the originality and contributions of this research. Secondly, the chapter summarises the thesis’ findings in relation to the research questions. Thirdly, it discusses the thesis limitations and future research avenues. Lastly, concluding remarks concerning the research implications in connection with the prospects of Thai politics will be provided.

Research Originality and Contributions

This thesis makes a contribution to the knowledge on the Redshirt movement, one of the largest political movements Thailand has witnessed, and offers a fuller understanding of the colour-coded political crisis which has gripped Thailand over the past decade. As indicated in chapter two, existing literature has provided empirical insights and conceptual explanations of the Redshirt movement. This body of literature critically challenged the conventional portrayal of the Redshirts as “poor farmers” and “hired protesters”, arguing that the Redshirt members cannot be classified by a single economic class (Apichat et al. 2013). Identified as cosmopolitan villagers, middle-income peasants or urbanised villagers (Keyes 2014; Walker 2012; Naruemon and McCargo 2011), Redshirt protesters largely emerged from the socio-economic change Thailand has experienced, although our knowledge of the Redshirt movement is still limited and incomplete.

Most of the existing literature focuses on the causes of the emergence of the Redshirt movement and is concerned with the 2010 Redshirt street rallies in Bangkok. Isan – the Redshirt movement’s stronghold and an area which has a long history of resistance against the Thai state – is also understudied. This thesis bridges this gap, offering a critical analysis of the Redshirt movement

since the establishment of the original Redshirt village in Ban Nonghuling, Udonthani in mid-December 2010, until the constitution referendum in August 2016. Based on extensive fieldwork and participant observation in three major Redshirts' stronghold provinces in Isan – Udonthani, Khonkaen and Ubonratchathani – the thesis provided a more systematic and complete explanation of the post-2010 Redshirt movement. Based on interviews with local leaders and villagers, the thesis also offered an emic analysis of the Redshirt movement from below which is different from the accounts of the national Redshirt leaders in Bangkok. The research finds that the Redshirt movement in the post-2010 crackdown period was characterised by internal conflicts which revolved around the issues of leadership contention, mobilisation competition and quasi-ideological contestation. As a study of a movement of marginalised people, this thesis also has wider implications for an understanding of opposition movements, which will be discussed later on in this chapter.

Research Findings

This research is guided by the following primary research questions: how has the emergence of Redshirt villages challenged state-village relations in Thailand? In order to tackle this question, the thesis is further guided by the following secondary research questions:

RQ1. How have the Redshirt movement and Redshirt villages changed since 2010?

RQ2. What were the power relations between the state under the Pheu Thai government and Redshirt villagers?

RQ3. To what extent, and how far, did Redshirt villages challenge state ideologies and projects?

RQ4. What repercussions did the 2014 coup have for Redshirt villagers?

RQ5. To what extent, and how far, have Redshirt villagers resisted the post-coup suppression?

Based on these research questions, the thesis argued that the Redshirt villagers have challenged the traditional elites who attempted to subjugate villagers to become politically passive villagers living in a “peaceful” village habitus. Redshirt villagers were closely involved with politics, and, like several political communities, such involvement even led to conflicts characterised by contention, competition and contestation which signified the status of being political agents and entrepreneurs. The thesis offers the following key findings.

Proclaiming Redshirt villages

As guided by the primary research question and RQ1, the thesis demonstrated that the major form of the post-2010 political challenges conducted by the Redshirts was the Redshirt village movement, which began with the proclamation of the original Redshirt village in December 2010, and operated until May 2014. Although the creation of the original Redshirt village was ostensibly a response to the concerns over Redshirt political prisoners affected by the March-May 2010 political incidents, the first village proclamation was a crucial attempt to revive the movement when the Redshirts’ identity and ideas were severely censored and constrained after almost one hundred deaths and two thousand injuries caused by the 2010 military crackdown.

In the months and years that followed, village proclamations had increased not only in Isan but also across other regions of Thailand. By early 2014, the resulting Redshirt village movement was eventually claimed by the Redshirt village leaders to number between 15,000 and 20,000 villages, approximately a quarter of the total villages in Thailand. But the emergence of the Redshirt village movement was not just a show of strength: it revealed critical cleavages within the Redshirt movement. As the Redshirt village movement gained increasing popularity and political potential, it precipitated intra-movement conflicts with other Redshirt factions which also contended, competed and contested for support from the Redshirts. In this sense, Redshirt villagers were rich political resources with which various political factions and entrepreneurs attempted to engage.

Leadership Contention and Mobilisation Competition

As demonstrated in Chapter Three, the emergence of the Redshirt village movement led to rivalries, jealousies and conflicts between the leaders of different Redshirt factions. Although the Redshirt village movement provided a new mechanism for mobilisation for the Redshirt movement, other Redshirt factions viewed this mechanism as a contention to their leadership. The national UDD leaders viewed the popular Redshirt village movement as an obstacle to the effective leadership and internal cooperation of the Redshirt movement. For Thida Thavornseth, the second national UDD president, after being damaged from the 2010 crackdown, the Redshirt movement needed centralised leadership under the UDD in Bangkok. But the Redshirt village leaders criticised the UDD for attempting to entirely control and monopolise the Redshirts, while never providing adequate opportunities to participate for other Redshirt leaders, especially those from Isan which accounted for the highest number of Redshirt members.

While Thaksin eagerly embraced the emergence of Redshirt villages as a new method to sustain the Redshirt movement and the struggle against the traditional elites, one reason for Thaksin's enthusiasm was that he benefited from internal competition, by dividing the Redshirts into separate factions and leadership. Such divide-and-rule methods kept all Redshirt factions comparatively active and kept Redshirt factions in check to ensure that Thaksin would still be relevant to the Redshirt movement. Such methods were evidenced when Thaksin encouraged the mobilisation of the Redshirt village movement especially in the beginning despite the objection from Khwanchai Praipana, the leader of People-love-Udon club, whose mobilisation largely contributed to the Redshirt movement not only regionally but nationally in the pre-2010 crackdown period. Local Redshirt leaders, such as Pichet Tabudda and Khwanchai Praipana who have prominent roles in the pre-Redshirt village movement period, at least initially opposed the Redshirt village movement and questioned its legitimacy. The leadership of these local leaders was challenged by Redshirt village ceremonies and activities. Pichet argued that the Redshirt village movement was negative for it was exclusivist against non-Redshirts,

while Khwanchai argued that the Redshirt village movement was not an authentic Redshirt movement. As well as providing a new type of method to challenge their opponents, the Redshirt village movement led to leadership contention within the red camp.

Chapter Four examined the relations among Redshirt factions when the state power was under the Yingluck government (August 2011-May 2014). Such relations are best characterised as complex or conflicting. The complexity or conflicts resulted from the political vulnerability of Yingluck premiership and the necessity to maintain Redshirt demonstrators during its parliamentary period. Such necessity allowed the newly-established Redshirt village movement to mobilise and manoeuvre, by claiming to protect the Yingluck government. However, such mobilisation which explicitly employed Redshirts' identity led to competition among Redshirt factions which had different approaches and purposes. The mobilisation competition within the red camp was expressed in circumstances in which mass mobilisation was involved, including the general election in 2011, the Central Plain flooding in 2011, the community development projects, and local elections in 2012. While such competition signified that different Redshirt factions attempted to protect the Yingluck government from the traditional elites' challenges, the thesis has demonstrated that Redshirt villagers were rich political resources with which various political entrepreneurs, especially pro-Thaksin politicians, attempted to engage. Thus, the thesis answered RQ2, by suggesting that such engagement between Redshirt villagers and different political entrepreneurs generated complex or conflicting relations in which a pro-Thaksin government informally supported but formally denied the Redshirt village movement.

Redshirt Challenges and State Counteraction

In answering the primary research question and the RQ3, Chapter Five analysed the challenges of the Redshirts against the state. Apart from the new mobilisation method of the Redshirt village movement, the thesis found that the Redshirts' village proclamation had posed significant challenges to the state – its ideology and policies – at the village level. Such challenges can be divided into challenges against Thai-style democracy, royal sufficiency, Thai conventional

nationalism, and militarism. Drawing from exceptional areas which were once caught under the ideological spell of the state, including a village designated for veterans in the War against Communism, a sufficiency economy village and a Democrat-dominated district that became Redshirt villages, the chapter showed that the Redshirts demanded political equality by continuing to use the notion of *ammattayathipatai* to challenge their opponents' claim of Thai-style democracy. They particularly opposed the royally-appointed prime minister and called for justice for Redshirt political prisoners.

The chapter then demonstrated that Redshirts critically opposed the royal-propounded doctrine of sufficiency economy, and preferred Thakin's populism. They argued that the Sufficiency Economy was not compatible with their aspirations and livelihoods. Redshirt villagers also challenged Thai conventional nationalism by evoking Isan ethno-regionalism. Such challenges were expressed especially by Pichet, the Chak-thong-rob leader in Ubonratchathani, who usually mentioned Isan's independence history and rebellious legacy in his radio programs and from rally stages. Redshirt villagers challenged the notion of state security as asserted by the state officers. They argued that the allegations that Redshirt villages were a threat to state security was misleading, and that such allegations were used to legitimise militarism which violated their personal rights and security.

The thesis argued that these challenges to Thai-style democracy, royal sufficiency, conventional nationalism, and militarism were not resolute and resilient. The underlying reason was because these challenges were internally undermined. The challenges to the *ammatt* were undermined by Pheu Thai politicians' attempts to compromise with the traditional elites. Similarly, Isan ethno-regionalism is mild within the movement as a whole. The idea was impeded by Thaksin's divide-and-rule technique which employed the Southerner trio as the leaders of the UDD. At local level, the struggle for recognition for Isan identity was further exacerbated by both Khwanchai and Arnon who showed no interest in performing Isan identity. Khwanchai, in particular, for all his talk, is from a central province of Suphanburi, although he well understood Isan culture as evidenced in his mobilisational methods.

Attempts to raise Isan ethno-regionalism within the Redshirt movement was fragmented. Last, the Redshirts' challenges against militarism was undermined by the previous generation of Redshirt leaders who used experiences of encountering with the military to delegitimise emerging leaders.

Chapter Six, examining the RQ4, offered a nuanced explanation of how the traditional forces, particularly the military, suppressed the Redshirts and regained power through subtle techniques of coercion and control. The chapter argued that the 2014 military coup created fear, censorship and subordination on the part of Redshirt villagers. It showed that although the Redshirts constituted a rich political resource, Thai traditional elites never attempted to make use of such a resource for electoral political ends, nor employed political means to deal with the Redshirts' uprising. The main techniques employed by the military centred on suppression, surveillance, ideological indoctrination, and moralising. While Redshirt villagers, particularly the Khonkaen Model, were the most severe case of the military suppression, local leaders were the targets of surveillance. As evidenced by the One Thai One Common Heart Project and the junta's "morality" propaganda, Redshirt villagers were also subject to more subtle control techniques defined by indoctrination and moralising. Rather than promoting political participation or moral improvement as claimed by the military, these political schemes invoked nationalism and royalism to silence Redshirt villagers' real demands and deprive their political agency. The main purposes were to derail electoral politics and to entrench the Prayuth regime which suspended Thai democracy.

Post-2014 Coup Resistance

To provide a fuller explanation to the primary research question and the RQ5, Chapter Seven explored the Redshirts' resistance against the military regime in the post-2014 coup period. Despite some indicators of high support among the Thai majority toward the junta, the chapter argued that there were patterns of challenges conceived and conducted among Redshirt villagers, driven by their sustained frustration against the junta and their rejection of ideological indoctrination and moral inculcation. Several Redshirt villagers reacted in frustration against the military, reinforced primarily by the military's false

reconciliation efforts, and exemplified by verbal critiques and physical indignation against Prayuth.

The research showed that several Redshirt villagers rejected the junta's ideological indoctrination and moral propaganda, paying no attention or giving no value to the twelve core values introduced in 2014. Many Redshirt villagers also rejected claims that the junta are serving the common good and cast doubt on the legitimacy of the coup as a form of political intervention. Such rejection was expressed even by those who endured the most repressive measures, like the original Redshirt villagers and Redshirt political ex-prisoners. This chapter found that the post-2014 coup resistance of Redshirt villagers was conjectured and conducted mainly in passive forms, revolving around an aspiration for separation, the maintaining of networks, and symbolic protest. The thesis showed that some Redshirt villagers felt that they less belonged to Thai society after experiencing injustice, and they aspired for a separate imagined community in which they are counted, while other Redshirt groups prioritised their networks and some are still symbolically protesting against the junta. Although less open, organised and substantive, these forms of resistance were resilient in allowing Redshirt villagers to both project and perform their political ideas and identity.

Such resistance has not been developed as far as street rallies or village proclamations which marked the Redshirt movement in the pre-2014 coup period. The chapter found that, owing to the lack of protest leadership, the cautious concerns among Redshirt villagers and internal distrust, the frustrated Redshirts did not take to the streets or demand confrontation. Many Redshirts even attempted to or planned an escape. The chapter also argued that, due mainly to their constraints, the Redshirts' rejection of the junta's ideational control and censorship had to be expressed in calculated conformity in which Redshirt villagers physically obeyed the military order, but their ideas remain Redshirt's, to an extent liberated from repressive control. Despite being prohibited and even prosecuted, Redshirt villagers still retain their political ideas and perform their political identity. This resilience indicated that the military measures were unable to eradicate Redshirt villagers and proved

unsuccessful. The research concluded that as long as the root causes are not politically solved, Thai politics will not truly transcend colour-coded conflicts.

Research Limitations and Future Research Venues

During the twelve-month period of fieldwork, the research covered mainly three Isan provinces, Udonthani, Khonkaen and Ubonratchathani, though additional fieldwork was conducted in Roi-et and Mahasarakham. These three provinces were selected since they were major Redshirt provinces and constituted key representatives of the Redshirt movement. These selected provinces were also areas in which prominent Redshirt factions emerged and operated, including the Redshirt village movement and the People-love-Udon club in Udonthani, the Khonkaen Model in Khonkaen and the Chak-thong-rob group in Ubonratchathani. There are of course other Redshirt Isan provinces which have different Redshirt factions characterised by different leadership, mobilisation, political ideas, and purposes. Future research may contribute to an understanding of these local Redshirt factions in some of the remaining provinces in order to understand these local groups and how they were related to the national UDD or other local Redshirt factions.

In terms of timeframe, this research is mainly concerned with the period between the 2010 military crackdown and the 2016 constitution referendum. There have been certain major political events occurring and may occur in the subsequent periods, including the royal transition and the possible next general election. These two political developments are undeniably related to the Redshirt movement, and future research may shed light on these subsequent political developments.

Research Implications

There are three implications for which this research on the Redshirt movement has, including a broader understanding of Thai politics, the concept of everyday politics and the comparative analysis of opposition movements beyond Thailand.

Redshirt Movement and Thai politics

The contribution of this thesis rests on its explication of the complexity, ambiguity and nuance of one side of the colour-coordinated politics. Thailand is highly polarised from recent political conflicts, which can be simplistically reduced and conventionally explained from bipolar colour-coded movements. This thesis, however, showed the difficulty in reducing and explaining such a complex phenomenon, like the Redshirt movement, into one “label” within the colour-coded politics. There are a wide range of supporters who were promoting different agendas for different reasons. The thesis also found that internal polarisation caused more of an impact than the external polarisation between the two sides. It suggested that “external” polarisation might not be adequate to explain the colour-coded politics over the last decade in Thailand.

The Concept of Everyday Politics

The thesis also contributes to the concept of everyday politics, especially the application of everyday forms of resistance. It demonstrated that the notion of everyday politics which is often used to explain peasants’ resistance and their economic struggle, can also be applied to examine resistance of villagers who did not solely identify themselves as peasants. In this regard, the thesis showed that everyday resistance may not be necessarily practiced against economic exaction and exploitation or for the sake of economic improvement, but concerned power relations demonstrated by the demands for political recognition, rights and equality.

By employing the concept of every politics, this thesis also argued that the overemphasis on resistance in terms of street protests or open, large-scale and confrontational challenges of Redshirt villagers would miss significant terrains of their resistance especially in the post-2014 period. The case of Redshirt villagers showed that they resist the military state’s physically suppression or ideological and moral inculcation by expressing frustration or directly rejecting the military programs. This thesis also showed that Redshirt villagers used subtle and complex techniques to resist the Thai military state. They demanded ideal society in which they belong and used cultural-religious elements as methods of expressing their resistance against the junta. The thesis

suggests that, compared to the claim of class and common economic consciousness, the use of cultural-religious elements and identity seemed more effective in enabling Redshirt villagers to be able to practice their everyday forms of resistance. The state authority who shared similar cultural and religious belief also found it difficult to suppress the Redshirts' activities even though such activities challenged their authority.

In addition, this thesis also suggests that the principle of individuality or non-coordination, one of the characteristics of everyday forms of resistance, may not be useful for the subordinate in practicing their challenges. Such characteristics might even undermine the success of resistance. Most scholars agree that this notion of everyday forms of resistance comprises three components. First, everyday resistance is not open or well-coordinated confrontation. Rather, it usually involves "self-help" or individualistic resistance that is not only non-confrontational and ill-organised. As Scott and Kerkvliet note: "They [the acts of everyday resistance] require little or no co-ordination or planning; they often represent forms of "self-help"; they typically avoid any direct symbolic affront to authority and they are generally underwritten by a sub-culture of resistance" (Scott and Kerkvliet 1986:1). Second, to constitute resistance, the acts must be directed against superiors, not equals or subordinates. Third, intention is important for the acts of everyday resistance (Scott and Kerkvliet 1986:2).

This thesis found that although acts of everyday resistance could be ill-coordinated among the *Redshirt* villagers, in order to practice acts of resistance or expand their movement successfully, as illustrated by the proclamation of villages, Redshirt villagers could not rely on the principle of individuality and needed acceptance from or at least coexistence with the neutral and *non-Redshirt* villagers. Redshirt villagers might be able to transform street protest to resilient everyday forms of resistance in the village. Nevertheless, such transformation could violate the political legitimacy for other villagers, especially non-Redshirts. Many villagers found the proclamation of villages violated their political rights and ignored their voice. Therefore, in order to successfully draw political protest into intimate level of everyday village life,

Redshirts needed an accepted degree of coexistence between Redshirt and non-Redshirts.

Comparative Opposition Movements

The last terrain for which this thesis provides an implication is on comparative opposition movements beyond the case of Thailand. The thesis demonstrates that it is important for opposition movements, especially newly established ones, which usually struggle for recognition, rights and redistribution, to firstly exert their “distinct” ideas and identity to make their claim perceived in the emerging phases. Without such exertion, their claims would continue to be neglected. But the more problematic aspects rest on the later phases, the opposition movement have to adapt and accommodate such “exerting” ideas and identity so as not to violate those of others in the wider polity.

Secondly, the thesis shows the importance of the power balance between leaders and protesters in an opposition movement. After their struggle, leaders are usually politically promoted and, thus, distanced from the mass. This distance can lead to internal conflicts, if such promotion and distance are perceived to be illegitimate by the other leaders or supporters. This involves a simple fact that no particular members want to be “unprivileged”, no matter how “unprivileged” the opposition movement is as well as no matter how vociferously they protest against political privilege in a political polity.

Thirdly, the massive size and the prolonged protests of a movement did not lead to the strength of the movement. An understanding that the bigger the opposition movement or the longer the life span of the movement, the more stable and strong the movement will become may not be correct. For the Redshirt movement, its size and prolonged struggle have led to potential differences and internal conflicts which had been developed over its operation. Such massive and prolonged protests could obstruct the movement from its goals. As can be learnt from the Thai case, the longer the movement needs to struggle or the bigger the movement aim to demonstrate might mean the more ineffective it becomes.

Such a premise is different from an argument made by critics, like Nelson (2014) who examined the Yellowshirts. Different from the Redshirts, the Yellowshirts not only had a relatively short life span and much smaller size, but their role also had “vanished” from Thai political landscape. Nelson (2014:141) argued that the Yellowshirts were downgraded from a “powerful movement” to become a mere “political sect”. But, the influence and goals of the Yellowshirts did not demise. The decline of the Yellowshirts created a platform for an alliance with a new type of the anti-Thaksin movement led by the PDRC. In this sense, the two anti-Thaksin movements could reduce potential conflicts concerning leadership and agency issues of two different types of leaders; Sonthi Limthongkul and Suthep Thaugsuban. In allowing different types of leadership to emerge, the anti-Thaksin forces were more united and “Yellowshirt” protesters were more resilient. In this light, by mobilising in a relatively short period and allowing new type of leadership, a movement is more accommodating and adaptive which is key to its continuity.

Prospect for Thai politics

The New Reign

The crucial royal transition on 1 December 2016 from the reign of King Bhumibol to King Vajiralongkorn caused seismic impacts on Thai politics and the Redshirt movement. Many Redshirts interviewed before the transition seemed optimistic, as they argued that the relations between King Vajiralongkorn and the Redshirts were not hostile. As one informant expressed her feelings towards the royal family, “I love the Crown Prince most because he doesn’t intervene into politics”.⁶¹¹ This optimism was also based on the belief that King Vajiralongkorn has good relations with Thaksin and, indeed, in the electoral campaign in 2014, one of the red T-shirt best-sellers stated simply “We love the Crown Prince”.⁶¹² Although the 2014 election results were annulled, the expressed affection towards the Crown Prince during the reign of then incumbent King Bhumibol was outrageous according to the Thai convention. Such an expression served the Redshirt proposes in two respects. Firstly, it

⁶¹¹ Interview with Nin (pseudonym), Khonkaen, 19 August 2015.

⁶¹² Please see appendix.

aimed to overturn the criticism that the Redshirt were anti-monarchists. Secondly, the expression attacked the royalists who presumably found the meaning of the expression as a wish for more rapid royal transition in the context that King Bhumibhol was already frail. In this sense, these red shirts competed with the Yellowshirts' signature script "We love the King [King Bhumibol]".



Picture: "We Love the Crown Prince" Shirts on Sale for 100 baht (£2) Each in a Redshirt protest

However, such optimism among the Redshirt is not necessary true. Shortly after ascending to the throne, King Vajiralongkorn appointed certain generals who were Prayuth's close allies, namely General Dapong Ratanasuwan, General Paiboon Koomchaya and General Teerachai Nakwanich as the Privy Council members which signified he aimed to maintain close connections with the military, rather than with Thaksin forces (*Prachatai* 6 December 2016). The most important evidence was the appointment of Prem Tinsulanond as the President of the Privy Council (*Matichon* 2 December 2016). Thus, the Redshirts' expectation for better treatment and justice, especially their demands for the release of Redshirt political prisoners charged with *lèse-majesté*, may not be attained.

The fact that a pro-Thaksin government was in power during the royal transition inadvertently escaped from rumours and allegations that Thaksin might be involved in the King's death. In the Thai context, rumours and allegations are commonplace, as illustrated by the accusation of the Yingluck premiership being negligent during the 2011 flooding crisis. As happened in the past, an allegation concerning a royal transition will prove even more detrimental. In 1947, then regent Pridi Banomyong was in power when the mysterious death of King Anandamahidol (Rama VIII) occurred. Unable to disentangle himself from several rumours and allegations by the Democrat Party that he was behind the death of King Rama VIII, Pridi had to leave Thailand and had to live in self-exile for the rest of his life despite the fact that the allegation was false.

The fact that a pro-Thaksin party was not in power during the transitional period concerning King Bhumibhol, Thailand's longest serving monarch whose prowess and charisma surpassed all his predecessors, inadvertently proved vital and prevented pro-Thaksin forces from potentially related allegations in the contexts when the Democrat Party still frequently use issues related to the monarchy as their political weapons. In this light, the political opportunity for the Thaksin network remained, if dimly. Thus, it has yet to be seen as to whether the Redshirt movement will be maintained, transformed or abolished under the new reign.

The Next Election

After the result of the 2016 constitution referendum which was in favour of acceptance by the Thais, the possibility of the next election is also tentatively underway. Based on fieldwork, most Redshirts interviewed argued that they will vote for a pro-Thaksin political party if the next election is organised. As determined in the last general elections in 2001, 2005, 2007 and 2011, pro-Thaksin political parties won, and they are likely to win the next election, if there is no electoral alchemy by the traditional elites. However, as the findings of this thesis have demonstrated, internal conflicts which have existed between different Redshirt factions and are not likely to be easily resolved and will undermine the stability and capacity of a pro-Thaksin government. As long as

these conflicts are not solved or ameliorated, it is very likely that the next pro-Thaksin government will be very politically unstable and incapable, and will not survive the challenges from their opponents. The research implied that an important question for pro-Thaksin forces apart from how to achieve state power is how to maintain such power and create the optimum balance of power among its internal factions.

Another implication proposed by the thesis is the mobilisation of the Redshirts to protect a pro-Thaksin government. As long as the regime and resistance are mutually shaped by each other (Boudreau 2004), the Redshirt's future challenges and resistance against the traditional forces will learn from their previous lessons and will not take the same forms and patterns. It is unlikely that mobilisation as manufactured by the Redshirts in the post-2006 coup or in the post-2010 crackdown periods will be repeated. Similarly, it is also highly unlikely that Redshirt villagers would participate in street rallies or village proclamations or other Redshirt activities, as led and organised by the previous leadership and methods. The underlying reasons are not only because of the military suppression but also internal conflicts. While the previous national leadership was highly centralised, Redshirt villagers were paid little importance. Unless, new type of leadership and participation are accommodated or allowed, the same Redshirt structure will be unable to mobilise a similar size of demonstration. Compared to the anti-Thaksin forces which transfer leadership in opposing pro-Thaksin government from the PAD to the PDRC, the Redshirt leadership proved to be too rigid and exhausted. Although the UDD leadership is able to provide continuity to the movement, it lacked innovative energy and new mobilisation agendas which were used effectively by anti-Thaksin forces.

Concluding Remarks: Personae Non Gratae

The internal conflicts among Redshirts factions which are unlikely to be resolved or ameliorated by Redshirt forces renders the stories and narratives of Redshirt villagers a "marginalised" story/history. This marginalisation is further complicated by the attempt to compromise between Thaksin and the traditional elites. Referring to the history of the student massacre in Bangkok on 6 October

1976, the suppression of the May 1992 middle class-led demonstration, and the 2010 military crackdown, Thongchai argues that such history is an 'eccentric/exceptional history' (*prawattisat nokrit*), which:

If fortunate, it will be revived some days. If unfortunate, [it] will become personal memories of few people who have first-hand experience. But [the memories] cannot be told out, or tell it out but nobody will be interested in. Because the memories is not consistent with the mainstream knowledge which is in domination. The story of their struggle is just a tragedy which the state wants to suppress or delete because Thai society does not allow [it] to explicitly exist (Thongchai 2016:153).

But the possibility of the story of the Redshirt to be discussed openly is relatively dim. Unlike the Octobrists of 1976 or middle-class of the May 1992, the Redshirts are relatively lacking in privilege or power. Their story will take an equally long time (or even longer) to be openly and publicly discussed in Thai society. Their existence will hardly be qualified with political essence defined by rights and equality. The proclamation of Redshirt villages to be areas in which they could express their political ideas and identity, and to create space where they belong is rarely perceived and valued by Thai society. The Redshirts will silently remain the majority who are marginalised in Thai politics. However, many Redshirts still faithfully declare they remain Redshirts regardless of efforts to assimilate or eliminate their movement. They still oppose the political intervention of the traditional elites, while demanding political participation, electoral rights and a pro-Thaksin government.

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3. Khonkaen Central Prison, Khonkaen, 2-3 May 2015.
4. Khwanchai Sarakham birthday event, Udonthani, 13 June 2015.

Appendix 1

The Proclamations and Activities of Redshirt Villages¹

Dates	Types of activities	No ²	Places	Brands	Details
Year 2010					
15 Dec	Proclamation	1	Ban Nonghuling, Udonthani	Udon Redshirts	The original Redshirt village
NA	Proclamation	1	Ban Kogsawang, Udonthani	Udon Redshirts	The 2nd Redshirt village ³
Year 2011					
25 Jan	Proclamation	1	Ban Pansuk 4, Udonthani	Udon Redshirts	The 3 rd Redshirt village ⁴
NA	Proclamation	1	Ban Saentor, Udonthani	Udon Redshirts	Attended by 1,000 Redshirts. ⁵
15 Apr	Proclamations	3	Moomon sub-district, Udonthani	Udon Redshirts	This proclamation was to call for “democracy” and to campaign for the Pheu Thai Party. ⁶
17 May	Proclamations	3	Huakhwangm sub-district, Mahasarakham	UDD ⁷	
29 May	Proclamation	NA	Trang	Udon Redshirts	Redshirt villages in the Southern region ⁸
3 June	Proclamations	18	Nongnakam sub-district, Udonthani	Federation	Attended by Surathin Pimanmekin, Jeng Dokjigand around 200 villagers. ⁹
1-7 June	Proclamations	5	Samprao sub-district, Udonthani	Udon Redshirts ¹⁰	

¹ Based on 17 Thailand’s Newspaper, involving 447 pieces.

² Numbers of villages

³ Pimthai, 26 Jan 2011, p.2

⁴ Pimthai, 26 Jan 2011, p.2

⁵ Matichon, 9 June 2011, p.2.

⁶ Matichon, 9 June 2011, p.2; Post Today, 16 April 2011, p. a.6.

⁷ Matichon, 9 June 2011, p.15.

⁸ Matichon, 9 June 2011, p.15.

⁹ Post today, 3 June 2011, p.A8.

¹⁰ Phujatkan, 8 June 2011, p.1

8 June	At this point, it was reported there were 213 Redshirt villages in 80 sub-districts in 11 districts (out of 1,635 villages, 165 sub-districts, 20 districts) in Udon Thani and 210 Redshirt villages in Khon Kaen. ¹¹				
8 June	Proclamation	3	Huakwang sub-district, Mahasarakham	UDD	By Suthin Klungsaeng, Pheu Thai MP. ¹²
9 June	Confrontation		Bangkok and Nothaburi		Between soldiers claiming to investigate drug and the Redshirts.
6 Aug	Proclamations	300	Kalasin	UDD	Thida (2012)
16 Aug	Bailed Prisoners		Udonthani	UDD and Pheu Thai MPs	UDD and 10 Pheu Thai Udonthani MPs, including Vichian Kaokham, bailed 22 prisoners charged with four arson cases related to the Provincial hall. ¹³ (Matichon, 17 Aug, p.15).
18 Aug	Help prisoners		Uttaradit	UDD and Pheu Thai politicians	Helped Wanlop Pithiprom, charged with shooting an M79 bomb to the Chiangmai construction, belongs to Newin family. ¹⁴
3 Sep	Proclamations	64	Udonthani (56 from Banpue District, 5 from Namsom District and 3 from Nayong Districts)	Federation	Komchadluek ¹⁵ , Bangkok Post ¹⁶
11 Sep	Proclamations	101	Roi-et (Suvanabhumm District)	Federation	Komchadluek ¹⁷
18 Sep	Proclamations	50	Srithat District, Rayong	Federation	Presided by Petsak ¹⁸
18 Sept	Proclamations	50	Udonthani (Srithat District)	Federation	Komchadluek ¹⁹

¹¹ Phujatkan, 8 June 2011, p.1; Matichon, 8 June 2011, p.15; Phujatkan, 8 June 2011, p.1.

¹² Matichon, 8 June 2011, p.15.

¹³ Mathichon, Lokwann, 16 August 2011, p.6A, Phujatkan Daily, 16 August 2011, p.15.

¹⁴ Matichon, 18 August, p.15.

¹⁵ <http://www.komchadluek.net/detail/>

¹⁶ Bangkok Post, 4 September 2011, p.4.

¹⁷ <http://www.komchadluek.net/detail/>

¹⁸ Matichon, 4 Sep 2011, p.14.; Phujatkan, 6 September 2011, p.11.; Nation weekly, 19-26 September 2011, p.10.

¹⁹ <http://www.komchadluek.net/detail/>

22 Sep	Proclamations	14	Nakhu District, Kalasin	UDD	Presided over by Virod Jiwangsan, the Kalasin governor, and Prasit Piyaprasit, Kalasin UDD leader, and 18 District Chiefs of Kalasin. The main claim to prevent drug. ²⁰
5 Oct	At this point, it was claimed that around 4000 villages proclaimed ²¹				
9 Oct	Proclamation	2	Prajaksilpacom and Sangkom Districts, Udonthani	UDD	Redshirt Districts presided over by Jatuporn Promphan. ²²
15 Oct	Proclamations	3	Chiang Rai (Tambon Pa Or Don Chai, there were 200 attendees)	Federation	Presided by Prasong, Kamonsin, Arnon as well as Pheu Thai politicians, ²³
17 Oct	Political Party				Arnon proposed to establish a Redshirt political party. ²⁴
17 Oct	Proclamation	1	Tambon Paordonchai, Muang District, Chiang Rai	Pheu Thai politicians	Presided over Prasong Boonpong. In event launched the first Redshirt village office of the north. ²⁵
17 Oct	Local Oppsition				Leaflets attacking the proclamation at Paordonchai. ²⁶
19 Oct	Proclamation	1	Sanpukwan, Hangdong District, Chiang Mai	Pheu Thai MPs	By Sunai Jullapongsatorn, Pheu Thai MP, and Pichit Tamun, Chiang Mai UDD leader. ²⁷
22 Oct	Proclamation	1	Tambon Rongkroa, Wangnue	Fed	Khanin Boonsuwan, a 1997 Constituion

²⁰ *Matichon*, 23 September 2011, p.14.

²¹ BBC monitoring Asia Pacific, 6 October 2011; *Dailynews*, 14 October 2011, p.8.; *The Nation*, 15 October 2011, p.9A.

²² *Siamrath Weekly*, 17 October 2011, p.6.; *Naewna* 10 October 2011.

²³ *Bangkok Post*, 20 October 2011, p.5.; *Khaosod*, 16 October 2011, p.16.; *Matichon*, 16 October 2011, p.15.

²⁴ *Dailynews*, 17 October 2011, p.14.

²⁵ *Daily News*, 17 October 2011, p.14.

²⁶ *Bangkok Post*, 20 October 2011, p.5.

²⁷ *Matichon*, 19 October 2011, p.16.

			district, Lampang		Drafter and attened by around 200 villagers. ²⁸
2 Nov	Local Opposition		Nonsaard District, Udonthani		Veerapong filed legal charges because of Redshirt signs which given to each village (56 signs each) were destroyed. ²⁹
4 Nov	Signs Damaged				56 Redshirt villages were cut by anonymous persons. ³⁰
8 Nov	Proclamation	NA	Tambon Robwiang, Muang district, Chiang Rai	Fed	Presided y Prasong Boonpong, Arnon and Darinee Kritboonyalai ³¹
8 Nov	Proclamation	20	Thongsaenkhan District, Uttaradit	Fed	According to the source, the correct number of villages proclaimed could be less than 20 villages. ³²
9 Nov	Proclamation	17	At Tambon Saikhao, Pan district, Chiang Rai	Fed	Presided y Prasong Boonpong, Arnon Saenan and Darinee Kritboonyalai ³³
9 Nov	Proclamation	18	At tambon Pahung, Pan district, Chiang Rai	Fed	Proclaimed by Prasong ³⁴
18 Nov	Support Royal Pardon			Fed	5790 Redshirt villages support the bill giving royal pardon for prisoners, including Thaksin.
21 Nov		6070th			6070 villages were claimed. ³⁵

²⁸ *Khaosod*, 22 October 2011, p.15.

²⁹ *Phujatkan Daily*, 4 November 2011, p.20.

³⁰ *Phujatkan*, 4 November 2011, p.20.

³¹ *Phujatkan Weekly* 2011, p.11.

³² *Phujatkan weekly*, 3 December 2011, p.55.

³³ *Phujatkan Daily*, 28 November 2011, p.5.

³⁴ *Phujatkan daily*, 28 November 2011, p.5.

³⁵ *Phujatkan Weekly*, 3 December 2011, p.55.

26 Nov	Proclamation	6	Moo 5,6,8,9,10,13 Tambon Anghthong, Chiangkham district, Prayao	Fed	Proclaimed by Prasong, Ananthachai, Darunee and Anon.
26 Nov	Proclamation	NA	Phusingha district, Srisaket	UDD	Proclaimed by Thida, Weng and Pheu Thai MPs, and attended by around 500 villagers. ³⁶
1 Dec	Opposition		Prayao	Fed	Prayao Yellowhirts argued Redshirt province or “Prayao Model” caused social division and proposed a debate.
13 Dec	Proclamation	300	Lamapng	Assembly	Dachai Uchukosonkan, member of the Lampang Assembly president deputy. ³⁷
19 Dec		8,662			Stated by Prasong ³⁸
23 Dec	Opposition		Nonrueng Village, Khonkaen		Local villagers opposed village proclamation. ³⁹
26 Dec		The 8,703th	Udonthani (Tambon Donhoysok, Nonghan Sub-district)	Federation	Stated by Prasong ⁴⁰
27 Dec					The Redshirt village founder aimed to get 30,000 village ⁴¹

³⁶ *Khaosod*, 27 November 2011, p.8.

³⁷ *Thaipost*, 13 December 2011, p.12.

³⁸ *Khaosod*, 19 December 2011:15; *Phujatkan*, 21 December 2011:7.

³⁹ *Naewna*, 23 December 2011:14.

⁴⁰ *Khaosod*, 27 Dec 2011, p.11.

⁴¹ *Phujatkan*, December 2011:15.

Year 2012					
19 Feb	Proclamation	1,000	Udonthani	Federation, with UDD leaders	Wipawadee (2012:45); Matichon ⁴²
6 Feb	Proclamation	17	Bundarik District, Ubonratchathani	UDD	Pruek, 2010
10-11 Mar	Proclamation	20	Chiang Rai (12 from Rongchang and 8 from Pohsringeon sub-districts)	Federation	Phujatkan, ⁴³
24 Mar	Proclamation	1,000	Chaiyaphum	UDD	Phujatkan, ⁴⁴
27 Mar	Proclamation	1	(Chicago, USA) ⁴⁵	Federation	Phujatkan, ⁴⁶
5 May	Proclamation	14	Narathiwat (Cho Airong District)	UDD	Bangkok Post, ⁴⁷
14 May	Proclamation	5	Songkhla (Cha Na District) ⁴⁸	UDD	Khao Sod, ⁴⁹
9 Aug			Establishing Redshirt Cooperatives, Udonthani	Federation	Phujatkan Weekly, ⁵⁰
9 Aug					Prasong Bunpong, former minister of labour, claimed that there had been 15,259 villages at this point. ⁵¹

⁴² Matichon, 19 February 2012.

⁴³ Phujatkan, 13 March 2012, p.7.

⁴⁴ Phujatkan, 26 March 2012. P.11.

⁴⁵ According to the source, it claims that there were already two "places" declared Red in the USA.

⁴⁶ Phujatkan, 6 April 2012, p.4.

⁴⁷ Bangkok Post, 17 May 2012, p.1.

⁴⁸ These villages were burnt after the proclamations.

⁴⁹ Khao Sod, 16 May 2012, p.15.

⁵⁰ Phujatkan Weekly, 25 Aug 2012, p.53.

⁵¹ Posttoday, 10 August 2012:A9.

16 Aug	Proclamation	One tambon	Phitsanulok (Neunmaprang District)	Federation	Phujatkan Weekly, ⁵²
20 Aug					15,000 villages report ⁵³
14 Nov			Change the name to Redshirt villages and Communities for Democracy against Drug, Udonthani.	Federation	Matichon, ⁵⁴
Year 2013					
26 Feb	Proclamation	NA	Srikoraphum district, Surin	UDD	Suriyasak Chatpimolkul, Surin UDD leader, Cerdchai tontisirin, local UDD leaders from Khonkaen, Roi-et and Surin. This event was attended by Yutthana Wiriyakitti, Surin deputy governor, and senior bureaucrats. ⁵⁵

⁵² Phujatkan Weekly, 25 Aug 2012. P.53.

⁵³ Nation Weekly, 20 August 2012:19.; Phujatkan Weekly, 25 August 2012:53

⁵⁴ Matichon, 15 Nov 2012, p.15.

⁵⁵ Pimthai, 26 February 2013, p.14.