RESEARCH BRIEFS

Ethics of Thai Politicians

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It has been more than 10 years that Thailand has been plagued by political crises, many of which resulted from the unethical behavior of politicians, namely, buying of votes, bribing, purchasing of positions, buying of members of parliament, intentional submission of false bank accounts, and so forth. In the 2010 academic conference convened by the Thai Senate, VichaMahakun, a member of the National Anti–Corruption Committee of Thailand (NACC) said that in the year 2003 there were 3,597 corruption cases which were sent to the NACC of which 2,933 were related to the politicians' abuse of power, the omission of political responsibility, and the use of power to derive personal benefits. Of the cases relating to political malfeasance, 371 were related to the destruction of the environment, and 293 dealt with procurement, outsourcing, and hiring process.(Siamrath, Vol. 57, Week 15, 2010, 7-41) It can be seen from the data that most of the cases investigated by the NACC involved politicians.

It is generally assumed by the electorate that play an important role in the administration of the country should possess high levels of ethics as they have been given the public trust to represent their constituents in the national parliament. However, due to the politicians' ethical misbehavior, Thailand has been confronted with political crises throughout the period of modern Thai history. These political crises have also led to conflict which produces factions among politicians, political parties, and the Thai people. The upshot is an effort to resolve the situation at a certain level vis-à-vis the May 22, 2014 *coup d'etat*.

This research project, "Ethics of Thai Politicians", is a study of the ethical behavior of Thai politicians and the mechanisms needed to be implemented to control their errant behavior. As such, the study will enable the general public to better understand the behavioral patterns that Thai politicians choose, whether ethical or unethical, namely, the factors influencing their behavior, the controlling mechanism, and the efficiency in implementing the mechanism. The research also attempts to find ways in which to solve ethical problems in Thai society and to enhance the ethics of Thai politicians while minimizing their unwarranted behavior. The study was supported by the Thailand Research Fund.

In specific terms, the study examined 1) the present condition of politicians' ethical behavior which produce many problems in the body politic of Thailand; and 2) the ethical problems of Thai politicians; the mechanisms used in controlling the misbehavior of politicians within the framework of ethical principles; and the ways to solve, or at least to reduce, political problems

in Thai society resulting from the politicians' unethical behavior Thai politicians.

This research analyzes the present status and modus operandi of Thai politicians' ethical behavior and makes recommendations to inhibit such practices so as to develop a political ethos which, in turn, will enhance the body politic of Thailand.

The research participants included members of the national parliament consisting of senators and members of the House of Representatives; and officials of the Office of the National Anti–Corruption Committee of Thailand, the Office of the Ombudsman of Thailand, the Royal Thai Police, and the Election Commission of Thailand. Interviews and focused group discussions (FGD) were carried out. Collected data are discussed in the following paragraphs within the context of the published literature.

NARRATIVES

Politics, Politicians, and Their Responsibilities

Politics is the maneuvering for power or advantage within a group or organization (Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, 1998, p. 968). More narrowly, it refers to achieving and exercising positions of administration, a systematic control over a human community, particularly a state. Political scientists explain that democratic politics may be considered to be the use of power or the attempt to provide the public with an alternative. As such, one can see that both points are related with the general public. Shively (2010) said that democratic politics is the use of power in making a decision for the benefit of the public. Politics is related to two major points. Firstly, politics is the matter of decision-making for all members in a group. Secondly, politics is the use of power by one person or one group affecting another person or group. Politics is then the matter of mutual decision-making and the use of state power.

Consequently, politicians play a vital role as representatives of the people in democratic societies. Their role is of major significance to their respective countries. Once they are elected to public office, they acquire the mantle of respectability from the electorate as is written, for example, in the United States Code of Conduct for Politicians: *"Public Office is Public Trust"* (U.S. House of Representatives Ethics Committee, 2012). For this reason, politicians must observe ethical principles.

Regarding this point, Max Weber focused on politics, politicians, and politicians' ethical principles in a series of lectures which were published in an article entitled, *Politikals Beruf* (Weber, 1946) in which he defined politics as to striving for power so as to influence the distribution of power between states or between groups of people within a political entity. In addition, Weber pointed out that politics is the use of power in expressing the opinions of people who create public policy. As such, it is incumbent that a political leader should be anointed by electoral legitimacy which, of course, is enhanced if that political leader is endowed with charisma. As a result, a charismatic political leader can mold public opinion.

Weber (Gerth and Mill, eds., 1946, p.4) delineated two categories of politicians:

1. Creatures for whom the locus of their inner-most feelings becomes politics. Such political animals enter the fray of politics for the sake of ideology. These people possess sufficient personal material wealth that they can comfortably "live" for politics.
2. Those not possessing enough personal wealth become involved in politics because of their desire for material wealth and well-being.

For the most part, it is the second group of politicians who are guilty of ethical misconduct by seeking wealth enhancement for themselves, colleagues, and political parties. As running for political office is not done on the cheap, many politicians expect to get "a return on their investment," assuming they are elected to office.

A never-ending concern voiced in democratic countries is the appropriate approach to improve the integrity of politicians. As politicians have the authority to allocate state resources to a plethora of groups in society, it is critical that they strictly observe the ethical principlesof social responsibility.

Ethics of Politicians

Most scholars of ethics seem to agree that ethics or ethical principles are the rules of good conduct. Blocker (1988, pp. 7-9), defined ethics as the rules of behavior which emphasize the norms of civil society and which distinguish what is appropriate from what is not socially acceptable. Blocker's definition of ethics is expanded by Solomon (1984,pp. 1-3) to include the rules of behavior regulating all aspects of human endeavor. As such, both paradigms of value and behavior are augmented according to the rules, customs, and expectations that govern society.

Lassman and Speir (1994,p. 12) supported Weber's conjecture that ethics assume importance in the political arena because politicians receive public trust to undertake the administration of a country. Hence, politicians are to be regarded as public servants. For this reason, the caretakers of government should carefully consider their behavior and attitudes so as to better perform good deeds. Babbie (1979,p. 59) interpreted ethics to encompass human behavior according to the variables among professional associations. Ethics in the daily life of the general populace is perceived as a *modus vivendi*. As such, societal membership compels one to accept and to adhere to the socially acceptable norms of that society.

Philosophers and academics have tried to use reason as a tool to establish rules of human behavior inasmuch as human beings come together in various professions. Such interaction mandates that professional organizations set up ethical guidelines that justify the actions of associates in accordance with values emanating from ethical standards. The major objective in creating a code of ethics for all professions is to maintain the honor and dignity of a chosen vocational pursuit.

Whether politics should be regarded as a profession is of significant concern to contemporary society. Unlike most professions, politics requires very little preparation or none at all. Politicians do not need professional training or practice in order to enter the field. The Founding Fathers of the United States, for example, were of a single mind that politics was not a profession and that rotation in office of politicians and diverse parties and ideologies gave volition to democratic institutions.

According to Uhr (2005, pp.252-253), politicians, unlike other professionals, universally lack the public confidence of professional occupations. This lack of public confidence leads to the diminution of responsible self-regulation of professional conduct on the part of politicians:

> Across the democratic world politicians universally lack the public confidence of professional occupations like health professionals, legal professionals, teachers, many police forces, and the military. This lack of public confidence reflects widespread suspicion that politicians lack the capacity for responsible self–regulation of their professional conduct.

This point provides a good explanation as to why a large number of politicians behave unethically despite the authority entrusted to them by the public. At present, most democratic

countries have tried every possible way to operate their governments smoothly, for any political upheaval will inevitably hinder a country's economic and social development. Many countries, ranging from traditional Western democracies to post-World War II Asian democratic states such as Japan and India, have established a code of political ethics that have successfully reduced the unethical encumbrances of politicians.

Ethics of Thai Politicians

In the case of the Kingdom of Thailand, ethical principles of politicians were incorporated into the Constitution of 2007, which was abolished due to the May 22, 2014 *coup d'etat*. Article 279 of the Constitution (2007) established the Ethical Standard of Public Service Personnel. The Article recognized three categories of political persons: political officials, members of the House of Representatives, and members of the Senate.

The first group includes political officials, namely, the prime minister, cabinet ministers, and government employees. There are eight major values which this group of politicians is expected to observe: (1) appointees must adhere to the democratic regime with the king as the head of state; (2) they shall also adhere to virtue and ethics; (3) they shall have good consciousness, integrity, and accountability; (4) they shall place national benefit above private gain and must not have conflict of interest; (5) they are expected to adhere to righteousness, fairness, and legitimacy;(6) they should render services to the public with promptness, cordiality, and without discrimination; (7) they are expected to provide the general public with complete, accurate, and valid information; and (8) they shall concentrate on the ultimate result of their work while strictly maintaining high standards and transparency.

The second group includes the members of the House of Representatives and committee members. Their Code of Ethics consists of three major parts: ideological principles, performance of their duties and responsibilities, and relationships between them and their family members as well as associates.

The three principal ideological principles governing the members of the House of Representatives and committee members are: (1) they should exemplify the qualities of loyalty and maintenance of the national, religious, royal institutions, and the democratic regime with the king as the head of state; (2) they should be good role models in the performance of their duty with integrity and sacrifice for the benefit of the country and the people; and (3) they must set a good example by adhering to honorable principles in the performance of their duties in a non-discriminatory manner and by promoting the institution of the family.

Regarding the performance of their duties and responsibilities: (1) members of the House of Representatives and committee members are expected to uphold the reputation of the institution; (2) they are expected to protect the interests of the nation and people, and, as such, are not to be obligated to the undue influence of financial institutions or derive benefits from non-governmental entities; (3) they are expected to respect the rights and freedom of people by a non-demeaning behavior; (4) they are expected not to disclose the content of official meetings or of private committee meetings; (5) they are expected to attend all governmental meetings with punctuality and to avoid unnecessary absenteeism; (6) they are expected to address the complaints, opinions, and suggestions of the electorate, and, as such, are also expected to treat people fairly and equally; (7) they are expected to deliver accurate facts and information to the general body of constituents without falsifying data for personal gain; and (8) they are expected to reveal information relating to the malfeasance of state agencies to the appropriate authority.

The third group includes senators and committee members. The Code of Ethics for

the upper house of Parliament also consists of three major components: ideological principles, performance of duties and responsibilities, and relationships between them and their family members and associates.

Regarding ideological principles, the first three elements are similar to those of the members of the House of Representatives and committee members. One additional point is added in that Senators and committee members are expected to be politically neutral.

The duties section consists of four components:(1) senators and committee members must perform their duties and express their opinions honestly and fairly, as such, they are expected to be of good conscience, integrity, responsibility, and sacrifice for the benefit of the nation;(2) in the selection or appointment process to the Senate, the Constitution stipulates that an individual's ethical behavior be taken into consideration. The other ideological considerations are similar to those of the members of the House of Representatives; (3) they must honor and respect personal freedom of the other senators and committee members and must not present false information in the meeting; (4) they must devote their time for the meeting aiming at the efficiency of the work and provide the public with accurate and correct information.

Regarding the behavior, responsibilities, and duties of senators: (1) in addition to functioning as role models, they are expected to preserve Thai cultural identity and to uphold the reputation and image of the Senate; (2) they are expected to conduct themselves ethically and to uphold the integrity of the institution; (3) they are expected to abstain from associating with or supporting individuals who behave illegally or seek undue benefits which may be harmful to the reputation and dignity of the Senate; (4) they are expected to refrain from using their status or position as senators to seek benefit for themselves, as such, they are expected to avoid conflicts of interest and persuade family members to follow suit.

From the study of the Thai Code of Ethics of politicians and the status of politicians of other countries, one can observe see that there are two major urgencies leading to the proclamation of codes of ethics for politicians:

1. To control the unethical behaviors of the politicians; and
2. To respond to the public demand for the politicians to have acode of ethics as a standard for the performance of their duties.

However, the implementation of a code of ethics is more complicated than just a public proclamation of the document. This means that all those concerned, particularly, all members of the parliament must unanimously agree to the idea of creating a political culture with ethical principles as the major component within the political community. This, however, is a very difficult task on the part of politicians once they attain political positions, for they are all too frequently beholden to interest groups which have supported them (Jenwidyakarn, 1998, p. 116). Another significant point to contemplate is that the Code of Ethics of the Senate and the House of Representatives frequently overlap with one another. Thus, it is difficult to distinguish between the duties and responsibilities of each branch of the national legislative assembly. Nevertheless, with the May 22, 2014 *coup d'etat* and the abrogation of the 2007 Constitution, we hope that the National Peace-keeping Commission and the new government will take these points under serious consideration in their endeavors to draft a new constitution.

Thai Politics since 1932 and Ethical Principles of Politicians

In 1932, Thai politics was faced with a profound transformation as Thailand changed from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional

institution. This change was brought about by the intervention of the People's Party—Kana Ratsadorn—most of whom were young military and civilian government officials. Most had been educated in Europe and the United States. Be that as it may, the Thai public was not ready for this significant change, which contributed to conflicts among many leading groups in society: the old power elite—members of the royal family and high ranking officials—and the new power elite, members of the People's Party. Moreover, there was also a conflict between the military and the civilian components within the People's Party which led to a power struggle between the two factions and became an obstacle in the development of a democratic regime.

In the decades following the so-called Siamese Revolution, Thailand has been broiled by continuous political volatility as a result of 13 *coups d'etat* and 11unsuccessful rebellions and the proclamation of 18different constitutions. The blame for such political instability has been attributed to the unethical behavior of politicians.

The last three decades have witnessed a profound growth of the middle-class,the majority of which are businessmen who began playing a leading role in Thai politics at the local level but, in time, expanded to the apex of national politics. These businessmen have played a dual role in dominating Thai politics: first, they give financial support to those campaigning for election, and second, they also have decided to stand for election. As a group they spend their money to network with the other groups in Thai society, namely, bureaucrats, the military, peasants, and laborers.

Corruption is seen as the paramount reason for most of the *coups d'etat* in Thailand inspite of repeated attempts from many sectors of society to lessen the impact of malfeasance. Two recent examples of intervention can be referenced. First, the *coup d'etat* of February 23, 1991, in which Army commander, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, leader of the National Peace-Keeping Council

(NPKC), citing corruption of the regime of Prime Minister Chartichai Choonhavan, overthrew the government and appointed Anand Panyarachun as prime minister. Second, the *coup d'etat* of September 16, 2006,was executed by General Sonthi Boonyaratglin against Prime Minister Taksin Shinawatra whose government was pursuing a populist policy aimed at Thailand's rural people such as subsidies for rice, the 30-baht universal healthcare program, the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) entrepreneurial program, the one million one village fund, and a four-year debt moratorium for farmers. The reasons cited by the military for assuming power from a popularly elected civilian government was on account of the unprecedented rift in society, namely, corruption, nepotism, interference in independent agencies, and insults to the institution of the monarchy.

On May 9, 2014, the National Anti-Corruption Committee voted 7-0 to indict Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra for dereliction of duty regarding the national rice subsidy scheme. This unfortunate episode caused the country to suffer losses of more than THB 300 billion and was a significant factor contributing to her removal from office on May 22, 2014, when General Prayuth Chan-ocha, Commander–in–Chief of the Royal Thai Army, carried out a successful *coup d'etat*. Subsequently, the military established the junta called the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) to administer the country. The military regime proclaimed martial law and suspended the Constitution of 2007. General Chan-ocha, leader of the military junta, has vowed to reform the country which has been plagued from 1932 by many ethical problems; however, he has yet to articulate specific policies aimed at addressing the corruption pandemic to the Thai political culture.

Ethical Problems of Thai Politicians

Most Thai governments, whether assuming power vis-à-vis the electoral process or by

military intervention, survive on average slightly less than four years. As a result, democratic institutions are sorely underdeveloped in the nation.

Research into the nature of Thai politics reveals six overriding ethical principles among Thai politicians.

1. Transparency International (2010) defined corruption as action taken by public officials in order to gain personal benefit. Such illicit activities of public servants undermine the confidence of the general public and inhibit the growth of democratic institutions. As such, the well-being of people is denigrated by the lack of integrity of public officials.

In the case of Thailand, corruption is linked with one of the more significant elements of Thai culture: the patronage system rooted since the Ayutthya Period. People in the rural areas, in particular, have unequal relationships among each other. In other words, those who are deemed "lower" in terms of the social and economic pecking order are submissive to the people of "higher" status; this is a feudalistic client-patron relationship (Rabibhadana, 1975, pp. 3-4). This relationship permeates national politics to the degree that the client gains recognition, protection, and financial consideration from the patron.

Nowadays, corruption occurs frequently among three socio-economic groups having intimate interaction—politicians, government officials, and businessmen (Figure 1). Each group maintains the relationship in terms of "exchanging mutual benefits" among each other. For example, businessmen give "benefits" to politicians and government officials in exchange for being awarded mega-building contracts. Politicians use their power and authority to benefit professional government bureaucrats and businessmen. Government officials attain

their positions from politicians and receive benefits from businessmen in return for assistance rendered.
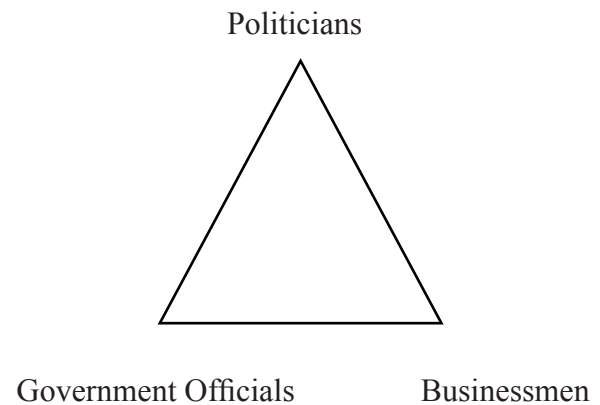
Politicians

Government Officials   Businessmen

Figure 1. **The Triangular relationship**

2. Many Thai politicians are businessmen who enter the political arena in order to protect their vested interests. As such, they perceive the procurement of public office as an investment. They can use their political position to augment their power and authority to gain benefits for themselves and close associates. As such, if they can obtain a multi-million baht project, the monetary expense of being elected to public office is seen as a "worthwhile investment." Vote buying is one of the more critical issues in Thai politics.

3. Acute competition among Thai political parties to participate in the formation of the government, as well as senior politicians jockeying for ministerial positions, is the norm in Thai politics as no political party wants to be in the "loyal" opposition. This factor undoubtedly has contributed to the decrease of the enthusiasm of Thais for democratic politics as voter participation has declined markedly from past elections.

4. Politicians use their power and authority to interfere in the work of government

officials. For example, a cabinet minister can transfer a government official unwilling to accept a reassignment to a lower bureaucratic position and then replaces him or her with a relative or friend. This process is not an unusual phenomenon, but rather is the modus of doing Thai politics as per usual.

5. The intentional concealment of personal wealth by politicians is in violation of benefit. Section 263 of the Constitution (2007) which states that any person holding a political position who intentionally fails to submit supporting documents showing assets and liabilities and the supporting documents or willfully submits false statements or withholds or conceals facts which should be made public, the National Counter Corruption Commission has the authority to refer the matter to the Supreme Court of Criminal Justice Division for Persons Holding Political Positions. If the Supreme Court decides that a politician under investigation is in violation of Section 263, that individual is prohibited to stand for elective office or to assume an administrative position of a political party at the national or provincial levels for a period of five years.

6. The word "populism" was used for the first time in Imperial Russia toward the end of the 19th century. The original meaning of the word in the Russian language, *narodnichestvo,* is defined as the process of promoting social change by concentrating on the people at the grassroots level, namely, peasants and agriculturalists who constituted the majority of the country's population (Laothamatas, 2008, pp. 25-26)

The word populism appeared in the Thai political lexicon for the first time in 2001 with the election by a landslide of Thaksin Shinawatra. His government was considered by many academics and politicians of the opposition parties to be "populist" even though Thaksin never referred to his government as populist (Laothamatas, 2008,p. 85).Nevertheless, a plethora of populist policies were promoted by the Shinawatra government. Later, when Yingluck Shinawatra became Prime Minister, she also pursued further populist policies: the rice-pledging scheme, the first-house tax rebate scheme, and the first-car tax rebate scheme. The populist programs of both Shinawatra prime ministers were underwritten in order to gain popularity with lower socio-economic Thais who comprise the overwhelming majority of the electorate. However, their policies were severely criticized by leading academics as serving the interests of a limited number of special interest groups, rather than contributing to the redistribution of national wealth. In the case of the rice pledging scheme, wealthy farmers benefitted more than the target population of the farmers of the mini fundia. It is understood by economists that, in the long run, these policies do not help Thai farmers to attain self-sufficiency (Sangwongwanich, 2013, pp.2-3).

In the decades since the Siamese Revolution of 1932, most problems associated with ineffective governance have been the result of the unethical behavior of politicians. All too frequently, the same problems reoccur regardless of the form of the constituent composition of the government—civilian or military. Such political problems have promoted divisiveness among the Thai people. As such, the country's economic and political development has been retarded.

Currently, Thailand is entering the stage of reform after the *coup d'etat* of May 22, 2014. Attempts at reforming the political milieu of Thailand are being advanced by the military junta to resolve these shortcomings. How much the junta can achieve remains to be seen.

We gathered critical issues from the research data, classified, and proposed them as guidelines under the concept of "Virtue-driven Society,"

consisting of 14 principal factors derived from components and details synthesized from quantitative and qualitative research findings: political party, moral shame-moral dread-consciousness, committed to good deed, Thai society, knowledge benefactors, religion, education system, government, abstinence from wrongdoings, politicians, mass media, independent entities, the family institution, and role model. The 14 factors are divided into two component groups.

- Nine factors are components in forms of individuals and mechanisms that need development—political party, Thai society, knowledge benefactors, education system, government, politicians, mass media, independent entities, and the family institution. They are identified as development factors.
- Five factors are components in forms of procedures and tools—moral shame-moral dread-consciousness, committed to good deed, religion, abstinence from wrongdoings, and role model. They are identified as procedures and tools.

Political Party

Shively (2010, p. 234) and (Chambers and Burnham, eds., 1967). stated that a political party is a social formation aiming to garner the majority of votes in a legislative assembly by obtaining popularity in the political arena by acquiring power in the government or maintaining the existing state power that their group currently possesses. The majority of political analysts contend that the primary influence exercised by a political party over members points in the direction of not offering the best candidates to the people but rather promoting those with the likeliest chance of electoral victory. For example, the politician no.11 from the focus group 1(personal communication, August 22, 2011)

said that "the political party doesn't take into consideration the qualities of honesty, potency, and morality and ethics in selecting candidates to seek political office. In contrast, most focus on who has the influence to win the election." The former prime minister 1 from the Interview (personal communication, August 23, 2012) added, "the political party itself holds a prime role in directing MPs in their conduct." According to the politician no. 12 from the focus group 1 (personal communication, August 22, 2011), "nowadays, political parties do not come in for the benefit of the country but for the benefits that politics can give."

The strategies and operational approaches of a political party greatly affect the ethics of politicians. Data from the research indicates that the relationship of support given by a political party to its members underscores the patron-client relationship of Thai society.

The 2007 Constitution indicated that a politician has the right to act independently of a political party; in practice, however, a politician must rely heavily on a political party and its financial contributions. With elections, candidates incur considerable monetary expenses. As such, it is the norm that financial support of a political party comes with a string attached, which diminishes the impartial and righteous performance of a politician. It is extremely difficult for all but a scant few politicians to avoid the cycle of dependency, which involves extending financial assistance to politicians running for public office in exchange for political benefits to the donor. This vicious cycle promotes malfeasance which, in due course, results in the collapse of the government and a return to the ballot box starting the political merry-go-round all over once more.

This deplorable modus operandi is an opportunity for a political party to set an example of being serious about promoting ethical governance by conducting workshops on ethics and by monitoring the ethics of its members.

Suggestions made to a political party to help develop its politicians' ethics is to take part in building an ethical political society by having the party set up its policies, strategies, and practices with a moral/ethical face.

Moral Shame-Moral Dread-Consciousness

Impartiality is a principle that encourages friendship among members of society by giving prominence to environmental harmony (Phra Phromkhunaphon, 1996, pp. 1-4). Society frowns on individuals who take advantage of others, as the intrinsic life value of the accused is perceived as being enveloped by moral shame and moral dread. Even positive intentions and actions if impacted by moral shame and moral dread can render moot a good conscious and trigger a diminution of ethics in politicians and society. Data strongly suggest that when politicians function within the framework of good conduct, with an eye on the negative aspects of moral shame and moral dread, they usually chose to do good deeds. It is our contention that if politicians read the Code of Ethics they would understand the milieu in which they should function as servants of the people.

The former priminister 1 from the Interview (personal communication, August 23, 2012) believed that "if they have some framework and have read some ethics, they would have self-awareness of the moral dread. It is a shame to commit wrongdoings.

"The problem is that society at present lacks consciousness and accepts this type of people. . . There's the need to stimulate consciousness of the disapproval of corruption—no acceptance, no association. No matter how rich you are, if you came from this path—the chartered path—we will not congregate, fraternize or be friends with you. We are against you."

Analysis of the way in which political sociologists view groups of people as to goodness and moral dread are seen from two distinct perspectives: 1) those who emphasize that the focus of moral education should be solely with juveniles as the mindset of adults is difficult to alter; and 2) those who emphasize that the focus of moral education should be equally on both juveniles and adults. For juveniles, the conscience to distinguish right from wrong should be fostered. As such, good deeds should be admired and supported. Negative consequences should be assessed as bad examples of civil society. At the same time, adults must also receive corrective feedback and remedies as mentioned by the politician no.12 from the focus group 1 (personal communication, August 22, 2011) that, "moral and ethics should be fostered since they were young . . . so they know discipline, right and wrong, good and evil."

Promoting awareness among Thais to have moral shame in doing bad deeds and to have moral dread for malfeasance requires urgent development and amendment of all sectors of society. This should be associated with a Code of Ethics which emphasizes honesty and illustrates how good deeds produce good results, while bad results are the result of bad deeds.

Committed to Good Deeds

Positive and creative thoughts and actions are crucial to minimizing behavior which might lead to ethical violations. In addition, rules and regulations may retard one from committing bad deeds; however, one can always find a way to circumvent positive ethics. Inclinations that perpetuate unethical behavior are corruption of entrepreneurial politicians and corruption of public policy by puppet ministers:

"The politicians and merchants are probably the same group of people. That links their benefits together" The member of the election commission (personal communication, June 15, 2013) contended.

"The Deputy PM seems to know me well. He came out and said that the PM and the cabinet asked him to crush corruption. I just happened to know that he stuffed money into sacks and in trunks. How he did it, I knew it all. . . .society's hope to crush corruption? I would say do not put your hope too high." The politician no. 23 from the Interview (personal communication, July 26, 2012) revealed.

The present pandemic of corruption and unethical conduct committed by politicians is becoming ever more insidious and has caused some forthright persons to forfeit honesty and go with the flow. People need to embolden their faith in good governance so that honest and efficient government prevails. As such, Thai society must unify and embrace good governance in one fell swoop and demand that political authorities set good examples in commitment to uphold justice, integrity, and honesty.

Thai Society

Joad (1966) wrote about Aristotle's belief that a state will be in good condition when its citizens are good. The people need to be taught to do good deeds. As citizens and society exercise the paramount influence over the personality and behavior of politicians, they are the ethical purveyors of politicians. As such, every sector of society must constantly monitor unethical politicians.

Research findings show that even as Thai society has matured vis-à-vis access to better education and information that "there were unsuccessful vote buying in many provinces" (Academician no. 7 from the focus group 2, personal communication, June 15, 2013). On the other hand, when there was a submission of signatures calling for the impeachment of politicians there has never been a successful impeachment due to the cumbersome legal procedures and multiple possibilities for intervention that allows politicians to elude

justice (The politician no. 10 from focus group 2, personal communication, June 15, 2013). The civil power's inability or refusal to monitor and control the unethical actions of politicians is a debilitating aspect of Thai political culture.

Knowledge Benefactors

Quantitative information indicates that more than 95% of the informants affirmed the importance of fostering positive political ethics with the new generation in Thailand. The data also suggest that it is difficult to alter ethics in adults as their emotional development is pretty much set in stone. Society's facilitators of knowledge—teachers, professors, and parents—must set a good example in order to benefit the entire social spectrum. They must instill in the next generation—the future of Thailand—the virtues of integrity, honesty, and commitment to good governance. Be that as it may, the implementation and appreciation of these ethical ideals is no mean task.

The developmental guidelines gathered by the researchers indicate the issues as to how to invigorate a teacher's motivation, to honor a student's dignity, and to promote good deeds as role models. It is incumbent that all elements of society support knowledge benefactors in conveying to the general public how to treat unethical politicians. On the other hand, knowledge benefactors must find ways to retain good politicians.

Religion

Every religion teaches its adherents right from wrong. Thai society is no exception. Religion advocates function as role models that people, regardless of their religious affiliation, can trust and rely on. It is a world-wide phenomenon that faith in religion is in decline as hedonism has surged to the fore. The ongoing argument is that religious values must be re-inculcated

in Thai society. If virtue and ethics are to be rejuvenated, society must arrest the continued deterioration of faith. For example, the politician no. 11 from the focus group 2 (personal communication, June 15, 2013) contended that religious institutes must take part in creating a democratic system that incorporates ethical values, otherwise it is impossible. "We must make education, religion, and temples as the major players who take care of the country, but right now they are not. It is a pity that religion has become a social problem"the politician no.7 from the interview (personal communication, April 17, 2012) added.

Education System

Buddhadasa (2006, p. 79) gave the guidelines in using education to solve social problems: "Education should proceed in such a way as to create a world with morality." (p. 79). Most informants proposed using education as one of the principal tools to create ethical individuals cognizant of their role as good citizens. Education should turn people into advocates of the ethics of virtue and morality. As such, they can inject the duties and responsibilities of civic duty into the curriculum. Needless to say, morality and ethics are important elements of the educational system.

"I hope to . . . create the new generation. It takes patience to create one. Is the Ministry of Education . . . ready? Is it ready to create curriculum and educational research for the new generation to have consciousness in ethics?" (the politician no. 8 from the focus group 1,personal communication, August 22, 2011).

"When people are poor, they will take the money that you give them. As long as they are still poor, the unequal educational system will only make their living worse"the politician no. 11 from the focus group 1(personal communication, August 22, 2011) believed. Moreover, the member of the National Counter Corruption Commission (personal communication, April 25, 2012) added, "It is the same as our education. If we use the budget deliberately, the money will not flow into the pockets of politicians, and I may have a better education."

Government

In the past, the form and procedure of politics in Thailand have always been dependent upon the nation's leadership. During the regimes of Field Marshal Plaek Pibulsongkram and Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, their strict administrations created discipline in the nation (Likhit Dhiravegin, 2001, pp. 141-234). It can be seen that the austerity, decisiveness, and seriousness of the leadership influenced the behavior of people in whether to act positively or negatively. It is clear that the administrative policies of the national government are critical to the ethics of the citizenry, not excluding its politicians.

Thai citizen no. 17 from the focus group 2 (personal communication, June 15, 2013) gave a guideline relating to the way the government and government officers work in affecting the ethical direction of the country:

The government itself should not use the policy that is wrong. . . . There seems to be a lot of dishonest policies. As a citizen, you wouldn't think they are stupid. They would know about it. Government officers in all agencies must be independent, including independent entities. . . , they must be independent and have freedom of thought and action as well.

Moreover, legislation must adhere to the letter and intent of the law in order for rules and regulations to be truly enforced. The counterbalance between the legislative, the judiciary, and the administrative structure must remain. In Thailand, the separation of powers is sorely wanting. Thailand needs a competent political leader imbued with the full understanding of democracy and human rights.

Abstinence from Wrongdoings

The majority of the informants in this research study suggest that society must join together in penalizing wrongdoers. The present economic, social, political, and materialistic conditions of Thai society are not conducive to promoting ethics. Data derived from this study indicate that a plethora of good deed doers exist in Thai society.

Development of guidelines to minimize wrongdoings is crucial. Political scientists at Thailand's major post-secondary institutions are in agreement that the electorate feels that it is the duty of their elected representatives to render assistance to their constituents.

Politicians

The research shows that the power and authority of Thai politicians is derived from three sources: the Constitution, the needs of the people, and the decisions of politicians. The preeminent authority of politicians devolves from the Constitution—a concept generally accepted by Thai society as the most legitimate source. As such, it cements relationships which translate into securing votes in the next election.

There are many politicians who violate the Code of Ethics for their personal gain or for cronies; ipso facto, they endeavor to perpetuate their stay in power at the public through ad infinitum. Niccolo Machiavelli would smile with approbation at the behavior of most Thai politicians who give and share in order to sustain themselves in power. This approach is clearly reflected in vote buying.

The concept and values of being a politician have changed drastically over the last three decades. As politicians can produce wealth and power without advanced formal education, there is little need to avoid the abuse of power. The upshot is a "professional politician who lives off politics" (Gerth and Mills, eds., 1946, p.

4). As such, the actions of this type of politico will produce a marked conflict of interests. This assessment is shared by the majority of informants. According to the member of the election of Thailand from the focus group 1 (personal communication, August 22, 2011),

"Those who come into politics today are different from those . . . in the past. It was a professional career, but now it is something cool to be an MP. Those who are businessmen can just come and cultivate more profits and wealth." The member of the Election Commission of Thailand from the Interview (personal communication, July 15, 2012), argued that "the personality of a Thai politician is a pattern of corruption, embezzlement, vile, and despicable—always seeking to abuse power for oneself without limit." "The most stubborn person is the representative. The intractable one that never listens is the MP. It is hard—very, very hard." (the politician no. 24 from the interview, personal communication, July 31, 2012).

Although politicians are humans with needs who make mistakes by exhibiting frailties common to everyone, they occupy a position that comes with power and authority that can move the country either forwards or backwards. That the guidelines to develop political ethics must originate with the politician is seen today as the crux to transparency in government. Ipso facto, it is urgent to turn politicians into ethical individuals equipped with a mindset for the sake of the majority.

Mass Media

The responsibility of mass media in reporting the news is to disseminate accurate data to the people. The ethics of mass media can influence the people's understanding of the behavior of politicians. Therefore, Thai mass media plays a profound role in monitoring the unethical behavior of politicians. Data collected from the research confirm that politicians use their

power and authority to interfere with mass media to encourage the reporting of inaccurate information and, as such, gain personal benefits. "Mass media are not working professionally. . . . I'm in Parliament. When we discuss proposed legislation, MPs fall asleep, but when we have a fight, they are enthusiastic. . . . Before developing politicians' ethics, mass media's ethics should be developed first."(the politician no. 12 from the focus group 1,personal communication, August 22, 2011). Furthermore, "politicians use mass media as a tool that helps them buy votes easier or helps them influence people to believe in untrue stories. If mass media work professionally with ethics, people will know the truth and understand the true situation." (The Ombudsman from the interview, personal communication, July 23, 2012)

To develop mass media in order to promote the ethical behavior of politicians, society must support mass media to have the right and ability to report facts to the public. As such, Thais can have access to information which may help them in electing credible representatives to work for them in Parliament.

Independent Entities

The intent of the Constitution is that the roles and functions of independent entities control the unethical behavior of politicians while promoting ethical practices. Without independent entities, unethical practices of the politicians could be worse; however, data endorse the concept that independent entities should be accorded additional authority.

A significant number of respondents said that the action of the Election Commission is not sufficiently efficient in regulating the unethical problems of fraudulent voting practices. The general consensus is that the Election Commission should eliminate buying votes and the corruption it generates: "The Election Commission should be consistent and just when they operate their duties. Their rules and the utilization should

apply for all" (The politician no. 6 from the focus group 1, personal communication, August 22, 2011). The politician no. 7 from the focus group 1 (personal communication, August 22, 2011) said, "The Election Commission shouldn't set an election unless Thais are ready." "If the Election Commission cannot declare [null and void] deceptive practice before the final phase of the election, it should be abolished." (the politician no. 11 from the focus group 1, personal communication, August 22, 2011). Academician no. 7 from the focus group 2 (personal communication, June 15, 2013) added, "Some agents of the Election Commission are corrupt."

On the one hand, a large number of the respondents criticized the ineffective performance of the Election Commission. On the other hand, there were a number of respondents who were sympathetic and understood the difficulties and obstructions confronting the independent entities: "I know that the National Anti-Corruption Commission has received a significant number of cases. . . . It has thousands of cases on hand now." (The politician no. 10 from the focus group 1, personal communication, August 22, 2011). Academician no. 7 from the focus group 2 (personal communication, June 15, 2013) believe that "the Election Commission's work results are both positive and negative. . . . The problems are from the conflict of duty. The organization has authority as a commissioner and committee at the same time."

Moreover, the research reveals the weaknesses inherent in attempting to control the mechanisms of ethics. In the case of the Code of Ethics, the implementation of which is not easy because the relationship between the ethical committees and the politicians dilute the intensity of the punishment. Other than the privileges of political officials—the members of the House of Representatives and Senate—the Code of Ethics focuses on acknowledging, warning, and suggesting rather than dealing out punishment. In addition, the Code of Ethics of the legislative branches of government overlaps one another.

Most informants from the research study suggest that these issues must be reconsidered in order to empower the mechanisms of ethical control.

That the issue of vote buying needs to be resolved is of paramount importance. An election system must be set in motion that can screen potential candidates exhibiting the traits of honesty, competence, and integrity so that the nation can be liberated from the cycle of buying votes. The data also reveal that the cycle of vote buying has percolated down to local politics. The informants provide interesting information that if village, district, or sub-district leaders support certain national politician's vis-à-vis being election canvassers, the permanence of their positions renders them a power base as much as for national politicians.

In order to resolve this issue, Thai society needs to boycott the illegal activities of politicians and report such behavior to the proper authorities without fear of repercussions. Be that as it may, the authorities must perform their investigative duties with honesty and fairness. Lastly, independent entities must execute their operations with transparency and veracity.

The Family Institution

As the family is the underpinning of society, it is also the guiding impetus of education. Therefore, the institution of family is the driving force in a child's moral, ethical, and personality development. If parents inculcate the values of ethics to their children, this will increase their chance of becoming ethical citizens when they mature. Data from the study substantiate that the family is the critical factor in promoting ethics. For example, the politician no. 2 from the focus group 2 (personal communication, June 15, 2013) believed that "the most important thing is family. . . . as the family unit is the originating source for how one interacts with others and heavily influences how one will behave in the future." According to the politician no. 24

from the Interview (personal communication, July 31, 2012), "father and mother teach their children well or not. Parents are role models. Children learn from them. They will grow up and have ethics in their life. . . . It depends on their parents . . ."

On the other hand, the younger generation can influence the ethical behavior of their parents. They can be agents of positive change by disseminating ethics into Thai society.

Role Model

Learning from a role model is the basic nature of humans. The findings from the research study can be approached from two points of view: role model and imitated behavior. The study confirms that politicians with high ethics, although in the minority, still exist. However, the number of politicians who impinge upon the Code of Ethics and the law is expanding almost exponentially. The study shows that there are not a few cases in which politicians are never punished for proven malfeasance. As such, the erosion of ethics in Thai politics is a political tsunami. As most politicians live unethically and above the law, they are free and wealthy; the implication to the "mass man" of Angel Ganivet is that doing bad things is not harmful. Such role models produce a national mindset that money equates power and that governance based on laws and civil rules are to be avoided by a society enamored of hedonism. For the politician no. 2 from the focus group 1 (personal communication, August 22, 2011), "the leaders, particularly, the governors must be role models in terms of behavior, speech, and thinking." Moreover, the former prime minister 2 from the interview (personal communication, August 23, 2013) insisted that "social value is very important. . . . If we say politicians do not have ethics while they still have a good life . . . this happens all the time. It will change the social norm. People will believe that they can do this as well. Everyone will do it as well."

"We must tell them whether their actions are right or wrong. If it is not right, we must not accept it. I want them to know that the society rejects unethical behavior"(the former prime minister 2 from the interview (personal communication, August 23, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The only way to promote a favorable disposition of politicians to embrace ethics is to secure the cooperation of all elements of society to scrutinize the 14factors delineated in this paper. Ethical behavior must be recognized and extolled so as to encourage the citizenry of Thailand to demand transparent governance of its politicians. As rational beings, Thais can distinguish right from wrong; however, they need to accept the basic preamble of a democratic society that "virtue leads society." Before the current generation yields leadership to young people attending the nation's educational institutions, it is incumbent that socio-political reform be implemented less a generation be lost in a wasteland of ethical desiccation.

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