

# Changing local elite selection in Thailand : emergence of new local government presidents after direct elections and their capabilities

著者	Funatsu Tsuruyo
権利	Copyrights 日本貿易振興機構 (ジェトロ) アジア 経済研究所 / Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organization (IDE-JETRO) <a href="http://www.ide.go.jp">http://www.ide.go.jp</a>
journal or publication title	IDE Discussion Paper
volume	411
year	2013-03-01
URL	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/2344/1263">http://hdl.handle.net/2344/1263</a>

IDE Discussion Papers are preliminary materials circulated to stimulate discussions and critical comments

**IDE DISCUSSION PAPER No. 411**

**Changing Local Elite Selection in Thailand;  
Emergence of New Local Government  
Presidents after Direct Elections and Their  
Capabilities**

Tsuruyo FUNATSU\*  
March 2013

**Abstract** Before rural local government units were established in Thailand, reform debates within the country faced a crucial issue: Candidates at the rural sub-district levels might adopt electioneering methods such as vote buying and the patronage system of the local political and economic elite, the methods that had been used in the national elections. In fact, the results of the 2006 survey in this paper, which followed the introduction of direct elections in rural local government units in 2003, contrast with the result anticipated during the debates on political reform. The preliminary data of the survey shows that the decentralization process and the introduction of the direct election system in the rural areas had some effect in changing the selection process of the local elite in Thailand.

**Keywords:** local government, direct election, education, social class

**JEL classification:** I2, N4, N9

---

\* Environment and Natural Resource Studies Group, Inter-Disciplinary Studies Center, IDE (funatu@ide.go.jp)

The Institute of Developing Economies (IDE) is a semigovernmental, nonpartisan, nonprofit research institute, founded in 1958. The Institute merged with the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) on July 1, 1998. The Institute conducts basic and comprehensive studies on economic and related affairs in all developing countries and regions, including Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Oceania, and Eastern Europe.

---

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s). Publication does not imply endorsement by the Institute of Developing Economies of any of the views expressed within.

---

**INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPING ECONOMIES (IDE), JETRO**  
**3-2-2, WAKABA, MIHAMA-KU, CHIBA-SHI**  
**CHIBA 261-8545, JAPAN**

©2013 by Institute of Developing Economies, JETRO

No part of this publication may be reproduced without the prior permission of the IDE-JETRO.

## **Introduction**

Under the political reform aimed at decentralization, which occurred between 1995 and 1997, over 6,000 new local governments were formed in Thai rural areas. This development brought democratic politics to rural inhabitants who hitherto had been limited in their participation in and right to vote for the local government. Under the former system, between 1932 and 1994, large- and medium-sized local government units (local administrative organizations, LAOs) were largely confined to urban and quasi-urban areas (less than 300 units), and in the rural districts, there were only administrative bodies like villages and Tambon Administration Organizations (TAOs). However, between 1994 and 1997, more than 6,616 rural units were created, and most of them were small-sized LAOs with a population scale of about 5,000–15,000 inhabitants. The creation of small-sized LAOs gave rise to both beneficial and problematic features.

So far as the advantages were concerned, the small size of LAOs meant that administration was brought within easy reach of the voters, and when elections were held, they took place within units small enough to facilitate democratic competition among the candidates. In that sense, small units were appropriate for helping local residents to elect their desired leaders.

On the other hand, a disadvantage was that the reform intensified the conspicuous contrast in the resource endowment between rural and urban LAOs in Thailand. In the case of LAOs in rural areas, their fragmentation into units of a very small size led to difficulties in budgetary spending and use of manpower (the average number of personnel in TAOs is only 15). In such cases, an increase in the transfer of administrative tasks meant that local governments faced nothing but difficulties stemming from a lack of resources, which in turn led to inefficiencies in the conduct of administration. It was with the aim of rectifying this resource deficiency that the Thai authorities planned to enhance the efficiency of the administrative systems by introducing direct elections, which were meant to increase the power of local presidents (Kowit 2005). Local governments were created on the assumption that local leaders would play a key role in the structure of the administrative system. They functioned as agents delegated by the people to promote local development and carry out efficient administration. Bearing in mind that there are socio-economic differences between urban and rural LAOs in Thailand, this paper clarifies the attributes and behavior of the local government presidents, who are key players in the conduct of local public administration in

Thailand. In particular, it takes into account the influence of both the election system and the system of administration.

### **1. Background to the decentralization of Thailand's local government: Creation of rural local government units and procedures for direct elections**

The decentralization of local government in Thailand formed part of the state's restructuring schemes, which was the aim of the new constitution introduced in 1997. Legal specialists and political scientists of Thammasat University put together a proposal for decentralization (Nagai 2008). These intellectuals did not belong to the bureaucracy and acted independently without reference to the intentions of the Ministry of Interior or members of the Thai parliament. During the 1990s, while intellectuals were strongly promoting the idea of decentralization to rural areas, democratization was becoming an increasingly important issue, as were political antagonisms between rural and urban areas and the gap in economic development between the cities and the countryside.

From 1992 to 2006, once the country had stabilized following a military coup d'état, the holding of elections at regular intervals became a possibility. In fact, up to the 1980s, Thailand relied on coups to initiate changes in the government, and those who assumed control at the center of the political administration were Bangkok-based elite, comprising men with a military background and highly educated technocrats. They acted independently from the wishes of the provincial population and members of parliament. Administrations of this kind, whose main distinguishing feature is the concentration of power at the center, have been described as "bureaucratic polity regimes."

The upshot was that investment and economic functions became concentrated within the single geographical pole of Bangkok and its peripheries, a process that led to an unrestricted form of regionally distorted economic development. This situation continued unchanged into the period of democratization.

Nevertheless, with the withdrawal of military intervention since 1992 to 2006, national elections began to be held, and from the mid-1990s onward, there emerged a marked difference in political intentions between the rural population, which constituted the great majority in Thailand, and their urban counterpart. Against the background of intensifying regional inequality, so far as investment and development were concerned, rural voters, and

especially those in the north and northeast, began to demand a greater share in the allocation of development funds (Anek 1996).

On the one hand, the decentralization of local government, which was pushed forward in this context, can be seen as a revolutionary reform that conferred on the rural population a new right of self-determination as well as a fairer share of the resources allocated to economic development. But on the other hand, the intellectuals who conceived the reform found it necessary to make compromises with conservative forces in the bureaucracy and with the urban population. There are three noteworthy concessions that had to be made.

First, the bureaucrats (particularly those in the main ministries) and the urban population were deeply suspicious of the growth of local government capabilities in the countryside. For decentralization to go ahead despite this suspicion, a gradualist approach, especially in the distribution of resources had to be adopted.

Second, the accountability of local government management had to be increased. To achieve this aim, the Interior Ministry carried out the selection and dispatching of the head clerk (“palad” in Thai) whose academic background was believed sufficient to conduct local government office procedures. For appointment to the post of local government president, eligibility requirements were also based on educational attainment (as the clearest qualification) to retain the trust of the bureaucrats and the city dwellers.

Third, to deter local businessmen and members of parliament from making open attempts to take over the new rural vote, the central bureaucracy gave priority to setting up a standing committee known as the Decentralization Committee in the Office of Prime Minister. The Committee is an independent body mainly consisting of intellectuals that implemented principles for budget allocations and that, among other things, managed decentralization policy.

After completion of the political process whereby the consent of the bureaucrats and the urban population was achieved, and following the introduction of the 1997 constitution and the legislative measures of 1999, the experiment in fostering grass-roots democratization in the regions got underway. In the countryside, 6,000 small local government units (known as *Tambon Administrative Organization, TAOs*) were established.

So far as systems were concerned, the decentralization reforms placed high hopes on the constructive role of local government leadership. Moreover, it was in this context that election systems and business management systems were established. In other words, leaders who were delegated by the people by way of direct elections to carry out local development may have been subject to strict control from the central authorities (*Note 1*), but at the same time they were vouchsafed a stable position (that of a “strong executive”) vis-à-vis local government councils. For example, (1) under the Thai local government system, local councils are not authorized to recall their local government president. Instead, the people are given the right to remove a local government president through the Interior Ministry. (2) The appointment of the president’s executive assistants does not require the local council’s permission, and (3) the right to issue ordinances and budget proposals to the local council is vested in the president and his executive assistants.

Moreover, (4) about the amount and use of budgetary funds, the requirement for presidents to submit a report to the Interior Ministry is limited to only part of the budget (general aid funds). Also, even though the total amount of the budgetary funds may be small, the system allows the president substantial room and discretion in planning his budgetary expenditure. Put differently, among the local governments of Thailand, which receive small amounts of resources that are further subdivided through budget making, resource shortages can be made good at the discretion of presidents. In addition, if presidents prove to be capable executive officers, local government business can be conducted with an efficient use of manpower and money. In summary, the system relies much on the ability of individual local government presidents.

In this way, a highly Thai-style view of leadership—a view that stresses competence of individuals—(see Shigetomi [2002]) gave insufficient attention to basic problems, such as the difficulties confronting the executive and the differences between rural and urban local governments. In other words, in contrast with the strong intervention of the central authorities in controlling the entry of candidates into the election process, there has been little attempt to monitor the running of local governments once presidents have been elected. The fundamental problem of how to achieve equality in the distribution of resources across many extremely small LAOs is the basic shortcoming of the decentralization reform, one whose solution continues to be postponed.

In what follows, with the peculiarities of the institutional arrangements providing the context, this paper comments on the analysis results of statistical data collected in 2006. These results help clarify the impact of direct elections on Thailand rural local government since 2003, and cast light on the executive system that centers on the administrative activities of local government presidents.

## **II Election system: Emergence of newcomer presidents and their attributes**

Based on survey data related to rural and urban LAOs in Thailand collected in 2006, this section clarifies the influence of direct elections on local government leadership. The survey on local government was the first large-scale investigation of its kind in Thailand and jointly conducted by the Institute of Developing Economies, Japan, and Thammasat University, Thailand. The survey relates to a particular time, and because no equivalent survey was conducted before 2003, when indirect elections were the rule, temporal comparison before and after introducing direct elections has been impossible.

However, of the 2,272 responses collected through the 2006 survey, some 267 came from LAOs whose leaders had been appointed prior to the 2003 transition to direct elections and whose administrations were being conducted with little change from the pre-2003 period. It has therefore been possible to make some comparison of conditions before and after the introduction of direct elections.

Table 1 shows the career backgrounds of presidents at the time of their election, by rural and urban areas, and allows for a comparison of conditions before and after the shift to direct elections. According to the table, in urban LAOs, in which there was a long tradition of local administration and thanks to a long-standing familiarity with elections for local *thesaban* (*Thesaban* councils), the pre-election career backgrounds of presidents before and after the introduction of direct elections differed, albeit very little. However, in LAOs that had been recently created, the introduction of direct elections led to the emergence of newcomer presidents whose career backgrounds displayed a different pattern. Thus, whereas under indirect elections 29.6% presidents had been previously engaged in farming and 40.8% had been businessmen, under direct elections the proportion of former businessmen fell by over 15.4%; the proportion of former farmers increased to 40.3% and that of former teachers to 14.9%. In this paper, author would name the individuals from the farming population and



from the teacher background as “new comer” presidents, while the those of former businessmen and ex-officials would be named as “old elite” presidents.

**Table 1 Occupations of President by Direct—Indirect Election (%)**

		Businesses Owner.	Private Employee	Farmer	Teacher	Ex Official	Other	Total
Direct Election	Urban							100.0
	LAOs	49.2	3.3	13.4	13.8	4.4	15.8	(N=246)
	Rural							100.0
	LAOs	22.1	3.8	44.1	14.9	4.6	10.5	(N=1759)
	Total	<u>25.4</u>	3.7	<u>40.3</u>	<u>14.8</u>	4.6	11.2	100.0 (N=2005)
Indirect Election	Urban							100.0
	LAOs	50.0	0.0	18.3	11.5	5.7	14.4	(N=104)
	Rural							100.0
	LAOs	35.0	7.4	36.8	8.0	3.7	9.2	(N=163)
	Total	<u>40.8</u>	4.5	<u>29.6</u>	9.4	4.5	11.2	100.0 (N=267)

Source: Calculated from the 2006 Survey.

Insofar as the origins of local government presidents are concerned, the figures clearly show that under the direct election system, an elite class composed of former businessmen and ex-bureaucrats was replaced by individuals from a different social class.

Table 2 selects data of presidents only from the direct election system and shows the educational backgrounds and former occupations of such individuals. According to the table,

as for the educational backgrounds of those who were formerly engaged in agriculture (the most numerous category), over 80% had been educated to the high school and junior college level. In the case of presidents who had formerly been employed in the teaching profession, because a graduate certificate is necessary to obtain a teaching license, some 60% were graduates. By contrast, among the presidents who had been businessmen and bureaucrats, 40% or more had academic qualifications that were superior to the basic education certificate, and the average number of years spent in education was far greater than in the case of those who had come from a farming background (*Note 2*).

**Table 2 Educational Backgrounds of President from Direct Election by Occupation (%)**

	Primary & Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary & Diploma	Bachelor Degree or Higher	Total
Business Owner(N=545)	14.3	48.4	37.2	100.0
Private Employee (N=75)	4.0	45.3	50.7	100.0
Farmer (N=817)	25.0	62.3	12.7	100.0
Teacher or Professor (N=298)	8.1	32.6	59.4	100.0
Ex official(N=96)	10.4	42.7	46.9	100.0
Other (N=232)	16.8	50.9	32.3	100.0
Total (N=2063)	17.3	50.7	32.0	100.0

$X^2=265.68$   $p.< 0.001$

Source Calculated from the2006 Survey.

From these results, we see that as far as rural local governments are concerned (as distinct from urban units), the introduction of direct elections exerted a profound effect on the appointment of local government presidents. In fact, the reality from the data is at odds with the “ideal situation” that was hoped for by the Ministry of Interior, which envisaged the election of well-educated presidents. A feature contrary to the standards that the bureaucrats tried to apply was that rural voters tended to elect presidents who had the bare minimum academic qualifications required for appointment to the post. In this way, insofar as the

exercise of the democratic entitlement of the rural population was at odds with the expectations of the Ministry of Interior, the emergence of the newcomer presidents marked the beginnings of an important change in the selection process of Thailand's local political leaders.

Moreover, the background of the individuals elected to presidential office, in both rural and urban areas, often included local managerial experience in service to the community, rather than the high levels of educational attainment, which was initially insisted upon by central ministry bureaucrats and the urban population as a prerequisite for election to the post of president.

When we investigate the previous career record of those elected to local presidential office, we find that over 70% of the respondents were either former *theseban* members (8.6%) or members of *tambon* assemblies (73.3 %), while 30% had served as chairpersons of *tambon* administrative districts (*kamnan* 12.9%, village headmen 19.5%). In fact, in rural districts, 30% of presidents had formerly been involved in community service, as members of village assemblies (12.9%) or members of community organizations (17.9%). To summarize, many of those who were elected to the post of local government president had ongoing experience of various types of managerial activity at the local level. They were individuals who had won the trust of voters through long periods of community service or by way of service as members of local government councils.

### **III Executive system: How do newcomer presidents try resolving problems?**

#### **1. Attributes of presidents and local government performance**

As for the reality of the emergence of newcomer presidents with their particular attributes, this section discusses its effects on the executive practices and administrative behavior of the new presidents appointed through direct elections. This section identifies the attributes and behavior patterns of presidents, both before and after the introduction of direct elections, in terms of a) the system variables of direct and indirect elections and b) the categorization of presidents' former career backgrounds in terms of the "old elite" (presidents who had been businessmen and bureaucrats) and the "newcomers" (presidents whose career background was in farming and teaching).

First, Tables 3 illustrate the states of resource distribution and the different indices of performance between rural and urban LAOs.

**Table3 Differentiated Resource Distribution between Urban-Rural LAOs with reference to Presidents academic backgrounds**

		Total Budget per population**	Special Grant per population**	Self-collected Budget per population**	No of Ordinances	No of Prizes**
Urban LAOs	Primary& Lower Secondary	6133.96	181.28	153.09	1.09	1.00
	Upper secondary and Diploma	4892.74	296.14	163.42	2.09	1.07
	Higher education	5828.16	610.25	150.22	1.80	1.57
	Total	5539.83	459.40	155.02	1.82	1.36
Rural LAOs	Primary& Lower Secondary	1533.89	83.31	42.62	1.85	0.76
	Upper secondary and Diploma	1540.13	76.83	41.48	1.68	0.81
	Higher education	1615.63	117.20	36.46	1.88	0.89
	Total	1560.68	89.57	40.25	1.77	0.82

\* p< 0.05 \*\* p< 0.01

Source: calculated from the 2006 Survey.

Note: The data on Budget is from the 2003 data.

Among urban and local governments in Thailand, budgetary allocations to urban local government units outstrip those to rural government units by a substantial margin. Moreover, in terms of the ordinances and awards passed by local councils, urban local governments surpass rural ones. However, there exists a budget category referred to as “special aid funds,” which at the discretion of the local government president, can be obtained through negotiation with the central authorities and members of parliament. Also, well-educated presidents of urban local government with a flair for statistical work can succeed in acquiring such funding. This difference in the present budget allocations might illustrate distinctions in how urban and rural local government units (presidents) approach the task of problem solving in the course of their work.

## **2. Behavior patterns among presidents attempting to address budgetary income shortfalls: Success and failure of such attempts**

In the overall behavior of local government presidents, actions related to obtaining all-important financial resources might be analyzed in terms of presidents' attributes, a task that is the focus of this section.

Tables 4 and 5 show, with respect to rural and urban local governments and concerning presidents appointed by both direct and indirect elections, the results of actual attempts by presidents to obtain financial aid by contacting heads of prefectural governments, regional politicians, and parliamentarians for budgetary assistance. The first point to note is that such appeals for budgetary help have been made very frequently. Between 70% and 80% of the presidents who responded to our survey confirmed that they had approached parliamentarians for assistance (link 6 in Figure 1 may not be a formal channel of communication, but in practice it is of great importance for supplying local presidents with aid). This type of action, aimed at acquiring budgetary funds and carried out through negotiation by political leaders, is recognized in Thailand as a legitimate part of the budgetary process. For example the "special aid fund," which is distributed for political purposes to local governments by members of parliament and cabinet ministers, has in effect become a political framework for the typical local government budget (*Note 3*).

Despite accusations of corruption and mutual back scratching among politicians and local government presidents, the practice continues as part of the formal task of the local government presidents. In this regard, there is significant statistical evidence to show that centrally placed politicians, such as heads of prefectural governments (Table 4) and parliamentarians (Table 5), give more aid to presidents, who have been appointed by indirect elections and who function as regional bosses, than to presidents newly chosen by direct elections. The distribution of budgetary funds to local governments can be seen as one of the determinants whereby political settlements are agreed upon, using parliamentarians as intermediaries.

**Table4 Contact to "President of Provincial Administration Organization" to ask for help on budget deficit by Direct—Indirect Election**

		To whom to ask for help when budget is not enough (President of PAO)		Total
		Got support	Could not get support	
Urban LAOs (N=225)*	Presidents from Direct election	68.9	31.1	100.0 (N=164)
	Presidents from Indirect election	82.0	18.0	100.0 (N=61)
Rural LAOs (N=1505)	Presidents from Direct election	83.5	16.5	100.0 (N=1375)
	Presidents from Indirect election	89.2	10.8	100.0 (N=130)

\* p< 0.05 Source: calculated from the 2006 Survey

**Table 5 Contact to "Members of Parliament " to ask for help on budget deficit by Direct—Indirect Election**

		To whom to ask for help when budget is not enough (President of PAO)		Total
		Got support	Could not get support	
Urban LAOs (N=205)	Presidents from Direct Election	75.0	25.0	100.0 (N=152)
	Presidents from Indirect election	83.0	17.0	100.0 (N=53)
Rural LAOs (N=1380)	Presidents from Direct election	79.1	20.9	100.0 (N=1260)
	Presidents from Indirect election	85.0	15.0	100.0 (N=120)

Source: calculated from the 2006 Survey

Next, and still on the topic of the behavior of presidents attempting to obtain budgetary funds, we compare presidents in terms of their attributes. As expected, presidents belonging to the old elite (businessmen and ex-officials) enjoy closer budgetary aid connections with parliamentarians and prefectural governors than do local government presidents appointed by direct elections (Tables 6 and 7). Nevertheless, newcomer rural presidents have closer budgetary aid connections with prefectural governors than newcomer urban presidents (Table 7).

**Table 6 Contact to “Provincial Governor” to ask for help on budget deficit by President’s occupational background**

		To whom to ask for help when budget is not enough (Members of Parliament)		Total
		Got support	Could not get support	
Urban LAOs (N=176)	Old Elite	76.9	23.1	100.0 (N=117)
	New comer	79.7	20.3	100.0 (N=59)
Rural LAOs (N=1288)**	* Old Elite	85.2	14.8	100.0 (N=445)
	New comer	77.1	22.9	100.0 (N=843)

\*\* p< 0.001

Source Calculated from 2006 Survey

**Table 7 Contact to “Provincial Governor” to ask for help on budget deficit by President’s occupational background**

		To whom to ask for help when budget is not enough (Provincial governor)		Total
		Got support	Could not get support\	
Urban LAOs (N=144)	Old Elite	68.7	31.3	100.0 (N=99)
	New comer	75.6	24.4	100.0 (N=45)
Rural LAOs (N=987)**	Old Elite**	78.6	21.4	100.0 (N=359)
	New comer	69.7	30.3	100.0 (N=628)

\*\* p< 0.001

Source Calculated from 2006 Survey

Many rural local government units in Thailand are extremely small in size, and this puts a premium on the efficiency of local government presidents and their ability to sustain personal relationships that are useful for their local government areas.

Table 8 introduces the most important structural variables, namely explanatory ones relating to socio-economic elements relevant to the analysis of the functioning of the presidents of Thailand’s local governments, rural and urban. In this table, the R2 squared value of 0.48 indicates the substantial explanatory strength of the model, but much of this stems from conclusions based on explanatory variables for all urban units, rural and urban. In addition, because the table deals with connections with parliamentarians and elements brought about by statistically significant differences between direct and indirect election systems, there are no differences related to the career backgrounds of local government presidents. Moreover, concerning connections between local government presidents and the executive branches of the ruling party, and the attributes of presidents (in terms of whether they belonged to the old elite), examples of statistically low indices exhibit a weak connection with *per capita* distribution of the budgetary allocation.

**Table8 Regression analysis of 2003 Total budget per capita.**

(6Variables→2003 Total budget per population)

	Beta	t	P
(Indipendent Variables)		25.22	0.00
Years of Education of President	0.01	0.33	0.74
Contact to Members of Parliament (Got support)	-0.08	-4.04	0.00
Contact to executive members of government party (Got support))	0.04	1.80	0.07
Urban LAO—Rural LAO	-0.66	-31.81	0.00
Direct-Indirect Election	0.06	2.80	0.01
Occupational background	0.04	1.89	0.06

Dependent Variable: 2003budget per capita

R2 0.48

N=1330

Source Caculated from the 2006 Survey.



Again, if we further take into account the regression analysis of rural and urban local governments, the explanatory power of the model considerably weakens. But the two explanatory variables of connections with parliamentarians and method of election (direct or indirect) emerge as elements whose importance is clear in a large number of cases. To summarize, funds obtained by budget-related approaches to parliamentarians, even though they represent a very small proportion of the local authority budget, are seen by both rural and urban local governments as a significant element. Moreover, as for the acquisition of local government budgetary funds, in all cases it becomes clear that the career background of the presidents has no statistical significance.

#### **IV Conclusions and Policy Implications**

The results of the above analysis demonstrate the radical nature of the political changes that occurred in the rural areas of Thailand as an accompaniment to the introduction in 2003 of direct elections for local government presidents. In particular, as a result of these revolutionary changes in the sphere of local government and the transition from indirect elections to direct ones, rural voters turned from an old elite consisting of individuals with high levels of educational attainment (businessmen and former bureaucrats) to new presidents from farming or teaching backgrounds. However, the behavioral choices available to newcomer presidents for the solution of administrative problems considerably differed from those available to presidents who belonged to the old elite, that is, presidents appointed as the result of indirect elections.

As the results of this survey make clear, presidents belonging to the old elite possessed “contact resources” in the form of access to administrative and political networks. In many cases, they enjoyed the possibility of activating helpful contacts for externally obtaining resources and acquiring supplementary funds for their budgets. For example, contacts with members of parliament, used in the statistical analysis as a variable reflecting the influence of contacts on budget distribution, demonstrate the possibility of obtaining an advantageous budget allocation, available to “old elite” presidents.

On the other hand, some of the data show that, as for attempts to obtain budget funds, there was not much difference in the way in which the central administrative authorities (central

administration and prefectural governors) treated presidents belonging to the old elite and those who were newcomers. This being the case, a new type of policy problem comes to the surface, namely one that concerns the links between the election system and the administrative system in Thailand. Against the background of high hopes being vested by the central authorities in newly elected leaders, and the intention to place in office leaders of ability who would be skilled in cultivating personal relationships, the candidature of persons entering elections for the presidents of local government was strictly controlled from the center. This was done under the assumption that if better presidents were chosen (“better” in this context meaning more efficient), the new presidents would be able to administer their local government units ably and efficiently, despite the paucity of the resources available to them.

In fact, as a result of the introduction of direct elections, the attributes of the presidents who were actually appointed differed somewhat from the outcome that had been envisaged by the Local Government Decentralization Committee and the Interior Ministry. In particular, when it came to using external networks to obtain resources and employing the help of parliamentarians to resolve problems, the farmers and the teachers who took up the job of president found themselves at a disadvantage relative to presidents who belonged to the old elite.

Taking into account the realities of the behavioral choices available to presidents for obtaining budgetary resources and for resolving problems, a case can be made for a change of course among the central authorities away from the centralized control and administration of an election system that is the gateway to local government presidential posts. Put differently, what is needed is a system of government that will allow the local government presidents of Thailand a fairer distribution of resources and easier access to information and sources of assistance.

## Summary

Since the 1990s, the local economic elite had been consistently selected in national elections at the local levels and their dominance was a matter of central concern. Thus, it was believed that decentralization would result in the new local government executive members whose professional backgrounds would be occupied by business people under political influence of national politicians.

However, the results of the 2006 survey, which followed the introduction of direct elections in rural LAOs in 2003, contrast with the result anticipated during the debates on political reform, that is, the former local elite with (their economic power and) business backgrounds would dominate after direct elections at the local governmental level. In fact, the results of a transitional period from indirect to direct election show an observable increase in the proportion of presidents selected from the farming population and the teaching profession in many of the rural LAOs that made a shift from indirect to direct elections.

The qualifications of “the newcomer presidents,” if these individuals from the farming population can be called as such, are mostly a high school diploma, which is the ‘minimum eligibility requirement’ for appointment to the post. During the foregoing period of indirect elections, those elected to the position of local government president with business backgrounds tended to have higher levels of academic attainment.

In this regard, the decentralization process in the rural areas, after it introduced the direct election system, had some effect in changing the selection process of the local elite.

When comparing the performance and capabilities of the newcomer presidents with those of their predecessors, we observe some impediments to their action in the former’s capabilities to construct networks and find resources to resolve problems in rural LAOs. In contrast to their predecessors with business backgrounds, most newcomers lack access to political and administrative networks useful for obtaining resources. In addition, the newcomers’ choices of strategies for resolving problems have differed in several ways from those available to their predecessors who were appointed through indirect elections. Presidents appointed by indirect elections, in their role as regional bosses, were able to cultivate useful contacts through personal political and administrative networks. Moreover, they could frequently obtain the necessary resources through these networks when there was a shortage of funds to cover

budgetary expenditure. Thus, there seems to be not only a need for intervention by the central authorities, who control the system by which local government presidents are elected, but also one to construct a system that emphasizes a more accessible way of conducting local administration.

Concerning the policy-related implications of this research for the newcomers, the deficiency of network resources needed to conduct administrative work should be rectified. Moreover, improvements should be made in their access to external sources of support, especially in the small rural LAOs lacking necessary resources to conduct local administration.

#### Notes:

1. Probably the foremost example of administrative supervision is the insistence of the Thai authorities on an acceptable level of educational attainment. Thus, the qualification for entry as a candidate for election as a *tambon* leader is a high school diploma, while that for candidates entering elections as a leader of a *teseban* and/or prefectural government head is a university degree is deemed essential. To the best of the author's knowledge, among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states, only Thailand and Indonesia insist on educational qualifications in the case of candidates entering local government elections.
2. Concerning the educational backgrounds of local government presidents, exceptions could be made with respect to candidates with late and intermediate school qualifications. Exceptions were made with respect to those who had previous administrative experience of a relevant kind. Thus, those who had local government experience during the foregoing period of direct elections as *tambon* council members and/or as council chairmen, or with experience as officials familiar with the work of local government administration were allowed to present themselves as candidates for election to the post of local government president. In such cases, late and intermediate school experience was accepted, and for former *tambon* leaders who wished to be candidates in local government presidential elections, instead of degree qualifications, high school leaving certificates were deemed sufficient.

3. The budgetary funds distributed to local governments are divided into various categories. Among these, the categories of general aid funds and government allocation funds reflect the population size of the local government area concerned and its economic level. Grants-in-aid are made with respect to administrative costs and local development planning. The overall framework of the budget allocation is determined by the Local Government Decentralization Committee, which also carries out in conjunction with members of parliament an assessment of how much money to give local governments in the form of planning subsidies. However, in the final stages, when it has to be finally decided how much to give and to whom, and whether upward or downward adjustment should be made, the Local Government Promotion Bureau of the Ministry of the Interior negotiates with the Local Government Decentralization Committee to arrive at a final settlement. Thus, it can be seen that the execution of much of local government business requires a better than average ability to negotiate, especially with council members and central administrative officials.

## References

- Anek Laothammathas 1996. "A tale of two Democracies: Conflicting Perception of Elections and Democracy in Thailand," in Robert Tylor ed., *The Politics of Elections in Woutheast Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 2000a. Heat Yu thi Thoongthin: Panhaa kaanmuang kaanpokkhong Thii Radap Chaat ansuep nuang jaak Kaan pokkhong Thongthin mai phiang phoo, Suun Kaansuksa lae Phathanaa kaanpokkhongthongthin, Bangkok:Thammasat University(in Thai).
- 2000b. Wisaitthat Kaanpokkhongthongthin lae Phaen Kaankracaaiamnaat, Bangkok: Samnak phim Mithimai(in Thai).
- Arghiros, Daniel 2001. *Democracy, Development and Democratization in Provincial Thailand*, Surrey: Curzon.

Chuwong Chayabut 1996. *Kaanphokkhong Thongthin Thai*, Bangkok: Borisat Ngamdii (in Thai).

Fumio Nagai 2008. "Decentralization Reform: The Consequence of 'Modernization without Rationalization'," in Yoshifumi Tamada and Tsuruyo Funatsu (eds.) *Thailand in Motion: Political and Administrative Changes, 1991-2006*, Chiba: Institute of Development Economies.

Kowit Phuangngam 2005. *Kaanpokkhong Thongthin Thai*, Bangkok: Winyachon (in Thai).

McVey, Ruth 2000. *Money and Power in Provincial Thailand*, Singapore: ISEAS.

Tsuruyo Funatsu 2008. "Performance of LAO Presidents in Thailand- How do their academic qualifications matter?" in Fumio Nagai, Nakharin Mektrairat and Tsuruyo Funatsu (eds.) "Local Government in Thailand- Analysis of the Local Administrative Organization Survey- " Joint Research Survey Series No.147, Chiba: Institute of Developing Economies.

Tsuruyo Funatsu 2012. "Creation of Rural Local Government Units in Thailand and Environmental Government" in Tsuruyo Funatsu and Fumio Nagai (eds.) 2012. *Changing local government and governance in Southeast Asia*, Chiba: Institute of Developing Economies.

Yoshifumi Tamada [2008] "Political and Administrative Changes in Thailand," in Yoshifumi Tamada and Tsuruyo Funatsu (eds.) *Thailand in Motion 1991-2006*, Chiba: IDE.