

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Paradox of the Thai Middle Class in Democratisation

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Abstract

The relationship of the bourgeoisie and democratisation has been inconsistent across the history of democracy. This work offers an alternative explanation taking the example of the Thai middle class, which had promoted democracy, turned against it. From the democratic transition of 1973 until the present day, the Thai middle class has played contradictory roles in the democratisation of the country. This work investigates the effects of democratic institution-building after regime change and the efforts to consolidate democracy in the middle class. This work proposes two major observations. The first is the failure of the middle class to establish themselves in democratic institutions and processes in either the legislature/executive, political parties, local government or structured interest groups. They have learned of the uncertainty of free elections and how the elected executives have benefitted other classes but not them. The second regards the missing prerequisite of democracy. Insufficient understanding of majority rules and two-turnover elections, caused the middle class who were disappointed with the outcome of democratic regimes and systems to easily turn away from democracy.

Keywords: Democratic Transition; Democratic Consolidation; Thai Politics; Middle Class; Anti-democratic Movement

Introduction

It is widely recognised in modern world political history that the middle classes tend to swing back and forth between liberal/progressive/democratic positions and conservative/anti-democratic ones. Analyses using Marxist, modernisation and contingency perspectives have been proposed for this phenomenon (Anek 1997; Becker 1984; Bell 1998; Bellin 2000; Bertrand 1998; Brown and Jones 1995; Chen 2013; Diamond 1992; Englehart 2003; Hewison *et al.* 1993: 6; Huntington 1991; Jones 1998; Koo 1991; Marshall 1950; Moore 1966: 413–414; Robison 1993: 41; Rodan 1993; Saxer 2014; Therborn 1977; Thompson 1963; Wu *et al.* 2017). To develop an alternative account, this work investigates the case of the Thai middle class (*chonchan klaang* in Thai); its development is a paradoxical example of the attitude toward democratisation described above. Modernisation theory presents the middle class as a pinnacle in the development of democratisation (Funatsu and Kagoya 2003: 243).

From the beginning of democratic transition (DT) in Thailand during the early 1970s until the democratic reforms of the late 1990s, the Thai middle class was considered to be a progressive force, pushing Thailand in a democratic direction (Anderson 1977; Anek 1993, 1997; Englehart 2003: 261; Funatsu and Kagoya 2003: 246; Girling 1996; Morell and Chai-anan 1981; Ockey 1999; Yoshifumi 2004: 32–33). Nevertheless, from the mid-2000s onward, its orientation shifted, and it began to support right-wing and anti-democratic campaigns against the powerful elected governments of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his successors, including Samak Sundaravej, Somchai Wongsawat and Yingluck Shinawatra. Fighting Thaksin and his cronies, they supported a movement that opposed electoral democracy and legitimised the coups that toppled the Thaksin government and its successor in 2006 and 2014 (Englehart 2003; Sinpeng and Arugay 2015: 109).

To explain why the former agents of democracy had become campaigners for anti-democratic ideas and allies of conservatism, this work uses documentary research and takes into account the consequences of democratic institution-building during the post-regime change period of the DT and the efforts to

promote a democratic consolidation (DC). Democratisation does not end with the overthrow of a non-democratic regime, subsequent elections and the establishment of an elective government. Much work remains to be done in that case. The Thai middle classes, who had played an active role in ending authoritarian power, represented the post-regime transition to themselves with wishful thinking, and it did not produce the results that they had expected. This work assesses the outcome of their efforts to establish themselves in different democratic institutions and their performance in handling the consequences. It evaluates their attempts to access political power and governing processes in the legislature, the executive, political parties, local/regional government and structured interest groups.

This work argues for two effects of the failures of the middle class on democratic institutions and the missing prerequisites of democracy. First, the about-face of the middle class was rooted in its own assessment of its losses after the establishment of democratic institutions were established. The results of the political liberalisation of the 1990s and free elections led to political opportunities for the uneducated masses of the urban lower middle class and rural poor as well as for elected politicians. Under Thaksin's powerful governments, electoral democracy ceased to be a useful political tool. The second factor is the lack of a certain prerequisite for democracy among the Thai middle class and in Thai society generally, namely, knowledge of its operations. The lack of a profound understanding of the majority rules and two-turnover election, led the frustrated middle class to wish to part company with democracy after losing democratic competitions at different stages.

To pursue this discussion, this article is divided into four parts. The first two define and describe the middle class and various phenomena relating to and explanations of the dilemmas of middle classes around the world. Then the next section turns to investigate the link between this study and the causal impact of the DT and DC to enhance understanding of the middle class in democratisation. The last section portrays the about-face of the Thai middle class and how earlier works had explained this. It offers an alternative explanation for why the middle class, which had supported democratic transition, ultimately turned against democracy.

Defining the Middle Class in a Context of Change

Although the middle class is generally understood to refer to the class of people in the middle of the socio-economic hierarchy, Marxists, modern social theorists, and economists continue to debate what precisely constitutes and defines it. Various levels and elements of class indicators, including socio-economic status, credentials and cultural perceptions, have been taken into account in these investigations of different times and places (Devine *et al.* 2004). Left-wing readers primarily define the middle class in terms of its relationship to the means of production, describing it as being below the ruling class but above the proletariat. Marxists present the middle class in one of two ways. On the one hand, the phrase is used to describe the bourgeoisie, such as urban merchants and the professional classes, which arose between the aristocracy and the proletariat at the end of feudalism. However, it has also been defined in more modern and developed countries as the petite bourgeoisie, comprising owners of small to medium-sized businesses who derive their income from the exploitation of wage-labourers, together with the highly educated professional classes. Thus, the middle class is here between the ruling capitalist owners of the means of production and the working class (whose income is derived solely from wages). Other economists and sociologists define the middle class differently. In contemporary America, the middle class is used as a self-description by some whom both Marxists and more mainstream economists would otherwise call the working class (Gilbert 1998). Scholars in the developing world often define the middle class in terms of socio-economic categories, such as per capita income, purchasing power parity or education level (Banerjee and Duflo 2008; Kharas 2010). These indicators have been used to classify those who played an active role in promoting the Arab Spring as the middle class. Unemployed educated people with incomes of USD 10–100 per capita per day in purchasing power parity were the main driver in political change in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Jordan and Morocco (Ghanem 2016: 39–64).

In Thailand, the term middle class has acquired different identifications in the changing social and political context of the country. During the 1930s, it was used to describe the small group of technocrats, intellectuals, journalists and others, either educated in Western countries or influenced by early twentieth-century democratic ideas from Europe. The People's Party (Khana Ratsadon), which included

the bureaucratic elites who wielded major power during the Constitutional Revolution from absolute to the constitutional monarchy in 1932 (Nakarin 2010; Reynolds 2004). In the 1930s to the 1940s, the middle class was usually termed as “merchants, ethnic Chinese, or Bourgeois” (Mackie 1988; Szanton 1983). The middle class was a minority in Thai society. The Thai middle class expanded during the end of the 1960s. Owing to the proliferation of mass higher education and the economic boom of the Cold War during the US-backed Sarit Thanarat dictatorship, many former members of the lower class were able to rise into the newly emerging parts of the middle class, the petite bourgeoisie (tradesmen and white-collar workers) (Anderson 1977). Many moved even further upward into the upper, more established middle class, or even to the haute bourgeoisie (bankers and industrialists), profiting from the economic boom of the 1990s (Anek 1993). Beginning in the DT of the early 1970s and lasting until the democratic reform of the late 1990s, the middle class came to be recognised as a progressive force, which pushed Thailand in a democratic direction (Anderson 1977; Anek 1993, 1997; Englehart 2003: 261; Funatsu and Kagoya 2003: 246; Girling 1996; Morell and Chai-anan 1981; Ockey 1999; Yoshifumi 2004: 32–33).

Analysing the inconsistent relationship between the middle class and democratisation in contemporary Thai politics, this article uses the term middle class exclusively to refer to the upper or older middle class as defined above. More recent work in this area takes account of the more complicated and diverse nature of the Thai middle class, applying a hybrid approach, including the assessment of quantitative data on socio-economic status and lifestyle, including income, education level, career type and assets, to classify the middle class in its diversity (Apichat and Anusorn 2017; Chalita 2017; Thorn and Chanon 2017). Such scholars argue that the continuation of economic growth between the late 1980s and 2000s, with the brief exception of the 1997 Asian economic crisis, allowed the vast majority of the poor to successfully climb above the poverty line and turn themselves into a new or lower middle class, while the pre-existing members of the middle class that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s became the old or upper middle class (Apichat and Anusorn 2017). Together, in 2010, the upper and lower middle classes accounted for respectively 14.3 million, or 21 per cent, and 36 million, or 54 per cent, of the total population of Thailand (Thorn and Chanon 2017). While members of the lower middle class tend to have higher incomes than the lower class, most still have a lower education than the upper middle class. They work in either the seasonal-agricultural and informal sectors or are lower-level or temporary staff in the public or private sector (Apichat and Anusorn 2017; Chalita 2017). The upper middle class are the urban and highly educated middle class and enjoy a relatively luxurious lifestyle. They are either professionals or entrepreneurs, with or without employees, but they certainly work outside the agricultural sector (Apichat and Anusorn 2017; Thorn and Chanon 2017). This study proposes that the divergence among these middle classes laid the foundation for political conflict in Thailand from the 2000s until the present day. The lower middle class tended to be in support of the Thaksin government and the Red Shirt movement, but the upper middle class tended to support the anti-Thaksin movement, the Yellow Shirts, under the leadership of the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) or the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) (Apichat and Anusorn 2017; Apichat *et al.* 2012).

The Paradox of the Middle Class in Democratisation

After the publication of Fukuyama’s *The End of History* (1989), it was taken as an axiom that the march of democracy could not be reversed (Fukuyama 1989). However, the middle class has taken a paradoxical role in democratisation worldwide, both in the past and recently. The middle class alternates back and forth between being the engine of democratic change and becoming its reactionary impediment. Much has been written to explain the range of ideologies and ideological changes among the middle class. Some have put a great deal of effort into depicting the middle class as the central democratic and progressive force at one of another specific point in time. Others criticize and condemn the middle class as a reactionary bourgeoisie.

Middle Class: Democratic Engine and Anti-Democratic Forces

It is often noted that the legacies of middle-class revolts in earlier history have had a deep impact on our world today. Many works have portrayed how the middle classes were among the first to reject hereditary

privilege, state religion and absolutist monarchy and to propose to replace absolutism with representative democracy and the rule of law (Anek 1997; Beetham 1974: Chapters 2 and 3; Brown and Jones 1995; Johnston 2006). With the famous dictum, 'No bourgeoisie, no democracy', Barrington Moore indicates his sense that the middle class is the decisive factor in democratisation (Moore 1966: 418). Beyond comparative history, the modernisation-correlation school also explores the positive link between the rise of the middle class, economic development and democracy (Bollen 1983; Brown and Jones 1995: 78; Lipset 1963). For instance, Samuel Huntington argues that modernisation and economic development produced the middle class, which in turn played a pivotal role in bringing about democracy (Huntington 1984).

By contrast to this sanguine picture, many writers take a pessimistic view. Marxists and socialists have looked at the middle class throughout history as the retrograde 'monster of fascism' and as a class of reactionaries, and non-Marxist liberal-radicals have condemned white-collar workers as alienated, confused, miserable and deeply deluded (Johnston 2006: 4–6). The role of the middle class has recently once again come into question. Amidst recent crises in electoral democracy, it appears to have switched its coalition and allied with conservative and unelected elites such as the bureaucracy and military to overthrow elected governments. In many countries, such as Ukraine, Egypt, Turkey and Venezuela, the middle class has become resistant to democratic development and institutionalisation (Kurlantzick 2013; Saxer 2014). This is not only true in the Western world; the burgeoning Asian middle classes who had earlier supported democratic transition later turned their backs on democratic government (Brown and Jones 1995). In many cases, the middle class seems to be quite ambivalent on the subject of democracy, illiberal and with a vested interest in the continuity and stability of authoritarian rule due to its role as the main beneficiary of state-led economic growth in previous decades (Bell 1998; Bertrand 1998; Brown and Jones 1995; Chen 2013; Englehart 2003; Hewison *et al.* 1993: 6; Jones 1998; Koo 1991). Recent events in Thailand, Egypt, Bangladesh, Chile, Venezuela and Fiji have demonstrated middle class support for democratic reversal. The middle class in the countries listed above has been sympathetic to military coups against democratically elected governments (Sinpeng and Arugay 2015; Therborn 2014). Many analyses have been developed on the conditions that have led the middle class to turn against democracy. Many works have produced structural explanations. Among these, Marxist, modernisation and other contingency proposals argue that the liberalising role of the middle class in democratisation is 'problematic' (Brown and Jones 1995: 79). Marxist analysts describe a pattern where in the middle class pushes for representative democracy and the protection of civil liberties but opposes greater equality or rights for lower classes (Marshall 1950; Therborn 1977; Thompson 1963) due to a lack of class ideology (Koo 1991: 492–493). Dependency scholars argue that the domestic bourgeoisie of Third World countries can neither institute democracy nor maintain DC because they are simply the servants of foreign interests rather than the bearers of national interest (Becker 1984). Many modernisation theorists admit that the events that led to bourgeois democracy in the West may not be possible in the late-developing countries at the present time (Anek 1997; Moore 1966: 413–414). The relationship between economic development and democratisation is dynamic and controversial (Chen 2013). Only specific interests and the specifics of the historical situation can explain why rapid development resulted in the rise of democracy in some cases (Englehart 2003; Huntington 1991; Jones 1998; Koo 1991; Moore 1966: 418). Last, many scholars propose countless contingent democrat hypotheses. Many argue that the middle class is sensitive to instability in the social order and opportunistic in responding to self-interest and government performance (Brown and Jones 1995: 97–98; Chen 2013: 10; Koo 1991: 490–492). Some follow an economic determinism approach and argue that the petty bourgeoisie are economically vulnerable and are therefore easily manipulated during economic crises (Kuvačić 1979: 338–342).

A large group of scholars of contingency focus on the power that a powerful non-democratic state can have over the middle class. The state successfully co-opts the middle class into adopting a dependent relationship to the state instead of opposing it. Through their connections, employment, socio-political orientation and dependency culture, the middle class is motivated to defend or show loyalty to any leader who can reliably offer protection (Bellin 2000; Brown and Jones 1995; Chee 1993; Chen 2013; Clark 1989: 140–141; Jones 1998: 152–156; Robinson 1991: 41; Wu *et al.* 2017). In addition to dependency on the state, contemporary works that adopt a contingency perspective call on a long list of factors that could be expected to turn the middle class against democracy, including external intervention, such as US

support for right-wing groups, corruption among elected politicians, lack of economic development, limited experience of democracy, limited government capacity, ethnic and religious conflicts, preference for consensus rather than confrontation, the legacy of colonisation and lack of confidence in the outcomes of democratic states (Anek 1997; Bertrand 1998: 357; Brown and Jones 1995; Chee 1993; Chen 2013: 6; Clark 1989: 140–141; Fukuyama 2012; Jones 1998; Robinson 1991: 41).

Describing other young Asian democracies, earlier work has largely argued for the success of the state in co-opting or patronising potential pro-democracy middle classes in their economic, political or cultural aspects. Economically, the middle class in such states is rather dependent on the state for their employment, either in the public sector, or as employees of state-supported companies. In Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea, professionals, civil servants and business interests all came to be in relation to bureaucratic connections (Jones 1998: 152–156). In Indonesia, the middle class grew with the state bureaucracy after the traumatic transition to Suharto's New Order (Brown and Jones, 1995: 83–84, 92–93, 100–101; Jones 1998: 154). Unlike other classes, the new middle class has more of a role as part of the state apparatus. Their ideas of democracy and the current party-state are tied to the state and its perceived socioeconomic well-being. This class thus tends to be more supportive of the current party-state and less supportive of any democratic change that could challenge it (Chen, 2013: 19–20; Chapter 4).

States accommodate and co-opt the middle class through corporatist participation. In Singapore, the PAP government does not suppress the middle class but adopts this strategy, presenting a caring and consultative style. It successfully promotes inter-party competition or builds up new channels for the middle class to promote their interests (Brown and Jones 1995: 81–82). In Taiwan, the Taiwanese government under both presidents Chiang and Lee managed to accommodate demands of the new middle class through a certain form of democratisation and co-opted most of the demands of the opposition party (Clark 1989: 140–141; Robinson 1991: 41).

Culturally, states mould the socio-political orientation for the rise of a new middle class (Lipset 1990). In China, the state has played a major role in class formation of the middle class, both at the individual level (e.g., perceived social and economic well-being as well as membership in the CPP) and the societal level (e.g., the level and speed of local economic development). They have successfully promoted dependency culture through local-modernised ideas by mixing liberal rhetoric and traditional ideas (Brown and Jones 1995). Since the 1970s, state education has played a major role in schooling training loyal and efficient citizens, who have responded positively to official calls for greater unity (Jones 1998: 149–156). A legalistic bureaucracy with a Confucian allegiance to moral rule have been promoted in South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, and in Singapore, Asian values became a matter of educational and political urgency in the 1980s. The military-backed authoritarian regimes of generals Park, Chun and Roh actively promoted the virtue of conformity in South Korea. In South Korea, the Confucian legacy, which dates back to the end of the Yi dynasty, has claimed to be the legitimate vehicle of the Korean nation (Jones 1998: 150–151). Traditional practices of cooperation and consensus building in Indonesia and Malaysia have been used to explain economic dynamics in those countries (Chee 1993). Pan-Asian nationalists like Kishor Mahubani and Mahathir Mohamad have asserted the superiority of local customary practices over liberal individualist alternatives. In Malaysia, the UMNO revitalised and purified traditions drawn from the golden era of the Malacca Sultanate but amended them to support a traditionalist leader devoted to building what was termed Malaysia Incorporated. In Indonesia, Suharto's New Order emphasised paternalistic guidance and deliberation leading to consensus (Jones 1998: 149 and 154).

The Paradox of the Thai Middle Class in Democratisation

As elsewhere, the relationship between the Thai middle class and democratisation has been inconsistent. The middle class has supported and abandoned democratisation movements and ideas across different transitions and efforts to consolidate democracy. On 14 October 1973, student activists successfully mobilised a mass movement to end the fifteen year long series of corrupt authoritarian governments, calling for a democratic government (Anderson 1977; Morell and Chai-anan 1981). However, the middle class, who had supported the DT of 1973, soon transferred its sympathies to the military, with the expectation that it would restore political and economic stability following the upheavals of the student and labour

movements between 1973 and 1976. After 1973, the Thai middle class supported right-wing movements against the student, labour and peasant movements (Anderson 1977; Funatsu and Kagoya 2003: 245–246; Prajak 2006).

In the early 1990s, the Thai middle class grew and established themselves, both financially and socially, as upper middle class (Apichat and Anusorn 2017). The loyalties of this middle class also switched back and forth. In 1991, a military junta, the National Peacekeeping Council (NPKC), staged a coup against the democratically elected government of Chatichai Choonhavan (1988–1991). At first, the coup seemed to be welcomed and supported by the upper middle class (Anek 1993: 77–80; Englehart 2003: 257–258). However, only after the leaders of the coup had revealed their intention to take control over parliamentary politics did the middle class start to campaign against the military and call for democracy (Englehart 2003: 257–258; Yoshifumi 2008). Mass mobilisation of the middle class in Bangkok and in the provinces, urban professionals, academics and young politicians marched out onto the street. They successfully revolted against the military's efforts to prolong their domination over parliamentary politics, appealing for the return of an elected government and premier (Anek 1993; Englehart 2003: 261; Funatsu and Kagoya 2003: 246; Girling 1996; Ockey 1999). However, it is difficult to assert that the upper middle class formed the majority of the protesters. White-collar and blue-collar workers are both underrepresented among the casualties of the May 1992 incident (Englehart 2003: 263). Above all, the majority of the middle class accepted and welcomed the king's political intervention in the reconciliation between the junta and protesters (Sinpeng and Arugay 2015: 109).

In addition to pushing ahead on democratic transitions, the upper middle class played an erratic part in the post-regime transition in two major areas, namely, the rise of social movements and the political reforms of the second half of the 1990s. Countless journalists, NGO workers, academics and socially concerned professionals were major supporters and worked hand-in-hand with groups of underprivileged people who had been negatively affected by the unjust consequences of government developmental projects and macro-economic policies (Baker 2000; Kanokrat 2003; Missingham 2003). At the same time, these middle class acted as a crucial force in promoting political reform. They supported the 1997 so-called People's Constitution, one of the most democratically oriented constitutions in Thai political history (Englehart 2003; McCargo 2002; Missingham 2003: 59–62; Naruemon 1998). Nevertheless, there are ongoing debates over how far these efforts ultimately promoted democracy. In favour of social movements during the 1990s, the Thai middle class, both its representatives who were NGO workers and those who were academics, took control over various movements and advocated middle class values and agendas (Kanokrat 2003). Political and constitutional reform were broadly challenged as lacking a democratic character, in spite of the utmost efforts to make the drafting of the 1997 constitution as participatory as possible. Various aspects of the constitution discriminated against the lower middle and lower classes and empowered unelected bodies over elected politicians (McCargo 2002; Naruemon 1998; Somchai 2002; Veerayooth 2016: 490).

The most paradoxical move that the Thai upper middle class has made in contemporary politics came during the rise of the Thaksin government and that of his successors in the early 2000s and the following political conflict between the anti-and-pro Thaksin movements throughout the 2010s up until today. From the very beginning, the upper middle class acted as a major force acting in support of Thaksin Shinawatra and his Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party. Countless groups of academics, professionals, NGO workers and social activists took part in consultation and policy-making for the TRT party from a very early stage. Nevertheless, after their overwhelming victory in the 2001 election, the TRT shifted their policy interests toward the lower middle class, the poor and rural areas. Universal healthcare, village funds and other actions promoted the popularity of the TRT in the lower classes. At the same time, the Thaksin government was implementing strong measures against its political opponents (McCargo and Ukrist 2005; Pasuk and Baker 2004).

As the frustration mounted among the upper middle class, they began to bring pressure to bear through the media and mass movements against the government. This pattern of mobilisation had previously been successful in getting rid of the governments that the middle class they disapproved of, particularly in October 1973 and May 1992, and in achieving their demands during the 1997 political reform, it did not continue to work under the Thaksin government. Owing to the design of the 1997 constitution, the success of the TRT policy platform and its abuse of power, the Thaksin government

took control of parliamentary politics, the bureaucratic system, the courts, independent bodies and popular support from the majority of the Thai population.

In fighting against the corrupt, populist and semi-authoritarian elected Thaksin governments and their successors, the Thai upper middle class gradually went further and supported anti-democratic and conservative-oriented movements, allying itself with ultra-conservative masses and elites to overthrow Thaksin and suppress those who supported democracy. By 2006, they were in support of the PAD, the anti-Thaksin movement organisation. They shifted from merely campaigning against corrupt and repressive government to advocating royalism, ultra-nationalism and above all, anti-democratic ideas and systems. Opposing democracy and egalitarian ideas, they proclaimed themselves in favour of a strong political order. They supported the call for a prime minister directly appointed by the king, based on Article 7 of the constitution. They invited military intervention and legitimised the coup that toppled the Thaksin government in 2006. Then, in 2008, countless numbers of the middle class backed an anti-Thaksin movement that adopted tactics of confrontation and violence strategies like seizing international airports and government offices, to remove the government of Samak Sundaravej (January to September 2008) and Somchai Wongsawat (September to December 2008), which were crony governments of Thaksin. Between 2009 and 2013, many even organised, participated in and supported ultra-nationalist and royalist campaigns that attacked masses of supporters of Thaksin in the Red Shirt movement. In 2013, a mass movement of the upper middle class reformed under the new movement organisation of the PDRC, led by former politicians of the Democratic party. Their mass protests successfully brought sufficient pressure to bear on Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin's sister, to dissolve parliament. However, they did not stop there. The upper middle class mass mobilisation continued. They forcefully campaigned for the suspension of the general election, as well as openly calling for military intervention. Subsequently, in May 2014, the military staged a coup (Askew 2010: 3–4; Kanokrat 2016; Montesano 2009; Saxer 2014; Thongchai 2008: 30–33). Then, in the 2019 general election, the upper middle class were strong supporters of Palang Pracharat party, which was allied with the military (Kanokrat 2019).

In seeking to understand why a middle class, which can be agents of democracy and was earlier in Western history, could become a conservative and anti-democratic force, the literature focuses on four major arguments: pragmatism, the liberal-procedural hypothesis, legacy and newly constructed supremacy and right-wing hegemony and the framing processes.

The first approach argues that the Thai middle class can be described as pragmatist. The relationship between it and democracy, on this view, is contingent on whether its financial and political interests can be protected (Jäger 2012; Sinpeng and Arugay 2015: 112–113). The call for democratisation and political liberalisation during the 1970s and 1990s, on this telling, were merely to protect themselves from an abusive bureaucratic elite. Materialistically, during the Thaksin regimes, the middle class felt itself squeezed and threatened by the rapid increase in the wealth of the upper class and the lower class (Apichat and Anusorn 2017; Nithi 2010). Giles (2007) argues that the middle class supported the military coup to preserve their wealth and social status.

The second approach argues that the upper urban classes called for the removal of the democratically elected Thaksin to rescue proceduralism and liberalism from populist and authoritarian leader (Jäger 2012). Allying with the powerful conservative elites and the masses to promote a military coup was the only feasible choice they had to save democracy (Thongchai 2008: 30–31). They backed the PAD movement, which presented itself as a safeguard for democracy (Chang 2006a, 2006b).

The third argument focuses more on legacy and the newly constructed supremacy of right-wing elements. Together with their higher educational, social and economic status, the Thai middle class developed a sense of intellectual superiority over the lower classes. They became proud of their status, access to information, political morality (no vote-buying) and moral and ethical standards (not relying on financial support from politicians). They looked down upon the lower classes for voting for corrupt politicians in exchange for short-term financial benefits (Sinpeng and Arugay 2015: 110–111). In addition to that, right-wing institutions have successfully promoted their hegemonic project. Thai people, including the middle class, have long been socialised in hierarchical social structures. For them, inequality is not only natural but moral (Mulder 1997: 308). The political thinking of the middle class is based on religious beliefs and moral good man's politics, which fundamentally differs from democracy. Here, the power to

rule is tied to personal virtue rather than support from a majority of the population (Apichat and Anusorn 2017). At the same time, radical and progressive Thai activists and academics have failed to propose any alternative ideology or ideological strategy that the Thai middle class would prefer to communitarianism-nationalism-royalism (Giles, 2009; Kanokrat 2016: 36; Kanokrat 2017; Kasian 2006; McCargo 2005; Pye and Schaffar 2008; Thongchai 2008).

The last of these perspectives relates the success of framing process through both the media and the master frame of the anti-Thaksin movement. Using the information-gap hypothesis, Jäger (2012) argues that the middle class consumed different media from the lower class in the countryside, particularly with respect to negative information on Thaksin and his performance. They were therefore more easily convinced by the Threat-Mega Crisis-Action Now frame promoted by the conservative leadership within the anti-Thaksin movement (Kanokrat 2017).

The Middle Class and the Consequences of Democratisation

To propose an alternative explanation of the paradoxical relationship between the middle class and democracy, this work examines changes in political structures and their consequences. It is particularly interested in how political institutions and structures affected the middle class after the DT and their political stand on democracy, using the case of the Thai middle class. The question here is what conditions have brought the middle class to change their political stand on democracy. Responding to this question, this work considers the consequences of institutional changes as well as other conditions, particularly relating to the available prerequisites of democracy among the middle class.

The effects of institutional and structural change are examined here in terms of the consequences for democratic institution building by the middle class. The period of this study is the period that overlaps between the post-regime change of the DT and the preparation process of DC, i.e., the period after the transition from an authoritarian to a democratic regime, including: formal legal changes to limit the arbitrary use of power; constitutional and legal changes to eliminate the unaccountable power of veto-groups; constitution drafting and ratification to guarantee equal civil and political rights and freedoms to all citizens; regular free and fair elections; and, above all, acceptance of the results of elections (Schneider and Schmitter 2004: 66). These are part of how democratic institutions and trust in democracy can be promoted during DC. The accomplishment of DC means that all citizens, whether elites, politicians or masses, can agree on an unequivocal and consistent commitment to democracy (Diamond 1994: 15; Haynes 2000: 132; Linz and Stepan 1996; Schedler 1997; Schedler 2001; Schneider and Schmitter 2004, 68). In this process, institutionalising democracy, avoiding democratic breakdown, avoiding democratic erosion, completing democracy and deepening democracy are all essential tasks (Schedler 1997). This work describes how unpredictably the results of the democratic institutional building during the DT and DC affected the political stance of the middle class. This work follows the suggestion of Gill (2008) as a means by which the middle class can participate in democratic politics, including the legislative/executive elections, political parties, local government and forming interest groups (Gill 2008).

In addition to structural changes, the missing prerequisites of democracy for the middle class should be considered. For the Thai middle class, this work proposes two crucial consequences of DC, including the rules of two-turnover elections and majority rules. Huntington (1991) and many other observers suggest that the two-turnover test be used as a prerequisite for democracy, particularly in relation to free and competitive elections. Huntington writes that a democracy becomes consolidated 'if the party or group that takes power in the initial election at the time of transition loses a subsequent election and turns over power to those election winners, and if those election winners then peacefully turn over power to the winners of a later election' (Huntington 1991: 267, cited in Encarnación 2000: 486). In short, those who win in the DT generally win only in the first round of subsequent elections and normally lose in the next round (Haynes 2000).

Likewise, majority rules is a crucial element of democracy. A majoritarian democracy is the conventional form of democracy in many countries and it holds that the elected leadership is responsible to the electorate and will of the majority, although the views and values of the opposition minority must be respected. Nevertheless, there has long been debate over how to protect democracy from what has been termed the tyranny of democracy (Arter 2006). Different perceptions of majoritarianism lead to

different approaches to the problem and its consequences. Understanding the danger of both the tyranny of the majority and of oligarchy, the societies of Switzerland, Germany, Denmark and Belgium, have tried to promote consensus democracy, with an inclusive decision-making structure that involves as broad a range of opinions as possible, in contrast to opposed systems where minority opinions can be ignored by vote-winning majorities (Arter 2006). Other countries with sceptical views of the majority, like the United States, opted for republican democracy, with a constitutional system that includes minority protections and individual rights (Falk 2014). Authoritarian democracies, like fascism and Stalinism, reject majoritarian democracy altogether. They value dynamic and organised minorities over disorganised majorities (Arblaster 1994). The different ideological foundations for majoritarianism in each society lead to different reactions to the form and development of democracy after its period of institutionalisation.

The Consequences of Democratisation on the Thai Middle Class

This work describes the loss of middle-class influence in democratic political institutions and the missing prerequisites for democracy. These have led the middle class to become supporters of an anti-democratic movement from being fighters for democracy. After democracy was installed, they failed to establish themselves in its mechanisms, including political parties, the legislature and executive, local government and interest groups. Further, the middle class did not sufficiently commit itself to democratic ideas, especially the understanding of majority rule and two-turnover elections.

The Loss of the Middle Class in Democratic Institutions

By the mid-1990s, the middle class that had newly emerged during the 1970s had moved up the social ladder and became the established middle class in terms of its social, political and economic status. In this promising environment, many members of this class promoted participatory democracy and campaigned for political reform to prevent the return of authoritarian government and to institutionalise democratic mechanisms. In 1994, upper middle class groups successfully put pressure on the Chuan Leekpai government (September 1992 to July 1995) to establish the Democratic Development Committee and inaugurate one of the most deliberative constitution drafting processes in Thai political history. The 1997 Constitution was the first to be drafted by a popularly elected Constitutional Drafting Assembly, following a nationwide process of public consultation. Over the course of the reform process, they sought to deal with the problems of money politics in the electoral system, the lack of ideological political parties and policy platforms and the instability of coalition governments by institutionalising political parties, increasing executive power and increasing decentralisation (McVey 2000; Nakharin 1991).

After a decade of political reform, the Thai upper middle class failed to establish itself and promote its own interest in the new democratic mechanisms by any means, whether through promoting their own political parties, securing legislative or executive power, establishing power in decentralised local government or enhancing the power of mechanisms of checks and balances.

First, upper middle-class political parties failed to gain electoral power. Throughout the 1990s, they relied on the Democrat and Moral Force (Palang Dharma) parties. These parties had moralistic and upper middle class reputations and were led by with highly educated people who were considered good men, polite, not corrupt, religious, honest and dedicated (Askew 2006; McCargo 1997). These parties' constituencies were confined to the urban middle class and the South. They were barely competitive in rural areas and in broad regions of the North or the North East, where the majority of the population of Thailand resides. Several articles were instituted in the 1997 constitution to foster more promising alternative parties and prevent the instability of the earlier coalition government system. In institutionalising political parties as having more of a policy and member focus and eliminating small and medium-sized parties to encourage a more stable government and a two-party system, all parties were obliged to create branches in all regions including a certain number of members in each branch, a party list system and other requirements. In addition, the effort was made to change the default from the multi-party coalition to a two-party system. This was done to reduce the power of corrupt politicians elected from rural constituencies and to increase the power of upper middle class parties.

The result was not what the upper middle class had hoped. Nearly all small and medium-sized parties were destroyed, and a two-party system was established. Thaksin took over the Moral Force Party and established a new policy-based party, the Thai Rak Thai (TRT), which was not a pro-middle class party. At the beginning, it did present itself as an all-class party and as having with middle-class support, but gradually, the party learned that their victory was owed to the mass of lower middle class and rural voters. The TRT party later secured majority support through pro-poor policies that threatened the legitimacy and power of the minority urban middle class (Connors 2008b; Kanokrat 2016: Chapter 7; Kasian 2006). The upper middle class was disappointed that the TRT did not represent their interests in the way that they had hoped. However, the potential rival party, the Democrat party, had a limited constituency and was little able to compete with the powerful TRT.

Second, the upper middle class failed to secure power in both the legislature and the executive. Throughout the 1990s, the Thai system had been characterised by a strong legislature and a weak executive (Connors 2009; Hicken 2001). Electoral features like the multiple-member constituencies encouraged the growth of small and medium-sized parties. The legal ability that MPs had to switch parties gave them and their parties additional negotiating power with governments. Therefore, the 1997 constitution boosted the power of the executive branch and made parliament much more subordinate to the executive. No-confidence votes became more difficult, due to the requirement that two-fifths of the lower house must demand a no-confidence vote for the prime minister (Pasuk and Baker 2004: 94–95). The constitution was also designed to make political cliques and small parties or factions virtually untenable, with political power concentrated among a limited number of larger parties. For example, the election law required MPs to register for their party at least 90 days before an election and restricted party swapping during a government's term. This made most MPs vulnerable to conflict with party leaders. Otherwise, they could be frozen out of an election. Only those parties who secured more than five per cent of the popular vote were entitled to party-list seats.

As expected, the outcome of the 1997 reforms was a strong central government and the disappearance of small parties. However, the party that controlled the executive branch was the TRT, which largely represented the rural lower middle class. The urban middle class, which had earlier played a crucial role in removing unsatisfactory governments in 1973 and 1992, found that it was nearly impossible to compete with the strong TRT government (Askew 2010; Kanokrat 2016: Chapter 7; Pasuk and Baker 2008). Thaksin used executive power to support pro-poor policies in the interests of his allies and denounced the unelected checks and balances of the new constitution (Jäger 2012: 1143). This drove out the hope of the established middle class in electoral democracy.

Third, decentralisation and the rise of local government after 1997 benefited the rural population more than the urban middle class. To solve the earlier problems of the excessive power of the bureaucracy in rural development, the 1997 constitution put the majority of its effort into promoting the decentralisation of political and financial power to rural areas and local government. It initiated a new form of local elections with legislative and administration functions at the village and sub-district levels to replace the bureaucrats sent from the Ministry of Interior. Additionally, these bodies were given power to collect certain taxes and administer their own budgets. However, the urban middle class benefited little compared to those in rural areas, while the rural population, who had previously been abandoned by the central government, enjoyed new sources of development and political participation. Urban populations had long profited from trickle-down development policies that tended to spend development money on urban areas and the middle class abstractly considered as the major beneficiary of the fruits of urban-centred development (Funatsu and Kagoya 2003: 249–250). The urban middle class had imagined that decentralisation and local government would allow them to take the administration of local communities away from the central government, but it became a mechanism for the lower middle and rural classes to extract resources from the central government.

Last, both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary unelected mechanisms of checks and balances promoted by the upper middle class failed to check Thaksin's strong governments. The Thai urban middle class had long experience in developing their role and political activities in extra-parliamentary politics. Under both authoritarian regimes and elected governments during the 1970s and the 1990s, their political participation had focused on street politics, using protests, petitions and symbolic action to put pressure on authoritarian and elected governments. Newspapers and the electronic media were used to

perform a watchdog role. They successfully countered power by these means: in particular mass mobilisation was used to great effect during the successful 1973 and 1992 middle class movements. Media and professional groups were key to pressuring coalition governments during the 1990s (Suchit 1997: 164–165).

Under the 1997 reforms, the new unelected independent bodies and elected senate were expected to aid the established middle class part of the checks and balances against the elected government. However, under Thaksin, both extra-parliamentary and new independent bodies were unable to meaningfully challenge the power and legitimacy of the elected government. Thaksin suppressed the earlier strong social movements that had been supported by the middle class. Civil society organisations and NGOs suffered under more repressive laws and violent countermeasures on the part of the government to control and delegitimise demonstrations (Pasuk and Baker 2004: 148). The government dissolved the protests of the Assembly of the Poor (Kanokrat 2016: Chapter 7). The upper middle class had incorrectly hoped that independent bodies and participatory politics such as social movements would counter a powerful elected government, and Thaksin denounced and intervened against independent bodies, including the Constitutional Court (Klein 2003). Furthermore, Thaksin started to claim absolute power through majoritarian legitimacy against the political expression of the minority, including the middle class. He restricted freedom of the press through intimidation and by building up his own media empires, as well as by suppressing other media (Jäger 2012: 1143).

The Missing Prerequisite of Democracy among the Thai Middle Class

The change that the middle class made from pro-democracy to an anti-democratic movements was not merely a result of their failure to access state power and influence public policy during the consolidation of democracy. This failure in the democratic competition was further driven by the insufficient prerequisite knowledge of democracy among the Thai middle class.

The long success of hyper-royalist conservative hegemonic projects, particularly from the 1970s onward, greatly influenced Thai society, including the newly emerging middle class (Thongchai 2016). Although they played a crucial role during the DTs of the 1970s and the 1990s, the focus was merely on regime change, political freedom and elections. The democratic elements in their campaigns were very limited and were largely hybrid with and influenced by conservative ideas, whether nationalism or royalism (Kanokrat 2016: Chapter 2). Even during the 1990s DC, royal liberalism was a dominant element in political reform and democratic institution building (Connors 2008a, 2009).

Against this backdrop, most of the politically active upper middle class had a limited ideological commitment to or understanding of post-transition institutions, procedures and consequences (Quigley 1996), particularly, regarding two-turnover elections or majority rules. Due to this lack of understanding of democratic institution building and its consequences, the Thai middle class had false expectations of their own role and influence in political processes for the post-transition period. Defeat in the second round of elections for key democratic fighters was common. The Thai middle class found that they had been more influential during the early stages of democratisation, particularly during the coalition politics of the 1990s. Middle class political parties, particularly the Democrat and the Moral Force parties, won several elections at multiple levels. The Democrat Party, under the Chuan Leekpai premiership, won elections and formed a government twice, in 1992–1995 and 1997–2001. The Moral Force Party leader Chamlong Srimuang was successfully elected to the Bangkok governorship in 1985 on an anti-corruption platform inspired by Buddhist principles. The upper middle class was not prepared to accept that after this initial stage that they were not be the core group of the country, intended to rule forever. In later rounds, after the new electoral rules of the democratic reform of the 1997 constitution, they lost, simply put.

In addition to the two-turnover elections rule, the Thai upper middle class had little understanding of majority rules. During the fight against the authoritarian regimes, in the 1970s and 1990s, The middle class was sympathetic to the mass of rural and urban lower classes and considered themselves major strategic allies. Nevertheless, the disparities and divergent interests of the upper middle class and lower classes soon emerged. Urban middle-class interests in public policy were in conflict with those of rural farmers. Throughout the 1990s, the upper middle class was the major beneficiary of the fruits

of urban-centred development. They did not support the idea of allocating budgets to the rural areas, seeing this as an obstacle to industrialisation (Funatsu and Kagoya 2003: 248–249).

As democracy began to take root, the minority middle class began to feel threatened by the majoritarianism of the rural lower class. The element of royal liberalism is shaped by the fear of the tyranny of the majority, widely discussed among the middle class in promoting political reform and the drafting of the 1997 Constitution. Electoral competition and the redistributive policies of elected governments provided power to the rural poor and the newly emerging lower middle class, who were now the majority of the population in Thailand. DC turned the upper middle class into a minority vulnerable to electoral democracy. After many election defeats and no sign of future victory, their voice seemed to be permanently subject to the supremacy of the majority lower classes. They felt that they could little accept democratic rule. Furthermore, the democratic state failed to propose redistributive policies that would satisfy the middle class. Prior to the transition, most public policies benefited the elite. Under democracy, redistributive policies were introduced to support the lower class. Successful political parties focused their campaigns on the interests of the majority rural constituency rather than the minority urban middle class. The success of the TRT in securing majority support among the poor through pro-poor and pro-lower middle class policies threatened the political privilege and power of the minority upper middle class. They argued that these policies were short-sighted and delivered only short-term benefits for a wide group of less well-off people without considering national fiscal problems and the greater debt burden for the middle class who pay taxes (Connors 2008b, 483; Kanokrat 2016: Chapter 7; Kasian 2006).

Conclusion: Why did the Middle Class Turned against Democracy?

While earlier studies on other South East Asian countries generally focus on state patronage through economics, welfare and culture and their influence on making the middle class deviate from democracy (Brown and Jones 1995; Clark 1989: 140–141; Jones 1998: 152–156; Lipset 1990; Robinson 1991: 41). This work offers an alternative proposal to those earlier studies by looking at the impact that DT and DC had on the middle class. It also takes the prerequisites of democracy into account to consider the transition of the middle class in democratisation. This work finds that the negative consequences of democratic institution-building limited the power of the middle class. During the effort to consolidate democracy, the upper middle class was unable to establish itself in new democratic institutions, whether these were political parties, the legislature or executive, local government or interest groups. In this more institutionalised democracy, the mass of lower classes and elected elites could claim legitimacy through democracy and become more powerful. The minority upper middle class felt marginalised. They subsequently questioned democracy, both in terms of strategy and ideology. Further, the frustrated established middle class did not have the necessary prerequisite commitment to democracy to handle the consequences of the establishment of democracy. Without any acceptance of the rules that democracy operated under, they distrusted the uncertainty of democracy and could not see it as a part of democratisation.

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