

Political Instability and the Roles of Governments in the Implementation of the Education Reform Policy in Thailand from 1999-2009

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Abstract

Throughout history, Thailand has been attempting to reform its educational system. The first reform occurred during the reign of King Rama V in order to supply the modern bureaucratic system, the main organisation for a modern centralised state, with a sufficient number of literate officials. The most recent attempt of the education reform in Thailand emerged when Thailand faced the severe economic crisis in 1997. The education reform policy officially began in 1999, when the National Education Act came into force. It was considered the most comprehensive reform in Thailand's history. From 1999 to 2009, many governments and ministers of education assumed power. Their roles in implementing the education reform policy as stipulated in the National Education Act were significant. This paper begins by explaining a theoretical framework and elaborating the political situation in Thailand from 1999-2009. This paper argues that based on a top-down approach to policy implementation analysis, political instability, especially from 2006 to 2009, was a major obstacle to the implementation of the education reform policy because each government needed to focus on how to deal with the pro- and the anti- Thaksin protesters. The education reform policy disappeared from the public interest and the governments' agenda.

Keywords: policy implementation, education reform policy, political instability

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Introduction

Before the major education reform in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V), from 1868-1910, monasteries were the centres of education, and the monks were the main teachers who could teach every subject deemed necessary for young men (Fry, 2002, p. 4).

According to Fry (2002, p. 21), education reform in Thailand can be divided into four phases. The first phase occurred during the reign of King Rama V. Kullada Kesboonchoo-Mead (2004, p. 68) argued that the main rationale for the education reform in this period was to supply the modern bureaucratic system, the main organisation for a modern centralised state, with a sufficient number of literate officials.

The second phase of education reform in Thailand occurred after the uprising of university students to topple the authoritarian regime in 1973. The key feature was the unification of the basic education including primary and secondary education under the Ministry of Education. Moreover, it was the period in which there was a demand for a more open curriculum, and many Marxist writings were allowed (Fry, 2002, pp. 12-13).

The third phase of education reform in Thailand occurred in 1990-1995 in response to globalisation and internationalisation of the Thai economy. Cooperation and integration between numerous actors in society such as the government, teachers and schools, parents, religious leaders, businessmen and industrialists was needed in order to improve the quality of the education system of Thailand (Commission on Thailand's Education in the Era of Globalization: Towards National Progress and Security in the Next Century, 1996 p. 36).

The fourth phase began in 1997 when Thailand was confronted with the most severe economic crisis in its modern history. This crisis had an unprecedented traumatic effect on people's daily lives. The country's education system was blamed on the ground that it had failed to prevent the crisis in the first place. On the other hand, it was also put forward as a solution to revive the country's economy from the recession, to lay a strong foundation to enhance the country's competitiveness in the era of globalisation, and to promote the wellbeing of Thai people in every perspective.

Before the promulgation of the National Education Act B.E.2542 (1999), which is commonly known as The Education Reform Act, there were some critical problems in Thailand's education system, which urgently needed to be resolved, exemplified by the inequality of access to high quality education between urban and rural children. There were about 7.1 million children between 13 and 24 who were excluded from the compulsory education system. Worse still, when compared to 47 other countries, Thailand's competitiveness ranked lowly at 33, which also reflected on the poor quality of the education system (Office of Education Reform, 2001 p. 1). Additionally, there were other weak points that exacerbated the education system. These included: (1) the lack of reliable indicators to measure the standards of schools and other educational institutions nationwide; (2) the teacher-centred teaching method, which has ignored the true potential of learners; (3) the centralised administrative system which has led to the inefficiency, rigidity and inertia of decision-making procedures,

as well as the low-level of participation of civil-society organisations and ordinary citizens. Consequently, the demand for a comprehensive education reform had been continuously increasing in Thai society.

The most significant milestone which turned the education reform vision into reality was the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E.2540 (1997), which was commonly known as the 'People's Constitution'. It was the first constitution of Thailand having the most tangible provisions on education in Chapter 3-*Rights and Liberties of the Thai People in Article 43* and in Chapter 5-*Fundamental Principles of the State in Article 81*. The first paragraph of Article 43 stipulates that "Persons have the equal right to receive not less than twelve years of basic, quality of education which must be provided free of charge by the government on generally available basis." (The Royal Thai Government, 1997, p. 10). Furthermore, Article 81 of the constitution stipulates that "The state must provide education and training, support the private sector to provide education and training to give rise to knowledge coupled with ethics, arrange to have a national education law..." (The Royal Thai Government, 1997, p. 16).

Two years later on 19 August, 1999, in order to comply with the provisions of the Constitution, Thailand's first national education law was published in the Royal Government Gazette and came into force the day after (The Royal Thai Government, 1999, pp. 1-23). It has become the master plan and framework for the education reform policy of Thailand in later years.

Every step to implement the education reform policy as stipulated in the National Education Act seemed to be smooth when the Democrat Party and Chart Thai Party were responsible for the education reform policy after the Act came into force. The 27th Prime Minister of Thailand, Abhisit Vejjajiva, was the Deputy Leader of the Democrat Party and the Minister of the Prime Minister's Office responsible for formulating the education reform policy in 1999. Mr Somsak Pritsananthakul of the Chart Thai Party was the Minister of Education. However, the major obstacle to the education reform policy began when the Chuan Leekpai government dissolved the House of Representatives on 9 November, 2000, and called for a general election on Sunday 6 January 2001 (The Royal Thai Government, 2000, pp. 1-2).

Thaksin Shinawatra became the 23rd Prime Minister of Thailand after he led his Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party to defeat the Chuan Leekpai's Democrat Party government. Thaksin's political party won almost half of the seats in the House of Representatives, 248 out of 500 (Pongsudhirak, 2009, p. 32).

The government, led by Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party with Thaksin as the Prime Minister, delivered a policy statement before the joint parliamentary session on 26 February, 2001. In that policy statement, the education reform agenda was not one of the government's urgent policies. The urgent policies of the Thaksin government were mainly about reviving the economy of Thailand from recession: (1) Three-year individual small farmers' debt suspension; (2) Establishment of the one-million baht Village and Urban Community Revolving Fund; (3) Establishment of the People's Bank; (4) Establishment of the Small-and Medium sized Enterprise Bank; (5) Establishment of a National Asset Management Corporation in order to comprehensively solve the problem of Non-Performing Loans (NPLs) in the

commercial banking system; (6) Development of State Enterprises; (7) Universal Health Care Insurance Scheme in which Thai people needed to pay only 30 baht when they went to hospitals; (8) Illegal drugs clamp down; and (9) Corruption elimination (The Secretariat of the Cabinet, 2001). The government declared the education policy as follows:

the Government is determined to launch educational reforms in accordance with the provisions and the spirit of the 1997 Constitution and the 1999 Education Act, with the aim of developing Thailand into a knowledge-based society, which is a pre-requisite for becoming a knowledge-based economy. The reforms will provide the Thai public with equal access to life-long education and training, enabling them to acquire knowledge and capital to generate income and to eventually pull the country out of the economic and social crisis. Towards this end, the Government will abide by the principle that “Education Builds the Nation, Empowers the Individual and Generates Employment”... (The Secretariat of the Cabinet, 2001).

This engendered doubts among officials and scholars in the education sector as well as ordinary people about the sincerity of the government to push forward the education reform policy.

Furthermore, during five years of the Thaksin administration from 2001-2006, the cabinet was reshuffled several times with the rotation of six Education Ministers including Thaksin himself. Every time the new Education Minister assumed power, the education reform came to a standstill. In 2002, when Suwit Khunkitti became the Minister of Education, the *National Education Act 2542 B.E. (1999)* was amended in order to separate the organisations responsible for religious and cultural missions, to establish the Ministry of Culture, which caused further delays to the education reform schemes (The Royal Thai Government, 2002, pp. 16-21).

From the end of 2005, the Thaksin government was met with strong resistance from the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD), or the yellow-shirt protestors, and Thaksin was toppled in the bloodless coup d’état of 19 September 2006. Until the end of 2008, the political situation in Thailand was dominated by the conflicts between the pro- and anti- Thaksin movements, so the agenda of the education reform almost entirely disappeared from the public interest. Even though the 2007 Constitution of Thailand, which was drafted after the coup d’état, also recognised the rights of Thai people to access high quality education free of charge in Article 49 (The Royal Thai Government, 2007, p. 15), the Thai government appointed by the military junta (2006-2007) was only interested in pushing forward the privatisation of public universities in Thailand. At the end of 2008, when the Democrat Party came to power and Jurin Laksanawisit, the deputy leader of the Democrat Party who was responsible for drafting policies of the party for the 2007 general election campaign, was appointed the Minister of Education. The situation seemed to be slightly better when he commenced to undertake tangible measures to implement the education reform policy, for example, the 15-Year Quality and Free Education for all Children in the academic year 2009 and the Tutor Channel Project.

The main objective of this paper is to analyse how political instability affected the implementation of the education reform policy in Thailand from 1999-2009 based on a top down approach to policy implementation analysis. This paper begins by explaining a theoretical framework. The latter part elaborates in detail the political situation in Thailand from 1999 to 2009. The last part showed how the situation had impacts on the education reform policy.

Top-down approach to policy implementation analysis

Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983, pp. 20-21) presented a definition of implementation as:

Implementation is the carrying out of a basic policy decision, usually incorporated in a statute but which also take the form of executive orders or court decisions. Ideally, that decision identifies the problem(s) to be addressed, stipulates the objective(s) to be pursued, and in a variety of ways, 'structures' the implementation process. The process normally runs through a number of stages beginning with passage of the basic statute, followed by the policy outputs (decisions) of the implementing agencies, the compliance of target groups with those decisions, the actual impacts – both intended and unintended – of those outputs, the perceived impacts of agency decisions, and finally, important revisions (or attempted revisions) in the basic statute.

According to Hill (2009, pp. 174-195), there are two main models for the study of policy implementation. The first model is the top-down model. This model separates the stage of policy implementation from policy formulation. People involved in the implementation process are directed by the objectives set in policy decisions (Meter & Horn, 1975, p. 445). The other model is the bottom-up model, which emphasises the roles of what Lipsky calls 'street-level bureaucrats' (Hill & Hupe, 2002, p. 51). Street-level bureaucrats, in dealing with their daily workloads, have to make choices on their own how to make use of their scarce resources. Controlled and directed from the top will lead to worse service delivery (Hill & Hupe, 2002, pp. 52-53).

Hill and Hupe (2002, pp. 45-51) referred to some scholars who contributed to the top-down approach of policy implementation, for example, Van Meter and Van Horn, Sabatier and Mazmanian, Hogwood and Gunn. To begin with, according to Matland (1995, p. 147), there are some general points which top-down theorists share: "(1) make policy goals clear and consistent; (2) minimise the number of actors; (3) limit the extent of change necessary; and (4) place implementation responsibility in an agency sympathetic with the policy's goals."

Van Meter and Van Horn (1975, p. 458) firstly identified two features affecting policy implementation: the level of change required and the level of goal consensus among actors involved in implementation. Concerning the level of change required, according to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975, p. 458), "incremental changes are more likely to engender a positive response than will drastic ones." Moreover, implementation would be more likely to succeed if the agencies involved would not be required to reorganise themselves to a considerable degree (Meter & Horn, 1975, p. 459). When discussing the level of goal consensus, they focused on the level of participation from subordinates or implementers "in the making of the policy

decision” (Meter & Horn, 1975, p. 459). Van Meter and Van Horn (Meter & Horn, 1975, p. 461) therefore concluded that in principle “implementation will be most successful where only marginal change is required and goal consensus is high.” However, they also noted that high level of goal consensus would not necessarily remove all problems of policy implementation (Meter & Horn, 1975, pp. 459-460). They went on to identify six variables which affect the implementation phase of public policy (Meter & Horn, 1975, pp. 462-474): (1) policy standards and objectives, which “move beyond the generalities of the legislative document to provide concrete and more specific standards for assessing program performance” (Meter & Horn, 1975, p. 464); (2) resources must be available; (3) interorganisational communication and relationships, especially if there is one superior organisation which can direct and influence others; (4) the characteristics of the implementation agencies, for example, the competence and size of the agency, the degree of hierarchical control, the political resources of the agency, the agency’s links with the policy-making body etc.; (5) economic, social and political conditions; and (6) disposition and attitudes of implementers towards the goals and standards of a policy.

Mazmanian and Sabatier (1989, p. 21) divided a large number of factors affecting implementation into three categories: “(1) the tractability of the problem(s) being addressed; (2) the ability of the statute to structure favourably the implementation process; and (3) the net effect of a variety of political variables on the balance of support for statutory objectives.”

In the first category, there are four issues to be considered: (1) technical difficulties; (2) diversity of proscribed behaviour; (3) the size of a target group (the smaller the target group is, the more likely the implementation to be successful; (4) extent of behavioural change required (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1989, pp. 21-25). The issues in the second category (the ability of the statute to structure the implementation process) include: (1) clear and consistent objectives; (2) valid causal theory; (3) initial allocation of financial resources; (4) hierarchical integration within and among implementing institutions; (5) decision rules of implementing agencies; (6) officials commitment to objectives; and (7) formal access by outsiders (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1989, pp. 25-30). Finally, nonstatutory variables are the followings: (1) socioeconomic conditions and technology; (2) public support; (3) attitudes and resources of constituency groups; (4) support from sovereigns; and (5) commitment and leadership skill of implementing officials (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1989, pp. 30-35).

Hogwood and Gunn (1984, pp. 199-206), provided ten recommendations for policy makers to ensure successful policy implementation which could be summarised as follows: (1) external circumstances should not be constraints; (2) adequate time and resources must be provided; (3) required resources must be available for each stage in the implementation process; (4) a policy needs to be based on a valid theory of cause and effect; (5) the cause and effect relationship is direct; (6) there is one implementing agency without the need to be dependent on others; (7) complete understanding of, and agreement on objectives to be achieved; (8) the tasks to be performed by each participant is specified in detail; (9) perfect communication and communication between agencies involved; and (10) the authorities of those in command.

Based on the top-down approach of policy implementation proposed by many scholars, there were five main aspects which could be used to analyse the obstacles to the implementation of the education reform policy in Thailand from 1999 to 2009, namely: (1) the size of target groups involved and affected and the extent of change required by the policy; (2) the ambiguity of the National Education Act as the main framework for the education reform policy; (3) the lack of one main agency responsible for implementation and the lack of agreement on the education reform policy; (4) Different levels of commitment and leadership of the governments responsible for policy implementation; and (5) political instability in Thailand.

This paper focuses only on how political instability affected the implementation of the education reform policy in Thailand from 1999-2009.

Political instability and the implementation of the education reform policy

In 1999, when the National Education Act came into force, Thai politics was relatively stable. The transition of power was within a democratic framework based on the provisions of the constitution. Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai dissolved the House of Representatives at the end of 2000. In 2001, Thaksin's political party won almost half of the seats in the House of Representatives, 248 out of 500 MPs (Pongsudhirak, 2009, p. 32). Thaksin and his political party could win the votes from both impoverished people in the rural areas and the urban middle class in Bangkok and other major cities. It was the first government of Thailand which could overcome the dilemma of Thai democracy, which Anek Laothamathas explained as "a tale of two democracies" (Laothamathas, 1996, p. 201). Before 2001, the urban and educated middle class and the rural impoverished voters always elected the candidates with different qualifications. As Anek (Laothamathas, 1996, pp. 221-222) explained the different voting patterns, "When the rural electorate chooses its candidates, it chooses patrons to look after its welfare and represent its communities. When the middle class evaluates the performance of the elected politics, it looks for political executives or professional lawmakers who could operate effectively at the national level." As the majority of Thai people still live in the rural areas, they have always been the people who put the government into being. On the other hand, the urban middle class who had less influences in determining who would be the government ironically had more power to topple the democratically-elected government by aligning themselves with the military to stage a coup d'état.

The slogan of Thaksin's party during the election campaign was "think anew, act anew". Thaksin and his Thai Rak Thai Party pledged to lead Thailand out of the economic crisis which endured since 1997. Thaksin captured a golden opportunity from the economic crisis when the Democrat Party was accused of assisting only the financial sector and neglecting the production sector and the impoverished people in the rural areas of Thailand.

When speaking to the rural voters, Thaksin promised to deliver unprecedented social welfares and economic opportunities such as universal health care scheme in which Thai people needed to pay only 30 baht every time they went to see doctors. When speaking to the urban middle class in major cities, Thaksin positioned himself as a successful businessman who would lead the country out of the economic crisis and to compete with other countries in the international arena. He promised to

strengthen every perspective of Thai economy and reformed the education system of the country to serve that purpose. The main indicator of his success was the electoral result in Bangkok; out of 37 constituencies in Bangkok, Thaksin's political party won 29 seats (The Royal Thai Government, 2001a, pp. 3-4; 2001b, p. 12).

The Thaksin government focused mainly on resolving the economic crisis and bolstering the economic growth of Thailand, not the education reform policy (Yampracha, 2001 p. 77), which was labelled by many scholars, both Thais and foreigners, as "Thaksinomics". Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker (2004, p. 100) explained that the main idea of Thaksinomics was the shift from neoliberalism, which IMF had imposed on Thailand before 2001, towards developmentalism, which the government had to "play a positive role in protecting and promoting firms and sectors to overcome the disadvantages of competing against more advanced economies.

The government implemented a 'dual track' policy. The first track was the stimulation of domestic consumption and providing more economic opportunities and welfare for the impoverished people. The second track was enhancing the Thai economy to be able to compete with other countries in the international arena (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2004, pp. 121-122). The Thaksin government's 'dual track' economic policy was popular with the electorate, especially its populist policy such as a universal health care scheme in which Thai people needed to pay 30 baht every time they visit doctors and the establishment of the one-million baht Village and Urban Community Revolving Fund (Funston, 2009, p. XV). It was the first government in Thai political history which could serve the full four-year term. Even though the Cabinet was reshuffled many times and there were five Education Ministers in the first term of the Thaksin government, it was Thaksin's decision to change his ministers. It was not the result of the political instability at all as the popularity of the Thaksin governments was high.

At the general election held on 6 February 2005, Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai Party won a landslide victory and could secure an absolute majority in the House of Representatives, 377 out of 500 MPs (Pongsudhirak, 2006, p. 286). Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party could form a majority government in its own right for the first time in Thailand's political history since its democratic revolution in 1932. The three opposition parties had only 123 seats combined. The number of seats Thai Rak Thai won clearly indicated that the Opposition led by the Democrat Party could not launch a censure debate against Prime Minister Thaksin and could not do so against ministers on corruption allegations based on the 1997 Constitution (The Royal Thai Government, 1997, pp. 46-47, 299). The second Thaksin government therefore could not be scrutinised in Parliament effectively. The second Thaksin government was mainly about abuse of power, manipulation and political interference in independent organisations set up by the 1997 Constitution. Mutebi (2006, p. 303) referred to the second Thaksin government as "semi-authoritarian", "soft-authoritarian" or "diminished democracy". Mutebi (2006, pp. 303-304) also argued that "there is little doubt that Thaksin's administration has shown greater authoritarian tendencies in comparison to his immediate predecessors". The Thaksin government after the 2005 election, was accused of interfering in the selection processes of positions of many independent organisations including the positions of Auditor-General, the commissioners of the National Counter Corruption Commission, the commissioners of the National Broadcasting Commission as well as the National Telecommunication

Commission as people selected was believed to have some connections with Thaksin or his government (Mutebi, 2006, pp. 306-314).

The political crisis began when Thaksin decided to take Sondhi Limthongkul's weekly current affairs programme called *Muang Thai Raisapda* or *Thailand Weekly*, which tended to criticise the Thaksin government more frequently and more severely in 2005 over corruption charges and disloyalty to King Bhumibhol of Thailand, off a state-owned Channel 9 television station on 16 September 2005 (Montesano, 2006, p. 2). However, Sondhi moved to host his programme at Lumpini Park in Bangkok Central Business District, which the audience continuously increased. Later, Sondhi's movement expanded to form the anti-Thaksin movement called the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), and it was commonly known as the Yellow-Shirt protesters at the beginning of 2006. According to Thitinan Pongsudhirak (Pongsudhirak, 2006, p. 297), Sondhi's movement was composed of "Bangkok-based social activists, NGOs, the intelligentsia, the disaffected middle class, and disgruntled businessmen". They mobilised mass rallies against the Thaksin government frequently in 2006.

The movement gained momentum when Thaksin decided to sell his family-owned telecommunication company, Shin Corporation, to the Singaporean government's Temasek Holdings. The deal was worth 73 billion baht and Thaksin did not have to pay any taxes for this sale. The deal triggered mass rallies against the government. Thaksin later dissolved the House of Representatives and called an early election on 2 April 2006, at which three opposition parties: the Democrat Party, the Chart Thai Party, and Mahachon Party, after failing to convince the government and the Thai Rak Thai party to agree to a political reform agreement, boycotted. This led to political brinkmanship in 2006. The election was later nullified by the ruling of the Constitutional Court of Thailand. The judges argued that the 37-day period between dissolution of the House and the Election Day, though technically not violating the constitution, had led to political problems severe enough for the election to be disqualified. Another rationale was that the positioning of ballot boxes violated the secrecy of the vote. Ultimately the court found that "The election yielded results which are unfair and undemocratic, and are therefore unconstitutional...from the beginning of the election process, i.e. from the scheduling of the elections, the application of candidates, the ballots, and the announcement of the election results" (Dressel, 2010, p. 679).

Finally, on 19 September 2006, while Thaksin travelled overseas, Thailand's military led by General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, the Army Commander, launched a bloodless coup d'état which toppled the Thaksin government and chose General (retired) Surayud Chulanont to be Prime Minister.

After the coup, the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) or the Red-Shirt protesters, the pro-Thaksin movement was established. Thailand has been deeply divided from that moment. At the 2007 general election, the People's Power Party, the nominee of Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai Party, won 233 out of 480 seats contested and formed a coalition government in 2008 led by Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej (Ockey, 2009, p. 318). The People's Power Party government attempted to amend the 2007 Constitution which had been drafted after the coup and passed the referendum in August 2007, in order to pave the way for Thaksin's return to Thailand as innocent and to whitewash other allegations against him. This triggered a new

round of the protests led by the PAD, which lasted for 193 days. The PAD illegally seized the Government House in Bangkok, where the Prime Minister works and the Cabinet meeting is held. When the Government House was taken over by the Yellow-Shirt Protesters, the Prime Minister and other Ministers including the Minister of Education and could not work effectively.

In September 2008, the Constitutional Court ruled that Samak violated the Constitution by working for a private company and must be removed from the position. Somchai Wongsawat, the Minister of Education of the Samak government and Thaksin's brother-in-law was appointed Prime Minister on 18 September 2008 (The Royal Thai Government, 2008 p. 1). However, the PAD continued to protest against the new Somchai government. Somchai could not enter the Government House to work, and his government was paralysed. Finally, when Somchai planned to return from the APEC Summit in Peru, the PAD protesters move to shut down the Suvarnabhumi Airport to prevent his return. The blockade did tremendous damage to Thailand's economy (Ockey, 2009, p. 327). In December 2008, the Constitutional Court stepped in to end the political impasse by dissolving the People's Power Party on the ground of electoral frauds and alleged vote-buying and banning the party's executives including Somchai from politics for five years. The PAD protesters stopped protesting. A faction of the People's Power Party MPs led by Newin Chidchop and other political parties turned to support Abhisit Vejjajiva, the leader of the Democrat Party to be the third Prime Minister in 2008 alone.

Leelavadee Vajropala (2012), former Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Education Somchai Wongsawat, summarised the political situation when she faced the anti-government protesters in 2008 (the yellow-shirt protesters) that when Thai politics was not stable, everybody including herself were always scared of what would happen, which gate of which ministry the protesters would block. They always listened to the radio and surfed the internet to follow the news on the situation. Therefore, they did not concentrate on putting forward the education reform policy, and the policy did not proceed as expected.

When the Democrat Party was able to form the government, the Red Shirt protesters did not accept its legitimacy simply because the Democrat Party did not win the 2007 general election and it was believed that the army convinced or even induced Newin and other political parties to desert Thaksin and support Abhisit (Stent, 2012 p. 33). The Red Shirt began protesting against the government and in April 2009 stormed the venue of the ASEAN Summit and other related meetings in Pattaya, a major tourist attraction in the eastern part of Thailand. As a result, Abhisit needed to cancel all meetings, declared the state of emergency in Pattaya and evacuated the leaders attending the meetings (Thai protests cancel Asian summit 2009). Kevin Rudd's jet plane had to make a sudden about-turn to Canberra (Allard & Gordon, 2009). When Abhisit returned to Bangkok and went to the Ministry of Interior and announced the state of emergency in Bangkok, the red-shirt protesters surrounded his car and pelted it with rocks, flags, chairs and sticks ("Two dead as violent clashes rock Thai capital," 2009). The army then encircled the protesters and the leaders decided to end their protest. Even though the Abhisit government survived the protests of the red-shirts, it showed that the legitimacy and stability of his government was challenged from the beginning, and Thai politics since 2006 was dominated by the conflict between the pro- and anti- Thaksin movements. This inevitably affected the implementation of the

education reform policy as the governments had to spend a tremendous time and effort dealing with the protests.

Conclusion

As described above, before 2006, Thai politics was relatively stable as there was no violent protest against the governments. The education reform policy therefore could be more or less implemented. However, from 2006-2009, Thai politics was not stable and was full of protests of the pro- and the anti- Thaksin movements. In 2008 alone, there were three prime ministers and three Education Ministers. Each government needed to focus largely on how to deal with protesters, and the education reform policy was not the governments' priority. Political instability was a major obstacle to the successful education reform in Thailand during the first decade.

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