

## ***Crime, Conflict and Control in Bangkok***

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### **Abstract**

As there were considerable crime and conflict in Bangkok, the researcher studied and analyzed such problems compared with crime problems throughout Thailand. The researcher did documentary research using data on crime statistics in Bangkok and crime statistics throughout the country during 2000 - 2010 from Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and Royal Thai Police. According to the study of statistics of reported criminal cases in Bangkok compared with statistics of reported criminal cases throughout the country, the researcher found that there were crimes against the person in Bangkok by 1/6 of number of reported criminal cases throughout the country. Moreover, there were property crimes in Bangkok by 1/3 of number of property crimes throughout Thailand. This caused by rapidly social change which made Bangkok grew with disorganization, causing imbalance of social structures and extreme competition, led to conflicts among various groups, criminal behavior and crime problems. Social Disorganization Theory and Conflict Theory could explain causes of conflict and crime problems in Bangkok and Social Control Theory could be applied for solving such problems. All problem-solving guidelines proposed by the researcher aim to solve conflicts among various groups, crime problems and enable people with authority or people concerned to determine policy to solve the mentioned problems.

**Keywords:** Crime, Conflict, Control, Criminal, Criminology, Sociology, Bangkok,

## **1. Introduction**

There was continuous change in every society. Social change aimed to meet people's need to enable people to have better living. For example, humans wanted cultural improvement, natural resources, and development of knowledge and technology. Those changes slowly or quickly occurred, were organized or disorganized, depending on several factors such as education level and culture of people in the society, changes of natural resources, or discovery of new inventions. These factors accelerated or decelerated social changes. Social changes were often mentioned in two aspects consisting of social progress and social deterioration. Evolutionary theorists said that social change was systematical change process with more development and progress. The simple society was changed as more complicated society with continuous progress, bringing about perfect society. On the contrary, conflict theorists said that social change caused negative impacts. They assumed that social behavior could be understood through conflict between various groups and various people caused by competition to own valuable and rare resources. Various conflicts of people group in the society would lead to social deterioration or worsening social change. Better and worsening social change impacted on human's living such as change of food, dressing, relation of people in the society, constructing accommodations. There were positive and negative impacts of social change. As for positive impact, discovery of new inventions caused better change and development such as road, electricity, airplane, and computer. In the meantime, social change negatively impacted on the society. For example, rapid progress of technology and industry caused difference between urban society and rural society, causing a lot of social problems such as social inequality, poverty, unemployment and leading to criminal problems which there were considerable in this research.

## **2. Objectives**

- 2.1 To analyze causes of crime and conflict in Bangkok.
- 2.2 To determine policy to solve crime and conflict in Bangkok

## **3. Methods**

This was documentary research which was survey research by studying problems for surveying data on reality or general characteristics of researched issue, aiming to know problems which would be guidelines of solving problems in the present time and future. Documentary research aimed to seek answers or create body of knowledge by using text and document including other media both printed material or electronic media (Scott, 2006). Documentary research was done by surveying reality of events in the past and present time through analysis of data from document, printed materials and data in various forms recorded or published by other people. Researchers did not have to go to research area but had to collect data from knowledge center which compiled various data. Documentary research was directly associated with study of data from various documents which had been already published. As for research, documentary research was social research. The researcher collected data from text, document, report or other media and presented research results by data analysis and

synthesis (Mogalakwe, 2006). Document or data source of this research was public document which meant document written or published by public agencies of the government sector and private sector for presenting data, policy, guidelines, or knowledge. Examples of public document consisted of Act, royal decree, ministerial regulations, annual report or document which showed statistics which were analyzed. These public documents were always published according to term of state agencies (Scott, 1990). Main data used in this research were data on criminal statistics in Bangkok and criminal statistics throughout the country during 2000 – 2010 from Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and Royal Thai Police.

## **4. Literature Review**

### **4.1 Theory of Human Ecology**

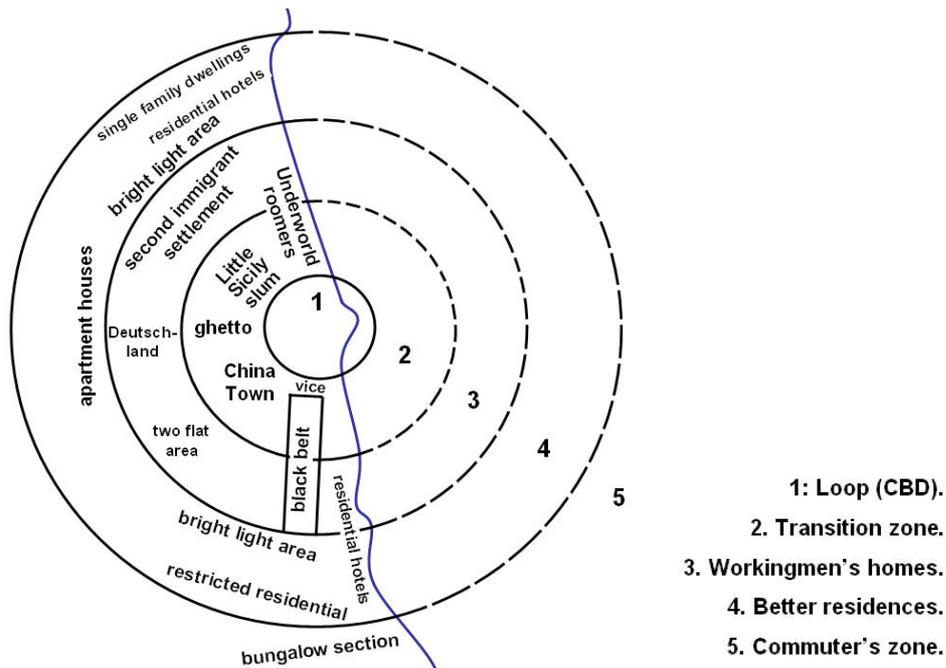
This theory was tested by sociologists of University of Chicago who studied deteriorated society of the city at that time, which subsequently caused criminal problems. Robert Park (1925) said “Human society was not different from other living things in the nature. Each person had to struggle for survival”. Park had compared plant dispersion in the nature with growth of various organizations of people in the society. Park’s concept occurred by observing rapid change of Chicago during the end of 18<sup>th</sup> Century – 19<sup>th</sup> Century. During 1860 – 1910, registered and non-registered populations of the city doubled in every ten years because a lot of Europeans migrated to Chicago. Park said that this change was geographical phenomenon and social change on structures or institutes. Robert Park compared human society consisting of several types of people having different race, complexion, occupation, incomes with plant communities. Both plants and people wanted to live and survive. Each kind of plants or each person had to be interdependent for survival. When each community changed so quickly that each people group could not be interdependent due to extreme difference in race or culture, there were conflicts and criminal problems. Park said that a lot of foreigners migrated to Chicago until Chicago consisted of several communities such as China Town Community, Little Italy Community, Black Belt Community. These communities indicated cultural conflicts, were cut off from the main society, lacked self-adjustment capability, and aimed to achieve social goals consisting of wealth and strength of group without thinking of criminal problems. Park had compared interaction process of plants and animals with social change. A community would invade, seize, occupy, and change other community as their dwellings. The community who used to live in that area would migrate to stay in other community and might cause change in other community. Park called this change process as “Invasion, Dominance, and succession” (Park, 1925).

### **4.2 Burgess’s Concentric Zone Model**

Burgess (1925), a criminologist, who jointly developed Theory of Human Ecology with Robert Park had used said theory for explaining growth of Chicago as follows;

“The society of Chicago grew by extending from the center in circle radius and each community would also extend from the center in the same way, causing change process in that zone or community” (Burgess, 1925).

Burgess’s Concentric Zone Model could be shown in the following diagram;



**Figure 1** Burgess's Concentric Zone Model

Burgess divided Chicago into five zones classified by area use with details as follows;

**Zone 1** was Loop which was the center of trading and business and was situated at the center of the city. This zone specifically had shops and business center without dwellings of urban people.

**Zone 2** was Zone in Transition which was the oldest area of the city and was dwellings of workers in industrial factories situated in Zone 1. For example, aliens migrating from other countries and black people migrating from the south divided dwellings zone by races or economic status. This zone was affected by change process of Theory of Human Ecology (Invasion, Dominance, and Succession), causing more deterioration at all times. Therefore, Zone 2 had the highest rate of crimes in Chicago.

**Zone 3** was Zone of Workingmen's Homes. As these workmen migrated from Zone 2, this zone was full of accommodations or rented houses with moderate price. Most dwellers had more incomes than people in Zone 2.

**Zone 4** was Residential Zone which was residence of people with higher economic and social status. Residences here were rather expensive and residents were rich. Some residents here used to stay in Zone 2 or Zone 3.

**Zone 5** was Commuters Zone which was adjacent to the rural area. Few houses were situated in this zone because this zone was very far from the city (Burgess, 1925).

Burgess, sociologists, and other criminologists of University of Chicago specifically attached importance to areas of Zone 2. As said areas were invaded by workers and aliens migrating, people with moderate or high economic status migrated to live in the next zone. Thus, areas in this zone were deserted and had dwellings with very cheap

price, attracting aliens or rural people who had just stayed in Chicago to live in this zone. Therefore, there were changes in Zone 2 at all times. Relation among people in the community was very low, causing low social mechanism or customs which controlled behavior of people in that community. Therefore, Zone 2 was changed as the community with more social disorganization, causing deviant behavior and criminal problems.

### 4.3 Social Disorganization Theory

Shaw and McKay (1942), sociologists of University of Chicago had jointly developed Theory of Human Ecology and Theory of Concentric Zone Model for use as guidelines of studying criminal problems. Finally, both theories were developed as Social Disorganization Theory as follows;

“Social condition of the community had changed at all times due to urbanization, weakening social control mechanism of the community and leading to considerable crimes” (Shaw & MacKay, 1942).

Therefore, criminal behavior according to this theory was caused by growth of the city, causing disorganization and change of community at all times and making that community face more crimes than other communities as shown in the following chart;



**Figure 2** Shaw and McKay’s Social Disorganization Model

Social Disorganization Theory explained that social disorganization of the community stemmed from growth of household which led to change in the community as follows;

**Loss or reduction of social control mechanism:** Due to more migration of people to stay in the community, dwellers did not know each other. Finally, this would lead to weakness of control mechanism of that community.

**Cultural inheritance:** New people group received bad and good cultures of original people group. Sometimes, adaptation to new culture caused deviant behavior.

**Cultural conflicts:** New migrants brought values, belief, and culture. Different cultures of these migrants unavoidably caused cultural conflicts.

**Poverty:** Most migrants were aliens or rural people finding new jobs in the big city. These people had low economic and social status.

Robert Park's Theory of Human Ecology (Park, 1925), Burgess's Concentric Zone Model (Burgess, 1925), and Social Disorganization Theory of Shaw and McKay (1942) were classified as Sociological Criminology of University of Chicago recognized and continuously used for explanation, especially use of said theory to explain characteristics of crimes in the big cities around the world. Yet, nobody in Bangkok, a capital of Thailand used to use and study said theory. And specific theory of characteristics of criminal problems in Bangkok was not created for explaining characteristics of criminal problems in the new city without planning.

#### **4.4 Conflict Theory**

Conflict theory emphasizes the role of coercion and power in producing social order. This perspective is derived from the works of Karl Marx, who saw society as fragmented into groups that compete for social and economic resources. Social order is maintained by domination, with power in the hands of those with the greatest political, economic, and social resources. When consensus exists, it is attributable to people being united around common interests, often in opposition to other groups. According to conflict theory, inequality exists because those in control of a disproportionate share of society's resources actively defend their advantages. The masses are not bound to society by their shared values, but by coercion at the hands of those in power. This perspective emphasizes social control, not consensus and conformity. Groups and individuals advance their own interests, struggling over control of societal resources. Those with the most resources exercise power over others with inequality and power struggles resulting. There is great attention paid to class, race, and gender in this perspective because they are seen as the grounds of the most pertinent and enduring struggles in society. Whereas most other sociological theories focus on the positive aspects of society, conflict perspective focuses on the negative, conflicted, and ever-changing nature of society. Unlike functionalists who defend the status quo, avoid social change, and believe people cooperate to effect social order, conflict theorists challenge the status quo, encourage social change (even when this means social revolution), and believe rich and powerful people force social order on the poor and the weak.

Conflict theorists, for example, may interpret an "elite" board of regents raising tuition to pay for esoteric new programs that raise the prestige of a local college as self-serving rather than as beneficial for students. Whereas American sociologists in the 1940s and 1950s generally ignored the conflict perspective in favor of the functionalist, the tumultuous 1960s saw American sociologists gain considerable interest in conflict theory. They also expanded Marx's idea that the key conflict in society was strictly economic. Today, conflict theorists find social conflict between any groups in which the potential for inequality exists: racial, gender, religious, political, economic, and so on. Conflict theorists note that unequal groups usually have conflicting values and agendas, causing them to compete against one another. This constant competition between groups forms the basis for the ever-changing nature of society. Critics of the conflict perspective point to its overly negative view of society. The theory ultimately attributes humanitarian efforts, altruism, democracy, civil rights, and other positive aspects of society to capitalistic designs to control the masses, not to inherent interests in preserving society and social order. (Anderson and Taylor, 2009)

#### 4.5 Social Control Theory

Social Control Theory or Social Bond Theory was written and proposed by Travis Hirschi in 1969. Social Bond theory, that later developed into the Social Control Theory, has historically been an interesting way of approaching social problems and how we in turn explain them. Before one can apply the Social Bond theory, they must first have a firm understanding of its definition, which can be accurately described by Hirschi (1969) as, “Elements of social bonding include attachment to families, commitment to social norms and institutions (school, employment), involvement in activities, and the belief that these things are important”. This theory is rooted and derived from the General Theory of Crime.

Hirschi’s (1969) social bond theory emphasizes the fact that there is an absence of social attachments among juvenile delinquents. Since family, friends, and other members of our social networks affect our lives in many ways, we in turn are direct descendants of their actions. One of the most critical times in our lives is our adolescence. During this critical time we need strong positive social ties to represent society in the best way possible. On the other hand, if the ties we share in our lives are negative and criminal-like habits, it most likely that negative results will occur. The basic difference between the General Theory of Crime and Hirschi’s (1969) Social Bond Theory is the focus on peers and peer groups of individuals. The four basic elements of social bond theory are attachment, commitment, involvement in conventional versus deviant or criminal activities, and lastly the common value system within an individual’s society or subgroup. Attachment is described as the level of values and or norms that an individual holds in society. Attachment is especially important when it come to the person’s parental figures. This theory suggests that conventional figures, such as parents, when bonded make a huge impact in the deterrent of criminal acts. Attachment to other peers tend to be just as supportive as parental ties, just as long as these ties are positive and do not deviate from the social norms of society.

According to Hirschi (1969) other attachments, such as school, play a tremendous role in conventional society. School has tended to be a middle to upper class involvement since it was first created. The middle class children tend to make fun of or demoralize the lower class children. This treatment also does not just come from the child it also comes directly from the institution, through the teacher. In combination with each other the person starts to resent school at the earliest point. This resentment also hinders the continuation of further education. This comes full circle to the lower class standard of living for generations to come (Hirschi, 1969). Next is commitment, this can be described as the level of commitment that an individual has to abide by legal behavior. The norms and values taught to us as an adolescent should be to obey how society works in normal terms. From very early in our lives we hopefully learn the difference between “right” and “wrong”. This understanding has an enormous effect on how we turn out and set our place in normal society. For example, if a child is raised in a home where drugs are bought, sold, and used regularly, then that child has a greater chance of having involvement with drugs in the future. Also, the “bond” between mother, father, and child in a normal nuclear family, is very strong, this in turn has made a blue print of an entire adult life on the child. Third, is a person’s choice to get involved in conventional versus deviant behavior. This choice is formed not far after basic rules of life are taught. If no “right and wrong” basis are formed or provided the adolescent will make the decision that tends to make the most sense.

This also ties into family involvement in the person's life. Lastly, is simply stated that if a person shares common values/norms as others in their subgroup then the motivation to deviate will be hard to overcome. This in many ways senses directly correlates many factors or aspects of the four main parts of Hirschi's (1969) theory. Together they form the backbone of the everlasting "bond" theory. Social Bond Theory has long been a widely accepted among many sociologists for a variety of reasons. The fact that bonds exist in all aspects of society means that the relation of these bonds can be readily discussed. Hirschi (1969) bases his theory on the means that social bonds do exist and when a bond is weakened or broken then unusual behavior for that individual may occur. This brings me to a profound quote by Hirschi (1969):

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1 General features of Bangkok**

Bangkok's land mass comprises 1,568.737 square kilometers on the Chao Phraya river basin, adjacent to Nonthaburi and Pathum Thani provinces to the north, Chachoengsao province to the east, Samut Prakarn province to the south, and Samut Sakhon and Nakhon Pathom provinces to the west. Bangkok is a special administrative district according to Bangkok Metropolitan Administration Act. B.E. 2528, an administrative agency with an elected governor and deputy governor responsible for administration.

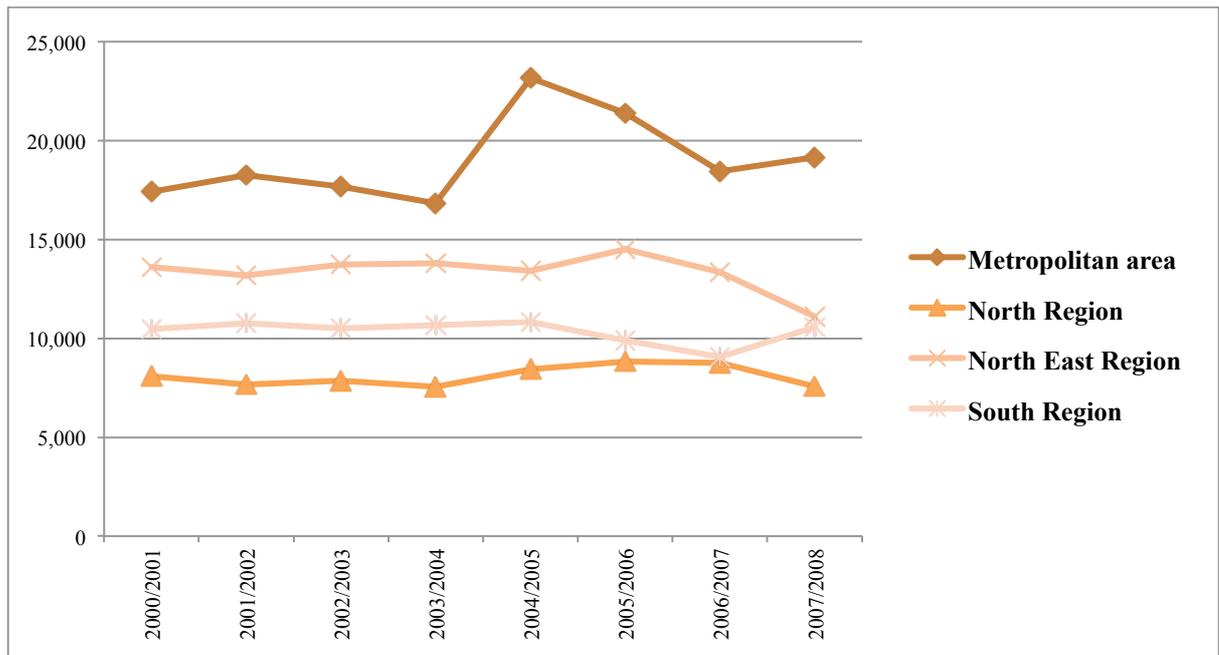
Bangkok comprises 50 districts in three zones according to the concept of crime control:

**The inner zone** districts are Dusit, Khlong Toei, Pomprap Sattru Phai, Phra Nakhon, Wattana, Pathumwan, Samphanthawong, Phrakhanong, Bangrak, Phyathai, Bangna, Yannawa, Ratchathewi, Bangkhorlaem District, Huay Khwang, Sathorn and Din Daeng.

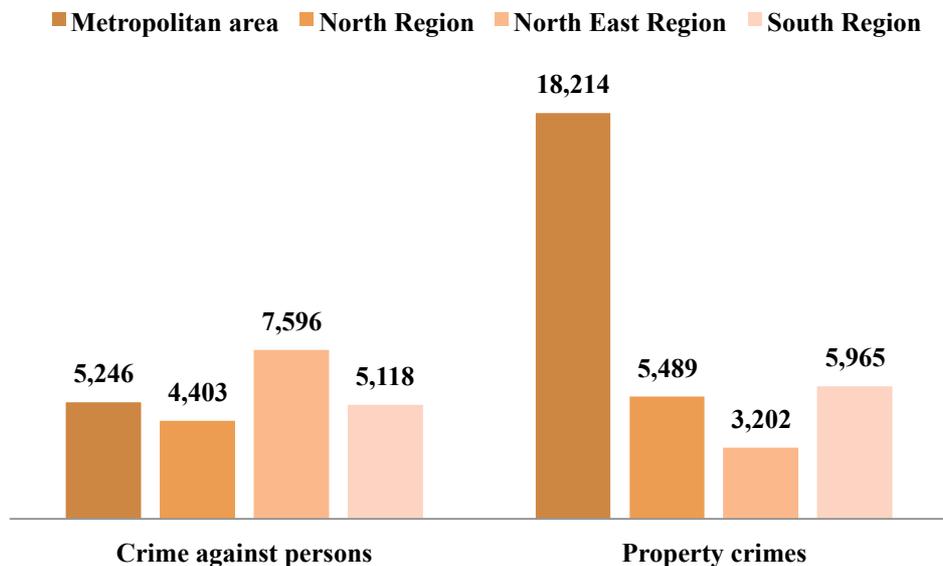
**The middle zone** districts are Bang Sue, Lat Phrao, Thonburi, Jatujak, Wang Thong Lang, Khlong San, Lak Si, Bueng Kum, Ratburana, Don Muang, Bangkokpi, Thung Khru, Bangkhen, Suan Luang, Jom Thong, Sai Mai, Praves, Saphan Soong and Khan Na Yao.

**The outer zone** districts are Min Buri, Bang Phlad, Phasi Charoen, Nong Jork, Bangkok Noi, Bang Khae, Lat Kra Bang, Bangkok Yai, Thawi Wattana, Khlong Sam Wa, Ta Ling Chan, Nong Khaem, Bang Bon and Bang Khun Thian.





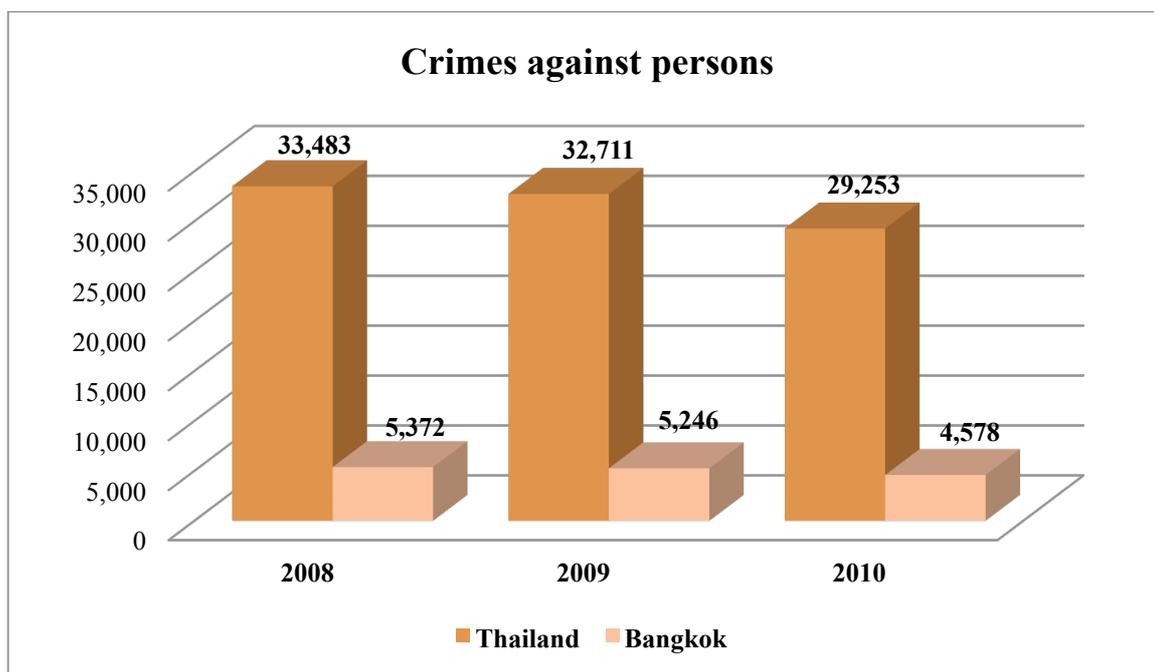
**Figure 5** Overall crimes against property across regions, FY 2000/2001 to FY 2007/2008



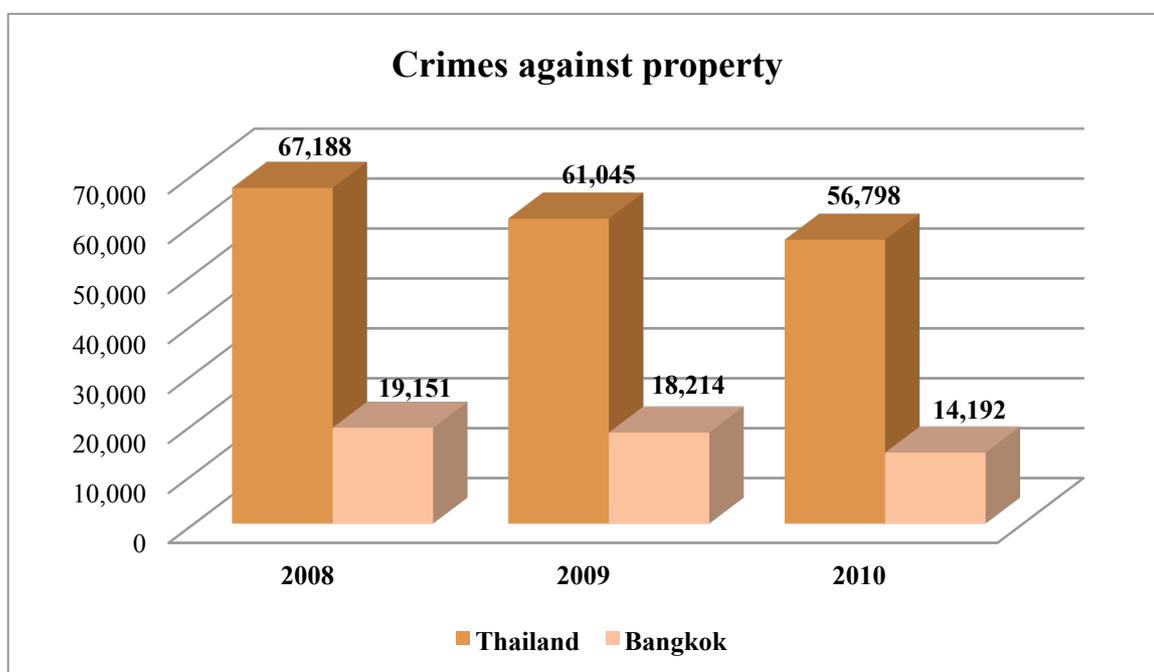
**Figure 6** Statistics of reported criminal cases in Bangkok and each region (2009)

The Royal Thai Police classify crimes into five categories: 1) serious crimes, 2) crime against persons, 3) property crimes, 4) interesting crimes, and 5) victimless crimes. According to the above chart of reported criminal cases in Bangkok and other regions during 2009, little difference in crimes against persons between Bangkok and other regions was seen. In contrast, crimes against property in Bangkok were three to four times higher than in other regions.

**Table 1** Statistics of reported crime against persons in Bangkok compared with reported criminal cases throughout the country (during 2008 – 2010)



**Table 2** Statistics of reported property crimes in Bangkok compared with reported criminal cases throughout the country (during 2008 – 2010)



After comparing crime statistics throughout three years in Bangkok with statistics throughout the country, the researcher found that, as for the two categories of offence shown in the above chart, criminal cases in Bangkok accounted for one-sixth the

number of crimes against persons and one-third the number of crimes against property throughout the country. Bangkok experienced more crime than in other provinces, which might stem from several factors.

### **5.3 Criminal causes in Bangkok**

Social problems in Bangkok have increased rapidly. Most problems stem from the migration of people to work, study and operate businesses in the city despite the government offering little support to migrants. The resultant crowded communities and inadequate infrastructure have created many social problems. According to Park's Theory of Human Ecology related to the community change process called "Invasion, Dominance, and Succession" (Park, 1925) that fosters crime, Bangkok is a city of rural migrants and immigrants whose situations cause social problems. The change process in Bangkok encompasses factors from the Theory of Human Ecology that lead to many social and criminal problems.

Bangkok grew and developed with no organized direction, patterns or urban/environmental planning. As rural people continued to migrate to Bangkok, the city extended continuously to the point of fully urbanizing the suburbs. General problems in Bangkok are overcrowding, child labor, swindling, unemployment, prostitution, drug abuse, pollution and traffic jams: all leading to a deteriorated quality of life. The causes of crime can be analyzed from two perspectives:

**In the macro perspective**, crime in Bangkok is caused by rapid social change that made Bangkok grow in a disorganized fashion, causing an imbalance among social and physical structures and much crime.

**In the micro perspective**, crime in Bangkok is caused by extreme competition. As everyone struggles to survive, individuals do everything needed to enable survival in the city, resulting in criminal acts.

Moreover, the Social Disorganization Theory, which states that "Social condition of community and dwellers had changed at all times due to urbanization which weakened social control mechanism of community and led to considerable crimes" (Shaw & MacKay, 1942), can explain characteristics of Bangkok's chaos. Bangkok is a norm-less city; its social mechanism have become more fragile over the past 20 years. More dwellings such as condominiums, apartments and rental homes that house migrants have weakened the social control mechanism: people seldom know each other. Moreover, Bangkok residents do not abide by laws that traditionally have controlled social order, such as the Building Control Act, Cleanliness Act and Traffic Act. Law-breaking by the general public has diminished their conscience, resulting in further violations of the law.

However, characteristics of crimes in Bangkok differed with those in other cities because Bangkok's development did not extend from the center as in other cities. Though its role is to solve crime in Thailand, the Metropolitan Police Bureau, Royal Thai Police has never made criminal maps of Bangkok; hence, characteristics of crimes in Bangkok cannot be clearly analyzed. However, after using Burgess's Concentric Zone Model (Burgess, 1925) to explain crimes in Bangkok, the researcher found that residential patterns in Bangkok are different from those in Western cities. People with high status desire dwellings in the center of Bangkok, while people with lower status prefer living in outside areas where costs are lower than in the city's

center. Moreover, dispersion of progress in Bangkok was unlike that in cities around the world. Department stores were built in each city corner. People illegally migrated to build dwellings and live in every district of Bangkok. According to Burgess's Concentric Zone Model, a district in Bangkok most similar to Zone 2 was Khlong Toei, with the highest rate of violent crime, crimes against property and drug-related crime. This resulted from district land being illegally seized and occupied by poorer people, causing the "Invasion, Dominance, and Succession" change process in Park's Theory of Human Ecology (1925).

#### **5.4 Problem-solving guidelines**

According to Social Control theorists, people do not commit offence due to mechanism consisting of various social institutes such as family, school, religion which prevents people from committing offences. Therefore, Social Control Theories study criminal problem-solving guidelines focusing on social relationship capable to prevent people from committing criminal offences rather than factors or influence of government mechanism. These Social Control Theorists do not explain perspective of law enforcement or justice process but consider awareness of public benefits which is an important element bringing peace to the society.

According to analysis results, the problems are caused by the followings; as Bangkok is a big city, people do not have mutual relationship and there is high unemployment. People in Bangkok do not have any social regulations to make them be good people and prevent them from committing any criminal offences. As Bangkok rapidly becomes an urban society, people living in Bangkok have less belief and less good traditions, weakening social norm and making these people tend to increasingly violate social regulations and commit criminal offences. As for the family problem of people in Bangkok where parents have to work outside to have enough incomes, children are less controlled by their family so they tend to increasingly commit offences in the future.

As for problem-solving guidelines, the researcher had proposed Community Relations Approach linking with Social Control Theories. The Community Relations Approach aims to solve criminal problems by creating interpersonal relationship to enable community members to know each other and mutually help keep a close watch on crimes. Moreover, community members are encouraged to participate in preventing themselves from facing crimes on their body and property. However, police's roles related to criminal problems are not ignored. It was suggested that local police should adjust their roles according to Community Relations Approach. Police have to plan, support, and give advice on criminal prevention to the community. Police under this approach are not the main responsible for criminal prevention.

#### **6. Conclusion**

Criminal problems in Bangkok stemmed from deteriorated society and weakness of social bond due to migration of people from other provinces to stay in Bangkok. There was rapid increase in number of rented houses, single houses, and large condominiums for supporting excessive populations. One thing which could be clearly seen in Bangkok was no relation among neighbors or people living in the nearby places. After analyzing problems with Theories of Sociological Criminology,

the researcher found that Bangkok was associated and was not associated with conclusion of said theory.

As for Bangkok associated with conclusion of said theory, Bangkok was a city where people from other provinces and foreign countries migrated to live, causing social and criminal problems. Social mechanism in Bangkok was weaker due to fast social change. Urban society caused Bangkok to face social and criminal problems. However, after comparing Burgess's Concentric Zone Model which could be used for explaining characteristics of crimes and characteristics of crimes in other cities, the researcher found that said theory could not be used for explaining characteristics of crimes in Bangkok because Bangkok was the city without growth extending from the center like other cities. Residing values of people with high and low social status were different from those of western people.

Criminal problem-solving guidelines indicated that problem situations and problem-solving guidelines completely link with Control Theories. Social Control Theories can completely be applied for solving criminal problems in Bangkok. All problem-solving guidelines proposed by the researcher aim to solve criminal problems, especially Street Crime in Bangkok and enable people with authority or people concerned to determine policy to solve the mentioned problems.

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