

***The Influence of Religious Beliefs on Participation of the Public for Local Government in Thailand: A Conceptual Perspective***

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to describe the empirical data corresponds the influence of religion belief variables that effect on people participation in Thepparat Sub-district Organizational Administration, Banpho, Chacheongsao, Eastern Thailand. The specific aims of this study are to 1) study the belief and religion variables that effect people participation, 2) examine the accordance of the belief and religion variables that effect people participation, and 3) study the general and indirect factors that affect the belief and religion variables that effect people participation. This is a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative research. The instruments used to collect data were questionnaires and interviews. The technique of a probability sampling, a stratified random sampling is used to collect data. The samples were selected from individuals and leaders at all levels in Thepparat Sub-district. The results of the study shows that a conceptual perspective for the influence of religious beliefs to the people participation in the local government. These results suggest that the principles and guidelines for the participation of the public in a meaningful administration of the local government.

Keywords: Influence, religious beliefs, conceptual perspective, local government

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## **Introduction**

Thailand is a land of Buddhism. Monks are the most respected as a part of the Triple Gem. As a consequence, they become a powerful Buddhism representative implicitly. Moreover, the moral principles in the Tripitaka exist for a long time. The Tripitaka for supporting political ideas is easily interpreted. An important characteristic of Buddhism is blending with societies and cultures of the land that Buddhism can be easily disseminated. In the other words, Buddhism is simple to be harmonized with societies and cultures. The Buddhism's ultimate goal is the disengagement of the Passion. That is a practice for peace and purity. These mentioned issues are conveyed in common senses of Thai people implicitly. However, the land of Thailand still consists of other beliefs such as belief in Islam.

The fundamental belief of Islam is the belief in God named Allah. Islamic people believe that he created the world, humans, animals, sky and lands. Moreover, he also created all of the things that were between the sky and the land. Nobody participated and involved those creations. He is a person who takes care of the world and the universe according to his system. He also determines the ultimate rules for human's life. Muslim is the people who hold Islam with pure faith for Allah. Allah is God of the universe who trusts in Prophet named Mohammed. The both beliefs are the content of declaration for people who believe in Islam. Therefore, Muslim has to promise that they will not believe in other Gods except Allah and Mohammed who is Allah's Prophet.

Islam does not separate the mind and the object apart. Islam teaching said that the life is united. It is declared for enhancing the human life to be perfect. With that reason, Muslim does not believe in mortifying. Islam does not teach human to escape from material world and prohibit being passionate in those objects. Islam believes in principles that elevating the mind can be achieved by practicing in moral framework of life. The aim of Islam depends on disciplining, enhancing the mind, creating balance of life with advising the right way for conducting and leading to peace in terms of purifying the mind, keeping the peace of human and becoming a perfect human. The faith in religious principles is the best and the center of mind because the life will not fail or slump. To respect Allah, the life will not suffer with insecurity that causes you feel fail and have disgusting life. The people, who believe in Allah who created the world and the entire world, will always aware that their life is relevant with the highest power of Allah. In everywhere, they always recall Allah and let themselves be under the protection of Allah all the time. They are psychologically stable and concentrate mind. Islamic people often absorb the moral principles in themselves including protecting and keeping the world that Allah created, seeking the peace for returning to live with Allah. It causes peace in Islam communities, other lands of the world including with Thailand that is diverse in beliefs and religions. Thailand has not only Buddhism and Islam, but it also has an important belief that is Chinese belief.

Chinese belief is the great culture. The nature of Chinese people is diligent and determined in learning and working. Due to the great nation, there are many doctrines such as Taoism. People who believe in Taoism focus on seeking the truth of life. They often escape from various problems by living near the nature. It leads to discover herb

therapy that is origin of evolution in medical knowledge of Chinese etc. The medical knowledge is the characteristic of Chinese people in everywhere.

However, the good value derived from Thais' beliefs and religions as mentioned above gradually fades away due to economic growth and globalization. It impacts the original cultures and traditions leading to materialism society and Thai's behavioral change. Moreover, Thai people focus less on the morality and cultures (The National Social and Economic Development Plan No. 11, p.14).

The National Social and Economic Development Plan No.11 (2012-2016) focuses on participation of people with determining plans in order to develop people and Thai society to the quality society. The people take part in developing society and politics, economics, visions and missions. The objectives, goals, strategies and development approaches of the National Social and Economic Development Plan No.11 (2012-2016) are high priority to create fair and quality society. All sectors are promoted to participate in developmental process (The National Social and Economic Development Plan No. 11, p.16).

Furthermore, the present constitution (2007) focuses on participation of people and fundamental of good governance that result to people become more awake in politics. In 2006, the crisis of politics affecting the Democracy Index of Thailand was 5.7 out of 10 points and was ranked in the 90 out of countries that were sample countries. After using the constitution, 2007, it led to election. It also impacts the Democracy Index of Thailand in 2008 which increased to 6.8 as the first rank comparing with the neighbor countries. This reflects that people feel awake in country administration more than in the past. The people express their opinions in politics or examine government administration together. Developing culture, democracy and governance is a part of Thai society lifestyle and promote to be more honest and clearer in the politics (The National Social and Economic Development Plan No. 11, p.8).

The awareness in politics of Thai people is increased. The right in politics of people is developed steadily due to people participation in determining directions for administration through an election. The representatives are important to reduce the problems of inequality in society with creating opportunity fairly and develop the democracy that is in election form especially more awareness of people in election, steadily increasing use the right in election for selecting representatives, perception of political information and participation in examining about political administration (The National Social and Economic Development Plan No. 11, p.27).

People's participation in the politics promotes the power of society in order to express opinions creatively by learning, understanding, managing for responsibility as a citizen of country. There is supporting to set the stage for exchanging, learning and expressing different opinions creatively for developing the country.

The people are supported to attend in the country development processes as follows: sharing ideas, making decision, determining approaches, pushing practice, examining operation in government sector and other development sectors including giving opportunity to participate in various activities of kids, youth, disabled, elderly, socially disadvantaged, poor people, and people who live in various local administration organization, the district council and subdistrict administration organization etc..

The district council and Subdistrict Administration Organization are organized according to the District Council and Subdistrict Administration Organization Act (1994). It identifies that a subdistrict should have a subdistrict council as a corporation. The subdistrict council that can earn money according to income criteria or its income is not less than 150,000฿ per year without supported money from budget year three years ago may be organized as a subdistrict administration organization by publishing announcement of the ministry of interior and announcing in the government gazette. Moreover, the subdistrict council is terminated immediately after declaration to be a subdistrict administration organization.

The Subdistrict Administration Organization (SAO) is a local government as a corporation. The structure of SAO consists of a subdistrict administration organization council and subdistrict administration organization committee. It is a local administration unit that is familiar with villages and communities the most. The SAO is assigned to do many things that affect directly to a quality of life and being of people in a local.

Because of communities and a local administration organization especially the subdistrict administration organization (SAO) being important power in social and economic development of the country, the Act of determining plans and processes for distributing power to Administrative Organization B.E. 2542 (1999) affects developing strength of communities and operating of local administration organizations that are an significant mechanism in building democratic culture and governance in community level.

When people in communities participate in social and political development processes such as making plan through exchanging knowledge, sharing ideas, finding problem solutions and leading to create goals of community development together, it causes of declaration and enforcement of the Act of community organization council in B.E. 2551 (2008) that aims for people in communities to take part in developing local in accordance with various lifestyles, cultures and local wisdoms (The National Social and Economic Development Plan No. 11, p.27).

Thepparat is a subdistrict in Banpho district, Chachoengsao province which gets influence of prosperous from Bangkok the most. Thepparat subdistrict borders Ladkabung district in Bangkok; therefore, those areas are blended between urban civilization and rural lifestyle as well. Thepparat is a subdistrict that is harmonized in various beliefs and cultures. It is said that most of people in the area are Buddhist, but many people are also Islamic people. Mosque still appears in the area and Islamic people take role not less than Buddhist people such as being administrative committee in Thepparat subdistrict administration organization, being teachers in schools, etc. At the same time in Thepparat subdistrict, Khong Suan 100 years market and a Chinese shrine are located. It reveals there is an influence of Chinese culture in the area.

When factors that can influence belief and religion are considered that how it influence on the local politics, it is to enhance the strengthen root for social and political development with morals and ethics. It is said that is integration between social capital and cultural capital leading to good outcome for religious places and the kingdom (The National Social and Economic Development Plan No. 11, p.7).

With the aforementioned reasons, it needs to study the influence of belief and religion on participation of people in Thepparat Subdistrict Administration Organization, Banpho district, Chachoengsao province. It is worthwhile to investigate at any level including study factors that can influence belief and religion on participation of people for applying the results to promote the competency of people participation and developing the local according to the people's needs and fundamental principles of self-government administration in democracy in the future.

## **Literature and Information Review**

After a review of the literature, the related research is below:

### **1. The people participation**

The people participation was behavior involved with feeling, consciousness, reason of people who were ready to participate in operation of Thepparat Subdistrict Administrative Organization, Banpho district, Chachoengsao province in order to find problems, set problems, plan, operate and follow up the results of administration of Thepparat Subdistrict Administrative Organization.

### **2. Participation in operation**

The people participation in operation indicated the level of people participation in issue of coordinating with officers, advertising, sharing ideas or advices, donating money and things, volunteering, preventing problems and resolving the problems.

### **3. Religion role to society**

The book titled "Young People and Muslim in Modern World" is to open the knowledge boundary about Muslim to society in various aspects. It causes to be aware of cultural diversity and mutual cultures in society. In addition, it leads to well-understanding between Muslim and different religious people.

Religion plays a role in various dimensions in society; therefore, it is considered that it is modern and new in society. It becomes an interesting point in Thai society to study related to religious knowledge exchange and roles of religions in society and especially politics. Moreover, the study reflects to response and adaptation of Muslim in the conditions changing all the times hardly find because most academic books are about doctrine of Islam.

Now, the religions can participate in the society by a variety of ways such as presenting the article of Muslim under the project "Young People and Muslim in Modern World Project". The article under the project is divided into 5 topics including 1. Topic: "Social Movement Process in the World of Islam" commented by Abdul Roning Suetae, Islam college at Prince of Songkha University, Pattany Campus and Mutsalan Mahana, Vice Rector at Yala Islamic College 2. Topic: "Islam and Politics in the Modern World" commented by Maroning Salaming, Islam college at Prince of Songkha University, Pattany Campus and Wisut Binlate, the Islamic Committee of Songkla Office 3. Topic: "Muslim Youth in Cultural Changing Wave"

commented by Prae Sirisakdamkueng, Faculty of Archaeology, Silpakorn University  
4. Topic: “Movement of Women Muslim” commented by Chawiwon Prajuobmuo and Saowani Jitmuod  
5. Topic: “Movement in Three Southern Provinces” commented by MuhammadSaki Jaeha, Islamic Yala University and Hammad Ayut Pata, Former Editor of Isranews Institute, Thai Journalists Association.

#### **4. Related Research**

Amnuay Yussayotha studied the “Advice on and Solution of Social and Political Problems Given by the Buddha”. The objective of this research was to study advice and solution of social and political problems given by the Buddha, which can be classified into four main research questions: (1) how Buddha gave advice on social problems; (2) how Buddha made solution to social problems; (3) how Buddha gave advice on political problems; and (4) how Buddha made solution to political problems. The results of the study revealed the following: (1) regarding advice on social problems, Buddha advised people to become morally virtuous first so that the society becomes good automatically. The advice given emphasizes individual rather than a system. Buddha is of the opinion that if a person is virtuous, although there might be some loophole for violating the moral code, he/she would not use that loophole in committing immoral act for his/he personal gain. (2) regarding solution of social problems, Buddha solved them in accordance with the prevailing situation. The solver must possess the Parami (perfections) as an asset for solving the problems. Buddha has already accrued noble 10 Paramis such as Dana (giving, charity, generosity, liberality); Sila (morality, good conduct), Nekkhamma (renunciation), Panna (wisdom, insight, understanding), Viriya (energy, effort, endeavor), Khanti (forbearance, tolerance, endurance), Sacca (truthfulness), Adhitthana (resolution, self-determination), Metta (loving-kindness, friendliness) and Upekkha (equanimity, indifference to praise and blame in the performance of duty). Most importantly, one has to turn enemy to become friend after solving the problems so that the person be trained to be virtuous. (3) regarding advice on political problems, Buddha improvised the teachings suitable with two political systems: aristocracy and Samakkhidham (community spirit). Buddha advised aristocrat rulers to act as a model so that the ruled followed the model. As for Samakkhidham system, Buddha emphasized the principle of community spirit. Along with solving the government aspect of the system, the economic aspect should also be materialized side by side. Buddha prioritized the use of authority more than the governing system, seeing that any system would be workable if “Dhammacracy” was utilized. Dhammacracy was seen as good governing system whereas “non-Dhammacracy” was not. (4) regarding solution of political problems, Buddha solved them in accordance with the prevailing situation utilizing impartiality, equity, honesty and public good as the basis. Moreover, Buddha was cautious not to act beyond his role and status as exalted teacher. Overall, Buddha gave advice and solved the social and political conflicts using “Dhammawuth” (weapon of Dhamma), not “Sastrawuth” (weapon of violence) because the latter was not able to solve the problems.

Danai Preechapermpasit studied the “An Analysis of the Strengths and Weaknesses of the Management Systems of Thai Buddhist Organizations in Terms of their Effectiveness and Contribution to Buddhism” The objective of this research was to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the management systems within Buddhist organizations, in particular, the public Buddhist entities in Thailand. Its purpose is to

help identify the weaknesses within, and find ways to increase the effectiveness of, these systems. This research was based upon studies of documentations around Buddhist organization management during the Buddha's time and the original Sangha Act 1962 (amended in 1992). The general framework for good management, according to the dharma vinaya, is that it should be transparent and for the best interest of the public, and that one should expect no benefits for oneself. The Four Adhikaraṇa or seven principles of problem management (Adhikaraṇasamatha) should be followed as best practices for organization management. The management systems of Buddhist organizations during the Buddha's time followed the dharma vinaya, as clearly laid out by the Buddha. When Buddhism entered Thailand, the systems had to adapt to fit the governance and culture of the country. However, the Sangha Act 1962 (amended in 1992) maintains Buddhist organizational management systems that resemble those of an absolute monarchy even though the Thailand's political system has become a constitutional democracy. This absolute system in the Buddhist sphere has caused many issues such as delays, injustice, and ambiguity – and ultimately has shaken the faith of Thai citizens. The pros of the system are it encourages unity and close connection to the state and to key leaders. However, the cons include distorting the dharma vinaya and deteriorating the faith of local citizens due to three main factors: (1) The Sangha Act 1962, (2) structure of the Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand, and (3) seniority system of monks Recommendations: 1. Revise the Sangha Act to be more current and establish clear boundaries between the state's governance and the Sangha governance to avoid duplication and delays. 2. Re-structure the Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand and National Office of Buddhism and simplify operational processes. In addition, decentralize and empower the local authority to make decisions that are efficient and fair. 3. Remove the seniority system from the managerial position to avoid the issue around personal benefits and potential abuse of power, and to allow the systems to be effective and following dharma vinaya.

### **Purposes of the study**

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To study variables of belief and religion influencing on participation of people in Thepparat Subdistrict Administration Organization, Banpho district, Chachoengsao province.
2. To examine the concordance of variables of belief with religion influencing on participation of people in Thepparat Subdistrict Administration Organization, Banpho district, Chachoengsao province.
3. To investigate overall and indirect factors influencing on participation of people in Thepparat Subdistrict Administration Organization, Banpho district, Chachoengsao province.

## **Scope of the study**

The scopes of this study are as follows:

### **1. Content**

In this study, the researchers study five variables that are manifest or observable variables and latent or unobservable variables. The unobservable variables are divided into exogenous latent variables and endogenous latent variables.

### **2. Population and Sample**

The populations of this study are general people. Fan, Y. W. (2001, p.422) stated that the proper subjects should not less than 400 people for analyzing the data in order to investigate the relation of variables by using computer program to analyze. Therefore, researchers apply the idea of Fan. The samples of the study are 400 and they are increased 5% to 420 in order to replace incomplete data collection. The data are gathered from people who have lived in the area of Thepparat Subdistrict Administration Organization, Banpho district, Chachoengsao province for more than six months during the survey from every villages locating in Thepparat district and 2 officers of each agency which has social missions. The officers are an executive officer and an officer who are responsible for the strategic department.

### **3. Research Area and Term**

The area used to collect sample is Thepparat district, Banpho district, Chachoengsao province. The duration of the research study is 12 months, from August, 2015 to July, 2016.

## **Methodology and place of the research study**

This is a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative research.

### **Qualitative research**

The informants are an executive of agencies and an officer who are responsible for the strategic department. That is, there are 2 officers in total from each agency. They are in charge of social missions such as Chachoengsao Social Development and Human Security Officer, Chachoengsao Community Development Officer, Chachoengsao Agriculture and Cooperatives Officer, Chachoengsao Agricultural Extension Officer, Public Health Doctor. The research instrument is in-depth interview developed by the researchers.

### **Quantitative Research**

The people, who derive from the survey by questionnaire developed by researchers, provide the important information. They have lived in the area of Thepparat Subdistrict Administration Organization, Banpho district, Chachoengsao province. The samples are 420 people living in the area of Thepparat Subdistrict Administration Organization, Banpho district, Chachoengsao province for more than six months



during the data collecting from every villages locating in Thepparat district, Banpho district, Chachoengsao province without sexual limitation.

## **1. Research Plan**

This research used qualitative and quantitative research methods. It is intended to study: 1) variables influencing on participation of people in Thepparat Subdistrict Administration Organization, Banpho district, Chachoengsao province, 2) the consonance of relationship model of variables influencing on participation of people in Thepparat Subdistrict Administrative Organization, Banpho district, Chachoengsao province that is developed with the empirical data, and 3) overall, direct and indirect factors influencing on participation of people in Thepparat Subdistrict Administration Organization, Banpho district, Chachoengsao province.

## **2. Research Methodology**

### **1. Population and Samples**

People are relevant with the study “the Influence of Belief and Religion on Participation of People in Subdistrict Administration Organization: A Case Study of Thepparat Sub district, Banpho District, Chachoengsao Province”

### **2. Methods of data collection and data collection techniques**

Data researchers collected field data:

1. Quantitative research by questionnaire
2. In-depth interview
3. Participant or non-participant observation
4. Group meeting with village luminaries
5. Seminar with villagers for perception of villager comments

### **3. Research Field or Place for Data Collection**

1. Appropriate community locations for focus group discussion
2. Government agencies involved with the community, such as schools, health district offices and village leader for the district and province.

## **4. Data Analysis**

Researchers analyzed data and facts from the documents and information from In-depth interviews and group meetings with village luminaries and did content analysis and descriptive data presentation.

## **Results**

1. The research findings benefits executive agencies in manage the province. They are able to plan strategies and policies regarding sustainable people and society development from implementing the research results. The research findings are integrated with involved agencies; therefore, they can plan operation in accordance

with happiness indicator of Chachoengsao people that leads to develop effective and efficient management administration systems.

2. The research findings are implemented to promote and develop well-being of Chachoengsao people in order to be self-reliant with integrated collaboration from private and government sectors and community organizations.

3. Integrated research on teaching and learning

Practice students to be research assistant and learn the truth of life from participation in research data collection at research areas.

In addition, the researchers comprise the knowledge from the research in order to improve the course “Meaning of Life”, “Thai Living” and “Buddhism and Thai society”.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Academic benefits are as follows:

1. To know variables of belief and religion influencing on participation of people in Thepparat Subdistrict Administration Organization, Banpho district, Chachoengsao province.

2. To know the accordance of variables of belief with religion influencing on participation of people in Thepparat Subdistrict Administration Organization, Banpho district, Chachoengsao province.

3. To know overall, direct and indirect factors influencing on participation of people in Thepparat Subdistrict Administration Organization, Banpho district, Chachoengsao province.

Furthermore, the related agencies are benefited from the research findings.

1. Policy issues

1.1 The research findings benefits executive agencies in manage the province. They are able to plan strategies and policies regarding sustainable people and society development from implementing the research results. The research findings are integrated with involved agencies; therefore, they can plan operation in accordance with people participation in Subdistrict Administrative Organization that leads to develop effective and efficient management administration systems.

1.2 The government sector should pay attention to determine policies that Chachoengsao villagers are able to participate more in Subdistrict Administrative Organization.

After completion of the research, it is intended to present to the relevant authorities about the findings in both document forms and with symposium presentations such as national and international academic conferences.

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