

# รัฐสวัสดิการ สังคมสวัสดิการ หรือ ประชานิยม ทางแยกสามสาย สำหรับเป็นทางเลือกสาธารณะชนในประเทศไทย

Welfare State, Welfare Society, or Populism;  
A Three Crossroads for Public Choice in Thailand

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## บทคัดย่อ

เมื่อวันที่ ๖ สิงหาคม ๒๕๕๓ อดีตนายกรัฐมนตรี อภิสิทธิ์ เวชชาชีวะ ได้กล่าวว่า ในอีกหกปีข้างหน้า ประเทศไทยจะเป็นรัฐสวัสดิการซึ่งจะเปลี่ยนจากแนวคิดแบบประชานิยม แล่งนี้ได้ก่อให้เกิดการโต้เถียงเชิงขัดแย้งกันมีทั้งฝ่ายที่เห็นด้วยและไม่เห็นด้วย รองนายกรัฐมนตรีในพรรคท่านหนึ่งได้กล่าวได้ว่า ประเทศไทยคงเป็นรัฐสวัสดิการไม่ได้นอกจากจะเป็นสังคมสวัสดิการ ปัจจุบันประชาชนคนไทยมีโอกาสที่ยอมรับและได้ประโยชน์จากสวัสดิการสังคมและนโยบายประชานิยมในด้านต่าง ๆ โดยเฉพาะหลังจากพรรคไทยรักไทยชนะการเลือกตั้งในปี ๒๕๔๔ และเป็นรัฐบาลอยู่จนครบเทอม นโยบายประชานิยมเชิงนวัตกรรมของรัฐบาลได้เอาชนะใจของประชาชนระดับรากหญ้าอย่างกว้างขวาง

ปรากฏการณ์ทางการเมืองที่ประชาชนคนไทยเผชิญหน้าอยู่คือ พรรคการเมืองไทยเกือบทั้งหมดได้เสนอนโยบายประชานิยมเชิงนวัตกรรมต่างๆ เพื่อเอาชนะการเลือกตั้งนี้ คือเหตุผลที่ว่า ทำไมประชาชนคนไทยจำนวนมากจึงเผชิญหน้ากับทางแยก เพราะฉะนั้นเรื่องนี้จึงเป็นเหตุผลของการศึกษานี้ โดยมุ่งที่จะวิเคราะห์และตั้งข้อสมมติฐานสิ่งที่พบว่า ทางไหนจะเหมาะสมและเป็นไปได้สำหรับประเทศ การศึกษานี้วิธีวิเคราะห์ใช้วิทยาแห่งการแปลตามด้วยสิ่งที่พบด้านความประสงค์และความคิดเห็นดังต่อไปนี้

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กลุ่มแรก คิดที่จะทำรัฐสวัสดิการเต็มที่เหมือนสวีเดนโดยไม่คิดถึงฐานปัจจัยต่างๆ ทั้งๆ ที่รู้ยู่ว่าระดับการพัฒนาด้านเศรษฐกิจและการเมืองของประเทศไทยเทียบกับสวีเดนไม่ได้

กลุ่มที่สอง เชื่อว่ารัฐสวัสดิการที่สมบูรณ์สำหรับประเทศไทยสามารถทำได้ในไม่ช้า ขึ้นอยู่กับ การประเมินต่างๆ เช่น สัดส่วนของรายได้ต่อ จีดีพี

กลุ่มที่สาม เสนอว่าสังคมสวัสดิการสังคมจะเหมาะสมกับประเทศ เนื่องจากข้อจำกัดด้านภาษี รัฐบาลก็จะใช้กลไกที่มีอยู่ เช่น กองทุนหมู่บ้านของรัฐบาลทักษิณ เพื่อพัฒนาสวัสดิการสังคม กลุ่มนี้เชื่อว่า สังคมสวัสดิการจะทำให้ประชาชนเกิดความรู้ร่วมกันคิดร่วมกันลงมือทำเลยไม่ต้องรอการช่วยเหลือจาก รัฐบาล

กลุ่มที่สี่ เป็นกลุ่มที่พยายามเสาะหาความหมายของนโยบายประชานิยมของพรรคเพื่อไทย กลุ่มนี้ มีการแบ่งแยกออกไป วิเคราะห์นโยบายประชานิยมของอดีตนายกรัฐมนตรี ทักษิณ ชินวัตร ว่าทำให้ประเทศไทยล่มจมเช่นเดียวกับประเทศอาร์เจนตินา แต่เมื่อมีการเลือกตั้งเมื่อวันที่ ๓ กรกฎาคม ปีนี้ ปรากฏว่า พรรคเพื่อไทยได้ประสพชัยชนะด้วยคะแนนเสียงท่วมท้น กลุ่มนี้จึงจัดสัมมนาเพื่อค้นหาว่า นโยบายประชานิยมของพรรคที่ชนะได้ให้สิทธิอันชอบธรรมอะไรแก่สังคมไทย

ผลดีที่สุด กลุ่มสุดท้ายเป็นกลุ่มที่ส่งเสริมนโยบายประชานิยมอย่างแข็งขัน กลุ่มนี้พยายามแสดง ข้อมูลซึ่งได้จากประสบการณ์เพื่อพิสูจน์ถึงความสำเร็จแห่งนโยบายประชานิยมของรัฐบาลทักษิณ ตั้งแต่ปี ๒๕๔๔ ตัวอย่างที่ดีเลิศคือ กองทุนหมู่บ้านหนึ่งล้านบาท นักวิชาการที่เห็นอกเห็นใจมวลชนรากหญ้าที่มาร่วมกับกลุ่มได้แสดงให้เห็นว่า นโยบายประชานิยมของรัฐบาลทักษิณ สามารถเป็นได้ทั้งสองอย่างคือ ประชานิยมที่เป็นยุทธศาสตร์ทางการเมือง และสวัสดิการสังคมที่เป็นยุทธศาสตร์ทางเศรษฐกิจ จริงๆ แล้ว นโยบายประชานิยมต่างๆ ของรัฐบาลทักษิณ ได้จัดตั้งและประสบความสำเร็จเรียบร้อยมาหนึ่งทศวรรษแล้ว

สรุปว่า สิ่งที่ค้นพบห่าประการข้างบนนี้สรุปได้ว่า ประเทศไทยอยู่ในสภาพทางสามแพร่งให้ สาธารณชนเลือกระหว่าง รัฐสวัสดิการ สังคมสวัสดิการ และระบบประชานิยมปัจจุบันประเทศไทยไม่สามารถจะเลือกทางสายใดสายหนึ่งโดยเฉพาะไม่ว่าพรรคการเมืองใดในระหว่างพรรคเพื่อไทยกับพรรค ประชาธิปัตย์จะครองอำนาจทางการเมืองนานพอที่จะจัดตั้งนโยบายเหล่านั้น อย่างไรก็ตามไม่ว่าประเทศไทยจะขับเคลื่อนไปถนนสายใดก็ตาม ก็ยังคงต้องการที่จะดำเนินมาตรการที่สำคัญต่างๆ เช่น การปฏิรูปการ จัดเก็บภาษีการขึ้นทะเบียนทรัพย์สินที่เก็บภาษีและภาษีมรดก การป้องกันและปราบปรามคอร์รัปชัน เป็นต้น เพื่อที่จะทำให้รัฐบาลไทยในอนาคตใช้บทบาทให้เป็นรัฐแห่งความยุติธรรมไม่แบ่งแยก ปฏิบัติเป็น มาตรฐานเดียวกัน มีเมตตาให้อภัยซึ่งกันและกันจริงๆ จากนั้นรัฐไทยก็จะสามารถใช้บทบาทในการป้องกัน และส่งเสริมความเป็นอยู่ที่ดีทางเศรษฐกิจและสังคมของพลเมือง และสร้างโอกาสที่เท่าเทียมกัน กระจาย

ทรัพย์สินที่เที่ยงธรรม และรับผิดชอบต่อผู้ไม่สามารถช่วยตัวเองได้ในเรื่องเสบียงอาหารน้อยเพื่อชีวิตที่ดี นี้แหละคือรัฐสวัสดิการที่แท้จริง

**คำสำคัญ :** รัฐสวัสดิการ; สังคมสวัสดิการ; สาธารณชน

### Abstract

On August 6, 2010, The Ex Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva stated that in the next six years. Thailand would be a welfare state which would move away from populist ideology. This statement has given rise to a controversial debate in the context of both agree and disagree. One of the Deputy Prime Minister from his own party argued that Thailand could not be a welfare state but a welfare society. Until today the Thai people have the opportunity to recognize and benefit from social welfare and populist policies in different ways. Especially after Thai Rak Thai party won elections in 2001 and ran government for the full term. Its innovative populist policies have won the hearts of the grassroots widely.

The political phenomenon that the Thais have faced are that almost all Thai political parties have proposed various innovative populist policies in order to win the election. This is why many Thai people face a crossroads. This is therefore a rationale of this study which aims to analyze and synthesize the findings that which path is appropriate and feasible for the country. The study uses hermeneutics as a method of analysis and comes up with the following five findings of wishes and opinions.

The first group dreams of a full Welfare state as Sweden without regard to the basis of facts. Even though they realizes that level of economic and political development of Thailand cannot be compared with Sweden.

The second group believes that the full welfare state in going to be in feasible for Thailand in the short run, based on various measurements such as a proportion of revenue per GDP.

The third group proposes that social welfare society would be appropriate to the country. Due to constraints on the revenue, the government should use the existing

mechanisms such as “village fund” of the Thaksin government to develop a social welfare. This group believes that from of welfare society would create awareness of Thai people to mutually think and mutually do without waiting for help from the government.

The fourth group is a group trying to seek the meaning of populist policies of Pheu Thai party. The group has severely criticized the populist policies of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra that they would cause Thailand a collapse in the same way as Argentina. But when the election on July 3 this year appeared that Pheu Thai party experienced a landslide victory, the group held a seminar to find out that populist policies of the victorious Party would provide what rights to Thai society.

Eventually the last group is a group that strongly supports populist policies. The group has tried to present empirical data to prove the success of the populist policies of Thaksin government since 2001. A beautiful example is a one million baht Village Fund. Joined with the group are scholars sympathetic to the grassroots masses. They argue that the populist policies of Thaksin government can be both populist as a political strategy and social welfare as an economic strategy. In fact several populist policies of the Thaksin government have been already institutionalized with success for a decade.

In conclusion, the above five finding can be summarized that Thailand is in a state of the crossroads for public choice among welfare state, welfare society, and populism. Thailand is at present not able to choose any one particular road, provided that any political party between Pheu Thai party and Democrat party be able to dominate the political power long enough to institutionalize the policies. However, whichever road Thailand would be moved to, she still needs to carry out several important measures such as reform of taxation, legislation to collect property and inheritance taxes, prevention and suppression of corruption, and so on, in order to make the Thai government in the future to play a role as a state where justice, non-discrimination, single standard treatment, and mercy are realized. Then, the Thai state is able to play a role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social well-being of its citizens, as well as creation of equality of opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth, and

responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provision for a good life. This is a true welfare state.

**Keywords :** Welfare state; welfare society; public

## Introduction

One banker (Phutrakul, 2010)<sup>๓๑</sup> said that during this period Thailand was in a critical junction that would determine her future during the next time especially the issue of the welfare state. It was expected that it would help alleviate the problem of income inequality and poverty that exists in Thailand. Hopefully welfare state may be an answer that will bring harmony of different parts of the country. The important question was that: “Is Thailand ready to step into a welfare state?” In this banker’s opinion, Thailand was not ready to provide full welfare service to the public for free at present, even in the next 20-30 years. This opinion seems to disagree with the statement of former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva a month before that in the next six years Thailand would be a welfare state (Political News, Naewna, 2010)<sup>๓๒</sup>. His aim to make the welfare state free throughout life would be to cut the use of populist campaigning. On August 6, 2010 he emphasized while presiding over the opening ceremony of the Annual Meeting of The National Economic and Social Development Board that at the end of 2016 the government must set a target of the Thai welfare state system. His thinking was that wherever the Thai people were born or lived, they would enjoy the basic guarantee of life from birth to

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<sup>๓๑</sup> Phutrakul,k. (2010). “Welfare state and the future of the Thai economy”. Retrieved from <http://www.bangkokbiznews.com>. Posted on 05-07-2010 15:32. Retrieved 25-04-2011 12:13.

<sup>๓๒</sup> Political News,Naewna (2010). Abhisit explained “making the welfare state free throughout life in order to cut the use of populist campaigning” 30-06-2010. Retrieved from <http://www.Rut9.com/s/nud/931936.30-06-2010 19:36> “Populism.” En.wikipedia.org/wiki/populism. Retrieved 07-09-2011 11:37.

death (Manakoangtre chip, 2010)<sup>๓๓</sup>. His had intention to use a new system to transcend Thai politics from populist policies of the Thai Rak Thai Party. His had intention to use a new system to transcend Thai politics from populist policies of Thai Rak Thai Party (Prachachat, 2010)<sup>๓๔</sup>.

The message above has given rise to a controversial debate in the context of both agreement and disagreement. Especially, one of the former Deputy Prime Ministers from his party (Democrat) announced against that Thailand could not be a welfare state but a welfare society (INN News, 2011)<sup>๓๕</sup>. He reasoned that Thailand had a population of 62 million, but taxed only 6 million people. In fact, he had been trying to implement further Thaksin Shinawatra's Village Fund into a social welfare of community which is a component of the concept of a welfare society (News desk for the community, 2010)<sup>๓๖</sup>. As a matter of fact, the Village Fund and other policies of Thai Rak Thai Party (Pheu Thai Party at present) were severely criticized by the Democrat Party and academic partners that they were hidden by the populist ideology. Some have even predicted that such populist policies would cause Thailand a collapse in the same way as Argentina (Boonma, 2010)<sup>๓๗</sup> (Boonma, 2011)<sup>๓๘</sup>. However, when the issue of good or bad between populism

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<sup>๓๓</sup> Manaroangtre chip.V. (2010). "The broken glass:In the next six years Thailand will be a welfare state". Retrieved from <http://corehoononline.com/index.php/2011-03-14-05-46-05/2011-03-14-05-47-26/5890-2010-08-09-15-32-46>.

<sup>๓๔</sup> Prachachat (2010). "P.Ch.P.drive-3-way reform system of Anand-Abhisit-Korn" from populism to welfare state. Retrieved from [http://www.prachachat.net/view\\_news.php?newsid=02po10115075388.sectionid=0202&day=2010-07-15](http://www.prachachat.net/view_news.php?newsid=02po10115075388.sectionid=0202&day=2010-07-15). Retrieved 15-06-2010.

<sup>๓๕</sup> INN News. (2011). "Triroang said Thailand was not a welfare state". Retrieved from <http://www.showthep.com/shoe-131632>. Retrieved 07-08-2011 16:18.

<sup>๓๖</sup> News Desk for the Community (2010). "Recovery of Thaksin's Village Fund as a base for Abhisit's community welfare". 12-07-2010. Retrieved from <http://www.isranews.org/community-news/สรุป-สารคดีข่าว/item/1146-2010-07-23-13-4>. Retrieved 11-09-2011.

<sup>๓๗</sup> Boonma, S. (2010). "Populist or non populist, equally falling into a puddle". Posted by admin in economics on 22-07-2010. Retrieved from [www.sarut-homesite.net/ประชาชนนิยมหรือไม่ประชาชนนิยม/](http://www.sarut-homesite.net/ประชาชนนิยมหรือไม่ประชาชนนิยม/) Retrieved 20-07-2011.

and welfare state is raised in the public debate, one senior professor of economics says that whether populism is good or not based on the intent of the policy makers and institutional requirements for the policies. In his view, the populist policies of Thaksin Shinawatra government can be both populist as a political strategy and social welfare as an economic strategy (FTA Watch, 2011)<sup>๓๔</sup>.

In fact, such a wishful statement towards a better state is not new in Thailand. The search for measures to reduce economic disparity and social inequality has been proposed and practiced as public policies along the Thai historical course of public administration and political development since 1932. Until today, the Thai people have the opportunity to recognize and benefit from social welfare and populist policies in various ways. Especially, after Thai Rak Thai Party won election in 2001 and ran government for the full term of four years. Its populist policies have won the hearts of the grassroots in the North and Northeast. The party is to win the election every time including even the election on July 3 this year despite campaigning by it's political opponents overly populist policies.

The political phenomenon that the Thai people have faced are the fact that political parties have proposed various innovative policies in order to win the election and form government. This is why many Thai people face a crossroads, at least three crossroads. This is a rationale of the study which aims at investigating, analyzing, and finding which road is appropriate and feasible to the country. In fact this article is a continuation of the research on the study of readiness and feasibility of the welfare state approach for Thailand.

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<sup>๓๔</sup> Boonma, S. (2011). "Expanding the definition of a populism (the end)". Retrieved from [www.bangkokbiznews.com/home/detail/politics/opinion/sawai/2011](http://www.bangkokbiznews.com/home/detail/politics/opinion/sawai/2011) 03:00.

<sup>๓๕</sup> FTA watch. (2011). "‘Rangsan’ criticized Thai society creating myths, misunderstanding that welfare state good but populism bad". Retrieved from [www.flawatch.org/all/news/19429](http://www.flawatch.org/all/news/19429). Retrieved 19-07-2011 15:52.

The article is the result of qualitative research, using data mainly from various documents from webpages. The study employs one of the oldest methods, that is, analytic induction with dialectical logic.

This article has a logic in presentation of contents and findings as follows. Firstly, what are the welfare state, welfare society, and populism, in the context of principles and practices, and political ideology ? Secondly, the paper presents the results of the analysis and interpretation of phenomenon of political conditions that led to a three-junction of public choices for Thailand. Thirdly, the article concludes which path the country should walk.

### **Welfare State, Welfare Society, and Populism: Principle and Practices and Political Ideology**

#### **What is the welfare state?**

Esping-Andersen categorized three different types of welfare state in the 1990 book "The Three World of Welfare Capitalism". The Three different types as noted by Wikipedia ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/welfare-capitalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/welfare-capitalism)) are the "Social Democratic" Model, as exemplified by the Scandinavian countries and particularly Sweden; the "Liberal" Model, often related to the U.S.A., Canada, Australia and increasingly the United Kingdom; and thirdly, the "Conservative" Model, which is indicative of Germany, as well as France, Austria, and Italy.

This study would focus on the "Social Democratic" Model, especially Sweden for three reasons. The first, one famous columnist offered the opinion two years ago that Thailand should be a welfare state like Sweden. He reasoned that because Thailand and Sweden have the same political system. That is a democracy with king as head of state or constitutional monarchy. The second reason is that the Thai government's Social Security office of the Ministry of Labour has publicized the official publications concerning the move to the welfare state in Thailand on the basis of the Swedish model (Social Security



office of the Ministry of Labour, 2007)<sup>๔๐</sup>. Finally, There has been a radical movement to demand change from status quo by transforming Thailand into a welfare state built on the concept of social democracy like Sweden (Thai Red Sweden, 2011)<sup>๔๑</sup>. This movement calls themselves the Red Quadrant for the Democratic Republic and the Welfare State. It is a group of Thai people in Europe who want to see Thailand as a country with real democracy, right, freedom, and equality.

Then, what is a welfare state based on social democratic ideology or Swedish model ? Welfare state is a general concept defined (en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Welfare.state) as a "concept of government in which the state plays a key role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social well-being of its citizens. It is based on the principles of equality of opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth, and public responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life."

Modern welfare states include countries such as Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland which employ a system known as the Nordic model (ibid). The modern welfare state involves a direct transfer of funds from the state, to the services provided (i.e.healthcare, education ) as well as directly to individuals. The welfare state is funded through redistributionist taxation (ibid).

It is understood that "social welfare in Sweden is made up of several organizations and systems dealing with welfare. It is mostly funded by taxes, and executed by the public sector on all levels of government as well as private organizations. It can be separate into three parts falling under the responsibility of Ministry of Health and Social Affairs; education, under the responsibility of the Ministry of

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<sup>๔๐</sup> Social Security office, the Ministry of Labour. (2007). **Thailand's move towards a welfare state.**

<sup>๔๑</sup> Thai Red Sweden (2011). **"Welfare state and reality in Thailand."** Retrieved from [www.Thairedsweden.com/2011/06/blog-post-06.html](http://www.Thairedsweden.com/2011/06/blog-post-06.html). Retrieved 12-09-2011. 18:22.

Education and Research and Labor market, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Employment" ("Regeringskansliet med departementen" (in Swedish)).

The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs is responsible for social welfare. This is defined as financial security in the case of illness, old age and for the family; social service; health care; promotion of health and children rights; individual help for persons with disabilities and coordination of the national disability policies ("Socialdepartementets ansvarsområden").

Sweden's entire population has equal access to the public health care services. The Swedish health care system is publicly-funded and run by the county councils. The health care system in Sweden is financed primarily through taxes levied by county councils and municipalities. The health care providers of the public system are generally owned by the county councils, although the managing of the hospitals are often done by private companies after a public tender.

However, the welfare state, which had been in preparation together with the various elements needed to support it since the nineteenth century, was formed in earnest after The Second World War; at one time it was the ideal model of developed capitalist countries that aimed at a mixed economy in their rivalry with socialist countries (Fujimura, 2000)<sup>๔๖</sup>. Infact, the welfare state and its vicissitudes may well have been a product of the twentieth century. With the arrival of the twenty-first century, it may be said that the welfare state stands at a crossroads (ibid). Starting in the second half of the 1970s, however, when various countries experienced low economic growth, the welfare state received widespread criticism (the crisis of the welfare state) and the concept of the ideal model underwent change (ibid). One revision was provided by the change hypothesis "from the welfare state to the welfare society" (ibid). Taking its place is the concept propounding the harmonious transition from a welfare state centered on central and local

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<sup>๔๖</sup> Fujimura, M. (2000). **The welfare state, the middle class, and the welfare society.**

Review of Population and Social Policy,(9), 1-23. doi : [www.ipss.go.jp/publication/e/R-S-p/NO9\\_/R-s-P/No9\\_P1.pdf](http://www.ipss.go.jp/publication/e/R-S-p/NO9_/R-s-P/No9_P1.pdf). Retrieved 02-09-2011.

governments to a welfare society centered on local communities and nonprofit organizations (ibid).

### What is the welfare society ?

In Fujimura's view (2000), a welfare society is a society where people are at the center of management through local communities and nonprofit organizations. In the case of Japan, the welfare society and the welfare state are regarded as being antithetical in terms of the people who run them. While the welfare state is regarded to place great importance to helping the poverty -level and low income group, the welfare society is giving rise to the idea of the welfare state for the middle class. The middle class, therefore, is the backbone of welfare society.

For any other view, Gordon and Spiker (1999) consider welfare society as not social welfare and significantly different from the welfare state. In general, the welfare state is a state that provides a wide range of benefits, but not by the state unilaterally. Thus, the welfare society means a society having many forms of welfare handled by multiple institutions and being independent of each other. Each institution creates welfares on the basis of competence and appropriateness of such an institution.

In the United States and England during 1980s-1990s neo-liberalism often criticized (Wann, 1998)<sup>๔๓</sup> that the welfare policies not only damaged the economy , but not also promoted the potential of people. This was because people were waiting for assistance from the welfare system. It resulted in state budget wastage and did not cause any increase in productivity. The economic was finally stagnant. The neo-liberalism considered that we should reduce the welfare state and increasingly promote the public welfare system on the basis of self-reliance and mutual aid. Overall, it was an attempt to

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<sup>๔๓</sup> Wann, M. (1998). **"Building social capital"** in Jane Franklin (ed). Social Policy and Social Justice. Oxford : Polity Press, PP. 154-165. Cited in Jaturoang Boonyarattanasoonthorn. Welfare state and welfare so ciety : a theoretical perspective. Retrieved from <http://swhcu.net/km/mk-articles/sw-km/185-welfare-state.html>. Retrieved 28-04-2011 11:20.

restore the friendly society in the 18-19 centuries by referring to the reasons of reducing the burden on the government, promoting the potential of individuals and communities, and being independent of management.

### **What is the populism ?**

Populism is in general defined either as an ideology, or as a political philosophy, or a type of discourse, i.e., of sociopolitical thought that compares "the people" against "the elite", and urges social and political system change, or a type of political mobilization that is essentially devoid of theory (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Populism).

However, the word "populism" has been defined in various contexts. For the case of Thailand, it is interesting to explore the opinions of those who look at Thai populism from both outside and inside the country. Dyer (2008) wrote that Thaksin Shinawatra was shaping up to be the Juan Peron of Thailand and he used his power to shift wealth and power systematically from the rich to the poor. By making decisive changes in government spending patterns, the poor loved him for it. Dyer created the image of Thaksin as symbol of a populism by clarifying that: "Thaksin was a populist who won the support of the poor by promising them debt relief, cheap loans, improved health care, and other services that were not previously part of the currency of Thai politics.

With the same linear perspective, Weiss (2007) pointed out the conflict-oriented ideology that had occurred. By championing huge infrastructure projects, debt relief and easy loans for rural villagers, "Thaksinomics" directly challenged King Bhumibol's "Sufficiency Economy" philosophy, a sort of Buddhist economics that espouses self-sufficiency and moderation. Moreover, Weiss accused Thaksin of being a classic populist who shamelessly exploited social, economic and class inequalities to win three elections and tighten his iron-fisted rules. But these fissures existed long before Thaksin and, if ignored, he guaranteed that Thailand, like other polarized societies, would remain easy prey (to be taken advantage of) for populist authoritarians.

The above pessimistically linear view from outside has been jointly reinforced by specific economists inside the country. A beautiful example is Sawai Boonma, who has criticized Thaksin's populist policies continually for almost a decade. He compares the

implications of populist policies in Thailand to be the same as those employed in Latin America, especially Argentina. After the populist politicians gained power through democratic process, they started spending the budget to carry on measures and policies to make them and the government popular. Such an action had been pursued continuously until the people became chronically addicted. This was an early sign that would bring society into bankruptcy. Boonma indicates that the process leading to the collapse started when the government spending was over revenues. The reserve was used until exhausted, and then they had to borrow money from abroad. When they could not borrow any more, they continued to print banknotes in a massive volume which led to a high level of inflation. When the value of money was reduced to almost no value, and Argentina was lack of ability to repay the debt, bankruptcy eventually occurred. The result took 40 years from the day that started populism.

However, although pessimistic the Thai populism has been painted to look, some Thai scholars have suggested quite sympathetic meaning. Rangarn Thanapornpunt (FTA Watch, 2011) has criticized that Thai society creates myth on misunderstanding about "welfare state being a good thing" but "populism being a bad one". He says that the definition of the welfare state is quite clear, but populism is still vague. However, populism is not completely different from the welfare state because there is some overlap. In his opinion, populism can be considered both in terms of economic policy and political strategy. So whoever is to run the populist policies has to answer for which target population group they are responded and what happiness the people can get. Nonetheless, when the issue of good or bad between welfare state and populism is raised in the public debate, he says that whether populism is good or bad depending on the intent of the policy makers and institutional requirements for the policies, as well as good governance in policy management, and clarification of funding sources. In sum, the populist policies will have to increase happiness to the people in significant proportion of quantitative and qualitative importance.

## Results of the Analysis and Interpretation of Political Phenomenon : A Three Crossroads for Public Choice in Thailand

The study comes up with the following five findings of wishes, opinions, and facts.

### Group one : The dream of the Swedish welfare state

The first group has a dream and desire to change Thailand into a full welfare state like Sweden with regard to the basis of facts. This is usually based on an activist who has moved to Sweden for a long period of time (Pornchoakchai, 2009)<sup>๔๔</sup>. The group realizes that the level of economic and political development in Thailand can not be compared to that of Sweden. The informant who has experienced with the Swedish welfare state explains that Sweden could institutionalize her dream due to the following factors. Firstly, the government implements strictly progressive taxation. Personal income tax is from 30 to 60 percent, while value added tax is around 25 percent. Moreover, the Swedish government collects the property and inheritance taxes at the progressive rate. Secondly, there is a strict action against the corruption and in a timely manner. Thirdly, Sweden has a strong and stable political system. The social Democratic Party won the election every three years and could administer continuously for 44 years. With such political stability and maintenance of an uncompromising ideology including also a strong labor union, this would allow the government to create a good social welfare system. Fourthly, people are well educated with the knowledge and awareness to obey the laws. The above factors could affect the success of the establishment of welfare state motion and allow the development of society in the way forward. But for the case of Thailand, it seems that these factors have not yet occurred.

In parallel with the above opinion, it has currently emerged the political movement to campaign and call for change in Thailand. This group composes of Thai

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<sup>๔๔</sup> Pornchoakchai, S. (2009). "Talk about a welfare state with Boonsong Chalethorn".

Retrieved from <http://www.vcharkarn.com/vcafe/162527>. Posted on 04-03-2009 11:34. Retrieved 06-05-2011 13:09.

people living in Europe. They want to see Thailand as a country with real democracy, real rights and freedom, and equality. They want the welfare state created under the concept of social democracy. In their view (Thai Red Sweden, 2011)<sup>๔๔</sup>, Thailand is ready to become a welfare state because she is classified in the mid-level developed countries. Efforts to create a welfare state in the past since 1932, the main obstacle is not a feasibility or infeasibility in economic sense, but it is a matter of politics. In sum, the most important thing in creating a welfare state in Thailand is a matter of political and social factors, not technical issues.

### **Group two : Technical infeasibility of the Thai welfare state**

The second group believes that the full welfare state is going to be infeasible for Thailand in the short run based on various technically quantitative measurements. The important question of this group is : "Is Thailand ready to step into a welfare state ?" One representative of this group said Thailand is still not in a position to provide public services for free for the moment in the following reasons (Phutrakul, 2010). Firstly, the countries that could create the welfare state have a very high proportion of revenue per GDP which is about 40-50 percent. This is because the majority of the population is an important taxes base. But in the case of Thailand at present, the Thai government still cannot fully collect tax because there are only six million people from more than 60 million people who are willing to pay. The government's total revenue is only about 17 percent of GDP. It would be difficult to let only 10 percent of people to pay taxes for services to another 90 percent.

Secondly, the welfare state countries have developed its own economy to the much level. The need for the development of necessary infrastructure to help facilitate the investment of the private sector is no longer needed. But for Thailand, there is still need to develop many infrastructures to benefit country's development and private investment, as well as to complete with neighboring countries.

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<sup>๔๔</sup> Thai Red Sweden (2011). "Welfare state and reality in Thailand." Retrieved from [www.Thairedsweden.com/2011/06/blog-post-06.html](http://www.Thairedsweden.com/2011/06/blog-post-06.html). Retrieved 12-09-2011 18:22.

With the above two limitations, any political party or group that wishes to make a full welfare state would be limited in any creative medium.

### **Group three : Welfare society proposal to transcend populism**

The third group proposes that welfare society would be appropriate to the country over the welfare state. The proposal received strong support of former Deputy Prime Minister Trirong Suwankiri of the Democrat Party who announced with confidence that Thailand could not be a welfare but a welfare society (INN News, 2011)<sup>๔๖</sup>. In his opinion, due to constraints on the revenue of the state and others, the government should use exiting mechanism such as "Village Fund" of the Thaksin Shinawatra government to develop a social welfare. He believed that the form of social welfare society would create awareness of Thai people to mutually think and mutually do without waiting for help from the government.

In fact an attempt to transcend populism with welfare society concept emerged and crystalized a few years earlier (Phusikhaew and Pornpongchotiwit, 2011). The National Economic and Social Advisory Council (NESAC) by the Income Distribution Working Group had submitted the proposal regarding the income distribution with the creation of welfare society to the Cabinet on September 11, 2008. Such a proposal has been elevated to a national agenda at a later time by targeting the people to receive universal welfare in 2017.

What is a welfare society concept in the Thai sense? Welfare society is defined in this institutional and operational context as the synergies from the various sectors of society to create social welfare in many forms. It is managed by a variety of institutions and cooperation of many parties to participate extensively in the production of welfare. It covers all of the groups, with each model and each institution being independent of each other.

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<sup>๔๖</sup> INN News. (2011). "Trirong said Thailand was not a welfare state". Retrieved from <http://www.showthep.com/shoe-131632>. Retrieved 07-08-2011 16:18.



What are the institutional approaches for creating welfare society? Firstly, the government needs to formulate a welfare society as a national agenda. Secondly, there must be a creation of welfare society partners from various sectors of society into 3 forms in the following. **The first one** is the public welfare which consists of three parts. Part one is the social services which includes education, health, housing services, and basic service facilities. The second part is social insurance composing of health insurance and disaster relief, disability insurance, maternity insurance, welfare of children, old age insurance, life insurance, and unemployment insurance. The third part is social assistance providing assistance to people who live in condition unable to help themselves or falling into a state of disaster. **The second one** is the welfare of the private sector or corporate welfare. Private sector can provide welfare to their employees through cooperation with the government such as extending the protection of all workers universal social security and welfare of workers in other characteristics. **The third one** is the welfare of the community. The state encourages and supports projects that are mutually formulated by communities. There are all three models as follows. The first model is to expand welfare on the resource and cultural bases extensively by means of the broad-based participation from the communities, households, and local authorities. One example is the establishment of savings groups for the welfare of the community. The second model is to support informal labor institutions. The last model is to support the budget in order to promote community welfare to the public sector in the form of groups, community organizations, NGOs, and foundations, to host the management of the Community Welfare Fund.

From the opinions and recommendations regarding the distribution of income by creating a welfare society, Secretariat of the Cabinet has authorized the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security to be the lead agency to coordinate with 16 relevant ministries and agencies. One tool that the government can develop further once is the promotion of Social Welfare Fund that can support the social welfare by the state, communities, and private sector.

#### Group four : The quest for meaning but doubts over the implementation of populism

The fourth group is a group trying to seek the meaning of populist policies of Pheu Thai Party. The group did not agree with the populist policies of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. It also severely criticized that such policies would cause Thailand a collapse in the same way as Argentina. But when the election on July 3 this year appeared that the Pheu Thai Party won a landslide. Scholars and activists of both right and left wings held a seminar on the topic of "Populism and Civil Rights in Thailand", on 14 July this year. The objective was to find out that populist policies of the victorious Party providing what rights to Thai society. They would use the seminar's findings in analysis, surveillance, and monitoring of the implementation of such policies of the new government (Public Communication Sub committee for Human Rights, National Human Rights Commission, 2011). It should be interesting to study the opinions of the scholars and activists who were the discussion speakers. The first speaker presented the definition of populism found mainly on the websites as the public discourse and rhetoric of politicians used in the campaign that reflected the needs of the people. However, we must consider what people need or want. Analysis of Thaksin's populist ideas shows that it is intended to make people at the grassroots level have occupations. But the easy loans to buy a first home and a first car by lowering taxes of the Pheu Thai Party are to buy middle class people. Everthough the politicians know that it will have a negative economic impact, but only to win Thai middle class people, they continue to pursue such policies. The second speaker raised the question whether or not populism benefits the public. In his opinion the public should have the right to receive care from the state. In principle, all states are required is provide welfare for their citizens. All states must know what their people need and take what they learn to formulate relevant policies. That is populist and a good populism is to give the public more. In addition to this, This speaker said That populist policies can resolve immediate problems at a certain level. For determining whether a proposed policy is a true populist or not, it can be monitored by

a change in a government that the policy still exists or not. If it still persists, it means that people need.

The last panelist defined populism as an adherence to the fundamental interests of the people. But the implementation of the populist policies of political parties is only infeasible if there is no budget. Today populism in Thailand is to allow the people to get benefits for free without taking into account the needs of the citizens to do. In his opinion, Thailand's populist policies are just the specific problem resolutions, but people are punished without knowing it. For example, the minimum wage hike makes higher prices.

#### **The last group : Strong belief in and support of populism**

The last group is a group that strongly believes in and supports populist policies of Thai Rak Thai Party and currently Phue Thai Party. The group has tried to present empirical data to prove the success of the populist policies under the administration of the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra since 2001 (Suparnaphesuch, 2011)<sup>๔๗</sup>. A beautiful example is a one million baht (approximately 33,333.33 U.S.\$) Village Fund which is criticized as easy loan. The Director of the Office of the National Village and Urban Community Fund has revealed the Fund's results and performance in the following. In 2008, report on the Fund of 80,000 million baht managed by the villagers still fully remains in the hands of the people. It has not gone away as criticized by the opponents. The interest has grown more than 30,000 million baht. All this interest has been brought to join the Fund the amount of 5,370 million baht, a saving of 15,766 million baht, a share of 1,876 million baht, deposits of 1,758 million baht, currency hedging of 1,676 million baht, average pay back to borrowers of 1,597 million baht, money for management of 2,441 million baht, and funds allocated for welfare and public

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<sup>๔๗</sup> Suparnaphesuch, V. (2011). "We...believe in Phue Thai's policies rather than anything else". Retrieved from [vattavan.com/detail.pkp?cont\\_id=311](http://vattavan.com/detail.pkp?cont_id=311). Posted on 07-08-2011. Retrieved 07-08-2011.

benefits of 2,950 million baht. In addition, bad debt or non-performing loan is only 0.5 percent.

He also reported, today, many Village Funds have been upgraded to the level of Community Financial Institution. It means many strong Funds which locate close together and have consensus to integrate their Funds together into a community financial institution. There are currently 1,149 community financial institutions nationwide. Many are very successful. This is not only a testament to the skillful management of the grassroots as well, but it also shows that common people possess high discipline and integrity. When borrowing to use or to invest, they try to repay debt. All these show that the grassroots have moved beyond insulting and underestimating words of the middle class and aristocracy totally.

It is also surprising to note the comments of the opposition politician and technocrat. The first is that the former Governor of the Bank of Thailand and former Deputy Prime Minister of Economic Affairs has said “Thaksin’s Village Fund” would be the best grass-roots political and economic model in the world because of the fact that people of all villages have access to capital (News Desk for Community,2010). But it must be driven to the end from only a political campaign. In conjunction with the above is the former Deputy Prime Minister of Economic Affairs of the Democrat Party and also former Chairman of the National Village and Urban Community Fund. What he and the previous government were in progress was the use of existing mechanisms, that was the “Village Fund” of The Thaksin Shinawatra era to develop the welfare society. So he ordered the establishment of a subcommittee to push for social welfare in the community by connecting the previous Village Fund. The money that people repaid to the Fund would be partly reduced towards the Welfare Fund for the welfare system in the community, such as medical expense, public benefits and so on.

Amid one-dimensional criticism of the populist policies of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra at present, one columnist (Kumpun Yoak, 2011)<sup>๔๘</sup> presents his multi-dimensional arguments in the following. In political perspective, this is to sow the populist policies to appease the base of 15 million voters who voted for the Phue Thai Party. Meanwhile, in the economic perspective, it is pumping money into the system to achieve liquidity. One other aspect is social. Part of the populist policies is to distribute the resources of the country, especially the public budget, to middle-level people and the grassroots level who do not have access to the resources of the country equally before, instead of retaining the use of the country's money only the top level.

### Conclusion

The above five findings can be summarized that Thailand is in a state of the crossroads for public choice among the welfare state, welfare society, and populism. Thailand is at present a society interwoven with conflicting ideologies and class interests. Each model seems to be idealistic in its own sake. By looking at what has happened in reality, there is not any model that is able to last long enough to avoid unfortunate disturbances from outside and inside. Recent historical evidence suggests that even the strong welfare states cannot maintain their status go when confronted with the economic crisis. In the case of the poor populist states, if the governments are incapable of earning revenues, they must suffer from the tremendous burden on public debts. The welfare society model remains short-lived and cannot prove the success or failure of it now.

Seemingly, Thailand is at the moment not able to choose any one particular path, provided that any political party between Phue Thai Party and Democrat Party be able to dominate the political power long enough to institutionalize their policies. The form of a welfare state continues to be an impossible dream as long as the tax base is small, aristocracy and landlords are not willing to pay property and inheritance taxes, and yet there is no strong political party that uncompromisingly adheres to social

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<sup>๔๘</sup> Kumpun Yoak. (2011). “**Just give access to...**” 23-09-2011. Retrieved from [www.thairath.co.th/column/pol/kaablook/](http://www.thairath.co.th/column/pol/kaablook/). retrieved 20-09-2011 09:24.

democratic ideology. Welfare society model may be possible if the Democrat Party wins the election and runs the government for full term. Similarly, the Phue Thai Party would implement its populist policies in order to comply with the campaign, but it will succeed or not depending upon the ability of the government to provide adequate revenues and to institutionalize the populist policies into economic strategies that is beneficial to create the economic immunity for various targets and for the economy as a whole.

However, whichever road Thailand would be moved to, she still needs to carry out several important measures such as reform of tax collection and base , legislation to levy property and inheritance taxes, prevention and suppression of corruption, and so on. More importantly, the Thai government must play a role as a state where justice, non discrimination, single standard treatment to the citizens, mercy and integrity can be realized.



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