

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Thailand and Myanmar are the members of ASEAN. Both also have the same experience in terms of political condition, and the military involvement in politics and the role of military become an important factor in terms of politics and directness of life of people in those countries (Hamish, 2013).

In Thailand, the existence of military has become an important factor in Thai political system. 1932 was the year when Thailand shifted from absolute monarchy regime to constitutional monarchy as a more democratic regime and at the same time the junta military launched their role in politics. Around 1932 until 1987, Thailand experienced thirteen constitutions, sixteen coups, and thirteen general elections (Sundarmani, 1999). The coups are not the new phenomena in Thailand. There is an explanation from Basis Susilo about Thailand coups. They happened during 75 years since the changing of absolute monarchy and was replaced by constitutional monarchy from 1932 until now. There have been several commutations of the prime minister and coups which happened in Thailand. Therefore, military acts as major actors in Thailand political system.

Comparing to the Thailand, in Myanmar, general Aung San was together with Thakin Nu to lead the military since 1936 in the era of colonialism. In 1945, General Aung San and his army fought for independence of Burma by joining the British side. In the same time Anti-Fascist People Freedom League (AFPFL) was created by General Aung San and his ally. Since then, Burmese is under the control of the military actors. After General Aung San was killed by gunmen in July 1947, the other general who came from military continued the military power in Burmese political system and AFPFL. In 1948, Myanmar/Burma gained the legal sovereignty as an independent country(Kelly, 2005). Furthermore, from 1962-1988 military junta took control over the government and dominated the executive body and Ne Win was appointed as the leader. Under military regime, Myanmar had the authoritarian government that controlled everything within a country of Burma/Myanmar like politics, economic and so on. Since 1962 until recent era military junta has dominated the government in Myanmar.

Hence, both countries are still in the political transition. It means that both are categorized as the countries which face a transition from authoritarian regimes to democratic system. The political condition there remains uncertain. 1932 is the historical phenomenon for Thai people because at that time Thailand was introduced to democracy which was the first step of democratization process. Like what happened in Thailand in 1932, Myanmar experienced the same phenomenon in 1988. At that time, Aung Saan Su Kyi as the leader of National League for Democracy introduced and promoted the democracy idea in Myanmar political

system (Sundarmani, 1999). In addition, the military take controls the main political power along with the national politics (Kaelola, 2009). This undergraduate thesis would seek to explain and analyze the involvement of military into democratization process in Thailand and Myanmar, and will also explain the differences and the similarities of military involvement in politics in both countries.

B. Research Question

What are the similarities and the differences between Thailand and Myanmar military role in politics?

C. Theoretical Framework

To answer the research question above, I will use the comparative political theory by Gabriel Almond and the concept of military professionalism by Samuel P. Huntington. These theories and concepts are the best in describing and analyzing this case and in the end will answer the question.

1) Military Professionalism

Samuel Huntington observed that civil military relations have been characterized by a high recognition of military professionalism, the effective subordination of military to political leaders, civil leader, recognition and approval

of the political leaders on the role of civil leader and military authority, and the minimization of the role of military intervention in politics. The civil-military relationship has been characterized by a high degree of military professionalism, effective military subordination to civilian leaders, recognition by civilian leadership of the military's role and competence, and minimization of the political role of the military (Huntington S. P., 1996).

Huntington analyzed that there are 3 aspects considered in a professional military:

1. The first aspect is *Expertise*. It is someone has the knowledge and skills in specific areas (knowledge gained from educational institutions and skills gained from professional institutions), in other words professionals obtained through education and experience.
2. The second is *Social Responsibility* to protect society and the state.
3. The Third is *Group / Institution*, which is the awareness and loyalty of the military members that they are members of a group / institution.

The organizational control of the military professionalism is done in two stages. First, colleagues observe adhesiveness among the officers as professionals and members of a social group. This group will always observe whether the behavior of military members, both personal behavior as well as professionals, is in accordance with the established standards. Second, external control is a hierarchy of command. Behavior and professional competence are judged by military

member's obedience to orders from superiors. Thus it is clear that the higher the level of expertise, the higher level of the military professionalism. In another sense, according to Huntington, the higher the level of military professionalism should be the more distant it is from politics. Professional military must always be ready to implement political decisions made by politicians who have civil and political legitimacy.

2) *Politics Definition*

According to Laswell (1989), politics defined as Who gets what, when and how. Politics is about the way to determine without the help of violence, who got the power and resources in the community and how they are gotten. Meanwhile, power is an ability to make other people legitimate of what you want to do. It could be defined as government job, tax revenue, legislation which helps you get your direction, or public policy that will give you advantages. Hence, Laswell explains that politics is a mean to get what you want by using the power that could influence others. Furthermore, politics could become the instrument to compromise and to create some cooperation, discussion and debate. For example, the actors of politics could become the leader of the organization who has some purpose from the existence. It is about the process to organize our collective life in some kind of social order. This is also about getting our own way to get the resources, because politics is about power (Laswell, 1989).

3) *Concept of Praetorianism*

In the *Military and Politics in Modern Times*, Perlmutter defines praetorianism as the system of politics which shows the existence of military which enters inside political arena to intervene the politics and potentially could dominate the political system within a state. The military is an institution that is categorized as a symbol of state sovereignty, promotes national power and values of the state. They maximize the power, strength, material resources and prestige. Therefore, the military can easily enter and participate in political environment by using guns and other army instrument to show the strength.

Regarding the situation of a state that does not have a good government, it means that the civilian government failed to run the system like a weak state. Hence, the executive body seems to have less power to govern any substance within a state such as military, organization and people's interest. Therefore, it cannot fulfill the national interest nor can it make the state wealthy. Then, military take a step to fix such kind of problem and to find a solution by being involved into political arena and start to be a part of government or even directly lead a government system. For Perlmutter, praetorianism explains about the unnatural power promoted by the military into political issue, because only civil rule is considered as natural. However, praetorianism is the opposite of the professionalism

idea which argues the military as an independent institution and is separated from the political arena (Gimbel, 1978).

"the penetration of the officer corps, either collectively or as Individuals, into various institutional fields, such as economic enterprises education and training of civilian manpower, fulfilling civilian administrative functions, and engaging in different forms of power politics" (Stephanie Lawson, 1995:3,4)

It happens in Thailand and Myanmar, that the military get involved in political arena and become an executive power. In Thailand, the military have become a part of political system. They have influence in the democratization process in Thailand by manipulating and influencing political development. There is an action taken by military side when they have intervened in politics, or when the military staged a coup d'etat in 1932, and when they shifted from monarchy absolute to monarchy constitutional. At that time, they claimed themselves as the institutions which had a mandate to preserve political issue and to defend the constitution and nation. It is the way of military to show the power. Similarly, in Myanmar military take a part in political arena. In 1936, the general from military side became a leader of a state and became a hero of a state to defeat the colonizer (Gimbel, 1978). Moreover, Anti-Fascist People Freedom League (AFPFL) was created by General Aung San and his ally. Since then, Burmese is under the control of the military actors.

4) *Concept of Democratic Transition*

The concept of democratic transition also needs to be discussed in order to complete the explanation of this under graduate thesis. According to Jeff Haynes in his book “ *Democracy in The Developing World*”, democratic transition is the period of the changing process from authoritarian system to a more open system with government election. This phase is also known as the democratization process, which might take a long time or a short time. Whatever the duration that needs to be taken, the transition typically creates, or helps speed up a dynamic change as a process of centering the interaction among political actors. Some scholars like Pridham and Vanhanen explain that the transition is a stage of regime change from non-democratic which starts to collapse. Therefore, it is leading to a situation when the democratic structure with new constitution becomes the behavior and is claimed as norms (Haynes, 2004). In sum, there are some characteristics of transition of democratic:

- a) Intense political uncertainty
- b) Struggle between competing political forces over the rules of the political game, and the spoils of victory and its attendant resources.
- c) The last is, the nature of political competition.

Those all points are the characteristics of transition of politics from authoritarian into democratic. The change of political system cannot be defined easily, because there are many steps that should be noted as the process of the

transition of politics particularly from authoritarian to democratic one. Basically, this process will involve the role of political agency such as political parties, parties and civil societies. Those actors have significant impacts on political outcomes (Bratton and Van de Walle). Moreover, Huntington identifies four modes of democratic transition or political transition which is explained below.

First, transformation is the situation when transition is initiated by the government actors. It happens, this happened when the authoritarian regime takes an action to promote the political change without any influence from other political agency as the opposition like civil society. Hence it is clearly the regime idea. Second, transplacement is the mode of transition that is taken by authoritarian elite and civilian elite. Larry Diamond argues that the main point of transition is a commitment to be democratic and to run the process of government freedom as the part of strategy. Moreover, the key success of this process is that reformers in the authoritarian regime and moderates as the pro-democracy actors have made a deal to build the new constitution system. Third, replacement is the situation of political transition when the previous government or the government in a duty is unable to lead the politics and to resolve it. This situation happens while the authoritarian government regimes may stand down by mass mobilization as an action of civil society and other political agencies (Haynes, 2004).

This phenomenon already occurred in some Asian countries such as in Thailand and Indonesia. Like in Thailand, the political change occurred in 1932

when the absolute monarchy was replaced by the constitutional monarchy. At that time, there is a considerable situation or a big issue that must be faced during the transition. The political institution will not easily change without any process and steps.

a. Theory of Comparative Politics

Gabriel A Almond proposes three concepts in analyzing and comparing the political system. Those three concepts are system, structure, and function (Almond, 1989).

i. System

System can be interpreted as an ecological concept that shows the process of interaction between the specific organ with the political community or the environment such as the aspirations of the people who voice political demands. Every organ within the system influences each other in order to promote one idea and goals so that it can influence the policy-making process. Moreover it is a state or government agencies. There is a figure of system that can be used as the media of explanation about environment; social and economic condition either domestic or international factors that exist within a system.

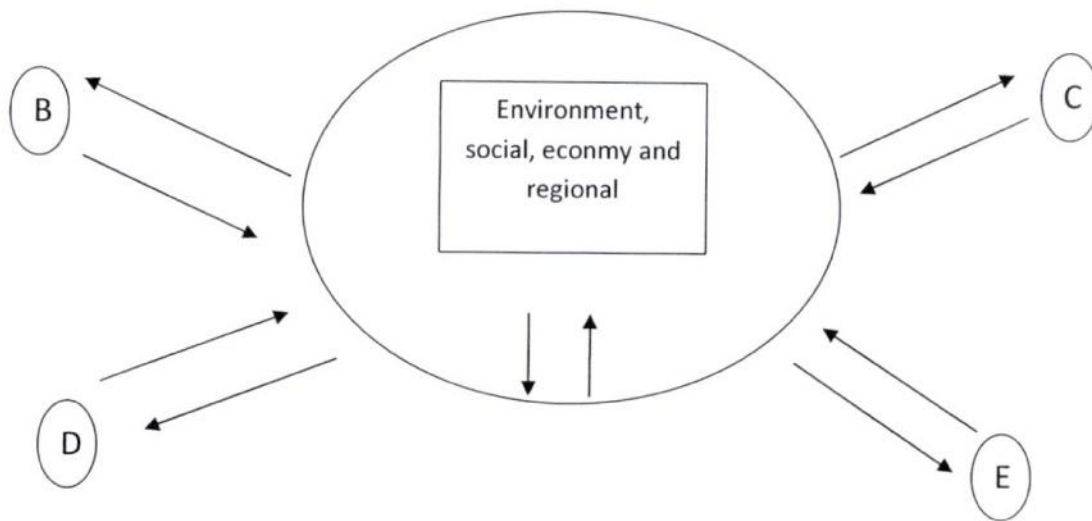


Figure 1.1 Systems of Politics

ii. Structures

Structures are possessed by a political system which has several categories such as interest groups, political parties, the judiciary, the executive council, legislature, bureaucracy and so on. However, the structure does not help much in the political system to compare one political system to another unless the political structure of the function goes hand in hand with the political system itself (Almond, 1989).

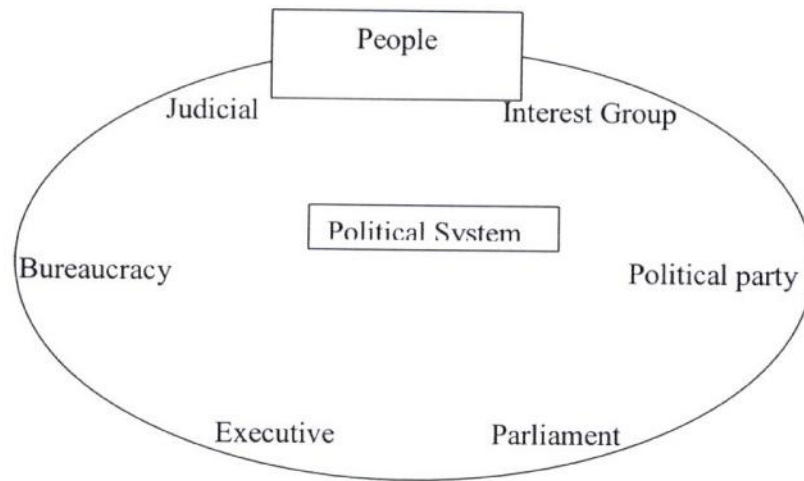


Figure 2.1 Stucture of Politics

iii. Function

Function is part of political system that becomes the measurement of succession of the system. It could be defined as the part of system that is not directly involved in the decision making process and in the implementation of public policy, but the role is very important to see and to analyze how the political system works.

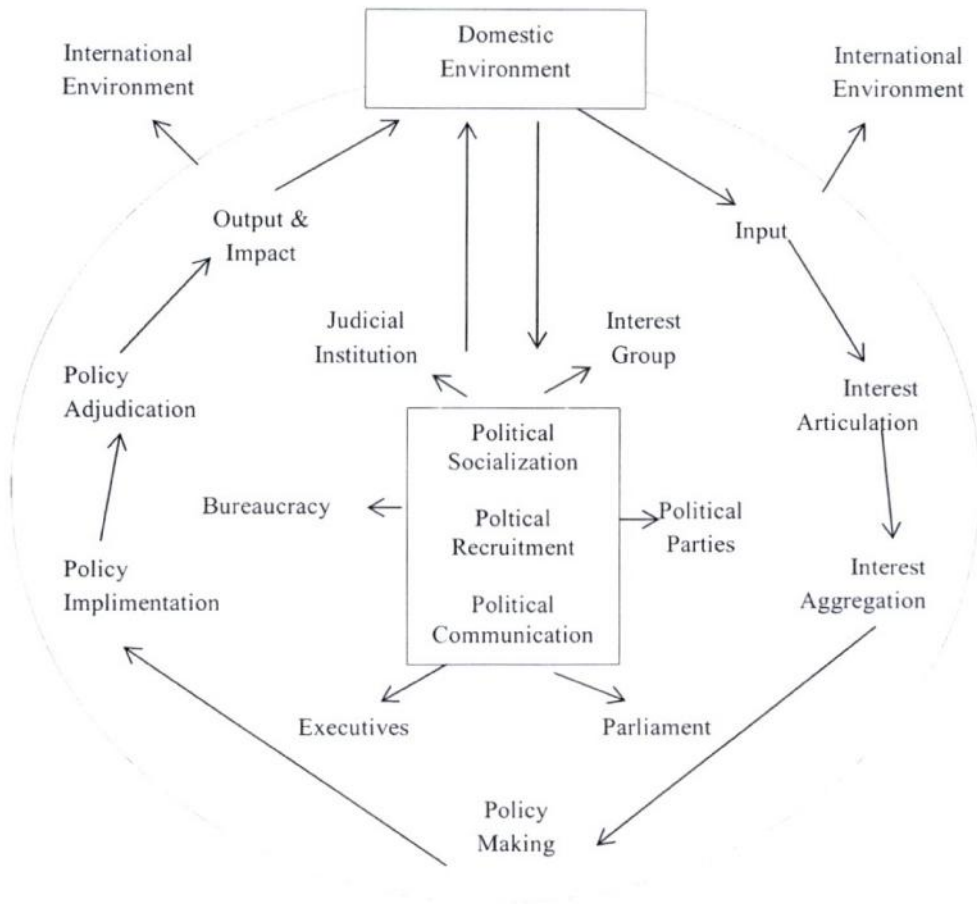


Figure 3.1 Functions of Politics

This paper will examine the comparison of Thailand and Myanmar by analyzing the military function. Military functions in a democratic country can be learned from the principles offered by Maj.Gen(ret), Dr. Dietrich Genschel. The principles referred are as follows(Genschel, 2002):

- The military is a part of the executive power of governance. Thus, the military is an element of separation of powers in a democratic political

system, characterized by separation of the legislative, executive and judicial branches.

- The military is under the political leadership that has been passed democratically, with the position held by a civilian defense minister.
- The military followed the political guidelines outlined.
- The military is obedient and subject to military law.
- The military is limited by the tasks set by the constitution on a regular basis to maintain external security of the state and to keep the national defense. In certain cases the situation and certain boundaries are clearly outlined.
- Military is neutral in politics.
- The military is not allowed to have access to financial support and is beyond the budget of revenues and expenditures.

D. Hypothesis

Based on the theory of comparative politics, the concept of praetorianism and the concept of democratic transition contain there are several points that become the similarities and the differences between Thailand and Myanmar military role in politics such as:

a) *The similarities:*

Both Thailand and Myanmar have the same experiences about military involvement in political arena, and both countries are still in the process of political transition because the political change is still happening there particularly from authoritarian regimes to democratic system. In Thailand and Myanmar, military is directly involved in the executive bodies and becomes the ruling party that has an authority to govern politics and to create its own business. Moreover, military also take an part in practical politics by being directly involved in political party. Hence, military has become one of major actors in the democratization process in Thailand and Myanmar. It means that military always joins in political arena because it has bargaining position against civilians. This happen because in Thailand the military is weaker and not solid like Tatmadaw military in Myanmar.

b) *The differences:*

In Thailand military junta has a strong competitor in political arena like in the election. There are several parties such as Thai Rak Thai/ Pheu Thai Party and Free Thai Party which become the competitors of military. In addition, it proves that these are the figures that become a prime minister who come from non-military regime like Mr. Tawi Bunyaket, Praya Manoprakon, Thaksin Sinwattra and Yingluck Sinawattra as the last prime minister from non-military. Meanwhile, in Myanmar military is very strong (solid) and does not have a serious challenge from

the competitor. It proves that since 1988- now military junta has taken control as the executive power and the existence of Aung Saan Syu Kyi was not a strong threat in the junta regime.

Military junta in Thailand has been actively involved in political arena and become a part of structure. This condition has been happening since 1932, when the military smell that a representative institution such as the parliament and political parties were weak and cannot fulfill their main role in the government. Therefore, the existence of military is the measurement of politic stability in Thailand, because in some condition military makes the government system led by the politician and the democratic process is smooth and possible to run that it could be like the firefighters. Meanwhile, in Myanmar military takes over anything in the government for a long time. Hence, it is hard for the society to gain their power even to run the democratic system.

E. Method of Research and Data Analysis

This undergraduate thesis is using descriptive method which describes and explains the problem based on the data and resource of information. The data are collected through a library research which is related to content analysis and expertise concepts which are published in the articles, textbooks, journals, news, annual report and other resources.

F. The Range of Research

This research is limited to the political condition in Thailand from 1932 to 2014 and in Myanmar from 1988 to 2014 in order to make the analysis and explanation in this undergraduate thesis easier.

G. System of Writing

- Chapter I : Examines about the background, research question, theoretical framework, hypothesis, method of research and data analyses and system of writing.
- Chapter II : Explains about the Thai military involvement and role in politic.
- Chapter III : Explains about Myanmar military involvement and role in politic.
- Chapter IV : Explains about and analyzes about the similarities and differences of Military involvement into democratic process in Thailand and Myanmar
- Chapter V : Conclusion