

MAIN FEATURES OF THAI SOCIETY IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

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INTRODUCTION

Doubtless thai economy has accused a continuing growth with an average of 8% each year. Although its modernization thai economy remains predominantly agricultural because the agriculture is still predominant because the agricultural sector employ still over 60% of manpower and in 1994 it accounted for 26% of total exports by value and the farming sector still provided the raw materials for Thailand's food processing industries and ensured that agricultural imports remain low².. It should be noted that in 1994 Thailand exported 4.9 million tons of rice which brought in 39 billion baht³. Therefore the exports sector of thai economy is dominated by the agricultural products. As results if this sector faces obstacles such as the trade barrier or protection of the other countries it becomes fragile and it will have nefast repercussions on the whole thai economy and society. It is the actual situation faced by thai economy. But this is only one aspect of the crisis affecting the thai society since some decades and this deep crisis is affecting both the political field as well as the social field. Therefore in the age of globalization even the economic prosperity cannot make the thai society avoiding a deep crisis. This is a major contradiction of the present time affecting most of the societies in the world.

Obviously with the eradication of the CPT since the years 80s the thai society cannot avoid to be involved in a deep crisis. The reason of the persistence of the social crisis in thai society is that roots of the crisis have not been removed. That is to say major causes of the social crisis in thai society have not been tackled, viz : social contradictions, poverty, corruption, unequitable distribution of wealth, lack of genuine democracy, monopolization of the State power by the political class and wealthy people.

I. SOCIAL CONTRADICTIONS

Contradictions affecting the thai society are of many sorts such as : contradictions between riches and poors, contradictions between political class and people masses.

² The Thai Chamber of Commerce montly report, 1996, p.95

³ Ibid. p. 95

1. Contradictions between riches and poors

Thailand continues to have a problem with unequal income distribution because the recent prosperity is benefiting Bangkok's rich and middle classes, but not moving down to rural villagers as rapidly as it should⁴.

Nowadays the more Thailand progresses towards the industrialization and the consumerism the more the gap is larger between the riches and the poors because the income disparities are already alarmingly wide. As said Senator Meechai Viravaidhya : "Thailand has 12 of the world's richest billionaires and the third highest sales of Mercedes-Benz cars in the world. Yet 8 million people in this country have incomes of less than 6,000 baht (\$233) a year⁵ .

For this reason Thailand is among the top 5 in the world in terms of gap between rich and poor according to Boonchai Bencharongkul president of United Communications a Bangkok-based Telecoms Company⁶. The riches are separated from the poors by the new system of social values, and the loss of humanism and the elementary Four Noble Principles taught by Lord Buddha viz. : Metta, Karuna, Mudhita, Ubekha, of generosity, friendship, and solidarity. The riches become more and more selfish, egocentric. While the poors become poorer because of inflation and economic pressure. The savage capitalism applied by multinational corporations in the age of globalization seems to deepen the discrepancy between the riches and the poors in spite of the apparent possibility of everybody to attain richness and abundance. This point has been emphasized by Reverend Brother Dr Prathip Komolmas when he wrote : "The situation of our farmers and our workers only underscores the well-known fact that conspicuous consumption aggravates the gap between the rich and the poor"⁷.

The richest 20% of Thais, most of them residents of Bangkok receive more than half of national income. The bottom 20% earn just 4%. According to the World Bank Thailand has the fifth most skewed income distribution in the world, and the worst outside latin America. In addition, about 14% of the population live below the poverty line⁸ .

It is well known that the thai society is a show up one (Sangkhom aw ratt aw priab) where rich people like to show up their "superiority" through their arrogant behavior by exhibiting their material richness : costly and beautiful cars, elegant and costly clothes, their mobile phones, their costly mansions, their TV and HiFi set, etc....

⁴ Thai Chamber of commerce 1996, p. 97

⁵ Michael Vatikiotis : Tough times. Economic woes hit Thais and threaten social unrest, in Far Eastern Economic Review June 12, 1997, p. 74.

⁶ Ibid. p. 76.

⁷ The impact of industrialization in a changing society", in Khru, Achan, Nak borihan kan suksa, lae nak borihan kan phatthana in Frada Dr Prathip M. Komolmas, ABAC 1993, p. 337.

⁸ Mind the gap in FEER, August 15, 1996, p. 42

Rich Bangkokians practise a kind of shameful social segregation and live in reserved areas far from the daily misery and from the sorrowing spectacles of miserable people who are the same human beings like them and prefer to take their meals in luxury hotels and restaurants and used to speak an arrogant language. They practise also the educational segregation by sending their children in select schools and colleges. *Because they deny and fear the difference*, as said Pope John Paul II :” *The fear of difference can lead to a denial of the very humanity of the other with the result that people fall into a cycle of violence*”⁹.

Concerning the injustice and the discrimination toward the poor by the rich the daily life in Bangkok and in other urban cities can witness them. And one can observe that is the results of many decades of exploitation and pressure of the savage capitalism. This fact has been observed by the then Buddhadasa Bikkhu when he wrote about that in the following terms :” The capitalism presses and run over the weak and the poor and the right belongs to powerful people that is to say those who detain wealth and power. That is the source of social injustice of capitalism with immorality and materialism”. And Buddhadasa Bikkhu denounced the social injustice with the following arguments :” If in any country there are still people in need it must mean that there is not equality in that society. As a consequence disorganization of many kinds and varieties will necessarily arise, for example, conflicts in the country, the breaking up of social harmony, insurrection, changes in the order of government, changes in the economic system to socialism or communism. Because when the poor can bear their situation no more they tend to look for a way to destroy the extremely selfish wealthy people with no regard for anything at all”¹⁰.

Furthermore they used to disdain simple people they consider as their inferior, they disdain poor people and think the whole Thailand belong to them alone. They disdain the Northeastern people they consider as their inferiors and non-Thai and they continue to label as *sticky rice and anchois (pla la) eaters*.

And with the introduction of the golf game in Thailand the golf players constitute a special microcosm in Thailand because they establish a special little world of select and wealthy people who gather in their reserved world. And these people emanating from business world, high-ranking military and civil servants, etc....belong to the upper class with all the rights and privileges due to “money power”. These people worship money for money is king and their values system and once they have much money they think they have all the rights and privileges in Thai society and their Weltanschauung doesn't overpass their microcosm. And one can raise the question to know whether these arrogant people are able to have a normal thinking and to behave normally. Because of their bizarre behavior these rich people separate themselves from the remaining Thai society. Needless to say that the poor are

⁹ United Nations (CNS). Text of Pope John Paul II's address to the UN General Assembly, October 5, 1995 in George F. McLEAN :” Civil society and social reconstruction. The Council for research in values & philosophy Washington 1997, p. 319

¹⁰ Peter Jackson , Buddhadasa : A Buddhist thinker for the modern world. The Siam society under the royal patronage, Bangkok 1988, p. 238-239.

motivated by the same sense of disdain vis-a-vis the rich people they consider as cowards and dishonest people and spoilers of the Thai society. Therefore the contradictions between the rich and the poor within the Thai society are exacerbated more and more and there will be risk of collision between these two opposed classes if there is any solution to this kind of social contradictions.

The convincing proof to this assertion is that the poor in the Thai society are united and coalized for setting up a new social force rather well organized aiming to express a new shape of social revendications since more than one year because they are conscious of their force within the Thai society in the age of the globalization. The appearance of this new shape of struggle overpassed the traditional shape and tactics of social revendications through political parties, Trade Union Congress, Parliament. This constitutes a denial of the role of MPs to defend the interests of grass-roots people in need.

In other words they set up the Forum of the the poor (*Samatcha Khon Chon*) composed of 11 000 members emanating from 37 provinces and able to challenge any political force in Thailand even the Thai government. This Forum, supported by the Bangkokian common people who provided it foods, water and fruits, was able to mobilize more supporters in the countryside, aimed to compel the Thai government to negotiate with it in order to settle the all-round problems. From December 1996 to March 1997 it occupied the ground of the Office of the Committee of civil servants located in front of the government Office then occupied the School of Commerce of Bangkok and encamped besides the Wat Benchama Bophit in Thonburi and besieged the Thai government which has been compelled to take in consideration this new Thai social contest force¹¹

Then this masses people organization has been able to rally and to make a 99-day protest outside the Office of the Government aiming to compel the Government to settle directly its demands without using the administrative channel that the Forum considers as bureaucratic and incompetent¹².

The Forum of the poor submitted to the Thai government 121 demands grouped into 6 categories, viz. : - group of 92 problems relevant to forests and land property - group of 15 problems created by the building of dams - groups of 5 problems relevant to the governmental projects of development - group of 7 problems of anarchic communities - one problem of workers suffering from working conditions and environment - one agricultural problem¹³.

During 99 days sit-in outside the Government Office by its members with the support of the Bangkokian population the Forum of the poor thought their

¹¹ Sayam Rath weekly Vol. 40, of 2/8/1997, "Chivit Rim Foot Bath 30 Van Mob Samatcha Khon Chon Tai Fa Moeang Krung, p. 20.

¹² Sayam Rath Weekly, Vol. 49, 4-10 May 1997, p. 20 : Sibsob samatcha khon chon mod khwam odthon doen na chon Rathabal

¹³ Sayam Rath weekly Vol. 40, of 2/8/1997, "Chivit Rim Foot Bath 30 Van Mob Samatcha Khon Chon Tai Fa Moeang Krung, p. 20.

representatives met the members of the Parliament, the Prime Minister to whom its leader Bamrung Khayotha submitted its demands and asked the Thai government to agree to settle them peacefully in order to avoid the "in finite" occupation of Bangkok for the members of this Forum have been determined to obtain their demands satisfied by the government. Otherwise they seemed to overcome the government's resistance or reluctance to satisfy their demands.

And the Thai government through the Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyuth has promised to satisfy the protesters and asked them to go back home in their provinces. On May 2, he and some of his ministers met the Forum of poor protesters and listened to their grievances and proposals. Thai Prime minister agreed to set up a fund to help farmers in distress to allot 15 rai of land to each family evicted as result of dam construction and to drop disciplinary probe into Forum's adviser and Ratchabhat Institute lecturer Somkiat Pongpaibul¹⁴.

On the other hand the countryside people have shown their force and are conscious of their social force the Thai government as well as the other social organizations have to take in consideration. Thus, nowadays the Council of the Thai villages Headmen (Kamnan, Phu Yai Ban), constitutes also a social organization operating in the countryside. It constitutes also a sort of local lobby which as need puts its weight in the political balance aiming to influence the adoption of the new Constitution by the Parliament and the Government. Recently it mobilized its members in a rally in front of the Government Office and the House of representatives in order to let the public opinion hear its voice favourizing the new constitution. The active presence of these two Councils reflected the growing influence of the rural people and their representative in any decision the central government of Bangkok may make. That showed any decision the central government may make, must take in account the opinion of the rural people. Therefore, it is important to note that time where the rich people thought their representatives in the central government of Bangkok decide unilaterally as before without taking in consideration the rural Thai people who are the majority in Thailand, is over. Similarly members of the Parliament have to taking in consideration the weight of the Thai people who elected them to the House of Representatives. Therefore, poor people once united can show really their force in the Thai society and can challenge even the rich and political classes. It is noteworthy that the contradiction between wealthy people and poor people deepens more and more and the discrepancy between them is so serious that in the very next future there will be risk of explosion. If the classes struggle concept is not yet pronounced since the collapse of the communist ideology, wrath and anger are sounding in the spirit of poor people humiliated and segregated by wealthy people. Therefore there is a fearful quietness like the volcanos quietness that risks to explode in unpredicted future. And this may occur given the dehumanization of the Thai society in the age of the globalization where human relationships are losing ground to the inhuman relationships. Otherwise in the age of globalization there are inhuman

¹⁴ Bangkok Post May 3, 1997 : Sceptical villagers head home

relationships between *the children of technology* because of loss of human friendship, of ethics.

2. Contradictions Between The Countryside And The Urban People

It is well known that the countryside Thai people nurtured great resentment toward the wealthy people of the capital and the central government in Bangkok because since a long time the Northeastern provinces have been abandoned by the central government and remain as before underdeveloped and poor while Bangkok metropolis is very rich very modernized even Europeanized monopolizing power and richness of Thailand.

Bangkok is the capital the most modernized and westernized. The Bangkokians are the first to carry out the cultural change that accelerated since the second Indochinese war due to the presence of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) base and Staff and troops. But among them the US presence was predominant with its dominant influence. And the Bangkokians more than other Thai people are the first to be subject of "acculturation" consisting of "behavioral changes and adaptations that an individual experiences as a result of participating in the process of societal-level acculturation that his cultural or ethnic group is undergoing"¹⁵.

Therefore the Bangkokians in particular and the Thai people in general achieved both the cultural change, the acculturation and the psychological acculturation and are led to undergo the change of the cultural and social system while the Thai individuals changed their psychological characteristics "¹⁶

In Bangkok with its supermarkets and stores one can find every luxury product emanating from America, Europe and from the other parts of the world. It is also in Bangkok one can find most selective schools and colleges reserved to rich people or privileged people belonging to the upper class. While in the countryside (in Changwad) children of common people can only attend the provincial state schools and colleges with the educational level situated at the average level of the country with educational means and teachers rather weak compared with those in Bangkok. Therefore there is a kind of frustration among the rural youth vis-a-vis the youth living in Bangkok.

A travel through the Northeastern provinces witnesses the poorness of the Northeastern people who cannot share the income provided by the economic growth because the economic growth profits only the business, banking and industrial classes who share the parts of the cake. While the majority of the Northeastern people are rejected from the economic boom results as "the medium and high technology come on too strong". They continue during decades to lack of water the irrigation may

¹⁵ Marshall H. Segall & alia : Human behavior in global perspective - Pergamon Press, New York 1990, p. 292-293.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 294.

supply. But there is general shortage of irrigation system and the Northeastern countryside continue to suffer drought and water shortage. As result they must rely on the rain for growing rice during the rainy season while with the irrigation they should practise biannual rice cultures per annum and increase consequently their income as well as breeding their livestock. But with the water shortage Northeastern peasants can practise only an annual rice culture and lack of grass to breed their cattle. That is why during centuries they remain poorer and poorer and why there is massive migration of Northeasterns to Central Plain and other parts of Thailand. It is an accurate problem for the Thai society.

Worse, in nowadays the Thai rural people are suffering of low price of the agricultural product while they are increasingly indebted toward banks because of their borrowings for buying minitractors, fertilizers, motobicycles, pick up cars, etc....In short Thai peasants of nowadays cannot earn their life by selling their agricultural products. Most of them succumbed because of bankruptcy due to their inability to pay their considerable debts. Therefore numerous are landless peasants. All these evils contribute to exacerbate their deep and serious resentment toward the central government and Parliament who seem to neglect the Thai rural people's interests while they used to cheat them with their honey talks. Most of Thai growers of sugar cane, of tapioca plants are ruined because of low price of these products in market. Therefore the ricefields as well as the livestock cannot afford sufficiently money to their proprietors for living. That is the reason why the rural areas are depopulated increasingly from year to year because young people cannot find job for earning their life.

Therefore this jobless people mass quitted the rural areas for forming the *rural exodus* toward the urban cities mainly in Bangkok area they overpopulated or expatriated to become expatriated manpower in many parts of the world. Thus the rural areas are depopulated and the agriculture lacks of manpower while the urban areas are overpopulated with the mass of rural people in quest of job and when they have chance to find job these people are exploited even overexploited by patrons in urban areas. Because they belong to the category of 80% work force unskilled for having only no more than a primary school education representing 85% of the country's 6.8 million industrial workers living in and around Bangkok¹⁷

Part of them become vendors of chinese soup, of vegetables and fruits, of grilled chicken along streets and alleys of Bangkok. Part of them become taxi drivers or manoevers in the port Khlongtoei, or carriers in manufactors, etc....While less Northeasterns remain growers of rice and while "*foreign companies began opening factories and farmers began making widgets*"¹⁸

The rural exodus constitutes a serious danger for Thai agriculture because in the countryside continue to remain only old people unable to tackle the agriculture

¹⁷ Far Eastern Economic Review June 12, 1997, p. 70 and Gordon Fairclough : Facing new realities, in Far Eastern Economic Review of August 15, 1996, p. 39.

¹⁸ Asiaweek October 4, 1996, p. 26

problem of manpower. Sociologically speaking this contributes to decrease the agricultural output and to provoke even the agricultural decay. This contributes to influence negatively on the demographic problem for there should have a denatality in the rural areas.

These interior migrants form a kind of "*lumpenproletariat*" living under the standard of living with very low wages. While women and girls are recruited as servants, bars, hotels, restaurants servers with low wages also. Part of them have been lured to become prostitutes in massage saloons or brothels and overexploited and generally harmed by savage patrons or proxenetes grouped in sorts of gangs and mafias. Due to the savage rules of free market and free enterprize these masses of *lumpenproletariat* people don't enjoy the social security and the protection and supervision of the government. In sum they are at the mercy of the patrons who are motivated only by the avidity of gains and profits and who ignore what it should be a matter of humanity and ethics. Otherwise they are living in "*unjust society where the rich selfishly hoard social wealth, the poor have no opportunity for spiritual attainment because of the unbearable nature of their worldly existence*"¹⁹.

Therefore their resentment turns against the government whose normal duty and role are to humanize the labour relationships and the wages. But the central government abandons them to the mercy of the patrons. As result the Bangkok metropolis has been invaded by the Isan workers. Out of a population estimated to 16 million the Isan workers amounted to 10 million or more. Each year at the opportunity of the Isan New Year in mid-April (Krut Songkran) Bangkok metropolis seems to be a deserted city because most of the Isan people flow into their native provinces for enjoying the Krut Songkran festivities and make there their expenditures or spare there their money earned in Bangkok with tears and sweat.

However in the age of globalization of the economy and the robotization of the production the labour market lacks of skilled labour, of new technocrats and new technicians skilled in electronics, computing, engineering, etc....In sum lack of high technology technicians²⁰

Because in the age of high technology and robotics implemented in modern industries the labour market can no more absorb the traditional manual workers or undergraduates and graduates in humanities and social sciences and caused the unemployment to the last category of labour and therefore most of people belonging to this category are jobless. Therefore the unemployment becomes the focal nexus of the crisis of the Thai society because most of the work force including the youth is victimized by the globalization of the Thai economy.

While they are attracted by material goods produced by the mass-consumption society young people are induced to behave abnormally for meeting their wants.

¹⁹ Peter Jackson : *Buddhadasa : A Buddhist thinker for the modern world-The Siam Society under the royal patronage*. Bangkok 1988, p. 239.

²⁰ *Asiaweek* October 4, 1996, p. 26.

Nowadays there are more and more effeminate boys and transexuals and travesties who represent the perversion of human beings in modern and high technology society. And most of them are involved in the sex commerce. All this proved the negative influence of the materialism in the age of globalization where, as said Buddhadasa Bhikkhu "*political conflicts and social tensions of the modern world arose from moral laxity*"²¹

If we follow again the thought of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu we can say that *modern society's problems must be solved both mentally and materially because "solving problems materially is inadequate ; problems must be solved mentally as well"*²²

Therefore such new developments in modern Thai society are the results of the domination of materialism that Buddhadasa Bhikkhu defined as "*the psychological or spiritual domination of the mind by desires for material objects of the material world*"²³

3. Contradictions Between Political Class And People

Like in the other developing countries "*Thai politics is still largely based on money and patronage*"²⁴

It is noteworthy that for the time being, there are more and more contradictions between the Thai political class and the Thai people and that leads to the loss of trust in political parties and politicians and the political instability. This negative thought of common Thai people toward the political class is due to the erosion of the mark image of Thai politicians unable to honour their commitments with their voters at any elections and their inability to meet the needs of their voters. During decades Thai politicians used to make promises they forgot soon after their elections. For this they seem to be liars to the Thai common people. And the natural reaction of the latter is apathy and inertia vis-a-vis politics and political class. The common people long to say that all the politicians are the same whatever they belong to one or another party. It is frequent to hear the same and usual grievances toward politicians who are identified with any central government in Bangkok the characteristics of which is too centralised and anti-democratic and to be cut from the people mainly from the countryside people. Concerning the role of rural communities, due to its centralist nature, the central government ignores the role of regional or local power, e.g. the rural communities' role and power in the economic and social development as well as their role and power in their contribution to the national politics. Therefore it is difficult to imagine the consultation for advice of representatives of rural communities by central government in order to carry out any governmental projects regarding the regional or local economic development. For instance, governmental politics

²¹ Peter Jackson : Buddhadasa : A Buddhist thinker for the modern world, The Siam society under the royal patronage, Bangkok 1988, p. 234-235.

²² Ibid. p. 234-235

²³ Ibid. p. 236-237.

²⁴ Sangwon Suh & Julian Gearing : Healing into the storm, in Asiaweek April 5, 1996, p. 40.

regarding the exploitation of natural resources, the environment don't take in account the interests of rural communities. It has been emphasized by Phithak Thammapracha as follows : "*The state or the administration carry out different projects such as : dams, governmental center's building up, construction of industrial complex, of electric power plant incinerating the scraps, setting up plantations of Eucalyptus, etc....and many other cases which need the regulations of the government. Such governmental programs have to evacuate (move) the population from their native cradle*". Such a development provokes the increasing contradictions which become more and more violent in a war of spoiling natural resources by the State, the Administration which exhibit bureaucratic law and regulations while communities of people implement traditions and customs and consider the Administration violating the rights of these communities..."²⁵

These contradictions are more and more exacerbated when people saw that political parties and politicians are involved in the money-politics in the old political games consisting of using verbal contests within the Parliament and defending their privileges while neglecting the interests of their voters and their constituencies. When interviewed about the politicians and Parliament members rural people said to whatever party they belong they are the same in cheating the people. In parliament they used to practise the political game in fainting to criticize each other for accrediting the confidence of the people in them. What they are doing is that they strive to preserve their seat in the Parliament and to secure it in the coming elections. Furthermore as MPs they strive to defend the interests of their lobbies and sponsors or to recover a fortune they spent during the last elections by "recouping the expenditures under the table from government-related contracts"²⁶.

Thus politicians, as said Gordon Fairclough, tend to focus on short-term band-aid solutions to problems to show that they are doing something²⁷

The MP Thavil Praisorn is more frank when he stressed about the MPs : "*Most simply talk about their own interests and their constituencies without any vision for the broader national interest*"²⁸

Because the political class is playing a political game by neglecting the national or people's interests that more and more people show a sort of apathy or disdain vis-a-vis it. They are all the same said a housewife. People seem to be fed up with sterile political game played within the Parliament. Common people saw only the bad side of the MPs and politicians. And the ones seem to prove their suspicion and disgust towards politics by giving a bad example of political instability and imbalance.

²⁵ Sayam Rath Weekly, Vol. 23, p. 39-40.

²⁶ Asiaweek October 4, 1996, p. 23.

²⁷ Gordon Fairclough : Facing new realities, in Far Eastern Economic Review, August 15, 1996, p. 39.

²⁸ Sangwon Suh & Julian Gearing : Nation in flux, in Asiaweek October 4, 1996, p. 22.

In the past 10 years Thailand had 8 governments interrupted by 2 Coups d'Etat. Indecision and lobbyism are characteristics of political class. Due to their rivalry there are a long list of missed or delayed opportunities. It has taken almost 2 decades to get Bangkok's second airport off the drawing board. Equally there is strong political resistance to allowing market forces to determine the now-inflated property prices, which would help restoring the economic confidence - but ruin many members of the establishment²⁹. The new constitution has required a long time of debating within the Constitution drafting Committee and the House of representatives before being adopted on 26 September by the House. Finally the 339 articles Constitution, the most democratic Constitution of Thai history attracted passions from conservative and democratic partisans within and outside the Parliament. Its adoption will pave the way for Thai government to settle the economic recession once the confidence restored.

The first reason is that political parties are instable due to the instability, disloyalty of its members. And generally a government is set up with a heteroclit majority composed of many little parties. These characteristics reflect the lack of true ideal and that leads their members to quest an ideal. As money politics and vote buying are constant principles in Thai politics members of every political party is subject to change their loyalty to bickering and backstabbing. Therefore one can observe the successive adherence of party members from one party to another. Therefore, this practice leads to provoke political turmoils and imbalance and even political crisis. Therefore the political majority after elections can be destroyed by defections of the disloyalty of members of the majority between the 2 elections. Within the coalised government there is no real unity and solidarity and the coalition parties play duplicity by ignoring or violating the governmental solidarity the former Banharn Silpa-Archa government has been undermined by this betrayal and ultimately was defeated by the non-confidence vote in the Parliament (House of representatives) and is compelled to resign. But before the confidence vote of the House 2 days earlier on August 13, deputy Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra had pulled his Palang Dharma Party out of the fragile coalition government. And this auto-suicide game or betrayal game is actualised by the pressure and bargaining exercised by the Chart Pattana Party of general Chatichai Choonhawan on Prime Minister Chavalit aiming at compelling him to step down and offering governmental key posts to his trusted men and this 6 days after the confidence vote of the House where general Chavalit Yongchaiyuth won 212 voices against 189 voices for the opposition. As it has been written in the Bangkok Post : " *In an effort to improve the government's sagging image and boost its efficiency following the no-confidence debate last week the Chart Pattana Party urged Prime Minister to conduct a sweeping change to his cabinet by bringing in outsiders*"³⁰

The mistrust of common people toward political class can provoke fertile ground for military to exercise its right "to safeguard the nation " like in February

²⁹ Michael Vatikiotis : Rudderless in FEER May 29, 1997, p. 14.

³⁰ Meesane & Wut Nontarit : "Chavalit's attempt hits snag", Bangkok Post September 29, 1997.

1991 putsch that ousted the then Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhawan for what the army said was his administration's excessive corruption³¹.

II Moral Crisis Or Loss Of Traditional Values

Thai individual and society in the globalization age are more and more progressing toward trend of adopting new values such as short-sighted and short-minded, elusive mind, intolerance, that leads to other social evil, e.g. drug addiction (involving in 1996 1.2 million people), materialist and consumerist society and loss of traditional moral ethics, e.g. dynamism, self-sufficiency, magnanimity and altruism³².

Nowadays it is a real fact that most of Thai people mainly urban people are obsessed by money and material and consumer goods. This is a new social and psychological factor after 20 years of rapid industrialization. As said Reverend Brother Dr. Prathip Komolmas :” It is no surprise that older people wonder where our moral standards and sense of decency have disappeared to, in the face of such massive advertising and consumerism”³³.

The move of the traditional system of values is due to the aggression of the modern media which instill and model daily habits, tastes, behavior, thinking, and modify the rationale of the individual in face of the society. And the social mimetism contributes to aggravate the irrationale of the individual. As results “the individuals, such as people in Bangkok are becoming more selfish and more willing to overlook dishonesty and indecency on their way to an easy and wealthy life” and “place more value on external form than content”³⁴. And all these afore-mentioned facts are corroborated by academic studies, according to which “the Bangkokians long to be adept at a very quick and desire of acquiring luxury consumer goods and imitating the Western lifestyles, lead a number of families in the North and Northeast to sell their daughters to proxenetes and as results these young girls are compelled to become prostitutes, and sex slaves without hope off escape.

Nowadays with the radical change in the Thai values system at the age of high technology and robotics doubtless the question of merit (*punya*) and demerit (*papa*) must be rexamined for making deep inquiries in the mass of Thai people with the aim to know whether they still continue to believe. Doubtless the ardent desire to acquire much money and abundant consumer goods leads people to forget these 2 concepts as well as they neglect the Avechi concept (*Mornarok*). Only people obnubiled by

³¹ (Sangwon Suh & Julian Gearing : Nation in flux, in Asiaweek October 4, 1996, p. 23)

³² See Phaen Phatthana khon lae sangkhom nai chwang phaen phatthana sethakich lae sangkhom haeng chat, chabab thi 9, 2540-2544, p. 12

³³ The impact of industrialization on a changing society, in Khru, Achan, Nak Borihan kan suksa lae nak borihan kan phatthana, ABAC 1993, p. 339.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 33

³⁵ Sayam Rath Weekly, Vol. 23, p. 39-40.

³⁶ Asiaweek October 4, 1996, p. 23.

³⁷ Gordon Fairclough : Facing new realities, in The Eastern Frontiers Review, Vol. 15, 1996, p. 309.

³⁸ Sangwon Suh & Julian Gearing : Nation in flux, in Asiaweek October 4, 1996, p. 23.

attachment (*Vedhana*), passion, and desire (*Kilesa and Tanha*), are dominated by evil or bad thinking and behavior. They don't have in memory what are Sammadidhi and Sammakammanta and do they mean.

In this respect Buddhadasa Bikhu said "that it is being gone about with a mental attitude of attachment and in such a way that it promotes further attachment to material things which in turn leads to suffering..."³⁵. This ardent desires (*Kilesa and Tanha*) lead young people to commit themselves in the sex commerce to become prostitutes. And as the Pandora box once opened it generates other results or evils. For the sex commerce generates the sexual tourism which in turn generates the proliferation of the sex industry, of the prostitute population, of the pornographic activities of sex bars, hotels, brothels, massage saloons, call-girls and boys. The proliferation of sex industry places does not enhance the honour and the mark image of the country. On the contrary it adds shame to it. And the proliferation sex commerce increases the proliferation of AID which becomes the threat number one to Thai people.

That is why there is an increase of criminality along with drug addiction among youth. Thus young men and girls became prostitutes in bars-hotels, brothels, massage-saloons, thieves, burglars, wangers, even murderers, gangsters, etc...Most of them become sexual goods for international organizations of proxenetes. Therefore, Thai prostitutes are exported to Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, Taiwn, Europe, USA, etc...under disguised shape such as housemaids, servants of beauty saloons, healthcare saloons, etc....

In summary the actual modern thai society reflects "*the moral degeneration that means attachment and the self-centredness of "I"- "mine"*" which Buddhadasa Bhikkhu regards as *the root causes of the confusion and lack of peace in the world*³⁶.

III. BUREAUCRACY AND CORRUPTION

The Thai administration is like an author has written, a dynosaure and a thousand years age turtle³⁷ not yet rational and really modernized because the feudalism and patronship are still prevailing. Everywhere one must face antiquated rules and red-tape compounded by corruption representing a serious concern for multinationals³⁸. Therefore it is difficult to eradicate Thailand'd corruption and streamlining regulations because it needs political will (sqid Integra Group's Eaton³⁹ Because bureaucrats are entrenched and resist change while politicians come and go⁴⁰. And politicians are obstacles to modernization. The corruption is a widespread phenomenon in Thailand. The middle class and the corporate sector have their own

³⁵ Peter Jackson : Buddhadasa : A Buddhist thinker for the modern world, p. 236-237

³⁶ Ibid. p. 237

³⁷ Phithak Thammapracha : Muang Thai Kab Panha khong khon chon, in Sayam Rath Weekly, vol. 23

³⁸ Let be a lesson, in FEER June 12, 1997, p. 74

³⁹ Nayan Chanda & Michael Vatikiotis in FEER June 12, 1997, p. 74

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 74

grievances and demand better economic management and an end to corruption. An engineer working in Northern Thailand laments the spread of corruption which he claims has lowered standards of construction so low that he fears buildings will start collapsing. "Before you could build things well enough because you paid less in bribes. Now you have to pay everyone. The shame of it is this is accepted practice"⁴¹

If people have some problem dealing with the administration it is certain that they will be drawn by the complexity of the bureaucratic administration. Therefore, in order to overcome these difficulties one can resort to specialists knowing well the Thai administration's personnel or responsible who can easily settle one's specific problem with adequate remuneration in money, or one can bribe the administration's responsible of problem concerning the interested people for having one's problem settle in due time. Otherwise the bureaucracy generates the corruption and the Thai administration is both bureaucratic and widely corrupted and incompetent⁴². This social evil is so secular that it become almost normalized and simple people consider it as an useful evil. But the corruption becomes a danger when it expands within the political class including the government. For political parties members resort to buy votes for being elected. As it is said : "To get more votes, some candidates pay 500 baht each. For vote-buying is a widespread and longstanding practice in parliamentary elections"⁴³

As said also the Senate Speaker Meechai Ruchuphan : "*Vote-buying is the weak point of Thai politics*"⁴⁴. Because it threatens the democracy's existence and the democracy will be meaningfulness or an empty concept or theoretical concept with a vacuum if votes of citizens can be bought by whatever political parties. On other words there is no democracy when owners of wealth can buy politicians, parliamentarians, ministers and attach them to their service and through them can control the state and orientate the national politics in conformity with their interests. Unfortunately, in Thailand the corruption is a generalised phenomenon that erodes the political life in Thailand. It reaches most of political parties and even ministers who belong to "*money politics and vested interests*"⁴⁵. For instance the former Banharn Silpa-Archa government emanated from huge scandal and corrupt elections even seen since the 1957 elections engaging huge amount of money. The Chart Thai Party of Banharn was accused to have spent 2,700 billion baht for setting up his government. Furthermore the businessman Rakesh Saksena who cheated the BBC Bank in Bangkok and has successfully stolen 4 billion baht from this bank and fled to abroad has stated he has given Banharn 300 million baht for securing the expenditures of the elections of his party. And the last but not the least 2 months after his accession to premiership Banharn has been accused for having perceived considerable commission from the Swedish Company Korkom which committed to sell submarines to Thai

⁴¹ Let this be a lesson, FEER June 12, 1997, p. 76.

⁴² Sangwon Suh & Julian Gearing : Nation in flux, in Asiaweek October 4, 1996, p. 22

⁴³ "Baht for your votes. The gilded way to subvert Thai democracy", in Asiaweek October 4, 1996, p.

24.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 24

⁴⁵ Sangwon Suh & Julian Gearing : "Heading into the storm", in Asiaweek, April 5, 1996, p. 40.

government⁴⁶. In addition, the Banharn government has been undermined by corruption involving some of its ministers. His deputy Commerce Minister Pairote Suwanchawee has been accused for having used his position to buy land on the east coast and for supporting influential Chon Buri tycoon Somchai Khunpluem when he was charged with corruption in the purchase of land by the Pattaya City Administration⁴⁷. As regards the Social Action Party leader Montree Pongpanich, deputy Prime Minister, he has been under attack following allegations that his wife illegally purchased national park land. He has been also accused of using his influence in bidding for a mining operation in Lampang. Deputy Finance Minister Newin Chidchob has been accused to link to a \$450,000 vote buying racket during election time. He and several other MPs have been also accused of using their influence with the Bangkok Bank of Commerce (BBC) to obtain borrower-friendly loans to take over some half-dozen ailing listed companies⁴⁸. Deputy Interior Minister Suchart Tancharoen has been accused to be implicated in the B.B.C. scandal, and using his powers to help family members obtain land on Samet Island in Southern Chumphon province and amassing property in several provinces under suspicious circumstances⁴⁹.

That is to say most of political class members, of high-ranking civil servants including magistrates, police officers, etc....are involved in corruption affairs. (The recent affair of corruption concerns the case of a Vice-President of the Thailand's Supreme Court bribed by a drug trafficker whose extradition has been claimed by the US Justice).

Therefore the only way to ease the social and political unrest and instability as well as the restoration of confidence and health of the economy is to clean up the political system and eradicate corruption⁵⁰.

IV. ECONOMIC RECESSION

After more than a decade of continued economic growth Thailand is facing a serious recession with a de facto devaluation of 40% of the Thai currency, the baht which is now floating at the rate of 35-37 baht for one US dollar since 2 July consecutively to the suspension of 58 finance companies. This serious decision provoked the lay-off of thousands employees and workers who are reduced to nil due to the closure of business, factories, etc....with serious social and psychological consequences. Thus many distressed people who made bankruptcy in their business or are not able to face or overcome financial and material failure resolved to make suicide.

⁴⁶ See Tamnan Apayos : Roee Damnam/Rakesh, Bot Phisut sua tia, in Sayam Rath Sappada Vichan, vol 10, March 1997, p.11.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.40

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 40.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 40

⁵⁰ Michael Vatikiotis : "Thailand. People's putsch" in Far Eastern Economic review, September 18, 1997, p. 15

As regards other serious economic consequences such as increase of VAT and inflation considerably the buying power and the standard of living of millions fixed salary people, mainly people earning low wages, viz. workers, employees, teachers, civil servants, etc...and make the living cost more expensive and the majority of people earning low wages will suffer more and more because they lost already 40% of their salary consecutively to the devaluation of the baht.

All these evils emanate from the mismanagement of national economy, the too slow adaptation of the economic structure to the rapid industrialization at the age of globalization of the economy. Otherwise there is a structural shortcoming of Thai economy characterized by the shortage of skilled workers : technicians and engineers able to master the transfer of technology and the know-how. this shortage has its origin in the low level of Thai system of education that has not put enough emphasis on the teaching of sciences, technology and advanced or high level researches as well as on vocational schools for training technicians. This weakness is the feature of thai education system still entrenched in old and obsolete system destined to train bureaucrats and executive officers.

It is noteworthy to bear in mind other shortcomings of the labour regime and relationships which are relevant to the overexploitation of the workers. If democratised they will create the detente between patrons and workers and consequently foster the efficiency of workers. And as a "condition sine qua non", govenment as well as patrons must upgrade the wages of Thai workers and reduce the working time so as to enable them to have rest and leisure, Ipso facto all these innovations of the labour conditions require the government to enforce them by appropriate laws and regulations as well as to insure the workers' health and security.

As regards the technical measures to be implemented in order to relieve the recession they depend on the political stability, the strengthening of the governmental team, the eradication of bureaucracy and corruption so as to have real political reforms as advised by the Chulalongkorn University lecturer Viraidh Charoenloet who said *"With effective political reform the situation will improve. If not there will be a social crisis"*.

Now as the new constitution has been adopted on 26 September, obviously the Chavalit Yongchaiyuth government has marked one score in regaining confidence of thai people, business milieu, the foreign creditors and will be able to act in order to relieve the critical situation of the thai economy.

As a technical measure among others it is urgent to solve the problem of deficit of the current account which increases unceasingly from years to years as follows : -186.2 billion baht in 1990, -193.7 billion baht in 1991, -160.1 billion baht in 1992, -161.2 billion baht in 1993, -203.2 billion baht in 1994, -335.7 billion baht in 1995. On the other hand it is urgent also to solve the problem of deficit of the balance of trade as follows : -255.1 billion baht in 1990, -247.7 billion in 1991, -205.4 billion

baht in 1992, -221.7 billion baht in 1993, -226.8 billion baht in 1994, -378.7 billion baht in 1995.

Concerning the current account it is obvious that the immediate remedy is to find a solution for clearing the \$ US 90 billion debt borrowed abroad (some \$US 70 billion is owed by private companies which are facing bankruptcy because of devaluation of the baht)⁵¹.

However, on August 13, 1997, the Thai government has reached an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on a \$US 16 billion loan of which \$US 4 billion from IMF and \$US 13 billion from other financial institutions and contributors in order to forestall a balance of payments crisis. Along with IMF other important contributors are Asiatic Development Bank (ADB), Japan, Australia, Hongkong, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, Indonesia, China. The stand by right granted to Thailand will be used to bolster foreign exchange reserves and to stabilize the baht value⁵².

Concerning the balance of payments, one of the appropriate measures to restore the equilibrium of this post and even more its excess, is to expand Thai exports by striving to overcome quotas, tariffs, anti-dumping measures or protectionist policy implemented by USA, EEC, scrapping privileges to Thailand, to diversify the foreign market and to overcome the competitiveness of other exporter countries who practise low wages undercutting Thai textiles, footwears, cannings, etc....and other goods⁵³.

As financial measures, Thai government should liberalize the financial situation by reducing the rates (actually 14-15%) to a lowest level and set up a fund serving to help the solvability of small-scale financial institutions and to avoid bankruptcy.

CONCLUSION

What has been analyzed above is main features of Thai society at the age of globalization. These features represent the old and the new trends of the Thai society characterized by a very strong acculturation of Thai new generation due to the very rapid modernisation and the strong influence of the modern mass media. Unfortunately the bad side of the modernization seems to be prevalent and constitutes a long-term threat to the traditional Thai values. However, it is incumbent to parents, to social institutions, to schools, colleges and universities, churches and Buddhist institutions to watch over this bad trend so as to rectify it in order to conform with the moral ethics.

⁵¹ Let be a lesson in FEER June 12, 1997, p. 71

⁵² Economist 16-22 August 1997, p. 22.

⁵³ Asiaweek July 25, 1977 : Devaluation 101. A layman's guide to the turmoil.