THE MORAL DISINTEGRATION AND POLITICS OF CULTURAL EMOTIONS WITHIN THAILAND'S CURRENT, DEEPLY DIVIDED POLITICAL CONFLICTS

Thannapat Jarernpanit

College of Local Management and Development, Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University, Pisanulok 65000, Thailand

Corresponding author: Fugith@hotmail.com

Abstract

This article aims to study the problems caused by the deep political divisions that currently exist in Thailand, and the conflicts they are causing. In particular, the article looks at the division between the 'yellow shirt' and 'red shirt' political groups during the last decade. It is argued that neither of these groups was ever really internally unified, comprised instead of a wide diversity of social sub-groups which shared different desires, ideologies and cultural emotions. The problem of a deeply divided society highlights the disparities that exist within the political and emotional framework of the country. Importantly, the illusion of morality has concealed and suppressed the diversity of thoughts and moral values in many groups of society. Subsequently, Thai political conflict and polarization demonstrate the struggle for power of political and moral meaning among several social sub-groups. This struggle is reflected in the cultural forces of emotions, which display greater complexity than the seemingly binary conflict between the yellow and red shirts.

Keywords: Political conflicts; cultural forces of emotion; morality; red shirt; yellow shirt

Introduction

Thailand returned to military rule in 2014, after a prolonged political crisis was followed by a military crackdown in Bangkok. The military coup in 2014 seized political power from the government of Yingluck Shinawatra, the younger sister of Thaksin Shinawatra, himself a former Thai Prime Minister. In its place, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) was set up, with General Prayuth Chan-o-cha as its head. The military coup was justified based on claims that national security was being threatened due to the political violence occurring in Bangkok and in several other parts of the country. The NCPO came to power promising to restore peace, love and harmony among the Thai people, by stimulating political, social and economic reform (The Secretariat of the House of Representative, 2014).

They announced the imposition of martial law throughout the country; dissolved the government and parliament, and nullified the 2007 Constitution. The new military government has continued to stress the importance of bringing peace and harmony back to Thailand, with the Prime Minister indicating that the problems which led to the political crisis are unsolvable using the old political system, due to corruption among politicians and a lack of harmony in the country. As with the 2006 military coup, military leaders argue that the key problem within Thai politics is a lack of morality, which has arisen in large part from a preoccupation with economic growth at both the local and national levels, especially during the implementation of Thaksin's populist economic programs. According to the military government, political issues have had an adverse impact on the morals and ethics held by Thai people, and the country must be placed back on course.

As a particular system of morality gained a central position in Thai politics and society, it concealed and suppressed a diversity of thoughts and other values expressed by many groups of people. This has led to the struggle for meanings of moral values and politics, as shaped by different cultural emotions such as anger, hate and disgust, among several social sub-groups during moments of political transition. This struggle reflected the moral disintegration and the politics of cultural emotions within the seemingly binary conflicts between the yellow shirts and red shirts.

This article aims to discuss the social, political and cultural structure of morality in Thai society, which has the monarchy as at its center, representing the center of morality and acting as the righteous legitimation of Thai political order. My intentions are to study the influence of these socio-cultural structures on, and the problems caused by, the current political divisions and conflicts taking place in the country. Also, the article endeavors to analyze the influence of morals - as socio-cultural and emotional forces - on the nature of these deep political divisions.

Morality and Cultural Forces of Emotion

Morality

Morality is called "*siladhamma*" in Pali language. Si-La means "normal" or the way things should be, or "*prakati*", and "*dhamma*" means truth or reality (Bhikkhu, 1986). It governs the principle of social practices and the basis of thought and emotion (Eoseewong, 2003). It instructs what people ought to do and what is right and wrong in society**.** If someone violates these moral principles, they are often treated with disgusted and/or punished by society (Rozin et.al, 1993). In general, morality is related to religious beliefs. However, I argue that Thai morality cannot be understood solely in terms of religion. From my point of view, morality is bound up in notions of power and cannot be separated from the concepts of monarchy and state. In particular, it connects to Hindu-Buddhist thought as mandala, integrated as part of the Thai political and socio-cultural structure, and used to justify the absolute moral power and status of the King. Morality has become the foundation of state political ideology, the political order, and Thai cultural identity which holds the monarchy at its center.

According to the concept of mandala, the King represents as the centre of the state and is surrounded by sub-systems. The King became a '*cakravatin*' (universal monarch) or '*devarāja*' (the god-king) under Khmer rulers during the early Southeast Asian political system. Notably, the King appeared as the 'the great man', 'man of prowess' or 'the big man'. This prowess signified and justified his spiritual leadership in a god-like absolute status (Wolters, 1999).

Hindu-Buddhism describes the King as *rajadharma* or the moral King who follows the rules of dhamma and acts as the standard-bearer of morality for state and society. The King is considered the exemplary centre of the state and the highest good man (*dhammaraja*) or "the great man" according to this moral power. The early Hindu-Buddhists used the King's images and symbols as alegitimation of kingship and sovereignty (Tambiah, 1976).

This formation of a Thai political and socio-cultural structure has long been inculcated since the primeval period. Recently, it has been utilized during the King Bhumibol period (Rama IX: 1927-2016). Hindu-Buddhism has helped to legitimate the power of the monarchy as the leader of Siamese state formation and the traditional Thai political structure. It provided a theoretical groundwork for the nature of royal power and the moral hierarchy where the King is the superior power through his many accumulated merits. This can be found within the Hindu-Buddhist doctrine of the hierarchical cosmology of the Traiphuum. The Traiphuum was based on a correlation of ascending degrees of religious merits with higher levels of wisdom and heavenly existence. It provided a religious reflection and justification for the social hierarchy focused on the King (Jackson, 1989). As a result, a power relation between people and monarchy in a hierarchical structure had been filtered through communities within the Siamese state. Thai villages or communities were grounded in Buddhism, thereby legitimising the power and moral status of the ruler.

A belief in Hindu-Buddhism has intertwined with beliefs in supernatural beings (*phi*), magic power and the supernatural mystical power of many Thai people. This can be seen in the spirit rituals associated with, and the sacralization of amulets, images of the Buddha, and statues in Thai society. Amulets (*khrūēang rāng*) are provided with sacred power by chanting sacred words (*pluk sēk khāthā*) in a ceremony (*phiti*). Annulets are imbued with the power to provide protection and prosperity for their owners. Images of Buddha, statues, and coins have given special power (*saksit*), charisma (*barami*), and protective virtue through rites of sacralization (*phiti pluk sēk*) (Tambiah, 1984). This process of sacralization also applies to images and statues of the King, provided with a god-like status. Also, a belief in merit (*bun* or goodness) justifies the power and status of the King as a great man, having accumulated much merit in the Kingdom. Therefore, the combination of

Hindu-Buddhist beliefs, supernatural beings and the supernatural mystical power of Thais support a belief in the charismatic and sacred power of the King.

In addition, Buddhism is also used as the state's tool to integrate all the state sub-functions into the common community of the Siamese state. Evidence can be seen through the reformation of Buddhist Sangha and the local monkhood, as conducted by the monarchy. King Chulalongkorn (Rama IV: 1853-1910) reformed the Sangha or Dhammayuttika-Nikaya in 1833 and made the Siamese state and society a Theravada Buddhism State (Tanabe and Keyes, 2002). It emphasized the royal Buddhism of the Thai court. This Buddhism reformation thus led to the development of a religious absolutism that paralleled and legitimated the political absolutism of the Thai monarchy in the second half of the nineteenth century (Jackson, 1989).

Hence, morality had been integrated with the power of the monarchy and the formation of Thai state and society based on Hindu-Buddhism and the beliefs in supernatural beings, magic power and supernatural mysterious power. Whilst Buddhism has served to construct the meaning of morality, it also justifies a hierarchical structure of morality with the King situated at the top, as the most virtuous being. This is the reason why morality is associated with power and cannot be separated from the concepts of the King and State.

Cultural Forces of Emotion

The cultural forces of emotion refers to the intense feelings and experiences of learning within the contexts of the subject's position (Rosaldo, 1989). The notion of force involves both affective intensity and significant consequences of experiences as based on cultural learning over a long period of time (Rosaldo, 1984). This power of feeling in human conduct underlies cultural forms. In this regard, the cultural forces of emotion can influence social actions and maintain social order or social norms such as an accepted moral code (Scheve, 2013).

Thai Buddhist doctrine teaches people to fear sin, evil and the consequence of karma**.** Thus, some Thai people avoid performing actions perceived as '**bad**' because of this fear**.** The fear of sin, karma and evil also merges with morality under the socio‐cultural context of Thainess (Thai identity). Therefore, as a Thai, if you do not love the nation and the monarchy,

then you are '**bad**', a sinner betraying your country and the King, and someone lacking gratitude towards the motherland (*pandin*). This discourse of gratitude to the motherland (*katan-yu, rukun tor pandin*) is closely associated to royal-nationalist doctrine and the concept of goodness in Thai morality. Consequently, the feeling of love is combined with religious belief, goodness, and faith or loyalty to King and nation as promoted in royal-nationalist ideology. It is a feeling of love embedded in the cognition and consciousness of the Thai people. The promotion of a particular Thai morality and a royal-nationalist discourse has been engaged for a long time, and given extra prominence during the reign of King Bhumibol (Rama IX).

During the Sarit government (1957-1963), King Bhumibol was advocated in the highest status as the Head of State. He became situated as the symbol of the nation and the spirit of the people including the source of morality and ethics in divine kinship. This has become the moral core of Thai people and the source of legitimate power in Thai political culture (Chaloemtiarana, 2007). Therefore, the discourse of royal-nationalism, with the good King at its center, intensified after this period, as the Buddhist model of Kingship also came under the authority of King, included the Buddhist rituals and ceremonies used to justify his status in divine kinship. As a result, the Thai monarchy has been re-divinized in the face of political culture and democratic rule through mass media technologies, placing the monarchy as the highest moral power (*barami*) and magical-divine power (*saksit*) (Jackson, 2009). This means that the principles of Thai democracy cannot be separated from the concept of the virtuous or great man in politics. This political model was encouraged by Field Marshal Sarit Thannarat and it has been redefined and reproduced several times by the elite establishment. As a result, this image of morality became the cultural force of emotions of most Thais.These helps to explain why many Thais express utter love and loyalty to the King, maintaining the traditional institution of the monarchy and the royal-nationalist discourse promoted by the ruling elites.

However, there is a problem in the need for total belief in the people to support and maintain righteousness and reality in Thai political culture. Yet this does not more align with the new consciousness, perceptions and realities faced by most people in their everyday lives. Such incompatibilities between

Thai morality and the new consciousness of many Thais have increased since the military coup of 2006. Changes in economic, political and sociocultural structures during the past few decades of Thai society created the new consciousness and perceptions of many groups within the Thai society. This new consciousness also arose in various social subgroups who joined political protests during the past decade. As several social scientists have explained, the yellow shirt and red shirt political movements were comprised of a wide range of social sub-groups and networks (Laungaramsri, 2013; Thabchumpon, 2016). In particular, red shirt groups developed into several small red shirts groups with different ideologies, desires, identities and strategies after prolonged protests against the yellow shirts (Eoseewong, 2010; Nostitz, 2014). Hence, the important issues to be considered are how to understand changes of people's perceptions, consciousness and emotions to Thai political legitimacy based on the charismatic power of the monarchy and morality in Hindu-Buddhism, and what impact it has made to political and social divisions in Thailand. In this regard, more focus has to be drawn on the different cultural forces of emotion that link to the diversification of social backgrounds of several social sub-groups inside the yellow and the red shirts.

Research Methodology

This study involved a qualitative research design. The method focused on the phenomenological understanding of the politics of everyday life, using the common-sense experiences of social actors. It included these experiences to understand the social and political reality within actor contexts and positions (Bernstein, 1976).

In this article, the data in part reflects my in-depth interviews with yellow and red shirt supporters in Chiang Mai, Udon Thani, Bangkok and Hat Yai, conducted between March 2015 and July 2017. These locations have been identified as the main base of yellow and red shirt protests in each region of Thailand. In this research, the key informants are aged between 50-70 years old, and come from various professions such as that of university lecturer, businessman, retired civil servant, vendor, agriculturalist, and NGO worker. For confidentially, pseudonyms have been applied to all key informants.

Informed consent was obtained in each case under the ethical operations of the study.

Results and Discussion

Having discussed social disintegration based on the lack of belief in a unique Thai morality, and also the lack of compatibility between royal discourse and the democratic system in Thailand, I will now argue that both red and yellow shirt groups have never really been internally unified, instead comprised a diversity of sub-groups which share different desires, ideologies and emotions. As a result, the patterns of cultural emotions seen within these groups can help reveal their internal differences, divisions and conflicts. I will examine this issue by focusing on an analysis of the affective emotions of anger, hate and disgust displayed by the red shirt and yellow shirt groups.

Anger, hate and disgust among the red shirts and yellow shirts

There are several causes of anger as a universal and basic emotion. However, for Solomon (1984), getting angry involves concepts and evaluations that are clearly and specifically learned in different ways within particular societies. As a result, the causes of anger might differ from culture to culture, as may expressions of anger, at least verbal expressions (Solomon, 1984).

I agree that the causes of anger vary across cultures, as do the meanings behind anger. Nevertheless, one cannot understand human affective action based only on one emotion and in a static sense, because an emotion cannot happen without other emotions and feelings being present within a particular context.

A number of other studies have tried to explain the red and yellow shirts' emotions as static and monotype, without discussing the varying contexts and cultures involved. However, my argument is that an emotion such as anger is embodied with other emotions and varies based on a society's context and culture. Even in Thai society, for example, the anger felt among political groups can derive from a variety of sources and have varied meanings.

In the case of the red shirts, the first cause of their anger is the political actions of the yellow shirt movement and its heavy criticism of Thaksin Shinawatra, the ex-prime minister and beloved red-shirt icon. They felt that Thaksin did nothing wrong, and cares for poor people, as shown through his policies and economic subsidies.

The second cause of the anger felt among the red shirts is the unfairness of legal procedures. They perceived the red shirt protests were unfairly criticized, judged as morally wrong and illegal, as opposed to the righteous yellow shirt and People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) protestors. For example, the yellow shirts seized Government House and other government buildings, and later seized the airport, yet no one stopped or arrested them. The People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) movement also seized several significance sites in Bangkok and obstructed the election in February 2014. Therefore, red shirt anger is directed towards double standards (*songmattatarn*) in Thai society and the political arena. This issue was exacerbated by the Bangkok-controlled media, which has always represented them in a negative light; as uncivilized, brutal, unemployed and stupid. For example, the newspapers constructed a very crude caricature of them during the protests, as a paid mob manipulated by the billionaire former premier (Rojanaphruk & Hanthamrongwit, 2010).

Moreover, many red shirt cases that went to trial involved the use of state suppression through violence and the use of Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Codes, commonly known as the lèse majesté law. As a result, many red shirt leaders and supporters have since been accused of being involved in the alleged anti-monarchy movement, itself linked to terrorism. For instance, Tai, who was the main red shirt leader of "Chak Thong Rob Group" in Ubon Ratchathani province, has been sentenced to serve life imprisonment, for burning the provincial hall of Ubon Ratchathani on May 10, 2010. He said he was accused of terrorism by the military and Thai court, a claim he fervently disputes (Tai, interview, 2015). Such cases cause red shirt anger, resentment and disappointment with the justice system in the country. This has focused their struggle to that ofjustice, equality and democracy. Chairat Charoensin-o-larn (2012) called this the desire for equality and justice, calling for the abolition of double-standard in Thai society, law and politics. State

suppression has further transformed this desire into a desire for revenge, mainly due to the lack of sympathy or consolation coming from yellow shirts or the government (Charoensin-o-larn, 2012).

However, in my opinion, the desire for revenge does not totally explain the red shirts' emotions and actions since the violent crackdowns of April 2009 and April/May 2010. Many red shirt supporters did not actually desire revenge, but still hoped for change, especially with the issue of the King's succession looming. The King's succession is a key factor in shaping the political crisis that exists in Thai society, and it will almost certainly lead to some form of transformation within the political scene, as well as in society as a whole. At that moment, the red shirts hope their search for the truth will end and everyone will be 'ta sawang' (eyes opening) with the truth. The desire for truth and righteousness is expressed through the struggle for identity and prestige of the red shirt protestors. A member of the Bangkok red shirt group TV24 hours explained that they remained focused on fighting for truth and justice in Thai society, even when defeated after the prolonged protests of May 2010. In fact, the red shirts did not aim to oppose the government and state power. However, they wanted the government to provide a reliable justice system and equality for all people. Significantly, they fight for the recognition of their identity, prestige and truth as well as legal righteousness in Thai society (P.Nee, Interview, 2017).

Some red shirt groups hope that Thaksin will be able to return; others hope for a return to fair elections (and victory) and for real democracy to be reestablished. Some of the radical red shirts hope that changes in Thailand's social and political structure will occur. Surachai Sae-Dan[1] mentioned in a YouTube video that "he hopes for a reformation of the Thai social and political structure through a people's revolution, as it could change Thai society into a liberal democracy" (Sae-Dan, 2016).

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[1] Surachai Sae Dan or Surachai Danwattananusorn is an anti-government activist and key leader of Red Siam group. He was the last political prisoner in the Communist offence of Thailand. He was born in Nakorn Si Thammarat province, becaming well known after 6th October 1976, as a key member of the Communist Party in Thailand. Surachai was a member of the 'Khwam Wang Mai Party' (the New Hope Party) of General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, and worked for the Thai Rak Thai Party (the Thai Love Thai Party) of Thaksin Shinawatra in Nakorn Si Thammarat province. He joined with the UDD Red Shirts in 2007, before separating from the leaders of UDD and organizing 'the Red Siam' group with Jakrapop Penkair (a former minister of Thaksin Shinawatra and famous spokesman in Thailand) (Editor, 2011).

Hence, the anger of the red shirts is accompanied by both hope and a deep-rooted sense of defeat and frustration. Their anger and hope are also linked to the emotion of hate, of which there are several kinds. They call the yellow shirts *'salim'* (a kind of Thai dessert of many colors). *Salim* refers to a group of people who say they are neutral, and will not take sides with any group and are free to believe, without being persuaded by others (Anusin, 2012). However, not all the red shirt members hate the yellow shirts; most pity them (in Thai *somphed*) because they do not yet know the truth or *ta sawanng,* and are just fools.

Another cause of hate among the red shirts arises from the symptoms of *ta sawanng* and the injustices they have experienced. This refers both to periods during protest, especially the violent, military coups that dissolved democracy and annulled election results, and since. This is hate mixed with anger at the injustice the red shirts feel is happening in Thai society and in the Thai political arena. These feelings of anger have led to an anti-power movement against the military and the elite, the so-called '*ammart*' (aristocracy) who the red shirts believe want to retain power for their own interests.

The situations discussed above have led to a desire for justice, equality and democracy by red shirt supporters, and also provoked anti-royalist sentiment, even as criticism of the royal institution is now prohibited by law. Actually, the concept of *ta sawanng* reflects the political resistance of many rural people to the state power which attempted to dominate and oppress them through forms of knowledge, ideology, laws, government projects and policies, and also through violent suppression. A sense of injustice is compounded by a feeling of loss of opportunities and rights within socio-political and economic structures. By contrast, *ta sawanng* does not directly imply the overthrow of the monarchy. In fact, they wanted to communicate to the state their refusal of an ideological domination with everything centered on the monarchy. Ultimately, for them Thai social structure should be more equal and open up opportunities for the rural class and other marginalized Thais. Likewise, some of the red shirts in Chiang Mai insisted in fighting for democracy and justice. In particular, they advocated fairness in the legal system. They did not focus on or talk about Thaksin for a long time after the

violent military suppressions in May 2010. They did not aim to oppose the military power and the monarchy, but believed that the monarchy and the elite should not be involved in politics (Keng, Interview, 2015).

Meanwhile, the state government and some sections of the media have accused Thaksin followers of being anti-monarchy, so the red shirts feel disgust towards the government, military, elite, media and some upper middle class people who are close to or a part of the monarchical network (in Thai called *'khonhonjao'*). In this regard, disgust can reflect a moral reaction to other people's actions, implying that their actions or character have violated normative standards (Rozin et al., 1993). Disgust displayed by the red shirt movement has led to them separating themselves from society, as they do not believe or trust the unelected government with their political campaigns and propaganda, the justice procedure, or the media. This is why the red shirts oppose the coups and the Abhisit government, and is why they only listen to and watch their own media channels, hoping for a new politics that addresses the transgressions and disagreements taking place in Thai society (Charoensin-o-larn, 2012).

As for the yellow shirts, their hate and anger also has several causes and conditions. First, their anger is linked with love and loyalty aligned with morality and a royal-nationalist ideal. Members of the yellow shirt group really love and are loyal to the Thai King, who for them represents moral righteousness. They are angry with and resent anyone who threatens, would wish to harm or disrespects the King. As one yellow shirt supporter in Chiang Mai said to me when I asked why people came out to protect the monarchy, "It is not too much. I don't want anyone to harm our King" (Ta, Interview, 2015).

Even though Buddhist doctrine teaches people that anger is a kind of passion, the royal-nationalist movement uses love in order to protect the monarchy as an institution. Anger; meanwhile, is embodied in the yellow shirt desire to take care of and protect the King. Anger is the driver for their protective behavior, behavior seen as a major criterion of human goodness. As Briggs (1971) stated when studying the Utku culture among the Eskimos of the Canadian Northwest Territories, a good person is seen as protective, helpful, and generous. These are all universal values (Briggs, 1971). Haidt

(2012) mentioned that care, loyalty and sanctity are the moral foundations of moral communities, but can also be politically divisive.

Nevertheless, a love of the monarchy and of Thai society requires one to display protective feelings and behavior, including faith, and these are the moral standards embodied within Thai morality. This framework has become the moral compass used to judge people, to influence others to feel the right emotions and convince people to follow the yellow shirt way of thinking. The framework uses disgust and fear to motivate an appropriate social behavior; to ensure people display the moral standards incorporated within Thainess.Therefore, the moral foundation of Thainess supports righteous anger when anyone violates the moral standards set by the yellow shirts, and this is why anger is usually accompanied by feelings of disgust and hate. It is the dichotomy which is the cornerstone of the divisions among Thai people, society and politics.

The second form of anger and hate felt by the yellow shirt groups has its moral foundation in the attribute of fairness. Even though the yellow shirts generally neglect fairness and equality within the hierarchical social structure it supports, fairness in this sense refers to not cheating, and to knowing one's place. Thaksin has been heavily criticized for cheating, being greedy, insulting the monarchy, and for his non-moderate character. It is this that led to anger, disgust and hate being felt by the yellow shirt groups, who still fear his return from exile. Thaksin and his supporters become objects of disgust, and are seen as having poor moral judgment (Chai, Interview, 2015). The yellow shirts also feel that those who support Thaksin have benefited from his policies and his money, and so do not really understand democracy (Kan, Interview, 2015).

Moreover, some yellow shirt members hate the red shirts because they find them unsophisticated and naive in only receiving information from their leaders. Puk, a leader of yellow shirt protests in Chiang Mai, explained to me that "the red shirt protestors listened to and watched only their own news channels. They are drunks and unemployed, but being red shirt leaders and members have been able to obtain food and money" (Puk, Interview, October 19, 2015). Some also think the red shirts do not understand true democracy; that the Thai democratic system should be governed by good people, not bad (Sak, Interview, 2015). These opinions and feelings are influenced by the Thai

media, and especially the Bangkok media, which during the protests created an image of the red shirt protestors as barbarians, uneducated, dirty and under the patronage of Thaksin and his politicians. This situation is a consequence of class-bias, in the sense that many Bangkokians and urbanites who supported the yellow shirt group see the red shirts as being less human than them.

The hate for Thaksin felt by many urban middle class aligned with a yellow shirt discourse which called for the removal of Thaksin's government and the Thaksin regime. It was also a consequence of the moral political discourse to promote the roles of the King and the elites since the late 1970s and early 1980s. It emerged alongside the rise of anti-vote-buying politics among the urban middle class, which promoted morals and ethics in every sector of Thai society (Winichakul, 2008). For instance, the argument of General Prem Tinsulanonda that corruption was a threat to the nation, and the rise of Sondhi fever in Bangkok during 2005 (Phongpaichid and Baker, 2012), helped encourage a moral political ideal within an anti-corruption campaign.

This moral political ideal links to their prior experiences, a discourse of royal-nationalism, and class, where they believed that the middle class had a crucial role in promoting democracy as well as goodness in Thai society. Many middle-class Bangkokians think and feel that they are more educated and developed than the rural class and red shirt protestors. This resulted from the socialization of class culture into the hierarchical structure of the moral community in which the king is placed at the top. This point of view was found in interviews with Kan (pseudonym) and other yellow shirt protestors in Bangkok. Most of them are educated and consider themselves to be middle-class. Most have experiences in politics since 14th October 1973, aged over 60 years old. For instance, Kan (60 years old) had joined the student movements in 1973 during her undergraduate study at Mahidol University in Bangkok. After she graduated, she worked for the government for several years. Kan believed that her knowledge and experiences have supported her critical thinking and she possesses an ability to decide what is right and wrong in Thai society. She supported the yellow shirts because the actions and ideals of this group were right in her mind. This was in complete contrast to the red shirts due to the differences in knowledges and background (Kan, Interview, 2015).

Thus, the sense of righteousness of many middle-class yellow shirts relates to the class specific-experiences which have shaped their perceptions, emotions and political perspectives. Many of them were fully aware of themselves as ordinary tax-payers and middle-class people. They see themselves as educated and able to think more critically than red shirt protestors. This is the self-perception formed by the class experiences of the middle class in cultural contexts, rather than formed by economic relations. E.P. Thompson (1963) mentions that class consciousness is not only determined by the productive relations as in classical Marxism, it can also be determined by class experiences in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, beliefs and institutional forms. This class consciousness lies in the vast, multiple and contradictory realm of experience, not in the unidirectional process of class struggle as expressed in the economic determinism of classical Marxism (cited in William (1986, 7).

This, in turn, reflects the embeddedness of morality in the perceptions, dispositions and sense of social class of many Thais. This morality justifies the feeling of hate towards Thaksin and his supporters, the red shirts, because they were considered a threat to the monarchy and an evil force in Thai morality. For instance, Sak, who was one of the yellow shirt leaders in Bangkok, claims that he could not tolerate the evil and wrongdoing in Thai society that took place under Thaksin, and was personally offended by it (Sak, Interview, 2015).

The moral politics and extreme royalism of the yellow shirt supporters emphasized the view of good man (*khon dee*), which was also considered as the good Thai citizen. The term "good man" is based on a belief in morality and connects to royal power in *barami* (charisma), where the King is regarded as the pinnacle of goodness in a hierarchical structure. Thus, the good man is one who acts morally according to the Buddhist doctrines.

The emotions of disgust, hate and anger often occur together (Rozin et al., 1993), and what has really divided people in Thai society are the emotions and disparities seen within the political and cultural arenas, exacerbated by economic divisions. Red and yellow shirt conflict reflects internal issues with the political and social order, which cannot be separated from the moral order, the values held and the emotions felt by Thai people. In fact, morals and

emotions act as a bi-directional mediator between the social structure and social action among the political groups (Scheve, 2013). To understand the diversity of social characteristics and actions that exist within these political groups, one cannot see emotions as static. Instead they vary in terms of meaning, level and dynamic, based on the contexts and cultures within which they are experienced. These emotions also reflect the social values, political meanings, moral reactions and moral judgments held by different political and social groups in relation to one another, all of which have led to a form of moral disintegration.

Conclusion

The deepest divisions between Thai people, as represented by the symbolic colors of red and yellow, emerge from the political and cultural emotions and meanings of politics. For the yellow shirts, a moral politics is shaped by beliefs and emotions in the charismatic power of monarchy and Buddhism. Their political ideology, with desire for a moral democracy, is based on the concept of a good man through a lens of royal-nationalism. On the contrary, the perception shared by red shirt groups is that of injustice in Thai society, particularly inequality and unfairness in the legal system. This meant universal justice, applied through the rule of law, and equality where all human beings respected each other. Notably, they fought for truth, prestige and identity within Thai society. Thus, many people remained red shirt supporters as they sincerely hoped and believed that one day truth and justice (in democracy) would prevail in Thai society. They would fight for their political ideal, with or without the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), Thaksin Shinawatra and the Pheu Thai party.

The crucial issue is the gap in understanding between these meanings of emotion, politics and moral values within the contexts and positions of social and political groups. This gap has led to a deeply divided Thai population in terms of the country's politics and society. Meanwhile, the cultural forces of emotion reflect the power structure that exists in the country, long framed under the concept of Thai morality, but now the basis for a struggle for new political meanings, social and moral values, such as justice

and equality among the social sub-groups in Thai society. Conflict reflects a social disintegration in the ideal and belief in morality and politics which centered on the monarchy, religion (Hindu-Buddhism) and royal-nationalism.

Acknowledgments

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