

***COMPARATIVE MODERNIZATION***  
***BETWEEN***  
**MEIJI'S JAPAN**  
***AND***  
**CHULALONGKORN'S SIAM**  
***AND CONTEMPORARY***  
**REPUBLIC OF KOREA**  
***AND***  
**THAILAND**



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## ***Introduction :***

Comparative studies can broadly serve two functions. First, they can serve as the basis for drawing generalizations. The various cases under comparison are for the purpose of trying to draw up commonalities and conceptualized into the abstract characteristics along the nomothetic approach. The aim is to come up with valid generalizations if not theories. Lucian Pye's "development syndrome" embracing the three components of political development—equality, differentiation and capacity, is an example par excellence of generalizations drawn forth from the ten definitions of "political development" advanced by political scientists. The second function, a more traditional one, is to pursue a comparative study with the objective of seeing the similarities and the differences of the various systems. The focus is more on the concrete rather than to draw out the abstract. By comparison, say, the British political system with that of the French, one will be able to discern the similarities and differences of the two systems. Moreover, one will also be able to comprehend any of the two systems better because of the comparative framework. This is due to the fact that in the process of comparing the two systems, alternately the two systems will serve as background against which the other system will be projected. Thus, it will enable the researcher to discern the other system more vividly.

Of more importance is the concomitant result from such a study. That, is, it will enable one to identify the variables which were missing in one system while the other system enjoyed the very factors which might become instrumental in its success. Thus, a comparative study of cases characterized as success and failure will enable

the researcher to have a glimpse of the underlying factors which have brought about the different outcome.

In order to have a better understanding of the differential result of the modernization efforts of Japan and Thailand and between Korea and Thailand, a comparative survey of the modernization process is in order. It must be pointed out here that this is only a short essay which attempts to address the issues which are perceived as the underlying factors which brought about the different outcome of the modernization efforts. It will not in any case pretend to be the definitive piece of work. At best, this should serve as food for thought for further investigation.

## ***The Case of Meiji's Japan (1867-1912) and Chulalongkorn's Siam (1868-1910)***

The two most interesting modernization histories in Asia is the modernization (Westernization) programs undertaken in the reign of the Emporor Meiji known as the Meiji Restoration which started in 1868 and the reform launched by King Chulalongkorn who ascended the throne in 1868. The two contemporary reigns covered roughly a span of more than four decades. Both countries attempted to reform the various structures of the society with the ultimate aim of avoiding Western imperialism. But after the end of the reigns, the outcome of the modernization process was marked by great disparity. While Japan was transformed into a power on a par with the Western powers at the time, Siam, despite the great achievement by the modernizing monarchs and his kins, the country was still struggling for survival. There must be reasons for this.

In order to find out the underlying factors for the difference in the achieved modernity, a conceptual framework for the analysis has to be devised and used as the analytical tools for the investigation. For the modernization process to become fruitful or a failure, it will conceivably depend on three important factors. This includes the pre-conditions or the pre-existing conditions before the modernization process taken place, the role played by the political leadership, and the environmental factors which the leaders will have to take into account.

### *The Pre-conditions :*

The pre-conditions existing before the Meiji Restoration were resulted from the two and a half centuries of the Tokugawa rule beginning in 1600 and lasted until 1868, the year of the Meiji Restoration. The evolution of the political, economic and social systems under the Tokugawa shogunate led to a situation in which ground was broken for the "take off" when the Meiji modernizing oligarchs started to launch their reform program into full swing. The pre-conditions could be briefly described as follows:

Politically and administratively, the Tokugawa political system could be classified as a centralized feudal system. There existed a central government at Edo but at the same time the 250 odds domains or han under the lord or daimyo were autonomous in their particular domains. Yet, they were subject to the sankin kotai or alternate attendance system in which the lords had to travel to Edo for the attendance to the shogune every alternate year and had to stay in Edo for six months. They had to leave behind their family in Edo presumably as hostages. Thus, there was a dual system of autonomous

domain while there was at the same time a centralized form of administration. In this sense, there existed a unified Japanese nationhood, at least in the politico-administrative sense. This would serve as the foundation for the Meiji leaders to turn it into a modern nation-state when they sought to do so subsequently.

In the case of pre-Chulalongkorn's Siam, the situation was different. Despite the fact that there existed the supremacy of Bangkok and there existed the semi-autonomous lords or **cha-omuang** of the provinces, there was a difference in degree between the two countries. The centralization of political power of the Tokugawa shogunate was much higher than that of the Bangkok government. Because of ethnic differences, the notion of a Thai nation under the rule of Bangkok or a Thai nationhood did not emerge until the centralization policy launched by King Chulalongkorn. Indeed, only through as tute policies and strenuous efforts on the part of Bangkok did a Thai-cultured Thai (predominantly Bangkok culture and Buddhism) identity start to take shape. Conceivably, efforts and energy were spent on developing a new modern nation-state which in the case of the Japanese, lesser efforts and resources were needed for such an undertaking.

Economically, there existed in Japan regional trade, communications and transportation channels blanketing the whole country because the **sankin kotai** system compelled journeys of the lords and their retainers. It also fostered the growth of cities, trade among regions which in turn led to the specialization of products of the various domains. Highways such as the Tokaido linking Kyoto with Edo and other routes including sea-route developed during the Edo period. There emerged also the market economy and money economy and the new system penetrated into the autonomous villages. Big cities



mushroomed due to the fact that every domain would have its urban dwellers consisting of the samurai, the merchants and the artisans. Edo was a city of one million population, Osaka, 400,000 and Kyoto, 350,000 people. All these were to serve as the spring board to a modern economy when the leaders turned resolutely to a new direction.

Socially, the Meiji leaders enjoyed the advantage of a large number of samurai who were administrators during the previous regime. They could be transformed into modern bureaucrats. Many of them discharged their energy in the business and industrial fields. The city dwellers also serve as the pool of human resources. Of more importance was the existence of numerous schools of thought including the Dutch Learning which embraced the Western civilization and a direction for reform along the Western model. The high literacy rate among the city people also served to be conducive for the reform program. There was, in short, a psychological predisposition toward change to a new direction among the Japanese people most notably the ruling elite.

In the case of pre-Chulalongkorn's Siam in both economic and social realms, the kind of positive pre-conditions existed in Japan were either absent or present in much lesser degree in Siam. Big cities were few. Only Bangkok would be comparable probably to Osaka. Most people were not literate. There was only a handful who were exposed to ideas other than Buddhism, Brahminism and the Chinese culture. The country's economy was mainly agricultural and the society was pretty much agrarian. There was a lack of qualified manpower to man the new bureaucracy. The urban sector consisted mainly of government officials and the Chinese merchants who were not yet committed to the cause of any reform due to their state of being foreigners.

It could be seen that in terms of the pre-conditions of the two countries, there obviously existed a discernable difference. The case of pre-Meiji Japan would prove to be supportive of the task of the Meiji reformers while in the case of pre-Chulalongkorn's Siam, in many instances, the pre-conditions proved to be a hindrance against reform. The absence of qualified persons to man the new bureaucracy was a constant complaints made by Prince Damrong when he was looking for people to serve as district officers.

### *The Role of the Political Leadership*

Reform needs agent of change. In the traditional set-up, the agent of change was the political leaders who undertook the task of reform. Thus, the role played by the human elements who were at the top of the pyramid of the power structure was significant. The role played by the leadership could be seen in the following perspectives.

First, who were the political leaders? Were they the incumbent or the new leaders who came to power. Their social background also played a role in the approach and scope of the reform program. Secondly, what kind of vision did they have for the country? Was it merely to survive the imperialist onslaught or was it a scheme to turn the country into a power? The ultimate goal envisaged by the leaders was important because it would entail different program and efforts. The last question was how much power could the modernizing oligarchs wield? Were they secure in their power posts or they had to muddle through for survival? These were important questions to be addressed when one discussed about reform.

In the case of Meiji Japan, the ruling elite were those who came to power after the Tokugawa shogunate fell from power after a *coup d'etat*. The young samurai of Satsuma and Choshu

of the two big Western powers were in control. These were mainly lower-and middle-rank samurai who did not have a stake in the existing order. Thus, they could afford to go all the way regarding the reform program. In the case of Siam, there was what was known as the King's dilemma. A major reform without bound might turn out to become detrimental to the king's power and yet there was a need for reform if the country and the monarchical institution was to survive colonialism. There was thus a need to strike a balance. Reform had to be gradual and a lot of compromises had to be made because it was undertaken by the incumbent elite.

In the case of Meiji Japan, the leaders first started to reform their country in order to avoid falling prey to Western imperialism. But subsequently they started to entertain a vision of turning Japan into a power on a par with the Western powers at the time. Indeed, even before the Meiji Restoration, a number of schools of thought advanced the idea of colonialism for the strength and progress of Japan. Thus, the Meiji leaders adopted the idea in due course. Such an aim would entail a more ambitious scheme than just struggling for survival which seemed to be the case of Siam.

In the case of power wielding, the Meiji leaders became entrenched in power especially after the Satsuma rebellion of 1877 which was crushed. The Japanese leaders were also spared from the menace from the colonial powers. They were engaged in power rivalry in China and South-east Asia, leaving Japan virtually untouched after the opening up of the country. In the case of Siam, King Chulalongkorn had to struggle against the conservative elements who were entrenched in the power structure. He was met with resistance when he started to undertake reform program which ran counter to their interests. Not until the demise of these elements which was a decade later

did the King start to resume his major reform program. The monarch of Siam was also unfortunate in the sense that he had to cleverly maneuver against the colonial onslaught most notably the French who menaced Siam with their gun-boat diplomacy. Only by clever diplomatic manipulation and territorial concessions was the country's political independence maintained. As such, much energy and resources were spent on warding off the colonial threat at the expense of the reform program.

### *The Environmental Factors*

The environmental factors would serve either as supportive variables for the reform program or as impediments. The environmental factors would consist of the pre-conditions which would become part of the environmental factors once the reform program started to be launched. They also consisted of variables which developed afterwards. In the case of Japan, the environmental factors were more or less supportive of the reform program. The Japanese could utilize the traditional symbol vested in the Emperor as the rallying force for the nation to move ahead. They could exploit the legacy of the Tokugawa system such as the samurai who readily became involved in the reform efforts. They were free from the constraints domestically and externally. The power elite were entrenched and could see to it that the program were duly implemented. There was no strong resistance to the extent of slowing down the program. This was somewhat opposite in the case of Siam. The power elite was not secure in their power. They had to make do with whatever manpower they had in the process of reform. They were compelled by the level of under-development to scale down the reform efforts. Colonial threat was constant and not until the very end of the reign that the country

was more or less secure. Under this situation, it could be seen that the environmental factors of the two countries were in fact drastically different. Thus, the differential degree of the achieved modernity was to be expected.

The three core factors, the pre-conditions, the role played by the political leadership and the environmental factors were taken as the conceptual framework which would explain why Japan and Siam of the nineteenth century came out with different result when they launched their reform programs. These factors were convenient tools for analysis of the two cases. They should serve as hypotheses for further investigation. By comparing the two cases, one would be able to discern more vividly the two cases both in comparative terms and as individual countries.

### *Republic of Korea and Thailand*

If the Meiji Japan and Chulalongkorn Siam were historical cases, the Republic of Korea and Thailand are contemporary cases of comparison. But due to the absence of intensive research on the subject, discussion of this portion will be brief, based upon the available information.

We will start with the year 1960 as the beginning of the point of time for our comparison. In the year 1960, Thailand had a population of 28 million people while Republic of Korea had a population of 25 million. But after two decades in the year 1981, Thailand's population was about 9 million people more than Korea. Thailand's national economic development plan started in 1961 (a six-year plan) while that of Korea started in 1962 (a five-year plan). The difference after two decades of economic development was clearly discernable. In 1961, the GNP of Thailand was US \$ 2,600 million while

that of Korea was US \$ 2,200 million but in 1981, that of Thailand turned to be US \$ 36,810, representing an increase of 14 folds, while that of Korea jumped to US \$ 65,750 million representing a 29.8 folds increase or double that of the Thai figures. In 1961 income per capita for the Thai was US \$ 100 and in 1981 it went up to US \$ 700, an increase of 7.7 times while in 1961 income per capita in Korea was only US \$ 83 but in 1981, it went up to US \$ 1,700 or an increase of 20.4 times. In the area of export, in 1961, Thailand's export was estimated at US \$ 500 million and it went up to US \$ 6,918 million in 1981 representing an increase of 12 times while in 1961 the value of Korean export was only US \$ 40 million but in 1981 it skyrocketed to US \$ 21,254 representing an increase of 513 times. Today, Republic of Korea stands as a newly industrialized country with great potential to strive forward even further while Thailand which was ahead of Korea in 1961 has fallen behind.

What were the factors for the different outcome? We have seen that both countries started the national economic development plan almost at the same time, but after two decades, the difference in the achievement was very clear. This was despite the fact that Korea enjoys less natural resources than Thailand.

If we were to trace the factors along the same vein we discussed the Meiji Restoration and the Chulalongkorn Reform, we would end up with a problem. First, there would be an absence of the difference in the preconditions. In fact, in many regards, one could argue that the preconditions in Thailand 1961 were better than those existed in Korea. We then had to come to the political leadership factor. But discussion of the leadership factor may have to be carried out simultaneously with the environmental factors. As for the leadership, one very clear distinction



was that the Korean leaders were faced with a need to turn the country into one which would bypass the Northern kins. There was also pressure and support from the U.S. and Japan especially investment from the latter to transform the country into a bastion for political and strategic reasons. While these were the important factors, it was found that one very crucial factor was missing in the vista of the Thai leaders. That was the role played by science and technology, a point to be discussed momentarily.

From the very beginning, the role of science and technology in the development of Korea was emphasized by its leaders. The Ministry of Science was set up, along with other institutions such as National Council for Science and Technology, Korea Institute of Science and Technology, Korea Scientific and Technological Information Center, Korea Advanced Institute of Science, Daeduk Science Town, etc. This would go to show that the leadership took full cognizance of the significant role of science and technology. In the case of Thailand, the Ministry of Science was set up 12 years later than Korea. It was given only scant attention that it was called a "cemetery" ministry. Only under the leadership of the late Minister Damrong Lathapipat that the ministry was injected with vitality. The science and technology factor seemingly played a significant role in the different outcome of the developmental efforts between Korea and Thailand. While this argument may be well-taken, in the final analysis, one would find that the perception of the leaders was the key factor. The absence of visionary leaders who could envision a futuristic country such as the future Korea or the future Thailand or the Thailand of the 21st century would naturally stifle any development effort. This is because development program would become piece-meal without a macro and future perspective. Failure to comprehend the significant role played by science and technology in the process of national

development indeed has far-reaching implications about the people and the society.

### *Conclusion :*

What we have learned from the comparison of Japan and Siam and Korea and Thailand are that success of reform or development program are multi-causal but the leadership factor cannot be ruled out. This is especially true in a country such as Thailand where the majority of the people still cling to the traditional concept of following the leader. The people would have to be mobilized rather than participate voluntarily in the development process. For this, there must exist strong and visionary leadership. It must be leadership which is intellectually enlightening enough to visualize a future Thailand. It has to be ambitious and yet realistic. It has to have an understanding of the history, of human civilization, and of course the future trend. To be sure, scarcity of resources may serve to hinder such an ambitious scheme but in the final analysis, one may argue that scarcity of resources may prove to be less obstructive than scarcity of ideas and visions. Only an enlightened intellectual horizon and a visionary leadership would turn up the fanfare of success of the development program.

To arrive at this end, a conceptual framework for the analysis and the planning for the future will have to be crystalized. This is significant because actions usually follow ideas. As such, ideas have to be crystal clear in order to serve as a guideline for policy formulation. A development program will have to be comprehensive taking into account the ultimate goal. Thus, there must be a complete equation of the input and the end result. National power is imperative if the development program is to be realized. Such a goal may be attacked as being idealistic. But ideals are like the stars. We may never be able to reach them at the moment but

they will certainly serve as the guideline toward which we can sail our vessel as our forefathers did in years past by following the North Star when they were sailing into the unknown. It is for this reason that in this concluding part, we would like to go beyond the two cases cited above which were taken as our departure point for a venture into the theoretical discussion of national development program.

Economists are well aware of the significance of economic infrastructure like hydro-electric dams, roads, transportation system, telephone facilities and monetary and credit institutions as the foundation upon which economic development and growth can take place.

From past experience, it is also known that economic infrastructure alone is not sufficient for economic development and sustained growth. The question of infrastructure has to be re-examined. What is missing in the equation of a national development model is political stability and a working (positively) state bureaucracy.

Economic growth can not be maintained when there is political in-stability and uncertainty. A country which is plagued by civil war or internal factional struggle is tense and uncertain which are not conducive to an optimistic economic outlook. Such a situation will only discourage long-term planning and necessarily bring in a short-term perspective.

The apprehension of political change and thus the impact upon the plan which planners strenuously have invested their energy and efforts will discourage a serious undertaking. Thus, while one, by necessity, has to analyze economic phenomena in a "controlled" framework of "other things remaining constant", in the world of reality, planners cannot view their plan in isolation from other variables, namely, political and social.

## *Political Factor*

To many planners, the political factor is not subject to control or planning and thus at best the consideration given is merely whether the plan will be politically feasible or not and not beyond. The same is true with how the social (cultural) variable is viewed. A situation like the absence of the absorptive capacity for the "modern" equipment introduced, the inability to maximize its utility and a lack of know-how for its maintenance is not given sufficient attention. Seemingly, the attitude is "this is not the area of our department's concern". This reflects an absence of a comprehensive perspective of the national development plan.

In undertaking a national development plan, a division of labor without an integrated, coherent macro-picture is very dangerous because it could very well lead to an imbalance in the different sectors of development in the country. For example, economic growth which in the final analysis is the increase of the size of the pie will inevitably lead to a demand for a fair share by those who are involved. This equitable income distribution issue is a political one and has to be addressed in a political institution which can accommodate it.

The absence of a political institution, which should have been taken as an important component of infrastructure development, will only lead to problems, and in certain cases even to political turmoil. The October 14, 1973 uprising in Thailand is a result of a number of factors, but analysts of Thai politics invariably attributed it to the unbalanced development program which led to an imbalance between economic growth and political institution development capable of accommodating both concrete and abstract demands of a politically conscious populace.



## ***Social Infrastructure***

As for the social (cultural) infrastructure, an appropriate out-look and value system are imperative. A modern, secular, scientifically based and technologically appreciative cultural and value system is a sine qua non for a development program which aims at going beyond mere importation of technology and modern equipment.

The "modern" social (cultural) environment is necessary for a genuine development potential and program. A scientific mind, punctuality, responsibility, national thinking, ability to plan ahead of time, efficient management by application of well-researched and experimented techniques are important cultural parts of the social structure.

This aspect of national development must be undertaken by the Ministry of Education. But this is valid only as far as administrative functional specificity and structural differentiation go, and when it comes to a comprehensive national development program, the social infrastructure component has to go hand-in-hand with economic and political development. The total is not only the sum of the parts. It has to be "organically" integrated and thus making a balanced, sustained and healthy economic growth possible.

## ***Five Variables***

If one is to conceptualize the national development scheme, one has to put into the equation comprehensive factors which show the sequence of the development process. To start with, a national development program take into account

five underlying factors imperative for national growth and national power. The five variables are :

1. Political development
2. Economic development.
3. Social development through social mobility.
4. Psychological modernity.
5. Sizable population.

These variables buttress our argument that national development program is a comprehensive scheme involving a variety of factors, and are complementary and cannot be taken in isolation.

Economic development cannot take place without political development or a political system which makes it possible to mobilize resources, human and natural. The above cannot take place if the society is a closed one and only those in the inner circle are allowed to take part in the decision-making process. Of more importance is that the system will have to be opened up so that able individuals can be utilized for the common goal of national development.

To be successful, a sizable population with a modern psychology and outlook is needed. If the population is too small, it will not have the advantage of a big domestic market for industrial development at least at the initial stage. A big population with a backward outlook such as superstitious beliefs and illiteracy will only serve to retard or if not impede the national development process.

Viewed in this context, a national development program which focuses only on economic development and overlooks other relevant factors, is bound to get into trouble in the long run. It will lead to unbalanced growth and crisis as economic growth starts to take place leaving other sectors untouched by the development plan.

These negative side effects can only be forestalled by a comprehensive plan, without which imbalance will inevitably follow and defeat the whole purpose of planning for economic growth.

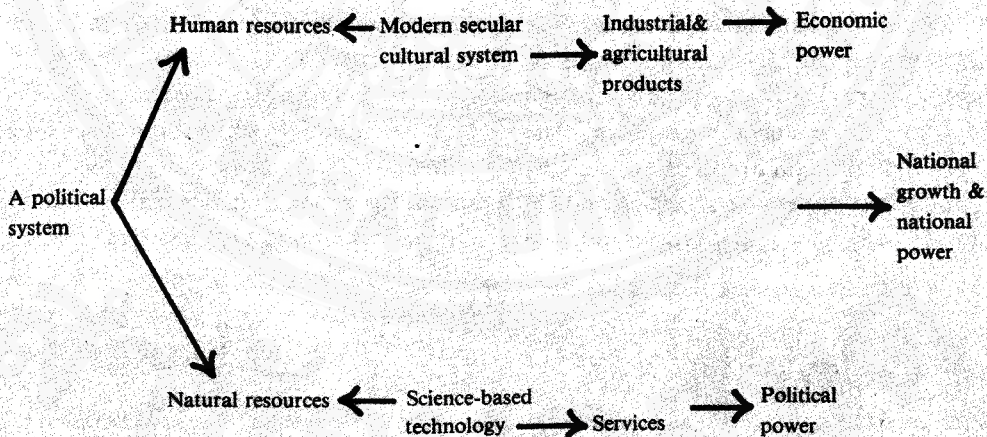
### *A Prerequisite*

To spell out the equation further, a national development program will need a functioning political system which is capable of mobilizing the human and natural resources of the society for development. Thus, the significant function of the political system is to make it possible for every able individual to utilize his potential for a positive end. It is a prerequisite.

However, a lynchpin is needed to connect the two elements, human and natural resources. The linkage can be done through a modern secular cultural system and technological know-how to enable the two elements to come up with a positive output, i.e., economic production in the form of industrial and agricultural products and services.

Improving economic production in both quality and quantity can only be done by receptiveness to innovations and the application of science-based technology. This will make it possible for the products to become competitive in the world market.

If the process is correctly undertaken, it would enhance the economic power of the country which in turn will lead to political power and hence national growth and national power. (See equation in graphic form)



## ***Balance Needed***

Now, how does one go about developing the political infrastructure in Thailand? Only in a totalitarian system can the leaders genuinely adopt a political planning program. In the case of a semi-open political system of Thailand it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to come up with a political planning program. This argument is well-taken. But one can certainly conceive of the issue in terms of providing the development of necessary foundation which, if allowed to proceed along, will eventually turn out to mature.

The most salient example is the development of political participation at a smaller unit of a lower level: local self-government at the tambol (commune) level or the tambol council. This unit is the basic administrative unit between the

village and the district. If these units, which total more than six thousand, blanketing the entire nation can be turned into viable local government units, they will serve as the foundation upon which a participatory political system at a national level can be built. If anything these units will be the ground upon which a participant political culture, local leadership and local initiative can be developed. This is just an example of political infrastructure development which was not given earnest attention until recently.

All in all, the need to have a balance between economic development and socio-political development is to be noted. Failing to take into cognizance of the need for such a concerted effort will only lead to a greater imbalance in the society which will intermittently give rise to political crisis and in the long run political instability, a situation which the planners would want to avoid.