

Fall 12-16-2011

# Transforming the Current Thai Political Conflict to a Peaceful Society

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University of San Francisco

Transforming the Current Thai Political Conflict  
to a Peaceful Society

A Thesis Present to  
The Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences  
Master's Program in International Studies

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirement for the Degree  
Master of Arts in International Studies

by  
Ranatchai Phumcharoen  
December 2011

Transforming the Current Thai Political Conflict to a Peaceful Society

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

In

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by

Ranatchai Phumcharoen

December 2011

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the current Thai political conflict which began in 2005 and continues in 2011. This conflict is different from the nation's past political conflicts, which were conflicts between people and the government. On the contrary, the current conflict is a conflict between Thais who share different political ideologies. Many scholars have explained causes and effects of the conflict on Thai society. However, currently, only a few scholars have proposed solutions to the conflict. Therefore, this is a challenge in order to investigate the current conflict and figure out sustainable means to transform the conflict and build peace in the society. This study posits that reconciliation, rehabilitation, and the narrowing of socioeconomic gaps can transform the current Thai political conflict and build peace in Thai society.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Traditionally, Thailand has largely been a peaceful nation and Thais lived in relative harmony and unity for many years, until 2005. The country was known as the “land of smiles” (Marshall, 2010, para. 1; Voigt, 2010; *Vox Populi*, 2011). Since 1932, the nation changed the political regime from an absolute monarchy to a democracy. Thailand had never experienced a “deep-rooted” conflict as a divided society until 2005 (Fisher et al., 2000, p. 6); the conflict continues to the present. As Sukhumbhand Paribatra—the present Bangkok governor—mentioned, the nation “had conflicts in 1973, 1976, and 1992, but this is unlike anything we’ve seen before” (as cited in Voigt, 2010, para. 2). The past three conflicts were people’s struggles against the government. In 1973, a student-led uprising led to the ouster of a military government and, in 1976, there were widespread protests against economic hardships and fears of a possible military coup; both resulted in massacres of student demonstrators. In 1992, a largely middle class uprising brought down another military government. However, the current conflict is a conflict between Thais and Thais.

Many studies have explained the starting point of the current conflict. Ex-Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was a symbol of modernization and reform. He brought many drastic changes to the country. Before he was a prime minister, he proposed an alternative policy under a slogan “Think new, act new for every Thai” (Walaya as cited in Pongpaichit & Baker, 2008, p. 64) to bail out the nation from the 1997 economic crisis. He became the new hope for the country. He acquired large support from Thais, which allowed him to win the 2001 election (Dalpino, 2010; Hewison, 2010; Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009; Pongpaichit & Baker, 2008).

When Thaksin became prime minister, he led changes in the country. One important thing was introducing populist policies. These policies provided budget and resources to improve the quality of life of the poor. As a result of the populist policies, he acquired favor and support from the poor in return. As a result, he won the 2005 election with a landslide and became the prime minister for his second term (Albritton, 2006; Dalpino, 2010; Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009; Phatharathananunth, 2008; Pongpaichit & Baker, 2008; Pongsudhirak, 2008).

Thaksin controlled a large majority of seats in parliament. Therefore, his government was a strong government. The advantage for the government was that it could easily implement its policies conveniently. On the other hand, opposition parties were concerned at the inability to challenge these policies or even debate the prime minister in parliament. The government was accused of corruption, abuse of power, and authoritarianism. Consequently, the society was divided into two sides: those for and against ex-Prime Minister Thaksin. This split symbolizes an ideological divide among Thais. The majority of those supporting ex-Prime Minister Thaksin are the poor, who appreciate his populist policies, whereas the majority of those against ex-Prime Minister Thaksin are the urban middle class who are discontented about his abuse of power and corruption ("Profile," 2011). This conflict between the Thai people led to political deadlock. Therefore, the 2006 coup took place in order to resolve the political conflict. The military toppled the Thaksin administration and established an interim government.

A year later, the interim government organized the 2007 election. A pro ex-Prime Minister Thaksin party, the People's Power Party (PPP), acquired a majority of votes and assumed power (Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009, p. 470; Ockey, 2008, p. 25). In 2008, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD, or Yellow Shirts) protested

against the government. The government could not resolve the conflict. At this time, the Supreme Court and the Constitution Court had crucial roles in resolving the conflict by terminating two prime ministers because one violated the Constitution by acquiring income from a television station and the other because of the 2007 election fraud (Albritton, 2006; Connors & Hewison, 2008; Dalpino, 2010; Hewison, 2010; Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009; Pongpaichit & Baker, 2008; Pongsudhirak, 2008; Prasirtsuk, 2009, 2010; Winichakul, 2008).

In 2008, Thai society got a new government led by the Democrat Party (DP), which was a leading opposition party (Prasirtsuk, 2009, 2010). As a result, a pro ex-Prime Minister Thaksin group, called the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD, or the Red Shirts), protested against the newly-installed government (Prasirtsuk, 2010, p. 204). In early 2010, there were large-scale protests in Bangkok, and riots in many provinces. The government managed to end the protests. However, the government and Thai society could not transform the conflict and build peace in the society yet (Charoensinolarn, 2010; Dalpino, 2010, 2011; Hewison, 2010; Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009; Prasirtsuk, 2009, 2010).

In May 2011, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva dissolved parliament. An election was held. The Pheu Thai Party (PTP, or For Thais Party), which is the latest incarnation of ex-Prime Minister Thaksin's party, won the election and acquired the majority of seats in parliament. Yingluck Shinawatra, who is Thaksin's youngest sister, became the prime minister. The DP then became an opposition party (Hookway, 2011). Two challenges for the government and Thai society are transforming the conflict and building peace in the nation.

## **Framework of the Study**

### **Background and Need for the Study**

The Thai political conflict is a deep-rooted conflict in Thai society. There have been many studies illustrating the causes and results of the conflict. However, these studies did not address how to transform the political conflict and build peace in the society. Moreover, the conflict is a current issue. Therefore, the challenges of this study are to find resolutions for transforming the divided society into a peaceful nation.

Currently, the society and scholars are concerned about reconciliation and rehabilitation. For example, ex-Prime Minister Thaksin apologized and forgave his opposing parties (Traisuriyathanma, 2011). Initial reconciliation models were proposed to the society. Furthermore, the Truth for Reconciliation Commission of Thailand (TRCT) is working on this issue (Satha-Anand as cited in “Surakiart,” 2011; Sathirathai as cited in “Surakiart,” 2011; “Thaksin,” 2011; Wasi as cited in “Unlock,” 2011). However, some Thais and conflicting parties do not commit to reconciliation. People and conflicting parties are still divided and do not perceive conflict in positive ways. Therefore, the society has to commit to mobilizing reconciliation. Conflicting parties have to perceive conflict in positive ways rather than remaining adversaries for the other side (Coy, 2009; Fisher et al., 2000).

This paper is going to explore the roots of the conflict and investigate how to transform the conflict and build peace. The paper envisions that reconciliation, rehabilitation, and narrowing the socioeconomic gaps can transform the conflict and build sustainable peace in Thai society.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the current Thai political conflict, which began in 2005 and continues today. This conflict involves large numbers of people and has vast effects on Thai society. This study aims to understand the causes and results of the conflict. In addition, it investigates how to transform the conflict and build peace in Thailand.

At present, the society is still divided. The government wants to transform the conflict, but conflict reconciliation has not yet taken place. Therefore, this research may be useful to Thai society to help it recognize and commit to transformation and peace building. In addition, this research may support conflict transformation and the peace building process, which the government aims to implement.

## **Research Question and Hypothesis**

This study's research question is how to transform the current Thai political conflict and build peace in Thai society? The hypothesis for the study is that reconciliation, rehabilitation, and the narrowing of socioeconomic gaps can transform the current Thai political conflict and build peace in the society.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is based on peace and conflict theories. Theoretical frameworks regarding nonviolence, conflict reconciliation, and conflict transformation, provided guidelines for this research.

The PAD and the UDD asserted that their to topple the government were based on nonviolence. In addition, the government tried to maintain balance between the rule of law and compromise. Even though conflicting parties asserted that they were committed to nonviolence, riots and violence took place in the society. Protestors, officers, and innocent bystanders were injured and killed.

The Peace Information Center described nonviolence in “19 Secrets of Nonviolence,” as follows:

nonviolence is an effective way to deal with conflict which will liberate us from the vicious cycle of violence; it is the use of social, economic, and political power for the transformation of society; and it is a way whereby everyone can empower him/herself. (as cited in Satha-Anand, 1999, p. 160)

However, there is no guarantee that social movements which practice nonviolent actions will not be met with violence (Johansen, 2009; King, n.d.; The Peace Information Center as cited in Satha-Anand, 1999). In addition, if nonviolence is used together with violence, the legitimacy of nonviolent parts of the movement will decrease, whereas the legitimacy of the other side to use violence will increase (The Peace Information Center as cited in Satha-Anand, 1999). Though the tactics by both sides in the conflict were never completely nonviolent, the stated commitment to nonviolence may be useful for the Truth and Reconciliation process and could help increase understanding as to the causes of violence during the past six years.

Any conflict has multiple origins. For example, social conflicts are often rooted in injustice and inequality (Coy, 2009). Therefore, in order to transform the current conflict, Thai society has to understand the causes of the conflict. The current conflict relates to several issues, including socioeconomic inequality, development gaps between urban and rural areas, corruption, and vote buying (Dalpino, 2010; Hewison, 2010).

In order to transform a conflict, both parties have to have positive views of the conflict’s potential in achieving their goals. They have to perceive that the conflict will lead to positive changes in the country (Coy, 2009; Fisher et al., 2000). According to Miall (2004), a society has to understand “types of transformation,” of which there are five (p. 9). Three types of transformation may be compatible with the

Thai political conflict, including structural, issue, and personal transformations. Structural transformations change the relationship between conflicting parties from asymmetric to symmetric relations. Issue transformations move incompatible conflicting parties' demands to compatible ones. Personal transformations make changes in personal perceptions.

Reconciliation is a way to support conflict transformation. It provides a place for conflicting parties to transform past conflict to a harmonious relationship. It deals with truth and mercy, and justice and peace (Lederach, 2003b).

### **Methodology**

This study used a triangulation of methods, including policy analysis, content analysis, and interviews. These methods helped the study acquire comprehensive information that can answer the research question: How to transform the current Thai political conflict and build peace in Thai society?

This research explored the Abhisit and Yingluck government policies in order to understand the positions of the government in relation to the conflict. When the study began in early 2011, Abhisit was the prime minister. He dissolved parliament and organized an election in July 2011. The PTP acquired the majority vote and Yingluck became the prime minister. However, despite this peaceful and legal transfer of power, the conflict continues. Therefore, the researcher investigated these contrasting policies of these two governments. Furthermore, the study examined the media, including newspapers, radio and television, and social media, to understand their influences on the conflict and Thai society. Lastly, the researcher interviewed a Thai scholar and five average Thai citizens in order to understand contrasting perspectives on the conflict and reconciliation.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study explored the current Thai political conflict, which is a sensitive issue in the society. Therefore, the researcher conducted this research using academic integrity and following the Thai Constitution, law, tradition, and culture. All findings in this paper were derived from academic sources.

The researcher examined various media in order to explore their influences on Thai society. Scholars argued that some media outlets take sides and influence people's attitudes on the conflict. However, examining the media is a sensitive issue. In order to avoid libel, the researcher indicated positive influences of the media on the society. The researcher did not directly illustrate negative influences of the media on the public. However, the researcher referred to and illustrated scholars' arguments and the media's opinions toward other media instead.

This study aims to serve the national interest by studying how to transform the conflict within the nation and to build peace in the society. The goal is successfully transforming the conflict for all Thais and the country. The study limits and reserves the right to use this paper for academic purposes only and absolutely refrains from any political purpose.

### **Significance of the Study**

The current Thai political conflict has continued for six years. The conflict needs to be resolved. This research explores the conflict in order to understand the causes and results of the conflict. Moreover, the research investigates how to transform the conflict and build peace in the country.

The study's findings may be useful for Thai authorities to resolve the conflict. In addition, the findings may contribute to conflicting parties understanding each other, perceiving conflict in positive ways, and collaborating to transform the conflict.

This study may facilitate Thais in better recognizing the “divisiveness” of their society, and in cooperating with each other to resolve the conflict (C. Satha-Anand, personal communication, September 8, 2011).

### **Definition of Terms**

People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD, or the Yellow Shirts): A group led by those against ex-Prime Minister Thaksin. They wear yellow as the group’s symbol, and Thais call them the Yellow Shirts.

United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD, or the Red Shirts): A group led by those for ex-Prime Minister Thaksin. They wear red as the group’s symbol, and Thais call them the Red Shirts.

The Black Shirts: They were unidentified forces who appeared when officers encountered UDD’s protestors. The Black Shirts started to use violence first, and this led to violent confrontations between officers and protestors. The government and the UDD suspected each other of supporting the unidentified forces.

The Multicolor Shirts: Members of the Bangkok middle class who “[were] not pro- or anti-government, they simply [wanted] the government to shut down the reds [UDD]” (River, 2010, para. 6).

Watermelon soldiers: The group of soldiers who support the ex-Prime Minister Thaksin and the Red Shirts (UDD). People call them “watermelon” soldiers because they wear an army green uniform, but support the Red Shirts (Chambers, 2010, p. 843).

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

Many studies have illustrated the causes and results of the current Thai political conflict. However, previous studies did not provide solutions in order to transform the conflict and build peace in Thai society. Moreover, some scholars have criticized the conflict based on their own pre-conceptions which lacked a comprehensive understanding of Thai politics. In addition, the conflict is a current issue that requires immediate resolution. Therefore, this research explores how to transform Thai political conflict and build peace in the nation. The first section in this chapter examines the causes of the current conflict. The second section explains the current conflict and its effects on Thai society. The third section investigates peace and conflict theories. The fourth section explores current reconciliation ideologies in Thai society.

#### **Review of the Literature**

##### **The Causes of the Current Conflict**

##### **Establishment of the Thai Ruk Thai Party.**

Thaksin Shinawatra has been a famous politician in Thai society since the 1997 economic crisis (Dalpino, 2010, p. 259). According to Kitirianglarp and Hewison (2009), in 1997, many Thais suffered from the economic crisis, during which thousands of businesses closed, and 1.48 million people were unemployed. The DP, as the ruling party, adopted the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank's neo-liberal economic policies, but these policies failed to stimulate the Thai economy. Consequently, people were dissatisfied with the government, and conflicts between the government and social movements increased significantly

(Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009, p. 454). In 1998, Thaksin, “disgruntled capitalists,” NGO leaders, and the left-leaning “Octobrists”—former university student activists who protested against the Thai military and authoritarianism in October 1973 and October 1976—established the Thai Ruk Thai Party (TRT) (Pasuk & Baker as cited in Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009, p. 455; Pongpaichit & Baker, 2008, p. 63). As Kitirianglarp and Hewison (2009) explained, the Octobrists have played major roles in Thai society. They are scholars, intellectuals, NGO leaders, and politicians. Therefore, they appealed to the public to support the TRT (p. 455). Moreover, Hewison (2010) argued, Thaksin successfully got his business allies and even some business rivals to support him (p. 123). The TRT proposed alternative policies against the neo-liberal policy of the government (Hewison, 2010, p. 121) under a challenging campaign “Think new, act new for every Thai,” which represented modernization and reform (Walaya as cited in Pongpaichit & Baker, 2008, p. 64). Therefore, the TRT and Thaksin were the new hopes of the nation. People believed that Thaksin could resolve the economic crisis. His popularity rose to 70 percent before the 2001 election (*The Nation* as cited in Pongpaichit & Baker, 2008, p. 66).

### **The Thai Ruk Thai Government.**

Thaksin led the TRT to victory in the 2001 election. The TRT formed a government, and Thaksin became prime minister (Pongsudhirak, 2008). He implemented populist, pro-poor policies—cheap health care, agrarian debt relief, village funds, and people’s banks—nationwide (Albritton, 2006, pp. 141-142; Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009, p. 458; Phatharathananunth, 2008, p. 117; Pongpaichit & Baker, 2008, p. 63). Some populist policies, such as village funds, were criticized for creating huge public debts to the nation (Boonma, 2011; Plainthit, 2011; “Thailand,” 2005). However, some policies did benefit the poor, such as the

One *Tambon* One Product (OTOP) policy, which has promoted local products of sub-districts to domestic and global markets. These anti-Thaksin scholars failed to acknowledge such successes, however.

### **Socioeconomic inequality and the Thai Ruk Thai landslide.**

Ex-Prime Minister Thaksin's populist policies gained him and the TRT many votes from rural people, especially in the northern and northeastern regions where the majority of Thais live. The policy successfully served grassroots' demands, which were neglected in the past. As Dalpino (2010) explained, the country's economic policies have been heavily centralized. Even though previous governments acknowledged the need for decentralization, it failed to fairly distribute socioeconomic benefits to the poor and rural areas. However, the Thaksin government responded to the demands of the poor and implemented the populist policies to serve their expectations (Dalpino, 2010, p. 259). As a result, the government gained greater support from the poor.

Because of Thaksin's popularity, the dominance of the TRT, and the government's successful economic policy, the TRT won a landslide victory during the 2005 election (Albritton, 2006, p. 141; Hewison, 2010, p. 123; Pongsudhirak, 2008). However, Phatharathananunth (2008) argued that it was the "power of its [the TRT] money" which also contributed to the electoral victory (p. 118). For example, in order to increase its majority in parliament, the TRT convinced some members of parliament from other parties to defect and convinced three smaller parties to merge into the TRT. According to the newspaper *Matichon Weekly* and Ockey, the party provided these members of parliament with "monthly allowances and substantial election funds" (as cited in Phatharathananunth, 2008, p. 108), though these scholars did not mention the sources of this money. The TRT acquired a substantial majority

of votes and won more than three fourths of the parliament seats (Albritton, 2006, p. 141; Pongsudhirak, 2008, p. 142), and Thaksin was the first Thai prime minister who was re-elected to a second term (Hewison, 2010, p. 123).

The TRT gained 377 out of 500 seats in the parliament, whereas the opposition parties gained 123 seats. (Albritton, 2006, p. 141; National Election Commission as cited in Phatharathananunth, 2008, p. 118). The victory of the TRT “ended the traditional system of coalition governments” (Albritton, 2006, p. 142). In a country accustomed to coalition governments, this complete control by one party of both the government and parliament led to accusations that Thaksin was an authoritarian leader (Pye & Schaffar as cited in Connors & Hewison, 2008, p. 5). This overwhelming political dominance resulted in serious corruption (Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009, p. 467; Pongsudhirak, 2008, p. 142; Prasirtsuk, 2010, p. 203), including government support for his personal businesses, questionable “privatisation of state enterprises” (Pongpaichit & Baker, 2008, p. 66), abuses of power, as well as challenging and disrespecting, the monarch (Hewison, 2010, p. 127; Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009, p. 467; Prasirtsuk, 2010, p. 203; Winichakul, 2008, p. 30).

Hewison (2010) explained that opposition to the “Thaksin regime” (Chirmsak as cited in Hewison, 2010, p. 120) was because it challenged the power of the “‘old elite’, ‘old oligarchy’” (p. 127). Hewison criticized the old oligarchy, but he did not give much attention to some weak points of the Thaksin regime, such as the combination of “corporate-dominated politics” (Pye & Schaffar as cited in Connors & Hewison, 2008, p. 5) with questionable populist policies. For example, Prime Minister Thaksin did not operate businesses or hold corporate stock in enterprises effected by government policies, but his family did both. For example, the government formulated policies that benefited Shinawatra’s businesses (Pinthong, 2009). As

Pasuk and Baker noted, Prime Minister Thaksin “seemed unable to distinguish between personal and family interests and those of the state” (as cited in Hewison, 2010, p. 124). Moreover, the Thaksin administration seemed to acquire benefits from privatizing public utilities to transnational capitalists, such as attempting to sell the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009, p. 460). In addition, the government implemented populist policies in order to appeal for support from the rural poor, rather than resolving the underlying social inequality (Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009, p. 461), which would have provided national long-term benefits. As Pongpaichit and Baker (2008) explained, Thaksin integrated the seemingly contradictory policies of corporate dominance and helping the poor because he was “a business politician who had adopted populist policies as a strategy to win popular acquiescence for reforms designed primarily in the interests of capital” (p. 66).

The polarizing policies of Thaksin’s government resulted in increasing conflict within Thai society. By 2005, the society was divided into two: those for and against Thaksin, a conflict that remains to this day.

### **The Current Conflict and Its Effects on Thai Society**

#### **Bringing down the Thaksin administration.**

With the overwhelming majority of seats in parliament controlled by the TRT, the opposition did not have enough votes and power to provide checks and balances on the Thaksin government. The opposition parties could not organize a censure the prime minister or otherwise constrain his actions (Albritton, 2006, p. 141). According to the Thai Constitution of 1997, opposition parties needed at least two fifths of votes, or 200 votes, from the members of parliament in order to organize a censure against a prime minister (“The Thai,” 1997). However, opposition parties had only 123 votes,

which was not enough to organize a censure. Therefore, some scholars pointed out that the prime minister abused his power through corruption and formulating policies that benefited his family's businesses (Hewison, 2010; Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009; Pongpaichit & Baker, 2008; Pongsudhirak, 2008). As a result, many people considered the prime minister an authoritarian leader, and there social movements emerged to oust him from office. These political forces emerged from outside the parliament, which Satha-Anand called "non-electoral democratic powers" (as cited in "Surakiart," 2011, para. 12). For example, technocrats criticized the prime minister through media like newspapers, radio, and television. Moreover, there was a large-scale social movement against him led by the PAD. As Ukrist pointed out, "[t]he PAD ... was re-established in February 2006 following the controversial sale of the [Thaksin] Shinawatra family's Shin Corp" (as cited in Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009, p. 467), was an important player in overthrowing the prime minister.

The PAD used "[strong] royalist and nationalist rhetoric" (Hewison, 2010, p. 120). It acquired major support from Bangkok's middle class, activists, NGO leaders, and trade unionists, rather than the rural poor who favored populist policies (Connors & Hewison, 2008; Dalpino, 2010; Hewison, 2010; Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009). In addition, Winichakul argued that the PAD had a pessimistic view toward politicians and rural voters. The PAD considers that "all politicians are corrupt, elections are essentially 'undemocratic' as they are dominated by vote-buying, and now believe that 'real democracy' can only be achieved through moral and ethical rule" (as cited in Hewison, 2010, p. 125). While such perspectives may appear to indicate an authoritarian mindset of some of Thaksin's conservative opponents, the PAD pursued a campaign in support of "clean politics" against vote buying and corruption (Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009, p. 468; Prasirtsuk, 2010, p. 207), a challenge for

Thai society (Tejapira as cited in “The War,” 2010). While Hewison’s label of the PAD as strongly royalist also implies authoritarian tendency, he fails to understand the importance of the monarchy to Thais and respect they have for the institution. The PAD mobilized hundreds of thousands of people to protest against the government (Pye & Schaffar as cited in Connors & Hewison, 2008, p. 5). The government and the society could not resolve the conflict, and this resulted in a political deadlock. Prime Minister Thaksin believed organizing an election would resolve the conflict. Therefore, he dissolved parliament and held the 2006 election. However, all opposition parties did not participate in this election. After the election, the Constitution Court “nullified” it (Pongsudhirak, 2008, p. 141) because of electoral fraud (Ockey, 2008, p. 21). Finally, a coup took place (Pongsudhirak, 2008), which resulted in ex-Prime Minister Thaksin living in exile. His \$2.2 billion in assets were confiscated (Prasirtsuk, 2010, p. 206).

Some scholars asserted that this was a conflict between the Thaksin regime and the old oligarchy. They explained that the old oligarchy supported the PAD and ordered the military to overthrow the government (Connors & Hewison, 2008; Hewison, 2010; Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009). However, they did not consider another aspect: the PAD and the military were not controlled by the old oligarchy. The PAD and the military were motivated out of their own desire to protect what they saw as the national interest and national security because the parliamentary system had become a vehicle for Thaksin’s ideological and personal goals and the “political system [broke] down” (Dalpino, 2010, p. 260). The military, therefore, considered it its duty and responsibility to protect the nation by siding with the large middle class protests against the government, staging the coup when political deadlock and strong conflict intensified. As Connors and Hewison (2008) asserted, this coup was a “good

coup” for the middle class (p. 3). In addition, according to coup supporters, it was necessary because “it saved the country from the clutches of authoritarianism” (Pitsuwan as cited in Connors & Hewison, 2008, p. 4). Others argued, however, that “the coup was not inevitable,” and it was a “bad coup” for the poor, because it removed the government that delivered populist policies and provided the poor with a political voice (Connors & Hewison, 2008, p. 4).

Anek Laothammatas explained the “Thai style democratic approach, which is called a tale of two democracies (two-city democracies)” (as cited in Callahan, 2005, p. 106; as cited in “Democratic,” n.d., p. 103). His approach presents the different political behaviors between the rural poor and the urban middle class. The rural people, overwhelming poor, constitute the majority in the country, and some of them sold their votes to politicians. According to Callahan (2005), there are many kinds of vote buying, and they are “adapted to the new situation,” for instance, the practice of politicians paying in cash, donating to villages, and recruiting voters as party members (p. 102). Vote buying is a serious problem in Thai politics. It has resulted from the “socio-economic gap between urban and rural sectors” (Laothammatas as cited in Callahan, 2005, p. 107). It takes the form of patron and client relationships between rural voters and politicians. Voters consider politicians who buy votes as “good people,” because voters are “acting morally within the existing social norm” (Laothammatas as cited in Callahan, 2005, p. 106). Candidates are supported by rural leaders who are “local worthies”; therefore, voters “give their votes as a ‘favour’ to candidates” (Laothammatas as cited in Callahan, 2005, p. 107). The votes of rural voters account for “90 percent” of seats in parliament (Laothammatas as cited in Callahan, 2005, p. 106) even though they are barely two-thirds of the overall population. According to the Thai Constitution of 2007, in the 2011 election, the 500

elected members of parliament included 375 people from the direct election (Bangkok has 33 members of parliament, whereas all provinces throughout the country have 342 members) and 125 people from the party list (“Election,” 2011). On the other hand, it is harder for politicians to buy votes from the middle class. In addition, the middle class has traditionally taken an active role in protecting what it sees as the national interests, monitoring and overthrowing corrupt governments (Laothammatas as cited in Callahan, 2005; Connors & Hewison, 2008), as during the earlier uprisings against military rule. However, Hewison (2010) argues that the middle class simply opposes the participation of the poor in political matters due to their negative views of the rural voters as “ignorant, uneducated, and easily bought” (p. 127).

### **Juridical roles.**

After the coup, the military formed an interim government. The TRT was dissolved by the Constitutional Court because the party had engaged in the April 2006 electoral fraud (Ockey, 2008, p. 21). However, the TRT established the People’s Power Party (PPP) serving as a “TRT proxy party” (Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009, p. 470). In 2007, the interim government held an election. The PPP won the election with 233 seats of the 480 seats in parliament (*The Nation* as cited in Ockey, 2008, p. 24; “The Thai,” 2006).

The PPP formed a coalition government with other five parties. The DP was only one opposition party. The government had 315 out of 480 parliament seats, whereas the opposition party had 165 seats (*The Nation* as cited in Ockey, 2008, p. 24). The PPP leader, Samak Sundaravej, became the prime minister. The government planned to amend the constitution in order to save one of PPP’s executives from being charged with the 2007 electoral fraud. As a result, the PAD returned to protest against the pro-Thaksin government (Prasirtsuk, 2009, p. 176). However, some scholars

disagreed with the PAD's protests as simply being a failure to respect the majority vote which brought to power an legitimately elected government (Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009, p. 470; Thongchai as cited in Hewison, 2010, p. 125).

The PAD successfully pressured the government and the society. According to Prasirtsuk (2009), protestors occupied the streets, took over the Government House, blocked the parliament, and seized Bangkok's domestic and international airports. The government could not dissolve the protests. At that time, the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court had crucial roles in resolving the conflict. The term of Prime Minister Samak was terminated by the judgment of the Constitutional Court, because a Thai prime minister cannot be an employee of a company and he was found to be operating a cooking program on television from which he earned income, and thereby considered an employee of the television station. As a result, his term was terminated because he violated the constitution. In another case, the Supreme Court judged one of PPP's executives guilty of violating the law for buying votes. Therefore, the Constitutional Court dissolved the PPP. All PPP's executives were prohibited from political activities for five years. Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat was among them; therefore, his term was terminated (Prasirtsuk, 2009, pp. 179-181).

According to Hewison (2010), since the 2006 coup, the judiciary had expanded its use of power. The courts intervened in what was a political conflict, which "can lead to charges of political bias," amounting to a "judicial coup" (Hewison, 2010, p. 130). Hewison's dismissal of the Thai judiciary system, however, ignores the fact that it was also willing to rule in favor of Thaksin when challenged in Constitutional Court, such as the 2001 ruling, following charges that he failed to disclose all his assets by hiding some assets in his driver and housemaid's names, in his favor. ("Likenesses," 2011).

### **The uprising of the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship.**

After the dissolving of the PPP in December 2008, the DP formed a coalition government by getting support from the military. Abhisit Vejjajiva became the prime minister (Chambers, 2010, p. 842; Charoensinolarn, 2010, p. 303; Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009, p. 470). This situation showed that the military had “influence in Thai politics” (Chambers, 2010, p. 835). A third-generation pro-Thaksin party, Pheu Thai Party (PTP, or For Thais Party) was established, and it became an opposition party. This situation led to a new protest of the pro ex-Prime Minister Thaksin group, the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) in early 2009.

The UDD is “characterized as left-wing, even radical” (Dalpino, 2010, p. 259). According to Panitan Wattanayogorn, a former government spokesman, the UDD comprises three groups. The first group he labeled “spotlights,” and they “sought out the limelight” (as cited in “Wikileaks,” 2011, para. 4). They give financial support to the UDD. The second group is “foot soldiers” (as cited in “Wikileaks,” 2011, para. 5). They were the groups of frontline protestors. These groups were established in rural areas. Each group was independent from one another. The third group consists of intellectuals and scholars. Some of them are the Octobrists. This group is the brain of the UDD (as cited in “Wikileaks,” 2011, para. 8). The second group comprises the majority of the UDD. They are the poor, from the north and northeast regions. Almost 80 percent of those from the northeastern region are farmers (Dalpino, 2010, p. 259; Macan-Markar, 2010b). In the past, the government had not given much attention to the poor. However, ex-Prime Minister Thaksin responded to their demands and made them aware of their economic and political rights (Connor & Hewison, 2008, p. 4; Hewison, 2010). Furthermore, the UDD publicized the poor’s concerns (Dalpino, 2010, p. 262).

According to Prasirtsuk (2010), the UDD argued that the 2006 coup was done in violation of the constitution. In addition, the two courts were used as a political tool in order to dissolve the TRT and the PPP. Therefore, the UDD wanted ex-Prime Minister Thaksin to “return home without guilt” (Prasirtsuk, 2010, p. 203). It protested against the Abhisit government and wanted the government to hold an election immediately (Dalpino, 2010, p. 262). The UDD rioted in Bangkok and Pattaya, where the 2009 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit was organized. ASEAN leaders had to flee, and the meeting was canceled (Prasirtsuk, 2010, pp. 204-205). However, the government ended the chaos after a brief period due to the UDD’s lack of support. According to Charoensinolarn (2010), after the 2009 riots, “the political divide remained real and intense” (p. 314). The UDD organized political rallies in the northern and northeastern regions, in order to gain grassroots support from the rural poor. The government members could not travel to the northern and northeastern regions. The pro-Thaksin group could not visit the southern region where the DP base is (Charoensinolarn, 2010; Prasirtsuk, 2010).

In early 2010, the UDD returned to protest against the government. The protests began right after the Supreme Court seized \$1.4 out of the \$2.2 billion of the ex-Prime Minister Thaksin’s assets which were frozen after the coup (Dalpino, 2011, p. 156; Mydans & Fuller, 2010, para. 1). There were hundreds of thousands of protestors (Thirasoontrakul, 2010) and “[t]his [was] the biggest rally by rural people who [came] to Bangkok making demands on national political issues” (Aphornsuvan as cited in Macan-Markar, 2010b, para. 13). However, Pittaway (2010) believed some protestors were hired for good rates at \$70 to \$240 a head if they brought a vehicle (p. 30). The ex-Prime Minister Thaksin funded them, and they were “very well paid” for rural Thais (Pittaway, 2010, p. 30). Walker and Farrelly (2010) called some rural

Thais, “Thaksin’s crown-for-hire” (para. 14). The UDD’s security guards were paid about \$30 a day, and \$60,000 was spent on daily security operations (Ruangdit, 2010, para. 17). Although a few sources mentioned that some of the protestors were hired, the UDD absolutely refused to address this issue. Therefore, these scholars might have pessimistic views of the UDD, but these scholars will have to furnish more evidence to support their arguments.

The UDD pressured the government by occupying main streets in Bangkok, splashing “hundreds of gallons of blood” on Prime Minister Abhisit’s house (Pittaway, 2010, p. 29) and the parliament (Pittaway, 2010, p. 30), taking over the Ratchaprasong area—Bangkok’s business center (Dalpino, 2011, p. 156), intruding into the Chulalongkorn Hospital (Dalpino, 2010, p. 261), and inciting riots (Pinprateep as cited in “Poldej,” 2010; Pittaway, 2010; “Suthep,” n.d.). As Pittaway (2010) asserted, “the Red Shirts were not there to make friends or negotiate; their list of demands would be met or they would have to be forcibly removed” (p. 29). Furthermore, Chambers (2010) explained, the UDD was aided by a fragmented military which supported ex-Prime Minister Thaksin. They were called “watermelon” soldiers—outside they wore an army green uniform, but inside they supported the Red Shirts (Chambers, 2010, p. 843). This demonstrated disunity in the military. However, Winichakul argued that some media, scholars, and civil society groups had a negative view on the UDD; therefore, the public had double standards for the PAD and the UDD. In addition, Chulalongkorn Hospital might take sides, favoring the PAD (as cited in “Poldej,” 2010).

The Bangkok middle class were frustrated with the UDD (Dalpino, 2011, p. 157; River, 2010). Therefore, they gathered in groups, such as the “Multicolor Shirts” (River, 2010, para. 6). The Multicolor Shirts argued that the UDD instigated violence

and riots in Bangkok and other provinces. They protested against the UDD and asked the UDD to end the protests. As River (2010) explained, “they [Multicolor Shirts were] not pro- or anti-government, they simply [wanted] the government to shut down the reds [UDD] to end the violence and interruptions to daily life” (para. 6). There were strong pressures from Bangkok’s middle class to the UDD. Consequently, the government decided to dissolve the protests. Finally, in May 2010, the UDD leaders dissolved the protests. However, some people believed that “defiant protesters”—UDD’s hardcore group—still created severe riots (Reuters as cited in “Curfew,” 2010, para. 18). As Dalpino (2010) believed, they burnt 39 buildings, including the stock exchange, banks, and the Central World department store, “which was linked to business families that had allied themselves against, or fallen out with, the former Prime Minister Thaksin” (p. 258). However, the UDD denied that they burnt these buildings. The protests ended, but the government could not transform the conflict and build peace in the society. This is only “the fragile peace of the post-Ratchaprasong period” (Dalpino, 2010, p. 262).

### **The shift in power.**

In early 2011, Prime Minister Abhisit dissolved the parliament in order to organize an election. The election took place in July 2011. There was much competition between two major parties, the DP and the PTP (“A Surprising,” 2010). The DP nominated Abhisit, forty-six years old, as a prime minister candidate, whereas the PTP nominated Yingluck Shinawatra, forty-three years old, the youngest sister of ex-Prime Minister Thaksin. Yingluck said that “running for the premiership was her way of ‘giving back to the country’” (Hookway, 2011, para. 5). In addition, she asserted, if she became prime minister, she would resolve conflict, not continue revenge (“Not Revenge,” 2011, para. 1).

The major campaign issue of many parties were reconciliation and creating unity in Thai society. The DP's reconciliation model was based on the rule of law. The party disagreed with giving amnesty to ex-Prime Minister Thaksin (Leekpai as cited in *Thairath Online*, 2011a; Vejjajiva as cited in Political Team, 2011b). The PTP confirmed that its reconciliation model did not grant amnesty to ex-Prime Minister Thaksin (Shinawatra as cited in *Thairath Online*, 2011b). However, Prime Minister Abhisit argued that the PTP launched "Thaksin Thinks, For Thais [PTP] Acts" as an election campaign; therefore, it was clear that the PTP and ex-Prime Minister Thaksin have a close relationship (Vejjajiva as cited in Political Team, 2011a, para. 1). Other parties also proposed reconciliation in their campaigns. For example, the Chart Thai Pattana Party (CP, or Thai Nation Development) used a "reconciliation bike" which was a "pink bicycle-like vehicle operated by seven people as a symbol of unity" (Raksaseri & Panyaarvudh, 2011, para. 7). The reconciliation bike was similar to a conference bike. Seven riders had to have unity in order to control the bicycle so it moved in one direction.

However, the PAD appealed to the public to "vote no," because the PAD was upset about the Thai political scene (Leenabanchong & Pharanawalai, 2011, para. 1; Wirawan, 2011, para. 6), and was frustrated by the DP government and the PTP. The PAD used animal pictures, including a dog, buffalo, monkey, tiger, and water monitor lizard, to represent Thai politicians who argue excessively, are controlled by superior powers, are undisciplined, are cruel, and are dishonest, respectively (Phuaphongphan, 2011, para. 8). The PAD claimed the public does not vote for any politician because their characteristics are similar to these five animals. On the other hand, the Thai Election Commission considered that these "vote no" signs violated election law because these signs were indecent (*ASTV Manager Online*, 2011b, para. 2;

“President,” 2011, para. 1). However, the PAD disagreed with the Election Commission and appealed this issue to a court (“People’s,” 2011).

The PTP won the 2011 election by acquiring 265 out of 500 of the parliament seats, while the DP was the second rank, with the latter acquiring 159 seats (Election Commission as cited in “Election Results,” 2011). Yingluck is the first Thai female prime minister. She used to be an executive of Shinawatra’s companies. She did not have political experience. She spent 49 days on the election campaign period and became a prime minister (Lifestyle Online Team, 2011; Petty, 2011). Her election is clear proof that ex-Prime Minister Thaksin still has significant influence on Thai politics and the poor.

The Yingluck government declared its policies to the parliament, announcing that reconciliation is an urgent policy that the government will implement in the first year. This policy has been continually implemented since the Abhisit administration. This study will discuss the two governments’ reconciliation policies in Chapter IV.

### **Conflict Transformation and Peace Building Theories**

Conflict transformation and peace building are new issues for Thai society, because the society had never been divided into two sides like this in the past (C. Satha-Anand, personal communication, September 8, 2011). According to previous literature, scholars did not propose how to transform the current Thai political conflict in order to build peace in the society. Therefore, this study explored these issues by investigating peace and conflict theories.

According to Mitchell, “conflict is a relationship between two or more parties ... who have, or think they have, incompatible goals” (as cited in Fisher et al., 2000, p. 4). Normally, conflict is creative and resolved without violence. When conflict

takes place we should solve it in positive ways, or nonviolently, including conflict resolution and transformation (Fisher et al., 2000).

Still, there is violence among human beings and other creatures. Some, such as Benjamin (2004), argue that “violence is a product of nature” (p. 236). People compete against each other to acquire limited resources, wealth, and power. When a conflict takes place, it can lead to the use of violence. As Galtung noted, there are three types of violence including “cultural, structural, and direct violence” (as cited in Pilisuk & Rountree, 2008, p. 49). Normally, dominant groups use violence to maintain their power, whereas subordinate groups use violence to acquire well-being and justice (Pilisuk & Rountree, 2008, p. 49). The use of violence affects people physically and psychologically (Johansen, 2009, p. 144).

Nonviolence is a social product. People are concerned about the results of using violence; therefore, people use nonviolence instead. As Johansen (2009) explained, the use of violence will result in “counter-violence” (p. 144). However, Johansen (2009) argued, “[i]t is not obvious that all nonviolent means will always result in nonviolent ends” (p. 144). Gandhi (1996) advocated “ahimsa” which means “the largest love, the greatest charity” (p. 40). Therefore, if people follow ahimsa, they can love their enemy. In addition, Gandhi (1996) explained the meaning of “non-violence” (p. 41) as follows:

When a person claims to be non-violent, he is expected not to be angry with one who has injured him. He will not wish him harm; he will wish him well; he will not swear at him; he will not cause him any physical hurt. . . . Complete non-violence is complete absence of ill will against all that lives. (p. 41)

According to King (n.d.), there are four steps of a nonviolent movement, including “collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; selfpurification; and direct action” (para. 6). King used nonviolent means to fight for

African American rights and justice. King and African Americans in Birmingham, Alabama, practiced nonviolent actions confident that they would not retaliate when they were attacked. In addition, they were ready to accept punishment from an authority (King, n.d.).

According to Satha-Anand (1999), in the past two decades, Thai society successfully used nonviolent movements to topple a military government. In 1992, Chamlong Srimuang, “a former military commander and Bangkok governor” led the Bangkok middle class to practice nonviolent movements in order to oust Prime Minister General Suchinda Kraprayoon from office (Satha-Anand, 1999, p. 159). They followed the “19 Secretes of Nonviolence” (Satha-Anand, 1999, p. 159). For example, the use of nonviolence prevented them from “the vicious cycle of violence” (Satha-Anand, 1999, p. 160). Nonviolence will affect enemy’s minds to overcome their “narrow-mindedness, love of power, and greed” (Satha-Anand, 1999, p. 159). However, nonviolence might not protect protestors from suppression. In addition, if protestors use both nonviolence and violence, this destroys nonviolent legitimacy (Satha-Anand, 1999).

According to Satha-Anand (1999) and Schock (2005), the 1992 nonviolent movements acquired support from nongovernment organizations, university student organizations, the middle class, and some capitalists. The protests began with a hunger strike by Chalad Vorachat in April 1992. This situation influenced large numbers of the Bangkok middle class to protest against the government. They followed nonviolent movements led by Chamlong. Soldiers were sent in to control and finally suppress unarmed protestors. When violence broke out, the soldiers dissolved the protests. The soldiers shot at protestors who attacked them, but not protestors who practiced nonviolence. However, the protestors soon returned and

regrouped. Even though the government censored the media, the middle class used communication technologies, such as cellular phones, fax machines, and email, to contact their networks, families, and to spread information among them and the public. The government could not control these modern communication networks. Moreover, other nonviolent means were used to pressure the government. For example, people withdrew money from the Thai Military Bank, doctors refused to treat injured soldiers, and professors refused to lecture at military institutes. There was high pressure from the society; therefore, the pro-military prime minister resigned. This case has illustrated how a nonviolent campaign overcame suppression by the government. The use of violence destroyed the legitimacy of the government (Satha-Anand, 1999; Schock, 2005).

In the current political conflict, the parties in conflict, including the PAD, the UDD, and the government argued that they used nonviolence (Satha-Anand, 2010). The PAD and the UDD believed that occupying commercial areas, seizing the Government House and airports, and splashing blood were nonviolent means. However, they denied creating the riots. The understandings of the PAD and the UDD of nonviolence might deviate from academic concepts like those of Gandhi and King (Thedmongthai, 2010), and the 1992 nonviolent resistances. The government argued that it carefully managed to end the protests. In addition, the military has learned from the 1992 conflict that the public and protestors do not accept the use of violence against unarmed demonstrators by the army. However, violence still took place, for example, in the clashes between protestors and officers in October 2008 and April 2011, as well as in dissolving the protests in May 2011.

Fisher et al. (2000) explained conflict resolution and transformation processes. Conflict resolution addresses the causes of conflict in order to end conflict and

violence between opposing parties. It aims to create compatible goals between conflicting parties. Conflict transformation addresses wider aspects of conflict, such as social and political causes. It aims to transform the negative energy in a conflict into positive and sustainable changes (Fisher et al., 2000, pp. 7-8).

Lederach (2003a) explained the meanings of conflict resolution, conflict management, and conflict transformation. People always perceive that conflict is bad and want to resolve it. However, we never resolve conflict and it still exists. In addition, we cannot manage conflict because it is difficult to predict and regulate. However, people can transform conflict, which means “we do not eliminate or control, but we do impact the path of conflict” (Lederach, 2003a, p. 90). We can transform both our “perceptions” and our “expressions” of conflict (Lederach, 2003a, p. 90).

According to Coy (2009), conflicting parties should perceive conflict in positive ways. Positive conflict creates social and political changes (Coy, 2009, p. 63). In addition, conflict does not have a single dimension, but it relates to many problems. For example, social conflicts relate to “‘violence,’ ‘injustice,’ ‘disrespect,’ ‘oppression,’ and ‘inequality’” (Coy, 2009, p. 64). The heart of conflict resolution is negotiation, which is based on “interest-based bargaining” (Coy, 2009, p. 64). It is impossible to resolve conflict without negotiations. For example, the Abhisit government and the UDD leaders negotiated with each other twice. The prime minister agreed to dissolve the parliament, if the UDD dissolved the protests. The UDD leaders almost accepted the government’s proposal. However, some UDD protestors did not accept. Therefore, the protests continued and violence took place. The UDD rioted in Bangkok, its vicinities, and in the north and northeastern provinces. Bangkok’s middle class, such as the Multicolor Shirts, were upset by the

UDD; therefore, they protested against the UDD and wanted the government to dissolve the UDD protests. Finally, the government decided to do that. Even though the government claimed that it carefully managed its attempt to end the protests, in some tense situations violence broke out. In conflicts related to “multiple problems” (Coy, 2009, p. 64), we need conflict transformation, which focuses on the roots of social conflicts and the changing of fundamental arrangements. Finally, peace building aims to mobilize a conflicted society to acquire “positive peace,” which focuses on ending direct, structural, and cultural violence (Coy, 2009, p. 69).

According to Miall (2004), there are five types of conflict transformations, which include context, structural, actor, issue, and personal transformations (pp. 9-10). Three types may relate to the Thai political conflict, including structural, issue, and personal transformations. Structural transformations aim to change the structure of conflicts, and create compatible goals and relationships. For example, two groups, including “non-electoral democratic powers” and “electoral democratic powers” have to adjust their power structures (Satha-Anand as cited in “Surakiart,” 2011, para. 12). Issue transformations aim to reform positions of conflicting parties in relation to the conflict issues. For example, the PAD pursued the rule of law against vote buying and corruption, whereas the UDD asked the society to respect the majority vote (Tejapira as cited in “The War,” 2010). These two issues are important for democracy. However, they are separated in Thai society. Therefore, the conflicting parties have to integrate both issues. Lastly, personal transformations aim to change the perspectives, heart, and will of a person. For example, ex-Prime Minister Thaksin has changed his perspective on his conflicting parties. He realized that he exercised hard power when he was in office. Therefore, he apologized to his conflicting parties and to the public (Traisuriyathanma, 2011).

According to Sarkin (1999), the conflict transformation of South Africa was a successful story. The country could overcome its previous wounds, such as human rights violations and ethnic divisions, of the apartheid regime. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) played a crucial role to remedy the nation's wounds. The TRC allowed victims to reveal their cruel truths, or "truth-telling," (Sarkin, 1999, para. 7) of the past conflict to the public. At the same time, reparation and rehabilitation were implemented to heal the victims. In addition, the TRC had authority to "grant amnesty where appropriate" (Sarkin as cited in Sarkin, 1999, para. 10). The South African model could be applied to Thai society.

According to Bar-on (2006), conflicting parties always blame each other as wrongdoers; therefore, conflict transformation does not take place. In contrast, Bar-on (2006) proposed "self-criticism" (p. 153) which asks conflicting parties to critique themselves rather than blame the other side for wrongdoing. For example, Bar-on (2006) asked Israel and Palestine to revise their narratives instead of discrediting the other's narrative. This may apply to the Thai political conflict. Conflicting parties have to critique themselves and aim to transform the conflicts. For example, ex-Prime Minister Thaksin admitted that he made mistakes. He had used hard power and had not considered some people's feelings; therefore, conflicts took place (Traisuriyathanma, 2011). Self-criticism makes conflicting parties recognize and address their mistakes. This may create an open atmosphere in Thai society and facilitate conflict transformation and peace building.

Reconciliation deals with "three specific paradoxes" (Lederach, 2003b, p. 40). First, it provides a place for conflicting parties to share their perceptions, feelings, and experiences with one another. This aims to create new perceptions and experiences. Second, reconciliation deals with the truth and mercy. Conflicting parties will expose

truth and renew relationships. Third, it relates to justice and peace by redressing wrongs and creating a connected future (Lederach, 2003b, p. 40).

### **Current Reconciliation Ideologies in Thai Society**

Before the 2011 election, Prawase Wasi, the chair of the National Reform Assembly of Thailand (NRA), proposed some solutions to transform the conflict. First, if the PTP gained power, ex-Prime Minister Thaksin would interfere with the government. Therefore, Wasi argued that the ex-prime minister should adjust his roles and refrain from doing things that people will not like. Second, the society has to learn to live together peacefully. Some Thais have to adjust their ways of thinking. Thais must not think of dichotomy or divisiveness. Conflicting parties always think that their side is right, and the other side is wrong. If the other side does not think as we do, they are wrong. Then, Thais fight against each other. These kinds of thoughts contrast with Buddhist and scientific principles, in which the nature of things is flexible and related. Therefore, ruling and opposition parties have to cooperate rather than fight against the other side. The media should not divide people and the society. Third, political movements have to be executed in positive and nonviolent ways. Positive political movements will facilitate policy changes, such as reforming power structure, land reform, tax reform, narrowing development gaps, and eradicating socioeconomic inequality. In addition, Thais have to have common goals, because some Thais never share common goals together. Some are always divided and narrow minded. Therefore, Thais have to change their ways of thinking and commit to public interests rather than private interests. Then the nation will successfully transform the conflict (Wasi as cited in “Unlock,” 2011).

Surakiart Sathirathai, a former deputy prime minister of the Thaksin administration, and Chaiwat Satha-Anand are members of the advisory team of the

Truth for Reconciliation Commission of Thailand (TRCT). Before joining the advisory team, they proposed reconciliation guidelines to the public. According to Satha-Anand, Thai society is considering two reconciliation models: truth seeking and the rule of law, and forgiving, forgetting, and amnesty. Each model leads to different results and costs to the society (as cited in “Surakiart,” 2011).

In addition, Satha-Anand explained, reconciliation relates to both non-electoral democratic powers, and electoral democratic powers. These two powers have to compromise with each other. Political parties are the electoral democratic power. Ruling and opposition parties could cooperate with the other side because they share common interests and rely on each other. However, many organizations in the society represent non-electoral democratic powers, such as the media and business sectors. They also have influence on politics. An important question is how to make the non-electoral democratic powers accept the reconciliation of political parties (Satha-Anand as cited in “Surakiart,” 2011). According to Sathirathai, conflicting parties have fought against each other for six years. Thai society loses and suffers, but the conflict still exists. Therefore, reconciliation is a right choice for the society. The TRCT is an independent body. It is an appropriate agency to execute reconciliation. The TRCT is accepted by all conflicting parties. Moreover, the United Nations, international organizations, and ambassadors accept the TRCT (Sathirathai as cited in “Surakiart,” 2011).

In addition, ex-Prime Minister Thaksin gave interviews to the newspaper *Matichon* and Thai Public Broadcasting Service (Thai PBS) about his reconciliation model. According to the article “Thaksin” (2011), ex-Prime Minister Thaksin tried to persuade Thai society that reconciliation is easy. He compared reconciliation with the human interactions of hitting, talking, hugging, and kissing. He explained, when

people or conflicting parties are angry, they should hit sandbags in order to release their emotions. When they calm down, they can talk to each other in order to create mutual understandings. Since conflicting parties start to talk, their relationships will be developed. Next, they can hug each other. Finally, when all conflicts are transformed, conflicting parties can kiss each other (“Thaksin,” 2011).

Ex-Prime Minister Thaksin further explained that reconciliation is an urgent task for the Yingluck government. It needs to be done with truth seeking and rehabilitation of victims. When truth is revealed, Thai society has to decide how to deal with the wrongdoers. They should be punished or given amnesty. The society has to answer these questions (“Thaksin,” 2011).

Furthermore, ex-Prime Minister Thaksin gave an interview to Thai PBS. He said that he forgives all conflicting parties and wants Thailand to become a peaceful and united society as it was previously. He forgives the 2006 coup leader and a PAD leader. If the two leaders do not believe him, they can visit him in Dubai where he lives in exile. He will treat them to coffee. In addition, he appreciates former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, and his reconciliation model. Even though he had been detained for 27 years, he forgave all those responsible for his imprisonment and successfully built peace in South Africa. Thai society might apply the South African model to transform the conflict and build peace in the nation. Furthermore, ex-Prime Minister Thaksin mentioned apologizing to Thai society. He said that no man is perfect. When he was the prime minister, he was devoted to work, but did not consider other people’s feelings. Moreover, he was the prime minister for a long time, five years, so he exercised hard power rather than soft power. Therefore, his actions created conflicts within Thai society. Finally, he emphasized that the government has to create unity and build peace in the country. Especially in 2011, this

is a very important year for all Thais to celebrate the king's 84<sup>th</sup> birthday. Therefore, the government has to create a united and peaceful society for this special occasion (Traisuriyathanma, 2011).

### **Summary**

The previous literature explained causes and effects of the conflict, but the literature did not propose solutions. Currently, there are some initial reconciliation ideologies proposed in Thai society. However, the conflict still exists and people have divided because they perceive conflict in negative ways. Therefore, conflict reconciliation is needed in order to transform the conflict and build peace in the country. This research is significant, because it may provide guidelines for Thai society to transform the current conflict and build peace in the nation.

## CHAPTER III

### STATEMENT OF THE THESIS

#### **Research Design**

This is a qualitative research study that aims to understand the current Thai political conflict. The study used a triangulation of methods to support the validity and reliability of the research (Patton as cited in Golafshani, 2003). Triangulation included policy analysis, content analysis, and interviews. This study aimed to answer the research question: How to transform the current Thai political conflict and build peace in Thai society?

#### **Policy Analysis**

##### **Government policies.**

This research explored two Thai government policies, or Policy Statements of the Council of Ministers, including the Abhisit and Yingluck government policies, in order to understand the positions of the government policies in relation to the political conflict. The study examined the two government policies because this research was conducted during the two administrations. The researcher began this study in early 2011. At that time, Abhisit was the prime minister. After the 2011 election, the PTP acquired majority votes. As a result, the power shifted from the Abhisit to the Yingluck government. In August 2011, Yingluck became the prime minister. However, the conflict was not resolved. Moreover, the Abhisit and Yingluck governments are from different parties. They have both common and different means to transform the conflict. Therefore, the study explored the two government policies in order to understand similarities and differences between the two government policies which have contributed to the current conflict.

## **Content Analysis**

### **The media.**

This study investigated the influences of the media on the conflict and society. Bruno (2009) illustrated the influence of the media in a United States case involving print media in which he argued that the U.S. had a bias toward a labor organization which shaped people's attitudes toward the labor organization.

Some Thai media share a similar situation because of the PAD's own media (Hewison, 2010; Ockey, 2007, 2009; Tejapira, 2006) as well as the UDD's (C. Satha-Anand, personal communication, September 8, 2011). In addition, both groups may have other media support (C. Satha-Anand, personal communication, September 8, 2011). Therefore, the research explored the media, including newspapers, radio and television, and social media, in order to see the media's influences on Thai society.

### ***Newspapers.***

The researcher examined Thai newspapers in order to find any newspaper support of one or the other conflicting parties, and how that support influences the public. The researcher accessed online newspapers because online media was convenient to access and suitable for the length of the study. According to previous literature, scholars pointed out that some media might take sides (*ASTV Manager Online*, 2011C; Hewison, 2010; Ockey, 2007, 2009; Tejapera, 2006; "Why," 2011). The researcher used these scholars' arguments as a starting point to examine newspapers.

This study started to explore *Manager Online*, because scholars pointed out that it supports the PAD (Hewison, 2010; Ockey, 2007, 2009; Tejapera, 2006; "Why," 2011). *Manager Online* is an online newspaper of the Manager group. The study searched *Manager Online* for news content related to the conflict. The researcher

found that the Manager group clearly stated that it takes sides (Thongthanakul as cited in Rojanaphruk, 2011).

In addition, the study also investigated other online newspapers whose contents were related to the conflict. The online search linked topic keywords to online newspapers from 2008 to 2011, including *Dailynews*, *Khaosod*, *Komchadluek*, *Krungthep Turakij*, *Matichon*, *The Nation*, *Prachachat Turakit*, and *Thairath*.

### ***Radio and Television.***

The study examined Thai radio and television. The researcher randomly listened to and watched mainstream radio and television from July to September 2011. Mainstream media appeared to attempt to create understanding and unity among Thais. Some radio and television broadcast programs addressed reconciliation issues explicitly, and others addressed them implicitly. On the other hand, there are alternative radio and television, and some of them might take sides. However, it is a sensitive issue to mention negative influences of the media on the society. Therefore, the study referred to previous literature when addressing such negative influences.

### ***Social Media.***

Social media was used to express information and opinions to the public. It is widely used among Thais, including the PAD and UDD's supporters, ex-Prime Minister Thaksin and Abhisit, and Prime Minister Yingluck to communicate with the public. This study explored social media while also referring to scholars' opinions toward social media. The researcher explored websites that might support the PAD and the UDD, and Facebook pages of ex-Prime Minister Abhisit and Prime Ministers Yingluck.

**Interviews**

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with Thai citizens, in order to obtain their opinions on the conflict transformation and peace building. The study used four open-ended questions. The length of the interviews ranged between 25-30 minutes per person.

**Population and sample.**

The researcher interviewed six Thais, including a respected scholar who is an expert in peace and conflict studies, and five average Thai citizens. Professor Sathanand is a faculty member of the Political Science Department at Thammasat University. He is an expert in the politics of peace and conflict. Large numbers of his studies relate to peace and nonviolent movements. He is a well-known scholar both in Thailand and internationally.

For the other five Thais, the researcher randomly requested them to participate in interviews. The interviews' topic and questions were related to political conflict; therefore, many people rejected interview requests because they were uncomfortable participating. The five interviewees were interested in political conflict and agreed to participate in the interviews. They had different genders, ages, backgrounds, occupations, and perspectives. They expressed their thoughtful opinions on the conflict transformation and peace building.

**Instrumentation.**

The researcher used four open-ended questions as follows:

1. Since 2006, there have been large-scale protests by the PAD and the UDD in Bangkok, Thailand. Do you agree or disagree with the PAD and the UDD leaders organizing the protests in order to put pressure on the Thai government?

2. Do you agree or disagree that even though there were large-scale protests of the PAD and the UDD, Thai society could handle them because there were not massive violations, such as civil war, taking place as in some countries?

3. Do you agree or disagree that some people might be persuaded and manipulated by the PAD or the UDD leaders in order to make them participate in the protests?

4. During the 2011 election campaign, creating harmony in Thai society was a major issue proposed by many parties. Two controversial topics were should the ex-Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra be granted amnesty and pardon. What are your opinions about these two topics?

### **Research Setting**

The research was conducted in Thailand and in the United States. Two parts of the research were conducted in Bangkok, Thailand, including the exploration of the media and the interviews. The researcher conducted this study in Bangkok because it is the capital city of Thailand and is directly related to the current conflict. The 2006 coup and the large-scale protests of the PAD and the UDD took place in Bangkok. Its population is the most economically diverse in the country, including the middle class, the urban and the rural poor.

An interview was conducted at Thammasat University with Professor Chaiwat Satha-Anand. The other five interviews were randomly conducted in communities of Bangkok that might relate to the PAD and the UDD. In order to protect privacy and confidentiality, the researcher did not mention specific community's names. The other parts of the research were written in the United States, at the University of San Francisco.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA AND FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

This research aimed to find out how to transform the current Thai political conflict and build peace in Thai society. Findings were derived from three sources, including the government policies, the media, and interviews. The study explored both the previous and the present government policies. The two governments are from different parties, the DP and the PTP. When the DP became the government, the PTP was an opposition party. Currently, the PTP is the government, while the DP is an opposition party. Therefore, the policy analysis will show similarities and differences in the two government policies. Next, the study explored the influences of the media on both the society and the current conflict. Some of the media are criticized as taking sides and having strong influences to shape people's attitudes. At the same time, the media serve to check and balance one another as well as those representing opposite sides. Lastly, the research compiled results of interviews with a scholar and five other interviewees. These interview subjects provided their opinions on the conflict and reconciliation issues.

#### **Findings**

##### **Government Policies**

##### **The Abhisit government policies.**

When the Abhisit government declared its policies to the parliament in December 2008, Thai society had been divided in two. Even though the PAD had already dissolved the protests, the conflict was intense. The government did not declare its policies at the parliament as usual, because it anticipated that the UDD

might protest at the parliament. Thus, the government kept the policies secret and immediately declared them at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (“Abhisit,” 2008).

According to “Policy” (2008), the government wanted to end the political conflict. The government organized its policies in two parts, including “urgent policies to be implemented in the first year” (p. 3), and the other seven policies to be implemented gradually. Ending the political conflict was one of the urgent policies. The government aimed to “heal social division and ensure for Thais a better quality of life, to put an end to the political crisis and undertake political reform consistent with the system of democratic governance with the King as Head of State” (p. 3). In order to accomplish these goals, the government committed to “[p]romptly promote harmony and reconciliation among people in the nation by using peaceful means” (p. 4).

According to the urgent policy about the political conflict, two major issues were addressed by the government, including the political conflict and the institution of monarchy. First, with regard to the current conflict, Thai society has been divided into two opposite sides, including dichotomies between the PAD and the UDD, the rich and the poor, urban and rural, and authoritarian and democratic (Dalpino, 2010, p. 258). However, other scholars had different views from Dalpino’s. There is not a conflict between the rich and the poor. However, there is a conflict between the middle class and the poor because the majority of the middle class support the PAD, whereas large numbers of the poor support the UDD (Connors & Hewison, 2008; Hewison, 2010). In addition, the PAD and the UDD acquire support from elites and have financial help (Satha-Anand, 2010, para. 5).

Furthermore, the ideological conflict is not a conflict between authoritarian and democratic rules. The PAD does not favor authoritarian rule as Dalpino argued.

On the contrary, the PAD argued that ex-Prime Minister Thaksin was authoritarian because he controlled the majority of seats in the parliament and “his political power became entrenched and unstoppable” (Pongsudhirak, 2010, para. 3). The PAD has fought against the money politics, corruption, and vote buying (Hewison, 2010, p. 125). The PAD has pursued democracy under the rule of law, but the UDD has pursued democracy under the majority vote. The rule of law and the majority vote are preferable for a democratic regime. However, in the current conflict, they are separated and the society has to integrate them (Tejapira as cited in “The War,” 2010).

The government declared its policies to promote harmony and reconciliation among Thais by using peaceful means. However, violence broke out. As Satha-Anand asserted, the government and the UDD were committed to nonviolent means. The government communicated and negotiated with the UDD in order to dissolve the protests. In addition, almost 80 percent of the UDD’s protests were nonviolent (Satha-Anand as cited in Tejapira, 2011b, 2011c). However, these attempts failed because there were unidentified forces—Thais called them the Black Shirts—who started to use violence first (*ASTV Manager Online*, 2011a). The government and the UDD suspected each other of supporting the unidentified forces. For 67 days of protests, there were 92 deaths, including 71 protestors, 10 officers, 1 Multicolor Shirt, and 10 innocent bystanders. Overall, the government and the UDD maintained nonviolence for 60 percent of the duration of the protests (Satha-Anand as cited in Tejapira, 2011b, 2011c). However, UDD leaders countered that the UDD never used violent means nor created the riots and that those who created violence were fake UDD protestors who tried to discredit the UDD and wanted the UDD to look guilty (*ASTV Manager Online*, 2010b; *Krungthep Turakij Online*, 2010a, 2010b).

Second, the Abhisit government committed to protect the institution of monarchy and illustrated this edict in the following policy:

to protect and uphold the Monarchy in its role as the centre of national unity and harmony among Thais, to enshrine the Monarchy in a position of reverence above all forms of political conflict; and to take all necessary measures to prevent any infringement of the royal inviolable position. (“Policy,” 2008, p. 3)

Typically, the monarchic institution is neutral and above partisan and political conflict (“Prime Minister,” 2009). However, conflicting parties had tried to involve the institution in the political conflicts in order to defeat the other side (Tejapira, 2011a, p. 53). For example, in 2006, the PAD could not oust the Thaksin government.

Therefore, it called on the use of Article 7 of the Constitution, and appealed to the institution to appoint a government. However, the PAD’s proposals were inappropriate (Connors as cited in Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009, pp. 468-469). In addition, when asked whether the PAD was acting on behalf of the institution, Princess Sirindhorn replied, “I don’t think so.... They do things for themselves” (AP as cited in Rojanaphruk, 2008, para. 3). On the other hand, when Abhisit was the opposition leader, he was alleged by the Thaksin government as *lese majesty* (“Prime Minister,” 2009). However, Abhisit was proved innocent.

According to Streckfuss, the numbers of Thai *lese majesty* cases have increased sharply. For the past 20 years, there were 5 to 6 *lese majesty* cases a year. However, the cases have dramatically increased to 126, 164, and 479 in 2007, 2009, and 2010, respectively (Streckfuss as cited in Citizen Journalism, 2011). Evidence shows that conflicting parties have tried to involve the institution in the conflict. However, the institution is above politics and Thais revere the institution (“Prime Minister,” 2009). Therefore, the government wanted to protect and uphold the institution from infringement.

In order to transform the conflict, the Abhisit government appointed three independent bodies, including the National Reform Committee (NRC), the National Reform Assembly (NRA), and the Truth for Reconciliation Commission of Thailand (TRCT) (“Abhisit Prepares,” 2011; Ashayaqachat, 2010; Daplino, 2010, p. 262). The NRC aims to create “reform strategies” for the country, and the NRA focuses on “public participation” in the reconciliation and reforming processes (Online Reporters, 2010, para. 4). Both share common objectives which aim to reduce social inequality and create unity in Thailand (Admin, 2010a, 2010b; Dalpino, 2010, p. 262). According to Kanit Na-Nakorn, the chair of the TRCT, the TRCT aims to find the roots and truth of the conflict, rather than find wrongdoers and punish them, because punishment is negative justice. Negative justice cannot resolve the conflict. The TRCT is committed to positive justice, including truth seeking, reconciliation, and rehabilitation, which facilitates conflict transformation and prevents a new conflict (Na-Nakorn as cited in “Introduce,” n.d.).

The members of the three independent bodies are notable figures in Thai society, and they represent the various groups in Thailand. The chair of the NRC is a former Thai Prime Minister, Anand Panyarachun, who served from 1991 to 1992. The chair of the NRA is Prawase Wasi, a respected senior Thai citizen who has worked in the social sector his whole life. The total members of the NRC and the NRA are 20 and 28 people, respectively. They are respected scholars, human rights activists, political activists, social activists, NGOs, economists, entrepreneurs, officers, and a priest. The chair of the TRCT is Kanit Na-Nakorn, who once served in various important positions, such as attorney general and vice leader of the TRT; he was also a respected scholar. The TRCT consists of eight people, including respected scholars, human rights activists, a senior newspaper editor, and an officer (Admin, 2010a,

2010b; *ASTV Manager Online*, 2010a; “Introduce,” n.d.). In addition, the TRCT already visited all conflicting parties in order to listen to their demands, and has been accepted by all the parties involved (Sathirathai as cited in “Surakiart,” 2011).

The first two independent bodies, the NRC and the NRA, and the TRCT have three and two years to complete their missions, respectively (Chanrotchanakit, 2011; “Three Years,” 2010). They did not complete their work in the Abhisit administration. Therefore, the results of conflict reconciliation have not yet taken place. However, the Yingluck government acknowledges these three independent bodies and has not intervened or changed their members. The three independent bodies have continued their work to transform the conflict, and will submit their proposals to the government. Therefore, the Yingluck government is playing a major role in transforming the conflict and building peace in the nation.

#### **The Yingluck government policies.**

When the PTP assumed power, there was no protest and the degree of current conflict had been reduced. However, the conflict is not resolved yet. In August 2011, the Yingluck administration delivered its policies to the parliament, declaring reconciliation, rehabilitation, and truth seeking as urgent policies (“Policy,” 2011). The government is continuing these policies from the Abhisit administration. The government especially encourages the three independent bodies, the NRC, the NRA, and the TRCT, which were established by the Abhisit government to continue their work (Traisuriyathanma, 2011). In September 2011, the TRCT invited six peace and conflict experts to be its advisory team. Professor Satha-Anand, who allowed this researcher to interview him, is one of the experts on this team. In addition, the TRCT plans to invite Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Ricardo Lagos, former President of Chile, and Martti Ahtisaari, former President of

Finland, to join the advisory team (“TRCT,” 2011). Thai society does not have rich experience in conflict transformation; therefore, the TRCT wants the advisory team to share its experience with the TRCT.

However, evidence shows that transforming the conflict and building peace in the country are not easy. First, since the PTP assumed power, the UDD cannot settle its appropriate roles yet. It still creates movements in order to show that the government has much support from the people, and it is ready to protect the government from opposition. When the government declared the policies to the parliament, some UDD supporters gathered and encouraged the government in front of the parliament. They charged two people who brought a wreath to the parliament (“Red Shirts,” 2011). Furthermore, UDD supporters upset a female television reporter who had asked questions that made the prime minister feel uncomfortable. The supporters sent email to intimidate her and other media outlets. They wanted her office to punish her (*ASTV Manager Online*, 2011d; *Krungthep Turakij Online*, 2011).

Second, it is clear that the PTP supports ex-Prime Minister Thaksin because it launched an election campaign “Thaksin Thinks, For Thais [PTP] Acts.” In addition, Prime Minister Yingluck accepted that she “[cloned]” her brother, ex-Prime Minister Thaksin (“Yingluck Accepts,” 2011, para. 3). Therefore, the public is now questioning the Yingluck government’s intentions to remove ex-Prime Minister Thaksin from guilt. The government denies any such intentions. However, since the PTP won the election and formed the government, ex-Prime Minister Thaksin could visit Germany and Japan. Despite the fact that the ex-prime minister is guilty by judgment of the Supreme Court, he still lives in exile and has not yet been punished. The government has issued an arrest warrant for him and, as a result, some countries that have legal agreements with Thailand do not allow him to visit. With regard to

visiting Japan, the Thai government said a Japanese business group invited the ex-prime minister to Japan and the Japanese government granted a temporary visa for him. The Thai government does not have the authority to request the Japanese government to grant a temporary visa (“Japan,” 2011; “Thaksin Visited,” 2011; “Yingluck,” 2011).

In another case, a deputy prime minister seemed to facilitate royal pardon procedures for ex-Prime Minister Thaksin. The deputy prime minister argues that more than 3 million signature requests were submitted to the Abhisit government two years ago (Rainangpised, 2011). He will follow up on this case. However, this is a sensitive and controversial issue. Some argued that a person who requests a royal pardon must be punished at that time. However, ex-Prime Minister Thaksin is not punished because he has lived in exile for six years. Therefore, he does not have the right to request a royal pardon. If the government wants to pursue this issue against the rule of law, a new conflict could occur (“Abhisit Does,” 2011; *ASTV Manager Online*, 2011e; “Sanan,” 2011) and may lead the PAD to protests (“Prinya,” 2011). Regarding this controversial issue, Prime Minister Yingluck affirmed that requesting the royal pardon is not the government policy and it is not urgent work. The government considers national reconciliation as its first priority, and it will not serve only one person’s demand, ex-Prime Minister Thaksin (*ASTV Manager Online*, 2011f; Rainangpised, 2011; “Requesting,” 2011). It is clear that there is resistance from the public about requesting the royal pardon. Therefore, the government has to handle this issue properly and carefully in order to avoid further conflict.

Apart from the reconciliation policy, populist policy is another urgent policy. The policy largely supported the PTP to win the election. The government asserts that populist policy will benefit the poor and narrow development gaps, which is a cause

of the current conflict. At present, Thai society pays attention to two populist policies, including to “[e]nable a worker to earn not less than 300 Baht [10 Dollars] per day and a bachelor’s degree holder to have an income of not less than 15,000 Baht [500 Dollars] per month” (“Policy,” 2011, pp. 6-7). People believed that workers will earn 300 Baht throughout the country, which has 77 provinces, and bachelor’s degree holders will earn salaries of 15,000 Baht. However, the government declared that in the first phase, workers in 7 provinces will receive 300 Baht. The rest of the 70 provinces have to wait for the second phase (“Seven,” 2011). For the latter policy, government officers who hold a bachelor’s degree will receive salaries and compensation for 15,000 Baht. The government cannot increase salaries to 15,000 Baht because this will affect the salary system, such as pensions. Therefore, the government will give compensation instead. This policy needs time, approximately four years, to increase salaries to 15,000 Baht. In addition, the policy is not enforced in the private sector (Maihadsibanyen, 2011). The government has to prove that it is committed to eradicating social inequality as promised.

### **The Media**

The media have played crucial roles in the public during the past six years. Some media that have been criticized as taking sides were the PAD and the UDD (Hewison, 2010; “ICT,” 2010; Kwanchai as cited in Macan-Markar, 2010a; Ockey, 2007, 2009; Satha-Anand, 2010; Tejapira, 2006; “Why,” 2011). Various media, such as newspapers, radio, television, and social media, have been used by conflicting parties in order to reach people of all ages in urban and rural areas and acquire support from the public.

To avoid defamation and libel, the research posits that all information illustrated in this section was derived from findings. The researcher did not make any

assumptions. Even though some media were criticized for taking sides, this meant some news and content of these media might be biased; however, not all news and contents of these media were biased.

### **Newspapers.**

This researcher acquired information by investigating newspapers and previous literature. In democracies, newspapers often check and balance one another. Therefore, the researcher acquired information by exploring several newspapers. According to Hewison (2010), one of the leaders of the PAD is a “media tycoon” (p. 125). He is an owner of *ASTV Manager*—the name of a television station and newspapers—(Ockey, 2007, p. 134; Tejapira, 2006, p. 5). In addition, the *Matichon* newspaper argued that the PAD has used *ASTV Manager* and its media networks to appeal people to join the protests (“Why,” 2011, para. 10). On the other hand, the Manager group asserted that *Matichon* was pro UDD (*ASTV Manager Online*, 2011c).

The Thai senate and media associations organized a seminar about the roles and responsibilities of Thailand’s media. This seminar was organized in May 2009 after the PAD’s protests in 2008 and the UDD’s riots in early 2009. According to Thepchai Yong, the director of Thai Public Broadcasting Service, *ASTV Manager* and D-Station (the latter, a pro-UDD television station) are alternative media. They broadcast political activities of the PAD and the UDD throughout the country. The number of people who consume alternative media have increased. Alternative media have influenced the public. Recently, they have tried to persuade people to take sides and stimulate people’s emotions to anger, love, and hatred (as cited in *ASTV Manager Online*, 2009). Therefore, Prasong Lertratanawisute, who was a former editor of *Matichon* and chair of the Thai Journalists Association, asked some media to stop intensifying the conflict (as cited in *ASTV Manager Online*, 2009).

In June 2011, the senate organized the same seminar and got the same result that the media were taking sides. As Rojanaphruk (2011) confirmed, “[t]he Thai media most likely will continue to be highly politicised, biased and divided—even after this Sunday’s general election [3 July 2011], a symposium on partiality and impartiality of media during elections has concluded” (para. 1). Therefore, the media have influenced and divided people. This situation is dangerous for the society (Yong as cited in *ASTV Manager Online*, 2009).

However, Suwat Thongthanakul, who is an “editor of *ASTV Manager Weekly* news magazine, a mouthpiece publication of the yellow-shirt People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD)” (as cited in Rojanaphruk, 2011, para. 6) countered:

The media’s role must be different from the past.... We must choose sides, choose the righteous side in order to protect national interests ... media must not be satisfied with merely being a messenger. It must perform the functions of a gatekeeper and censor on what it thinks the public ought not to read, watch or hear. (as cited in Rojanaphruk, 2011, para. 7)

In addition, evidence indicates that news and information about the PAD can be retrieved from *Manager Online*. For example, when the PAD organized protests, it declared reasons and standing points of the protests to the public. The PAD delivered 56 announcements and declarations. All of these documents can be found at *Manager Online* (*ASTV Manager Online*, 2008).

*Matichon* and its associated newspapers asserted that they were quality newspapers and did not take sides. Furthermore, *Matichon* asked other newspapers to use their influence to create unity within Thai society. As Boonlert Kachayuthadej, who is a journalist and adviser to *Matichon*, argued:

“Right now, are we biased and prejudiced due to our love and hatred, or not?”... “Are we going to deny that news headlines are biased and prejudiced?”... [T]he past five years or so had seen the emergence of a political mass media with its own goals and ideologies. Some resorted to giving political opponents degrading names, like calling the now

detained red-shirt co-leader Jatuporn Promphan a “toad.” The situation is messy and there are no standards to be followed any longer. (as cited in Rojanaphruk, 2011, para. 3)

On the other hand, the Matichon group was criticized that it might take sides, in favor of the UDD and the PTP. During the 2011 election campaign, an email was forwarded to many media. The email asked the media to promote the PTP. However, the email account owner denied sending it and explained that this email account was available for all reporters to follow the PTP’s campaign schedules. Therefore, someone used this account and forwarded the email to the media (*ASTV Manager Daily*, 2011a; “Reveal,” 2011). The National Press Council investigated this case and seemed to doubt the Matichon group taking sides to support the PTP. However, the Matichon group insisted on its innocence and disagreed with the results of the investigation. It argued that the council was prejudiced and arbitrarily created a new investigation issue in order to make the Matichon group appear guilty. Therefore, the group did not accept investigation results and resigned from the council (“Committee,” 2011; “Matichon,” 2011). However, the Manager group argued that the Matichon group could not defend itself; therefore, it resigned rather than appealed this case (*ASTV Manager Daily*, 2011b).

### **Radio and television.**

Community radio and alternative television have been widely used by the PAD, the UDD, and both sides’ supporters to communicate with people. In 2009, there were 5,500 registered and 100-200 unregistered community radio stations throughout the country (the National Telecommunications Commission as cited in *Krungthep Turakij Online*, 2009). During the political conflict, community radio and alternative television were monitored. For example, in 2009, the military controlled 245 radio and 2 television stations (Chambers, 2010, p. 848). It monitored and shut

down especially those radio stations that broadcasted *lese majesty* and aggravated the situation (Dalpino, 2011, p. 159).

However, the government has used the mainstream radio and television stations to deliver information to the public. During the conflict, the government explained the situation, expressed its concerns, and communicated with people and protestors through radio and television. When a crisis took place, the government declared states of emergency to the public through the radio and television. Therefore, Thais knew what they should do and protestors knew what the government was concerned about and requested them to do.

At present, there are no protests. Mainstream television stations, especially a state-owned channel, broadcast programs that create harmony and unity in society. For example, in August 2011, a musical titled “The Impossible Dream” was broadcast on the National Broadcasting Services of Thailand. The musical is about a conflict in a rural village. Typically, villagers in this village were farmers who lived in peace. One day, a billionaire who had grown up in this village visited his hometown. He wanted to develop this agricultural village into an industrial city. Villagers were divided into two sides and fought each other. A village headman stopped the conflict between the villagers. He compared the various viewpoints of the villagers to the various colors of flowers, which are beautiful when in the same vase. In addition, he explained his point to his friend—the billionaire. He argued that agriculture suited the village. Modernity and prosperity did not ensure that villagers would have a better quality of life and happiness. As the headman argued, if we develop the village by ignoring our background and local wisdom, we and the village will face socioeconomic problems. We will preserve our peaceful village and we will pursue our dream to develop the village in our own ways. Finally, the billionaire understood

and agreed with the village headman (Sarawat, 2011). This musical was produced in order to appeal to Thais to live peacefully and have sufficient lives (Thai News Agency, 2011).

Mainstream radio stations broadcast programs that facilitate conflict reconciliation. In September 2011, a radio program, *Exclusive*, interviewed Chaturon Chaisang, who was a former Deputy Prime Minister of the ex-Prime Minister Thaksin administration, about amnesty and reconciliation. According to Chaisang, in past conflicts, such as the 1992 uprising, amnesty was granted to all conflicting parties, including the military and protestors, without implementing a truth seeking. Approximately a decade later, an authority began to explore the truth about the 1992 protest. However, the truth seeking was stopped in the middle of the process, because all conflicting parties were already granted amnesty. Therefore, it might be useless to explore the truth. However, granting amnesty for the current conflict is a controversial issue. Therefore, the TRCT has to investigate the truth before granting amnesty. However, Thai society does not have rich experience in truth seeking, so the TRCT needs support from experts, such as the TRCT's advisory team (as cited in Mungkornchaiya, 2011).

According to the roles of the radio and television, mainstream radio and television try to counter-balance influences of alternative radio and television. The mainstream media broadcast programs that promote harmony and unity in society. However, the public also needs cooperation from the alternative media to promote these issues.

### **Social media.**

Social media are highly used as the other media. There are many websites in Thailand and abroad that support the PAD and the UDD. In 2010, the government

censored 612 websites that aggravated conflict. These censored sites have posted on their homepages “[t]his website has been blocked by ICT [Ministry of Information and Communication Technology] & TOT [Thai State-Owned Telecommunications company]” (“ICT,” 2010, para. 1; *Thairath Online* as cited in “Censor,” 2010). In addition, the government has closed 43,000 websites with *lese majesty* content (“Three Ministries,” 2010). Currently, the Yingluck government ordered the police to set up a war room to follow websites with *lese majesty* content (Sattaburuth, 2011).

Moreover, Facebook and Twitter have been used for political purposes. For example, ex-Prime Minister Thaksin always communicated with the UDD during its rallies and protests through social media and video links. Social media made him maintain influence in people’s minds. These technologies allowed him to communicate with people in real time. His supporters and opponents perceived that he was existing and talking in front of them (Charoensinolarn, 2010, pp. 320-321). Moreover, ex-Prime Minister Thaksin used Skype to talk with the Yingluck’s cabinet in a cabinet meeting. He urged the cabinet to execute the government policy. Some people criticized that he interfered with the government, stating that his action constituted a “Thaksin thinks and the cabinet do” relationship (Political Team, 2011c, p. 3). However, Prime Minister Yingluck stated that ex-Prime Minister Thaksin did not interfere with the government, but he just greeted and encouraged the cabinet to devote themselves to working hard for the people (Political Team, 2011c, p. 3).

In addition, some Thais use Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and chat rooms in order to express their political views and share them with the public. Social media provide convenient, available two-way communication. Not only ex-Prime Minister Thaksin uses social media, but many politicians and parties also use them to communicate with the public. Ex-Prime Minister Abhisit, Prime Minister Yingluck, the DP, and the

PTP use Facebook. They have many supporters who follow them on Facebook. From the 2011 election campaign to the present, ex-Prime Minister Abhisit has delivered his messages to the public called, “From the bottom of my heart to all Thais” (Vejjajiva as cited in *Prachatai*, 2011). There are eight messages posted on his Facebook and 833,178 people “like” his posts. Prime Minister Yingluck has used Facebook for election campaigns and to inform the public about the government’s work. There are 482,959 people posting “like” on her Facebook page.

Evidence shows that politicians and the people have used social media for political purposes. However, the use of social media has disadvantages. For instance, some opinions and information that people shared on blogs and chat rooms were not reliable. Moreover, some information created misunderstandings among the public (Yong as cited in *ASTV Manager Online*, 2009). In addition, some websites presented “materials [deemed] too sensitive in the political climate” (Dalpino, 2011, p. 159). These websites have been censored.

The media play major roles in influencing the society. Alternative and social media are popular with the government, conflicting parties, and Thais to express their opinions to the public, and they are convenient for supporters to follow these messages. Some media might take sides, but this is their right as long as they do not violate the law. Some media deliver sensitive and inappropriate contents, which can worsen an already tense situation. However, in the divided society, Thais need reconciliation and unity; therefore, the media should consider these issues and adjust their roles. They should play positive roles to lead the public to accomplish a united and peaceful society rather than divide people and aggravate the situation.

## **Interviews**

The researcher conducted interviews with six Thais, including a scholar and five ordinary Thai people in order to acquire their opinions about conflict transformation and peace building. These interviews were conducted in Bangkok, Thailand. The study first aimed to interview Professor Satha-Anand, because he is an expert on peace and conflict transformation. The other five interviewees were people whom the researcher randomly requested to participate in the interviews. There were two females and three males. Their ages ranged between 20 and 60 years old. The study used qualitative interviews with four open-ended questions. The interviews were face-to-face interviews.

The researcher's topic is a sensitive and controversial issue in Thailand; therefore, in order to protect interviewees' privacy and confidentiality, these interviews were anonymous. Interviewees' identities were not informed individually. The interviewees were given pseudonyms, including Ms. Sri Nalini, Ms. Ruji Won, Mr. Pawin Smith, Mr. Puri Niti, and Mr. Jarun Satid. However, Professor Satha-Anand allowed this study to indicate his name. He is a faculty member of the Political Science Department at Thammasat University. He is an expert in nonviolence and the politics of peace and conflict. His academic works are well known in Thailand and internationally. Moreover, shortly after the researcher interviewed him, he joined the TRCT's advisory team in September 2011.

The other five interviewees consisted of a freelance researcher, a graduate student, an instructor, an office worker, and an officer. Their ages ranged from the 20s to the 50s. In addition, they shared different political views. Three interviewees seemed to support either the PAD or UDD. Two people seemed to be neutral. All of them used to participate in protests. Some interviewees participated in both the PAD

and the UDD protests. According to their background, they were studying and working in Bangkok. However, two of them are originally from Bangkok, whereas the other three interviewees are from other provinces. They represent the Bangkok and rural middle class. These five interviewees were chosen because they shared different genders, ages, backgrounds, occupations, and perspectives. However, this interview population is small because many people were uncomfortable in participating in such a political interview. They simply provided a random sampling of attitudes and perceptions. When the researcher asked for interview permission from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco, the researcher committed to not disclosing the interviewees' identities individually in this paper.

#### **Interview questions and findings.**

The researcher used four open-ended questions to ask interviewees their opinions on the current conflict. The questions and interview results were as follows:

1. Since 2006, there have been large-scale protests by the PAD and the UDD in Bangkok, Thailand. Do you agree or disagree with the PAD and the UDD leaders organizing the protests in order to put pressure on the Thai government?

The majority of the interviewees agreed that people have rights to protest under the rule of law and must commit to nonviolence. Five interviewees, including Ms. Nalini, Ms. Won, Mr. Smith, Mr. Niti, and Mr. Satid, agreed that protests are political rights of all Thais. People have the right to monitor the political scene, and express their voices and demands to the public under the rule of law and using nonviolent means. Mr. Smith admitted to occupying symbolic streets, which related to Thai democratic history, such as Ratchadamnoen Streets and Democracy Monument, and believed that this was acceptable. This was civil disobedience and could be

considered nonviolent. However, the five interviewees disagreed with the PAD and the UDD taking over the Government House, airports, commercial areas, as well as using women and children as human shields, and using all kinds of violent means. In addition, Mr. Smith added, the protests should not be unending protests; for example, the PAD spent 193 days and the UDD spent 67 days protesting against the government. The five interviewees asserted that the protests abused other people's rights, caused trouble to the public, and worsened the country's image and reputation.

Professor Satha-Anand further explained that there are four important aspects about the current conflict. First, the current conflict is different from previous conflicts, which were conflicts between Thais and the government. But the current conflict is a conflict between two gigantic social movements, the PAD and the UDD, in other words, conflict between Thais and Thais. This is an "unprecedented" conflict within the nation. People have been divided into two sides. This "divisiveness" is in almost all organizations, such as families, universities, and military groups. Second, the PAD and the UDD acquires huge support from large numbers of people because they link with two big political parties, the DP and the PTP, respectively. In the 2011 election, the DP acquired more than 11 million party list votes, whereas the PTP acquired more than 15 million votes. If only 10 percent of each party's supporters joined the protests, the PAD and the UDD members would number more than 1 million people. Third, the PAD and the UDD own media and have other media supporting them. Fourth, the PAD and the UDD acquire support from elites. Elites of each side have conflicts of interest with the other side.

2. Do you agree or disagree that even though there were large-scale protests of the PAD and the UDD, Thai society could handle them because there was not massive violence, such as civil war, taking place as in some countries?

The professor, Mr. Niti, and Mr. Satid pointed out that the society could not manage the conflicts; therefore, violence took place. This resulted in losses, injuries, and deaths to protestors, officers, and innocent bystanders. However, Mr. Smith, Ms. Nalini, and Ms. Won argued that, comparing the current conflict with conflicts in other countries, the current conflict has less violent than that found in many countries.

Professor Satha-Anand acknowledged that the government, the PAD, and the UDD tried to use nonviolent means, but they were not purely nonviolent movements. They controlled militia groups. Therefore, in tense situations, violence broke out, such as in the clash between the PAD and the police in October 2008, and in the clashes between the UDD and soldiers in April and May 2010. In the latter case, the soldiers tried to use nonviolent means, but violence broke out because unidentified forces started to use violence first. This situation caused injuries and deaths to the protestors, soldiers, and others.

The other five interviewees admitted violence took place in the society. Ms. Nalini believed the PAD was not absolutely nonviolent. Ms. Nalini and Mr. Niti believed that the UDD used violence and created riots. Ms. Nalini and Ms. Won added that the UDD leaders aroused protestors' emotions to create violence. This exacerbated the situation and expanded the conflicts. As Mr. Niti asserted, some media outlets take sides. This influenced people's attitudes and worsened the situation. Ms. Nalini and Mr. Niti added that the government tried to compromise with the UDD, for example, through negotiations. However, the negotiations were failures.

On the other hand, Ms. Nalini, Ms. Won, and Mr. Smith argued that Thai society managed the conflict better than many countries. They believed other countries will not be patient with civil disorder and allow unending protests to take

place in their countries. However, Mr. Satid added that Thai society has to learn from these past mistakes and cannot allow violence to happen again in the future.

3. Do you agree or disagree that some people might be persuaded and manipulated by the PAD or the UDD leaders in order to make them participate in the protests?

All interviewees asserted this point. The professor affirmed these protests were the large-scale actions of two social movements; therefore, mobilizations were unavoidable. Moreover, the PAD and the UDD used their media to mobilize their supporters and prevented them from being persuaded by the media of the other side. Mr. Smith and Mr. Niti also confirmed the media issues.

Mr. Smith agreed that the PAD and the UDD leaders played a major role to persuade people to participate in the protests. Protestors believed and had faith in their leaders. Ms. Won believed that rural leaders had influenced rural people's decisions. Moreover, some people donated to and supported the protests, such as providing transportation in order to deliver people to join the protests.

Mr. Niti agreed with this question. Some protestors believed all information that the leaders told them and the public. These protestors did not check the reliability of the information and were convinced by the leaders. Mr. Niti further explained that he has friends from the two groups. When he discussed the conflict with them, they talked about the same issues that the leaders did. When he challenged them with new aspects or questions, his friends could not answer, but could only reiterate the same ideas. In addition, he believed some protestors might be persuaded by incentives. Therefore, the society has to evaluate the motive of the protestors, not only the number of protestors.

Ms. Nalini admitted that she used to join the protests on both sides. The PAD leaders persuaded the public, but they used evidence to support their arguments. The UDD leaders seemed to persuade people by arousing their emotions to love and hatred. Some people who had limited access to other information were easily persuaded. In addition, some protestors might receive incentives. For example, she had a chance to talk with a taxi driver. The driver said he and his wife had protest group member cards, so they received some incentives when they joined the protests.

Ms. Won and Mr. Satid admitted that there was news about incentive issues on both sides, such as providing transportation. Ms. Won believed the leaders used various methods to persuade people to protest against the government. However, Mr. Satid countered that the society did not have evidence to prove this issue; therefore, we should not conclude that the PAD and the UDD used incentives.

4. During the 2011 election campaign, creating harmony in Thai society was a major issue proposed by many parties. Two controversial topics were should the ex-Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra be granted amnesty and pardon. What are your opinions about these two topics?

All interviewees affirmed reconciliation is necessary. But they shared different opinions.

Mr. Smith believed if amnesty and pardon are conducted under existing laws, resistance from the society may not take place or may not be strong. But if new laws need to be legislated in order to pardon some people, this may result in new protests. Mr. Smith's opinions were similar to Ms. Nalini's, Ms. Won's, and Mr. Niti's, but were opposite to Mr. Satid's. Furthermore, Ms. Nalini, Ms. Won, and Mr. Niti asserted the society must respect the rule of law. Everyone who violated laws should be punished. Moreover, Mr. Niti disagreed with granting amnesty and pardon for the

PAD and the UDD, who violated laws. On the contrary, Mr. Satid countered that amnesty and pardon must be done without a political intervention.

The professor further explained reconciliation with a broader perspective. Reconciliation in Thailand involves both “non-electoral democracy,” and “electoral democracy.” These two powers have to reconcile with each other. The conflicts take place because the two powers could not reconcile. Non-electoral democratic powers believe that some rural Thais do not possess democratic power. In other words, they believe that the democratic power does not belong to the people, but to politicians. Some of the rural poor possess democratic power for only four seconds when they decide to vote on an election day. They are ignorant and vote because they favor populist policies. Ms. Nalini and Mr. Niti believed some rural people have limited access to information. Therefore, they are easily persuaded.

Mr. Smith suggested Thais should see conflict in positive ways. Thai people should accept each other and live together in peace even though they have different ideologies. This will result in a two party system, including the DP and the PTP. The DP should rebrand itself in order to acquire more public support and compete with the PTP. In addition, Mr. Satid added that the media play a major role to support reconciliation. Some media should change their roles from aggravating the situation and dividing people to encouraging harmony and reconciliation.

### **Summary**

At present, there is not any protest in Thailand; however, the conflict has not been transformed yet and deep-rooted conflict exists in Thai society. The government has tried to resolve the conflict. This challenging work was transferred from the Abhisit to the Yingluck administration. The Yingluck government declared reconciliation, rehabilitation, and truth seeking as urgent policies. However, some

Thais, especially the DP and the PAD, doubt that the government pays much attention to these urgent policies, rather than trying to assist ex-Prime Minister Thaksin. In addition, the ex-prime minister may interfere with the government. Therefore, in order to avoid further conflict, the government has to prove that it commits to conflict transformation and national interest rather than individual interest.

The public also plays major roles in reconciliation and peace building. The media are criticized about taking sides and dividing people rather than encouraging reconciliation and peace building. People want harmony and unity in the country, but some of them do not open their minds and accept the other side. These situations discourage reconciliation. Therefore, in order to transform the conflict and build peace in the nation, the society has to see conflict in positive ways and commit to conflict transformation and peace building.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Discussion**

The current conflict has vast effects on the society. This conflict has lasted for six years and it needs to be ended through transforming the crisis to create a peaceful society. The findings of this study and previous literature support the research question and hypothesis that reconciliation, rehabilitation, and the narrowing of socioeconomic gaps can transform the current Thai political conflict and build peace in Thai society.

#### **Reconciliation**

Thai society is still divided into two sides, including those for and against ex-Prime Minister Thaksin. As Satha-Anand affirmed, divisiveness exists in the society. For example, families, universities, and the media illustrate the effects of the divided society on a smaller scale (personal communication, September 8, 2011).

Divisiveness obstructs reconciliation, which aims for conflicting parties to come together in order to transform painful past experiences into harmonized and united relationships (Lederach, 2003a). Important players need to be discussed, including the UDD, the government, the media, the PAD, and Thai society.

Currently, the UDD cannot settle into an appropriate role. Even though their demands are fulfilled, and the 2011 election took place, and the PTP successfully formed a government, it still creates new conflicts for the society. The UDD's roles conflict with the government reconciliation policy. It should not become a guardian of the government and intimidate the society. The inappropriate roles of the UDD reiterate divisiveness in the society. The UDD leaders should acknowledge the government policy and commit to reconciliation, rather than create new conflicts for

the society. In addition, it should acknowledge the statement of ex-Prime Minister Thaksin that he hopes the government can create a united and peaceful society to celebrate the king's 84<sup>th</sup> birthday (Traisuriyathanma, 2011).

The government declares it will transform the conflict and build peace in the country. However, the transformation process is not yet implemented. Some Thais may not trust the government's sincerity to implement the reconciliation policy. Prime Minister Yingluck and the PTP are closely related to ex-Prime Minister Thaksin. As a result, some people believe that the government aims to give the ex-prime minister amnesty rather than commit to implementing the reconciliation policy. Furthermore, the ex-prime minister may continually interfere with the government. Therefore, the government has to affirm that it is committed to national interests and reconciliation, rather than personal interests.

However, there are two good signs of reconciliation in the nation. First, in September 2011, Prime Minister Yingluck and ex-Prime Minister Abhisit joined a rally for an anti-corruption campaign. The two leaders walked together at the rally. This showed collaboration between both leaders in order to eradicate corruption. Second, Thailand has been suffering severely from months of flooding. Currently, resolving this issue is the national agenda. All organizations in the country are cooperating to resolve the problem. In October 2011, the two leaders started cooperating and helping the flood victims. Thai society hopes these two situations will facilitate the nation's reconciliation and peace building processes ("Abhisit Cooperates," 2011; Pongaksorn, 2011).

Conflicting parties have used the media to deliver messages to the society. Various kinds of media, such as mainstream, alternative, and social media, make these messages available and accessible to all Thais. Therefore, the media have major roles

in shaping the society's attitudes toward the conflict. Previous literature and this study's findings have illustrated that conflicting parties have used their own media solely for their own support. In addition, they have other media supporting them as some media may take sides. Conflicting parties use the media to appeal for public support and persuade people to participate in the protests. The two former and the current prime ministers, including Thaksin, Abhisit, and Yingluck, respectively, maintain their influence on their supporters and conflicting parties through social media. The ex-Prime Minister Thaksin especially has appeared and communicated with his supporters and conflicting parties through social media. The social media make his existence relevant in Thai society, even though he has been in exile for six years (Charoensinolarn, 2010). In addition, many websites have delivered information and content that aggravate the conflict and discredit the other side. Therefore, the media should change their roles from being a part of the conflict to facilitating reconciliation and creating harmony and unity in the society (Lertratanawisute as cited in *ASTV Manager Online*, 2009; Satha-Anand as cited in "Surakiart," 2011; Wasi as cited in "Unlock," 2011).

The PAD accepted the 2011 election results and has not created any movement against the new government. However, it continues monitoring the government. If the government assists ex-Prime Minister Thaksin against the rule of law, the PAD may return to protest. However, the PAD should not consider solely its own viewpoint. It should acknowledge that the TRCT is working on transforming the conflict to a peaceful society, and it should respect the TRCT's proposal regarding these issues.

Thai society has to see the conflict in positive ways. Conflict leads to change in Thai society. The current conflict is taking place because there are problems in the

country, such as socioeconomic gaps, vote buying, and corruption. Therefore, this is a chance to resolve these problems. Unfortunately, some Thais do not perceive the conflict in positive ways. Some Thais do not accept other people who think differently from them. For example, the PAD and the UDD do not accept the other's demands. They perceive that they are adversaries and have to fight against each other rather than respecting the other's opinions and living together in peaceful ways (Wasi as cited in "Unlock," 2011). In addition, some media stimulated people's emotions to anger and hatred toward the other side (Yong as cited in *ASTV Manager Online*, 2009). Protest leaders stimulated protestors' feelings rather than committing to nonviolent means. The society already learned that the use of violence cannot resolve the conflict, and that it only leads to a cycle of violence and continuing conflict that exists today. Therefore, Thais have to consciously change their attitudes toward the conflict and conflicting parties. They should open their minds in order to understand the other side. People can think differently, but they can also be friends, not enemies. Conflicting parties can live together peacefully in the same society and try to resolve conflict by nonviolent means (Coy, 2009; Fisher et al., 2000; King, n.d.; Lederach, 2003a; Miall, 2004; Satha-Anand, 1999).

Previous literature and this study's findings have illustrated some initial models, which could transform the conflict. Satha-Anand's proposal is compatible with the current situation. Two main actors that are non-electoral democratic powers and electoral democratic powers have to reconcile with each other. This proposal can link to Miall (2004), who discussed types of conflict transformation. First, the two groups of powers have to adjust the power structure. For example, ex-Prime Minister Thaksin exercised hard power and caused conflict in the society (Traisuriyathanma, 2011). Currently, the PTP leads the government; therefore, the government and non-

electoral democratic powers have to settle on appropriate power relationships with each other. Second, there are two issues that have to be transformed by integrating the rule of law and the majority vote. Tejapira challenged the society to integrate these two issues (as cited in “The War,” 2010). The rule of law pursues a clean democracy without vote buying and corruption. The majority vote asks the society to respect people’s decisions. Both are fundamental issues for democracy; therefore, the society should recognize the negative effects of vote buying and corruption and eradicate them. As a result, the society will be able to effectively integrate the two methods together. Third, conflicting parties should open their minds to perceive the conflict in positive ways. This will facilitate conflict transformation.

### **Socioeconomic Gaps**

Divisiveness can be seen in other relationships, such as this relationship between the middle class and the poor, as well as between urban and rural areas. The majority of the middle class in urban areas support the PAD. On the contrary, the majority of the impoverished in rural areas support the UDD. These kinds of relationships represent socioeconomic gaps.

Previous literature and the findings have asserted that social inequality affects politics, such as vote buying, corruption, populist policies, and political mobilization. For example, vote buying is pervasive in rural areas. The poor are the majority of Thais; therefore, politicians who can buy votes may win an election (Callahan, 2005; Laothammatas as cited in “Democratic,” n.d.). Vote buying leads to corruption issues in the country. These two factors led to the PAD protests against the Thaksin government.

However, there might be other reasons that caused conflicting parties to overthrow the Thaksin administration. Ex-Prime Minister Thaksin accepted that when

he was in office, he exercised hard power and was not concerned with people's feelings; therefore, his actions created conflict in the society (Traisuriyathanma, 2011). This issue could be another reason that made conflicting parties overthrow him. However, conflicting parties did not mention this issue to the public, but they instead used the corruption issue as a reason to topple him.

Social disparity also affected political mobilization. As Satha-Anand explained, some people might be mobilized or persuaded in order to participate in the two social movements of the PAD and the UDD (personal communication, September 8, 2011). For example, some Thais suspected that the UDD's protestors and security guards were hired (Pittaway, 2010; Ruangdit, 2010; Walker & Farrelly, 2010). According to the interview results, all interviewees believed that some people were persuaded by various means, such as by providing transportation and bribing them, to join the protests. However, the society and scholars should reflect before judging the use of financial inducements to mobilize people to participate in the protests for two reasons. First, some people wanted to join the protests, but they did not have the financial capacity to do so. For example, grassroots protestors had to commute from rural areas to participate in the protests in Bangkok. They could not afford transportation fees and other costs associated with taking part in the protests. When they were provided the financial means to do so, they could join the protests as they wanted. In contrast, some people who would not have otherwise been inclined to participate in the protests were effectively bribed through financial incentives; therefore, they decided to join the protests in order to make money. The two cases are very different; therefore, scholars should further investigate how many protestors were there because they believed in the cause and how many people were there because they were bribed.

According to previous literature, however, some scholars shared different views. Hewison (2010) and Winichakul (2008) argued, many in the urban middle class have a bias against the rural grassroots protestors and politicians. Many in the middle class believe that the grassroots protestors are uneducated and ignorant and the politicians corrupt. These discourses were created in order to affirm that democracy “can only be achieved through moral and ethical rule” (Winichakul as cited in Hewison, 2010, p. 125). Moreover, Hewison (2010) argued, the current conflict is a conflict between the old oligarchy and Thaksin. When Thaksin was a prime minister, he created many drastic changes within the country. These changes challenged the power of the old oligarchy. On the contrary, other studies illustrated that conflicting parties tried to involve the old oligarchy and the institution of monarchy into the conflict for several reasons. The PAD requested the institution to exercise power that was based on Article 7 of the Constitution to appoint a prime minister to replace the ex-Prime Minister Thaksin, but the PAD was criticized that its request was inappropriate. The PAD argued that it protected the institution. However, the PAD had “several factions” (Hewison, 2010, p. 125). Some PAD leaders might have had a conflict of interest with the Thaksin government; therefore, these leaders fought against the ex-prime minister. As Princess Sirindhorn explained, the PAD’s movements did not relate to the institution (AP as cited in Rojanaphruk, 2008). Moreover, some media have presented contents with *lese majesty*. The media wants to aggravate the situation rather than commit to conflict reconciliation and transformation. These cases show the conflicting parties, and scholars even tried to involve the institution in the conflict. As Tejapira (2011a) insisted, conflicting parties must not involve the institution in the conflict (p. 53). On the contrary, the institution has not been involved in the conflict because the institution has committed to the rule

of law to maintain a neutral status, above partisan politics. Therefore, Hewison's view about the old oligarchy should be reviewed.

Even though there are different views of scholars concerning vote buying and corruption, these two problems continue to grow in the society. Hewison (2010) and Winichakul (2008) seemed to ignore these problems and appeal to the society to respect the majority voice. However, these problems need to be resolved. The problems may be resolved by narrowing socioeconomic gaps between the middle class and the poor, and between urban and rural areas. The government uses populist policies to attempt to solve these problems. However, some scholars argued that the populist policies will create budget burdens in the long term, over the next few decades, and make rural people become dependent rather than become self-reliant. For example, in the case of populist policies in Argentina and Greece, the two countries suffered from populist policies (Boonma, 2011; Plainthit, 2011).

The NRC and the NRA play major roles in proposing long-term, sustainable policies for narrowing the socioeconomic gaps (Admin, 2010a, 2010b; Dalpino, 2010; Online Reporters, 2010). Therefore, the government should pay attention to the proposals of the two independent bodies. It may implement the populist policies together with the long-term sustainable policies to eradicate socioeconomic disparities. In addition, the government, the NRC, and the NRA could explore these effects of the populist policies in order to understand their advantages and disadvantages and prevent long-term budget burdens. Therefore, the government could learn which policies are useful for people or create budget burdens. As a result, the government could implement the populist policies properly.

An important point concerning populist policies is making the poor become dependent rather than self-reliant. The main advantages of populist policies are

immediately to respond to the demands of the poor and alleviate poverty by providing resources and a budget to serve the poor. However, if the government and people do not manage these resources well, the government may waste a budget and the rural poor could become dependent. Some of the poor may perceive that the government will continually provide these free resources to them. As a result, they just rely on these supports. In addition, if some people do not have self-discipline, they may consume all these resources instead of investing and saving. Therefore, the government and the impoverished have to pay attention to these issues. The government should have plans and manage the populist policies well. It may develop efficient aiding programs which provide grants and loans to help the poor. For example, the government may improve projects, such as village funds, people's banks, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and infrastructure. In addition, people should have self-discipline and be self-reliant, which corresponds with the "Sufficiency Economy" philosophy that was initiated by King Rama IX (National Economic and Social Development Board [NESDB], n.d., p. 1).

According to NESDB (n.d.), the Sufficiency Economy philosophy encourages Thais to follow the middle path and become self-reliant. The philosophy is based on three principles, including "moderation," "reasonableness," and "self-immunity" (p. 2). Moderation and reasonableness encourage people to manage and spend their income carefully. They should avoid over spending and extravagance. As a result, people will have money left for investing and saving. Self-immunity is encouraging people to be aware of the negative economic impact; for example, consumerism may cause people to carelessly spend money and even sink in debt. Therefore, if Thais, especially the impoverished, follow the philosophy, they could have a better quality of life, become self-reliant, and even become prosperous.

Moreover, this could be a good opportunity for the government, the NRC, and the NRA to examine causes of social and economic inequalities. These problems may derive from global and Thai economic policies. These policies might aim to develop urban areas and the economic sector rather than rural areas and the agricultural sector. As a result of unbalanced development, socioeconomic disparities and development gaps take place. Therefore, the government should implement balanced development, which concentrates on both the urban and rural sectors.

### **Rehabilitation**

During the past six years, violence took place in the society and caused several losses, injuries, and deaths to protestors, officers, and others (C. Satha-Anand, personal communication, September 8, 2011). This conflict's wounds need to be cured. Rehabilitation has to be implemented with reconciliation. The society has to define appropriate justice based on the spectrum of the rule of law and amnesty. The research proposes that society may apply Buddhist principles for rehabilitation (Wasi as cited in "Unlock," 2011). Buddhist principles may help the society settle its position between the rule of law and amnesty. If the society believes in reciprocal deeds, the rule of law may be enforced. If the society wants to forgive and forget, amnesty may be granted. According to the chair of the TRCT, he admitted that negative justice which aims to punish wrongdoers cannot transform the conflict. The TRCT is committed to positive justice which aims at rehabilitation and prevention of a new conflict (Na-Nakorn as cited in "Introduce," n.d.).

### **Conclusions**

Conflict transformation is needed for Thai society. However, the society is not committed to facilitate reconciliation. Even though there is not any protest, the society still maintains deep polarization. Conflicting parties and some Thais do not open their

minds to perceive the conflict in positive ways. This situation seems that conflicting parties temporarily stop fighting, and then prepare for the next fight to overthrow the other side. The chair of the NRA is aware of this point and has requested the society to change its way of thinking. Thais can think differently from each other, but Thais have to learn to live together in harmony and unity.

The government and the TRCT play major roles to implement reconciliation and rehabilitation. However, the society may doubt the government about concentrating on ex-Prime Minister Thaksin's issues rather than reconciliation. If the government aims to assist the ex-prime minister, a new conflict may take place in the society. Therefore, the government has to prove that it commits to transforming the conflict and does not intervene in the legal process. Two good signs are that the prime minister and the opposition leader have cooperated in order to eradicate corruption and help with flood relief. These two situations could be defined as the starting of reconciliation within electoral democratic powers. If the two leaders could further develop their collaboration in reconciliation, this will largely contribute to the reconciliation process in the society.

According to non-electoral democratic powers, the media have influence to shape people's attitudes. The mainstream media support reconciliation policy. They try to create harmony and unity in the country. The alternative and social media outlets should recognize these issues. They have to stop dividing people and making conflicting parties to angry and hateful towards the other. They have to commit to the national interest rather than the groups' interests.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study is a primary research that concentrates on transforming the current Thai political conflict and building peace in the society. The research is conducted at the same time of the current conflict. The study provides some suggestions which could facilitate conflict transformation and peace building. Therefore, future research may explore the conflict transformation process in order to understand what factors contribute to the success or failure of the conflict transformation process.

In addition, a future study may examine post-conflict conditions. For example, future research could investigate the results of the conflict transformation to Thai society: Does peace take place in the society? How does the society learn from the conflict? The future research may investigate the evolution of the conflict: Is the conflict completely transformed or does it create a new conflict in the society?

Moreover, future researchers may use the results of this study to understand politics in other countries which share similar political conditions with Thailand. Future research could apply the case of the current Thai political conflict to prevent conflicts that may take place in those countries.

### **Recommendations for Educational Practice**

This research may provide some information for educational practice. Universities could expand their areas of focus in politics of peace and conflict to concentrate in Southeast Asia and East Asia regions. Some countries in Southeast Asia are in the process of political development. Political conflicts take place in some countries, for example, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Thailand. In addition, there are conflicts between these countries, for instance, border conflict between Cambodia and Thailand concerning the case of the Phra Viharn Temple. Moreover, border conflicts

take place among six countries in Southeast and East Asia concerning the case of the Spratly Islands.

Furthermore, universities could develop courses or workshops which focus on conflict transformation. These courses may provide fundamental knowledge and skills for scholars to understand some recent conflicts of the world and could be able to propose some solutions to transform those conflicts.

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## Appendices

## **Appendix A**

### **Human Subjects Approval**

The researcher acquired approval to conduct interviews from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco. A copy of the IRBPHS approval letter can be found in Appendix B.

In order to prevent risk and maintain the privacy and confidentiality of interviewees, the names of the five interviewees are pseudonyms. Professor Satha-Anand allowed the study to mention his name. In addition, the study records will be kept confidential by locking interview notes in a safe. No individual identities will be specifically used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. The study information will be coded and kept in locked files at all times. Only the researcher will have access to the files.

## Appendix B

From USF IRBPHS irbphs@usfca.edu  
 To rphumcharoen@usfca.edu  
 Cc Stephen Zunes <Zunes@usfca.edu>  
 Date Thu, Aug 11, 2011 at 8:20 AM  
 Subject IRB Application #11-078 - Approved  
 Mailed-by usfca.edu  
 Important mainly because of the people in the conversation.

August 11, 2011

Dear Ranatchai Phumcharoen:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #11-078). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.
2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS. Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.
3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP  
 Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

-----  
 IRBPHS – University of San Francisco  
 Counseling Psychology Department  
 Education Building – Room 017  
 2130 Fulton Street  
 San Francisco, CA 94117-1080  
 (415) 422-6091 (Message)  
 (415) 422-5528 (Fax)  
 irbphs@usfca.edu

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<http://www.usfca.edu/soe/students/irbphs/>

## **Appendix C**

### **Researcher's profile**

The researcher is a master's student in the International Studies Program at the University of San Francisco. He is originally from Thailand. He is interested in the current Thai political conflict and would like to find the means of transforming the conflict and building peace in the country. The researcher hopes his study will illustrate the need to end the political conflict and to work toward sustainable peaceful reconciliation and transformation.