

# The Analysis of the 1<sup>st</sup> States' Corruption Between Thailand and South Korea Under the Democracy Regime

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## Abstract

This article aims to study the similarities between Thailand and South Korea's politics after the Revolution. Before 1932, Thailand was governed by an absolute monarchy. The same as South Korea, even though the absolute monarchy system of Korea (Choson Dynasty) was destroyed by the Japanese Emperor in 1910, but the first state of the Republic of Korea was founded in 1948. According to the study, we can focus on the same behavior of a new leader in both Thailand and South Korea who had ruled the country. The evidence found out that the new leader had corrupted behavior in direct and indirect ways. Therefore, researchers aim to study the reasons for motivation for corruption and the management of corruption.

**Keywords:** Thailand, South Korea, Corruption, Siamese Revolution, Seung Man Rhee

## Introduction

According to the topic of this article shown, the research focuses on Thailand and South Korea's politics in the first state after the revolution. In the case of the kingdom of Thailand, as we know, that Thailand or old name, it was called Siam, which was ruled by an absolute monarchy since the Sukho Thai era until the Siam Revolution in 1932. After its revolution, Thailand had a government that started ruling the country with democracy policies, and maintained the royal institutions as a symbol of the country. On the other hand, the condition of South Korea, which brought the country to be a democracy country that was completely different from Thailand. Before the Republic of Korea was founded in 1948. The background of Korean peninsula history in 1910-1945 belonging to Japan's occupied period was necessary to study and will help more understanding of it. South Korea's entry into a democratic nation is quite different from Thailand. Because South Korea destroyed the monarchy before becoming a democracy. While in Thailand, although there is a seizure of power from the king, the government still gave the king and the monarchy as a symbol of the country and has no political power. But the similarities between Thailand and South Korea after established the country to a democratic regime. The leaders of both Thailand and South Korea at that time used their power in the wrong ways.

The situation in Thailand found that the country's first prime minister involved in the seizure of the king's assets and sell it to their relatives at a cheap price. In South Korea during the Korean that was the poorest country in the world. South Korean government at that time received a huge donations from

the United Nations and the United States. But cannot solved the problem of poverty of the people. On the contrary, there are a lot of evidence to show that leader at that time (Seung Man Rhee) were not sincere in solving the problems of the people. But only need to maintain his political power for as long as possible. This corruption problem, the studies are interested that what affects the decision of leaders to commit corruption?

### Literature Review

The research tried to find the definition of the concept of political corruption, which has many different meanings depending on the purpose of the corruption. Because the purpose of corruption sometimes doesn't mean only money, but power is one of the things that many corrupters hunger as well.

Sangsit Piriyaangsan (2006) Thai scholar presents 15 types of corruption in Thai society as follows:

1. The benefit about economy such as monopoly, concession, illegal share.
2. Kleptocracy such as bring state property to the family.
3. Conflict of interest.
4. Make a profit from the stock market.
5. Concealing incorrect management.
6. Using policies, laws, regulations unfairly.
7. Using commercial influence.
8. Public resource corruption.
9. Using the power from allies.
10. Giving and taking bribes.
11. Accepting illegal gifts
12. Using inappropriate populist policies.
13. Abusing the power of the military and police.
14. Election Corruption.
15. Illegal Campaign.<sup>1</sup>

According to the 15 types of corruption in Thai society, actually not only in Thai society that, until nowadays, we have heard these kinds of corruption, but also every country in the world that has a corruption problem also has maybe one on its list as well.

Nathdanai Pratuangboriboon (2018) said in the article "The Causes of Corruption in Sub District Administrative Organization: The Opinions of the Village Headman in Lampang Province" about the "Patronage system". The patronage system is an important part that causes conflicts of interest. It means corruption. In this way, when there is a process of corruption, there will be a group process where everyone in the group will benefit from each other, and must help each other, because if there is a mistake, they must be responsible together.

From the above, the researcher quite strongly agreed. Due to corruption at the state level, it is unable to operate alone but must have a coalition to support. For example, the first president of South Korea, Seung Man Rhee, spent huge sums of money on paying the politicians who supported him.

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<sup>1</sup> Nathdanai Pratuangboriboon. (2018). The Causes of Corruption in Sub district Administrative Organization: The Opinions of The Village Headman in Lampang Province. *Governance Journal*, No.7(2)

### The Siamese revolution in 1932 background.

As mentioned in the introduction, Thailand, or old name, was called Siam, which had been ruled the country since the Sukhothai period by an absolute monarchy until 24 June 1932. It was changed to a constitutional Monarchy by Khana Ratsadon (People's Party). During the revolution in the reign of King Rama VII, the revolutionary groups realized the people's difficulties in daily life. If you consider the situation of the world at that time, the whole world was affected by World War I. The global economy was really bad. For example, the Great Crash in the United States. Even though Thailand is a small country, the economy way would be affected as well.

At that time, the monarchy might not be able to help the people. In addition, the military and civilian people's leaders at that time (Member of the Khana Ratsadon) who were educated in the West. Therefore, there is an idea to revolutionize the administration of Thailand to be like the western nations. In addition, the Khana Ratsadon also gave 6 main principles for the revolution as follows,

1. To maintain the supreme power of the Thai people.
2. To maintain national security.
3. To maintain the economic welfare of the Thai people in accordance with the National Economic Project.
4. To protect the equality of the Thai people.
5. To maintain the people's rights and liberties, insofar as they are not inconsistent with any of the above-mentioned principles.
6. To provide public education for all citizens.<sup>2</sup>

Before the revolution, Khana Ratsadon had done a lot of preparation, such as the cooperation between the people who worked inside the palace or senior commissioned officers who controlled the Ministry of Defense. Therefore, on 24 June 1932 was the day that King Rama VII or King Prajadhipok went to his palace (Klaikangwong Palace) in Prachuap khiri khan province. 3 head commander of Khana Ratsadon Phraya Phahonphonphayuhasena, Phraya Songsuradet and Phraya Ritthiaknay gathered hugely soldiers and congregated in front of Equestrian statue of Chulalongkorn the Great. Phraya Phahonphonphayuhasena read the text of the manifesto of the Khana Ratsadon which was written by Pridi.

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Figure 1: Phraya Phahonphonphayuhasena declaring a constitutional monarchy

<sup>2</sup> The Nation. (September 22, 2020). The history and significance of the Khana Ratsadon memorial plaque. The Nation. <https://www.nationthailand.com/perspective/30394936>

<sup>3</sup> นรินดี เศรษฐบุตร. 24 มิถุนายน 2475. สถาบันพระปกเกล้า (King Prajadhipok's Institute). <http://wiki.kpi.ac.th/>

Source: The Story of Thai Democracy: The 1932 Revolution  
<https://kenlwrites.com/2017/06/23/the-story-of-thai-democracy-the-1932-revolution/comment-page-1/>

On 25 June 1932, King Rama VII returned to his Grand palace in Bangkok and accepted the requirement of Khana Ratsadon for two reasons. First, he didn't need a civil war and, second, he had the intention of changing the regime from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional regime.



Figure 2: A constitution is granted

Source: The Story of Thai Democracy: The 1932 Revolution  
<https://kenlwrites.com/2017/06/23/the-story-of-thai-democracy-the-1932-revolution/comment-page-1/>

### **The management of King's properties and the corruptions of Khana Ratsadon.**

After the revolution, the first Thai Prime Minister became Phraya Phahonphonphayuhasena. King Rama VII abdicated and went abroad. Therefore, the throne of Thailand was sent to a young boy who was living in Switzerland named Prince Ananda Mahidol, and the king's properties were separated into 3 parts according to the House of Representatives.

1. Personal Property meant all the property that belong to the king before his reign.
2. Crown Property meant the property of state, not personal stuffs.
3. Property that belong to the state such as Palaces, it must be use for public use.<sup>4</sup>

The new king was so young, he was only 8 years old when he reigned the crown. Moreover, he and his family were living in a country very far from his mainland. So, the Thai government at that time appointed HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Krom Muen Anuwat Jaturon to be his regent. The most discussed issue regarding the unfairness of the management of crown property is land management. The person responsible for taking care of the land of the King at that time was Lieutenant Khun Nirandonchai, and found that he bought more than 90 plots of Royal land at a low price and used other people's names as buyers. Not only Lieutenant Khun Nirandonchai, but also one of the Khana Ratsadon leaders of the revolution, like Luang Phibulsonggram, made the purchase of such land as well. But for fear of guilt, he hurriedly took it back. The corruption of royal land was also discussed in the House of Representatives by Mr. Tai Panikabud and Mr. Liang Chaiyakarn. Their debate topic made Khun Nirandonchai upset. He ordered his guards to carry both of them out of the council and throw them into the pond.

The situation was really serious that made HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Krom Muen Anuwat Jaturon cannot stand for highly pressure because he was a king regent that meant the responsibility

<sup>4</sup> ชัยวัชร์ ตูลานน. (20 มกราคม 2565). การจัดการความมั่งคั่งของสถาบันกษัตริย์หลังการปฏิวัติ 2475 และปฏิวัติ 2490. คณะก้าวหน้า.  
<https://progressivemovement.in.th/article/common-school/knowledge-market/6494/>

will be including him as well. Later, he decided to commit suicide himself. Anyways, Mr. Tai Panikabud and Mr. Liang Chaiyakarn was still keeping on debating on the same topic to pressure all the accomplices. Finally, the Prime Minister and all the Council of Ministers resigned and gave a change to investigate the case.<sup>5</sup>

The result of royal land has been managed in the right ways after the investigation. Many of the palaces and land which was bought by the members of Khana Ratsadon, returned to the state's property. However, in the case of Khun Nirandonchai, at first the evidence proved that he had royal land property, around 90 plots. Recently, references by his descendant have been shown the royal land that belong to his descendant, around 80 plots in the middle of Bangkok.<sup>6</sup> In the future, how his descendants will decide to turn it back or not still have no any reports.

### **The First State of Republic of Korea**

As the researchers have described in the introduction, the condition of South Korea how it become Republic regime after absolute monarchy. The beginning of a democratic regime in South Korea started in 1910, after the Korean peninsula had been occupied by Japan and the absolute monarchy was destroyed at that time. The Korean peninsula was ruled by the Japanese Empire for around 35 years (1919-1945). Until the end of World War 2, the Japanese Empire had lost the war, and the Korean peninsula was free. Anyways, the competition for Cold War power had started at this time between the United States of America and the Soviet Unions. Unfortunately, the Korean Peninsula had become a battle land of its war.

Before the Korean War had started. There was a disarmament of Japanese soldiers in the Korean Peninsula. The Soviet Union disarmed Japanese soldiers in the north, and the United States disarmed Japanese soldiers in the southern part of the peninsula. There was a demarcation zone for disarmament at the 38th parallel. After disarmament ended, the United Nations, along with their members, especially the USA, needed to establish a democratic regime in Korea, but their hope could not be completed. Because of disobedience of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the United Nations had decided to start the first election in Korea on the peninsular in the southern part only.

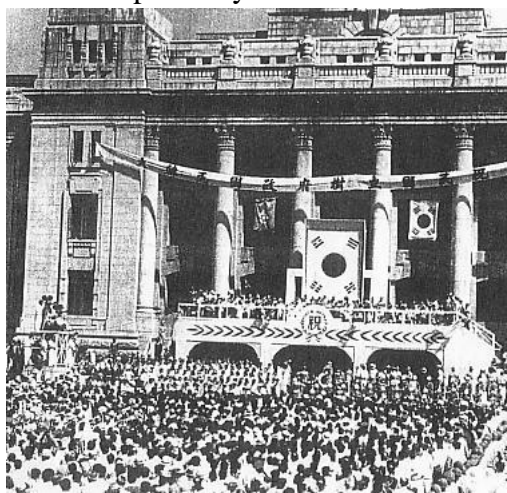


Figure 3: Establishment of the first Republic of Korea

<sup>5</sup> อานนท์ สักดิ์วรวิชัย. (31 ก.ค. 2565). ทริพย์สินพระมหากษัตริย์ ตอนที่ ๑๔ : ปล้นพระคลังข้างที่ ๒๔๗๕ มาแบ่งกันในหมู่คณะราษฎร. MGROnline. <https://mgronline.com/daily/detail/9650000066812>

<sup>6</sup> ผู้จัดการออนไลน์. (26 ธ.ค. 2563). ทายาท “ขุนนิรันดร์ชัย” ขอพระราชทานอภัยโทษแทนบิดากระทำการทำผิดร่วมคณะราษฎร 2475 .MGROnline. <https://mgronline.com/onlinesection/detail/9630000131996>

Source: Boston University: Rhee Syngman, First President of the Republic of Korea <https://sites.bu.edu/koreandiaspora/individuals/1910s/rhee-syngman-first-president-of-the-republic-of-korea/>

Finally, in 1948, the Southern part had its first president. He was Dr. Sung Man Rhee, and at the same time, he also announced the southern part of the Korean peninsula as a Republic of Korea. In the same year, the Northern Part of Korea Peninsular, which was always supported by the Soviet Unions and China, collected their own leader, who was Kim Il Sung. Thus, North and South Korea were separated from each other until nowadays.

**South Korea under the Government of Sung Man Rhee (1948-1960)**

In 1948, South Korea had its own government. South Koreans at that time were very poor or it could be said that South Korea was the poorest country in the world. Therefore, researchers have studied economic development guidelines and relations with foreign countries. According to a study found that during the rule of Seung Man Rhee government ran the country slowly. It might be because of some condition that was the Korean War from 1950 to 1953. This war destroyed the quality of life of the Korean people, and opportunities for the country's development as an independent state, and has its own democratic system. However, when considering other elements, it is found that the first government of South Korea, which may be called the government of hope, was not what the people intended. Many corruptions were found in this government. Also, was the government leader President Rhee Instead, they ruled the country in a way completely opposite to democracy. The researcher divided the corruptive characteristics of Dr. Rhee government into two types; financial corruption and corruption in political power.

**The Financial corruption**

After the first election in 1948, South Korea was known as the poorest country in the world, supported by the USA and the United Nations, which under the organization was called United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency, which had provided support money and food to South Korean. The support was provided to South Korea from 1945 to 1961. It included 4 kinds; free support money, loaning money for development, support for food and others. The supporting finance can separate for 2 periods; Between the end of World War Two to the ceasefire agreement of Korean War (1945-1953) and between the ceasefire agreement of Korean War to 1961. In the first period, supporting finance was provided to South Korean about 2,293 US million dollars, and the second period was 935 US million dollars. The large amount of supporting money can be assumed that the USA spent over 80% of its money in South Korea compared with financial aid which was provided to other countries.<sup>7</sup>

[Table 1-9] US Assistance to South Korea: 1946-76

	1946-52	1953-61	1962-69	1970-76	Total
Economic Assistance	666.8 (98%)	2,579.2 (62%)	1,658.2 (40%)	963.6 (25%)	5,745.4 (46%)
Military Assistance	12.3 (2%)	1,560.7 (38%)	2,501.3 (60%)	2,797.4 (75%)	6,847.3 (54%)
Total	679.1 (100%)	4,139.9 (100%)	4,159.5 (100%)	3,761.0 (100%)	12,592.7 (100%)

Sources: Mason, Kim, Perkins, Kim and Cole (1989), p182

Figure 4: The Summary of Financial Aid from US to South Korea 1946 – 1976

<sup>7</sup> Damrong Thandee. (1999). Korean Today. Center for Korean Studies Faculty of Humanities, Ramkhamhaeng University. Bangkok, page 25-29

Source: Kdevelopedia: Official Aid, Broad overview of US aid in Korea  
<https://www.kdevelopedia.org/Development-Overview/official-aid/broad-overview-us-aid-korea--201412120000421.do>

The government of Seung Man Rhee managed to receive donations for infrastructure development and the country's defense, such as reducing the price of produce to be lower in order for people in the country to be able to consume cheap food, keeping interest rates low, keeping exchange rates low for the benefit of trade competition. However, the effect of this government's economic management took more than 10 years to see the results.

However, Korean citizens were focused on how this government had managed financial aid from foreign organizations. In particular, the leader had been using the money which was received from donations without inspection. For example, in the investor support program, the government chooses to provide finance loans only to businesses that support their government's politics. So it was similar to buying votes. Later, the rules of loan conditions were changed. The 12 large companies were selected, and the amount of loan money must also be allocated to the government's political parties.

Additionally, there had been talked of tax evasion by large operators close to the ruling party. Therefore, during the era of the Rhee government it can be said that it was an era of corruption and bribery between the state and business. This issue may extend the relationship between the public and private sectors until it becomes a chaebol<sup>8</sup> in the next state later.

### **The Political Corruption**

In fact, being honored by the people and the National Assembly of Rhee came for many reasons. One of those reasons, according to the researcher's opinion, is that Sung Man Rhee was the greatest person who believed in democracy, hated communism, had a close relationship with the United States, and was very patriotic due to various efforts during Korea's rule of Japan. Therefore, it was not surprising why his first election was overwhelmingly won by the votes by faith of Korean citizens.

But after winning the presidency, greed led him to do things that were extremely hostile to the democratic regime. In 1952, the last year of Rhee's presidency. As a result of past operations since 1948. People were so dissatisfied with tackling poverty, war and corruption that they knew that a normal general election would certainly prevent him from getting a vote in the Assembly. Therefore, the constitution was amended on the issue of direct presidential election. As a result, the 1952 election was won by Rhee, and in 1954 he amended the constitution again. Because of the original conditions of the constitution, the president can hold office a maximum of 2 times. It had been revised to be able to hold it forever. Many disagreeing groups spread throughout South Korea.

But Rhee used anti-communist laws to deal with dissent, arguing that these people oppose the government because they support the communists. The third election in 1956, Rhee still received the highest number of votes, with 5,400,000 votes from a total of 9,067,063 eligible voters. And the fourth election, in 1960, he won again. Korean people know that the elections in the past were definitely cheated, especially this term of election. Rhee's government used a lot of efforts to control the media in presenting news as well. However, after the announcement of the election results for Rhee's 4th term, which at that time he was

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<sup>8</sup> The chaebol structure is a business conglomerate system that originated in South Korea in the 1960s, creating global multinationals with huge international operations. Chaebol is an English transliteration of the Korean word 재벌, which means plutocracy, rich business family, or monopoly, and the chaebol structure can encompass a single large company or several groups of companies.

over 80 years old, students and huge citizens came out to protest the election results, demanding that the vote be recounted.

Until violent clashes broke out between protesters and officials in the city of Masan, and the body of a high school student was discovered who had been shot dead by tear gas. The body was found near the port of Masan. Demonstrations erupted across the country. This became known as the April Revolutions<sup>9</sup>. The focus of public protest had changed with the recount of election results to be call for Rhee's expulsion instead. As a result, Seung Man Rhee had to flee to the state of Hawaii of the United States later.

## Conclusion

In this article, the researchers have a point to compare and study the method of how the first state of democratic regime of Thailand and South Korea had been started by corruption by the person who called themselves a democracy leader. Considering evidence from the documentary and the theories related to corruption, we found that the intention of the Khana Ratsadon (People's Party) was to change the government from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. There are 6 objectives as mentioned in the content. Mr. Pridi Banomyong, one of the people who seized power, gave an additional reason for achieving all 6 objectives, which was to create new relationships in society. For example, the regime changes in Western Europe at the end of the 18th century were to advance the development of industrial countries and technology. According to the record of Phraya Songsuradet who had given consistent reasons with Mr. Pridi Regarding the relationship between employers and employees that Thai society had a class of masters and servants, and higher than that was the Royalty which created a lot of inequality in Thai society. Especially in the upper class, which had a lot of cheats, such as supporting friends and relatives, which caused damage to the country. Therefore, it was necessary to change the governance system.<sup>10</sup>

But after the People's Party successfully completed the Siamese Revolution. There was an abuse of power in the management of the king's property. Although, Mr. Pridi Banomyong and Phraya Songsuradet were not the people who bought and sold land in this section. But they were members of the People's Party who must know some involvement. Two important people who were the leaders of the People's Party that had a direct role in the change of government in 1932 were Luang Phibun Songkhram, and His Royal Highness Athitayapa, involved in the buying and selling the King's properties or, in the case of Lee Seung-man, the first democratic leader of South Korea. After coming to power, he changed into a different person and used the power like crazy.

What are the reasons that cause them to be corrupt without no shame among the groups of people who were trusting in them? The answer cannot be anything other than greed.

Aree Chuemuangphan (2013) said about greed. Greed is inseparable with the animals. In economics, it teaches humans how to manage their unlimited desires. If everyone is satisfied with what they have and rejoices in what they have, human greed will be diminished.

Finally, there are important lessons from two different countries which were not concerned with each other's politics or international relations. Ultimately, as humans, the weakest point that causes humans to

<sup>9</sup> April Revolution or in another called the April 19 Movement were a political crisis that South Korean protested the 4<sup>th</sup> terms election of President Syngman Rhee from April 11 to 26, 1960 which led to Rhee's resignation.

<sup>10</sup> วิจิตรวงศ์ ณ ป้อมเพชร์. (2560). คณะราษฎรเศษเสี้ยว ปฏิวัติ 2475 ปฐมบทจากความเสื่อมโทรมของระบอบสมบูรณาญา. ศิลปวัฒนธรรม ฉบับมกราคม 2560



succumb to their own strong ideals is greed. Therefore, a man who overcomes his or her greed and maintains a firm ideology is most worthy of praise.

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