

## The Conflicts between the Government Sector and People: A Case Study of the 1974 Arson at Ban Nasai in Nasing Sub-district, Srivilai District, Bung Kan Province

Khatawoot Yawanopas<sup>1</sup> Vinai Poncharoen<sup>2</sup> Tatchawat Loasuwan<sup>3</sup>

### บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1) ศึกษาข้อเท็จจริงของเหตุการณ์เผาบ้านนาทราย พ.ศ. 2517 ตำบลนาสิงห์ อำเภอศรีวิไล จังหวัดบึงกาฬ 2) ศึกษาปัจจัยแห่งความขัดแย้งระหว่างรัฐกับประชาชน กรณีเหตุการณ์เผาบ้านนาทราย พ.ศ. 2517 ตำบลนาสิงห์ อำเภอศรีวิไล จังหวัดบึงกาฬ และ 3) ศึกษาผลกระทบ ที่เกิดจากการบังคับใช้มาตรการปราบปรามคอมมิวนิสต์ กรณีเหตุการณ์เผาบ้านนาทราย พ.ศ. 2517 ในพื้นที่เขตงาน 222 ภูสิงห์ ซึ่งเป็นการศึกษาวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพโดยอาศัยการรวบรวมข้อมูลทั้งหมดที่ได้ด้วยการศึกษาค้นคว้าทางเอกสารและข้อมูลจากการสัมภาษณ์ แล้วนำหลักแนวคิดด้วยการทบทวนวรรณกรรมมาเป็นกรอบ ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงพรรณนาอธิบายปรากฏการณ์ที่เกิดขึ้น ผลการวิจัยพบว่า

1. เหตุการณ์เผาบ้านนาทรายในปี พ.ศ.2517 เกิดจากความบกพร่องในการปฏิบัติงานของ เจ้าหน้าที่รัฐ ซึ่งไม่สามารถกระทำการคัดกรองระหว่างชาวบ้านผู้สนับสนุนผู้ก่อการร้ายคอมมิวนิสต์ที่เขตภูสิงห์ กับชาวบ้านที่ไม่มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องใดๆ ได้ จึงเข้าล้อมปราบปรามด้วยการเผาทำลายเกือบทั้งหมดทั้งหมู่บ้านและสังหารประชาชนผู้ต่อต้าน โดยการใช้ออกกล่าวหาเกี่ยวกับภัยคอมมิวนิสต์ในการกระทำการอันรุนแรงเกินกว่าเหตุ

2. ปัจจัยแห่งความขัดแย้งระหว่างรัฐกับประชาชน กรณีเหตุการณ์เผาบ้านนาทราย พ.ศ. 2517 ถูกแสดงออกผ่านสภาวะทางการเมืองที่เกิดขึ้นโดยมีปัจจัยที่นำไปสู่ปรากฏการณ์นี้ คือ 1.ทัศนคติ 2.พฤติกรรม และ 3.เป้าหมาย ที่ไปด้วยกันไม่ได้ จึงเกิดการตอบโต้กันถึงในระดับที่การดำรงอยู่ของอีกฝ่าย เป็นอุปสรรคต่อการบรรลุเป้าหมายของฝ่ายหนึ่ง ซึ่งถูกแสดงออกทางการเมืองอย่างเปิดเผย

3. ผลกระทบที่เกิดจากการบังคับใช้มาตรการปราบปรามคอมมิวนิสต์ กรณีเหตุการณ์เผาบ้าน นาทราย พ.ศ. 2517 ในพื้นที่เขตงาน 222 ภูสิงห์ ปรากฏผลกระทบที่เกิดขึ้นภายหลัง คือ 1. เกิดการสูญเสีย ทั้งชีวิตและทรัพย์สินของประชาชน 2. เกิดการต่อสู้ด้วยกำลังอาวุธขึ้นอีกภายในพื้นที่ หรือเหตุความรุนแรง ได้ขยายตัวออกไป 3. เกิดความแตกแยก ทำให้ประชาชนผู้ที่ได้รับผลกระทบจากการปราบปราม เข้าป่าต่อต้านรัฐบาลร่วมกับผู้ก่อการร้ายคอมมิวนิสต์เขตงาน 222 ภูสิงห์ ไปในที่สุด

**คำสำคัญ :** ความขัดแย้งระหว่างรัฐกับประชาชน

### ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was conducted to investigate: 1) the arson incident in 1974 at Ban Nasai, Tambon Na Singh, Amphoe Srivilai, Bung Kan province; 2) the key factors led to the conflict between the government and the local people; and 3) the consequences after the reinforcement of the anti-communism suppression measure at Ban Nasai within the Phu Singh Operation Area 222. The data was collected from the previous research papers and the interview with the participants. Also, the literature review was used to construct the

<sup>1</sup> Graduate student in Politics and Governance Program, College of Politics and Governance, Mahasarakham University

<sup>2</sup> Asst. Prof. (Ph.D.), Politics and Governance Program, College of Politics and Governance, Mahasarakham University

<sup>3</sup> Assoc. Prof. (Ph.D.), Politics and Governance Program, College of Politics and Governance, Mahasarakham University

research framework and the descriptive analysis was performed to explain the arson incident. The outcome was found as follows.

1. The 1974 arson incident at Ban Nasai indicated there was really the consequence after the careless operation. Those officers were unable to differentiate between normal people and the communist, so they mistakenly burned down the whole village and killed innocent people. This excessive action of the officers was claimed as the communism suppression measure.

2. The key factors that led to the conflict between the government sector and people and over the arson incident at Ban Nasai and resulted as the political conflict were attitudes, behavior, and objectives. That is, the conflict started since these three factors did not go along each other. Hence, the conflict grew and reached its peak in which the existence of one side finally became an obstruction for the success of another side.

3. The communism suppression measure reinforced at Ban Nasai entails several negative consequences including: 1) loss of life and property; 2) repeated fighting and spreading violence; and 3) disharmony. Eventually, the people decided to leave the village join a group of the communist settled in the wood.

**Keywords:** Conflicts, Government Sector and People.

## Introduction

The 1974 arson incident at Ban Nasai marks a flaw into the history of the anti-communist measure under Thai government and it was broadly accused that this measure was plotted to gain some budget or “the resurrection of the communist spirit” so that it was once put on the headline news spreading around the country. Soon after the arson incident was the news about a dead body in a red tank found in Phattalung province. These two suspicious incidents finally upset the local people and completely ruined their positive attitude toward the government sector and the officers in the area who were under the control of the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC). For the public, the mission was merely another failure and in return it encouraged more people to join the communism (Bancha Suma, 1985: 115-117). Similar to the nearby areas, Ban Nasai was directly affected by the incidents while the situation was gradually getting more serious. In responding to the situation, the local government organization under the Bung Kan district (Dang Nadin, 1974: 63) began investigating and assuming that Ban Nasai had become one of the communist’s base for food and information

(Dang Nadin, 1974: 69), so they decided to encircle the area to suppress the communist’s movement in which it was terribly ended with the people’s houses were destroyed and burned down. The worst was that many people were killed by an accusation of communism (The Northeast News Center, 1995: 11)

This brutal situation was happening while the student and educator were starting their campaign against the threatening intervention of the Central extreme intrusion Intelligence Agency (CIA) over the democracy in Thailand. While the anti-CIA demonstration was going on, the arson incident at a village in the northeast suddenly appeared to be acknowledged amongst the public (Konnum Publisher, 1974: 210) in which it was revealed by Thirayuth Boonmee and the members of the People’s Assembly for Democracy (PAD) (Konnum Publisher, 1974: 37) .

Later, this incident eventually became the political issue in which Mr.Boonmee and his colleagues decided to hold the exhibitions and high parking to show their resistance against the government officers. This happened after Mr.Boonmee had visited and found the truth in Ban Nasai. He also took the villager’s representative with him to address the petition to

Mr.Sanya Dharmasakti., a prime minister at the time, while the movement from the PAD was made in association with the National Student Center of Thailand and The Independent Student Federation to address the petition for Ban Nasai people. (The Northeast News Center, 1995: 11)

Consequently, Thai society was encountered with strong tide of social conflicts, fighting, and brutal competitiveness over the underlying truths between both sides i.e. the government sector that uses the laws and policies to control the citizen and local people who were to follow and inspect the proper use of the government power. In this regard, if the truth from any of both sides was widely agreed amongst the majority, it would assign fairness to that side so their actions would undoubtedly become reasonable, especially ones concerning their political ideology.

Accordingly, all truths were meant to be searched for the enlightenment of Ban Nasai's history concerning the primary factors, background, and significant consequences. These were expected to point out the problem and conflict caused by the need of maintaining the governance system as one of the national entities.

### Objectives of Study

1. To investigate the undying truth of the arson incident in 1974 at Ban Nasai, Tambon Na Singh, Amphoe Srivilai, Bung Kan province.
2. To explore the key factors led to the conflict between the government and the local people at Ban Nasai.
3. To find the consequences after the reinforcement of the anti-communism suppression measure at Ban Nasai within the Phu Singh Operation Area 222.

### Scope of Study

#### 1. Scope of Content

This study was purposively to explore the social conflict with linkage to the political issues

at the time where the government became the opponent of the local people. Thus, the scope of study was centered at the battle between the government officers, the elites who used their power to securely retain their social class against the local people who were socially oppressed under the government and they typically were the peasant, the labor, and the intellectuals who claimed to settle down the political problems after the government officer acted violently toward the innocent people who were accused for being the communist.

#### 2. Scope of Study Area

The area of study was centered at the Thai state with social conflict resulted from the reinforcement of the national security measure to fight back the communist, with particular emphasis on the violence at Ban Nasai in Tambon Nasing, Amphoe Srivilai, Bungkan Province.

#### 3. Scope of Time

The study was to explore the social conflict concerning the movement of communism at Ban Nasai in 1974.

Any of associate consequences after the incident happened either before or after the time of study was roughly discussed as the guideline only to construct unity, relationship, and essence of this study.

### Research Methodology

This study was conducted with qualitative research methodology and planned as below.

1. The Document study was based on the following data.

#### 1.1 Primary Data

1.1.1 The primary data from document and pieces of writing on the arson incident at Ban Nasai in 1974's were compiled from 3 sections including 1) the government sector, 2) the journalist, and the communist nominee. This documentation was likely a compilation of the publicly revealed documents at that time that should be discussed in this study.

## 1.2 Secondary Data

1.2.1 The secondary data was gathered from different sources including printed media, books, journals, thesis, and websites.

2. The interview: the researcher decided to use a semi-structured interview form to collect the data from the key informants by holding a focused group discussion with structured question items. These key informants were properly classified and assigned to different topics by snowball sampling in which the data was linked from one to other key informants. Accordingly, the key informants consisted of 3 groups of people as follows.

2.1 The community leaders at Ban Nasai to visit a Prime Minister Sanya Dharmasakti.

2.2 Heads of the government officer in Ban Nasai.

2.3 The communist leaders in Ban Nasai.

In particular, more of the useful information could be collected from the third party mentioned by the key informants in order to completely get all details regarding the incident.

## Data Analysis

Practically, the data from the document study and interview was combined with the key concepts from the literature review on the conflict issue criticism by Johan Galtung. The data was finally analyzed by descriptive analysis and summarized following the objectives of study.

## Research Conceptual Framework

The literature review on associate theories and research papers was used to construct the research conceptual framework for this study and the Johan Galtung's key concept of the social conflict was applied to create the research tool for data analysis. Basically, Galtung (2007: 7-22) described that a social conflict has its own life cycle similar to creature that could be classified into 3 phases including 1) Before violence; 2) During violence and 3) After Violence. Listed below were the key factors to start a social

conflict.

1. Attitude: The hidden frustrated feeling from the oppression that lastly turned into hatred toward those with offensive intention.

2. Behavior: The intension against the opponent that was exposed through either actions or speech. This behavior entailed the resistances and violence in the forms of self-defense or personal revenge.

3. Goal: The situational problem resulted from the fact that the individual commonly had different goals that sometimes could not get along with or even became offensive one another. With these contradictory goals came along the conflicts and other related problems. Especially when the goals were so simple e.g. need, demand, or fundamental benefits, the individual's frustration became more serious.

This data analysis aimed to comprehend the attitude, behavior, and critical issues that draw in the attention of both opponents since these were the key factors with strong influence on the situation between them.

## Conclusion

1. The truth behind the arson incident at Ban Nasai in 1974 and the brutal violence basically grew from the unsolved conflict between the local government officers and the people at Ban Nasai that had a long history from the past. It was claimed that the government officers, as the mechanism to carry out the missions to serve the government, evidently had been treating the people with violence with neither a proper compromising nor a process of judgement since the first movement of communism was found around the area. As a result, this conflict and other internal conflicts were used as the background for several political reactions in which Ban Nasai people and the student-people movement with an outstanding act against the government after 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1973, teamed up as an ally to claim for the judgement from the government. In fact, this was led

to the political problem after Mr.Thirayuth Boonmee and the student's movement acknowledged what really happened in Ban Nasai so they requested for an investigation on the incident. Soon after retracing the truth and gaining sufficient information, Mr. Boonmee and Ban Nasai people moved into Bangkok to address their petition concerned with the arson incident in 1974. This inevitably was turned into the political conflict. In addition, another fact indicated that this conflict started after the student's movement shown their resistance an old-fashioned political value and ideology though the dictatorship had been already put to an end. This meant that the old-styled politics was still rooted in the society. The resistance became visible after the political conflict on 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2016 in which the people dared more to defy the government's power regarding the currently existed social value, belief, and paradigm. To support the claim, the interview data affirmed that the key informants agreed that what the government officer did to the people in Ban Nasai was unfair and stated that the government sector and system was truly the problem so the people needed to present the petition for the judgment after the arson incident in 1974.

2. The key factor of the conflict: after the arson incident was exposed to the public, it undoubtedly fell into the criticism by the mass media so it later became the highlight to the eyes of the public. This was widely discussed amongst the people whether the government officer's action was proper done or it was the unnecessarily excessive performance. This people's inquiry aroused a group of student and educator from both Nong Khai and Nakhon Ratchasima to join force in order to request for the justification for Ban Nasai people and to pressure the government to take responsibility on finding the truth from this case. The case was finally pushed into the consideration of National Legislative Assembly followed by the argument between the government officers who sided with Mr.Boonmee and those officers who disagreed and claimed that Mr.Boonmee's strike-back defamed and ruined the government officer's spirit

for working though they risked themselves in a distant area fairly finishing the mission to protect their homeland from the life-threatening communism. These contradictory attitudes entailed a serious confrontation between the governments under the Prime Minister Sanya Dharmasakti representing the government power and the people's movement claiming for justification for Ban Nasai. During that period, different forms of violence were communicated through a context of political conflict pushed by differences in attitude, behavior, and goal. Under this brutal conflict, it seemed that the existence of one would mean the failure of another. Accordingly, the political conflict was explicitly played out.

3. The consequences after the reinforcement of the anti-communist measure: After the political violence and conflict had ended, the government addressed the cabinet's resolution and promptly assigned a commission to investigate the truth behind the incident by cooperating with the mass media. The commission consisted of the high-ranked government officers in the National Legislative Assembly. After visiting Ban Nasai, the committee reported the fact to the cabinet and later Winyu Angkanarak, the head of the commission, declared that none of certain guilt could really be defined since they only had the circumstance evidence. Accordingly, the commission suggested that people wait for the official announcement from the government. Due to this unclear solution, an inquiry was raised again from Mr.Surin Matdit, a member of the National Legislative Assembly, but it was still unclear whether the incident was actually happened due to the government officer's operation. The government reacted toward this inquiry by merely informing the progress after the support had been sent the people in Ban Nasai since January 24<sup>th</sup> such as a report on the death of 3 people, 104 houses and 82 barns had been burnt down, and 3 rice mills were partly burnt. The damage cost was totally 3 million baht. Still, the conclusion on the arson incident remained unclear so more negative attitude was raised

by the journalist who disagreed with what the government did. Namely, they were frustrated and felt that there must be some truth behind the arson incident in Ban Nasai and this frustration was turned into a request for a process of judgment toward the brutally political conflict and to recover the victimized people. Unfortunately, some members in the National Legislative Assembly still disagreed with the resolution made in the parliament; therefore, the reconciliation guideline and anti-terrorist measure revision could not be made as previously agreed. For these reasons, many of the anti-government groups were formed and they seemed to confront with the government again. At that time, it looked like a sign of political disorder and more of violent acts were widely found due to the unstable condition of the government under a Prime Minister Sanya Dhamasakti. At that point, the government was finally aware of the political movement mad by the student in order to help the local people in a distant area since they witnessed different forms of inequality from the government, especially the anti-communist operation in the local community. Then, soon after the political violence had been terminated, it was visible to the public that the reinforcement of the anti-communist measure at Ban Nasai caused the loss of the innocent's life and property. It was even worse that the expansion of the fights and violence use caused disharmony within the society; meanwhile, those victimized people later decided to flee into the wood and join the communism.

### Discussion

In general, the conflict between the government sector and local people concerned with the 1974 arson incident at Ban Nasai exactly grew from a primitively unsolved argument between Ban Nasai people and the government officer in which the officers violently treated the local people by an order from the authorities who were battling to own the power and under the serious national security policy previously influenced by the powerful western coun-

tries in the past. To be exact, it was evidently seen that Thai government's policy was typically adopted from a trend of the liberalism in the western countries so that communism was used as a key factor to interfere with the national interior affair. This finding was similar to the outcome from a study by Phornaid Pungluan (2001: Abstract) stating that Thai society was commonly full of many ideological conflicts and when looking deeply, it was found that the fighting for personal ideology and thinking process was remained the major conflict. This conflict was simply found in the fighting for human right, freedom, equality, and fairness over different issues in the society and these were resulted from a primitive argument over the political ideologies between the authoritarian and social democratic ideologies. At the meantime, the actual cause of the violence treated on the people in Ban Nasai was the consequence after the use of the anti-communist measure without a process of judgment or a proper compromising approach since the earliest movement of communism in the area so it was eventually ended with violence in the political conflict. In the same vein, Somchai Phattananunt, (2006: Abstract) similarly found that the political conflict and resistance in Isan was rooted in a long history and it was a negative result from the bad domination and oppression from Thai government over the local people in different periods of time. Thus, Isan people's strike-back over their political ideology was presented in different ways. However, a conflict was a structural problem that would be endless if it could not be solved properly. This claim was supported by the research outcome from King Prajadhipok's Institute (2012: Abstract) affirming that a political conflict in Thailand was basically grew from a simple problem which was social inequality that correspondingly noted that differences of the individual's political ideologies could lead to social disharmony and might grow bigger after an individual had been fully satisfied with a taste of the unfair power.

After all, it could be said that this political

conflict firstly began after Mr.Boonmee and People's Assembly for Democracy (PAD) had visited Nong Khai province on purpose of educating the local people about democracy and was accidentally informed about the violence in Ban Nasai ,so he later decided to expose the truth to the public. It immediately became the talk of the town amongst the mass media and was widely discussed amongst the people. This conflict was addressed to the parliament with a request for an investigating commission to find the truth in order to terminate the unsolved ideological confrontation between the government and the student's movement. This movement exactly started after the political incident in October 1973 with strong intention to strike back the power of the privileged and to free the innocent people from the unfair judgment. To support the claim, a previous study by Wittaya Seehabut, 1992: Abstract) also found that the social conflict started when the youth take their resistance against the old-fashioned ideology and expected for a modern society whereas the old people needed no changes. After the incident on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1973, the student's movement completely played an outstanding role as a new hope for the oppressed people. Likewise, Thanee Sukkasem (2004: Abstract) noticed that after the incident on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1973, a sense of political freedom was broadly spread out as the peasant became more aware of the political consequence after they had been supported by the student's movement. Moreover, the democracy education campaign helped the local people know how to fight for their human right and to negotiate with the government for problem-solving. The campaign also activated the resistance amongst the conservatives and forced the government to practically implement different types of the anti-terrorist measure.

Based on the abovementioned, it was affirmed that there was usually a consequence after the reinforcement of the anti-communist measure. In the case of the arson incident at Ban Nasai in 1974, the measure was resulted with the loss of the

innocent's life and property as the conflict was often repeated and grew bigger to be social disharmony and many people fled into the woods to join with the communist fighting against the government. With the contradictory attitudes, the government officers, a government's mechanism, was being seen as a dictator wanting to hold tightly their power, and the people, treated or ruled by the unfair authorities, finally became rivals with different political ideologies. This statement was supported by a study by Thikan Srinara 2005: Abstract) who noted that the dictatorship pushed the people to join fighting with weapons and the intellectual activities with the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) that evidently happened after the incident on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1976 and later Mr.Boonmee and the leaders of the student's movement had to enter the join with the communist in the wood. In addition, Bancha Suma, 1985: Abstract) similarly found that the communist prevention and suppression policies in Thailand had been used and revised constantly but if violence was regularly used, more of the political conflicts would surely come after and strongly affected stability of the government. Likewise, Pairoj Kanjanapan (1975: Abstract) stated that changing from social disorder to a battle and the fact that the communist became more aware might make the government officer depressed and somehow lose their temper. When things went beyond their limit, the officers might ignore the operational plan and fight back with violence. In the court, the case of violence use would be more favorable for the communist and encouraged the people to show more of their negative attitude toward the unsuccessful mission of the government.

### Suggestions

1. Suggestions from this study were explained as follows.

1.1 The unsolved conflict between the government sector and the local people was likely a time-bomb waiting to burst out again so both sides should be more aware and cooperate to end the

conflict so that it would not be repeated or break out.

1.2 In a political context, the best way to prevent the conflict is to have positive attitude for one another and show more cooperative behavior and vision toward the goal. It should be also better to avoid using violence to solve the problem, particularly when a whole society was in an unusual situation.

2. Suggestion for further study was suggested as below.

The information concealment by the government from the past to present is slowing down the creation of knowledge body for political history research as the guide to the educational development. In fact, all information should be widely accessible. This concealment is the reason why the information concerning the political conflicts in Thailand is permanently bound to the false memory created through the major entities of democracy including The Legislature-The Executive-The Judiciary (Judge) under the control of the powerful politicians who connected the local background with the national history, the main stream. To be exact, the truth will be well-kept but flexibly changeable following a social tendency so it is difficult to retrace what really happened in the past. For these reasons, it was recommended that any of the further study should construct a knowledge body by linking a local history to the explanation on the origin of a regional conflict. Besides, it needs to be deeply related to a basic cause or the actual source of the problem.

## References

- Galtung, J. (2007). **The Transcend Method in Conflict Mediation Across Levels Conflict Literacy and Competence as an Approach to Peace.** Translated by Decha Tangseefa. Bangkok: Kopfai Publishing Project.
- Kanjanapan, P. (1975). **The Thai Government's Anti-Communist Propaganda Campaign: A Case Study on the Northeast.** Thesis in Master of Political Science Program; Ramkhamhaeng University.
- King Prajadhipok's Institute. (2012). **Creating the National Reconciliation.** Bangkok: King Prajadhipok's Institute.
- Konnum Publisher. (1974). **The Burning Na Sai.** Bangkok: Chong Charoen Printing Ltd.
- Nadin, D. (1974). **A Demon of Na Sai.** Bangkok : Bannakit Trading Publisher.
- Phattananant, P. (2006). **Conflict between Isan Region and Thai Government: Domination and Resistance.** Researching Report; Mahasarakham University.
- Pungluang, P.. (2004). **Political conflicts during 1932 -1947: Authoritarian versus Social Democratic Ideologies.** Thessi in Master of Political Science; Chulalongkorn University.
- Srihabut, W. (1992). **The Political Role of Thai Student's Demonstration During 1970-1981.** Thesis in Master of History Program; Srinakharinwirot University.
- Srinara, T. (2005). **Ideological Conflicts in the Communist Movement in Thailand between 1976 -1982.** Thesis in Master of History Program, Faculty of History; Thammasat University.
- Sukkasem, T. (2004). **State and Peasant: A case Study on Resistance against State Power of Thai Peasant During 1973 – 1976.** Thesis in Master of Political Science Program; Ramkhamhaeng University.
- Suma, B. (1985). **The Communist Movement and the Thai Government's Prevention and Suppression Policy (1957 – 1980).** Thesis in Master of Arts Program; Chulalongkorn University.
- The Northeast News Center. (1995, 19<sup>th</sup> October). **Ban Nasai and the Past beneath the Trace of Time.** Manager Daily, p.11.