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The Corrupt Behavior of Local Government Officials and Its Effects: A Case Study of Muang District, Songkhla Province

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องค์กรปกครองส่วนท้องถิ่นและผลกระทบ
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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อเปรียบเทียบการพบพฤติกรรมการทุจริตคอร์รัปชันของเจ้าหน้าที่องค์กรปกครองส่วนท้องถิ่น และความคิดเห็นของประชาชนต่อผลกระทบที่เกิดจากการทุจริตคอร์รัปชันของเจ้าหน้าที่องค์กรปกครองส่วนท้องถิ่น จำแนกตามปัจจัยส่วนบุคคลของประชาชน และศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างพฤติกรรมการทุจริตคอร์รัปชันของเจ้าหน้าที่องค์กรปกครองส่วนท้องถิ่น และความคิดเห็นของประชาชนต่อผลกระทบที่เกิดขึ้น กลุ่มตัวอย่างในการวิจัย คือ ประชาชนผู้มีสิทธิเลือกตั้งในจังหวัดสงขลา จำนวน 322 คน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูล คือ แบบสอบถาม สถิติที่ใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล คือ ค่าร้อยละ ค่าเฉลี่ย ส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน t-test ANOVA และการวิเคราะห์สัมประสิทธิ์สหสัมพันธ์เพียร์สัน ผลการวิจัย พบว่า พฤติกรรมการทุจริตคอร์รัปชันของเจ้าหน้าที่องค์กรปกครองส่วนท้องถิ่นในภาพรวมอยู่ในระดับมาก และกลุ่มตัวอย่างมีความคิดเห็นว่าผลกระทบที่เกิดจากการทุจริตคอร์รัปชันของเจ้าหน้าที่องค์กรปกครองส่วนท้องถิ่นในภาพรวมอยู่ในระดับมาก การทดสอบสมมติฐาน พบว่า กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่มีปัจจัยส่วนบุคคลแตกต่างกัน พบพฤติกรรมการทุจริตคอร์รัปชันของเจ้าหน้าที่องค์กรปกครองส่วนท้องถิ่นแตกต่างกันอย่างไม่มีนัยสำคัญ และมีความคิดเห็นต่อผลกระทบที่เกิดจากการทุจริตคอร์รัปชันของเจ้าหน้าที่องค์กรปกครองส่วนท้องถิ่นแตกต่างกันอย่างไม่มีนัยสำคัญ โดยพฤติกรรมการทุจริตคอร์รัปชันของเจ้าหน้าที่องค์กรปกครองส่วนท้องถิ่น และความคิดเห็นของประชาชนต่อผลกระทบที่เกิดขึ้นมีความสัมพันธ์กันในระดับสูง ในทิศทางเดียวกัน

คำสำคัญ: พฤติกรรมการทุจริตคอร์รัปชัน องค์กรปกครองส่วนท้องถิ่น ผลกระทบ

Abstract

This research aimed to compare the corrupt behavior of local government officials and the public's opinion about the effects of this corruption, as classified by the personal factors of the public. It also analyzed the relationship between the corrupt behavior of local government officials and the public's opinion toward the effects of this corruption. The sample used in this research comprised 322 voters from Songkhla province, with a questionnaire being used to collect data. The statistics used in the data analysis were percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test, ANOVA and Pearson correlation. The results showed that the corrupt behavior of local government officials was at an overall high level. The participants' opinion toward the effects of corrupt local government officials was also at an overall high level. Hypothesis testing indicated that participants with different personal factors did not vary in how they regarded the corrupt behavior of local government officials, and the participants' opinions toward the effects of corrupt local government officials also did not vary. The corrupt behavior of local government officials and the opinions toward

the effect of corrupt local government officials are both at consistently high levels and follow the same trend.

Keywords: Corrupt Behavior, Local Government, Effect of Corruption

Introduction

Corruption is an issue that causes a broad impact. A recent report by the European Commission on the issue of corruption within the European Union (EU) stated that it is financially equivalent to over €120 billion per year, representing about 1 percent of the combined income of the member nations. This report created consternation throughout the world, because the EU is regarded as one of the least corrupt regions in the world (“Corruption in Europe not Least as I Thought,” 2014).

Corruption and misconduct in the government is not new; it has occurred throughout the ages of civilization. The index of the appearance of corruption for Thailand in years 1995–2011 revealed that corruption was at its lowest value of 2.79 in 1995, while the highest score of 3.8 occurred in 2005. In addition, the survey found that 81.2 percent of private sector contractors admitted paying bribes or kickbacks totaling more than 200 billion baht per year (equivalent to about 25–30 percent of the value of the work). The repair and construction of roads and bridges was the area ranked highest in corruption, followed by

the purchase of equipment by the government and areas such as flood compensation, compensation for crops and livestock, and assistance schemes in line with state policy. The police was the agency found to have the greatest incidence of corruption, followed by politicians and bureaucrats involved with the approval of projects, the Department of Land, the Department of Revenue, and the Customs Department (Monattaraphadung, 2012: 24).

Regarding the results of the corruption perceptions index for 2013, Thailand was scored 35 out of 100 points and ranked 102nd out of 177 countries, alongside Ecuador, Moldova and Panama. Thailand ranked 16th out of the 28 countries in the Asia–Pacific region (THAIPUBLICA, 2013a). This indicates that Thailand has high levels of corruption that are likely to increase. This is especially worrisome, and it shows that the implementation of anti-corruption initiatives in the past have not been successful enough, despite the country continuously trying to define and take measures to combat corruption (King Prajadhipok’s Institute, 2005: 12).

A survey of business leaders on the issue of corruption in Thailand by the Thai

Institute of Directors (IOD) in cooperation with GFK Marketwise found that 93 percent of business leaders believed that the severity of the corruption problem was currently high to very high. Three quarters of the participants also agreed that the issue of corruption had gotten worse over the last two years. Of the participants, 63 percent said that the impact of corruption on the business sector was either relatively high or very high and had increased the cost of business by at least 10 percent. The process with the most potential for corruption is procurement, followed by the acquisition of permissions and the management of government projects. The causes of corruption mostly relate to laws, regulations, and orders, especially where government officials have the opportunity to use discretion, further contributing to the corruption. The political process lacks transparency and makes accountability difficult, not to mention political interests (Tipmanosing, 2010: 164).

Most business leaders said that the effects of corruption in Thailand are mostly related to reduced competitiveness in the region, the moral decay of society, and a bad reputation for the country. If corruption was removed, most believed that the private sector would contribute more to the country's growth than the current 50 percent. At the same time, a quarter of the respondents thought that business confidence was relatively high or very high and that corruption could be

addressed. The government should give priority to enforcing the law against those who commit seriously corrupt offences at the macro level (THAIPUBLICA, 2013b).

The problem of corruption and misconduct in local administration organizations is increasing day by day, allowing the researcher to study the corrupt behavior. Additionally, public opinion regarding the impact of corrupt local officials was investigated by selecting Songkhla province as a case study. Songkhla is a large province where the problem of corruption can always be found. The director of the Anti-Corruption Commission of Songkhla province stated that corruption in local government is likely to rise because the positioning of a local politician is a substantial investment that must be repaid with a divestiture of the law. In Songkhla province, there are corruption complaints in the form of almost 100 lawsuits ("Candidates for the Provincial Anti-Corruption Commission of Songkhla Present Vision.", 2013). The results of this study will be used as an orientation course and a basis to formulate measures to solve the problem and tackle corruption when it occurs, as well as preventing corruption from occurring in the future.

Objectives

1) To compare corrupt behavior of officials of local administration organizations, as identified by personal factors.

2) To compare citizens' opinions regarding the impacts of corrupt officials in local administration organizations, as identified by personal factors.

3) To study the relationship between corrupt behavior of local officials and public opinion regarding the impact of this corrupt behavior in local administration organizations.

Hypotheses

1) People with different personal factors may regard the corrupt behavior of local officials differently.

2) People with different personal factors may have different opinions about the impact of corrupt local officials.

3) The corrupt behavior of local officials is related to opinions about the impact caused by this corruption.

Research Methods

Data Source

To get the most complete information, data was collected from multiple sources using the following methods:

1) Documentary Research: A study of documents, books and texts about the concepts, theories and related research were used as the guide for conducting this research.

2) Field Study: Data were collected from the people of Songkhla province by means of

a questionnaire.

Population and Sample

The population studied in this research was the voters of Songkhla province, which comprised 994,907 people ("Election Commission Invite Elected Chief Executive of Provincial Administration Organization Songkhla.", 2013). According to the table by Askin and Colton (1963: 151), the sample size of 322 is at a 95% level of confidence with 5% error for a population over 500,000. Cluster sampling was used by choosing Muang district, Songkhla province.

The Research Instrument

The questionnaire used to collect data was divided into three parts:

Part 1: general information about the respondents.

Part 2: the corrupt behavior of officials in local administration organizations.

Part 3: opinion concerning the impact caused by the corruption by officials in local administration organizations.

Monitoring the Quality of the Research Instrument

This study examined the quality of the questionnaire used in the following ways:

1) Validity: Content validity measurements were constructed according to a comprehensive

definition of the terminology used in the research and found to substantially meet the aims of the research. Subsequently, the questionnaire was examined by experts. Finally, the accuracy of the questionnaire was tested.

2) Reliability: The researchers used the questionnaire responses from outside Muang district in order to test the internal consistency based on Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, which must be at least .70 to be used as a tool (Cronbach, 1951: 297).

The reliability test of the scales used in this study found that for the corrupt behavior of local government officials and the effects of the corruption of local government officials, the coefficient of reliability was at a very good level with values of .952 and .959, respectively.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a computer program. The details are as follows:

1) Descriptive statistics: percentage, mean and standard deviation.

2) Inferential statistics:

2.1) t-test and ANOVA for testing hypotheses 1 and 2.

2.2) Pearson correlation coefficient for testing hypothesis 3.

Findings

Personal Factors of the Sample

Most of the sample voters in Songkhla province were female (56.8 percent). The respondents aged between 25-35 years accounted for 35.1 percent of the sample. Most respondents were educated at an undergraduate level (59.2 percent). Their marital status was fairly evenly split, with 51.5 percent being married and 48.5 percent being single. The largest group of respondents was government officials (24.7 percent), followed by company officers (21.4 percent), and students (17.3 percent). Almost half (46.7 percent) of the sample had between zero and five years of experience, and a similar proportion (49.1 percent) had a monthly income lower than 15,000 baht.

The Corrupt Behavior of Local Government Officials

From this study of the corrupt behavior of local government officials, it was found that the corrupt acts of local government officials involve a contract or concession for their party or support for a local authority. Power and positions are used to give benefit to the corrupt official's companies or associates. This political graft provides protection for illegal businesses, intervention in procurement processes, avoidance of regulations and laws to prevent exploitation, and the creation of

laws to facilitate a project. This collusion or conspiracy can be a negligent act or a refusal to act responsibly and legally. For personal benefit, corrupt officials commit fraud and misappropriate government property as if it was their own. Bribery is often used, or some other benefit that constitutes a bribe. Offenders discriminately favor their relatives and other cronies by providing information not released to the rest of the auction. The procurement and utilization of a project's budget is distributed in favor of their own businesses, with their concessions being at high levels.

In addition, this study found that according to the sample the corrupt behavior of local government officials was at a moderate level in areas such as providing a service to collect compensation from it, demanding compensation for permission to ignore the laws and regulations, receiving or charging commissions, holding shares or interests in companies involved in the bidding process, the tribute between central and local government, preventing incentives claims through intimidation or bullying, exploiting family members, committing forgery or other fraudulent actions, and transferring the proceeds of fraudulent activities to banks, financial institutions or legitimate businesses in order to hide the illegal source of the money.

In short, the overall behavior of corrupt officials in local government is at a high level.

Citizens' Opinions concerning the Impact Caused by the Corruption of Local Government Officials

The results showed that the sample's opinions about the impact caused by the corruption of local government officials is at a high level on most issues. However, the participants believed that the impact on the loss of budgets and the loss of funding for local development was at the highest level. Overall, the participants' opinions on the impact caused by the corruption of local government officials was at a high level.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1

The results in Table 1 show that participants with different genders, ages, education levels, marital status, occupations, lengths of work experience, and salaries all regard the corrupt behavior of local government officials in the same way.

Hypothesis 2

The results in Table 1 show that no differences for the opinions of participants with different genders, ages, education levels, marital status, occupations, lengths of work experience and salaries regarding the impact caused by the corruption of local government officials.

Hypothesis 3

The results show that the corrupt behavior of local government officials and public opinion

about the impact caused by this corruption are related at a high level in the same direction ($r = .758$).

Table 1 Results of Hypothesis 1 and 2 Testing

Variables	Hypothesis 1		Hypothesis 2	
	t, F	P-Value	t, F	P-Value
Gender	1.231	.219	1.005	.316
Age	.511	.728	1.054	.379
Education Level	.975	.442	1.244	.283
Marital Status	1.783	.076	1.419	.157
Occupation	1.011	.431	1.388	.201
Length of Work Experience	.788	.580	1.637	.136
Salary	.911	.487	2.030	.061

Findings Discussion

Corrupt Behavior of Local Government Officials

In this study of the corrupt behavior of local government officials participants found that the corruption of local government officials to be at a high level overall. This is caused by a lack of awareness in staff and government personnel and a lack of serious anti-corruption enforcement. This is consistent with the study by Lawakul (2002: Abstract), which found the presence of corruption in all its forms going back for a long time. It is also consistent with the results of a survey of business leaders on the issue of corruption in Thailand. This survey, which was undertaken by the Thai

Institute of Directors (IOD) in cooperation with GFK Marketwise, found that 93 percent of business leaders thought that the severity of the problem was high to very high (THAIPUBLICA, 2013b).

The study of Monattaraphadung (2012: 22) found that 81.2 percent of private sector contractors admitted paying bribes or kickbacks totaling more than 200 billion baht per year, about 25-30 percent of the value of the work. The area that was most affected was the repair and construction of roads and bridges. This was followed by the purchase of equipment by the government, flood compensation, compensation for crops and livestock, and various assistance schemes according to state policy. This

is consistent with the director of the Anti-Corruption Commission in Songkhla province, who said that corruption in local government is likely to rise because positioning a new local politician is a considerable investment that must be repaid with a divestiture of the law. In Songkhla province, there are complaints in the form of almost a hundred lawsuits (“Candidates for the Provincial Anti-Corruption Commission of Songkhla Present Vision.”, 2013). Corruption is like a plague that has not been addressed, and the behavior is mimicked from the national to the local level (Pariban, 2003: Abstract). While the study by Keeratayakom (2001: Abstract) found that local government corruption actually occurred, it was still at a low level. The results of Sutteewasinnon (2008: Abstract), meanwhile, found that the corrupt behavior of local administration organizations is at a moderate level. Noknoi, et al. (2007: 108) stated that the participation of citizens in the running of government is one factor that can prevent corruption.

Citizen’s Opinions concerning the Impact Caused by the Corruption of Local Government Officials

The study of citizen’s opinions concerning the impact caused by the corruption of local government officials found that the participants thought it to be at an overall high level largely because of unfair treatment from government officials and operational inefficiency. This is

consistent with the results of a survey of business leaders on the issue of corruption in Thailand by the Thai Institute of Directors (IOD) in cooperation with GFK Marketwise, which found that corruption reduces Thailand’s competitiveness in the region, leads to the moral decay of society, and gives a bad image to the country. If corruption was suddenly removed, most business leaders believe that the private sector would contribute more to the growth of the country than it currently does (THAIPUBLICA, 2013b).

Meanwhile, Sukumanphong (2013: 46) stated that corruption is an obstacle to national development. It makes the government pay higher costs, while the citizens get lower quality public services. It also causes investors to have a lack of confidence in Thailand’s bureaucracy. This is consistent with the study of Sutteewasinnon (2008: Abstract), which found that corruption in local administration organizations leads to losses of local development funding and results in citizens receiving poor quality services. In addition, the projects for local development are inappropriate. This is because budgets for community development are allocated to commissions comprised of men that know the entrepreneur who was awarded the project. This results in reducing production costs by using lower quality materials. The results of the projects then tend to be poor quality and not up to standard.

People with Different Personal Factors Found the Corrupt Behavior of Local Officials to Be the Same

The study showed that participants with different genders, ages, levels of education, marital status, occupations, lengths of work experience, and salaries all perceived the corrupt behavior of local government officials no differently. This may be because acts of corruption must be performed covertly and they are not easily uncovered. When the corruption of local officials is revealed, it is frequently publicized in the news media because this behavior causes the state to pay more than it should and provides people with poor quality public services (Piriyarangsana and Phongphajit, 1993: 36).

People with Different Personal Factors had Similar Opinions concerning the Impact Caused by the Corruption of Local Officials

The study showed that participants with different genders, ages, levels of education, marital status, occupations, lengths of work experience, and salaries all had similar opinions about the impact caused by the corruption of local government officials. This may be because people thought that while corruption is performed in violation of the moral code, the benefit to the public is not totally damaged. Meanwhile, the benefits from acts of corruption will be received, such as authority, respect

and a better living standard (Yawapraphad, 2001: 48).

The Corrupt Behavior of Local Officials Is Related to Citizens' Opinions concerning the Impact Caused by the Corruption of Local Officials

This study showed that the corrupt behavior of local government officials and citizen's opinions about the impact caused by the corruption of local government officials are related at a high level in the same direction. This may be because when people encounter more corrupt behavior in local government officials, they will be more concerned about its impact. This also causes investors to lose confidence in Thailand's bureaucracy because of the frequent use of non-authorized persons still referring to the interests of investors in exchange for allowing privatization processes in which the state must act. The state does not monitor such actions (Piriyarangsana and Phongphajit, 1993: 67).

Suggestions

- 1) Thailand should cultivate principles of good governance and ethics in the practice of public office by pointing out the consequences of corruption, including the impact on individuals, society and the nation.
- 2) The country should promote the inclusion of citizens and local community

members in the operation of government agencies, such as in the decision-making, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes. Putting all these operations in the public eye will reduce the chance that the authorities will act corruptly.

3) The country should have a procedure to effectively check the operation of authorities. The implementation of such a change will involve carefully following steps before the operation, during the operation, and after the operation. This agreement will be a standard set of practices to ensure it is clear for officials.

4) The country should take appropriate measures to combat corruption in government, including improving and tightening rules designed to fight corruption and making new applicable laws related to preventing and suppressing corruption.

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