CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN THAILAND
INTRODUCTION:

The objective of this chapter is to trace the historical and constitutional evolution of local self-government, both urban as well as rural, in Thailand. The scope of this chapter is a period of one hundred years. For the sake of convenience, this period may be divided into two phases, namely:

(i) Pre - 1932 coup d'état, and
(ii) Post - 1932 coup d'état.

2.0.1. Local Self-Government (Urban & Rural) Before 1932 Coup d'etat.

The history of rural local self-government in Thailand can be traced back to the early beginning of the present Thai nation, for instances in the Sukhothai period of the Kingdom (A.D. 1238-1350), The King was an absolute monarch but in practice, local autonomy was considerably permitted to towns provinces which were beyond a relatively short walking distance from the capital.¹ This indicates that rural local self-government in Thailand, at the earlier stage, existed along with the principle of decentralization of power rather

than the centralization one. Though Thai political system is an absolute monarchy, but so far as local self-government is concerned, it enjoys considerable autonomy with the condition that it furnished the annual revenue and fulfilled military levies as requested by the capital.

In the Ayuthaya period, the pattern of rural local self-government was changed in favour of centralization. The reasons were the improvement of communication system, the increase of military requirements, and the entrance of different political ideas. All these contributed to the development of more highly centralization and controlled system of local government. This period witnessed the formation of the general hierarchy of territorial units which prevailed throughout the Kingdom. The primary unit of local government was the small hamlet or ban which was headed by headman or puyaiban. At this period, it was customary to seek approval for these headmen and thus develop a basic form of local self-government. This unit of local government with the method of popular selection of the headman is, at present, the primary unit of rural local self-government. However, the method of popular selection is being replaced by the method of popular election of the headman.

On the other hand, the development of local government in urban areas of Thailand has a much shorter history
than that of the rural ones. That is to say that the trend toward the separate treatment of government in rural as well as urban began in 1897 with the issuance of a decree establishing the Bangkok Health Administration. This trend started with the fact that there had long been differentiation in the administrative organization of the capital and the rest of the Kingdom, i.e., the capital area requires special treatment to the special problems created by the heavy concentration of the people in the urban area. Thus, the organic act was passed for the creation of sanitary district which, in turn, marked the beginning of the realization of the fact that problems peculiar to or aggravated by urban concentrations required a special kind of governmental organization for their solution.

The next development in urban local self-government came after the end of the absolute monarchy and the creation of the constitutional kingdom. The movement started in 1932 and the next few years were marked by the consideration of many new ideas and plans. The most important contribution to the development of urban local self-government is the fact that the liberal political leaders extended their administrative reforms to the local government system by establishing municipalities. This new system provided for greatly extended local autonomy. The municipality form of urban self-

2. Ibid.
government made its appearance in Thailand in 1933 with the passage of the Municipal Administration Act. This development brought a pronounced increase in the independent authority located in a local government. The control of authority remained in the state government officials but much greater discretion than previously was now allowed to local officials by the law. Further, additional acts in 1943 and 1953 made extensive changes in the formal municipal organization and the distribution of authority but did not aim to change the fact that relatively broad authority was in the hands of local officials. Later legislation tended to restrict municipal activity in some areas and to tighten the national control system.

2.0.1.0. King Chulalongkorn (Rama 5):

Under the pre 1932 coup d'etat period, the historical evolution of urban and rural local governments started during the reign of King Chulalongkorn of the Chakri Dynasty. He revolutionized the administrative pattern of the Kingdom by adapting the western system. It was claimed that the present system of local government was initiated by him.\(^3\)

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His great contribution was the sanitary system. He started his experiment by the issuance of a decree establishing The Bangkok Health Administration in B.E. 2440 (1897). The executive committee of Bangkok Sanitary was totally composed of Central Government officials like the Ministry of Interior, Engineer and Doctor. It is important to note that the Bangkok Sanitary has not yet obtained full autonomy. His main objective was the democratization of the principle of self-government including the sanitation of the communities, i.e., the provisions for cleanliness and maintenance of the communities. Fortunately, it was considered to be successful and gained popular recognition. So, he proposed to extend it to the rural areas. The first sanitary district established in rural area was the Tachalom Sanitary District. It was set up by a decree dated: March 8, 2448 (1905) but made effective from April 1, 2449 (1906).

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Further, after the establishment of Tachalom sanitary district, it appears that the system was more successful, popular and welcomed by the rural people. Thus, the king decided to extend it to the other parts of rural area of the kingdom. To do so, he enacted the Sanitary District Act in B.E. 2451 (1908). The act states that sanitary district shall be classified into two categories:

(i) Muang Sanitary District which shall be set up in communities where the provincial headquarters are situated.

(ii) Tambon Sanitary District which shall be established in tambon (commune).

2.0.1.1. King Mongkut (Rama 6):

With the death of King Chulalongkorn, sanitary system also died. That is to say that the succeeding King — King Mongkut, instead of following the experiment initiated by King Chulalongkorn, started with a new experiment according to his own ideas.  

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His new experiment is known as Dusidhani. In the first place, he created an experimental town inside the dusidh palace, secondly, for the administration of dusidhani, he asked the officials in his palace to elect from among themselves the members of the dusidhani council. In addition, he also created political parties. At that time, there were two political parties, namely; the government and opposition. Finally, there was also started a newspaper to act as the voice of the people in criticizing the working of government. It should be noted that King Mongkut was considered as the builder of democratic institutions of Thailand but it is unfortunate to note that when he died, such institutions also died. Finally, during his reign, there was no reference to rural local self-government as such.

2.0.1.2. King Pokklao (Rama 7):

King Pokklao is called the father of municipal government system in Thailand. He wanted the people to learn how to govern themselves as well as acquaint with such principle. So, he proposed the establishment of municipal government system. To do so, he appointed one commission on November 28, B.E. 2470 (1927) comprising of Mr. R.D. Craig as Chairman, Am-mat-ek Ehrakrishnapornpan and Phraya Chindaruk as members, and Mr. Cheüy Pitrachart as secretary, called as Municipal Commission. This Commission was asked to study the working

of municipal government in neighbouring countries before submitting the report on the establishment of municipal government. The commission made following suggestions:

(i) The establishment of municipal government seems to be easy due to the fact that people, desire for the progress, but the difficulty seems to be that the total withdrawal of central control is not possible.

(ii) So far as municipal finance is concerned, the main requirement is that the municipal financier must be drawn from the central government officers and subject to the central government as a case in Phillipines.

(iii) The commission feels that municipal government should not be placed under the department of public health. It suggests that it should be placed under the department of the Ministry of Interior.

(iv) Such department shall keep a close contact with the municipal government and frequently check its working.

(v) The central government can keep control over municipal government by an issuance of municipal ordinance which must get an approval from the Minister of Interior.
vi) The Municipal government shall be classified into three categories based on income and population. In addition, there shall be provisions for elevation or downgradation of municipal status when income and population increase or decrease.

vii) Members of municipal government must be elected from among the non-government persons, and the qualification of candidates shall be prescribed as they must reside in the municipal area at least for one year and have paid the tax as prescribed by law.

viii) Categories of municipal government:

(a) 1st Class shall have an income of Baht 30,000 onward with the population of 8,000 inhabitants.

(b) 2nd Class shall have an income of Baht 10,500 onward with the population of 4,000 inhabitants.

(c) 3rd Class shall have an income of Baht 5,000 onward with the population of 2,000 inhabitants.

In case any locality having an income below Baht 5,000 shall be administered by its own people.

ix) The municipal council shall comprise of the provincial governor as president, the deputy governor, the provincial public health officer, the district officer, Kamnan and four elected members. It must be mentioned that the 2nd and 3rd class municipal
It is important to note that King Pokklao was a far-sighted ruler in the sense that he had visualized that in future Thailand shall need a change in her political system, i.e., a change from an absolute monarchy to the constitutional monarchy. Thus, to cope up with a change, he proposed to set up municipal government system as a preparatory step, as he thought that the people should get benefit from this system of local government, a real experience before they come to control the machinery of national government through parliamentary system. But unfortunately his proposal could not be put into effect due to the coup d'etat which took place on June 24, 1932. As Prayad has remarked, it is unfortunate that because of the success of the coup d'etat the drafted municipal government act could not be passed out and put into effect. The reason behind it is not known, but the cause of such delay must be investigated and identified.

11. King Pokklao's Personal Diary, Democracy in Siam, National letter Division.
From the above, one can say that the various attempts were made by different Kings before 1932 coup d'etat. All these attempts were aimed at the democratization of self-governed units. However, this period also witnessed several changes including a change in political system of the Kingdom. In addition, some new ideas were experimented but there is a lack of pursuit of these new ideas. One of the reasons is the personal beliefs of the leaders, i.e., whenever there is a change in leadership, there is a change in ideology as well. In other words, the personal values of leadership play a significant role in Thai political behaviour, and it, alone, formulates and directs the political course of the kingdom. To elaborate this point, for instance, during the reign of King Chula-Longkorn (Rama 5), the sanitary system was experimented and seemed getting success both in urban as well as rural areas. So far as urban local self-government concerns, his great contribution lies in creating the sanitary system. In the case of rural local self-government, he issued a royal decree for the establishment of sanitary system in Tachalom, Samutsongkarm province. Thus, he is regarded as the father of Thai local self-government because prior to his reign, there was no uniformity in local self-government. Not only this but he also reformed the administrative pattern of the country. On the other hand there is not much to say about King Mongkut (Rama 6) as far as local self-government is concerned. This may be due to the fact that his experimentation was conducted inside the dusidh palace.
As far as King Pokklao is concerned, his great contribution in the field of local self-government was the municipal government system. But before the municipal government act could be passed there was a coup d'état which brought to an end the absolute monarchy, and created the constitutional monarchy in its place. Hence, one can come to the conclusion that there is a lack of continuity in the development of local self-government in Thailand during the pre-1932 coup d'état period.

2.0.2. Local Self-Government after 1932 Coup d'état:

With the success of coup d'état on June 24, 1932, the new government made an attempt to decentralize the power to the local people. Its main contribution was that it passed the law concerning local government in B.E. 2476 (1933). This law stated that the local government shall be established in a form of municipal government. This Law further stated that municipal government shall be classified into three categories:

(i) Nakorn municipal government.
(ii) Muang municipal government, and
(iii) Tambon municipal government.

The objective of government was to set up municipal government in various tambon throughout the kingdom. Here it may be remarked that there is no provision for the
establishment of any other form of local self-government except the provision for the establishment of municipal government. This means that the dream of King Pokklao was being realized. Later the Municipal Government Act was enacted in B.E. 2476. However, this act was amended in order to meet with the future growth of municipal government. Those amendments were:

(i) Municipal government act B.E. 2476,
(ii) Municipal government act B.E. 2481,
(iii) Municipal government act B.E. 2486, and
(iv) Municipal government act B.E. 2496.

In the same year, i.e., 2476, was established the provincial council charged with the duty to give an advice to the provincial governor on the matters of execution of provincial activities. This could be regarded as a step toward the realization of the principle of self-government. In addition to this, sanitary district was reintroduced again in B.E. 2495 (1952). The reason being that the government intended to establish municipal government system throughout the Kingdom, but in reality, it could not do so

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due to differentiation in the status of one area to another area; secondly, the government realized that the establishment of municipal government system was an expensive one. Hence, it gave up the idea and reintroduced sanitary districts. Though the government amended the act to overcome such problems but it, still, could not succeed. As remarked by Prayad, "if the government really wants to set up municipal government system in every tambon, it would take at least a hundred year to finish its task." Thus, the re-introduction of sanitary district was inevitable. The government firmly believed that the introduction of sanitary district was more economical as there was no need to set up council for sanitary district because it had already one organ, i.e., sanitary district commission responsible for both executive as well as legislative duty, while in the case of municipal government system, the council is 'must'. Another important fact is that a sanitary district commission comprises of almost all local state government officials. A new sanitary district, according to the government, shall be set up in accordance with the prescribed conditions, namely, it shall be established in localities where the district headquarters are situated but which are neither in a position to set up a municipal government nor being able

to elevate to the municipal status. And finally, they shall have sufficient income to carry out the activities of sanitary district. So far as rural areas are concerned, the government decided to set up two forms of local self-government, namely; the provincial administrative organization and the tambon administrative organization. These were set up by the Provincial Administration Act of B.E. 2498 (1955) and the Tambon Government Act of B.E. 2499 (1956) respectively. It is important to note that later on the tambon administrative organization was abolished by the Revolutionary Party's Proclamation No. 326, dated: December 13, 2515 (1972).

Besides the establishment of tambon administrative organization in B.E. 2499, there was established a tambon council called 222. A tambon council is established by the Directive of the Ministry of Interior No. 222/2499 which is popularly known as tambon council 222. Lastly, by the Directive of The Ministry of Interior No. 275/2509 (1966) there was established another tambon council, called tambon council 275.

Later on, the government announced the merging of Bangkok and Thonburi with a creation of Nakornluang-Krungtheponburi. This merging is ordered by the Revolutionary Party's Proclamation Nos. 24 and 25, dated: December 21, 2514 (1971). As far as its administration is concerned, the new form of Nakornluangkrungtheponburi signifies the division of two levels of government, i.e., local state

government as well as local self-government. This form is continued until December 13, 2515 (1972), then it is abolished by the Revolutionary Party's Proclamation No. 335, dated: December 13, 2515.\textsuperscript{17} The latest form of Bangkok and Thonburi, according to the proclamation, is Bangkok Metropolitan (Krungthepmahanakorn) and the Bangkok Government Act is enacted in B.E. 2518 (1975).\textsuperscript{18} Lastly, the government enacted the Pattaya City Government Act in B.E. 2521 (1978) with the establishment of a special form of local government at Pattaya City. Pattaya City is set up as city-manager type of local government.\textsuperscript{19}

From the above, development of local self-government institutions during the post-1932 coup d'état one could say that various attempts were made by the new government to democratize the principle of self-government. The great contribution of the new government is the establishment of the municipal government system and the reintroduction of sanitary system. These two forms are mainly for the urban areas. In the case of rural areas, the provincial council,


\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
the provincial administrative organization, the tambon administrative organization and the tambon councils are new creations of the government. At the same time the government also paid attention to special areas by establishing the special forms of local government, i.e., Bangkok Metropolitan for Bangkok and Thonburi, and a city manager for Pattaya City.

2.0.3. Constitutional Development:

The most striking thing about the Thai constitution so far as local government concerns is that there is absolutely no reference to it at all. We find two types of (indirect) indication of the status of territorial administration in the following:

(i) Section 1 of 'General Provisions' states that 'the Kingdom of Thailand is one and indivisible.'

(ii) Section 74, Chapter IV notes that 'the assembly of the people's representatives has the power of control over the affairs of state.'

21. Ibid., pp. 80-81.
In effect, then, the operative Thai constitution (of 1932, as amended in 1952), clearly demonstrates a lack of interest in detailing any form of territorial administration and at the same time, it establishes the unitary character of the state and proclaims the supremacy of the legislature. The entire local government and administration system, therefore, is left up to the central organs of state power to determine as they wish. Thus, in Thailand, territorial administration is completely a creature of the central government with no stipulations whatsoever being made by the national constitution.

Since 1932, Thailand has amended her constitution several times. According to the present constitution, i.e., the constitution of B.E. 2521 (1978), we find that there is some mention about the status of local government and administration as following:

(i) Section 9 of 'Local Government', article 180 states 'The establishment of local government shall be in accordance with the desire of local people with respect to the principle of self-government. And all this shall be subject to the provision of law.' This means that by law, local government shall be established with the initiation of local people. In other words, local people, themselves, shall desire, initiate the
establishment of local government. But it may be remembered that such desire or initiation shall be subject to the principle of self-government as well as the provision of law. Further, article 181 states 'Local authorities shall have two organs; local council and local executive committee or local executive. The powers and functions of local council, local executive committee or local executive shall be in accordance with the provision of law.' This is to say that theoretically speaking, local authority must consist of two organs, namely; the executive and legislative in order to be responsible for its administration. As far as their powers and functions are concerned, they shall perform them according to the prescription by their constitution. Next, article 182 says 'the local councillors shall be totally elected. The appointment shall be possible if necessary occurs and shall be subject to the provision of law, and the number of appointive member shall be less than that of the elected one. The election shall be direct and by secret ballot. The candidate shall have the minimum qualifications as prescribed in article 94(1) and (2). The principle and procedure of election under this article shall be subject to the electoral law.' This means that the objective of the constitution is to create the democratic local government institution because of the fact that democracy and election go together. Hence, this article guarantees local democracy by stipulating that the councillors of local authority must be chosen by election.
At the same time it also states that the appointment of local councillors is possible. This indicates a contradiction in the sense that it, not only states about the election of councillors but also about the appointment of councillors. So, in practice, the local councillors are drawn by election and appointment. The power to make an appointment is reserved by the constitution for the central government.

(ii) Section 5 of 'Directive Principle of State Policy', article 63 states that the state shall initiate local people in understanding and having good faith in democracy with the King as a head of state. In addition, the state shall also take an initiation for localities in having an access to the principle of self-governed in accordance with the provision of law. This means that the duty of state in making people understand the principle of democracy and making them having a good faith in democracy. At the same time, it must also initiate the localities in experimenting such principle.

Laws related to urban local bodies may be stated as following:

(1) Municipal Government System; it is established by the Municipal Government Act of B.E. 2476 (1935), as amended in B.E. 2496 (1953). As per the act, municipal government is a
juristic person. Change of boundary, status, establishment or abrogation of municipal government must be carried out by Royal Decree and must be subject to this act. At present, the law concerning structure and organization of municipal government is the Municipal Government Act of B.E. 2496 (1953). The act states that the establishment of municipal government must fulfil the following conditions:

(i) The communities to be elevated to municipal government status, must be considered from the point of its development and revenues, i.e., it must be a developed community and having adequate revenue to carry out the municipal government activities.

(ii) Municipal government shall be classified into three categories:

(a) Nakorn Municipal Government (City Municipal Government).
(b) Muang Municipal Government (Town Municipal Government).
(c) Tambon Municipal Government (Township Municipal Government).

Since, the enactment of Municipal Government Act in 1933, Thailand has totally one hundred and twenty municipalities, but due to the merging of Bangkok and Thonburi, the
number is reduced to one hundred and eighteen. Further, the act says a municipality shall have two organs:

(i) Municipal council; consisting of popularly elected members. The number varies depending upon the categories of municipality, e.g., a township municipality shall have twelve members, a town municipality eighteen and a city municipality twenty-four.

(ii) Municipal Executive Committee; consisting of the appointive members who are appointed from among the councillors. The number is also varied, i.e., a township municipality shall have a mayor and two executives, a town municipality has a mayor and two executives, and a city municipality has a mayor and four executives. In short, one can say that municipal government is a juristic person, and differs from central as well as local state governments. It possesses its own budget, property, personnel and power to administer the activities assigned by the central government. Finally, it has autonomy in carrying out its administration.

(2) Sanitary District: it is set up by the Sanitary District Act of B.E. 2495 (1952). According to part 1 'Incorporation',
of the Act, when the condition of any locality to be raised to the status of a sanitary district is ready, the same shall be incorporated and become a sanitary district under this act. The said sanitary district shall have the status of a juristic person. Incorporation shall be published by a notification issued by the Ministry of Interior which shall include the name and area of the incorporated sanitary district. Any change in the area or dissolution of a sanitary district shall also be published by a notification issued by the Ministry of Interior. Notification issued by the Ministry of Interior thereunder shall be published in the government gazette. Subject to law governing municipalities, a sanitary district may be raised to the status of a municipality by Royal Decree. The said newly incorporated municipality shall pass from the status of a sanitary district as from the date of publishing the Royal Decree and all such properties, debts, rights and claims as belong to the same sanitary district shall pass to the newly municipality at the same time, whilst any bye-laws passed by the said sanitary district and in force at the time shall provisionally continue to govern until such time as they shall be issued as municipal bye-laws. The act, further states a sanitary district shall be set up in:

(i) Localities where the district and sub-district headquarters are located.
(ii) If they are not the localities of the district and sub-district headquarters, they shall have at least one hundred shops, the population of at least 1,500 inhabitants with a boundary of about 1-4 square kilometres.

Again, the act states that sanitary district shall have only one organ, namely; the sanitary district commission. A sanitary district commission shall be appointed consisting of:

(i) The local district officer

(ii) One deputy of the district officer where the sanitary district is established who is appointed by the changwat governor in a public notice.

(iii) The chief of the provincial police station of the district or sub-district where the sanitary district is established.

(iv) The district or sub-district public health officer.

(v) The district or sub-district treasurer.

(vi) All the Kamnan and Puyaiban in the area of the sanitary district.

(vii) Four persons qualified to be puyaiban under the law governing local administration who are elected by citizens in the area of the sanitary district.

In case of rural local authorities, it shall be as following:
(1) **Provincial Administrative Organization**; it is set up by the **Provincial Administration Act of B.E. 2498 (1955)**. As per the act, the provincial administrative organization is a juristic person, it administers the activities of the province with budget derived from revenue not subject to central government's extraction. It also supposes to have its own salaried officials which shall be regarded as an attempt to separate it from the power of the provincial governor as well as the central government. It also states that the provincial administrative organization shall consist of two organs; the provincial council and the provincial governor. Concerning the provincial council, the members of the council shall be popularly elected. The number varies depending upon the population of a province. Generally, it runs from 18,20,30 to 60 members. The terms of the councillor is five years except in the case of dissolution, decease or resignation or the provincial governor orders the resignation due to lack of required qualifications or impeached by the council on account of unbecoming conduct. As for the provincial governor, he is the chief executive of the provincial administrative organization, and is responsible to the council on the matter of execution of provincial activities which shall be in accordance with law and resolution passed by the council.

(2) **Tambon Council**; in the case of tambon council 222, it is established by the Ministry of Interior Directive No. 222/2499,
dated: March 8, 2499. Tambon council, according to the directive, shall operate through the following procedures:

(i) Each village shall have two members in the tambon council. The qualifications of the members shall be the same as the qualifications for the puyaiban except that there is no requirement that the person has to be the owner of a house.

(ii) The method of selection to the tambon council will be according to the following procedure:

(a) The district officer or his designated representative will consult the village committee and tambon committee to select a man or woman of good conduct who is interested in local progress, and invite that person to be member. The district officer or his representative, and the kamnan will announce the name to all the people.

(b) The puyaiban will be the other representative to the council by virtue of his position.

(iii) The place for the meeting of the tambon council will be a public place in the tambon, e.g., a school hall or wat hall.
(iv) The district officer or his representative will be the chairman of the council at all meetings of the tambon council. The members can elect one or more vice-chairman. The members will select a teacher to be the secretary or a villager who is qualified to carry the duties of secretary. Decision on other committee positions will be made according to the desire of the council.

(v) Requirements for the meetings of the tambon council will be similar to meeting regulations of the municipal council, adapted by the governor so that the members of the tambon council can easily understand and unnecessary or formal regulations can be eliminated.

(vi) In forming the tambon council, the government desires to hear the opinions of the people. The government also wants the people to have a part in controlling and supporting the governmental administration in the tambon. Therefore, the tambon committee will join the meetings of the tambon council. The members of the tambon council will have the following rights:

(a) The right to ask the tambon committee for any information.

(b) Express ideas on the following:

(1) To make arrangements for any activities
which protects or relieves troubles and loss. To make arrangements to help, maintain and support local progress and the people in the tambon.

(2) To investigate any activity which is being carried out inappropriately. A request can be made for the formation of a committee to investigate the facts. If the tambon council votes favourably on such a request by members of the tambon council, the tambon committee must cooperate. However, if the tambon committee disagrees, or agrees but does not have the capability to carry on the work, the committee can report to higher authority. The governor will make the final decision.

In the case of the tambon council 275, it is set up by the Ministry of Interior Directive No. 275/2509, dated March 1, 2509.

Coming to Part II 'Members of the tambon council; the directive says that the tambon council will consist of the following:

(i) Kamnan
(ii) Puyaiban of every village.
(iii) One public elementary school teacher of the tambon
(iv) Tambon physician
(v) One honorary member from each village.
It shall be observed that 1, 2, and 4 are members by position, while 3 is selected by the district officer from among the public elementary school teachers of the tambon, and 5 is elected by people in the village. The method of election shall be adapted from that of the election of puyaiban. Finally, it states that kamnan will be the chairman of the tambon council. There will be one vice-chairman, elected by the members. The vice-chairman will have a term of one year. When there is an election, the vice-chairman can be re-elected.

2.0.4. Concluding remarks:

After having a close examination of historical development of local self-government institutions in Thailand both urban as well as rural local self-government, one can say that historically speaking, ancient Thai government administration during the Ayuthaya period and early Bangkok period was marked by decentralization rather than centralization.22 The whole kingdom was divided into provinces, each in turn divided into districts, communes (tambon) and villages (muban). Each province was governed by a governor appointed by the king or he be a vassal prince. As a matter of fact, the governor enjoyed much autonomy in the administration within his jurisdiction. Nevertheless, it usually turned out that those

provinces which were near the capital were subjected to high degree of central control because of strategic and security considerations. The degree of control diminished with the distance between the capital and provinces. The outlying provinces which were ruled by vassal princes enjoyed complete autonomy in local administration but still subjected to tributary obligations to the central government.

Centralism in government was in full swing during the reign of King Chulalongkorn of Chakri dynasty. It is mainly due to military requirements, advancement of communication and threat from Western colonization. The period was marked by the fact that provincial administration throughout the kingdom was brought under the central bureaucracy via the Ministry of Interior in Bangkok. Moreover, the outlying provinces which formerly enjoyed great autonomy were also brought under the direction of the central bureaucracy. These changes were due to the impact of possible threat of western colonization. It is fair to say that centralism along with absolutism, with its reflection in the pattern of centrally directed territorial administration seemed to be tied closely with Thai political culture. By contrast, the concept of local

self-government was a western political culture. It was introduced to Thailand during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. Yet, Thai political culture, at that time, bound no basis for democracy or local self-government. Thus, it is important to note that the historical development of local self-government in Thailand reveals the following points:

(i) At first, local government as introduced by King Chulalongkorn was conceived as a special type of government dealing with urban problems. It was considered by the King that the urban area especially that of the capital city had certain problems and characteristics which made it different from rural areas, and hence required a special type of government to tackle its problems. So, in 1897, the first local self-governing unit in the form of sanitary district was established in order to provide services peculiar to urban type living.

(ii) Local self-government was created from the top or by the central government, it was not created according to the political consciousness of Thai people. In other words, the model of western local self-government or the representative local government was imposed by the central government on Thai political system without taking into consideration the political consciousness of the people. So, it appears that people were not
ready to accept this new experiment. The result was a failure in the working of local self-government. Then, the constitutional regime, the creation of local self-governing institutions was deemed as an essential step toward a democratic society. During this period, various attempts were made in order to fulfil its aim, e.g., a municipal system of representative character, sanitary district, provincial administrative organization with elected provincial assembly, the tambon administrative organization, and tambon council 222 and 275 were established as different forms of local self-government institutions. The municipality and sanitary district were urban local self-governments, while the provincial administrative organization, the tambon administrative organization and the tambon councils were the rural units.

(iii) There were successive amendments of the organic laws concerning local government. Though the granting of more autonomy to local authorities was the main goal of the constitutional government, but in actual practice, every change in laws had tightened the control of national bureaucracy over local administration. This means that the more a change in laws concerning local bodies, the more the central control over local administration. Reasons offered for these changes were the

weak performance of local authorities and political immaturity of Thai people. This may be true to some extent as Ryan alleged that even the constitutional government of Thailand have inherited absolutism and centralism from the absolute monarchy day. In fact they did not favour decentralization.

(iv) In the past three decades, local government system in Thailand was unhealthy and unpromising. This is because of the facts that legally local government system is a creation of the central government and hence it is closely tied with national politics. Further, Thailand experienced the political instability and many coups during these three decades. The political instability unquestionably jeopardized the growth of strong local self-government, e.g., when general Sarit Thanarat came to power through a coup in 1958, all forms of local government were brought under direct control of the revolutionary government until 1965. During this period, the provincial and municipal councils whose members were locally elected were dissolved. They were staffed by the appointed members instead.

25. Ibid., pp. 77-78.

In addition to the above, it is significant to note that in the beginning Thai local self-government existed along with the principle of decentralization of power rather than centralization. But the decentralization was replaced by centralization during the Ayuthaya period and continued till the early Bangkok period. This indicates that the development of local self-government is a halting one, i.e., there is no uniformity in the development of Thai local self-government. The facts are that various attempts were made by different Kings but there is a lack of pursuit of these attempts due to personal beliefs of leaderships. Therefore, one may summarize that the historical development of Thai local self-government is not consistent because it suffers from a setback, and such setback contributes to the slow growth of local self-government institutions in Thailand.