

## การเมืองภาคพลเมืองของคนพิการในการทำสิทธิทางการศึกษาให้เป็นจริง Civil Politics of People with Disabilities to Make Their Education Rights a Reality

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### บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาทำให้คนพิการรู้เท่าทันต่อและไม่ตกเป็นเหยื่อของผู้แสวงประโยชน์ โดยมีขอบ หรือการถูกเลือกปฏิบัติโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งจากเจ้าหน้าที่ของรัฐ ผู้นำคนพิการ รุ่นบุกเบิกจึงขับเคลื่อนสิทธิทางการศึกษาเป็นลำดับขั้นๆ บทความนี้ผู้เขียนนำเสนอ จุดเริ่มต้นของการจัดการศึกษาสำหรับคนพิการ และการเริ่มขับเคลื่อนสิทธิโดยผู้นำคน พิการตั้งแต่ช่วงปี 2533 ถึงช่วงก่อนการรัฐประหารในปี 2557 นำเสนอในเชิง ประวัติศาสตร์ โดยสัมภาษณ์คนพิการที่เป็นแกนนำในการขับเคลื่อน สอบทานด้วย เอกสารทางประวัติศาสตร์ เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาเรื่องการเมืองภาคพลเมืองของคน พิการในการทำสิทธิคนพิการให้เป็นจริง ผู้นำคนพิการเป็นพลเมืองที่กระตือรือร้น มุ่งใช้อำนาจทางการเมืองเพื่อทำสิทธิทางการศึกษาคคนพิการให้เป็นจริง โดยเจรจาและโน้มน้าว โดยตรงกับนักการเมืองผู้กำหนดนโยบาย มีส่วนร่วมอย่างใกล้ชิดกับข้าราชการด้วยความ พุ่มเทเสียสละ และร่วมกันพัฒนาข้อเสนอระบบโครงสร้างและกลไกการจัดการศึกษา อีก ประการหนึ่งคือผู้นำคนพิการได้เข้าสู่อำนาจทางการเมืองด้วยตนเอง

**คำสำคัญ :** การเมืองภาคพลเมือง, การศึกษา, คนพิการ

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## Abstract

Early leaders of the disability rights movement in Thailand have constantly set as a high priority the education of people with Disabilities (PWD). Without a proper and recognized education PWD will continue to be discriminated against and taken advantage of in society. This article as part of a dissertation title Civil Politics of Persons with Disabilities to Make Their Rights a Reality, presents a history of the disability movement in Thailand to promote equal education from 1990 to 2014. It uses a historical approach by interviewed leaders of the PWD community who have played a major role in the movement and review by historical documents. The study shows leaders with disability are active members of the community. They have engaged with those in power to for the educational rights for all PWD's. The movement has negotiated and lobbied directly with politicians, local and national, who are responsible for education policy. Leaders with disabilities also devoted themselves to work in a political position to work for change.

**Keywords :** Civil Politics, Education, People with Disabilities

## Introduction

Education is the foundation of life. However, access to education for people with disabilities is limited causing them to be taken advantage, discriminated, and not be able to reach their other rights. This affects the employment and living in society equitably. This article is part of the dissertation on Civil Politics of People with Disabilities to Make Their Rights a Reality. The objective is to recognize the integration and the movement of people with disabilities in making the education rights of persons with disabilities become real. It is a lesson and a guideline to continue to work.

The author uses the Civil Politics framework to study the integration and the movement of the rights of people with disabilities. The Historical Approach is presented from the elite and the government began to provide education for people with disabilities, rise of the blind to provide the education for people with disabilities, movement to create fundamental structure for the education of people with disabilities, and to have the law for the education of people with disabilities as well as implementing the law into concrete practice. It is the challenge for the leaders with disabilities to bring the lessons of the past in the continuous movement. It is also a guideline for the Ministry of Education and related agencies to know the ideas and needs of people with disabilities. If all parties have the same goal, learn about one another, and collaborate, it possibly stabilize the foundation of education of people with disabilities. The disabled persons have the opportunity to develop their potential fully leading to having jobs, living independently, and being the citizens who produce economic output resulting in the inclusive society.

### **Civil Politics**

Anek Laothamatas (2013) discusses the concept on politics as the activities for public or the activities having ethics for public (Politics = Civic + Virtue). According to the Aristotle's definition, the word "civic" means those who are involved in political decision making and are entitled to serve the positions involving political decision making as well as performing the important government's missions. It is the process which human beings as citizens are required to have the deliberation for deciding the significant virtue issues in various status. This action enhances the chance to deliberate

and practice to create habits leading to more virtue gradually. (Weera Somboon, 2018) Thippaphorn Tantisunthor (2012) states about the civil politics as the politics power based on the non-governmental mechanism power in the society. In other words, it is the power of civil society meaning the institutions and powers which are non-governmental organizations including private sector, organizations, and private volunteers outside the governmental power institutes.

In general, the civic politics has various definitions following three different forms of goals: (Isin, Engin Fahri, 1999) 1) Public Sphere focusing on creating the non-congress centralized mechanism to discuss the issues in expanding the rights and power beneficial for the society, 2) Civil Society or Citizen Politics focusing on the active participation of individuals and organizations in the society to debate and reach the agreement on various issues or enforce some issues to become the government policies, 3) People's Politics or New Social Movement focusing on the movement to raise the awareness of the common mankind interests which are global environment, world capital condition, opposition to globalization, etc.

The "citizen" in the civic politics is an active citizen with the basic awareness of having freedom in the self-government, awareness in one own sovereignty, responsibilities on civic duties, awareness on one duties with the consciousness, knowledgeableness, and intellect. The engagement is the Self-determination. The citizens must work with the government and politics in the representative system as the partners to support one another and not overthrow or stay in the opposite party. The citizens rely on structural work by the government for the benefits of the country and society. Therefore, the collaboration between the government and civil society is counterpart

and the citizenship is no longer just a citizen of any country. In the liberal democracy with the openness in global equality and civil liberties, the citizens must then be aware internationally. In terms of social welfares, the author suggests that if the policy is to encourage people to participate politically, Civil Politics seems to provide protection and care on one another of people in the society leading to sustainable society leaving no one behind.

### **Roles of the elites and the government in the provision of education for people with disabilities**

Starting in 1939, Foundation for the Blind in Thailand under the Royal Patronage was founded with the cooperation of M.R. Pinthureka Chakraphan and Dr. Fon Saengsingkaew. The Bangkok School for the Blind was also founded having Miss Genevieve Caulfield, the American blind lady, proposing the ideas and consultation with Dr. Fon throughout the time. Miss Caulfield was determined and wanted to assist the people with visual impaired as at that time there was no organization in Thailand paid attention to help the blind. (Wikipedia, 2016) This was followed by the education for the deaf. M.L. Pin Malakul, teacher from Faculty of Arts and Science (Faculty of Arts at present, Chulalongkorn University) saw the importance of the deaf. If they were well-educated, they could live as other people. Therefore, the qualified persons were invited to cooperate in founding the Foundation for the Deaf in 1951 or the “Foundation for the Deaf under the Royal Patronage of Her Majesty the Queen” at present. At earlier stage, the teaching unit for the deaf was opened in Municipal School 17 (Wat Sommanat) on 10<sup>th</sup> December, 1952, falling on the date of 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UN Universal

Declaration of Human Rights. For the physical and mobility disabilities the “Foundation for the Welfare of the Cripple” was founded in 1954 with the assistance of Prince Prem Purachatra having Mrs. Herbert Link, the wife of the Vice President of Rotary Club, Lady Sumalee Chatikawanich and Professor Dr.Kasan Chatikawanich, the husband, join in establishing the school named Srisangwan School to provide the education particularly for the children with the physical or mobility impairment. Having the schools for these disabilities is necessary because general schools do not accept the disabled students. Besides, the parents of the disabled children also do not believe that the disabled persons can study and work. Even the top executives, they think, “The blind can do nothing. They can neither study nor work.” (The Committee to commemorate Miss Genevieve Caulfield, 1972) A Minister said that teaching the blind “is like teaching tables or chairs. Teaching them is useless.” (Thailand Association of the Blind, 2000).Even though the deaf look like not having the disability and are not difficult to learn but the reality is not like that. Phaisan Leungworaphan, 68 years (born in 1950), had the communication problems said as follows.

“...When I was at the age of school admission, my parents sent me to study in Charoenwit School which was the school for people with normal hearing. This caused me to have the communication problem because I have the hearing impaired and could not communicate in words. Mostly, I wrote on a piece of paper for taking to the others and use only the simple sign language to be easily understood. I studied there until being in grade 2, I resigned to further studying in Bangkok at Thungmahamek School for the Deaf...” (Phaisan Leungworaphan and Kamphon Suwannarat, 2016)

For the physical and mobility handicapped, apart from facing social problems like the attitude of society as same as the deaf, the major obstacles that make the disabled persons uneducated is the travel and the environment of the school without any facility. The elites and the government play an important role in initiating the education for people with disabilities. However, with the attitude of society, the education of people with disabilities is still limited. Until the disabled people educated in the early generations rose to drive the rights of people with disabilities to progress more as to be discussed later.

### **The Blind Pioneer Education for the Blind**

Since people with disabilities join together as a collective movement, the very first thing they pay attention to is the education. The blind leader in the first era joined in founding the Association of the Blind which was later the Thailand Association of the Blind. The information was given that in the Buddhist Era of 2510 – 2530, people with disabilities were restricted in nearly every aspect. The school did not admit them to study. Luckily, the private schools of the priests admitted. When graduating and wanting to enter the university, the universities also did not admit them to study. They had to see the executives for explaining all things. More importantly, they had to prove that they were qualified to study. Even when graduating with excellent grades or honors, some of them were also obstructed when wanting to be recruited to work in the government sector. Everything is in trouble because the others thought that the disabled could not do. The blind could not do. They had to stay home or went begging only. (Petcharat Techwatchara et al., 2017) In the past, before the first law of the disabled persons enacted,

individual with disabilities or group was to struggling. Dr. Prayat Phunongong said that he could pass the writing exam in whichever teacher colleges but he failed in the interview all the times because they did not admit the blind to study. Once,

“...I applied and the teacher read the regulations that the applicants must neither be blind, deaf, nor handicapped. Oh, Thailand. Then, I shouted why anywhere did not accept me. When the Rector heard, Lady Supha Kitjathorn walked downstairs and asked what happened? (Why shouting?)...” (Prayat Phunongong, 2016).

Dr.Prayat shouted so loud that the Rector heard and walked downstairs to solve the problem and let him study. When graduating bachelor degree, Dr.Prayat Phunongong thought that to enable the blind to study must be done by himself. Teacher Prayat or Dr.Prayat was the person lacking of chance in education. During his childhood until being 15 years, he went to Bangkok and was trained to be the carpenter even though he did not want to become the carpenter. He had no choice and he also spent the free time in the evening to study diligently until graduating the doctoral degree, international program, Human Resource Program, Burapha University. He could become Dr.Prayat Phunongong proudly.

Teacher Prayat returned to start the project in Khon Kaen, his hometown, in 1978. He rented the wood house in Thantip, Muang District, Khon Kaen Province to become the residence of 13 blind children. It was the place for teaching, preparing for walking with the sticks, living in the society, adjusting the personalities to become ready physically, emotionally, socially, and mentally until being able to study with the other children and



to live in the society happily. (Inthira Witthayasomboon and Chulaphorn Thaworn, 2009)

“...I started there to create the residence for the blind children and they were sent to study as regular schools... They (the provincial office) ordered me to send the children back home. Teaching over 7 students must be applied for the license as prescribed by law... When the first building was completed in the construction, we move to the new building in 1982, moving from the rented house. At that time, there were around 20 children. Then, we tried to earn money by taking the children to sing the songs, play the Indian lute, and play the reed organ in exchange with the food, rice, and dried food. We could live for several years until applying for the registration of Foundation...”

The provision of education for the blind of Teacher Prayat encountered the major obstacle in getting permission and cooperation from the government. But he still tried with the assistance from some people.

“...I remembered the day on which they announced for the Khon Kaen people to pay respect to His Majesty the King. I took 15 children to Khon Kaen Airport. When we arrived, they kindly let us in the front row. His Majesty the King was accompanied by Her Majesty the Queen, the Crown Prince, and HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. The King was sitting in front of my seat. Then, he asked where the blind came from. I replied that they were brought from many provinces in the Northeast to prepare for reading and writing the braille and traveling. Later, they would be sent to study in the schools in Khon Kaen. The King said helping people to be educated was good. He thanked for my help. If I need something, he said I could send the letter to him and he would assign HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn to

help. Then, the King returned. I was very happy and I returned to prepare to write the King's royal patronage. He replied back on 2nd June, 1984. Later, all were smooth." Teacher Prayat told the author with the gesture and the smile that expressed the sense of gladness.

The Christian Foundation for the Blind in Thailand initiated by teacher Prayat was the model and the important foundation of educational provision for the blind in Thailand mainly operated by the blind. The Foundation had expanded the network nationwide to include 13 schools for the blind. There were 16 organizations and branch offices. It was called the agency to provide education for the blind with the largest network in Thailand. The Foundation fought for the blind children to attend schools from basic to university level. Teacher Prayat said with pride, "...What I was most proud was that the graduated children could find some works. They could also become teachers. Lately, I have at least 20 students graduating the doctoral degree....". It is also the major base in enforcing the laws and policies on education for the disabled on behalf of the Disabilities Thailand. Teacher Prayat is an example of an enthusiastic citizen who insisted in the human right firmly. And with the divine of His Majesty King Rama IX, Teacher Prayat could overcome the obstacles so that they can handle the blind to progress nationwide until the present.

### **Movement to create Fundamental Structure for the education of people with disabilities**

The movement began. "...At that time, it was the year of education of the world. They said Thai people studied only in some percentage. I argued in the meeting that it was not true because there were more disabled

people who did not study. On that day, the meeting was held in Pattaya. (1990). As I was a teacher at the blind school of the Blind Training Center, I had the opportunity to attend the meeting. But I also talked about the disabled persons. In fact, it was mainly a reality about the disabled persons. But we say all kinds of disabilities whether deafness or blindness. They said because of the blindness, we have no right to study. We objected to you that saying such percentage does not really matter. It is just that. Do you included the disabled persons in your percentage? He said not included. So, how could it be called 100 percent ? At that time, we were quite the only a lonely fighting, no party, no partners, so our voice was very low. They called Let our voice be heard in English. We must let our voice be heard. Later, when we meet our friends at the Association of the Disabled persons, we distributed this idea to our new friends there. Everyone agreed. And then we grouped to form the Association...” (Narong Patibatsorakit, 2015).

The enforcement of Act on Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons 1991 (B.E.2534) was successfully implemented but the practice actually began in 1994. The education has always been pushed forward by offering opinions in the conferences.

“...That I remembered was that Ajarn Boonsom Navanukroh held the seminar with Ajarn Narong Patibatsorakit. I went to listen to the seminar on the non-formal education for people with disabilities around 1995-1996 at the United Nations Building (Bangkok). But all the contents were about physical disabilities or called at that time as visible disability. No one talked about the invisible disability. I could not stand it. I felt very upset and I asked them for letting me speak on the stage. I spoke and cried (smile). It came from the heart. It was the feeling that we were glad that people talked about

the disabled persons. We accepted that our children were different from others and at least there were some attempts to help. But the people who wanted to help did not know about Autism. Then, I had a chance to combine the work with the Ministry of Education from that day... I set up the program to develop non-formal education for children with Autism as the first course in Thailand. Then, I had the opportunity to meet Lady Kasama Worawan Na Ayutthaya who was the secretary of the Office of National Primary Education at that time. She also asked that the autistic children should study altogether or should study separately. I said that my children should study with their friends but the teacher must understand. Then, she asked me to train the teachers. She trained the teachers nationwide. We went to all the stages... Later, the Lady moved to the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development. She wrote the book which was the first book of the Ministry, the guidebook to help autistic children. But for part of Autism, she asked me to write. We wrote together and invited the doctors and parents who had experiences. It was like decoding the lesson. This was a very important part of the process. It made the learning in the schools better. It was like we were lucky but the process itself was not moving entirely..." (Chusak Chanthayanon, 2016).

Inclusive education (the Act on Educational Provision for People with Disabilities, 2551) is the key concept that the leaders with disabilities have pushed. Meanwhile, the expansion of public education is largely by opening the schools for particular disabilities. Most of them are the schools for the deaf. This is different from the propulsion of people with disabilities who want all children with disabilities to be able to attend classes equally with all children. That is, schools close to home must not refuse to accept

disabled children. Schools need to have technology, facilities and teaching methods for children with disabilities to learn and develop their potential fully. In 1996, Narong Patibatsorakit was appointed as the senator resulting in the respect to the leader with disabilities and the disabled organizations more. The operation could be performed more easily. When the opinions were proposed, the others listened to them.

“...We enforced in the national education law. Ajarn Daranee Uthairattanakit accidentally knew Mr.Abhisit Vejajiva as his family studied in Satit Kaset. She asked me to visit Mr. Abhisit who at that time was the Prime Minister’s Office Minister. He asked what the disabled persons or the children with Autism wanted. I replied that they wanted one Section of law. He said I had to talk to Dr.Rung Kaewdaeng who was at that time the Education Council. He was assigned to do the law on educational reform. We had the chance to visit Dr.Rung Kaewdaeng. We went with Ajarn Narong Patibatsorakit. Going to the Education Council, they held the meeting on the 3rd floor. I remembered that I had to carry Ajarn upstairs because there was no elevator. There were only the stairs. I was very tired that day. However, I tried to take Ajarn upstairs to talk. Eventually, Ajarn Rung accepted to think over and proposed. We then talked about one Section of law which was later developed to Section 4, Paragraph 1, primary education of 12 years thoroughly with quality. I remembered that it was for general people. Paragraph 2 was the education for the disabled persons who had some special needs. The facilities were provided to service and assist in education. Section 3 and Section 4 followed. I thought that the movement as the dimension of law was successful. After the Act was enacted, whatever was done by the Ministry of Education on the National Education Act only one

Section 2 paragraphs, it led to the clearer special education system...” (Chusak Chanthayanon, 2016).

The additional meaning of the disabled in Section 10 of the National Education Act B.E.2542 (1999) is that the education for persons with disabilities should be provided with the rights and opportunity to receive basic education from finding the disability at birth with free of charge as well as being entitled to access to facilities, media, services and other educational assistance following the rules and procedures as prescribed in the Ministerial Regulations. Moreover, the education must be organized in the right way taking into account the abilities of each person with disabilities. After the enactment of the National Education Act B.E.2542, the major changes in the education of persons with disabilities took place in the same period. At that time, Ms. Kanchana Silpa-archa was Deputy Minister of Education.

“...I was really related to the disabled persons when Mr. Somsak (Pritsanantakul), Minister of Education, seeing a group of disabled people meeting at the Ministry of Education that day. They wanted the opportunities. They do not bend their knees to wait for money. They want to fulfill the potential of their friends with disabilities to have the opportunity to benefit the society. This was just they want... They came to ask for the education opportunities for people with disabilities. It really made me think that it really was the basic right of the citizen. It was the basic right that all deserved. I heard that whenever the minister was changed, people with disabilities had to come to meet the Minister every time to ask for the education opportunities. I asked myself why they had to do that. It was because they had the right. So I paid attention and dedicated to it. I would

like to give people with disabilities equal rights in education...” (Kanchana Silpa-archa, 2017).

Ministry of Education in the time of Mr.Somsak Pritsanantakul being the Minister of Education and Ms.Kanchana Silpa-archa being the Deputy Minister of Education enforced the Cabinet to announce 1999 as the Year of Education for the Disabled Persons. In front of all academic institutes, Schools nationwide, there was the sign indicating that the disabled students who wanted to study must be able to study.

“...The disabled who wanted to study must be able to study. Ajarn Narong was the one who initiated this idea. I helped him as he asked me what I wanted my children to do. I said I wanted my children to study. He said the disabled persons who wanted to study must be able to study. This originated the slogan nationwide. I was very glad because it was the opportunity. The Minister of Education at that time was Mr. Somsak Pritsanantakul. He appointed Ajarn Narong as the Minister’s consultant. Ajarn Narong did not work alone. He asked every organization of us to work. Even though we got no position, he told us to help working. So, we form the Committee of the Educational Reform for People with Disabilities. I remembered another person, the former Prime Minister, Mr. Banharn Silpa-archa. He said he wanted to conduct the Educational Reform for People with Disabilities. It was the first time I worked with the politicians as Prime Minister. I saw how he thought and I saw the political power resulting in the changes. Apart from law, the strategies of council were the connection with the persons having the power in decision making. This was as same as triangle to move the mountain of Ajarn Prawet. I learned from the reality....” (Chusak Chanthayanon, 2016).

Behind this policy statement is a systematic visit to and support for the leaders with disabilities. There are policy proposals based on constitutional principles and international concepts. There is knowledge of educational management for the disabled by an academic team working with disabled people. There are practical guidelines that can be followed by a dedicated team of supporters. Moreover, there is also a devoted to disability work that Banharn Silpa-archa, the former prime minister and the head of the Thai National Party, fully dedicated to. But few people know that behind the success is a team of qualified masters dedicated to work in details both to the policy department and policy implementation to be expanded.

“...On Friday evening, we would go out to schools around Bangkok and plan. We put the slides on the screen and then wrote the structure. We wrote the provisions about law. We secretly made the structure of education management. At that time we asked for special education center and structures. However, the structures at that time were secretly in the office. Therefore, it was not called the office. It was called the National Center for Special Education. This was special education center for the province. At that time, the reform committee wanted to see the overall picture but we did not know how to present the whole picture. We had to process times by times before presenting. For the Budget Bureau, Mr.Somneuk Vimolsathian, the Deputy Director of Budget Bureau at that time, helped in drawing the structure. The outsiders did not know. Only the insiders knew and did it... Ajarn Wiriya, Ajarn Chusak, Ajarn Puangkaew went altogether. The others went as well but only once. We did not force them. Then, I had to take Ajarn Surasit as well. Ajarn Surasit was the head of research. We went



to the schools near Bangkok such as Setsathien, Tungmahamek, Nonthaburi, Lopburi Panya, Phetchaburi Panya, Nakornpathom Deaf School... We went almost every week. I told them that this committee was meeting from 8AM to midnight. We did not know how to do. We had to stay overnight. We depended on the place to sleep, the food to eat, people, screen, printer, papers. The schools offered few people to help. The budget which we discussed was not available. When it was unavailable, we depended on the car to pick us up from the ministry at 4PM-5PM in the evening of Friday and went back on Sunday evening to return to the Ministry..." (Theera Chantharat, 2017).

Ajam Puangkaew Kittham, a professional on disabilities, told that "...Ajam Wiriya, Ajam Chusak, Director Theera, and Puangkaew invited the specialized lecturers to help... At that time, there were 4 subjects of the Ministry of Education; IEP, Management Structure, Act, and auxiliary regulation. I learned a lot... We ate the late-night meal and woke up early. We stayed in the existing condition. Sometimes we slept in the nursing room because there was no facility in the schools. We worked together until everyone was friend who understood one another..." (Puangkaew Kittham, 2017). The commitment of working in the atmosphere of sharing happiness leads to the progressive education of the disability leaders progressively. By driving directions from the leaders of the disabled with the government officials proposed to senior government officials and political parties, each one helps one another to break the barrier.

On 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1999, the Cabinet had the resolution to declare the year 1999 as the year of education for the disabled persons as suggested by the Ministry of Education in order to expand the special education for

children with disabilities. The explanation of policy for disabled children admission expanded the facilities to provide subsidies to schools to work closely with a multidisciplinary team and family to mobilize all sectors with the coordinated mechanisms both inside and outside the country. For the operational guidelines, the school declares that parents with disabled children who want to attend the schools must notify their intentions to provide education for parents whose children have disabilities. Organizing the sports projects to strengthen and rehabilitate along with the public relations, National Seminar and Conference, and all departments with the missions in relation with the budget allocation in the year 2000 to review the special education development plan (people with disabilities), develop the Disability Information System for the Research and Development on Education for the Disabled, Human resources development, development of coordination and management mechanism. There is the national board on education for the disabled persons and the committee drafting the law on education for the disabled persons.

From 1999, it was considered that the education for the disabled persons was introduced. Government officials and people with disabilities work together harmoniously. Although the government had changed, the leaders with disabilities had been able to reach out and work well. In the government of Dr.Thaksin Shinawatra who was the Prime Minister, Ajarn Wiriya Namsiriphongphan was one of the founding members of the Thai Rak Thai party at that time. Ajarn Wiriya was also appointed the Chairman of the Advisory Board Committee to the Prime Minister, other leaders with disabilities and the author was included in this committee. Ajarn Wiriya negotiated to ask Dr.Sirikorn to help with continuing the education of the

disabled. As a result, the implementation of the policy at that time was not interrupted despite the change of minister until the legal education of disabled people succeeded in the later period. When all parties coordinate in the same direction, the promotion of education for people with disabilities is active and continuous.

From the database of integrated Cabinet's resolutions publicized via [www.cabinet.soc.go.th](http://www.cabinet.soc.go.th) of the Secretariat of the Cabinet, it was found that between 1999 and 2013, the Cabinet acknowledged or approved 21 issues of education for persons with disabilities. Particularly in 1999 and 2000, there were 12 issues resulting in the expansion of 13 special education centers and provincial special education centers nationwide. Although at the first phase, the area of other educational institutions did not have the strength, in the following years, the teacher proportion, education and budget were allocated for the construction of special education centers along with the operating budget for improving facilities to accommodate people with disabilities in schools and learning centers such as museums and libraries, etc.

The extra money was paid for special education teachers for the morale in working, allowance for tuition and fees for children with disabilities in private schools including the planning of strategies to promote education for the disabled systematically. (Secretariat of the Cabinet, 2017). Apart from pushing the leaders with disabilities through the administration, the legislature also discussed with members of the House of Representatives to ask questions in the House of Senators as well.

“...I often talk to the Member of the House of Representative telling him that the government levied tax but did not provide education for the

disabled. The disabled could study but the government ignored them...” (Prayat Phunongong, 2016).

Mr.Premsak Phiayura, the member of the House of Representatives from Khon Kaen, asked and the government must respond leading to the Cabinet meeting to resolve the problem of public suffering. The Declaration of the Year of Education for the Disabled Persons in 1999 was part of the Disability Movement during the preparation to host the FESPIC Games or the Disability Sports Tournament in the Far East and Southern Pacific. Thailand's first host was not interested by the government. Later, Lieutenant Colonel Torphong discussed with the author as the principal of the Redemptorist Vocational School in Pattaya. After the discussion, we decided to bring about fifty walks and wheelchairs from Pattaya, Chonburi province, heading to the Ministry of Education to submit the letter to the Minister of Education which oversees the Department of Physical Education. We stayed overnight at Wat Tan Lom, Bangsaen, Chonburi for one night and then go to the second night at Wat Bang Bo, Samut Prakarn Province. To ask the government to focus on and accelerate the preparation of competition in parallel with the host of the Asian Games in Thailand to be held in late 1998, Mr.Somsak Pritsanantakul, Deputy Minister of Education at the time, responded the issue. After that, he discussed with Banharn Silpa-archa and led to great success in terms of competition both in the management and results. This raised the awareness of the potential of the disabled persons. At that time, when combined with the current political reform, the role of the disability leader became more prominent. Another important tip is the educational reform with National Education Act B.E.2542 as the key to promote education for people with disabilities in the leap development. In the early stages. The

principle of the National Education Act was that the leaders of the disabled had to push the principles of education. In the National Education Act, it is our job to educate people with disabilities, standard and media facilities. We do these things and then do the structure. We have to work hard to attend the conference on Saturday - Sunday to work late a year long. It is the new subject to discuss the special education. We have to go to school to discuss what to do... we help thinking of the law of education for disabled people. We want the law to be like this in foreign countries to make the media accessible to the disabled to access the education..." (Wiriya Namsiriphongphan, 2016).

The Act on Education Provision for the Disabled B.E.2551 is the law that defines educational rights and duties, the promotion of education for the disabled persons, which provides a mechanism for the Education for the Disabled. There are Special Education and Regional Administration Office. More importantly, this law also has a fund to promote and develop education for the disabled. It is an important tool for promoting and developing education for people with disabilities.

Since 1990, the leading groups of people with disabilities confirmed the educational rights of the disabled. We are committed to the law of education and presentation of rights through the public forum at various conferences including access to political power as well as access to political power as a senator Leader of political party, advisor to the Prime Minister, consultant or committee appointed by the Minister. There is also a team that works in details in the practice strongly.

At first, people with disabilities have difficulty accessing the education system because it is not favorable for people with disabilities, so

only certain groups of people with disabilities have an opportunity to study. Leaders with disabilities play an important role because they are people who are aware of the problem and try to solve it. The "inequality" of people with disabilities that occurred in society continued until the National Education Act 1999, resulting in more schools for the disabled, which behind this success comes from the power of leaders of disabled people who push giving the disabled the opportunity to study in accordance with the empowerment theory which means participation, control and decision-making power defining options and resources for people with disabilities with the goal of reallocating power and changing power relationships is a process of transition between individuals and society. Changing public consciousness and achieving human needs and leading to liberation without repression, which is based on equality in religion, Human rights and, civil rights (Nosek, 1992; Wils, 2001)

### **Promoting Education after the Implementation of the Act on Education Provision for the Disabled B.E.2551**

In 2008, the military-era dictatorship having Ajarn Wiriya as a member of the National Legislative Assembly and having the leader with disabilities as the subcommittee on disabilities related issues. It is not strange that Ajarn Wiriya reveals the progress in the study for the disabled persons with political factors. "...The politics made us successful. If politics did not help, there is no way. We want to have a special education center to help in the study. I joined the Thai Rak Thai party's education team from the party formation. At that time, the team Head was Dr. Kasem. (Prof.Kasem Wattanachai), Khun Sirikorn (Dr.Sirikorn Maneerin), Khun Bunnam Thansamrit

was the Deputy Governor of Bangkok in the era of Major General Jamlong Srimuang as the Governor of Bangkok. I was responsible for the education and for driving to set up the Special Education Center. It was formed without legal support but we used the ministerial order...” (Wiriya Namsiriphongphan, 2016).

The other educators also noted similarly. “...When the minister declared, all responded. The administration of education funded. The minister declared that it must reduce the disparity, provide inclusive education, focusing on screening the children, etc. The policy was clear like Khun Abhisit said, “People with disabilities learn free in the university.” The Office of the Higher Education Commission made it in three months, announcing that “the disabled can study free.” It was another chance like the rising up. There was the immediate importance...” (Daranee Uthairattanakit, 2017).

Creating a satellite to orbit the earth or constructing the building is not too difficult, simply allocate the budget can be done without complication rather than the current technology. However, the management of education is not easy. It is not just dedicating budget to success. It takes time and learning, both for the instructors and the learners and especially the attitude of educational personnel towards the disabled persons. The attitude is to campaign for continuous understanding. At the same time, in terms of the role of special education centers, the government officials who are alongside the disabled people in the age of progressive education have the opinion that

“...we have to take care of the disabled children from birth to life. So I called our special education teacher as an insurance salesman. Selling

insurance, he knows customers and he takes care of customers. We have to take care of people with disabilities until they die. As the Act mentioned, we have to take care of people with disabilities from birth to life. I said it was not a career but how to track how they went to work. Are they happy? Can they get along well with their co-workers? If it does not work, we have to relocate or reinstate as Case Manager for the disabled persons. I would like to say. When I have the opportunity to speak, I will try to warn that our boat is not hired that to ship out to the shore and leaving. We are special education teacher. Now we are insurance salesman that have to take care of them for all their life...” (Theera Chantharat, 2017).

Although the government led by Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra was seized by the military government in the first half of the year of 2006 to early 2008, Ajarn Wiriya and the leaders of people with disabilities still pushed for disability laws. After the original coalition government changed the name of the party and had Yingluck Shinawatra as the leader of the government, Ajarn Wiriya and the leaders of people with disabilities could also propose amendments to the law on education for the disabled persons. “...We propose to amend the law because the original law special education teacher must have graduated diploma. We think it's too high. Only bachelor degree with training should be enough. So, we amended...” (Wiriya Namsiriphongphan, 2016) until the Act on the Education Provision for the Disabled (Volume 2) B.E.2556 was enacted.

One mechanism of the education law for the disabled persons is the fund for the promotion and development of education for the disabled persons. The purpose is to spend money to promote, support and develop education for people with disabilities fairly and thoroughly. It is established



under the Act on the Education Provision for the Disabled B.E.2551, starting in the fiscal year of 2010 from the year 2012 - 2016 for a total of 5 years. The fund for the study of the disabled persons for 174 projects was 712 million baht. It was proposed by the government 120 projects worth 656 million baht; fundamental education 70 projects 490 million baht, 17 non-formal education programs worth 66 million baht, 15 projects by vocational schools for 41 million baht, 11 higher education programs for 40 million baht and 7 private education offices for 19 million baht.

Another 53 projects are proposed by the Foundation, Associations, Private Schools and Institutions, with a total of 56 million Baht. To support the disabled or visually impaired students worth 36 million baht. There are 6 projects for the group of children with autism in the amount of 11.3 million baht. For all types of disabilities in 6 projects, the total amount was 5.6 million baht. One project for learning disability totaled 2.3 million baht. One project for hearing disability totaled 360,000 Baht.

After the retirement of Mr. Theera Chantharat, new comer who has been serving in the position of director of the Office of Special Education Administration were in the short time together with leaders with disabilities pushing on education's right focusing on other areas of interest. In particular, the author received comments from school administrators under the Office of Special Educational Administration. The movement for education for disabled people lack of continuity. Although efforts are now being made to improve the law on disability education, the promotion and support of general education for people with disabilities is an inclusive education, but it is delayed and lack of continuity. Director Theera concluded the lead role of disabled people in education,

“...The leaders with disabilities is very important. Disabled people also helped the ministry. No one is a hero starring. People will help to progress. But there are some organizations of people with disabilities to play other roles. Ajarn Dtan (the name of the author), do you think you involve in the education a lot? They play another role. But other roles to play are that important too. So, we focus on education. When I was here, the blind was considered to carry the flag. Now the blind itself goes away. Ajarn Wiriya goes to the center of vocational training. It's open in many provinces like Chiang Mai and Nakhon Pathom. Ajarn Chusak went to build his own network...” (Mr. Theera Chantharat, 2017).

In the period of only 20 years, education for the disabled has developed rapidly with the number of children with disabilities in the educational system of about 30,000 persons. (Ministry of Education, 1999). In the academic year 2016, there were 473,640 disabled children in the educational system. (Special Education Bureau, 2017). There is the clear Education management for the disabled persons. There are special education centers in every provinces throughout the country. There is a special education center at the district level. There are service units down to the district and village levels, with special education teachers distributed to almost every area of the country. These cannot deny the role and importance of the leadership role of the disabled persons. The strategy to push the right to education is as concrete as this. However, those who are involved in the study of the disabled persons, especially the deaf children gives the opinion on the right to education in the present,

“...It's true, but it's not perfect, in the city in the group of people with good knowledge. But in the provincial, we do not know much. I also

think that university scholarships are available. But people with disabilities don't know it. People with disabilities know that their rights are right, but the truth is that they did not receive the fund. Therefore, our rights still need to be campaigned. We need to be realistic by not aggressively combining the benefits. Then try to spread the knowledge and distribute resources. Do not spread wrongly so that the school will become shelter. In the past, people donated to the Department of Public Welfare, go to the social welfare home for disabled persons. Now they go to the Special Education Center. Instead of showing people how to study, children come to the birthday party. Will they learn? Thai people like this. So we have to deny it. I do not know how to do it. One of the parents of a cochlear implant was tired of having to negotiate with the school every year. This is private school. They said the student learn inclusively, but the teacher in charge for the student resigned and no teacher replacement the school did not accept this student to be continue. This is quite headache problem because we did not pay attention. Saying about the inclusive society, inclusive education but letting the children study in the school for only disability is not Inclusive. You have to maintain the rights. The associations of persons with disabilities focus on having an ideological society when they grow up. But when children are more inclusive, why not help from the moment? That's a good thing. If they have been together since the small ones, we have been working together for a long time and have not been separated..." (Maliwan Dharmasaeng, 2017).

There are always the challenges due to the fact that all people with disabilities are educated and have good quality of life. It also needs to be driven, especially in rural areas and in a poor family. This role is the subject

of a law that has already been promulgated by the law or the leaders of the disabled to be involved with the right to the disabled.

Although the movement in education is progressing and accomplishing well. But the fact is, there are still issues with accessing education. According to the Disability Situation Report prepared by the Department of Empowerment of People with Disabilities, as of September 30, 2017, 1.8 million disabled persons with disabilities were found at the studying age and under 60 years for 310,339 persons. For the disabled persons who were educated for 1.2 million people, they were educated at only primary level for 989,347 persons (83%), secondary level for 133,763 persons (11%) lower than bachelor degree for 27,652 persons (2.32%), bachelor degree for 15,932 persons (1.33%), and 2,370 persons (0.20%) respectively. (Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2018). Information from the Office of Special Education Administration, Office of the Basic Education Commission Ministry of Education identified that there were 149,727 disabled children (excluding the learning disabilities children) in every supervisions nationwide. However, only 3,854 were enrolled in vocational and higher education. Both the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and the Ministry of Education clearly sees that many people with disabilities lack educational opportunities. The graduates are mostly primary and secondary. If dig down into details, according to the report of the Office of Special Education Administration, the most studied children with disabilities were the students with mental disabilities of 49,299 persons followed by 28,929 physical disabilities, and 11,569 autistic children, etc. (Office of Special Education Administration, Office of the Basic Education Commission Ministry of Education, 2017).

The leaders of people with disabilities do not only push law and policy but they also have strong involvement in the practice to make it a reality. However, with the limitation that the number of disabled people leading the rights of the disabled persons, the understanding of the concerned persons and other environmental factors, access to education for the disabled is not yet completely implemented.

### **Conclusion**

Civil Politics of People with Disabilities to Make Their Education Rights a Reality reflects the driving force of the disabled persons as an active citizen realizing the needed to be educated so that they can live in the dignified society. The education has made people with disabilities aware of and not victimized by abusers. They will not be discriminated especially from government officials. Apart from pioneering the education of people with disabilities, the strategy of the disability leaders to make educated rights is to negotiate and persuade directly the policy-makers by engaging closely with government officials with devotion, sacrifice, and jointly developing structural proposals, mechanisms and services. Regarding the access to education, one more thing to mention is that the leaders of the disabled persons have access to their own political power. As a member of the founders of political parties and as a government party, the leaders with disabilities as a member of the Advisory Board Committee to the Prime Minister, can push the proposal until the Act on Education Provision for the Disabled Persons was introduced in 2008 and brought into practice. However, people with disabilities still face access issues, especially in remote

areas. It is a challenge for disabled people and people involved in driving the right to education of the disabled persons to be completely true.

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## Interview

Chusak Chanthayanon was the interviewee being interviewed by Supomtum Mongkolsawadi at Ministry of Education, Bangkok, on 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2016.

Darane Uthairattanakit was the interviewee being interviewed by Supomtum Mongkolsawadi at Mae Fah Luang University, Chiang Rai Province, on 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2017.

Maliwan Dharmasaeng was the interviewee being interviewed by Supomtum Mongkolsawadi at Buriram Rajabhat University, on 15<sup>th</sup> February, 2017.

Narong Patibatsorakit was the interviewee being interviewed by Supomtum Mongkolsawadi in TV program Kiang Ba Kiang Lai at Song Fang Khlong Restaurant, Pakkret District, Nonthaburi Province, on 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2015.

Petcharat Techwatchara, Wirat Sritulanon, Yutthana Srimunchai, and Wimon Ongamphom were the interviewees being interviewed by Supomtum Mongkolsawadi at Foundation for the Employment Promotion of the Blind on 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2017.

Phuangkaew Kittham was the interviewee being interviewed by Supomtum Mongkolsawadi at Samphan Rose Garden, on 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2017.

Prayat Phunongong was the interviewee being interviewed by Supomtum Mongkolsawadi at Ramintra School for the blinds. Bangkok, on 6<sup>th</sup> October, 2016.

Theera Chantharat was the interviewee being interviewed by Supomtum Mongkolsawadi on Line Program on 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2017.

Wiriya Namsiriphongphan was the interviewee being interviewed by Supomtum Mongkolsawadi at Universal Foundation for Persons with Disabilities, on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2016.