Thailand’s Resource politics and the public sphere: Challenges, Opportunities and Implications

Naruemon Thabchumpon
Chulalongkorn University, Thailand
Outline

• Introduction
• Thailand as a Neo-authoritarian State and the shrinking of public sphere
• Civil Society in the contested public sphere: Challenges and Opportunities
• Implications to Southeast Asia
• Conclusion
Introduction: Thai Democracy since 2014

• Thailand has retreated away from parliamentary supremacy to an authoritarian rule with shrinking of public sphere

• Experiencing the politics of exclusion, economic inequality and social discrimination in all sectors, we consider Thailand as on the path to a neo-authoritarian state
Conceptual Framework: Understanding Neo-authoritarian State

- Authoritarianism is defined as a form of government with strong central power and limited political freedoms.

- Individual freedoms are subordinate to the state and there is no legal/constitutional accountability under the authoritarian regime.

- Four characters of Thailand as an authoritarian state:
  - limited political pluralism
  - a basis for legitimacy based on emotion (regime identification)
  - minimal social mobilization
  - informally defined executive power with vague and shifting powers.
Resource politics and the shrinking of public sphere

• How does Thailand 4.0 and military projects related to resource politics and guided democracy?

• How can civil society movements respond to these challenges?

• Content analysis of military government policies and projects

• Perspectives of stake holders, especially members of civil society movements through semi-structure interviews
How does Thailand 4.0 and related projects affected resource politics and guided democracy?

• The state is taking the lead in developing the country’s economy with their trusted business allies while civil society are being co-opted as civic state.

• Public sphere is under controlled and close supervision by the state.
What will be the stage of democratization process?

- Thailand as a non-linear democratization or hybrid system = electoral authoritaian
- People are seen as the subjects, not citizen, under state benevolence for social policy
- Integration between trust networks and public politics; Insulation of inequalities from public politics and the autonomy of those with coercive means in public politics.
How can civil society movements respond to these challenges?
Civil Society – State relationship

• State: Allow public space under close supervision and regulations.
• CSO: tacit understanding, advocating and meditating on public issues, agenda and conflicts
Characteristic of CSOs

• Legal basis and regulatory framework
• Size, number, patterns and types of organizations
• Thematic foci and interests
• Capacity and resources of CSOs
• Revenues and donor relations of CSOs
• Accountability and transparency of CSOs
• Role in democracy and good governance
• ASEAN involvement
• Role in social changes
• Future development
What is to be done for us?

• The actors level with individual players and their interests and goals, alliances, policy initiatives

• The underlying structural changes (diversification, differentiation, globalization) in the political economy.

• The resulting changes in the composition of society (sociological dimension), e.g. rising and declining classes, fragmentation of milieus.

• The intermediate level of discourses which translate “what is happening” into “what needs to be done”.
The Public Sphere: inputs and outputs

The state

votes

political parties
politicians

public opinions

audiences

published opinions

media system

actors

polled opinions

audiences

general interest groups, advocates, experts, intellectuals

civil society

functional systems

special interest groups, lobbies

public opinions

Vortrag von Jürgen Habermas auf der 56. Jahrestagung der International Communication Association (ICA) in Dresden, Juni 2006
modes of communication | Arenas of political communication
---|---
institutionalized discourses and negotiation | government/administration
parliaments, courts
mediated political communication in weak publics | political system
published opinions | media system
polled opinions | lobbyists
civil society-actors
every-day talk in episodic publics | civil society
associational networks and social movements
What is to be done for us?
Thank You for your attention