

WP4 workshop, Chiang Mai 2014

New models of development and conservation in Southeast Asia

This workshop will explore how competing models and conceptions of development and environmental conservation have been contested and transformed in contemporary Southeast Asia. What are the causes and consequences of the fate – adoption, rejection, or something more ambiguous – of alternative “models” of development in Southeast Asia? What actors have successfully harnessed ideas, institutions, and mechanisms associated with new notions of development/conservation? What roles do transnational social networks – within Southeast Asia and between Southeast Asia and the wider world (especially Europe) – play in promoting/opposing particular models? What roles have Southeast Asian scientists and technocrats played in recent controversies over rival models of development and conservation? At what scales – ranging from the global to the individual – are choices about adoption and adaptation of rival models effectively made and with what implications for equality of access to intellectual resources and economic opportunities? To what extent and how have international legal and regulatory frameworks shaped dynamics experienced in Southeast Asia?

ABSTRACTS

Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem, Professor
College of Social Sciences and Philosophy
University of the Philippines, Diliman

Abstract: Contemporary contestations over models of economic development: The Philippine experience

This paper examines the nature of the contemporary contestations of models of economic development which have ensued in the Philippines during the post-martial law period (1972 to the present). These development models have generally been propagated by the country's politico-economic elites with the support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank through the state's technocrats. The country's development paradigm has generally espoused liberalization, free trade and an export-oriented development model. Because such a development model has brought about poverty, underdevelopment and socio-economic inequalities, this has been challenged by the country's social movements led by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), its military arm, the New People's Army (NPA) and its illegal united front, the National Democratic Front (NDF) or the CPP-NPA-NDF, also known as the mainstream left particularly during the martial law period (1972-1986). The post-martial law period opened other forms and strategies of contestations with the transition from authoritarianism to democracy under the auspices of a neo-liberal model of development.

The first part of the paper will therefore give a brief discussion of the nature of Philippine development and contestations during the pre-martial law period (1946 to 1971) and under an authoritarian regime (1972-1986). The second part of the paper will highlight the issues and concerns of development in the Philippines in its transition from authoritarian rule to democracy. Focus will be placed on the nature of development and contestations in the shift from an authoritarian state-led capitalist development to a market-led capitalist development. The third part on the other hand, will examine the new challenges presented in an era of globalization to development efforts in the country.

In all these sections, the paper will argue that the Philippine politico-economic elites with the support of international financial institutions have greatly determined the thrust of the country's development trajectory to the detriment of the majority. Because of this, they have been greatly challenged by the country's social movements and civil society players. Although much has been achieved by the latter in presenting an alternative development paradigm, major challenges still lie ahead in pursuing a more and just humane development model.

Tomas Larsson

Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Cambridge

Abstract: The political economy of GM agriculture in Southeast Asia

This paper explores the dynamics of political contention over the diffusion of genetically modified crops as a "model" of rural and agrarian development in Southeast Asia. The paper first surveys Southeast Asian responses to new knowledge and technologies associated with genetic engineering of crops – and their embodiment in GM seeds. It will then compare and contrast the responses of two states, the Philippines and Thailand, in greater detail, seeking to explain the divergent positions they have taken with regards to farming of GM crops. It will, in particular, highlight the role of transnational network in advocating and combating, respectively, the adoption of GM technologies by Southeast Asian peasants and farmers.

Triinu Püvi

Estonian Institute of Humanities, University of Tallinn

Abstract: The Shan Civil Society's Engagement in Myanmar's Development Process

There is a wide consensus among experienced Myanmar-watchers that the country has changed more over the past five years than at any time since the 1988 pro-democracy uprising. The 1962 coup and 1964 National Security Act ushered in the world's most durable military dictatorship, which brought the country to socialism and minimized contacts with the international community. Only constitutional change in 2008 and recently elected formally civilian government have brought about new perspectives, though judgment of such developments has remained assessor-centered and often regarded as more theoretically spoken of than in practice implemented. Nevertheless local communities are experiencing various new benefits, which enable ethnic people to coordinate their activities more openly to facilitate transition process through unofficial civil society groups and their initiatives.

Understanding of development process embodies multiple perspectives and cannot be treated universally existing in Myanmar, regardless of location, social stratification and subject. Rapid economic development in populous urban areas is evident, however developments in political sphere and social issues remain under debate. The parliamentary elections in 2015 are regarded decisive for democratization process by the government and military, oppositional forces and external actors. Period up until that time remains vague and unstable, involving constant negotiation between local and foreign actors with multiple agendas.

Various ethnic groups constitute distinct civil societies within Myanmar, which function as a fused system of ideas, agendas and relationships, however in many regards remain separated by various

cultural, sociopolitical and historical aspects. With civil society organizations becoming more numerous and consequential, it is crucial to understand the nature of the non-state public sphere in Myanmar, the strength and orientation of the organizations that populate this realm, their relationship to the state, society, and the ongoing development process.

In the presentation the focus will be on the Shan civil society and its agents, with an aim to explore their sociopolitical power and networks to facilitate development process. The objective is to add a neglected dimension to the understanding of development process and discuss the often too homogenized presentation of Myanmar's internal politics, civil societies and their sociopolitical objectives and deeds.

Sulfikar Amir
Nanyang Technological University

Abstract: Nuclear power and risk politics in Southeast Asia

After being idle for a decade, nuclear power is increasingly gaining popularity among Southeast Asian states. The unprecedented rise of oil prices in international markets following the Iraq War, the global concern of climate change, and technological breakthroughs in the safety system of nuclear reactor design are among the crucial factors that render nuclear power a viable, strategic option for Southeast Asian countries to secure their energy supply. Most of these countries, including Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam have for decades developed considerable capacity in nuclear research. But it is just recently that these countries are taking serious measures to materialize the production of nuclear power plant for energy purposes. The growing desire for nuclear power in Southeast Asia has been accompanied by a variety of public responses in this region. These responses are by and large determined by democratic conditions in the respective country. Focusing on the emergence of the nuclear regime in Southeast Asia, this presentation discusses how the production of nuclear power is being implemented in this region and highlights key factors driving Southeast Asian states towards nuclear power. The presentation will highlight the current progress of nuclear power development in the region and before examining a more specific case country, namely Indonesia, in which nuclear politics is marked by the struggle over nuclear risk between state experts and civil society groups.

Lye Tuck-Po, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer
School of Social Sciences
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang

Abstract: Cacophonies of mutual ignorance

Issue: many voices are speaking about, and on behalf of, the environment in Malaysia. Actions are taken, some unprecedented. These include: blockades and lawsuits by disaffected minorities; partnerships between indigenous communities, civil society, and opposition parties; ever larger and unsustainable development projects with “new” capital inflows and increasing moves toward free market enterprise; growing numbers of calls for transparency, benefit-sharing, etc.

Reality: despite all the above, environmental problems worsened. Issues such as climate change and nuclear production, once seemingly foreign, are now “domesticated.” Questions of representivity:

rather than conversation leading to better understanding (the traditional modernist approach), it seems to be leading to mutual ignorance, with seemingly alarming consequences for the future of the environment.

Approach: political ecology, ethnography, discourse analysis

Objective: analyse some ongoing discourses about one issue in particular, the building of big dams in Sarawak, and how people seem to be talking past each other. Actors: implementers, investors, affected communities, NGOs. Will analyse in particular the images and metaphors of the environment used in these discourses, identify sources of tension and conflict, and whether there are prospects for improvement.

Amalia Rossi, PhD in Anthropology
University of Milan-Bicocca

Abstract: Sufficiency economy and the institutionalization of eco-Buddhist approaches in northern Thailand: the case of *Phid Tong Lang Phra* Royal Project in Nan province.

The northern-Thai province of Nan, since the late Eighties, had pivotal role in experimenting grassroots eco-Buddhist approaches in Natural Resource Management (NRM) in areas damaged by massive deforestation. For this reason the province deserved the attention of American and European anthropologists who focused their researches on the experience of an activist monk, Phra Kru Pithak Nathakhun, an important follower of Buddhadasa Bikkhu. As pointed by these western social scientists, at its early stages the eco-Buddhist movement in Nan competed with the model of development established by the state-corporation alliance, but always in a creative way: by promoting the local knowledge and by embracing other activist networks, by avoiding direct clashes with authorities and companies (construction, logging and agro-business sectors) and by adopting the so-called *santhiwithi* (peaceful method), that implied the gathering of different stakeholders within innovative eco-religious ceremonies. From 2000 onward among the Buddhist *khon mueang* living in and around the small towns in the valleys, the Buddhist socio-environmental syntax gained terrain over developmentalist/westernized approaches to agriculture and nature exploitation. Simultaneously the ethnic minorities scattered on the hills, still loath in embracing the Buddhist eco-orthopraxis, have become the main target of the new moralized vision of the rural landscape.

In this paper I will argue that in Nan, as in other northern-Thai Provinces, this process of practical and ideological contamination/colonization occurring since at least thirty years from the grassroots, has been further legitimated by the spread (from above) of the Sufficiency Economy (Setakit Po Piang) philosophy of King Bhumibol, which has rapidly become a hegemonic discourse in the national and regional debate on the environment. Here I will examine the ways by which Setakit Po Piang is acting as a powerful device of institutionalization of eco-Buddhist ideologies and practices in Thailand, encouraging radical ecological, cultural and political transformations: for instance influencing new mobilities/immobilities and reshaping local ideologies of social inclusion/exclusion. Grounding my evaluations on ethnographic data gathered between 2007 and 2012 in Nan, here I will analyze the circumstances and impacts of the implementation of the *Phid Tong Lang Phra* (English translation: hiding gold behind the Buddha image) Royal Project, started in 2009 with the objective of restoring the hydro-geological balance of the upper basin of the Nan river.