

Confronting Unequal Worlds of Development: Crisis of Public Knowledge, and the Transnational Social Science Agenda in ASEAN

by

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Chumpot Pantip conference room, 4th floor, Prajadhipok Rambhai-Barni building, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

The Southeast Asia region is undergoing rapid change that is a complex and multifarious phenomenon, contingent on political-economic and environmental systems that have fostered particular – and often uneven - characteristics of development over the past 30 years. It is no understatement that the region's recent history has been dynamic, often tumultuous, and driven by powerful local, national and global forces. The governments of the region, with a deepening commitment to the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN), have been attempting to integrate with one another through economic, social and political cooperation. A multi-speed development has emerged, strongly shaped by a resource extraction economy that is closely tied to the region's rapid industrialization, urbanization and rising GDP.

The production of knowledge by a range of different actors, including government, private sector, scholars, civil society and the media shape how the region's development is perceived, (re)produced and (de)legitimized. In a region where the market economy is increasingly pervasive and embedded, the production of expert and bureaucratic knowledge has played an important role in defining and legitimizing this mode of development. As the deployment of expert knowledge for this purpose has come under scrutiny, communities affected by development projects together with civil society groups and some scholars have sought to build bodies of public knowledge that uncover the costs of development and its injustices and to name alternatives.

A wide range of approaches to public knowledge creation have emerged from within the region.

- **Community-led research**, which in Thailand, for example, is known as Thai Baan, is now widely practiced; this approach to knowledge creation seeks to redefine the definition and values of knowledge creation beyond expert knowledge, in doing so rebalancing power relations that emerge from the politics of the use of knowledge in development and to empower communities to claim their rights.
- **Epistemic networks** engaged in research and policy dialogue represent another category of public knowledge. The Mekong Program on Water, Environment and Resilience (M-POWER) network, for example, is a network of organizations and individuals working to democratize water governance in the Mekong Region.

- **Advocacy civil society networks** have also emerged in response to specific issues, such as the Save the Mekong coalition in response to proposals for dams on the Mekong River's mainstream.
- **Information sharing** via online social networks and email lists has also proliferated; for example, the LaoFAB listserv about agriculture, rural livelihoods and natural resource management in Laos now has over 3000 members.
- **Scholar researchers and graduate students** is another important category of public knowledge creation, which seeks to understand regional trends such as the expansion of rubber plantation and to create public space for critical discussion. Academic networks are emerging as platforms for public knowledge agendas, such as the International Conference on International Relations and Development (ICIRD) Knowledge Network, and the Social Inequity Reduction Network (SIRINet).
- **The Media** throughout the region maintain a critical role in investigating and disseminating public interest news and shaping the public knowledge and public policy agenda.

The social sciences have much to contribute towards understanding the region's multi-fold development challenges, and have been highly active in this public debate through offering wide-ranging interpretations and analysis. Yet, knowledge fragmentation is pervasive including geographically, between disciplines, between actors, and between the legitimacy of different forms of knowledge. There is a need to overcome this crisis of divisions of knowledge between and within the natural and social sciences and their multitude of disciplines, as well as divisions across geographic borders. For those in the social sciences engaged in building public bodies of knowledge, critical discussion over existing and potential methodologies and strategies is needed. In overcoming this crisis, the social sciences can widen and deepen the region's public sphere and create public knowledge that both furthers its legitimacy and impacts on policy making.

Despite the proliferation and diversity of approaches to public knowledge creation in Southeast Asia, a number of challenges are also faced to scaling up existing efforts. This conference, therefore, will address a number of key questions towards the status and role of public knowledge, including:

- Under what conditions have the various approaches to public knowledge creation been successful?
- How can public knowledge be meaningful for people from different social classes, particularly the marginalized one?
- How might social science better inform public knowledge on these issues? What barriers need to be overcome and how can they be done so?
- What questions should we be asking towards the resource economy in the ASEAN region that at present are not being asked?

Thursday 25th October

Theme: Multispeed Worlds of Development and Crisis of Public Knowledge

9:00 – 9:10 Conference Introduction

Prof. Surichai Wun'gao, Chulalongkorn University

9:10 – 10:20 Keynote Address "Confronting the Unequal/Multispeed Worlds of Development: Social Justice and Repositioning Public Knowledge"

Prof. Dr. Michael Burawoy, President, International Sociological Association (ISA), University of Berkeley, California

10:20 – 10:40 Coffee Break

10:50 – 12:00 Panel Discussion in Response to Keynote Address

Prof. Dato' Dr. Abdul Rahman Embong, IKMAS Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (The National University of Malaysia)

Prof. Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Chiang Mai University

Representative of SIRINet project, Chulalongkorn University

Mr. Pablo Solon, Executive Director, Focus on the Global South

12:00 – 13:00 Lunch

Theme: Public Knowledge and the Challenge of the Social Sciences in Thailand

13:00 – 14:30 Panel Discussion on “Approaches and Challenge of Social Sciences in Shaping the Public Knowledge Agenda in Thailand”

Dr. Uthai Dulyakasem, President, Association of Qualitative Researchers of Thailand

Prof. Surichai Wun'gao, Chulalongkorn University

Asst. Prof. Dr. Nalinee Tantuvanit, Thammasat University

Representative from the National Research Council of Thailand

Dr. Silaporn Buasai, Thailand Research Fund

14:30 – 14:50 Coffee break

14:50 – 16:30 Panel Discussion on “Re-Shaping the Public Knowledge Agenda in Thailand and Southern Asia: What Priorities? What Approaches?”

Prof. Wan Zawawi Ibrahim, Universiti of Brunei Darussalam

Representative from the Thai Media

Representative from Thai Civil Society

Representative from Khon Kaen University

Representative from Association of Sociology and Anthropology (SASA)

Prof. Dr. Anan Ganjanapan, Siam

Friday 26th October

Theme: Consequences of Regional Economic Integration and the Resource Economy for the Mekong Region: A Critical Reflection on the Public Knowledge Agenda

9:00 – 9:20 Introduction Opening Remarks :

Prof. Pirom Kamolratanakul, M.D., President, Chulalongkorn University

9:20 – 10:15 Keynote “Development, Public Knowledge and the Role of Civil Society in Laos and Beyond”

Mr. Sombath Somphone, Director, PADETC and recipient of Ramon Magsaysay award

10:15 – 10:30 Coffee

10:30 – 12:00 Panel Discussion: “Regional Economic Integration and the Resource Economy: Exploring the Interface of Public Knowledge and Public Policy”

Discussants

Assistant Professor Dr. Kanokwan Manorom, Ubon Ratchathani University
and Co-Chair of M-POWER Network

Representative from Laos

Representative from Vietnam

Representative from Myanmar

John Dore, Senior Water Resources Advisor, AusAID

12:00 – 13:00 Lunch

Theme: Linking Social Justice to ASEAN Regionalism: Critical Questions Towards a Regional Public Knowledge Agenda

13:00 – 14:40 Panel Discussion “Linking Social Justice to ASEAN Regionalism: Critical Questions Towards a Regional Public Knowledge Agenda”

Prof. Dato Dr. Rahman Embong, Malaysia

Mr. Sombath Somphone, Laos

Representative from Indonesia

Representative from Thailand

Prof. Wan Zawawi Ibrahim, Brunei

14:40 – 15:00 Coffee break

15:00 – 16:30 Concluding Reflections: “The State and the Future of Public Knowledge and the Transnational Social Science Agenda”

Prof. Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Chiang Mai University

Prof. Dr. Michael Burawoy (ISA)

16:30 – 16:40 Closing Concluding Remarks