# **Current political developments in Thailand**

Date: 2015 May 26 (Tue)

Venue: AC3-11-256, City University of Hong Kong (CityU)





Organized by the Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC)

## Speakers:

Dr. Charnvit Kasetsiri <a href="mailto:charnvitkasetsiri@gmail.com">charnvitkasetsiri@gmail.com</a>

Dr. Pavin Chachavalpongpun <pavin@cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp>

Dr. Prajak Kongkirati <prajakk@yahoo.com>

Dr. Federico Ferrara <fferrara@cityu.edu.hk>

Prof. Mark R. Thompson <a href="mailto:rmthompso@cityu.edu.hk">mthompso@cityu.edu.hk</a>

# Schedule

Time	Titles & Speakers	Page no.
13:30 – 14:00	Twilights in Siam and Thailand: The Two Reigns of King Rama V and Rama IX  Dr. Charnvit Kasetsiri	1-2
14:00 – 14:30	Coup, King, Crisis: What's Next for Thailand?  Dr. Pavin Chachavalpongpun	3-4
14:30 – 15:00	Transitional Coup and the Consolidation of the Military's Semi-authoritarian Regime  Dr. Prajak Kongkirati	5-6
15:00 – 15:30	Tea Break	
15:30 – 16:00	Understanding Thailand's Domestic Political Conflict: Democracy, Social Identity, and the Struggle for Recognition  Dr. Federico Ferrara	7-8
16:00 – 16:30	When 'good governance' breaks bad: Thailand and the Philippines Compared  Prof. Mark R Thompson	9-10

**Charnvit Kasetsiri** is a Professor Emeritus of Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand, born 1941; he is a prominent historian and Thai Studies scholar. After obtaining his bachelor's degree in Diplomacy with Honor from Thammasat, 1963, he pursued his 1967 M .A. in Diplomacy and World Affairs at Occidental College, Los Angeles, California, under a Rockefeller scholarship and his 1972 Ph.D. in Southeast Asian History at Cornell University.

His thesis: The Rise of Ayudhya and a History of Siam in the 14th and 15th Centuries, was published by Oxford in Asia, 1972. He served as Lecturer of History at Thammasat from 1973-2001 and founded, in 2000, the Southeast Asian Studies Program. He was the President of Thammasat University in 1995-96. He has written approximately 200 articles and a number of publications on Thai and Southeast Asian History. He has launched a 'Siam not Thailand' campaign to rename the country as to reflect the reality about its ethnics, languages and cultural identities.

His latest works deal with questions of war and peace and good ASEAN neighbor relations, especially between Thailand and Cambodia. He is a co-author, along with Pavin Chachavalpongpun (Kyoto) and Pou Sothirak (Phnom Penh), 'Preah Vihear: A Guide to the Thai-Cambodian Conflict and Its Solutions', 2013.

### Twilights in Siam and Thailand: The Two Reigns of King Rama V and Rama IX

In order to understand present-day Thailand, I am giving a comparative view of the twilight years of the two Reigns: King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) and King Bhumibol since 1946. The two are the longest in Thai history. The two are similar but different at the same time. The first was an absolute one while the second should be termed as 'new monarchy' which is neither absolute nor democratic. I would also try to give a picture of 'whither Thailand?'

**Pavin Chachavalpongpun** is Associate Professor at the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University. Earning his PhD from SOAS, he is the editor of "Good Coup" Gone Bad: Thailand's Political Developments Since Thaksin's Downfall. Pavin is also editor of Kyoto University's online journal "Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia". After the coup of May 2014, the military summoned Pavin twice for speaking out about its political intervention. He rejected the summons and subsequently, the Thai junta issued a warrant for his arrest thus forcing him to seek refuge from the Japanese government.

#### Coup, King, Crisis: What's Next for Thailand?

The military staged a coup on 22 May 2014, overthrowing the elected government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra. Outwardly, the military justified its political intervention with the classic claim that corruption was the rot of Thai politics and the coup was needed to purify the political domain. At a deeper level however, the military intervened at a time when a critical transition in Thai politics is on the horizon: the imminent royal succession. For decades, the traditional elites, of which the military is a part, have long dominated Thai politics. This changed with the arrival of the Shinawatras who set huge socio-economic changes in motion. They then took advantage to empower themselves politically, and in doing so, shook the old political structure. In today's Thailand, the power struggle between elective and non-elective institutions is now reaching its peak because the era of King Bhumibol is closing. Haunted by anxiety over a future without the charismatic King, the traditional elites are vying to manage the royal succession and maintain their power position. The speaker argues that the military government led by General Prayuth Chan-ocha is seeking to accomplish three missions: to reconstruct the electoral system that will benefit the traditional elites; to eliminate political enemies though the legal system, particularly the lèse-majesté law and other non-legal means; and to reinforce the position of the palace to ensure that the monarchy will continue to be at the centre of power in the post-Bhumibol days. It is unlikely that these undertakings will stabilise Thai politics, and as voters become alienated in the political process à la Prayuth, large-scale violent protests may be seen as unavoidable in order to restore democracy.

**Prajak Kongkirati** is lecturer at the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University. He is also editorial board of *Asian Democracy Review*. Currently, he is a Head of Southeast Asian Studies Center, East Asian Institute, Thammasat University. He has published widely in the field of Thai politics, conflict and violence, party and electoral politics, democratization, and social movements. His comments on Thai politics have been regularly appeared in many Thai-language newspapers, as well as the *Bangkok Post, the Nation, New York Times,* and other media. His book, *And Then The Movement Emerged: Cultural Politics of Thai Students and Intellectuals Movements before the October 14 Uprising* (Thammasat University Press, 2005), received the Toyota Foundation's Best Book award of 2005 in the field of social sciences in Thailand. Prajak received his MA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2008, and Ph.D. from the Department of Political and Social Change, ANU in 2013, with a dissertation titled "Bosses, Bullets and Ballots: Electoral Violence and Democracy in Thailand, 1975-2011." His study has been supported by the Australian Leadership Award (ALA) of AusAID. His latest book is *The Not-So-Bloody Election: Violence, Democracy and the Historic July 3, 2011 Election* (Kobfai, 2013).

#### Transitional Coup and the Consolidation of the Military's Semi-authoritarian Regime

Among Southeast Asian countries, Thailand is notoriously known as a land of coups. The 2014 coup is different from the past coups and thus needed to be viewed with different perspective. In an attempt to understand the May 2014 coup, ones need to take the socio-political context of the coup into account. This 12<sup>th</sup> successful coup in Thai history took place in the context of two critical transitions of Thai society— a) the succession of the monarchy, the most sacred and influential traditional political institution; b) the emergence of turbulent, uncompromised, and violent extra-parliamentary activism that led to bloody and chaotic street politics in the past ten years. These two major transitions posed significant challenges and imminent threat to the army as the self-proclaimed role as the guardian of Thai nation.

Staging the coup during this critical time, the Thai army has seized this opportunity to readjust its power with other political forces and organizations in order to turn their institution to be the ruling force of Thai polity. Regarding the state-society relations, General Prayuth and his regime has brought back the old model of "bureaucratic polity" in which the civilian bureaucracy and military dominate politics. The new constitution, which is under the drafting process, is clearly drafted to establish the semi-authoritarian system similar to the Prem-era in the 1980s, in which the party system is weak and fragmented so that the army and unelected bureaucratic elite can control and manipulate both the executive and legislative power.

**Federico Ferrara** was awarded a doctorate in political science by Harvard University in 2008. Since then, he has served as Assistant Professor at the National University of Singapore (Department of Political Science, 2008-10) and City University of Hong Kong (Department of Asian and International Studies, 2010-current), where he teaches courses on comparative politics and social science theory and methodology. His scholarly work on subjects including comparative political institutions, political parties and elections, contentious politics, and Thai politics and history has appeared in academic journals such as the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, the *International Political Science Review*, the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, and *Electoral Studies*. He is the author of the book *The Political Development of Modern Thailand*, which was published by Cambridge University Press in March 2015.

# Understanding Thailand's Domestic Political Conflict: Democracy, Social Identity, and the Struggle for Recognition

The state of crisis Thailand has lived through since 2005—itself the culmination of eight decades of political instability, over which the country has witnessed a succession of thirteen coups and nineteen constitutions—has been the subject of disparate interpretations. In an effort to remedy the existing explanations' failure to accommodate key facts about the crisis, as well as build on the literature's major achievements, Federico Ferrara argues that Thailand's domestic political conflict is best understood as a "struggle for recognition." The adoption of the "struggle for recognition" as the framework for analysis, supplemented by the analytical tools of the "social identity" approach to inter-group conflict, permits the assemblage of a richer, more coherent account of what the opposing sides want, how they came to hold different sets of political preferences and beliefs, and the role that demographic traits including class and ethnoregional background have played in the emergence of rival partisan identities. The same framework also helps shed light on the conflict's timing and apparent intractability.

Mark R Thompson is acting head of the department of Asian and International Studies and Director of the Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC) both at the City University of Hong Kong. He taught in the United Kingdom (Glasgow), Germany (Muenster, Dresden, Passau and Erlangen-Nuremberg), and Japan (Keio University) before coming to CityU. He is outgoing president of the Asian Political and International Studies Association, APISA. 2007-08 he was Lee Kong Chian Distinguished Fellow for Southeast Asian Studies at Stanford University and the National University of Singapore. He recently completed a German Research Council funded project on dynastic female leaders in Asia and has received a research grant from the Hong Kong government (together with William Case) for "Democracy and its Discontents in Southeast Asia." He is also currently working with Stephan Ortmann on a project about China and the "Singapore Model."

#### When 'good governance' breaks bad: Thailand and the Philippines Compared

Advocates of 'good governance' in Thailand and the Philippines overthrew corrupt and brutal dictatorships in the so-called 'black May events' of 1992 and in the 1986 'people power' uprising, respectively. In subsequent national elections 'angel' narrowly defeated 'devil' parties with promises of reform—constitutional, economic, and social. Yet soon self-proclaimed reformists in Thailand and the Philippines were acting illiberally, overthrowing popularly elected governments in both countries by military coups or military-backed insurrections. The elite advocates of 'good governance' had broken bad vis-à-vis democracy because populists, Thailand's Thaksin Shinawatra and the Philippines' Joseph E. Estrada - had won overwhelming electoral victories (in 2001 and 1998, respectively) by mobilizing support along class lines threatening traditional establishment elites (the 'network monarchy' in Thailand, the 'cacique democrats' in the Philippines). The discourse of 'good governance' was employed by their opponents (who, coincidentally, in both Thailand and the Philippines, often use the colour yellow to symbolize their righteous reformist cause) to discredit populists' electoral victories (attributed to vote buying), their administrations' performance (said to be riddled by corruption), and their reckless use of force (Thaksin's anti-drug campaign and violence in the south, Estrada' 'all out war' on Muslim secessionists). After taking divergent paths in the last national executive elections - the pro-Thaksin party won parliamentary elections in Thailand in 2011 while the "reformist" Benigno 'Nonoy' Aquino, III won presidential elections in the Philippines in 2010 - reformists have now also emerged 'triumphant' in Thailand after a May 2014 military coup which brought to power a military junta pledged to carrying out reforms led by 'good people'. But both the Thai putschists and the Aquino forces may soon face further electoral challenges from populists, with the junta once promising elections in 2015 and then 2016 (a promise on which it looks likely to renege). The latter year is also the one in which the Philippines will elect a new president with the populist oriented vice president, Jejomar ('Jojo') Binay currently leading in the polls to the chagrin of reformist elites despite his being involved in a major corruption scandal which his opponents are widely seen to have 'uncovered' at just before the electoral cycle begins. In Thailand and the Philippines, the struggle between political factions acting in the name of good governance and those claiming to speak for ordinary people has not been resolved, only postponed.



## **Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC)**

City University of Hong Kong 1B-307, Block 1, To Yuen Building 31 To Yuen Street Kowloon Tong

URL: http://www.cityu.edu.hk/searc

Tel: (852) 3442-6330