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Theory and Practice of Public Administration in Southeast Asia: Traditions, Directions, and Impacts

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Abstract: In Southeast Asia, it is possible to discern three distinct models of public administration at various stages of its evolution, including the colonial-bureaucratic, the postcolonial-developmental, and the current "new public management" models. These models originated mostly in western nations, and were subsequently borrowed by (or imposed on) various countries in the region. However, there were considerable gaps between these ideal-type administrative models and the actual administrative practices in Southeast Asia. There also emerged major variations among countries in the region in terms of the extent to which they conform to the original models due to their differences in colonial backgrounds and national contexts. These issues and concerns are critically examined in this article. It concludes by making some critical assessment of the major trends of public administration in the region.

Keywords: bureaucratic model, development administration, new public management, Southeast Asia, administrative theory

In the current age, there has emerged a major paradigm shift in the theory and practice of public administration worldwide. This transition in the field can be observed not only in advanced capitalist nations, but also in transitional economies and developing societies. In line with this global trend, Southeast Asian countries have embraced such a major shift in public administration largely guided by market-led principles and businesslike structures and standards. These recent promarket initiatives represent a significant move away from the earlier state-centric colonial bureaucracy and postcolonial development administration that continued until the mid-1980s in various countries in the region.

At these major stages of administrative development—including the colonial, postcolonial, and modern periods—most Southeast Asian countries

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followed in various degrees the experiences and prescriptions of advanced capitalist nations. Unlike the evolution of public administration in western nations in line with their own societal conditions, the formations of administrative systems in developing countries, including those in Southeast Asia, have often been based on the imitation or imposition of western models, although these models had to be adjusted with the indigenous local contexts of these countries.[1]

In any case, due to this relatively imitative nature of administrative practices, there hardly emerged any intellectual tradition in the field that could be claimed by Southeast Asian countries as their own. Although there existed certain precolonial administrative traditions in Southeast Asian countries, such as autocratic-paternalistic rule and kingship-based authority,[2] these were largely transformed or replaced during the colonial rule and postcolonial administrative modernization. Even in the case of Thailand, which did not experience direct colonial rule, the administrative system began to evolve in line with the "western pattern" during the 19th and 20th centuries when the major European powers established colonial control over its neighbouring countries.[3]

According to the Office of the Civil Service Commission (Thailand), the foundation of the country's modern administrative system laid down by the Civil Service Act of 1928 was highly westernized.[4] For Uthai Laohavichien, at this initial stage, public administration in Thailand "followed the 'public law' tradition, as manifested in France, Germany and other countries on the continent, as well as the 'broad-based or general education' approach of Britain."[5]

In more recent decades, the nature of education, training, and research in public administration in Southeast Asia have also been shaped by the concepts, experiences, and theories found in various western nations. Thus, for some authors, "the civil service systems in Asian countries resemble those of Europe and North America . . . although they have arrived at stages of development later than civil services in the developed world, they seem to have gone through a similar process of development . . ."[6]

However, most countries in the region did not follow the borrowed or imposed concepts and theories in absolute terms—these were often used as "formal" official goals or norms to be achieved, while the "actual" practices often reflected considerable deviations from such formal prescriptions due to the influences of diverse indigenous socio-political contexts as well as the local vested interests. Because of these formal-actual or theory-practice gaps, the extent of imitating the western administrative models vary among Southeast Asian countries.

Beyond such cross-national variations in the degree of adopting imitative models, similar to the situations in other developing regions, this reality of borrowed administrative models has major implications for the overall public governance in Southeast Asian countries, especially in terms of their external

intellectual and professional dependence as well as their challenge to reconcile such foreign models with unique local conditions. In fact, the borrowed western models as well as the externally imposed socialist structures (in some cases) created elitist administrative systems based on social isolationism, and often reinforced the power of state bureaucracy in developing societies, including those in Southeast Asia.[7] In addition, due to the overwhelming dominance of this elitist bureaucracy and its vested interest in such elitism, there has been very limited scope for administrative innovations and for the development of an indigenous model of public administration.

In examining these issues and concerns related to public administration in the developing world, Southeast Asia represents an interesting region in terms of its coverage of diverse national settings with different colonial backgrounds, socio-cultural formations, and political structures, which may have produced their respective patterns of administrative systems and administrative reforms. Although there are certain dominant theoretical perspectives that characterized various states and bureaucracies in the region, such as the so-called "bureaucratic polity," "administrative state," and "developmental state," there is a relative lack of consensus in this regard,[8] which also implies the need for further study.

In addition, Southeast Asia includes some of the most high-performing economies (often known as the Asian "economic miracles") in the world, which has created recent debates on the positive and negative role of the state and its public management in such economic achievements,[9] especially due to the recent shift from the state-centered to market-led governance in the region. The main agenda of this article, however, is to explore the trajectory of theoretical models and practical frameworks of public administration found in Southeast Asian countries, to examine the exogenous origins of such models and their cross-national variations in the region, and to briefly assess the implications of these administrative patterns and variations.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: THEORETICAL MODELS AND PRACTICAL TRENDS

As mentioned above, Southeast Asia covers countries with diverse backgrounds and characteristics. For instance, in terms of the colonial legacy, which had profound impact on the nature of public administration, Malaysia and Singapore were under the British rule; Indonesia experienced the Dutch rule; the Philippines came under the Spanish and American rule; and Cambodia and Vietnam were ruled by the French.

On the other hand, the current patterns of governance are based on the parliamentary democracy in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand (with the one-party-dominant system in Malaysia and Singapore); the presidential system in Indonesia and the Philippines; the military rule in Myanmar; the communist

model in Vietnam; and so on.[10] These countries also vary considerably in terms of their territorial and population size, ethnic and religious composition, and level of economic development. According to the *World Development Indicators 2001*, the per capita GDP reached $24,750 in Singapore; $3,370 in Malaysia; $2010 in Thailand; $1044 in the Philippines; $570 in Indonesia; $390 in Vietnam, and $260 in Cambodia.[11] There are also considerable variations among these countries in terms of their political systems as well as their governing institutions.

Despite these variations among Southeast Asian countries in terms of their major territorial, demographic, economic, political, and cultural dimensions, most of these countries adopted some common public administration models, which have been classified differently by various authors. For instance, in line with the evolution of civil services in Europe, Burns and Bowornwathana identify three major models of civil service systems in Asia, such as "servants of the emperor," "servants of the state," and "servants of the people."[12] However, these models are too reductionist to explain administrative experiences in Asia, because they focus on the interests of three internal stakeholders (the emperor, the state, and the people) without considering the fact that in many Asian countries the civil service often served the interests of external colonial rulers or international powers.[13]

In addition, these models do not convey other distinguishing criteria of administrative systems, including the extent of economic intervention, political neutrality, and developmental role. On the other hand, Cheung and Scott present three major paradigms of public sector reforms in Asia, including the "capacity building," "new public management," and "social network and civil society" paradigms.[14] Although these are more comprehensive categories, they only represent the recent developments in public administration since the 1980s, and thus, are not useful for examining the trajectory of earlier administrative traditions. In addition, these three reform initiatives represent few stages or elements of the same promarket administrative model.[15]

In the above context, this article presents three major models of public administration that evolved in most countries in the developing world at various stages in the history of their administrative systems. More specifically, many developing countries have gone through the three stages of administrative evolution, which represent the three corresponding models of public administration—including the traditional bureaucratic model practiced mostly during the colonial period, the developmental model adopted during the post-colonial phase, and the "new public management" model introduced in recent years.[16]

This section of the article examines the extent of practicing these administrative models in Southeast Asian countries as well as their major differences and similarities in this regard. The main advantages of using these three models (colonial-bureaucratic, developmental, and new public management) are that they are quite relevant to the past and present administrative experiences in

developing societies; they cover longer historical trajectory of public administration (since the colonial period); and they convey major dimensions of the administrative system, including its economic role and political context. These are used here as ideal-type administrative models from which the real-life national experiences of some Southeast Asian countries may differ, while other countries in the region may represent these models more closely.

Colonial Bureaucratic Model

The bureaucratic model of public administration emerged largely in western capitalist nations. According to Max Weber, the model is characterized by prescribed rules and procedures, official documents, hierarchy of authority, selection based on merit, and separation of private or personal life from office.[17] One of the distinct features of this model is the "rationalization" of collective action in order to achieve the "highest degree of efficiency."[18] Since western countries themselves had already experienced the emergence of this bureaucratic model in their own administrative affairs, it was quite natural that they applied this model as well in their former colonies in different parts of the world. In addition, this centralized and rigid bureaucratic model stressing maximum hierarchical loyalty, became an effective means for western colonial rulers to govern their colonies.

However, as explained later in this article, unlike the bureaucratic model that evolved endogenously in western nations, the imitative version of this model imposed exogenously on developing countries during the colonial rule often diverged from their real-life administrative practices. Thus, a distinction should be made between the bureaucratic model found in western nations, and the colonial-bureaucratic model in developing countries—the latter usually held the "formal" principles of bureaucratic model (discussed below), but showed considerable deviations in "actual" practices (discussed in the next section).

In most Southeast Asian cases, this colonial-bureaucratic model came to provide the guiding principles for modernizing state administration, which largely replaced the indigenous mode of local administration based on ascriptive norms like heredity and kinship that existed in almost all countries in the region.[19] It is pointed out that in the region, the preference for the bureaucratic model was due to its perceived strengths (e.g. rationality, efficiency, predictability, merit principle, and political neutrality) rather than its frequently criticized adverse outcomes or dysfunctions.[20] Several authors mention that many of the Southeast Asian states inherited their bureaucratic systems from the colonial powers, and they often contain some major components of Weberian bureaucracy.[21]

In the case of Malaysia, the British colonial government gradually institutionalized the bureaucratic model of administration based on the assumption

of political neutrality and hierarchical loyalty. After the country's independence in 1957, the new government introduced the British model of parliamentary democracy in the political sphere and the Weberian bureaucratic model in the administrative realm.[22] The Malaysian government ensured the autonomy of public administration and political non-interference through the creation of the Public Service Commission assigned with the task of guaranteeing the merit principle and administrative efficiency. It is suggested that the administrative elite in this country are largely guided by "routine, disciplined, pragmatic, and rational" behavior.[23] Beyond these dimensions of the colonially inherited bureaucratic model in Malaysia, there are other indicators of this model such as greater emphasis on performance standards and educational achievements.[24]

In Singapore, which was a part of Malaysia before its separation in 1965, it was the British model of public administration based on the above-mentioned bureaucratic principles, which became the dominant administrative legacy for the People's Action Party (PAP) that came to power in 1959. In general, the public bureaucracy in Singapore "is organized along West-minster lines as a career civil service subordinate and loyal to the government of the day and has been somewhat similarly rewarded for its loyalty."[25] In line with the bureaucratic model, the public service in Singapore came to put greater emphasis on discipline, efficiency, rationality, and capacity. Due to this British influence, the colonial-bureaucratic model of public administration could also be witnessed in the case of Myanmar when it was a colony.[26]

On the other hand, in the Philippines, the period of American colonial rule also witnessed the formation of the bureaucratic model of public administration, although it evolved under the American-style presidential system (based on the separation of power, the direct election of the president, and the system of checks and balances) rather than the British parliamentary system of government.[27] According to Burns and Bowornwathana, due to this American colonial background, in the Philippines, "the civil service follows Weberian ideal-type bureaucracy by adhering to the principles of political neutrality, responsiveness and loyalty to the political regime. . . ."[28]

On the other hand, some Southeast Asian countries experienced a different system of colonial administration based on strong executive power under the French rule, which include Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. In these countries, the French colonial ruler developed centralized bureaucracies headed by a cadre of French officials under whom the administrative hierarchy included the mid-level officials recruited usually from the French educated local elite, followed by the lower-level officials recruited from various ethnic groups.[29] Whatever bureaucratic model these countries inherited from the French colonial rule, became uncertain and unsustainable due to the subsequent political turmoil caused by internal power struggle, external military intervention, and the communist takeover of state power.[30]

As mentioned at the beginning, although Thailand was not colonized by any western power, the administrative system began to shift towards the western bureaucratic model, especially after adopting the Civil Service Act of 1928 that created its foundation based on the uniform standards of public service, classification of various career services, principle of political neutrality, and separation between public office and private life.[31] The evolution of this bureaucratic model in Thailand can be observed from certain major initiatives, including the adoption of competence-based recruitment in the civil service in the 1920s by King Rama VII; the standardization of public personnel system through the Civil Service Act of 1928; the creation of the Civil Service Commission through the Civil Service Act of 1933; the reinstallation of the rank-based classification of public personnel in 1936 through the amendment of the Civil Service Act of 1928; and the replacement of rank classification by position classification through the Civil Service Act of 1975.[32] In line with this overall trend, the system of training for the Thai civil service, according to Uthai Laohavichien, covered both the national public law and the British administrative tradition until the 1950s when such training moved increasingly towards the "core beliefs" found in American public administration.[33]

Postcolonial Developmental Model

Immediately after independence, most developing countries began to pursue state-led socioeconomic development, and attempted to restructure their inherited colonial bureaucracy in favor of development-oriented public administration, which became widely known as "development administration."[34] This development administration model, which was adopted in line with the developmental goals pursued by almost all newly independent states, should be distinguished from the concept of "developmental state,"[35] although they are related. While the developmental state is discussed largely in the area of comparative politics, the concept of development administration falls under public administration. However, the institutional features of development administration (e.g., development planning commissions, boards, councils, or agencies) are more likely to be found under a developmental state.[36] To a certain extent, an efficient development administration could be considered the micro-administrative component of the broader developmental state in East and Southeast Asia.[37]

In any case, this development administration model tried to move away from the rigid colonial bureaucratic model, and emphasized the adoption and implementation of state-led economic plans and programs through a new set of development-oriented public agencies and employees in order to achieve development goals like economic growth, poverty eradication, income generation, nation-building, and so on. In short, it is an administrative system that was expected to enhance socio-economic progress in postcolonial developing countries.

However, such a development administration model was not necessarily an indigenous attempt of developing countries, it rather emerged from the prescriptions for economic development suggested by international donor agencies on the one hand, and the policy choices made by the national ruling elite for rapid socioeconomic progress on the other. For instance, in the 1950s, the United Nations put special emphasis on the transformation of public administration in developing countries in order to effectively implement their development plans and programs.[38]

In line with this trend toward a state-centric model of development administration in the developing world, some countries in Southeast Asia pursued the model in order to realize their long-term development plans, programs, and projects through creating various planning agencies and development-related institutions.[39] Among these countries, Malaysia represents one of the most widely known cases in terms of seriously pursuing the development administration model, under which the public service became the main stakeholder in undertaking the country's development initiatives and carrying out the long-term economic development plans.[40] In fact, immediately after its independence in 1957, Malaysia introduced various administrative reforms to enhance the developmental role of public administration. In addition to these plans and reforms, two main indicators of emerging development administration model were the publication of the Montgomery-Esman Report (which recommended reforms in line with the main tenets of this model) and the subsequent creation of the Development Administration Unit functioning under the Prime Minister's office.[41]

Being the part of Malaysia until 1965, Singapore had similar experience of having such a model of public administration that emphasized its greater role in the city-state's national development, which, however, did not prohibit or preclude the economic role played by the private sector.[42] The government took some major initiatives, including the creation of the Political Study Centre, in order to transform the colonial mindset of top bureaucrats, eradicate any form of bureaucratic corruption, and reinforce administrative attitudes in favor of nation-building, social cohesion, and economic development. Gradually, the new breed of development-oriented top public servants began to form partnership with local and foreign investors and serve on the managing boards of various government-linked companies.[43] The government also created development-oriented organizations like the Economic Development Board (1961), Jurong Town Corporation (1968), Development Bank of Singapore (1968), etc.

In the case of Thailand, the government increasingly pursued an interventionist developmental role through the creation of many state enterprises. During the 1960s and 1970s, there emerged a stronger alliance between the state and the private sector, the political and administrative elites assumed greater power in the name of enhancing the nation's development agenda.[44] The Thai government established the so-called National Institute of Development

Administration (NIDA) in 1966 under the ministry of education in order to provide education and training in development-related public administration. In the 1970s, the new curriculum of NIDA put greater emphasis on economic development and development administration.[45]

Similarly, in Indonesia, the scope of public administration expanded considerably under the Suharto regime as the public sector became the main agent to carry out development activities related to agriculture, industry, education, health care, transport, banking, infrastructure, and so on. Although the regime was widely known for excessive control, inflexibility, patronage, and corruption,[46] its official mission was largely portrayed as developmental, especially in terms of its increasing involvement of the public sector in economic development plans and social programs.

Similar trend towards development administration can be found in the Philippines, where the economic role of the public sector expanded under the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand Marcos when the number of state enterprises increased in all major sectors. Institution like the National Economic Development Administration (the major coordinating body for development plans, policies, and agencies) was created to delineate the role of a development-oriented public administration in this country.

Even communist states such as Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia moved towards their own versions of planned development under the ideological guidance of the ruling party, although their development initiatives were disrupted by frequent violent conflicts. In addition, under communist rule, it was relatively difficult to make any distinction between the political and administrative realms in terms of their developmental roles. For instance, during the mid-1970s, the initiatives of postwar national reconstruction and development in Vietnam and Cambodia were largely based on the Soviet-model central planning and collectivized agriculture, pursued under the ruling communist party that had absolute control over the whole state apparatus.[47] In this context, as the administrative systems remained quite undeveloped or weak in terms of skills, specialization, and capacity,[48] since the mid-1980s, there have emerged various reform initiatives (often funded by donor agencies) to improve administrative institutions and procedures in order to enhance the pace of development in these countries.

Recent "New Public Management" Model

Recently there has been a paradigm shift in administrative theory and practice worldwide in terms of its greater emphasis on businesslike institutions, structures, and functions. These market-oriented administrative reforms, which began in the 1980s in developed nations like America, Australia, Britain, Canada, and New Zealand, are now encapsulated as a new model known as New Public Management or NPM.[49] According to various authors, the promarket

assumptions underlying the NPM model is quite evident in its intellectual foundations deriving from sources such as new institutional economics, public choice theory, and business management that emphasize market competition, business principles, managerial autonomy, customer choice, and performance standards.[50]

   In line with these market-centered underpinnings of the NPM model, according to its main proponents, the major tenets of the model include the following:

(a) reduction of public sector's direct role, redefinition of its role as a *facilitator*, and involvement of private sector in service delivery through means such as *downsizing, outsourcing, and partnership*;

(b) restructuring of the public sector for more *internal competition* among its various units by introducing *performance contracts* and market-type mechanisms like the competitive pricing and *market-testing* of various goods;

(c) expansion of management's operational *autonomy and flexibility* in financial and personnel matters (as found in business management) through the so-called *agencification* or conversion of public organizations into various businesslike *autonomous agencies*;

(d) assessment of public sector performance by evaluating its *final outcomes or results* (rather than inputs or procedures) based on the preset *performance targets or standards*; and

(e) reinforcement of *customer-orientation* by providing greater *customer choice* and ensuring better service quality based on *user charges*.[51]

   Beyond these major common features of NPM, there are controversies regarding whether other market-driven initiatives like the structural adjustment program and the related policies such as privatization and deregulation, should be counted as parts of this model.[52] However, the market-led structural adjustment program has been counted as a part of NPM by several studies on Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean.[53] Similarly, the policy of privatization is placed under the rubric of NPM by some other studies on both developed and developing nations.[54] Even for the developed market economies, if the major strategies of NPM are to downsize the public sector, involve the private sector in service delivery, and devolve economic activities to the market forces,[55] then policies like privatization and deregulation should become its logical options. Moreover, for the developing world, where the market forces are less developed, these promarket policies are essential to create a conducive policy environment to implement the abovementioned NPM-style reforms in public management roles, structures, and functions. One of the most well known proponents of NPM, Christopher Hood, himself recognizes that the rise of NPM was linked with "privatization and quasi-privatization."[56]

   However, to avoid controversy, this article treats various promarket policies (e.g., privatization, deregulation, and liberalization) as a conducive policy

condition for introducing the above tenets or components of market-led NPM model in a developing region such as Southeast Asia.

The adoption of various ingredients of the NPM model in developing countries has already been recognized by some authors,[57] and in the case of Asia, the primary reasons for adopting the model has been its "stress on private sector practices in government and managerial efficiencies."[58] In particular, most countries in Southeast Asia have embraced the NPM model in various degrees with a view to re-engineer the public sector in order to enhance its efficiency, competition, transparency, customer-orientation, and value-for-money.[59] In terms of the above explanations of NPM, although some of these countries may not have introduced the basic tenets of this model to any significant extent, they have at least introduced certain promarket policies (e.g., deregulation, privatization, and liberalization), and thus, created a favorable market-driven policy atmosphere for further public sector reforms based on the NPM principles.

For instance, in Malaysia, the policy atmosphere has changed in favor of NPM since 1983 when the government adopted the Privatization Masterplan—encompassing sectors such as telecommunications, airlines, railway, electricity, port, and postal services—to reduce public spending, relieve the state's fiscal burden, and strengthen market forces.[60] This divestment policy is complemented by the liberalization of trade and foreign investment. In terms of the direct NPM features, the government has undertaken measures to streamline or downsize the public sector by reducing the civil service growth rate. By 1994, most public agencies (220 out of 274 agencies) "submitted restructuring proposals that resulted in the abolition of 9253 posts."[61]

There is also a change in the role of public sector from being a leading agent of socioeconomic activities to an enabler or facilitator of service delivery carried out by the private sector. In this regard, the government has also restructured the public service based on greater managerial autonomy in financial and personnel matters, concern for service quality and customer satisfaction, and emphasis on outputs rather than inputs.[62] In addition, "public sector employees are evaluated on specific outcome-based performance targets agreed upon by appraiser and appraisee at the start of a particular year. Mid-term reviews of performance plans allow for changes in performance targets."[63]

In the Philippines, according to Hayllar, the NPM-style reform began with the Economic Recovery Program launched by the Aquino government (1987–1989) under the influence of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), especially in terms of reducing state intervention in the nation's economic activities.[64] More specifically, the government planned to reduce public sector employment by 5–10 percent, redefine its role as a facilitator rather a leader in economic activities, and redesign the public service in favor of greater operational autonomy for public managers.[65]

It has also moved towards businesslike structures, techniques, and performance standards. These tenets of NPM found in the reform initiatives of the

Philippines, however, were complemented by a more promarket policy environment. For instance, since the mid-1980s, the government has deregulated market forces, liberalized foreign investment and foreign ownership, and privatized most of its large enterprises.

Similarly, in Indonesia, the government took initiatives to decentralize the administrative system, privatize public assets, and deregulate state controls. These initiatives have certain favorable policy implications for adopting the NPM model in terms of restructuring public agencies into businesslike entities, adopting market-based performance standards, and so on.[66] In this regard, although progress in Indonesia may appear to be relatively slow, some of the recent reform initiatives have increasingly moved toward some NPM principles. For instance, there is a growing emphasis in Indonesia's public sector on devolving service delivery to the private sector, converting public hospitals and universities into corporate-type organizations, and decentralizing the budget to operational units.[67]

In the case of Singapore, it has been pointed out that the basic features of NPM are inherent in its major public service initiative known as the Public Service for the 21st Century or PS21 that emphasizes various businesslike management principles, standards, and attitudes. In addition to the government's attempts to ensure minimal growth of public sector employment, it has introduced the strategy of outsourcing, reduced the interventionist role of public agencies, and transformed the administrative system into a catalytic institution in terms of its role to enable the private sector to play the leading economic role.[68] In line with the NPM model's organizational structures and financial arrangements followed in New Zealand, the Singapore government has transformed various departments, agencies, and authorities into "autonomous agencies" assigned with certain managerial autonomy; and adopted the so-called Block Vote Budget Allocation System and the Budgeting for Results that provide financial flexibility to public managers and stress performance-based indicators and outcomes.[69]

In Thailand, the recent public service reforms—especially those adopted under the new Civil Service Act (1992), the Public Sector Management Reform Plan (1999), and Administrative Renewal Project (1999)—are identified as NPM by the country's Office of the Civil Service Commission.[70] According to Martin Painter, the recent reform initiatives—including *Public Sector Reform Master Plan* (1997), *Public Sector Management Reform Plan* (1999), *Royal Decree on Good Governance* (2002), and *Strategic Plan for Thai Public Sector Development* (2003)—"bore the unmistakable stamp" of NPM in Thailand.[71]

It is mentioned by other authors that under the influence of various global and local forces, "Thailand has chosen to follow the New Public Management model that emphasizes decentralization, delegation of authority and responsibility to agency heads and top-level managers."[72] In particular, the Thai government has taken steps to downsize public employment, abolish unnecessary

state agencies, contract out the delivery of services, replace the role of public sector by private enterprises, establish result-oriented administration, reinforce customer-orientedness, and redefine the role of the public sector as a facilitator or enabler rather than controller of economic activities.[73]

Under the above reform initiatives, the government has introduced the "performance based" budgeting system, which requires government departments or agencies to define program objectives, specify outputs and outcomes, and set performance targets in order to receive budget allocations.[74] They are to be held accountable for these agreed outcomes and targets rather than the inputs and procedures. In addition, the government has adopted the so-called "Result-Based Management" (RBM) based on the principles of managerial autonomy in finance and personnel as well as performance indicators or results. Under this RBM, public agencies can be converted into Autonomous Public Organizations (internationally known as Executive Agencies), and since 1999, about 50 such public agencies have already adopted the RBM principles.[75]

Martin Painter mentions that the Thai government has created the Budget Commission that signs the so-called "public service agreements" with ministers regarding their service delivery targets, as well as the "service delivery agreements" with departmental heads regarding their delivery of required outputs, and these two sets of agreements are used to assess respectively the performance of ministers and the accountability of departmental heads.[76] According to Painter, this trend towards result-based budgets, service targets, and performance agreements represents the "echoes of NPM."

Even in communist Vietnam, there have emerged some substantive changes since the launch of *Doi Moi* (renovation) in 1986, especially in terms of the country's transition from state control to market competition through privatization, deregulation, foreign investment, and subsidy reduction,[77] which has created a supportive policy context for adopting the basic tenets of NPM in the future. Although progress has been slower than other countries discussed above, the Vietnamese government has adopted measures such as contracting out certain services (e.g., garbage collection, infrastructure development), reducing state subsidies, and downsizing the public sector.[78] In the process of streamlining the public sector, the number of ministries and agencies has been reduced from 76 to 48 during 1986–2001, the public sector employment was cut by 8.5 percent by 2001, and the ownership rights of the private sector was constitutionally recognized in 1992, while assigning the public sector with a supporting role in favour of market forces.[79]

In Cambodia, the government has pursued its transition to a market economy through privatization and deregulation, reduced the number of civil servants through its mandatory retirement scheme, and thus created a market-based policy context for the businesslike NPM model to emerge, especially through the National Programme for Administrative Reform during the 1990s.[80] More recently, the Cambodian government has adopted unified

budgeting process, market-based accounting, and results-based management system.[81] Similarly, in Laos, the policy context has shifted towards privatization, deregulation, foreign investment, and trade liberalization since the launch of a promarket initiative known as the New Economic Mechanism in 1986.[82]

There are also some changes in the public sector, including a drastic reduction in the number of state enterprises, increase in managerial flexibility, greater role played by the private sector, and the overall renewal of public management based on certain market principles.[83] Briefly, although Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos may not have directly embraced the mainstream features of NPM, their recent market-oriented reforms have at least created a favorable policy context for this administrative model.

DIVERGENCE AND CONVERGENCE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE REGION

In Southeast Asia, among the three major models of public administration discussed above, the bureaucratic and developmental models were largely based on the dominant socioeconomic role played by the state, whereas the current NPM model prescribes the diminishing presence of the public sector, the increasing role of the private sector, and the transformation of the public service based on businesslike structures and standards.

In this section, the article explains that although Southeast Asian countries have borrowed these administrative models, their actual administrative practices show considerable deviations from these ideal-type models, representing certain theory-practice gaps. In addition, there are cross-national variations among these countries in terms of the extent to which they have followed or deviated from the original theoretical models, which makes it difficult to draw any grand generalization of the region's public administration systems.

Theory-Practice Gaps

First, with regard to the colonial bureaucratic model, although most Southeast Asian countries (except Thailand) were under the colonial rule of western countries experienced in bureaucratic administration, in these colonies, the western administrators themselves played the dual roles of politics and administration, which often compromised the principle of political neutrality and legal-rational character of the bureaucratic model. This deviation from bureaucratic neutrality was also caused by the remnants of the paternalistic and kingship-based rulership that existed in Southeast Asia during the precolonial period.[84]

In addition, there were considerable variations among the British, Dutch, Spanish, and French modes of colonial rule in terms of their compliance with this model of public administration. With regard to the politically neutral merit principle, the British colonial rule in Malaysia and Singapore appeared to be more in line with the bureaucratic model than the Dutch rule in Indonesia, the Spanish rule in the Philippines, and the French rule in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In other words, it is not only Southeast Asian colonies that deviated from the bureaucratic model, the colonial rulers themselves also diverged from the model in various degrees.

After the end of colonial rule, although some countries in Southeast Asia adopted the western parliamentary or presidential form of politics and inherited the bureaucratic model of public administration, there emerged considerable deviations from this western politico-administrative framework due to various events and factors that developed after their independence. Similar to the common challenges to public administration faced by many other developing countries, including one-party dominance, military rule, and corruption, some Southeast Asian countries could not maintain the bureaucratic principles of political impartiality, equal opportunity, and public accountability.[85]

For instance, although the Philippines experienced a relatively free and open political culture under the American colonial rule, during the post-independence period, it experienced the authoritarian rule of Marcos under which the democratic model of constitutional rule, bureaucratic neutrality, and public accountability came under serious challenge.[86] After independence, similar undemocratic political atmosphere emerged under the military rule in Indonesia and Myanmar, under the monarchy in Brunei, and under the communist regimes in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.[87] Some of these countries suffered from political instability, violent political conflict, and frequent changes in the ruling party.

In the case of Thailand, for example, there were 50 different governments during 1932–1992.[88] In this context of such authoritarian atmosphere, political conflicts, and political instability in these countries, the neutrality, meritocracy, and accountability of public administration (expected under the bureaucratic model) could not be guaranteed. Although the Thai administrative system officially held bureaucratic principles like structural hierarchy, rational decision-making, political neutrality, and so on, in reality, the system functioned as a bureaucratic polity that diverged considerably from such principles of Weberian bureaucracy. The term "bureaucratic polity" was originally coined by Fred W. Riggs in his study on Thailand, and it implied a system of government characterized by military rule, political cooptation of top civil servants, competition among bureaucratic cliques, politicization of civil service, and patronage and corruption.[89] These prevalent features of Thailand's bureaucratic polity showed considerable deviations from the above principles of a rational bureaucracy.

In the case of multi-ethnic Malaysia, following the end of the British colonial rule, although the country experienced considerable political stability, the distinct racial or ethnic identities of major political parties became reinforced to the extent that the neutrality of bureaucracy and its accountability to all ethnic groups became questionable.[90] In the case of Singapore, the post-independence administrative system appeared to be closest to the bureaucratic model in terms of the country's stable political atmosphere based on elected government and its strong emphasis on neutrality and meritocracy in public administration.

However, the Singapore case still needs careful scrutiny due to its political system characterized by the so-called one-party-dominant system under which the ruling party has been in power since 1959. It requires careful study because, according to Jose Oscar Monteiro, in many developing countries, the public bureaucracy under a one-party-dominant system tends to develop certain inclinations toward party affiliation and political loyalty that may weaken the principle of its neutrality.[91]

Second, in Southeast Asian countries, although public administration gradually moved away from the bureaucratic model and adopted some features of the development administration model, there were some major gaps between the main tenets of this latter model (e.g., development orientation, devolution of power, people's participation, and resource mobilization) and the actual administrative practices of these countries. For instance, in cases like Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, the political situation became so violent and unstable that the need for stability and order became more crucial than any concern for economic development.

At the later stage, although there emerged certain development agenda under the central planning of the communist state in these countries, there was little scope for people's participation under this political system in which the party membership and personal contacts of public servants received more priority than their merit and competence for economic development.[92] In such cases, the developmental capacity of public administration could not be realized due to the lack of human skills, resources, legal systems, and so on.[93]

Similar lack of decentralization and people's participation could be observed under the autocratic rule of Marcos in the Philippines where the administrative system increasingly became based on patron-client relationship.[94] In Indonesia and Thailand, as the military personnel came to occupy top administrative positions purely based on their coercive power rather than their knowledge and skills in development, the basic tenets and conditions of development administration were compromised,[95] although the regimes pursued an official agenda dominated by the rhetoric of national development. It was found that in both cases, the continuation of rigid hierarchy, business interests, and personal connections in the civil service[96] became an obstacle to the reorientation of bureaucracy towards development. In Myanmar, under the military rule, the administrative system became highly politicized, especially

due to the regime's overwhelming influence on the recruitment system in civil bureaucracy,[97] which represented a challenge to the emergence of a competent development administration.

Malaysia and Singapore are the two Southeast Asian cases that did not experience any military rule or undemocratic dictatorial regime, and both cases consistently engaged the administrative systems in nation-building and development activities by creating various government agencies, planning institutions, and state enterprises. Although the Singapore government has often co-opted military personnel into the ruling party, all members of the parliament and cabinet are elected.

In Malaysia, although the political neutrality of public administration may have been affected by its ethnicized political system and economic policy,[98] it has been able to maintain the basic norms of democratic governance that is vital for the success of development administration. However, in the early years of post-independence period, both countries faced some challenges to transform the inherited colonial bureaucracy into a development-oriented administrative system.

Similar to the continuing legacy of colonial administrative elitism in other developing nations,[99] in Malaysia and Singapore, there is still much scope for improvement, especially in the area of people's access and participation ensured through decentralized representative institutions at the local level governance which constitutes a basic component of the development administration model.

Third, with regard to the NPM model, there are controversies regarding whether it has become a global model and regarding the extent to which this model has been adopted in various countries.[100] In Southeast Asian countries, it is possible to detect certain deviations from the basic tenets of NPM in their recent public sector reforms. For some of these countries, it has not been easy to drastically change the past state-centric structures (including the legacies of colonial bureaucracy, postcolonial military rule, and communist apparatus), and embrace a market-oriented administrative model like NPM. In particular, the NPM model faces greater challenges in countries like Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In Myanmar, for instance, there is still the dominance of the state over major economic sectors, prevalence of "vast planning machinery," monopoly of centralized bureaucracy, and continuation of administrative corruption, which considerably hinder market-oriented reforms in the public sector.[101]

In Vietnam, the market-led reforms have not yet created an effective market-friendly environment, the administrative structure still needs substantive changes in favor of business principles, and many aspects of administrative agencies still remain ineffective. According to some authors, Vietnam's contemporary administrative reforms are largely for making a transition from the highly politicized bureaucracy to a more systematic administrative system based on the rule of law, rational politics-administration relationship, well-trained

civil service, and effective regulatory framework[102] before it can extensively adopt an NPM-style public administration. As mentioned by Jan-Erik Hallandvik, "we can point out the mixed public/private system in Vietnam. This system has superficially some points of resemblance to the reforms in New Public Management, but is more tied up with the need of public organisations to earn money—than plan for efficiency."[103]

In addition, the implementation of reform initiatives is often affected by the continuing patronage system as well as the difficulty in reconciling socialist ideology with market-led economy.[104] Similarly, in the case of Cambodia, the administrative structure and the service delivery system remain quite centralized and the legal framework is still not very conducive to private sector activities. In Laos, the recent administrative reforms have not been very effective to improve public sector management, and there is continuing politicization of the civil service, and the ruling party still views the role of the private sector with suspicion.[105]

In other more market-friendly Southeast Asian countries, the NPM model has not been embraced without skepticism, especially due to its challenge to existing bureaucratic authority as well as the perception that the model is less appropriate for the local contexts of these countries.[106] In the Philippines, the government's attempts to re-engineer public bureaucracy in line with the NPM model did not receive strong endorsement from the skeptical legislators who were afraid of losing political power, and the model remained relatively ineffective in the country's administrative atmosphere dominated by the patron-client relations.[107] In the case of Indonesia, the politicization of the civil service has not ended and the administrative system remains vulnerable to vested political interests,[108] which is not conducive to the creation of public administration based on the NPM principles.

In Thailand, most of the civil servants are not familiar with the recent NPM-style reforms; top officials are opposed to such reforms due to the fear of losing bureaucratic power; and the creation of a "performance culture" has been disrupted by the prevalence of political patronage and corrupt administrative behavior.[109] It has been pointed out by some experts that the current "NPM fever" in Thailand has often been guided by the political motive of the prime minister to reinforce his control over the administrative apparatus.[110] Instead of the so-called autonomization of state agencies, the creation of Autonomous Public Organizations has allegedly led to greater political control over these agencies, which is illustrated as the "prime ministerialization" of the state.[111] The overall result of such NPM-style reforms in Thailand is a hybrid model of public administration, reflecting the French model that is less concerned for the NPM's emphasis on a "separation between politicians and bureaucrats" found in other western countries.[112]

Even in the case of Malaysia, where the reform initiatives resembling the NPM model have been more intensive and comprehensive, there still prevails the traditional top-down bureaucratic structure and behavior, and these reform

efforts were constrained by the country's unique political system and culture dominated by ethnic identity.[113] Similarly, in Singapore, although there are considerable NPM-style reforms undertaken recently by the government, the effectiveness of such reforms remains limited due to the state's continuing control over major economic sectors and corporations through various government-linked companies. In this regard, Martin Painter mentions that in Singapore, "corporatization and privatization have been pursued, but not to the extent of undermining control of these corporations by the political and bureaucratic elites."[114]

Cross-National Variations

It is discussed above that although Southeast Asian countries adopted three major models of public administration that largely originated from or pre-scribed by western nations, the actual administrative practices differed consid-erably from the original models. However, Southeast Asian countries also differ from each other in terms of how far they conformed to the original models. For instance, in terms of adopting the basic legal-rational principles of bureau-cratic model, while Malaysia and Singapore could be considered closest to the model; cases like Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were far removed from the model; and Thailand, Indonesia, and Philippines may fall inbetween the two poles. Although the last three countries (Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philip-pines) were guided by bureaucratic power, in terms of the legal-rational norms of the bureaucratic model, they would rank lower than Malaysia and Singapore.

According to Erik Martinez Kuhonta, public administration in Singapore became closest to the Weberian bureaucratic model; in Malaysia, it was affected by ethnic considerations; in Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, the system was often influenced by patrimonial connections; and in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, it was heavily influenced by the command structure of the ruling party.[115]

With regard to the development administration model, although Singapore had the advantage of high administrative competence, it could be ranked average in comparison with some Southeast Asian countries in terms of the extent of decentralization and people's participation in administrative decisions. On the other hand, the Philippines might suffer from the lack of administrative capacity, but it could rank higher than some other cases with regard to the participation of grassroots institutions in development programs. In Southeast Asia, Malaysia might qualify as a country case that became clos-est to the development administration model due to its reasonably competent administrative system as well as its avenue for community-level participation.

In terms of the degree of conformity with the NPM model, there are also some significant cross-national differences in Southeast Asia. In Singapore,

the government had already introduced some components of the NPM model (e.g., the use of market-based criteria in the public sector) before its widespread adoption in other countries of the region. More recently, it has introduced some significant reforms resembling the main tenets of NPM, and it is concluded by one author that the NPM model has clearly taken roots in the administrative system of Singapore.[116]

Malaysia also represents one of the most enthusiastic cases holding strong support for the NPM model. In terms of national ranking in the application of the NPM principles, next to Singapore and Malaysia could be the Philippines and Thailand as their governments have recently shown clear support to this model; whereas the command economies like Vietnam and Laos would rank lower than other cases, and they need to do more before they can be effective in practicing such a market-driven administrative model like NPM.[117]

The above cross-national variations in public administration among Southeast Asian countries are not totally unique; such variations can also be found among western nations. For example, there are certain differences among developed nations in terms of the extent to which they have pursued the major tenets of NPM in their recent public sector reforms.[118] However, these divergences in public management among western countries are not as extreme as those among Southeast Asian countries. It is hard to imagine that the administrative systems in western capitalist nations would deviate from each other as drastically as the differences found between the two major groups of countries in Southeast Asia—between Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines on the one hand, and Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar on the other. For some scholars, these greater variations in public administration among Southeast Asian countries are allegedly caused by significant differences in their colonial backgrounds, ideological beliefs, political institutions, cultural traditions, and so on.[119]

IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

It has been explained in this article that in the evolution of public administration in Southeast Asia, it is possible to identify three general models, including the colonial bureaucratic model, the postcolonial developmental model, and the contemporary NPM model. In general, these administrative models originated in western developed nations, and were subsequently borrowed in various degrees by Southeast Asian states. In adopting such models of public administration, there were certain external and internal forces or vested interests. For instance, the colonial bureaucratic model was largely imposed on various countries in the region (except Thailand) by the colonial rulers to maintain law and order and expand their colonial power and control.[120]

Although the model of development administration aimed to enhance national development and succeeded to produce some favorable socioeconomic

outcomes in some cases, it often served the agenda of foreign aid agencies,[121] expanded the interventionist role of the state, and reinforced the power of the political and administrative elites. With regard to the adoption of the NPM model, there has been external pressure and influence on top policy makers in Southeast Asia to introduce substantive reforms in line with the model's basic principles and standards. For instance, the World Bank and the IMF extended massive loans and financial assistance to Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines based on the conditions that the governments of these countries would intro-duce promarket policies and administrative reforms resembling the NPM model.[122]

Despite these initiatives of external and internal actors to impose or bor-row the above administrative models, as discussed above, there have been considerable gaps between the main tenets of these models and the actual administrative practices pursued by various countries in Southeast Asia. There is no doubt that such theory-practice gaps also exist in western developed nations, but it is likely to be much less than the situation in the developing regions like Southeast Asia.

Compared to most western countries, state institutions in Asia are much less institutionalized and the civil service systems are less neutral and more vulnerable to political influence.[123] As mentioned earlier, one main reason for such greater theory-practice gaps in public administration in Southeast Asia and other developing regions is that the attempted administrative models hardly emerged from their indigenous local contexts. Even the development administration model, which was considered more relevant to developing countries, was largely a model related to western development assistance and a construct of western scholars like Fred W. Riggs, Irving Swerdlow, Kempe R. Hope, and others.[124] About the adoption of the NPM model in Southeast Asia, it is suggested that the model is incompatible with the region's politico-economic reality characterized by the dominance of state institutions and the dependent nature of the market.[125] Thus, although most Southeast Asian countries have adopted in various degrees some basic components of the three administrative models discussed in this article, most of these countries deviate from such models in their actual administrative practices, especially due to the exogenous origins of these models.

What are the implications of using these exogenous administrative models? In general, the application of the colonial bureaucratic model allegedly led to the degradation of politics, expansion of bureaucratic power, erosion of civil society, and creation of an overdeveloped bureaucracy (compared to other realms of society) in many developing countries.[126] On the other hand, although the development administration model tended to overcome the limits of colonial administration and enhance nation-building and socio-economic progress, it demonstrated only limited success in Southeast Asia.

During the period of development administration between the 1950s and the 1970s, while Malaysia and Singapore did relatively well, there emerged

dictatorial regimes in Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, and the Philippines, and most of these regimes received considerable foreign assistance in the name of implementing development plans and programs. In many developing countries, there were certain adverse outcomes of the development administration model, including the further expansion of administrative power, proliferation of state intervention, and worsening situation of external debt and dependence.[127]

The adoption of the current NPM model also has potential negative implications for some Southeast Asian countries. As the model prescribes the streamlining of the public sector, reduction in state subsidies, and service delivery based on the user's fee, it is likely to have adverse impacts on low-income families, especially in poorer countries in the region. Between 1996 and 1998, the unemployment situation worsened in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines.[128] There have been welfare cuts in education and health care in some Southeast Asian countries, although the situation of poverty has not improved in any significant manner in these countries after the financial crisis.[129] In fact, some critics blame the NPM-style reforms as one of the main causes of this financial crisis, because such promarket reforms might have diminished the state's financial and regulatory capacity and increased the vulnerability of the region's national economies to external economic powers and vested interests.[130]

In the above circumstances, the top policy makers of Southeast Asian countries need to reexamine their existing ways of articulating administrative principles and practices based on the models that largely originated in different (western) contexts. They need to assess their own social contexts, consider their citizens' expectations, and thereby establish more realistic and need-based administrative models in order to overcome the theory-practice gaps and adverse consequences caused by such borrowed models of public administration. However, they can still learn from western administrative models, critically scrutinize their potential benefits and adverse outcomes, and selectively use only those components of such models that are relevant to their own societal contexts and people's needs.

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