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WATER RESOURCE ALLOCATION ISSUES IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

The allocation of scarce resources has been problematic throughout modern history, particularly in the case of a resource as critical to human existence as water. Grounds for allocation include considerations of ideology, politics and equity. In conditions of increasing uncertainty regarding the supply of water resulting from global climate change and its effects, as well as continuously intensifying demand for water from industrial, agricultural, tourist and residential interests, the means and effectiveness of allocation decisions has become one of the most important decisions that governmental agencies are required to make. This issue is examined through the case study of Thailand, which is a country in a sub-tropical region receiving considerable rainfall during the monsoon season but with enormously elevated levels of demand for water in the contemporary period as the result of industrialization, population increase and the creation of a mass tourism industry. Historically, water allocation has taken place as the result of political contestation between government agencies and the provincial and national levels and private sector organizations and individuals. However, in a changing political and natural environment, new directions and approaches must be explored. This paper introduces new approaches to the issue of water allocation and highlights the changes in thinking required for future decision-making under conditions of greater unpredictability of supply and intensification of demand.

Keywords: *industry; resource allocation; scarce resources; tourism; water*

INTRODUCTION

Natural resources are the bases for livelihoods which have been classified in different ways: some are essential for our survival, while most are used for satisfying various needs. Natural resources include land, animals (flora and fauna), energy, the atmosphere and water. Natural resources management deals with managing the way in which people and natural resources interact with each other. It brings together water management, land use planning, biodiversity conservation and the future sustainability

of agriculture, mining, tourism, fisheries and forestry in order to maintain people's health, as well as economic productivity. However, in any classification, the use of natural resources creates both positive and negative effect not only for the resources themselves but also for society as a whole – this is because attempts to control resources and their distribution seem inevitably to rely on top-down command and control systems which provoke all kinds of unintended consequences in dealing with very complex and interlocking ecological systems (Holling and Meffe, 1996). Understanding the extent and interaction of the various natural resources will be, therefore, important in determining how to manage them so as to reach sustainable goals for social and economic harmonization and for future generations.

Water is one of the most important of the natural resources. It is essential for household water supply and community health, agriculture, industry, electrical supply system, transportation, aquaculture, recreation and ecosystem survival. Owing to the existing often unprofessional management regime, fast growing socio-cultural and economic activities, as well as climate change, the water allocation system in Thailand has been inefficient and is possibly unsustainable. This paper aims to examine the nature of the water management system in Thailand with a view to understanding how water resource allocations are made and how they might be better made in the future. In doing so, it is necessary to consider the issue of definition of natural resources and the epistemological issues that arise from such a definition. The paper will then explore the impact of different political and ideological issues with respect to resource allocation and then provide a conclusion drawing together the different issues raised.

DEFINITION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

When people speak about natural resources – air, water, underground minerals – they tend to conflate those resources that are owned by the state (i.e. a government or monarch), those resources owned and defended by a group of these resource-users (Schlager & Ostrom, 1992). For most purposes, of course, there is no need to distinguish between these different governance situations since they all appear to be a form of commons. That is, one of a set of newly land-based space-resources that people expect to be available for their non-destructive and non-exclusive use (Holder & Flessas, 2008). This is a form of usage that tends to persist in the pre- and early-capitalist phases of development but to be eliminated as more advanced forms of capitalism occupy the

space that once was a form of commons. As Santasombat described it, "Since the early 1960s, the growth-oriented development paradigm has served as a hegemonic discourse in which Thai rural populations have been objectified, ordered, and controlled. This development paradigm later spread to other countries in the Mekong Basin, especially Laos and Cambodia, at an increasing pace (Santasombat, 2011:35)." Natural resources have been drawn inextricably into, that is, a political-economic framework of meaning and, as a result, have adopted multiple meanings and values to different constituencies. As a result, epistemological issues are raised since people have different expectations for how such resources are to be managed. The paper now discusses this issue.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISSUES

One of the principal issues in the study of water management is epistemological; that is, there are several perspectives concerning the meaning of good or effective management and these perspectives can conflict with each other. The principal perspectives involved are:

- Scientific or hydrological: this perspective sees water management as an integrated and interlocking set of issues including the weather systems, the nature of river basins and oceans, physical processes of sedimentation and, increasingly, the impact of global climate change. The purpose of this approach is to understand and document the water systems and provide evident for use I the development and impact of human societies;
- Development studies: this perspective aims to find the ways in which existing human settlements can be provided with the water services they need to provide a decent quality of life with a view to incorporating equity and gender issues. This approach sometimes includes an anthropological approach that places emphasis on locally specific conditions and emphasizes the importance of maintaining continuity with the solutions employed by communities in the past;
- Sustainable development: this approach focuses on the long-term issues related to water management and the need to conserve supplies in the future under conditions of increasing uncertainty. This perspective tends to be on the large-scale and utilitarian in nature in that it aims to maximize the availability of water to the largest number of people for the greatest possible length of time;
- Political: the political approach to water management is aimed primarily at providing effective water services to important constituents. The nature of political water services management

is subject to differing ideologies and to the form of the political settlement. The ideological component can vary from the left to the right: from the perspective of water, ideology affects the nature and number of important constituents. A government of the left would aim to provide water services to all members of the state with low or zero cost; a government of the right would prioritise certain elements in society above others in allocating water services and, increasingly, focuses on the use of market mechanisms to determine how the available stock of water is allocated. The type and form of government also has an impact: governments in representative democracies has a strong incentive to prioritise their own voters as a means of being re-elected and their decisions about the provision of water services and infrastructure tend to be synchronized with the electoral cycle. Non-democratic governments have less need to appease constituents whose only power would come from the vote and are often able to think and plan in the long-term, and at a larger scale. All forms of government are subject to lobbying by special interest groups and to the role of cronies or embedded patronage networks;

- Bureaucratic: the bureaucratic perspective represents the intersection of the scientific and the political worlds. Bureaucrats are ostensibly given their jobs so as implement the policies of the government of the day and to inform politicians of known negative impacts of their policies or any other obstacle to the implementation. However, there are various states in which the bureaucracy has reserved the right for itself to operate policies from a scientific or technocratic perspective that are considered to be superior to those of politicians, whose motives or competency might be viewed with suspicion;
- Managerial perspective: the managerial perspective concerns the way of efficiently managing organizations involved in the provision of various water services at the range of different scales involved within the framework of strategic objectives set by top management in connection with the existing external environment and changes within that environment. Within the sphere of management, there are numerous technical aspects aimed at monitoring and improving accountancy, finance, human resources, marketing, operations, logistics and so forth. Often, the management processes involved work at a scale and in a way that is quite removed from the overall purpose of the organization (i.e. to contribute to water service provision) and may even be counter-productive in some ways.

It is clear that some of these perspectives overlap with each other, either potentially or actually, particularly in the case of a specific country such as Thailand. It is possible to display these overlapping factors as in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Typology of Perspectives on Water Management; source: authors' own composition

Perspective	Scale	Scope	Accountability
Scientific	Mostly large	Mostly long-term	Ontological: only facts and data included
Development studies	Mostly small	Mostly short-term	To local communities and individuals, gender component
Sustainable development	Mostly large	Mostly long-term	Utilitarian
Political	From very short to long	From very small to large	Very variable
Bureaucratic	As requested or longer-term	As requested or larger scale	To legitimate government or ontological
Managerial	Individual, department or organizational	Mostly short to medium-term	To top-level management or stakeholders

One way in which practitioners of water management as a whole have sought to unify these different perspectives, is through the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) approach. Spurred by multinational meetings at a global level converted by international organizations, such as the Rio Summit in 1992 – the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) – practitioners, scholars and concerned people from all walks of life united behind a definition of IWRM that was designed to be inclusive, rational and universal:

"Integrated water resources management (IWRM) is a process which promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources in order to maximize economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems and the environment (GWP, 2012)."

It is difficult to criticize any particular element of this formulation (or its variants) because it rests on clearly desirable attributes and conditions such as 'coordinated development,' 'maximise … welfare' and qualities

such as 'equitable' and 'sustainability.' Further, there are some examples of IWRM which have been employed successfully at the state level. In Southeast Asia, the obvious example of this is Singapore, which has a well-resourced government operating in the expectation of stable, single-party rule with clearly defined water management problems susceptible to scientific and technological solutions and a population displaying social solidarity to the extent that it is willing to listen to state-level explanations of water-related issues and to follow the policies prescribed. Above all, perhaps, Singapore is a small, island-based city state. The narrow geographic focus of Singapore and the ability and willingness of its government to use scientific means addressing problems from a long-term perspective circumvents the problems of differing understandings of scale and scope highlighted above. However, for a country that is not so well-defined in terms of resources and geography, the shortcomings of IWRM can become apparent. These include complications resulting from complex, river systems that cross jurisdictions and borders and also the contradictions between people with different perspectives and responsibilities highlighted above. Where there are contradictions and conflicts, the likelihood of being able to bring about an integrated approach are greatly reduced, particularly in a weak or internally divided state. This may be demonstrated by the case of Thailand.

THE IDEOLOGY OF NATURAL RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Although it may not have been so obvious in the past, it has become increasingly obvious that natural resources are finite or scarce in nature and, with unregulated exploitation, will be depleted with perhaps catastrophic consequences. The concept of the Tragedy of the Commons indicates that unregulated use of 'natural resources; will lead to resource depletion even though every individual acts consistently and rationally (Hardin, 1968). This is evident from the collapse of fish stocks, for example, and the deforestation of large parts of the rainforests of the Mekong Region (Usher, 2009). Since the loss of resources such as potable water would be disastrous to any ecosystem, therefore, it is necessary to create some regulatory framework to ensure that sufficient of the resource remains to pass on in an intergenerational manner, which is at the heart of the definition of sustainable development (WCED, 1987:43). Resource allocation on a sustainable basis takes place in parallel with the efficient use of these resources. Economists have argued that growth may take place in a situation of exhaustible natural resources but there is a need to adjust the rate of exploitation to the optimum rate of exploitation that balances both the highest level of growth with the resilience of the

resource in the future (Stiglitz, 1974). Yet within this basic formulation of combining efficiency with sustainability, there are various ideological issues that should be examined. These include the prerogative of humanity to use resources for personal gain, the need for economic growth and the role of humanity as a shepherd of the environment. These issues are approached in the following sections.

Allocation of Water under Conditions of Political Contestations

As a result of being located in a region that has a series of river basins passing through several countries, Mekong region countries must deal with each other as potential rivals for access to water resources. As Lebel, Garden and Imamura (2005) argue, in such situations, it is possible to identify three levels of the politics of space:

- Scale: different water-users wish to control their own ease and disposition of water resources but, where there are multiple actors, there will be the potential for conflict. In general, conflicts will be won b the more powerful actors and, hence, state-level agencies will eventually overcome regional and community-level actors. In the Mekong Region, this is a process that has been assisted by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank;
- Position: in general, water flows from upland north to low level south in the Mekong Region and this tends to mean upstream-living people and organizations tend to have first use of the water resources and to have the opportunity to structure its distribution;
- Place: however, both position and scale are trumped by the politics of place when it comes to access to water. Capital cities in delta regions (e.g. Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh city and previously Yangon) receive privileged access to water, meaning intermediate communities may be deprived, similarly, industrial organizations may be able to negotiate deals to access as much water as they wish even if this has a negative impact on agricultural and household communities (*ibid.*).
- These political conflicts may be considered at the national or domestic level or the international level. At the national level, the contestation has, it has been argued, depended to a large extent on the supply of institutional capacities, which are not only limited overall but subject to decisions as to which capacities to be permitted to develop. Such decisions are subject to systemic background factors: external security threats, popular pressure and resource constraints (Doner, 2009: 18-20). In the case of water

resources and hydroelectricity, the Thai state has out-sourced security threats and popular pressure to non-democratic regimes in Myanmar and Laos, where the dams are being built and the electricity generated (Lebel, Garden and Imamura, 2005). It is the reiteration of inter-institutional conflict over a period of decades that has been instrumental in the creation of so many overlapping mandates and responsibilities in the management of water in Thailand (Chintraruck & Walsh, 2013). To some extent, the ability of a democratically-elected government in Thailand to enforce its will and its mandate over the bureaucracy is limited, as was seen during the 2011 floods, during which there was plenty of evidence of fragmentation between important institutions. This is partly because of ideological political differences that are to some extent class-based and partly because of the technocratic nature of much of the leadership of the civil service in the country that results from the educational system (which also, of course, has a class component). The division between technocratic solutions and populist responses, which is an important aspect of contemporary political discourse – was stimulated by the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and the intervention of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which required a return for its funding a range of policies in line with the neoliberal agenda (e.g. closing down factories and companies deemed unsustainable, privatization of government services and reductions in welfare provision) that were deeply unpopular but embraced by technocrats as necessary to cure the ills of the country and its economy. Consequently, if a democratically-elected government wishes to change policies with respect to water distribution, in part to reward its regionally-segregated voters, it can be challenged on the grounds that this is a populist approach that is not rationally based and is akin to the concept of 'policy corruption,' which has been used as a legal means to counter government policies.

From an international perspective, the contest for water resources may be viewed from a number of different paradigms. In the theory of international relations, the first position of realism posits states as unitary actors competing directly with each other with threat and use of hard (i.e. military) power to obtain scarce resources to maintain their own security. This approach has been lent more nuance in the post-Cold War era by liberal and institutional paradigms that add the concept of cooperation for positive sum gain to the zero-sum game of hard power confrontations (and the negative sum game of nuclear exchange) (Swe

& Chambers, 2011:11-22). There are, of course, structural approaches such as Marxism and the neo-Gramscian approach, which unites (with something of a leap) the dissolution of the state predicted by Marx with the realism or neo-realism of so much of contemporary, international relations (Femia, 2005).

When considering the extent to which any one paradigm may be used to view the Mekong Region, the following points should be address:

- Civil society in the region is muted but sporadically present and has been internationalized by volunteer groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from around the world;
- While episodes of co-operation may not always have been successful, especially in the case of governing water resources, they have certainly occurred and it is notable that no armed conflict has taken place between states who had become members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN);
- Quite extensive use of soft and commercial power have been used by those nations seeking to gain influence in the Mekong Region, most notably by China, for whom its many private or semi-private corporations are used to help implement state-level developmental goals;
- Governance mechanisms generally have been disappointing in their impact and to have lagged behind those observed elsewhere (Dore, 2003).

Natural Resource Allocation under Buddhism

Thailand has a predominantly Theravadin Buddhist-professing population which is divided into a number of different sects and varied superstitions and animist practices. Those variations make it somewhat problematic to speak of Thai Buddhism as a unitary body of thought and belief. However, it is possible to consider Buddhism as a philosophy in general and to make some comments about resource allocation as a result.

The case of Buddhist philosophy focuses on the impermanence of the universe, the undesirability of attachment to those impermanent phenomena and the need to annihilate the ego so as to achieve nibbana and thereby escape the pain and suffering of this universe. However, since this is a difficult long-term process (occupying multiple instances of existence in this world), there is also a kammic strand to Buddhist thought and this focuses on the ways of behaving with respect to the

universe and to other people that are usually considered to be important components of ethics (Pryor, 1990). This gives rise to a number of precepts which people are recommended to follow, with the exact number and nature of them determined by their station in life. Certain professions that involve behaving in an unethical way are prohibited but it is recognized in the Aganna Sutta, that the fallibility of human perception of behaviour has given rise to systems such as private property and the caste system which are sub-optimal but pragmatic responses to human failure (*ibid*.). Evidently, then, there is nothing wrong with amending or even overturning these systems if more righteous ones can be located.

Buddhist concepts are becoming increasingly accepted as important new ways of complementing and improving economics and other western-centric social sciences (Daniels, 2005) and can be used as part of a dialectic uniting theory and practice (Boyd, Ratanakul & Deepudong, 1998). In this case, the allocation of water resources should take place n a way that is, broadly speaking, equitable but with the recognition that non-ideal systems will be created that may be used as an interim until something better can be formulated.

Marxist Natural Resource Allocation

There seems to be an inevitable link between Marxism and the maximal exploitation of natural resources and, indeed, it has been criticized by ecologists on just that basis (Burkett, 2005). However, by studying writings other than Capital, Foster (2000) has located Marx in a tradition that relates humanity to nature as an integral part of the formation of social relations and the means of emancipation of the working classes. Destruction of nature or any of its elements, therefore, would be an act that reduced the possibility of freedom and the reduction in the value of goods and services that labour can provide (*ibid*.).

Water allocation in the Mekong Region under a Marxist regime would, therefore, be organized on a basis that provides economic development and growth for all equitably and which ignores nationalism and attendant borders and institutions. As a materialist ideology, Marxist water allocation would ignore the privileging of certain institutions and organizations for superior access to water on grounds that can only be justified on class- or superstition-based grounds. As an example, albeit an example debased by the legacy of Stalinism and the presence of rabid and xenophobic nationalism, Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge witnessed something of a recovery of natural resources and commons (e.g. forestry and fisheries) because capitalist exploitation of those

resources was ended and any non-Cambodians involved were expelled. Economic growth and concomitant use of resources was reduced because of the lack of capacity in the domestic economy rather than for any ideological purpose Slocomb, 2010:205-12). Land and its resources were nationalized and agriculture was organized on a collectivist basis, with urban residents forcibly employed on such farms, where the exposure to disease, illness and hunger contributed to the horrific mortality rate under the regime.

Just as Marx had very imperfect knowledge about the unsustainability of contemporaneous economic and industrial practices, so too did more recent Marxist influenced regimes have imperfect knowledge of the pollution and environmental degradation they were causing – and often, of course, significantly negative disincentives when it came to reporting bad news to central authorities. A Marxist approach in the present would, it has been argued, take a purely rational and scientific approach with respect to the natural environment and global climate change and identify the contribution of advanced capitalism to intensifying those problems (Tanuro, 2007).

Governance Issues in Water Allocation

An environmental governance system contains a variety of qualities by which the merit or quality of the system may be judged: power, sustainability, holism, participation, transparency, equity and accountability (Dore, 2003). These are qualities which have become uncontroversial, at least in academic or civil society discourse, since they are generally considered to be central to a harmonious, liberal, multi-actor society. Within the Mekong Region, there are mixed reports about the extent to which these factors have been achieved to a satisfactory level even when new supply regimes have been successfully introduced. For example, before 1996 the Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority was characterized by its inability to provide a reasonable level of service despite abundant water resources (albeit in a country with minimal amounts of functioning infrastructure as the result of decades of violence and disorder). Citizens were obliged to rely on expensive and unreliable supplies of bottled water from the private sector. After restructuring, service levels increased significantly but largely because of the ability of top management to enforce market-based transaction norms on important customers and institutions who would normally expect to cut preferential deals to obtain government services. However, this was not achieved by transparent means, with accountability or with any public participation, even if it was done in the name of the public (Un & Hughes, 2011).

Until good governance in the Mekong Region as a whole improves, it is unlikely that environmental governance will also be improved to the desired level. However, this does not mean that some examples of good governance cannot be found. The privatization of certain parts of the water supply system in Thailand, initially in Pathum Thani province with East Water, has resulted in the spread of water supplies to the urban poor, with price increases offset by a differential pricing structure that has enabled industry and other intensive users to subsidise households (Amir Zaki). Arising as a result of the IMF's intervention in 1997, this privatization process, which has subsequently been expanded on an incremental basis has taken place with as much transparency and accountability as is reasonably to be expected in Thailand.

Water Resource Management in Thailand

Thailand has an enormous amount of water resources; annual rainfall is 800,000 mm^3 and this becomes both surface and groundwater. The country has had different experiences in flood and drought conditions over the course of time but such incidents are increasing in recent years, in line with extensive deforestation and climate change issues. The main reason for flooding problems is that most of the population lives in low-lying areas (DWR, 2009). In terms of management, Thailand has, in general, prioritized market mechanisms, albeit state-led market mechanisms, as the principal means of economic growth. As a result, water has come to be seen as one more resource which should be managed with respect to providing maximum efficiency for those processes contributing to economic growth (Santasombat, 2011:7). Also, along with an impact from other human activities, such as deforestation, changing patterns of land use and cultivation, recent manifestations of climate change and the incidence of the El Niño and La Niña phenomena have resulted in changing run-off patterns and increasingly violent flooding and prolonged droughts, sea level rises, decreased agricultural and fishery yields as well as other natural disasters such as landslides, land subsidence, forest fires and health-related issues (Marks, 2011).

Thailand is a country that has been passing through a period of intensive modernization and industrialization in recent decades and has now reached upper middle income status. The country is heavily export-dependent, with exports accounting for more than two thirds of gross domestic product (GDP). Accordingly, the country needs a reliable and well-developed infrastructure system and a set of public utilities, for which water is perhaps the most important, which are required to make Thailand a leading performer in Southeast Asia. The form of

water resources management in Thailand has been changed over the last decade in order to reach sustainable natural resources management. One factor to consider in the implementation of new natural management policies in Thailand is the pressure from the new democracy movement and the 1997 Constitution. These new legislations place a great emphasis on decentralisation of environmental policy implementation, including water, and allow public participation in the policy-making process, in order to try to achieve the goal of effective sustainable development. However, management of water has become centralized and managed on behalf of market activities and for large urban centres, notably Bangkok, which have great demand for water and which, for political reasons, represent important constituents for recent political administrations. Consequently, local and rural municipalities still lag behind the Bangkok metropolitan and adjacent areas for most water management issues.

The agencies responsible for water resource in Thailand are so many, including the Office of the Prime Minister, the Royal Irrigation Department (RID) under the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, which deals with water for agriculture; the Metropolitan Waterworks Authority (MWA) and Provincial Waterworks Authorities (PWA) are state enterprise under the Ministry of the Interior who deal with water supply and prices (the MWA is responsible for water services in Bangkok, Nonthaburi Province, and Samut Prakan Province, with water from Cho Praya and Mae Klong rivers to produce tap water reaching World Health Organization (WHO) quality, while PWAs are responsible for water supply in the other 74 provinces). The Department of Water Resources (DWR) and the Department of Groundwater Resources (DGR), under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE), deal with water development, conservation and restoration, while the Pollution Control Department (PCD) under the MNRE deals with water pollution. The Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM), under the Ministry of the Interior, deals with natural disasters and the Thai Meteorological Department (TMD), under the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT) deals with the weather and rain forecasting. The Department of Industrial Works (DIW), under the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Education also have roles. The National Water Resources Committee (NWRC) was created in 1989 to be the agency that coordinates plans among agencies as well as conducting monitoring and evaluation activities. The Basin Committee was also created to coordinate local plans and implementation among national agencies and the 25 basins of Thailand (DWR, 2009).

There are quite a number of factors that have prevented an effective policy implementation from taking place, including: 1) the existence of a gap between rhetoric and reality; 2) problems of the enforcement of law that are themselves unclear and unenforced; 3) the lack of integration among various governmental units, as well as the lack of co-operation between the government and the public creating duplication of work and unclear results; 4) slow policy implementation process; 5) the lack of true decentralisation in decision-making and resource allocation from the metropolitan to the rural areas; 6) frequent changes of government and government policies; 7) the lack of transparency in the provision of environmental issue-related information by government agencies; 8) corruption within the government; 9) the lack of expertise and governmental support for technology and knowledge in environmental problem and water management; 10) government's bias in policy implementation towards certain area and industries with high economic values; 11) the lack of public participation; 12) the lack of government engagement with industry; 13) pressure from the highly competitive international market, which causes Thailand rapidly to increase its exports with high consideration for the need of water but little for environmental damage caused; 14) inequality between the rich and the poor within Thailand's social structure, resulting in inequitable access to water between the social groups and 15) Thai people perceive water as a 'public good' and expect the state to provide water supply facilities and infrastructure in order to achieve equitable water distribution.

All of the above factors have contributed to failure in the translation of water policies into action, making effective policy implementation a far-away goal that is yet to be achieved. Finding other possible choices for improving water management procedures should be addressed. Accordingly, water privatization might be an alternative way of management for Thai people to achieve a higher level of water service that might also provide a new source of revenue and with deploy more expertise and innovation as part of a proactive and solution-based market. This has, in fact, been explored since 1997.

CONCLUSION

Multiple voices exist and have an impact with respect to the allocation of water resources in Thailand. These include civil society and the ideologies of politics and religion. Within this, neoliberalism contends with Marxism, Buddhism and the desire for sustainable development. In a fragmentary state, in which institutions are not united behind the

democratically-elected government, the state has only a limited ability to ensure that its policies are in fact implemented as desired. Consequently, several varieties of opinion are actually represented in the water allocation decision-making system, rather more than might be evident when looking at the situation from the outside. This gives scope for building alliances and coalitions of interests in order to push through various policies which might include some measures antithetical to the opinions of some parts of those coalitions.

One means of understanding this complex situation is to examine the role of power in individual and multilateral relations within the water resource system. Partners with power may be expected to wield it to obtain access to resources, whether they choose to do so on a cooperative or a confrontational basis. Further research in this area in the context of apparently successful partial privatization of some aspects of the water supply system is underway.

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