The Rise of Antagonism: The Chiang Mai Province People's Network for Self-Governing Administration and Its Reaction Against the Hegemonic Centralising State

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Abstract

Focusing on the decentralisation process in Thailand, the role of the Chiang Mai Province People's Network for Self-Governing Administration (CMPPNSA) is taken as a case study. This article intends to explore three aspects of the movement: its formation, strategy, and impact in the context of a centralising state. By using Chantal Mouffe's concept of hegemonic formation and antagonism, and William Roseberry's concept of hegemonic process and language of contention as theoretical frameworks, this paper analyses the various ideological practices used by the state and the movement in a contest of political discourse. The study evaluates the movement of CMPPNSA as a new democratic struggle which plays a constitutive role by redefining the rules of the political game along democratic lines, and constituting a new social grammar in Thai politics.

Keywords: hegemonic formation, antagonism, over-centralising state, decentralisation process, self-governing province

Introduction

The decentralisation process can be studied in various and complex dimensions. Not only in how the state tries to monopolise the power, but also in how the power is exercised by people, communities, and civil societies challenge the state for their rights, i.e. the possibility to negotiate for self-government amongst the limitations of centralised power (Pongsawat, 2005) to which this paper is dedicated.

While there have been many movements attempting to separate their regions as a new province, e.g. Fang and Bua Yai, which would be separated from the Chiang Mai and the Nakhonratchasima province respectively, they are still under the frame of provincial administrative structures which maintain the concept of deconcentration. The formation of the Chiang Mai Province People's Network for Self-Governing Administration (CMPPNSA) in 2009 has become a new phenomenon in Thai politics because this is the first movement formed by a variety of local development networks, calling for its right to 'self-governing' that challenges the structure of the centralised Thai state.[1]

In order to understand the process of decentralisation from below, this study emphasises the role of the CMPPNSA and its interaction with the centralised state, regarding it as a 'new democratic struggle' in Chantal Mouffe's sense, or the way in which the democratisation of political life has opened up the possibility of democratising all other aspects of human life (1988).

The main question in this study pays attention to three aspects of the movement: its formation, strategies, and impact on the decentralisation process under the context of the centralised Thai state. Under this main question, the research attempts to explain.

1) What factors and contexts facilitate the movement and what are the movement's goals?

2) What is hegemonic formation? How does the centralised Thai state monopolise its power?

3) How does the movement express the antagonism that has emerged in response to the hegemonic formation of the centralised state structure?

4) How does the movement defend, define and contest the definition of decentralisation and self-governing?

5) To what extent does the movement play a constitutive role to redefine the rule of the political game along the democratic line?

6) What are the implications of the movement for democratic transformation in Thailand?

This research is grounded on a qualitative methodology that engages with the structuralist approach (Desai and Potter, 2006) to unmask the unseen structures and forces that guide the path of over-centralisation in the Thai state on the one hand, and the strategies used by the CMPPNSA to counteract hegemony on the other.

The study is mainly based on a theoretical interpretation of research. Data was collected from the existing literature e.g. academic research and articles, government documents, laws and regulations, news from newspaper and online sources, which will be used to the answer the research questions.

Theoretical frameworks and key concepts
Hegemonic formation and antagonism

Based on Gramsci's notions, Chantal Mouffe settled her concepts of hegemonic formations and antagonisms to fathom the rise of the new social movements, or what she terms 'new democratic struggles', and conditions that 'are necessary for specific forms of subordination to produce struggles that seek their abolishment' (Mouffe, 1988: 89, 94).

Social movement in her sense is the appearance of antagonistic reactions to hegemonic formations originating in particular times and places. In other words, it is the appearance of subordination that are articulated as antagonisms and come to be social struggle against specific hegemonic formations which regulates the material and discursive conditions.

Mouffe explains a hegemonic formation as the collective of institutional blocs which exercise hegemony by a dominant group and 'react reciprocally either to provide each other with mutual conditions of existence, or at least to neutralise the potentially destructive effects of certain social relations on the reproduction of other such relations' (ibid: 90). She describes that the continual hegemonic formations can be seen in the history of capitalism, all categorised by the moment of the social relations of production. Nevertheless, such a moment is unstable, it is secured through a persistent political struggle, which intermittently refabricates the essential conditions for capital accumulation. Hence a hegemonic formation could be considered as a ceaseless process of hegemonic struggle, which consists of economic, political and cultural practices. This means that not only does it generate new hegemonic formations, but it also does cause some forms of subordination which become new antagonisms and new social struggles.

In Mouffe's sense, the feminist movements in the twentieth century illustrate the new antagonisms. She argues that even though women's status had been inferior for long periods, the antagonism – with the emergence of feminism – just formulated in this time. Under the hegemonic formation of the Fordist

model of mass production and the Keynesian welfare state, the
development of capitalism that 'commodifies' and 'bureaucratises'
social life led to the termination of preceding hierarchical social
relations. The naturalised form of men's domination was defied
by their subordination – the feminist movements – that gave birth
to the new antagonism.

Domination is vital but insufficient for a condition of
subordination to formulate antagonism and social struggle. To
stimulate its emergence, it has to be constructed in a specific
way, together with discourses or practices. Mouffe clarifies that
the feminist antagonism exploded when the democratic revolution
and the contention that 'all men are equal' challenged the
traditional value of women as subordinate subjects. Hence, the
emergence of women's new subject position as equal citizens led
to the question on their 'subordination in all other subject
positions' (ibid: 95).

Hegemonic process and language of contention

The perception of antagonism that consequences from a
mutual subjectivity which is challenged by diverse discourses and
practices of a hegemonic formation, relates to the notions of
hegemonic processes and common discursive structures argued by
William Roseberry.

Akin to the point of view that hegemony is unstatic,
William Roseberry in his work (1994) asserts that hegemony is
never stable and always challenged. It is also a claim, an always-
contested claim, of leadership. As he specifies, 'hegemony not as
a finished and monolithic ideological formation but as a problem-
atic, contested, political process of domination and struggle' (ibid:
358). Hence, hegemony in his view is the 'project' – process –,
rather than the 'achievement' of the leading group (ibid: 365).

What is principally significant in his theorisation of
hegemonic processes is how procedures of domination shape not
only the terms of 'consent', but also the 'struggle' through
'language of content'. Hegemony in his view is the exercise of
power which the words, images, forms, symbols, institutions,
organisations and movements used by subordinators to speak of,
recognise and represent themselves to, or defy their dominance.
Hence, the hegemonic process through which hegemony is consti-
tuted. Simultaneously, it originates a 'common material and
meaningful framework' through which such hegemony can be
contested. The common framework is in part, 'discursive': 'a
common language or way of talking about social relationship that
sets out the central terms around which and in terms of which
contestation and struggle can occur' (ibid: 361).

It should be noted that the concept of hegemonic
process in his view cannot be analysed through an uncomplicated
aspect of power in terms of an conflict between 'the dominant'

and 'the subordinate'. Conversely, both of them are shaped by the process of domination (ibid: 365-366).

The concept of *'decentralisation'* and *'self-governing province'*

Alongside the term *Good Governance*, *'decentralisation'* is a key component of the Post-Washington Consensus stream which has influenced international development since the mid 1990s. According to the 1997 World Bank Report, decentralisation is a main feature to improve accountability and incentives in the areas of development planning, service delivery, and economic development with 'bringing the state closer to the people' by 'devolving power carefully' (World Bank, 1997: 10-11). Its report in 2000 also focused on good local governance as an instrument to empower the poor and as an approach to attacking poverty (World Bank, 2000). Theoretically, the close relationship between citizens and government strengthen the former in public pressure, and facilitates them to become more informed and more demanding (Tendler, 1997).

The term decentralisation comprises four major components (Charoenmuang, 2006). First, a local self-governing unit must have its own legal status, including its own budget, property, departments, and personnel. Second, such an organisation will have its own autonomy in deciding what projects should be set up and carried out in order to solve local problems and improve local conditions. Nevertheless, there are certain areas which they can administer, e.g. education, health, construction, transportation, and other areas where they cannot, e.g. state finance, the armed forces and foreign affairs, which are determined by the constitution.

Third, the legislative and executive branches of these local government units have elected officers so that the latter may be held accountable to voters. The term for these officers should be limited so that newcomers can have an opportunity to render services for their community or an incumbent can be re-elected if he maintains his popularity. Fourth, people actively participate in local self-government. They not only vote for the representatives of legislature and executive but also take time to attend municipal meetings, follow how the elected officers react to various local issues, and voice their views on those issues. Since local people are actively involved in their own affairs, a number of them enter local politics and accumulate experience in local government affairs which will form a strong foundation for their participation at a national level.

In sum, decentralisation is the system that empowers local people to make their own decisions in local affairs. This definition closely relates to a recent concept for local social movements in Thailand; *'self-governing province'* which entails local people in each province participating in decision-making and determining their own developmental strategy and distribution of

resources in politics, economy, society, culture, natural resource and environment, physical and mental health.

The essence of self-governing province is to transfer political power that is concentrated in the central administrative system to a provincial community unit (Political Development Council, 2012). The concept might be considered as the background notion for 'new social movement', leading to national restructuring which focuses on forming citizen consciousness as a form of 'country ownership' under democratic regime (Chaisri, 2012).

The self-governing province concept has been developed from three bases. The first is to react to the failure of the centralised but fragmented state, for which the central and provincial administrative systems are unable to solve complex problems in certain areas, while dissuading local administrations by over-controlling budget spending and limiting fiscal decentralisation. As a result, it is a good chance for capitalists to monopolise political power at the centre of the political arena. The second base is a consequence of the social capital in local areas around Thailand which applied the self-sufficient concept to manage their own communities and exchanged their lessons within the network. The third base comes from the 2007 constitution which mentions several sections about community rights, decentralisation and self-governing as a part of local government. Overall, the self-governing province is the alternative concept of national reform to solve a number of current problems, e.g. political crisis, the problem of the lack of development in public participation, and the problem of the unresponsiveness of Local Administrative Organisations (LAOs) to local people (Singkaneti, 2014).

Debate on the decentralisation in Thailand

Thailand is often considered to be a highly centralised state. A Thai studies scholar has argued that

> … *the Thai state is extremely strong and has effective reach into all provinces and districts, no matter how far they are from Bangkok. Despite never having been colonized, Thailand's provincial administration is reminiscent of the colonial apparatus of administrations… It was designed to ensure effective central control of rural areas* … (Arghiros, 2001: 21).

On this point, there has been a considerable debate among some who assert that the state of centralisation is unavoidable for the country, and others who defend decentralisation.

Of those who hold the first point of view, almost all are Ministry of Interior (MOI) officials, for whom provincial administration is considered as a 'bridge' which links central and local governments. They see provincial administrative offices as the most crucial mechanism for running the country because it will bring about efficiency. Another important onus is to supervise the LAOs in their responsibilities that were transferred from the central government. Furthermore, with their area-based apparatuses (such as village committees, voluntary village health volunteers), they compare provincial administrations to being a school for democracy that may form a good foundation for broader participation (Ministry of Interior, 2011). On the contrary, full-fledged decentralisation is costly, weakens national security and may cause social unrest which may lead to an independence movement, cannot produce timely solutions due to too many conflicting views, it also grows local Godfathers who always have conflict of interests and a tendency to corrupt (Charoenmuang, 1993).[2]

In other direction, the supporters of decentralisation specify that Thailand's structure of administration is not separated into three fragments, but rather, the central and provincial overlap. Normally, when the central government introduces policies, it enjoins its officers in the province and directly monitors them instead of permitting the LAOs to initiate and achieve them. Moreover, the LAOs are dominated by the provincial administration in terms of budget and authority, which are prohibited by many laws. As a consequence, the LAOs have been weakened and have had restricted power to enhance its own organisations and local conditions (Charoenmuang, 2006).

The provincial administration as a centralised state apparatus is greatly criticised for having excessive power in controlling and monitoring the local authority. For instance, the governor or chief district officer must agree with and approve the LAOs' budget plan and local regulations before its declaration. In addition, the governor has the permissible authority to suggest the Interior Minister to dismiss an LAO executive and can also suggest the minister to dissolve the local council.[3] As well, the very principle of appointed governor is challenged: how can they be held accountable to local people who might have an effect on their actions (Nelson, 2002). In 2011, the systematic problems of provincial administration were analysed by the National Reform Committee (NRC), which offered 'the proposal to reconstruct the state's power structure' to the cabinet. The essence of this proposal is to revise the relations between central and local administration. The paper comes up with the suggestion to abolish the provincial administration structure and transfer its power to the local administration (National Reform Committee, 2011; Bangkok Post, 25 April 2011).

The dynamic of the centralised Thai state as hegemonic formation

In order to comprehend the factors and contexts that shape the construction of the CMPPNSA, this part intends to explore what this study calls *hegemonic formation*. The first section introduces the debate on the formation of the centralised Thai state. This will serve as the background to understanding its flexibility and reaction in the historical context that was challenged by the decentralisation stream which will be presented in the second section. The last section surveys various excuses presented by the centralised state which is a part of the language of contention that shows why Thailand has taken a long time on the way to full-fledged decentralisation.

Two views of the modern centralised Thai state's formation

There were at least two debates on national reforms during the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910). First, the reform was a result of external threats, namely Western colonisation, which transformed the issue on inequitable commercial treaties to extraterritoriality and subjugation (e.g. Samudavanija, 1970; Bunnag, 1977). This argument convinces that the reform reflected the King's intelligence that made *Siam* a sovereign state until present. This explanation partly attempts to identify that national reform under royal duties; for instance, the abolishment of slavery, the fiscal reformation, legal, military, educational, and centralised bureaucratic system, formed the history of success which has been considered as the foundation of the modern Thai government. The reform has also been considered as the first establishment of a modern state and absolute monarchical state in Thai history.

A different view argues that there were multiple processes which go beyond the modernisation approach mentioned above. What is more important is paying attention to the formation of modernity by considering the transformation of the Thai elite's worldview and consciousness regarding political, economic and social changes during the reign of King Chulalongkorn and before that help understand 'internal factors' leading to a national reform (e.g. Sattayanurak, 1995; Wantana, 1990). Meanwhile, this view points out that 'external factors', the 1855 Bowring treaty as a global economy agent, provided a good chance for the King to reconstruct and centralise political power to the monarchy. This can be seen from the abolishment of slavery that emancipated slaves from a feudal system to free labour simultaneously with administrative and fiscal centralisation that brought Siam into the fold of global capitalism (Kesboonchoo-Mead, 2000).[4]

One might conclude from both arguments that the consequence of modernising the state was what research has referred to as 'internal colonisation' which has influenced the

present political and social structure. It has been the state that has made efforts to assimilate citizen's consciousness and way of life to Bangkok and the monarchy as the centre of power. The state started by establishing a modern military force to suppress local rebellions, reforming law and enforcement, establishing new modern ministries, and designing new state apparatuses – a provincial administrative system as a branch of the central authority. By doing this, MOI is a main mechanism for territorial administration. Its role in the initial stage was to control, administer, and collect revenues in all areas of the territory. Even though its role has been decreased due to the decentralisation policy, MOI remains one of the biggest ministries and has the authority to support, control and supervise the LAOs.[5]

The hegemonic formation: centralisation within decentralisation

On the one hand, many reforms during King Chulalongkorn's reign were used to centralise power to the King and helped found the absolutist state. On the other hand, the practice of hegemonic formation can be understood through the development of local government which can be traced back to this period as well. To institute new power relations, the state constituted the local government under the ideology of the state by convincing its subjects that they had their own power to self-govern. In 1892, 'village headmen' were introduced in order to expand state power to people in remote areas (Bunnag, 1977). A village headman would be elected by villagers and would be instituted as a 'synaptic leader' who was assigned to work for the state, and also to be an unofficial local leader. Thus they are the symbols of the village's interests and the state's authority to maintain central power and to build the nation-state (Moerman, 1969). In 1908, the King introduced the Sanitary Act, which assigned *Sukhapiban* (sanitary districts) to maintain a cleanliness of area, provide primary public healthcare and take care of the maintenance of roads. However, because they were administered by an appointed official, *Sukhapiban* could be regarded as local state-government rather than local self-government (Chayabutra, 1997).

At least four decades into the democratic regime after the 1932 revolution, Thai politics were regarded as 'bureaucratic polity' (Riggs, 1966; Laothamatas, 1992). As opposition to voted politicians, bureaucrats completed the choices of allocation and distribution, and could maintain control over the political arena. A great number of them were selected to both the parliament and the cabinet, thus their interests and demands were respected more than the commits of political parties, interest groups, and social forces outside the state apparatus (Riggs, 1966).

This situation could not have been kept from affecting the decentralisation process. Even though various types of local

administration were initiated, including municipalities, PAO[6], and some special forms of local administration (BMA[7] and PCA[8]), bureaucratic polity outshone and obstructed the significance of local government and people participation. Local government was organised and influenced by bureaucrats from the central and provincial administrations rather than locally elected representatives, i.e. the provincial governor was the chairman of the PAO (Provincial Administration Organisation Act of 1955), and the chief district officer took to managing the sanitary district (Sanitary District Act of 1952).[9] In terms of responsibility, local administrations played a little role in local development and fell under a high degree of control when it came to the procedural administration by central government (Chardchaval, 2010).

Compared with the 1960s, a power relation in directing country development between the state and social forces was not different. Thailand under the age of developmentalism was driven by the contexts of cold war and internal political economy. Thai state mobilised its apparatuses to strengthen economic growth in order to stabilise internal security and to stop the Communist movement which played an important role in the rural area. A score of development programmes were launched under the first national economic plan started from 1961 as well as a great number of royal projects initiated by the King Rama IX and the network monarchy.

It should be noted that an embryonic idea of participatory development was brewed in this period. Non-Governmental Organisations, academics and students walked into villages and communities in remote areas to seek a practical knowledge. By doing this, numerous side effects of development as economic growth were revealed. Their movements had become a role model for NGOs during the next period.

At least until the 1980s, however, hegemonic power remained in the hands of Thai state. A concrete example is the rural development policy emphasised by the semi-democratic government. In 1981, the Prime Minister General Prem Tinsulanonda launched the Regulation of the Office of the Prime Minister on Rural Development and Administration, and settled up the committee in national, provincial, district and sub-district levels. Noticeably, ninety-nine percent of committees came from government official. This reflects that the centralised Thai state dominated the rest of society in all aspects; political, economic and social arenas.

The political turmoil in May 1992 brought about the transition from semi-democracy to full-fledged democracy. The decentralisation of power was one of the main agendas for reforming Thai politics, and was the outcome of the constitution of 1997 which states distinctly that decentralisation measures must be implemented by the state, and large provinces should be

promoted to a special form of local administration (Section 78). Moreover, it also determines that there must be legal provisions which specify the division of authorities and responsibilities of public services provision between state and local government, and among local governments (section 284). As a result, the Act of Determining Plans and Process of Decentralisation to Local Government Organisation was promulgated in 1999. The law is considered a pattern plan in transferring power and duties from the state to LAOs up to the present.

Nevertheless, the centralised state succeeded in its hegemonic project. Decentralisation has been neutralised under the state ideology by paying attention to the merits of local government. The following are three examples: First, before 1999 the LAOs shared a very small proportion of financial support, the target of distribution of budget and fiscal decentralisation which, as determined in the 1999 act, created the image of the decentralised state. In fact, the budget distribution for local governments remains low and the redistributed budget from local tax collections has been unfair (Thongsari, 2004).

Second, when a campaign for a gubernatorial election was launched in late 1992, the MOI immediately came out to push for an election of the PAO chairman and declared that they agreed with the pro-decentralisation movements and they supported the sub-district council issue. However, after the issue was accepted and put into practice, the drafting of the bill was very slow and its content remained far from being accepted and delayed the procedure (Charoenmuang, 2006).

Third, the restructuring of ministries and departments program as a part of the public administration reform in 2002, which was influenced by the good governance framework, was criticised as extending the structure of central administrative system. As a result, the number of central agencies was enlarged, from 14 ministries and 126 departments to 20 ministries and 143 departments (Painter, 2006). Notably, the mission to facilitate the work of the LAOs was assigned to the Department of Local Administration which is under the MOI.

These three cases show that even though decentralisation had become the new format of Thai political structures, it was a slow decentralisation process in the early stages to a great extent due to the opposition of the central level and the provincial level agencies with their fear that they would lose a great deal once parts of their power were removed.

The recentralisation policy still played a great role in challenging decentralisation practices. One of the most dramatic changes to the administrative system during the Thaksin government was the CEO governor policy which increased its authorities in terms of decision-making and budget spending in order to promote integration and cooperation among various

agencies in each province. Thus the role of CEO governor was compared to that of a Prime Minister's assistant in the area. This policy impeled governors to be accountable to the cabinet rather than to the local residents (Mutebi, 2004). Moreover, to replace the role and influence of local Godfathers in providing public service delivery, the government used this stronger bureaucracy to run populist policies, and changed state-society relations to patron-client politics dominated by the state (Netipho, 2003).

The 2006 coup against the Thaksin government carried changes to the administrative system that affected the decentralisation process. Although the new constitution promulgated in 2007 remained the principle of local government, the domination of bureaucratic force, particularly the MOI's bureaucrat network, in the parliamentary process was remarkably. For instance, some unfair regulations were issued for local officers and could be realised as hindrance to their career path (Chardchaval, 2010). It was the first time the status of provincial administration was assured in the constitution which determined the provinces must have its own development plan and budget.[10]

In 2009, through the coordination between the Governing Officers Association of Thailand (GOAT), the MOI, and the Village Headmen Association (VHA), the parliament passed the amendment of the 1914 District Administration Act which was the MOI's endeavour to strengthen the status of the sub-district headman and the village headman, as the act states in section 3 that *'The positions of sub-district headman, village headman, sub-district public health officer, sub-district headman assistant, village headman assistant must not be abolished'*.

Excuses for late decentralisation: the practice of language of contention

'Thailand is one and indivisible Kingdom'
(Section 1 of the Thai constitutions since the second
* constitution in December 1932)*

The epigraph for this section illustrates how the practice of language helps the state's agencies defend and define the centralising hegemonic formation. If looking at the historical context, every time the wave of decentralisation has blown along with challenges and questions about the weakness of over-centralisation in Thailand, two discourses of centralising state are always restated.

First and foremost, *'Thailand is a unitary and inseparable state, over-decentralisation undermines internal security and the stability of the Kingdom under the King as the head of state'*. The supporting argument is usually described historically by implicating the Western colonial threats before the reformation of the

administrative system in 1892. Without a centralised government, the sovereignty would never have been protected (Yuwaboon, 1988). The fear concerning the existence of the nation-state is proved in the suggestion that the local governments and local politicians' freedom would inure the capability of the state to maintain its power and it would create autonomous states as happened in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia at the end (Chu-kliang, 1991). Thus, it is a provincial administration which takes on crucial functions to unite and stabilise the unitary state by creating 'nationalism' instead of 'localism' (Techacharn, 1988).

More recently, M.L. Panadda Disakul, a former high-ranking officer of the MOI commented on the self-governing province concept, stating that

> '… if one considers the history of the reign of King Chulalongkorn, he stated in English that there were 'little governments all around the Kingdom'. In order to unite and to build the state, he established regional administrative systems and assigned the MOI to promote the policy. Prince Damrong, who was the first MOI minister took a long time to make local leaders consent to Bangkok power, thus the Thai nation-state has a tradition regarding this policy. If one talks about a self-governing province in the current situation, it may bring about difficulties that have happened in the past. It also links to the unrest in the Deep South of Thailand …' (Dissakul, 2013: 7, my translation).

Another MOI officer who doubts whether the concept of 'localism' would affect national security (Emasuwarn, 2014), while the VHA criticises the fact that a self-governing province allows LAOs to have more autonomy (Editors, Kamnan-Phuyaiban Journal, 2014). This situation was due to a lack of connectivity with the central government and lead to a number of independent states. Additionally, the GOAT goes beyond by arguing in its statement that *'this over-decentralised agenda would lead to the collapse of Kingdom'*, and to eliminate the provincial administrative system means to violate the King's executive power runs through the cabinet. The GOAT also suggests that instead of a provincial administrative system, the PAO should be abolished because of overlapping responsibilities (Statement of the Governing Officers Association of Thailand on 28 July 2014).

Second, *'it is not an appropriate time for self-governing'*. This is a classic argument for defending centralisation which presents the notion that local, especially 'rural', people are not ready to self-govern (Puangsopa, 1991) even '50 years from now' (Prachuabmor, cited in Rojanaphruk and Cherdchusilp, 2011). This excuse has many supporting arguments, e.g. the fact that many LAOs are short of the competence to proceed their new duties (Nagai et al., 2007) and they are prone to target huge

budgets that are transferred to LAOs which are inclined to corruption (Governing Officers Association of Thailand, 2014; Wong, 2007). As Lieut-Colonel Kamol Prachuabmor, the president of GOAT, stated *'Everyone wants power. We have to control them.'* (Rojanaphruk and Cherdchusilp, 2011).[11] From this point of view, local people still lack democratic consciousness. The provincial administrative system is a supporting unit to reinforce democracy or a 'school of democracy'; for instance, by establishing various committees at the grassroots level to make a collective decision in a democratic way (Nelson, 1998; MOI, 2011).

These explanations show a contest of political struggles. The state has accomplished the hegemonic project to seize the definition of decentralisation which is limited to top-down change. Citizen participation in this perception thus only exists to recruit more people to join state-led policies. In the hegemonic process, one can see the workings of the state ideology which Winichakul (2008) termed 'The discourse of democratic royalism'. In his view, the network monarchy has played a vital roles in generating the discourse of clean politics, which sees politicians as being tremendously corrupt. The discourse also illustrates that the uneducated rural people are deficient in democratic consciousness, which is what lies at the root of vote-buying. This leads to the perception that an election is not the same as democracy, and to an acceptance of moral authority as ultimate legitimacy. The state also attempts to expand the 'empire of fear' through nationalist ideology by referring to the separatist movement in southern Thailand and recognising that decentralisation is not a solution for peace. This helps explain why excuses for late decentralisation are still acceptable in the contemporary context.

The rise of antagonism: The Chiang Mai Province People's Network for Self-Governing Administration and its reaction against the hegemonic centralising state

The previous part illustrated the hegemonic formation which shows the adaptability of the centralised Thai state. This is crucial context for understanding the development of the CMPPNSA movement, which this study considers to be antagonism and contradiction to the centralised Thai state. In this part, I will first recognise the CMPPNSA in terms of its formation, goals and components. Then, the question of how the movement has expressed antagonism in response to the hegemonic formation of the centralising state will be addressed.

The Chiang Mai Province People's Network for Self-Governing Administration: its development, goals, and components

The embryonic idea of the CMPPNSA movement can be traced back to 1990 when some local intellectuals and national politicians (e.g. Tanet Charoenmuang and Tawin Pri-son respectively) pushed their campaign to support the elected governor. Even though their demand was not accepted by the government, this agenda sparked Chiang Mai's people to talk about their right to self-govern.

In 2008, led by civil society organisations such as the Coordinating Committee on Development of Northern Thailand, Social Management Institute, and scholars, the 'self-governing' concept was synthesised from the lessons of agricultural self-sufficiency that were applied in numerous communities around Northern Thailand, and from the political crisis between 2003 and 2006. The concept was levelled gradually to be included in the social agenda, which was mentioned from local forums to provincial and regional forums. The CMPPNSA was formally established in 2009 (its first name was 'Peaceful Homeland Network') in order to react to the centralised bureaucratic structure and unfair distribution of resources as a root of local problems. Administratively, an appointed governor is often shuffled and has no real authority to develop and to solve several problems in the area continuously. Developmentally, local people's interests have always been decided by the central government (Chanruang, 2012). In other words, the CMPPNSA is a response to the situation, which Tan-ud (2014a) called 'the black hole of power', that the state is assimilating the diversity of locality by its ideology and practice.

The primary goal of CMPPNSA is to integrate all parts of civil society in order to participate, possess, and use social capital in local development under the self-governing concept. People's participation is the principle of the movement in all development issues with the basic conviction that the sovereignty should be accessed by local people concretely, and it is only them who know better about themselves, their demands, and their area. To accomplish this goal, the linking processes, *Systematic Chiang Mai Province for Self-governing*, are set up. Each network's representative is assigned as the 'Strategic Team for Chiang Mai Province for Self-Governing' to proceed to the organisation plan (Political Development Council, 2012).[12]

The most important practice initiated by the CMPPNSA is the Bill of Chiang Mai Metropolitan Administration. The bill drafting process lasted from early 2011 to mid-2012. The final draft was passed to the public hearing held by the CMPPNSA in 25 districts of Chiang Mai (Chanruang, 2012) and was finally offered to parliament in 2013 (Prachatham, 26 October 2013). Under this bill, provincial administrative units would be abolished,

left only to central administrative units and two-tier local administrative organisations which have the administrative power to determine policies, local regulations, fiscal administration, and human resource management. This administrative power excludes four main areas, namely, military, monetary, foreign, and judicial affairs. The relationship between the executive and the legislative body is designed to connect with its people by building and supporting strong civil juries to check and balance the mayor and representatives. In terms of taxation, 30 percent of all revenue collected by the Chiang Mai Metropolitan Administration (CMA) would be sent to the national government, while the rest of it would be preserved by the CMA.

The bill was warmly welcomed. According to Maejo Poll, about 60 percent of Chiang Mai residents agreed with it, because the province had the potential to govern itself transparently (The Nation, 28 February 2014). Another great impact is that 45 people's provincial network in the rest of the country declared itself as an alliance for the CMPPNSA (Chanruang, 2012).

Expression of antagonism: the discourse contention in the war of positions

As mentioned in the previous part, hegemonic formation for the centralised Thai state has been reproduced through the discourse of democratic royalism and nationalism which concentrates on the national security of the unitary state. This state ideology has more influence on the institutional design of the interrelationship between central and local government. Even though there have been some institutions emphasise on the right of community e.g. the 1997 and 2007 Constitution and the 2008 Community Organisation Councils Act, LAOs are always lessened in their roles and the decentralisation process in Thailand has been slowed down in the democratisation context on an international scale.

With this condition, the strategies for the CMPPNSA movement, as the expression of antagonism against hegemonic formation, can be considered in the name of the *war of position*, which is a resistance to domination via the establishment of some sort of cultural counter-hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). There are two strategies for the movement; *to constitute new civic consciousness for self-governing*, and *to redefine the meaning of decentralisation as a discourse contention*.

♦ The constitution of new civic consciousness for self-governing

Going beyond an argument about the well-organised design that was determined through the constitution and other laws, the CMPPNSA focuses on ideological movements. The key concepts of empowerment for community self-management, and good governance for community self-management are the basis of the

CMPPNSA campaign in Chiang Mai. The three main related objectives of the campaign are: one, to change people's consciousness from the state's ideological image as patronised subjects to civic citizens who are concerned about their self-interest and the collective interest of the community. Two, to adjust power relations among local people, local communities, and local administrative organisations by opening public spaces for all parts of the community. Three, to revive neo-customary law, or traditional community customs, and apply indigenous knowledge to strengthen the local community (Panichkul, 2011). These intentions thus emphasise constituting deliberative democracy with local citizens acting not just as 'participants' but also as 'power owners'.

This procedure has been promoted at all levels in Chiang Mai, from a tiny discussion group to the Yellow Shirts and their opponents – the Red Shirts –, entrepreneurs and scholars. collaborate with other civic groups, the new consciousness of self -governing has expanded to urban and rural people in 25 districts. There have been academic seminars and forums in sub-districts and regional areas (Tan-ud, 2014b). Apart from the Chiang Mai Metropolitan Administration Bill, which was developed by the people of Chiang Mai, a number of developmental issues were deliberated and became urgent issues for the CMPPNSA movement. For instance, the campaign against the cable car construction project which links Chiang Mai Night Safari to *Doi Pha Dum*, the campaign for participatory design for public areas of Chiang Mai city '*Kuang Luang Wiang Kaew*', the campaign against the townscape development for tourism projects which was suggested by the *Doi Suthep* temple's committee, and so on.[13]

♦ *Redefining 'decentralisation', counter-argument to over-centralisation and discourse contention*

> *… do not allow section 1 of the Constitution which states that 'Thailand is one and indivisible Kingdom' hinders or limits the creativity and diversity of decentralisation. The word 'unitary state' does not mean monism but it means multiplicity in proper ways; for instance, a special form of local government or a large local government unit that differs from a provincial administrative system, a self-governing unit which shows its form of decentralisation – not the central state ones. So 'Thailand is one and indivisible Kingdom' cannot restrict a creative and diverse decentralisation, as well as a new form and principle of decentralisation…* (Laothamatas, cited in Maru, 2014, my translation).

The above quotation implies a key strategy for the movement, intended to resist the domination of the centralised state's discourse, and aims to defend, define, and contest the

meaning of decentralisation. After the concept of self-governing province which was generated by the CMPPNSA, this 'Chiang Mai Model' became the heart of the 2011 NRC's national reform proposal, and was taken to be the essence of the Self-Governing Province Administration Bill drafted by the Law Reform Commission of Thailand (LRCT) between 2013 and 2014. To expand the network for supporting decentralisation in the form of self-governing, the CMPPNSA joined together with people's networks in other provinces, the Association of Local Administrative Organisation, the LRCT, the Political Development Council, academics, and civil society organisations. As counter-hegemony projects, various strategies were launched in order to seize and interpret the definition of decentralisation. Numerous websites and webpages have been created for self-governing province campaigns [14] which are a mouthpiece of the movement in the communication process.

Publishing in websites, newspapers, and academic forums, intellectuals have played a vital role in the discourse. To dispute the myth of the security of the unitary state, the form of administrative and fiscal decentralisation in Japan and China are taken to prove that the 'unity' of the state still exists, and by doing this, local governments have more than enough competence to grow their economic and social development in their own ways (Pattamasiriwat, 2013). While this form of decentralisation is defended as not being a separatist movement because it does not want to get involved in central government affairs, it was given the new label of 'ownership of locality' which would bring about local advancement. Also the movement for a self-governing province is not illegal because it is a right that is clearly determined by the constitution (Tan-ud, 2014a).

Academic and research papers are also published to legitimate the concept of self-governance. An important one is quantitative research on the problem of the 'Hamilton Paradox' or over-fiscal centralisation, which, the author argues, destroys the tax base and causes uneven development in a province, and considers fiscal decentralisation under the self-governing province concept to be a solution (Suwanmala, 2013). As well as a research paper on the impact of decentralisation in Thailand during 15 years, Veerasak Kruethep and colleagues have identified that in local people's view, the LAOs are more efficient than provincial administrative offices in public service delivery, and 72.5 percent of them agree with the concept of a self-governing province administration (Isra News, 15 March 2014).

The discourse of corrupted politicians established by the proponents of centralisation is also challenged. Chamnan Chanruang, a founder of the CMPPNSA, asserts that both provincial civil servants and local politicians are corrupt; however, the difference between the two is that politicians have to be

more accountable to their people than appointed officers, they need to maintain their popular vote by being hard-working, and even though vote-buying is not avoidable, many researchers have found that it affects people's decision to vote by only 4.5 to 4.9 percent (Chanruang, 2014).

Not only do academic publications express contrarian attitudes to the centralising state, the symbolic campaigns run by the network also take part in this process. To redefine the meaning of decentralisation, the Thai Local Network for Self-Governing criticise over-centralisation as a root of problem. The statement asks the government to *'return the power to people'*, which has more weight than to simply *'participate in the power'* (Manager Online, 7 May 2014).

One interesting phenomenon implies that the language of contention is a drafting process of the Self-Governing Province Bill. According to the Law Improvement on People Participation and Decentralisation Commitee, LRCT minutes (17 December 2013), there was a discussion on the *name* of the bill, which was finally changed from *'the Local Administration (Provincial level) Bill'* to *'the Self-Governing Province Administration Bill'*. Sawing Tan-ud, another founder of the CMPPNSA, suggested that the word 'self-governing' is specified in the constitution under the local govern-ment section, whereas Pairoj Polpetch advised that the word 'administration' would neutralise the meaning of 'self-governing province' and the people would not be confused by this word. The impact of this renaming caused the MOI's interest in the bill to grow. For instance, the MOI assigned a high-ranking officer team to attend the meeting (Maru, interview; 4 July 2014), the Ubonratchathani governor sent an official note to the district administrative offices in order to inform the local people of the impact of abolishing provincial administration (Ubonratchathani provincial office's official note, 9 April 2014), and several reflec-tive articles were published in the Thesapiban journal, the mouth-piece of the MOI.

This part has shown that the rise of the CMPPNSA is a consequence of over-centralisation. The movement raised its antagonism against the centralising state through ideological strategies in order to redefine and to contest the definition of decentralisation as self-governance. The achievements of the movement can be seen by the reaction from the MOI which is a representative of the hegemonic formation. The next part will evaluate the impact of the CMPPNSA movement and its future after the coup d'état on 22 May 2014.

The implications of the Chiang Mai Province People's Network for Self-Governing Administration movement for the decentralisation process

Under the martial law declared by the junta, the CMP-PNSA maintains its intention for a self-governing campaign. The CMPPNSA chose the date of 24 June, the day on which Thailand changed its regime from absolute monarchy to democracy in 1932, to launch its statement 'decentralisation is reconciliation'. The campaign was terminated by the military due to fears over 'public security' (Prachatham, 24 June 2014). However, it was yet another instance in Thai political history in which the subordinator tried to express its antagonism to the hegemonic formation of over-centralised state.

Looking back to previous part, one can understand the state of contention between the centralising state and the CMP-PNSA to defend, define and contest the discourse of decentralisation. While the former shows its flexibility to maintain the status quo through the state's ideology, the latter constitutes its own definition to challenge the state. Even though the agenda for the self-governing province has not been achieved concretely, some of the movement's benefits have been illustrated:

Firstly, the influence of the CMPPNSA movement led to local people in the rest of the country to become more concerned with their right to self-determination in terms of ownership of power and resources. This can be seen from the growth of the provincial people's network for self-governing, as seen in Phuket, Rayong, Umnaj Charoen, Ubonratchatani, etc., and in the collaboration between these networks to push forward their developmental agendas. These movements also changed the balance of power between the state and society, altering it from a hierarchical society to a more democratic society, which is based on local people's interests.

Secondly, one may consider the CMPPNSA as an actor which played a constitutive role in redefining the rules of the political game along democratic lines, thus helping to regulate the behaviour of the state and the character of political relations between the state and the public sphere of society (White, 1995: 384-385). Decentralisation and local governmental components as a requirement for Thai constitutions after 1997 is evidence of this great transformation.

Lastly, due to the fact that the strategy of previous movements had never moved beyond the border of the top-down decentralisation process, the role of the CMPPNSA can be regarded as that of a 'new democratic struggle'. The movement has redefined decentralisation as the way to 'self-govern', which has opened up the possibility of democratising all other aspects of human life. By doing this, the meaning of democracy in a

Thai context has been gradually changed by adding the self-governance concept to the equation. In Avritzer and Santos's words (2003), *a new social grammar* has been constituted, which is swallowing the centralised state's definition of decentralisation by defining it from below instead.

Postscript: The 2014 Coup d'état and the future of decentralisation

The wave of democratisation brings about the questions on what occurs in the third-wave countries which are presently partial democracies in several places across the world. Thailand is very characteristic, before 2014 its people confront the 'vicious cycle of Thai politics' with 12 victoriously coups d'état, 11 political insurgents, and 2 people revolts during the democratic regime between 1932 and 2013. Probably, it might be termed 'democratisation backwards' by which the democratic regime was introduced before the establishment of the basic institutions of a modern state; for example, the rule of law, accountability of rulers, and institutions of civil society (Rose and Shin, 2001).

Again, the 2014 coup d'état led by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) has seen Thailand getting lost in the loop of re-democratisation. Under military rule, the structure of the local administrative system and the relationships between the central and the local government has seen dramatic changes according to three of the NCPO's announcements. The first was announcement no. 85, which temporarily suspended elections in all LAOs, instead appointing high-ranking officials or chairmen of civil organisations to become local legislative members. Next, there was announcement no. 86, which determined the same principle for searching for the vacant BMA legislative member. Announcement no. 104 gives much more authority to the provincial governor and head district officer to control and monitor the budget spending of LAOs (Announcement of NCPO no. 84, 85 and 104, 2014).

The tension tended to be eased up when the Prime Minister Genaral Prayuth Chan-O-Cha, in capacity as his head of NCPO invoked the interim constitution absolute power's section 44 launching head of NCPO order no.1/2014 allowing local executives and local legislative members who completed their term to stay in position. However, this absolute power was also used several times to order the suspension a number of local representatives. From May 2015 to September 2016, 150 people has been suspended. This includes the elected BMA governor who was claimed that there were irregularities involving corruption (Order of the Head of NCPO No. 16 and 19, 2015; No. 1, 43, 44, 50, 52 and 59, 2016). He was then dismissed by the military government in October powered by section 44's constitution

(Order of the Head of NCPO No. 64).

Even though these rules hinder and limit the decentralisation process and the local government, section 27(4) of the 2014 interim Constitution determines decentralisation as one of eleven main issues for national reforms. At least it reflects that decentralisation has become a core institution in Thai politics, which is a good sign for its future. This might be considered a consequence of the movements from the past to present.

Appendix
List of legal frameworks referred in this article

The King Chulalongkorn's reforms
-Sanitary Act B.E.2451 (1908)   *-District Administration Act B.E.2457 (1914)*
The 1932 revolution
-Sanitary District Act B.E.2495 (1952)   *-Municipality Act B.E.2496 (1953)*
The age of developmentalism
-Provincial Administrative Organisation Act B.E.2498 (1955)
The Semi-democratic regime
-Regulation of the Office of the Prime Minister on Rural Development and Administration B.E.2524 (1981)   *-Sub-district Administrative Organisation Act B.E.2537 (1994)*
The 1997 Constitution

-Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E.2540 (1997)
  -Provincial Administrative Organisation Act B.E.2540 (1997)
  -Determining Plans and Process of Decentralisation to Local Government Organisation Act B.E.2542 (1999)

The 2007 Constitution

-Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E.2550 (2007)
  -Chiang Mai Metropolitan Administration Bill B.E. …
  -Self-governing Province Administration Bill B.E. …

The 2014 coup d'état

-Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand (Interim) B.E.2557 (2014)
  -Announcement of National Council for Peace and Order No.85, 86 and 104/2557 (2014)
  -Order of the Head of National Council for Peace and Order No. 16 and 19/2558 (2015)
  -Order of the Head of National Council for Peace and Order No. 1, 43, 44, 50, 52, 59, and 64/2559 (2016)

Notes

[1] In addition, there have been other alliances which work together with Chiang Mai in order to set the concept of self-governing administration as a new social agenda. For example; Phuket, Rayong, Umnaj Charoen people's network.

[2] See also part IV. (IV.3 Excuses for late-decentralisation: the practice of language of contention) for more detail.

[3] Provincial Administrative Organisation Act of 1997, Municipality Act of 1953. In case Sub-district Administrative Organisation, provincial governor has the same authority as the interior minister by a suggestion of chief district officer (Sub-district Administrative Organisation Act of 1994).

[4] Another reform that should be mentioned is the abolishment of tributary states and replaced by *Thesapiban* Administration which was established to strengthen the centralising state. Under this management, the government in Bangkok sent its representatives to governmental units which compose of *Monthon Thesapiban* (provincial cluster), *Muang* (city), *Amphor* (district), *Tambon* (sub-district), and *Moobaan* (village) to control its subjects and political power in remote area.

[5] 31,937 MOI officials were appointed to implement the government policy in provincial and district unit in 2013 (Office of the Civil Service Commission, 2014). Furthermore, there were village headmen who were elected by local people (but appointed by and working for the MOI) and at least two assistants in the 74,965 villages of the country.

[6] PAO - Provincial Administration Organisation

[7] BMA - Bangkok Metropilitan Administration

[8] PCA - Pattaya City Administration

[9] The 1997 Constitution resulted in changing internal structure of local administration into the council and city chief system such as abolishing Sanitary system, ending governor's role in PAO and Sub-district Headman in TAO.

[10] See section 78(2) Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E.2550 (2007) It should be noted that before 2007, the provincial administration status was mentioned only in the Public Administration of the Kingdom Act.

[11] It was M.L. Panadda Disakul who again discredited some PAO presidents that live a luxurious life at the expense of taxpayer money without shame. He also posted on his Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/nopburi.srinakhonping?fref=ts, several times, emphasising the good characteristics of the civil servant that is the King and the people's honest servant.

[12] Several networks involve the Systematic Chiang Mai Province for the Self-Governing process; namely, area-based network, social force network, media section, policy section, academic and research section, and human development section.

[13] See at https://www.facebook.com/chiangmai.link?fref=ts

[14] For example, Self-governing Province http://p-power.org/, People's Network for Self-governing Province https://www.facebook.comgroups/541027749339185/599572360151390/?notif_t=group_activity, Phuket Self-governing https://www.facebook.com/phuketselfgovernance, Chiangmai Link https://www.facebook.com/chiangmai.link?fref=ts, Rayong Self-governing https://www.facebook.com/rayongforpeople?fref=ts

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