Civil Society Amidst Traditional Public and Private Sectors: Their Interactions and Roles in the Thai Public Policy Process

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CIVIL SOCIETY AMIDST TRADITIONAL PUBLIC
AND PRIVATE SECTORS:
THEIR INTERACTIONS AND ROLES
IN THE THAI PUBLIC POLICY PROCESS

Abstract

It is widely believed that the civil society will help lead to
good governance in Thailand. This idea is not far-fetched. In the
discussion of civil society, the two traditional sectors--the public and
private-are first examined with respect to their roles in the public policy
process and in the economy. Despite various benefits of both public
and private sectors on the society and economy, failures in both sectors
sometimes occur. The civil society is put forward as an alternative,
third, or people's sector to compensate for the state and market failures.
In the case of Thailand, the prevalence of corruption, a form of state
failure, particularly gives rise to the pressure for a stronger civil society.
Therefore, the policy environment in Thailand has changed, in that the
private sector as well as the civil society in such forms as
nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations
have asserted a more active role throughout the public policy process.
But with this new policy environment, this paper still argues for the
importance in the function of the public sector, especially in policy
implementation.
At the present days, especially during the economic crisis, people talk a great deal about good governance—a phrase that has been translated into Thai in a variety of ways. Boonmee (1998) defines good governance as the interaction among the public, private, and the civil society with respect to public management with the aim to increase effectiveness, legitimacy, equitability, and accountability. Boonmee stresses the importance and empowerment of the civil society which is a main ingredient of good governance, because the civil society comprises the largest portion of the citizens. Rhodes (1996) equates good governance with the new style of governance. This new style of governance should imply a minimal role of the state via spending cuts and privatization. In addition, the new public management is directly related to good governance, in that there needs to be mechanisms that can increase public involvement, such as public hearing and decentralization of public decision making. Therefore, most definitions of good governance strongly relates to the concept of civil society.

In the case of Thailand, similar to many other developing countries, good governance and the idea of empowering the civil society tend to be discussed simultaneously. Amidst the traditional—public and private-sectors, the civil society emerged as an alternative, third, or social sector in the Thai society.

Although slightly different definitions are given to the concept of the civil society, most scholars agree that it is a popular, nonstate and nonprivate sector. From the angle of the civil society, the state is a coercive and compulsory institution by using such means as law enforcement and
other forms of regulation to force sometimes non-voluntary behaviors. Liberal theorists, in discussing the civil society, emphasize the themes of independence, liberty, plurality, and voluntary actions. To them, the civil society usually needs public and civic consciousness among individuals within a community as a main ingredient for voluntary group formation and collective action to secure particular interests, such as those within a community (Rodan, 1997). Laothamatas (1997) and Danziger (1996) consider the civil society to comprise groups, organizations, foundations whose purposes can be both protecting groups' interests as well as protecting a wider, societal interests. And unlike the private sector, the civil society, as a separate sector, usually is not profit oriented. In these senses, therefore, the civil society should include nongovernmental organizations, interest groups, charitable organizations, grassroots, people's organizations, and even general people with public and civic consciousness.

Advocates for good governance and civil society abound, particularly at the present time. Many people believe that the replacement of governance for government is appropriate, as the word “governance” tones down the sense of being governed and coerced by the state due to the implication of people’s self government in the word “governance.” Owing to the popularity in the discussion of the civil society as a means to achieve good governance, this paper purports to do the following. It will first examine the roles market or private and nonmarket or public sectors. The discussion, then, moves to the civil society as well as its relationships to the state and the private organizations with a particular reference to the case of Thailand. Lastly, the implications of the relationships among these three sectors with respect to public policy are discussed.

The Private Sector and the Market Failure

In the democratic society and capitalistic or free market ideology, the provision of goods and services is mostly believed to be the duty of the market. The market mechanism will allocate scarce resources in such ways that usually lead to a social well being. In the societal terms, although resources will unavoidably be exploited, those resources are assured to be,
expended in the most efficient manner in the market. In other words, with respect to the amount of resources consumed by our society, our resources will not be used up more than they should. Also, the competition in the free market will help lead to a fair price and quality of goods and services. This represents an ideal situation in a perfectly competitive market.

However, this ideal situation does not always occur or it sometimes does not occur in its entirety. At times, the market does not function properly and, hence, gives rise to the phenomenon of market failure. The market failure gives legitimacy to the government to intervene the free market, resulting, in turn, in roles of the state in the forms of various types of public policy. Ripley and Franklin (1986) distinguish among four types of public policies—distributive, competitive regulatory, protective regulatory, and redistributive policies. These policy types result in various state agencies or bureaus and bureaucracy. As Downs (1967) states, “Many people regard bureaucracy and bureaucrats as necessary evils at best ... Certain vital social functions must be performed by nonmarket-oriented functions that possess all the traits defined as characterizing bureaus” (p. 32). These bureaus are created mainly to deal with the market failure. At times, therefore, state’s intervention in the market as well as in people’s private lives through these policies is not only appropriate but also necessary.

One type of market failure is due to the nature of certain goods and services themselves. It is necessary that some goods or, usually, some services be provided mainly by the public sector. For instance, national defense and security as well as law creation and enforcement comprise classic cases of services that usually need to be publicly provided. Theoretically, these are public goods which have unique characteristics. Their nature of non-excludability, in particular, makes private provisions of these goods and services inappropriate and almost impossible. People, whenever possible, always try to have access to these public goods free of charge. It is usually impractical to exclude people, who do not pay, from receiving the benefit of, for example, national security resulting from national defense. It is, in turn, not realistic to expect the private sector to
provide this particular service and some others. These public goods, then, result in the need for distributive policies and programs.

Income distribution is another function and service of the government through redistributive policies and programs. It is believed that poverty beyond a certain level, usually below the poverty line, is considered unacceptable. Economic distress can lead to many social problems such as thefts and corruption. Although the market can allocate scarce resources efficiently, it has neither mechanism nor incentive to equalize income and wealth.

Social regulations through competitive regulatory and protective regulatory policies and programs are also considered an appropriate and necessary role of the state. Certain private activities sometimes cause negative effects, which become a burden on the society. Consumption and certain kinds of production that result in pollution are an example of these private activities in need of state’s regulation.

Moreover, certain goods and services, especially public utilities and other types of infrastructure, are traditionally provided by the state (Stiglitz, 1988). This is due to the need for a large amount of investment in these industries. In most parts of the world, the provisions of these goods and services, in the past, automatically became the duty of the state, usually via state-owned enterprises or public enterprises.

Also, some goods and services have the “merit” characteristics, while others have the “nonmerit” characteristics. The consumption of the former is encouraged while the consumption of the latter is discouraged by the state. Education, due to its external benefit to the society, is usually encouraged through the public school system. On the other hand, smoking and drinking is usually discouraged by the imposition of excise taxes on such products as cigarettes and liquors.

State Intervention and State Failure

According to the above discussion, in a free market economy, we expect the market to function freely by itself. But the incidents of market
failure give some justifications for the state to intervene in various forms of public policy. However, just as the market sometimes fail, the government sometimes fail as well.

One important cause of governmental failure is internalities. Wolf (1979) refers to internalities as private goals of public agencies. In fulfilling its tasks, a public agency usually needs to develop certain standards for its day-to-day management, such as evaluating personnel, determining salaries and promotions, comparing subunits within the agency in order to allocate funds within the organization. With these private goals, usually for day-to-day administration, the phenomenon of goals replacement, which can result in detrimental effects such as unfulfilled public needs, sometimes occurs. In other words, goals replacement usually takes place when a public organization intentionally or unintentionally substitutes its private goals for the intended policy outcomes, as specified in the policy declaration or policy formulation.

It should be fair to state that both private and public organizations have private goals. However, only the private goals of private organizations go through the market test or market control mechanisms in the form of price and quality competition in the market. Internal standards and private goals of private organizations are generally related, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, to meeting the market test and therefore, responding to or anticipating consumers' desires (Daft, 1989; Wolf, 1979). For public organizations, in their nature of service provisions, their outputs and outcomes are usually difficult to evaluate. As a result, feedback from their clients are hard to assess and measure and sometimes even unreliable. Furthermore, in goods and services provided by public organizations, because there are usually no competing producers, the incentive to gear internal standards and private goals toward public purposes, which they are intended to serve, is weakened.

One among the most detrimental effects or governmental failure resulting from internalities is inflated cost in rendering public services. As bureaucrats generally want to maximize the budgets of an agency, this practice usually represents the agency's private goal. Therefore, for many
public agencies, budget growth becomes the norm. And in developed and developing countries alike, the size of the public sector, in turn, usually has a strong tendency to grow. In order to justify an increase in the funding of an agency, for instance, proposals to expand the functions, work force, and divisions of each agency are sometimes created unnecessarily (Wolf, 1979).

In private organizations, certain kinds of production and consumption sometimes cause side effects such as pollution or externalities. By the same token, state's actions in the forms of different types of policies, as stated above, may generate not only intended policy outputs and outcomes but also the unintended side effects. Wolf (1979) refers to these side effects as derived externalities. The likelihood of derived externalities is further enhanced by the nature of nonmarket outputs and outcomes. The nature of nonmarket outcomes that are hard to be assessed could create a pressure from both inside and outside of an organization for it to act before there is adequate knowledge or time to consider carefully potential side effects. An irony is that the market externalities or side effects provide the rationale for state intervention in the form of, for instance, regulatory policies and programs only to create another set of side effects or derived externalities. For instance, a few decades ago, when standards for noise emissions were formally and strictly established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, an unanticipated strain occurred in the U.S.-French and U.S.-British relations over the issue of the Concorde Airplanes.

Sometimes, it is difficult not only to foresee but also to realize the existence of the derived externalities. This is partially due to the nature of public services whose effects—both intended and unintended—are generally long-term and incremental (Wolf, 1979). For instance a new labor policy might gradually alter inter-personal relations within families or within a community or an entire province or region. But it might take some time before such effects are realized and noticeable.

There are old and well-known, but sometimes not practiced, mechanisms that could minimize side effects of policy implementation. Methods of needs assessment within communities are available as one type of program evaluation; it is an evaluation before implementing a program.
Posavac and Carey (1989) refer to needs assessment as program planning. Assessing community needs is sometimes necessary, since there is usually a long interval between a policy initiation and the actual program implementation. Politicians and bureaucrats all have different ideas that need to be debated, argued, and discussed until an agreement is reached with respect to a policy and implementation objectives. Sometimes, by the time each policy is translated into implementation plans and objectives by bureaucrats, community needs have long been altered. Hence, needs assessment prior to implementation would be considered not only appropriate but sometimes also necessary.

Pilot studies are another mechanism that could be used to foresee and minimize side effects of governmental programs. Pilot studies are like an experimentation of policy implementation in a tested community prior to the over-all application of a program to targeted communities. Sometimes, these pilot studies are possible; but sometimes, they are not. The policy outcomes--both intended and unintended--from the tested location could, then, be assessed before the actual implementation. Precautions could, then, be taken in case that there are negative side effects.

Similar to other types of program evaluation, such as outcome evaluation, needs assessment sometimes are not actually practiced. And at times, although a program evaluation is pursued, its results are virtually ignored. This probably gives rise to the pressure for more community-based development or program implementation where inputs from the community is not only encouraged but also mandatory with the hope to meet the community needs. These inputs of ideas and effort are usually in the form of a decentralized decision making through local governments and public hearings. With the state failure in the case of derived externalities, for example, it is increasingly believed that a higher degree of public participation in resource allocation and management within a community as well as local public service deliveries would be worthwhile.

A rationale for state intervention in the form of redistributive policies is income and resource distribution such as progressive taxation. The question is whether or not resource distribution actually results from
such policies and programs. One form of governmental failure is distributional inequity. According to Wolf (1979), nonmarket activities, whether intended to overcome the distributional inequities of market outcomes or to remedy other inadequacies in the market's performance, may themselves generate distributional inequities.

A few reasons could explain distributional inequities or this type of state failure. Firstly, in most forms of policies, especially redistributive policies and programs, some people or groups of people benefit from the policies and programs than do others (Ripley & Franklin, 1986). Dye (1995) explains this phenomenon using group theory that the direction of policies or policy changes highly depend on group influences and power. According to Dye, group theory describes all meaningful political activities in terms of the group struggle. Policy makers are viewed as constantly responding to group pressures—bargaining, negotiating, and compromising among competing demands of influential groups. Group theorists believe that public policy at any given time comprises an equilibrium reached in the group struggle. Policy usually moves in the direction desired by the groups gaining influence and away from desires of groups losing influence.

Cases of political inequality within the group struggle could be observed even in a pluralistic society like the United States. Certain privileged groups such as big businesses generally have more political resources needed for influencing policy directions than do other interest groups (Lindblom, 1993). The privileged status of big businesses comes from a simple logic that businesses perform economic functions essential to the capitalistic society. As a result, certain public policies are intentionally made in favor of businesses, such as protected markets, moderate regulations, and low business taxes. In addition, businesses enjoy the privilege of, for instance, available funds for lobbying as well as their readily available organizations over other interest groups.

Another reason that could explain distributional inequalities, a type of state failure, is the nature of administrative procedure—the discretionary power of bureaucrats. In many of social services, such as health, education, and law enforcement, where service providers are considered professionals,
administrative decision-making is of an extremely discretionary kind. Too rigid an adherence to rules and rules-guided procedures would be criticized for inflexibility, insensitivity to differing clients' needs and circumstances, dishonoring and distrust of those professionals, as well as impersonal treatment of clients. These comprise the usual arguments, which are somewhat reasonable, for the support of bureaucrats' discretion in administration. On the other hand, excessive discretion has been seen as leading to arbitrariness, inequality, abuse of administrative power, and eventually corruption of the public sector (Adler & Asquith, 1993: Wolf, 1979). But in any case, a certain degree of discretionary power is needed for policy implementation.

**Relations between Public and Private Sectors**

Most people agree that we need the operations of both public and private sectors. Each sector has both strengths and weaknesses. In many countries such as the United States for the past few decades, constant changes back and forth could be observed from a high degree of state intervention or regulation to a lesser degree of state intervention or deregulation and sometimes back to high degree of state intervention or re-regulation again. But most of the time in the United States, anti-government sentiment by means of commercial and populist pressure grows more rapidly than antibusiness attitude. Within the capitalistic ideology, pressures for privatization also abound in many countries. For public services possessing characteristics of impure public goods, which are the case most public services, privatization is usually encouraged. Along with well known methods of privatization such as sales of governmental assets in public enterprises and governmental contracting with private firms, Savas (1987) also proposes other less-known yet interesting and possible methods of privatization such as grants, vouchers, voluntary service, and self-service.

In the conventional way of looking at policy implementation and public service provisions, the "iron triangle" illustrates participants in this phase of the policy process. In this iron triangle, bureaucrats are known to be the most active participant, since implementation is considered the direct
duty of public agencies (Downs, 1967; Ripley & Franklin, 1986). Politicians and interest groups comprise the two other parties whose roles in the iron triangle are to satisfy their constituents and protect their own interests, respectively. These two parties become the auditing for the use of bureaucratic decision making as well as for the responsiveness of policy implementation to the policy intent. With the trend toward privatization, another participant--private organizations--then, enter into the original picture of implementation. Thus, the original picture of the iron triangle is changed to the "iron rectangle," as the following figures illustrate.

**Privatization and Minimal State**

In many countries, the movement toward a less active role of governments is encouraged. In the United States, for instance, a small government is generally preferred to a big government. A lot of attention is given to the size and growth of state and local governments by reference to the number of government units, their expenditures, the taxes they levy, and the number of people they employ. From 1940 to present, U.S. government
expenditures have grown a hundredfold, from an eighth to more than a third of the gross national product (Savas, 1987).

Added to the fear of big governments, the phenomenon of globalization provides another argument for privatization. According to Evans (1997), as income and wealth are increasingly generated by private transactions that take place across the borders of states rather than within them, it has become increasingly inappropriate to sustain the image of states as the preeminent actors at the global level. Access to capital and technology depends heavily on strategic alliances with those who control global production networks. And underlying the transnational mobility of capital and the construction of global production networks is a radically globalized financial system, whose operation poses a fundamental challenge to public authority in the economic realm.

Up to this point, the discussion in this paper has outlined the relationship between the two original sectors—public and private. Despite the market failure, many factors explain the trend toward more privatization efforts in most parts of the world. These factors include the governmental failure just as the existence of market failure, the capitalistic ideology especially owing to the possibility of private provisions of impure public goods, the fear of big governments, as well as the phenomenon of globalization.

Although the factors listed above consist of the general rationales for privatization, in the case of Thailand, the pressure for a less active role of the public sector is due not simply to the fear of big government but mostly to the fear of corruption in the public sector. This is probably true not only in the case of Thailand but possibly also in many other developing countries. Corruption in Thailand is believed to be mainly responsible for "bad governance." Along with other characteristics of bad governance such as administrative inefficiency, corruption in the Thai public sector possibly stems from distributional inequity as a form of state failure. But this failure—corruption—together with its consequences have long been customary and strongly felt in Thailand.
Scholars have discussed problems concerning governance in the Thai case. Clientelism gives rise to an extraordinarily strong bureaucratic power. This power well expedites the distributional inequity, which is partially due to the fact that bureaucrats could exercise a certain degree of administrative discretion. According to Riggs (1964), “Some officials enjoy positions which enable them to extort bribes and other favors from interest groups. Part of this extra intake must be passed on to superiors or influential members of prismatic bureaucracy who furnish protection” (p.270). With Thailand being a bureaucratic polity, at least up to the present time before the full application of the new constitution of 1997, cases of co-optations between market and nonmarket organizations for the purpose of private or personal gains of both sides have been widely known*(Samudavanija, 1990; Phongpaichit & Piriyarangsan, 1994). These co-optations, take place, for instance, between a private organization and a regulatory agency set up for the purposes of social and economic regulations.

One purpose of this paper is, then, to bring attention to a slight difference in the nature of governmental failure between the particular case of Thailand, perhaps along with some other developing countries in the region such as Indonesia and Malaysia, and the case of developed countries. Along with other types of state failure such as internalities, in Thailand, corruptions and briberies mainly seem to put forward the pressure for a less active role of the government. This more latent role of the public sector tends to be believed by many people to be the most likely means available that the prevalence of this nonmarket failure could be reduced.

The Emergence of the Civil Society

With respect to the above discussion, the popular desire to attenuate the state's roles must be compensated by an increased role of others. An interesting development in Thailand, especially during the drafting of the new constitution and the economic crisis, is the growing pressure for a more active role of conscious people--the civil society. Both the private sector and the civil society in such forms as NGOs and people’s organizations share one characteristic, in that both are nonstate sectors.
However, while the main objective of the private sector is to make profit in the free market economy via production and consumption, this is usually not the case for the civil society. There are various organizations, such as voluntary, governmental, grassroots, and charitable organizations, whose motive is not primarily profit maximization. These organizations all belong to the category of the civil society (Laothamathas, 1997). In any case, it is believed that with a more active role of the citizens, via the formation of the civil society, the state's power and roles should decrease. The nonmarket failure—corruptions within the public sector as well as co-optation between the public and private sectors, in particular—should, in turn, be abated, as a result of a more active role of the society in scrutinizing state's activities, budget allocation, and spending. In addition, with more public participation, public services should be more responsive to community needs.

The concept of civil society is actually not new, with respect to the western theory of public policy. In policy formulation, the civil society, usually in the form of interest groups, should perform the role of interest articulation. As Almond and Powell (1966) state, “Interest articulation is particularly important because it marks the boundary between the society and the political system” (p.73).

But not only in policy making, in policy implementation, the civil society, again mostly in the form of interest groups, also has its place in the iron triangle. Its role is again to oversee the state's activities—that is, both the bureaucrats and politicians' activities in policy implementation. In the western theory of policy implementation, bureaucrats and politicians live the so-called "life in a goldfish bowl." They are constantly scrutinized, through the crystal clear glass of a goldfish bowl, by interest and watchdogs groups. In addition, even though many people make a distinction between the private sector and the civil society, Savas (1987), Percy (1984), Foltz (1991), and Whitaker (1980) do not. Savas (1987), in his proposed methods of privatization, includes citizens' self-service and voluntary service as possible forms of privatization along with other more conventional ones. Whenever there is a coproduction of public services in any form, such as household recycling, self-organizations of neighborhood watch by
community residents, and waste reduction, privatization is believed to take place.

In Thailand, in this era of the new constitution and the hope for political development as well as the economic crisis, nevertheless, the civil society seems to be separated distinctively from the two traditional--public and private--sectors. Earlier discussions on state failure in the case of Thailand, in particular, may provide an explanation for this attempt to make the three sectors separate from one another. Co-optation between the public and private sectors, usually for personal gains of bureaucrats, politicians, and businesses, have occasionally been observed. On the other hand, the society or most people in the country must pay the price of this co-optation in the form of pollution, resource depletion, as well as unfair income and resource distribution. In public issues in Thailand such as the case of Forum of the Poor, for example, it is believed that co-optation and the resulting benefits for the rich--bureaucrats, politicians, and businesses--cause the demise of the poor and disadvantaged (Pintobtang, 1996). This is currently interpreted as bad governance in this country and perhaps also in some other developing countries.

Civil society is believed by many to be another force or social, sometimes grassroots power, that could come into the picture of the policy process to balance and challenge the power of the original sectors. Usually, public and civic consciousness as well as group formations among people with similar interests are necessary ingredients for the civil society to be effective in balancing, challenging, and auditing the power of the other two sectors in both policy making and policy implementation phases of the public policy process. Particularly with respect to policy implementation, the civil society should take the place of interest groups in the iron rectangle, as the following picture illustrates.
The above iron rectangle would be altered if we refer to the civil society in a slightly different manner. In the current discussion of the civil society and the belief in its possible consequence in better governance in the case of Thailand in particular, the civil society could be interpreted in a slightly different way. As stated, the state failure in the form of corruption and co-optation among the state, private, and perhaps influential, upper middle class interest groups to achieve personal gains have been strongly felt and fearful in Thailand. In order to balance these forces, the current ideal concept of civil society is referred to a stronger social sector in the sense of individuals' stronger public and civic consciousness; awareness of and concern in community, local, and national public issues; as well as readiness and commitment to participate in politics such as forming and joining grassroots groups within communities. The organizations and gathering of people in various forms such as grassroots organizations and NGOs are primarily charitable in nature. The interests that these organizations want to protect usually seem to be societal, longterm, and indirect, such as environmental protection and preservation, as opposed to a more direct self-interests that traditional interest groups want to protect. If this is the case, the picture of iron rectangle would be changed to an iron pentagon, with separate positions of the civil society and interest groups, as the following picture illustrates.
The Need for "the Necessary Evils" Remains

Thus far, this paper has already discussed the place for the Thai civil society as the third, alternative, people's sector amidst the two original sectors--public and private--in relation to public policy. This last portion of the paper will turn to consider political and social implications of all the above discussions regarding the three sectors with respect to their roles in the Thai public policy process.

Despite the pressure for a stronger role of the civil society, this paper will still make an argument for the necessity in the roles of the state. As Downs (1967) states, the bureaucracy, being "a necessary evil," remains. But while remaining, the state cannot deny the reality that it must exist in a new environment of public policy where the other two sectors--the private sector and the civil society--are gradually growing in strength in the Thai society.

In the above discussion of public policy, the civil society could, theoretically and legitimately, play a role almost throughout the policy process. Its role as policy advocacy within the process of interest articulation is theoretically clear. But more than that, forces within the civil society in Thailand have increasing tried to assert a heavier role in policy implementation. This heavier role and political participation is usually in the form of an increase in the number of NGOs and people's organizations, such as environmental groups and welfare and child welfare organizations.
(Sangwoli, 1991; Pongsapich & Kataleeradabhan, 1997). The role and position of these organizations are legitimately located within the iron triangle, iron rectangle, and iron pentagon. But this paper will give a further discussion of this role in relation to the public and private sectors, since the civil society's role in the phase of policy implementation differs somewhat from its role in interest articulation or policy advocacy in the phase of policy making.

In this new environment of increasing role of the Thai civil society, policy making and implementation have to be considered carefully. In the above discussion of public policy, the civil society could theoretically and legitimately have a role almost throughout the policy process. But what would happen to the other two sectors, when there is a change within the policy environment? In theory, along with the private sector and the civil society, the state still deserves its places throughout the policy process (Diamond, 1994). Among the talks regarding a decreasing role of the state and an increasing role of the other two sectors, Evans (1997) also cautions that "The danger is not that states will end up as marginal institutions but that meaner, more repressive ways of organizing the state's roles will be accepted as the only way of avoiding the collapse of public institutions. Preoccupation with eclipse [of the state] cripples consideration of positive possibilities for working to increase state's capacity so that they can more effectively meet the new demands that confront them" (p.64).

The administration of public affairs often involves complex tasks that citizens alone might not have adequate capability and resources to handle (Lam, 1996). Sangiampongsa (1997) discusses centralization and decentralization of public service delivery or policy implementation. Decentralization of decision making certainly benefits localities in a variety of ways. Nonetheless, in some occasions, a centralized decision making is also appropriate, such as when collective efforts among various, usually nearby, jurisdictions are needed. In these cases, coordination would be necessary.

In certain policy areas, uncoordinated efforts among separate communities could result in detrimental effects. These are policy areas
where actions or nonactions could create both positive and negative spillover effects. And unfortunately, the private sector and the civil society such as people's organizations have less means and authority to coordinate than does their public counterpart. Community-based pollution control and abatement, for instance, could export the pollution to nearby communities. For instance, preventing waste dumping in a location may push the waste to be dumped in another location. Also, loose, community-based law enforcement in a community could result in a breeding of local criminals, which, in time, might spread to nearby jurisdictions (Sangiampongsa, 1997). Also, bad schools and bad teaching in some communities could result in illiteracy which may have a detrimental, national effect, since illiterate people could move, mostly in the form of unskilled labor, from their hometowns to other places. Solow (1971) refers to these local, community-based actions and nonactions as piecemeal efforts which sometimes do not work. For certain policy areas, such as environment and education, multi-jurisdictional cooperation—the coordinated efforts among localities in decision making and implementation—is necessary to minimize positive and negative spillovers.

Also, in some policy areas, uncoordinated, piecemeal efforts among nearby communities or regions lead to a costly service delivery and policy implementation. A concerted effort in, for instance, pollution control, could lead to a cost reduction.

The coordination task of the central government does not at all mean that local inputs are denied. On the contrary, local participation could serve as needs assessment. In local governments, people's participation in policy making and administration via the civil society should ensure a more responsiveness of public services to local needs. It is the intention of this paper to emphasize that local participation in local politics and administration, with an aid from NGOs, for instance, does not automatically imply a smaller government. But local participation in local politics certainly should help achieve "good governance" or a more effective form of government. Having "good governance" does not necessarily mean that the state suddenly evaporates and disappears. Certainly, the state remains;
but with local inputs, the state should become a leaner and more effective one. Therefore, amidst the public sector, be it local or central governments, the civil society, that has been gaining more strength, theoretically, should be able to assist in arriving at "good governance" by properly articulating interests in public policy making and properly balancing the power of bureaucrats, politicians, and the private sector in case of privatization in policy implementation.

This paper will continue pointing out the necessity in the state's roles. In many developed countries, privatization is encouraged for the provision of impure public goods. But the state should still have some roles in the provision of certain services that have effects on public welfare. The private sector, due to the lack of profit, might not have incentives to deliver such services. Also, profit making should not be the main or the only objective of the provisions of services affecting the public welfare. On the contrary, it is important that the state, in delivering these services, be mindful of their social objectives.

In the United States, for example, active roles of the state are reflected in all policy types--distributive, redistributive, and regulatory. With respect to redistributive policies and programs, with much reliance on income tax, the American tax structure is quite progressive. In addition, many welfare and social security programs such as special medical assistance for senior citizens, unemployment benefits, aid to families with dependent children, and aid to single-parent families through the child support system all have some roles in equalizing income and wealth and, in turn, minimizing other social problems. With respect to distributive policies, American local governments are active in providing public education through public schools, due to the belief in its social benefits. Many parks, museums, libraries, and other recreational and educational facilities are publicly provided. For regulatory policies, occupational safety, as well as food and drug safety are all regulated to meet public health standards by regulatory agencies, such as Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) (Greer, 1987).
With respect to the roles of the Thai public sector, be it local or national, amidst the changing policy environment, there is still much room for its tasks in improving policy making and administration. Some scholars, such as Riggs (1966) and Samudavanija (1990) refer to Thailand as a bureaucratic polity. This paper would argue that the Thai bureaucracy is not at all strong and effective in delivering services that meet public needs. Local decision making and administration do not involve only budget allocation, road constructions, and the construction of other types of infrastructure. Human services programs or social services programs are much lacking in many parts of the country. And some of these programs could be somewhat community-based with some coordination from a centralized authority. In addition, non-privileged and disadvantaged people such as senior citizens, handicaps and mental retards certainly could use more representation and assistance.

Most probably because the Thai state together with the private sector, in case of privatization, are weak in delivering crucial public services, such as human services programs, the civil society is, then, believed to compensate for this weakness. Some NGOs such as the Foundation for the Better life of Children, the Emergency Home, as well as cremation associations increase their roles beyond policy advocacy into welfare policy implementation side by side state agencies. As stated earlier, civil society in the form of NGOs, for instance, well deserve its place in both policy making and administration. And in some services, coproduction from the civil society is possible as a form of privatization. However, for some services, coordination from the authority such as local and national governments is needed for collective efforts to render their usefulness. And as stated, these are cases where certain actions, due to uncoordinated, piecemeal efforts, could result in spillover and, possibly, harmful effects to nearby communities.

In addition, in order for civic consciousness and political participation in a form of the stronger civil society to result, certain requirements are necessary. Similar to such behaviors as recycling, nonlittering, and volunteering to help people in distress, more direct
involvement in politics throughout the policy process should be considered a prosocial behavior. Awareness of consequences in action or nonaction as well as ascribed responsibility are two main factors that usually activate prosocial behaviors (Schwartz, 1968; Heberlein, 1971). Sangiampongsa (1995) found that although these two altruistic factors are necessary in activating prosocial behaviors, the cost factor far exceeds the two altruistic factors in importance in determining people’s prosocial behaviors. Even though people are altruistic, they will neither recycle nor reduce waste generation if they feel inconvenience in so doing. The sense of inconvenience represents the cost or the price that people have to pay in behaving prosocially, such as recycling and reducing waste generation.

By the same token, it is doubtful that people’s participation throughout the policy process will take place systematically. The civil society in the form of people’s civic consciousness and political participation might take place only when they do not feel a burden in being public mindedness and in political participation. Given that people have other things to do such as earning a living through their routine work, political involvement is sometimes pursued only on the side or only if they have some free time. And sometimes, there are free riders who desire free benefits resulting from others’ active involvement in the policy process. Usually, more direct positive and negative incentives such as mandatory recycling are far more effective in pushing recycling behavior than people’s senses of altruism. Similarly, although some people actively join NGOs, people’s organizations, and other interest groups in policy advocacy and some others coproduce public services such as recycling; formal, direct duties of bureaucrats in policy implementation could still ensure, on a large scale, a systematic service delivery. This might, then, suggest that the role of the civil society, through political participation, in policy advocacy and scrutinizing the work of bureaucrats and politicians in policy implementation might at times be more realistic and promising than the actual coproduction of public services which requires more time and effort in active involvement.
Lastly, this paper will point out that political inequality exists not only in Thailand but also elsewhere, such as the United States. As stated earlier, certain groups such as big businesses are equipped with more political resources for influencing policy directions than some other groups (Lindblom, 1993). But in the United States, local, state, and federal governments still have their roles in delivering public services. The society still certainly need the state’s roles in coordinating and delivering goods and services that have some effects on social well being. But in a somewhat pluralistic society such as the United States, interest and watchdogs groups should still ensure some degrees of interest protection of the less privileged groups.

Similarly, in Thailand, with a stronger civil society at the present days, the efficiency of its roles of interest protection in policy initiation and implementation should gradually increase. And the power of other actors in the public policy process would be more properly balanced in a new policy environment. On the other hand, the power of the state, according to the arguments of this paper, properly remains within its functions and boundary.
References


