

Call for Papers for workshop: **“Arts of resistance and authoritarian rule: protest movement, civil disobedience and media response in Myanmar in a comparative perspective”** at Chiang Mai University, organized by the Regional Center for Social Sciences and Sustainable Development (RCSD), University of Yangon and University of Passau, from 8 – 9 July 2022.

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Outline:

Is the coup in Myanmar on 1. February 2021 in line with the global trend towards the rise of authoritarian governments or is it a special case for Myanmar? In fact, for quite a few years Myanmar could be cited as special case. In Thailand the military staged a coup in 2014. In Indonesia we have a trend towards authoritarianism and control of public spheres. Neither in Cambodia, nor in Laos or Vietnam do we have any indicators for increased liberalism. Myanmar seemed to be an exception. Thus, the coup, although not fully unpredicted was a surprise.

A question is, why remains resistance to authoritarian governance often rather limited? In fact, in several cases a wider public actually appreciated a coup. Like in other countries, the military in Myanmar used the usual ideologies of nationalism, anti-corruption, law and order etc. as reasons for the interference. They tried to legalize and thereby legitimize the coup through reference to alleged faults and manipulations of the 2020 election. Obviously their ideologies and/or the coup had an appeal to some people outside the military, but, maybe unexpected, people from different classes and ethnicities resisted it. In Myanmar, it seems that the military was surprised by the resistance and in particular the resilience of resistance even against brutal, violent repressions.

In the title we refer to “arts of resistance”. The title intentionally makes use of two of James Scotts studies namely “Weapons of the Weak” a rather old study based on data from Malaysia using the differentiation between on-stage and off-stage interaction as formulated by Goffmann, and “Arts of Resistance”, where he differentiates between interaction between classes of different status and within such classes. This reminds of N. Elias on the difference between formal and informal behaviour patterns, as well as the need for internal cohesion for elites as well as groups or classes trying to maintain resistance. The important aspect is that on the surface and even in the interactions between dominant classes or factions and subordinates, little resistance is expressed. Nevertheless, outside of these interactions forms of resistance are institutionalized.

Interestingly, these ideas of “arts of resistance” can as well be applied to internal struggles within the elite and authoritarian governments. The government needs some legitimacy and therefore alliance with other groups and classes, like petty bourgeoisie, minorities etc. Thus, an important question is which groups are seen by the elite as the usual opponents and as easy pawns who would follow their demands. In other words, what are the cultural, social, economic and political variables and institutions that favour acceptance/acquiescence (or even more so appreciation!) of authoritarian rule or resistance against it. Authoritarian

governance does not only imply censorship and control of opinion and media, but as well the orchestration of a new language without any critical terms like in Russia (not war, but “special military operation”). The use of this new language in media is an attempt of to control the mind and the construction of reality. Especially to go beyond such constructed realities, a comparative approach provides a better understanding. A goal is to analyze the specifics of the Myanmar case, and to show that authoritarianism is not specific to Myanmar culture.

Please submit possible presentations, and/or initial abstracts to us by early June, so that we can finalize the programme.