

*Democracy with Thai Characteristics?
Social Movements, Nationalism,
and the Coup of 2006*

A Public Lecture presented by Associate Professor Jim Glassman
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Thailand has a rich history of social movement struggles that have contributed to uneven democratization over the course of the 20th century. Ultimately, successive waves of such struggles have encountered obstacles to the processes of social transformation they seek, resulting in repeated lapses into military rule and a general prevalence of what some have called “low quality democracy.” Various factors contribute to these outcomes. This paper interrogates one such factor: the inability of Thai social movements to effectively challenge royalist-nationalist hegemony and to build regional and international connections that would create more leverage for transforming the Thai state. While internationalization of social struggle is no guaranteed formula for success, and might even have some costs, the repeated folding of Thai social movements into royalist and nationalist projects—sometimes through the active co-optation of such movements by groups within the Thai state—has weakened these movements in important ways. The royalist-nationalist hegemony that social movement weaknesses have indirectly abetted, this paper will argue, played a direct role in enabling the coup of September 19, 2006. Moreover, even the forms of social movement internationalism that have been present in Thailand, working through fairly high profile NGO-networks, have failed to counter this royalist-nationalist hegemony and have sometimes contributed to it. This suggests that more than simply internationalism, Thai social movements need international allies that are not beholden to forces in the Thai state, as are some national and international NGOs

Friday 30th March 2007

1:30 pm

Senate Room

Murdoch University

All Welcome

Jim Glassman is Associate Professor in the Department of Geography at the University of British Columbia. He received his PhD in Geography from the University of Minnesota in 1999. His area of specialization is political economy of development in Southeast Asia, with a special emphasis on urbanization and industrialization in Thailand, where he has conducted research since 1995. He has written on topics ranging from social struggles over development and geo-political conflict in the region to state policies for regional and industrial growth, and he is author of the book *Thailand at the Margins* (Oxford, 2004), a study of uneven development and the transformation of labor processes in Thailand since the Second World War. His current research, funded by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, is on development in the Greater Mekong Subregion.