

From domestic legitimacy to international recognition:

Sufficiency Economy Philosophy as foreign policy in Thailand

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Abstract

This thesis explored the usage of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) by asking if its use in Thai foreign policy is a tool for political legitimacy and international recognition? SEP was coined by the late Thai King Bhumibhol Adulyadej, as an alternative development approach. It espoused moderation, reasonableness and immunity with the support of knowledge and morality. It became a pillar of Thai politics as the 2014 coup-makers, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), introduced the concept at the UN as way to realize the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). This thesis used qualitative content analysis on nine foreign policy speeches to better understand this shift in Thai foreign policy. Five categories of usage were extracted, namely, 1. Thailand's role in the international community, 2. the monarchy, 3. Forward Engagement Policy, 4. values of the NCPO, and 5. localization of SEP. The thesis concludes that the NCPO's SEP narrative internationally functions both as a way to gain domestic political legitimacy, by association to the monarchy and its moral principles, as well as a tool for international recognition by having SEP be accepted for its usefulness in realizing the SDG, despite its connection to an authoritarian regime.

Keywords: Sufficiency economy philosophy, Thailand, Foreign policy analysis, Thai foreign policy, Sustainable development goals, Political legitimacy, International recognition, Linkage politics.

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A note on Thai names

With regards to Thai scholarly convention, all Thai's are referred and referenced to by their first name. Likewise, the reference list alphabetizes Thai authors by their first name. All other names are referred to by their family name.

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1. Introduction

During the general debate of the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly on the 1st of October 2018 Thailand's Deputy Foreign Minister, Virasakdi Futrakul, addressed the assembly re-declaring Thailand's commitment to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). A centerpiece in Virasakdi's exposition of Thailand's commitment to the SDG was the Thai government's adherence to the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP). This idea was first coined by the late King of Thailand Bhumibhol Adulyadej, Rama IX. The story of SEP is one of King Rama IX touring the country soon after his ascension to the throne, and seeing the struggle of farmers and local communities, he encouraged the people of Thailand to have a balanced way of living. Three principals were central to this approach, namely: moderation, reasonableness, and immunity. These principles together with conditions of morality and knowledge were supposed to be applied to any level of the society; from an individual to the nation.

SEP is not, however, a traditional foreign policy tool in Thailand. Introduced to the nation in 1997 by King Bhumibhol as an alternative development strategy after the 1997 economic crisis it came to be associated with the much revered King's wisdom. Yet it was mainly disregarded by subsequent leaders, including the controversial Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. SEP was only seriously brought into a foreign policy context following the 2006 coup d'état of Thaksin as the military used SEP as a justification for the coup. However, after the 2014 coup of Thaksin's younger sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, and the establishment of the military junta National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), SEP started to take a central role in Thai foreign politics. For example, it was mentioned in every single speech to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) by spokesmen of the junta between 2014-2018. This can be contrasted to it only being mentioned twice by democratically elected governments since 2001, when Thaksin was elected. The defining difference of the NCPO's use of SEP in foreign policy is the desire to spread the concept internationally.

This thesis aims to answer how and why SEP is used in Thai foreign policy under the NCPO. It will do so by using a qualitative content analysis method on nine foreign policy speeches made by NCPO spokesmen from 2014-2018. Through analysis of the speeches it is concluded that SEP is used in foreign policy to gain both domestic legitimacy and international recognition.

The most direct correlation found is the military's attempt to connect themselves with the monarchy in Thailand, with the intention of gain royal legitimacy. Additionally, in promoting values such as moderation and local wisdom, the junta can be said to use etho-politics in order to justify their rule as moral. A romanticized view of the community also suggests there to be a wish for Thailand to turn into what can be called "enlightened authoritarianism".

However, for a foreign policy speech, the audience is the international community, and not directly the Thai population. The thesis also turns to recognition theory in trying to expand the view of what Thailand is attempting to convey beyond its borders. In this regard, the NCPO has tried to establish Thailand as a middle country who is open to being a bridge builder between developed and developing states. Utilizing SEP as a means to portray the junta as morally good, the NCPO is trying to depict themselves as different from previous governments, despite co-opting central parts of Thaksin's foreign policy initiatives. By gaining recognition for SEP through different partnerships, the NCPO hopes to silence the critiques of their authoritarian regime.

1.1. Study aim and research question

This thesis is interested in investigating the use of SEP as a discursive political tool in Thai foreign policy. Applying content analysis on nine different foreign policy speeches by spokesmen of the NCPO, this thesis tries to understand the increased use of SEP in international forums as well as its narrative function for the junta. The speeches range from 2014 to 2018 and take into consideration the cultural and domestic variables that play into the decisions of the NCPO as foreign policy makers. The analysis takes root in the idea of linkage politics, connecting the domestic scene with the international arena. As an explanatory theory for explaining SEP's domestic usage, the thesis turns to the idea of political legitimacy, while explanations for its international usage is seen through the lens of international recognition.

The research question for the thesis is therefore:

- Is Sufficiency Economy Philosophy used in Thai foreign policy as a tool for political legitimacy and international recognition?

Additional sub-questions have also been considered as supportive in answering the main research question:

- What is the history of SEP as a political tool?
- Is the usage of SEP in foreign policy a shift from previous Thai governments?

- In what ways has there been an increased use of SEP in foreign policy?

2. Theoretical Framework

Decision maker's obligations to perform in domestic politics as well as foreign politics is often referred to as the "two-level" game (Putnam, 1988). The NCPO's SEP strategy seems to have objectives both in domestic politics and in foreign politics. The following section will outline the theoretical framework for the thesis by first explaining its basis in foreign policy analysis with the goal to elaborate on the linkages between domestic and foreign policy, and also to explain how "culture and national identity" and "domestic politics and opposition" function as variables in foreign policy analysis. The subsequent sections will introduce political legitimacy and recognition as theories to explain the junta's objective on the domestic and diplomatic scene respectively.

2.1. Foreign policy analysis

The theoretical framework of this thesis stems from the sub-field of international relations known as foreign policy analysis (FPA). FPA uses the actor (groups or individuals) as the ground of analysis, in contrast to the state in international relations. This allows the research to understand the changes in foreign policy in relation to changing domestic scenes which happens independently from external factors (Hudson, 2007, p.7-8). One of the first authors to write about this phenomenon was James Rosenau (1969) who, through collected case studies, showed that domestic factors indeed can have effect of a country's external relations. The theory of "linkage politics" has often been applied to the Thai context (Corrine, 1982; Kusuma Snitwongse, 2001; Pinitbhand, 2018; Pavin, 2010).

Valerie Hudson (2007, p.17, 34) draws on FPA literature as she outlines nine different levels of analysis which relates to foreign policy decision making and action which have been studied in greater detail. These levels are connected to the psychosocial-milieu of foreign policy decision makers. That is to say that they affect the actor of foreign policy decision-making through their psychological and social settings, which may result from personal, domestic and external influence. The major levels Hudson (2007, p. 34) list are: cognitive processes, leader personality and orientation, small group dynamics, organizational process, bureaucratic politics, culture and identity, domestic political contestation, national attributes, regional and international systems.

These variables do interlink and function parallel to each other, yet to make feasible research it is helpful to isolate one or a few of them as independent variables for FPA. Since SEP is

connected to the monarchy, a symbol of the Thai state, it can be considered to be part of the culture and identity, at least of the military and NCPO. The junta also find themselves in a different regime type from the previous government and have placed themselves in a peculiar situation vis-à-vis domestic political contestation. These levels of analysis have been well documented and can contribute to a nuanced analysis and contextualization of the qualitative content analysis. The two categories which this thesis will focus on are therefore “culture and identity” and “domestic political contestation”.

National identity is the simplified answer to the questions “who are we?”, “what do we do?” and “who are they?” when asked to the majority of a population. The specific answers relate to the social discourses a society uses to answer these questions. Culture is what we call the transitory results of all this social discourse (Hudson, 2007, p. 119-121). The link between culture and national identity is described by Hudson (2007, p. 120) “In a way, we cannot speak of issues of national identity without reference to culture as it arises from the continual and dynamic process of social discourse.” Culture and national identity function in the political as a way to make sense of information, that is to see culture as an organization of meaning (Geertz, 1973), Culture affects what decision makers want and desire, that is to say culture as a value preference (Hofstede, 2001), and finally as a human strategy to gain approval by having action meet cultural preferences which the population value (Swidler, 1986). Looking at how culture functions in the domestic political scene allows us also to understand how it functions in foreign policy due to the assumption of linkage politics. The important variables for this level of analysis is the usage of culture and national identity in social discourse.

The second variable this thesis takes into consideration is that which relates to domestic political contestation. This level of analysis directly parallels with linkage politics as it relates to how power struggle on the domestic scene effects outcome in external relations. Here different actors and institutions have different agendas and clash with the means provided to them by the regime type. The aim of each actor is to gain concrete support, such as capital, manpower or material, as well as ideational legitimacy. The distribution of power as well as the source of power decides on how successful an actor will be in relation to others, therefore, regime type plays a crucial role in this matter. The regime type decides the rules of the game. Foreign policy is therefore both a result of the regime’s desire to seek and maintain power as well as the opposition’s ability to hinder or change those policies be it through power from public opinion or through institutionalized means (Hudson, 2007, p. 142-144, 155). The

important variables for this level of analysis is the regime type, political opposition and information dissemination in media. Another common variable is how well the actor is received in the public. However, this thesis will not engage in such a discussion as it looks only at foreign policy strategy, not reception.

2.2. Political legitimacy

As we understand that foreign policy can be a continuation of domestic politics we can ask ourselves why the NCPO have been putting SEP at the center of their foreign policy. If we combine culture as a human strategy with the need of regimes to seek and maintain power, we land on the conclusion that foreign policy can be a tool to seek domestic political legitimacy.

In democracies, political legitimacy is given to governments through election as the ultimate symbol for the people's consent. In authoritarian regimes, however, that legitimacy is not inherently given. To keep stability an authoritarian regime are known to use strategies of repression and co-option, yet, according to Gerschewski (2013, p.18), that is not enough, there also need to exist some form of legitimacy belief. In a Weberian tradition legitimacy is defined as "...active consent, compliance with the rules, passive obedience, or mere toleration within the population" (Ibid). Alagappa (1995, p.33,41-43) combines applies Weber's theory of legitimacy in his research on Southeast Asia to find that states employ different ways to support legitimacy claims over time. This implies that sources of legitimacy are not static but change over time as the wants and needs of the population changes. The idea of popular sovereignty is there for intrinsic in the idea of legitimacy.

Panuwat Panduprasert (2017) builds on Gerschewski and outlines three ways that the NCPO has tried to achieve legitimacy without holding elections. "Performance legitimacy" relates to the acts to prove the NCPO is doing something which the previous democratic governments could not. Firstly, blaming corrupt politicians and performing symbolic acts to fix apparent mistakes of the Yingluck government, like paying rice farmers affected by the rice pledging scheme.

"Reform legitimacy" relates to the ideas that the junta presents as their plan for the future. The NCPO's reform agenda has shown itself with the presentation of the new ideology of pracharat, and their 20-year national strategy which came into effect in 2018 (Ibid).

Finally, there is the "royal legitimacy". As King Bhumibhol Adulyadej held great esteem among Thai people, many view the monarchy as an essential and sacred institution. If a threat against the monarchy was presented then, logically, it's protector should gain praise and

acceptance (Ibid). This form of legitimacy relates to the cultural variable in FPA as the monarchy is considered a cultural institution which historically is known to give approval to national leaders.

2.3. Recognition

The first strand of this thesis attempts to answer why SEP is used in foreign policy from the perspective of domestic politics. This assumes the audience for all political acts are the citizens of that country. Yet the direct audience for the foreign policy speeches is the international community. Therefore, the second argument follows along the lines of more traditional international relations theory to ask what kind of “recognition” the NCPO is seeking from the international community with these speeches?

The concept of recognition starts with the idea of identity, constructed through processes in which individuals, collectives and states construct narrative accounts of who they are. These stories tell actors who they are as well as how they are supposed to act; culture as value preference. States may, for example, tell stories about themselves being super, great or middle powers (Ringmar, 2007, p. 66-70).

This correlates with the idea of identity presented by Steele (2008) in his theory of ontological security which argues that agents need stable and secure self-identities in order to be able to act in a self-confident way. Actors therefore seek to maintain their narrated self-identities through routine actions. If the identities of the actor are challenged it might act in a way that threatens its physical security or that is inconsistent with international norm if it occurs to an actor that its self-identity does not correspond with its actions (Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008).

In recognition theory other actors perform a more central role in prompting such challenges. For an agent to be able to act in a self-confident manner, its identity needs to be recognized by others. Continuity in a sense, enhances ontological security, as it makes the actor feel secure in their identity (Gustafsson, 2015, p. 121).

Recognition can be divided into two types – “thin” and “thick”. Thin recognition is about being recognized as part of a community while thick recognition, in contrast, acknowledges difference or uniqueness, for example, in the form of specific qualities. While the latter sounds similar to the process of “othering”, recognizing each other’s differences could also bring states together. Mutual recognition, involving two parties recognizing each other not merely as equals but as possessing different traits or qualities, can create solidarity and improved relations (Wendt, 2003, p. 511-512). In search of thick recognition, states need

others to acknowledge that which makes them different, the stories they tell about themselves to stand out.

Recognition play crucial role in international politics as self-narratives might not be accepted by other states or actors, who instead judge the states account of itself as unreasonable or presumptuous. The audience may, for example, not agree that a state is a great power and instead deny it recognition for the story it tells about itself (Ringmar, 2007, p.78-83). Denying recognition may result in humiliation or be seen as disrespectful, as our identity are closely linked to our emotions (Wolf, 2011). That humiliation might, in the worst cases, lead to violence between states or prompt changes in foreign policy and traditional alliances (Gustafsson, 2015, p. 122-123).

3. Literature review

This thesis aims to expand knowledge of Thailand's foreign policy by employing theories of international relations and political science under the umbrella of FPA. By analyzing the trend of SEP in Thai foreign policy, it hopes to be able to further unpack characteristics of Thai politics. It therefore joins other works of IR and FPA analysis in Thailand. Moreover, it also adds to more recent academic research on the effect of alternative development strategies for political use. The following sections will outline some basics with regards to SEP and look into the literature regarding SEP as a political tool. In the end there is a discussion of what knowledge gap this thesis is trying to fill.

3.1. SEP as an alternative development approach

SEP was first coined by the late King of Thailand Bhumibhol Adulyadej, Rama IX. The story of SEP has its origins from the King's tour of the country after his ascension to the throne. As he saw the struggles of farmers and local communities he encouraged the people of Thailand to have a balanced way of living (The Chaipattana Foundation, 2017). He later proposed his philosophy as an alternative to the traditional neo-liberal development approach, as the country was stricken by the Asian financial crisis in 1997. Three principles are central to the SEP: moderation, reasonableness, and immunity. These principles together with conditions of morality and knowledge are supposed to be applied to any level of the society; individual, community and national level (Prasopchoke, 2008, p. 474-476).

The three main principles of SEP are interconnected and interdependent. The philosophy stresses "the middle- path", which according to Rachroat (2011, p. 44-45), takes root in Buddhist philosophy. This idea means living in moderation with self-reliance and not to

overindulge. To achieve this lifestyle one must have reasonableness, that is to say, knowledge and experience about the consequences of one's actions to oneself and others. With that knowledge one should also act compassionately and empathetically. Building up one's self-reliance and discipline also leads to the final principle, self-immunity. This refers to the ability to protect oneself against any external turbulence and to cope with events that are unpredictable or uncontrollable. In order to make sufficiency economy work one needs knowledge, the ability to understand received information as well as the prudence to use said information. One also requires various personality traits such as morality, integrity, trustworthiness, ethical behavior, honesty, perseverance, as well as the ability to work hard (Prasopchoke, 2010, p. 127-129).

In an article describing SEP's contribution to the theory of development Prasopchoke (2010, p. 125-127) points out the problems of mainstream ideas of development. She explains that their faultiness lies in dysfunctional institutions, poor conditions for human capital, environmental degradation and the role of government. She suggests that SEP can help solve these flaws if it is allowed to be the philosophical and practical basis on both a government and community levels. She offers a few examples of good practices, like the Koy-Rut-Tak-Wa community and the villages of Ban Moung Wan and Koak Chareon (ibid, p. 131,133).

3.2. SEP as a political tool

Since SEP is an alternative development model that stresses moderation, some critics (Elinoff, 2014; Hewison, 2008) have called out the class contradictions it seems to be built on. That is to say, as long as you perceive yourself as living in moderation, you can maintain a luxurious lifestyle. Simply put, SEP is too vaguely defined to have any practical usage without interpretation from those who aim to utilize it.

Its interpretivist character has opened for SEP to be used domestically as a tool by the political elite class. In the late 1990's it was used to co-opt developmental projects which were connected to rural communities with historical ties to political dissent, to include them in royal projects under state control (Heis, 2018). In the lead up to, and following the 2006 coup, it was used by the opponents of former Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, to criticize his leadership and lifestyle as anti-royalist and anti-Buddhist. SEP was juxtaposed as the model of a morally superior alternative to Thaksin's corrupt politics. SEP was used as a discursive tool to justify the 2006 coup (Chanida & Bamford, 2007; Hewison, 2008; Ivarsson, 2007). The military appointed an interim government led by former Army General Surayud Chulanont. He introduced SEP as the guiding philosophy for Thailand's development

strategies and policies and justified co-option of development projects started by Thaksin in the name of SEP (Walker, 2010, p. 242).

In the third and current phase of SEP as a political tool, Schaffar (2018) argues that it's used by the NCPO as a tool to legitimize changes towards a fascist regime. His argument builds on two ideas. Firstly, Aram Ziai's (2004, p. 1048) critique of post-modern thinking, which reasons that alternative development theories have a tendency to romanticize pre-modern subsistence communities. They are not subjected to similar critical scrutiny but are presented as pure and uncorrupted by domination and conflict. Ziai (2004, p. 1055) warns that this characterization might lead to the dismissal of other ideas connected to modernity and development, like democracy. The state might instead argue that communities should be ruled by moral leaders in a sort of "enlightened authoritarianism". Secondly, Ivarsson & Isager (2010, p. 223, 236-237) suggest that SEP has a history of being used as a form of etho-politics. Nicholas Rose's (1999, p. 478) concept of etho-politics maintains that certain political power aims to shape behavior of the populace in such a way that responsibility for the wellbeing of communities is put on the individuals in those communities. Individuals are to be fostered in a certain ethos so "Politics is to be returned to citizens themselves, in the form of individual morality and community responsibility" (Rose, 1999: 476).

Schaffar (2018, p. 402-406) argues that the NCPO has linked moderation and morality to austerity while highlighting the importance of community through their usage of SEP. Furthermore, Schaffar likens this system to that of Salazar's fascist Portugal, from 1932-1968, where the people were controlled and managed by keeping isolated community's poor by austerity measures.

3.3. Identifying a knowledge gap

There are many analyses that find that international recognition of SEP has led to Thai regimes' belief in their own legitimacy (Elinoff, 2014, p. 90; Hewison, 2008). Examples of such recognition is the 2007 report on SEP and human development and a Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award to King Bhumibhol given to him by Kofi Anan (UNDP, 2007)

While Schaffar (2018, p. 407-408) connects the junta's use of SEP in foreign policy as a foreign extension of its use as a discursive political tool in the domestic scene, he does not elaborate on why that is. What is the rationale behind employing a tool of domestic political value to the realm of international politics? There has yet been a study with a more in-depth

analysis of the rationale behind employing SEP in a foreign policy context. Hence, this thesis will attempt to analyze this aspect using both domestic political legitimacy theory as well as recognition theory.

4. Methodology

The method of this thesis is a qualitative content analysis where foreign policy speeches by the NCPO are analyzed and contextualized in order to draw conclusions about the nature of Thai politics. This firmly puts this thesis under a constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology (Bryman, 2012, p. 28-30, 33-34). A constructivist ontology infers that the state of the world is constructed by social phenomena and their meanings, that in turn are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena are in a constant state of revision by being re-produced through social interaction. An interpretivist epistemology infers that knowledge of the state of the world must be collected through interpretation and contextualization of social phenomena.

By analyzing SEP in foreign policy speeches, this thesis assumes that actors, such as the NCPO, construct their realities, and that of others, by way of discourse. SEP becomes a political discursive tool which must be interpreted and contextualized in order to gain in-depth knowledge of.

Building on this, the methodology section will first outline the chosen method and empirical material and how they go together as data analysis. Those sections are followed by a discussion on the challenges and considerations of ethical research, positionality and limitations.

4.1. Method and data collection

Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon (2005, p. 1278) define qualitative content analysis as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns.” By identifying commonly used or peculiar terms, words and phrases, a qualitative content analysis aims to achieve a deeper understanding of the contextual use.

Since the research question asks how and why a SEP is being used in foreign policy a qualitative content analysis of foreign policy speeches can help illuminate an answer. The foreign policy speech is addressed to the international community as an audience, yet, is a reflection of the experiences, objectives and values of the actor who is speaking. For this thesis, that actor is the NCPO and their use of the SEP. Nine speeches, as shown in table 1,

made by NCPO spokesmen at different foreign policy forums, which featured the concept heavily have been chosen for coding and analysis. These speeches have been transcribed into 4-5 pages each.

Table 1: Background information of speeches

| Event | Speaker | Location | Date |
|--|--|---|-------------|
| General Debate during the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly | Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tanasak Patlmapragorn | United Nations Headquarters, New York, U.S.A. | 27-09-2014 |
| General Debate during the 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly | Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha | United Nations Headquarters, New York, U.S.A. | 29-09-2015 |
| Handover ceremony of the chairmanship of the Group of 77 | Minister of Foreign Affairs and special envoy of the Prime Minister Don Pramudwinai | United Nations Headquarters, New York, U.S.A. | 12-01-2016 |
| the 5th Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia | Minister of Foreign Affairs Don Pramudwinai | Beijing, China | 28-04-2016 |
| General Debate during the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly | Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha | United Nations Headquarters, New York, U.S.A. | 21-09-2016 |
| Opening of the 2nd Asia Cooperation Dialogue Summit | Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha | Bangkok, Thailand | 10-10-2016 |
| General Debate during the 72th Session of the United Nations General Assembly | Minister of Foreign Affairs Don Pramudwinai | United Nations Headquarters, New York, U.S.A. | 22-09-2017 |
| General Debate during the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly | Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Virasakdi Futrakul | United Nations Headquarters, New York, U.S.A. | 01-10-2018 |
| Thailand Together for the ASEAN Chairmanship 2019 | Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha | Bangkok, Thailand | 21-12-2018 |

The selection of the speeches was made by consideration of a couple of criteria. First of the

variety of speeches had to span the entire period in which the junta has been in power to notice consistencies and changes in discourse. The speeches also needed to be held by a spokesperson of the NCPO who discussed or presented the SEP.

The annual speech in front of the UNGA was a starting point for the thesis as it is a well-established forum for leaders to promote their work within the UN. Since SDG would certainly be discussed and the assembly is continually well attended, five speeches were chosen, one for every year the NCPO had been in power, between 2014-2018. The Group 77 (G77), Asia Cooperation Dialogue Summit (ACD) and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) are forums that are featured as cooperation partners for SEP on TICA's webpage regarding "SEP for SDG partnership" (Thailand International Cooperation Agency, 2018). The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is also lifted as a valuable cooperation partner for Thailand's SEP and sustainable development. As Thailand is the chair of ASEAN in 2019, with the slogan "Advancing partnership for sustainability", a speech from 2018 of what to expect from the Thai chairmanship is also included.

To further investigate the links between the junta's foreign policy campaign and the domestic situation they find themselves in, the thesis also reviews policy documents, Thai language newspaper and televised speeches by Prayuth. The policy documents, consisting of the 2017 constitution, the 20-year strategy, and the twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP), are analyzed to understand the usage of SEP domestically in order to better contextualize the findings of SEP in foreign policy. The articles and programs are examples of how SEP is portrayed as a force of good outside of Thailand. The media dissemination tactic links the efforts to spread SEP internationally to the NCPO's legitimacy campaign. The speeches are also analyzed to the backdrop of similar foreign policy speeches held by politicians in previous cabinets, specifically under Thaksin, Yingluck and Surayud.

4.2. Data analysis

These speeches have been coded through a series of basic questions based on Bryman's (2012, p. 575) coding scheme:

1. What is happening here/ What kind of event is going on?
2. What are people doing/ saying they are doing?
3. Of what general category is this item of data an instance?
4. What does this item of data represent?

5. What is this item of data about?
6. What question about a topic does this item of data suggest?
 - a. How is SEP being used?
 - b. What kind of recognition is being sought?
7. What sort of answer to a question about a topic does this item of data imply?

From the coding, key thoughts and concepts were highlighted and sorted into five categories and sub-categories. This makes it a conventional content analysis as the categories are drawn from observation rather than from theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 2085). Evaluating the use of SEP, the categories are as follow: Thailand’s role in the international community, the monarchy, Forward Engagement Policy, values of the NCPO and localization of SEP.

The categories set the basis for analysis through the theoretical framework. Looking at the NCPO as an actor for foreign policy decision the thesis does a two level analysis, as shown in figure 1. The first level of analysis examines the categories through the FPA levels of analysis with regards to domestic political contestation and culture and identity to see how the usage of SEP relates to domestic political legitimacy. This is done by matching the empirical data to variables of regime type, political opposition, narratives of culture and national identity. The second level of analysis examines the categories through the concept of recognition for a more international relations oriented breakdown. This is operationalized by matching the empirical data, to variables of national identity and culture, to then further explore narratives of thin and thick recognition.

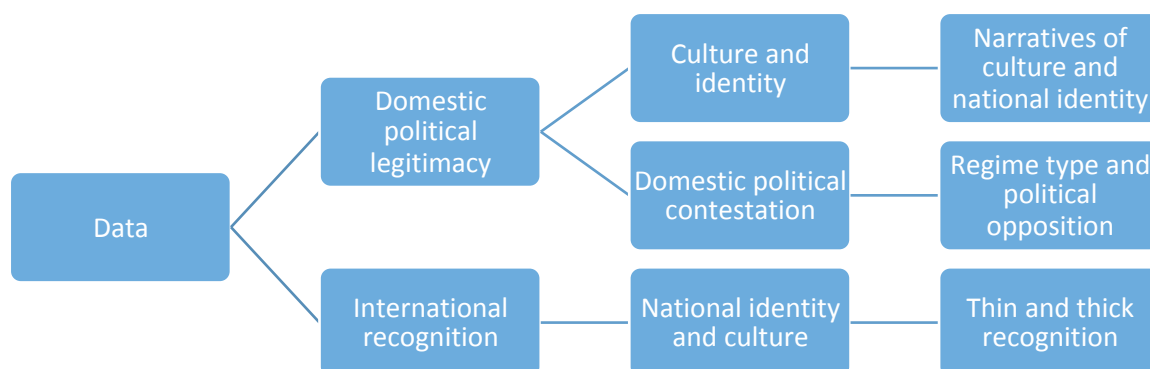


Figure 1: Flowchart of analysis through theoretical framework

4.3. Ethical considerations and challenges

Putting together the puzzle that is qualitative data analysis presents many challenges, both theoretical and practical. On the theoretical side there is the issue of the researcher’s

positionality and the risk of reproducing false conceptions of an area based on western means of knowledge production. The practical issues relate more to limitations with language, access and scope of thesis.

As for ethical considerations this thesis has exclusively used secondary sources made publically available by the government and the institutions which they engage with. Due to the interpretivist epistemology, subjectivity is an inherent problem. To increase reliability, all collected data are publically available on the internet.

The shrinking space for academic freedom and tense political situation in Thailand should require special consideration. As lese majeste (insulting the monarchy) charges has increased since 2014 the thesis reaches a grey area in regards of lawfulness in Thailand. While the study of power and strategy of the authoritarian regimes might be illegal in Thailand, it is not in Sweden. Therefore, critical evaluation should not be deterred but subjectivity should still be minimized. This thesis has to further minimize subjectivity the discussion of data will relate back to existing literature. To this end thesis uses neutral language and the analysis refers back to existing literature (Bryman, 2012, p. 149-150).

4.4. Positionality

As someone born in Sweden doing research on Thailand it is imperative to reflect on what that means for production of knowledge. Huotari (2014, p. 7) claims that methodologies have epistemic content, meaning that methodologies and theories from the west are built on certain ideals and assumption which, if mindlessly applied to the Thai context, might risk portraying a false image of the country. Such action might also perpetuate the idea of the country as intellectually dependent on the west, which disregards context sensitivity, a crucial element of area studies.

Positionality is also important to consider when collecting data. This is usually done through critical consideration of one's standing in relation to one's research subject. As the nature of qualitative content analysis leaves room for interpretation and subjectivity, misrepresentation is possible without criteria to base the thesis on. Huotari (2014, p. 6,9) suggests relativists to follow an alternative academic standard of rigor, which relates to confirmability and transferability with regard to other local and time contexts.

In regards to this thesis, considerations have been taken to accommodate for the difficulties suggested above. In regards to epistemic content of methodologies, a more extensive section has been dedicated to the history of SEP and to understand the position in which the NCPO

finds itself. This also follows the criteria of transferability with regards to time context. Active reflection during the research has also helped prevent presenting Thailand as dependent on ideas of the West. The use of theories of legitimacy connected to indigenous Thai culture is an example of this.

In regards to confirmability this thesis only uses data from publically available sources on the internet to increase transparency. However, this thesis assumes that SEP is mainly used by the NCPO as a discursive political tool and therefore disregards the effects it has had in development projects where it has been applied. That is to say, the thesis consciously chooses only to focus on the use of SEP within one context, foreign policy.

4.5. Limitations

Due to limitation with the Thai language, all the source material is in English. Since foreign policy speeches are directed towards the international community it does make sense that they are in English or translated into English. However, translated speeches might be cause for concern; there is a potential problem of sensitivity to specific national and cultural contexts that become lost in translation (Bryman, 2012, p. 74). Out of the nine speeches, five were conducted in English. Four of the speeches were held by Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha, who conducted all his speeches in Thai, but they have been translated into transcripts by Thai translators, who are possibly more adept in translating meaning and clarity instead of direct translations.

Access to certain sources has also proven a difficult task. While the speeches have been relatively easy to track down, which in turn suggest that their intended audience is the international community, other documents, intended to contextualize the speeches content have been hard to track down. Such an example is basic policy documents related to foreign policy and strategic security policy, like the “Ministry of Foreign Affairs national plan” and National Security Council’s report “National Security Policy”, which I was unsuccessful in obtaining, even in Thai, despite having connections within the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

The limitations have forced the original idea of the thesis to narrow, yet in narrowing the scope there has had to be consideration not to make the constraints broaden the need for interpretations. Therefore, using qualitative analysis, there is a greater emphasis on consistencies and commonly used terms throughout all nine speeches.

5. Empirics

The empirics is devoted to background information and contextualization for the findings and analysis. By gaining a better understanding of the history of SEP and how it has been used by previous governments, as well as the NCPO, this thesis hopes to give a more nuanced analysis based on historical, cultural and domestic aspects. Therefore, this section consists of a brief history of SEP, review of Thaksin's foreign policy, the usage of SEP during the Surayud government in 2006 and lastly, a review of the juntas uses of SEP since the 2014 coup.

5.1. History of SEP

SEP is described as the former King Bhumibhol Adulyadej, Rama IX, personal philosophy that he gave to Thailand. He promoted self-reliance and sustainable farming in the 1950's but introduced SEP in 1997 (The Chaipattana Foundation, 2017). The earlier versions of SEP were named the "New theory of agriculture" and was the leading principle for the immensely popular royal projects established in 1969 (Ivarsson & Isager, 2010, p. 226-227).

However, if the King would have introduced the theory earlier, it might not have had the same impact it has had today. During the rule of Field Marshall Phibunsongkhram 1938-1944 and 1948-1957 the monarchy was at odds with the military over power and influence. However, after the 1957 coup by Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat, there was a concerted effort to bring back the monarchy and King Bhumibhol into politics. This was part of Sarit's political strategy to win political legitimacy and promote the military coup leader's paternalistic programs (Thak, 2007).

The campaign wanted to establish King Bhumibhol as someone with "barami". The term barami is an indigenous form of social power in Thailand which can best be described as "accumulated goodness" based on a leaders perceived "moral strength" (Persons, 2016, p. 29). With roots in Theravada Buddhism, the term is used for royalty in Thailand, to instill them with a sort of religious moral legitimacy. Many scholars draw parallels to Weber's notion of charismatic legitimacy and authority (Jory, 2016, p. 16-17; Ünaldi, 2016, p. 42-43). King Bhumibhol was the epitome of barami, yet the popular sovereignty of the King had to be continually practiced by its followers to maintain his status. This was done by the King's followers through orchestrated rituals, mass media, education, and spatial arrangements, which started under Sarit's rule (Ünaldi, 2014, p. 382).

While Phibunsongkhram was focused on economic nationalism, Sarit was more concerned with the direct needs of the people and opened up the country for investors while focusing on

infrastructure, healthcare and developmental projects. The King would visit these developmental projects and patronize them, while collecting charity funds (Saitip, 1995, p. 203-205). The royal development projects featured in this campaign and the rapid acquisition of wealth by the monarchy under Bhumibhol was then justified by his perfection of the moral virtue of giving; he had accumulated great barami (Jackson, 2018, p. 210). This symbiotic relationship between the military, as practitioners of the monarchy's legitimacy campaign, and the monarchy in turn legitimizing the political control of the military worked well for Bhumibhol and Sarit. The relationship between the military and monarchy has been close ever since (Saitip, 1995, p. 203-205; Thak, 2007).

The term Sufficiency Economy was first coined by the King in his birthday speeches, 1997 and 1998. It was portrayed as a continuation of the "New theory of agriculture" in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. In criticizing the growth-led debt-financed development paradigm which had led to the crash, The King called for a self-supporting economy to follow the examples of communities that had not been affected as badly by the recession. Such communities lived under the royal projects (Bhumibhol, 1997, 1998). Schaffar (2018, p. 395) suggests that the success of the self-sufficient communities might have been exaggerated but the esteem of the monarchy prompted major institutions like the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) and Thailand Development Research Institute to pick up the concept, and elaborate on it. It was incorporated in the ninth NESDP (NESDB, 2001) for Thailand and has been included ever since.

Since SEP is so closely connected to the monarchy, few have attempted to evaluate its capability critically in a field study, as strict punishment can be dealt to those who criticize the monarchy. Ivarsson & Isager (2010, p. 223, 236-237) suggest that SEP is too vague and opaque for any practical application and that it has been interpreted by technocrats and academics for practical use. Instead they suggest SEP to be a form of etho-politics. Nicholas Rose's (1999, p. 478) concept regarding political power which aims to shape behavior in such a way that responsibility for the wellbeing of communities is put on the individuals in those communities. The portrayal of self-immune communities with moral leaders who are happy living in moderation fits well with this concept.

5.2. Foreign policy under the Shinawatras

The task of governing Thailand during the financial crisis fell on Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai from the Democrat party. Thailand accepted loans from the IMF on promises of tighter fiscal and monetary policies. The monarchy castigated the Chuan Leekpai's cabinet for

their neo-liberal policies and in turn gained support for SEP when they turned economically struggling voters away from the Democrat Party. Thaksin Shinawatra exploited this by promising to empower the poor through populist policies. After his party, Thai-Rak-Thai, won a landslide victory in 2001, Thaksin started his economic policy which was dubbed “Thaksinomics”. Thaksinomics offered a dual-track policy of development whereby one track would push foreign investment, international trade, exports, and tourism while the second track sought to tackle poverty, via populist policies, as well as strengthen small and medium-sized businesses (Chambers, 2013, p. 88-89).

Han (2010, p. 215) points out that the rationalization of SEP was in direct opposition to Thaksinomics which championed high government expenditure, high investment, high consumption, and entry into the international global economy. Thaksin did at times publicly support SEP. For example, he opened and funded four SEP study center in all four regions of Thailand. Yet as Chanida & Bamford (2007) explains:

“Whatever lip service he [Thaksin] may have paid to the sufficiency economy, his policies drove a coach and horse through it...These stimuli worked to accelerate GDP growth during Thaksin’s reign, while the sufficiency economy was buried in the NESDB plans that no one bothered to read.”

Thaksin’s foreign policy correlates well with Thaksinomics. On the one hand, Thaksin had a business-oriented policy, particularly towards Thailand’s immediate neighbors. He tried to paint Thailand as an Asian economic powerhouse with the likes of Singapore, China and India. On the other hand, he wanted to formulate foreign policy to fight social and economic disparity by closing the gap between local realities and globalization. He coined this second aspect “people-centered diplomacy”. Thaksin was known for coming up with catchy titles for his different ideas and initiatives and the one concept that came to define Thaksins foreign policy was the “Forward Engagement Policy” (FEP) (Pavin, 2010, p. 10, 19).

According to Pavin (2010, p. 33- 35) Thaksin wanted to reposition Thailand as a regional leader in Southeast Asia. In support of that objective FEP consisted of 8 objectives:

1. Connecting people at the grassroots to global politics.
2. Building trust and partnership with neighboring countries.
3. Strengthening ASEAN.
4. Strengthening Thai Economy.
5. Promoting unity and consciousness among Asian nations.
6. Expanding networks of partnership with all regions of the world.

7. Solidifying the Thai image abroad.
8. Formulating people-centric diplomacy.

In his attempt to establish Thailand as a regional leader, Thaksin restructured Thailand's International Cooperation Agency in 2004 to focus on cooperation on bilateral and trilateral levels to provide infrastructure, capacity-building and human resource development (Carle, 2015, p. 23).

In 2006 Thaksin went into self-exile as he was toppled by a military coup led by Army Commander General Sonthi Boonyaratglin. An interim government led by retired Army General Surayud Chulanont was put in place for a year until elections were held in 2007. The 2007 election as well as the 2011 election was won by continuations of Thai-Rak-Thai. Thaksin's younger sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, became Prime Minister in 2011 for the political party "Pheu Thai".

While subsequent continuations of the Thai-Rak-Thai governments followed in Thaksin's footsteps they were never able to govern long enough to establish any lasting foreign policy initiatives. Pavin (2010a, p. 449) identified these governments as conducting both "populist" and commercial foreign policy while Thitinan (2012) noted Yingluck's ability to reassert good relations with neighboring countries through her "next-door" policy.

Yet SEP was never part of the Shinawatras foreign policy. One of the starkest differences between the discourse of the Shinawatra government and the NCPO is the use of SEP during the UNGA. In every major address to the assembly held by an NCPO spokesman during the plenary sessions, SEP have been highlighted as a guiding principle for Thailand's development work around the world, as a result of its success in Thailand (Don, 2017; Prayuth, 2015, 2016; Tanasak, 2014; Virasakdi, 2018). This can be contrasted to the Thaksin and Yingluck era where SEP was only mentioned twice during the all speeches by Thai spokespersons at the UNGA plenary sessions, once under Thaksin, the year the ninth NESDP was released featuring SEP (Surakiart, 2002), and once under Yingluck (Surapong, 2011).

5.3. 2006 military coup and SEP

As SEP was introduced in 1997 during the financial crisis and Thaksin took the reins in 2001, SEP never had a chance to be used in foreign policy. That is until the coup of 2006. The following year Prime Minister Surayud (2007) tried to legitimize the coup to the international community in his UNGA speech as necessary to fix a corrupt system. It was an implicit hint

at Thaksin who was accused of corruption. Instead Surayud offered the military junta as an alternative:

“I believe that governments have a moral responsibility to address disparities in income distribution. This is why Thailand has made it our national priority to promote growth with equity and to achieve development from within. Our approach has been based on His Majesty the King’s philosophy of a “sufficiency economy”, which calls for moderation and mindfulness in consumption, prudent economic decision-making and careful risk management. The philosophy’s recognition by the United Nations Development Programme in its 2007 Thailand Human Development Report has strengthened our conviction that we are on the right track” (Surayud, 2007)

The coup makers used SEP to contrast themselves from Thaksins government. They claimed the coup was justified since Thaksin was morally corrupt while the junta spokesmen promoted the importance of a return to political and economic morality based on SEP. Throughout the country, local development initiatives funded by Thaksin were re-badged as “sufficiency economy” or “sufficiency agriculture” projects (Walker, 2010, p. 242).

The Surayud government was only in office for one year and did not use that time in trying to spread SEP to the rest of the world. In that aspect, their foreign policy regarding SEP is very different from the NCPO who launched the campaign “SEP partnership for SDG” which will be discussed later in the thesis.

5.4. 2014 military coup and SEP

On May 2014 the Thai Royal Thai armed forces, led by Army General Prayuth Chan-Ocha, launched a coup d’état, toppling the sitting government of Niwatthamrong Boonsongpaisan. It was soon declared that the interim government was going to be led by the military junta who called themselves the NCPO. While a return to democracy was promised the need to maintain stability was given as a reason to postpone elections (Campbell, 2018). Prayuth and the NCPO have remained unelected in power up until 2019 when an election was held.

During the post-coup pre-election era, the NCPO were able to establish a coherent political platform under a new state ideology called “pracharat”, roughly translated as “state of the people”. The policy platform was introduced in 2015 in conjunction with an economic stimulus package. The aim of pracharat is to connect the people, the government and the private sector to pursue sustainable development and help farmers, workers and communities secure their livelihoods (Patsara & Malaekarach, 2015). When asked about pracharat Prayuth described it as:

“Pracharat means the Prime Minister is the “rat” [state] who reaches out to the people for a common agreement to create stability from the foundation up.” (Suthichai, 2015)

Pracharat has been criticized for being used for populist purposes (Pesek, 2019; Prajak, 2019b). Ironically enough, it was created in opposition to former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's populist policy of “prachaniyom”, which literally translates to populism (Suthichai, 2015).

A pillar of pracharat is the SEP. While pracharat is mainly something that is discussed on the domestic scene, there has been a noticeable shift in using SEP in Thailand's foreign policy. SEP became a more prominent part of Thai foreign policy in terms of global development discourse. It can mainly be seen with increased use of SEP during international forums, change in policy documents but also with the increased efforts to establish SEP development projects in other countries.

In 2016 Thailand held the chairmanship of the G77 and SEP was a central part of their agenda as chair. Regarding what Thailand attempted to accomplish during their chairmanship, Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai said:

“A key challenge for the group in 2016 was laying down the groundwork for the full implementation and realization of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development... It's hopeful that when the group looks back on the Thai chairmanship you will remember that we shared with you our homegrown approach to sustainable development in a globalized world and that is the sufficiency economy philosophy.” (Inter Press Service, 2017)

Indeed, SEP has been used since 2014 to link SEP to the UN development goals. Four months after the 2014 coup, former Foreign Minister, Tanasak Patimapragorn, stood in front of the UNGA and explained that Thailand was committed to work for democracy, development and human security. Even though it might seem counterproductive to have a military coup, Tanasak explained that it was in the name of democracy that the military had to step in, to change a dysfunctional system. The way to move forward was through partnership guided by developmental agendas such as the SEP. Tanasak described SEP as promoting the right values to build resilience from grassroots level up and by doing so, lay a solid foundation for sustainable economic development at the national level (Tanasak, 2014).

Don (2017) stated that SEP was used to guide key national frameworks created by the NCPO, namely, the 2017 Constitution, the 20-year National Strategy Framework and the twelfth NESDP. SEP is mentioned in all these documents but with varying degrees of clarity.

In the 2017 constitution, drafted by a constitution committee selected by the junta, SEP is mentioned twice as the guiding principle for national and economic reform (The Royal Thai Government Gazette, 2017, p. 19,77). This is not surprising as SEP was used in a similar fashion in the preceding constitutions of 2006 and 2007, which also came to be in similar fashion as the 2017 constitution.

SEP has also been part of the NESDP (NESDB, 2001, p. i-iii) since 2002 when it was introduced in the ninth edition. Most recently, SEP was used in the 2017 NESDP (NESDB, 2016, p. 9,11) to describe the mindset needed by Thais to cultivate conditions in regards to developmental issues regarding economic reform, community empowerment, agricultural practices and corruption.

The 20-year plan is a different type of document. It outlines the long term strategic goals of Thailand to ensure continuity among different governments. SEP is said to be the underlying philosophy of the three categories outlined for the plan's vision, namely security, prosperity and sustainability (The Royal Thai Government Gazette, 2018, p. 5-6).

These documents deal with the domestic concerns of the government, yet they also discuss sustainable development. The increased usage of SEP in international forms indicated that these documents also affect the work of Thailand international cooperation agency (TICA), which is the primary section for foreign development cooperation at the MFA.

In 2016 the MFA and TICA started a campaign known as "SEP for SDG Partnership". It is a continuation of TICA's efforts to establish sustainable development projects with SEP frameworks. These projects are established under what is known as South-South Cooperation(SSC). The purpose of SSC is for developing countries to collaborate among themselves in the political, economic, social, cultural, environmental and technical domains through knowledge, skills, expertise and resource sharing. These partnerships are initiated, organized and managed by developing countries themselves with help from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) initiative Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC). SEP projects are initiated either bilaterally through the SSC or in collaboration in which traditional donor countries and multilateral organizations. This kind of project is called triangular cooperation. As of 2018, Thailand has 20 SEP partners, meaning they have established SEP projects in 20 countries outside of Thailand.

Thailand has at multiple occasions been recognized by the UN for the SEP. In 2006 King Bhumibhol Adulyadej was awarded the Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award

by former UN Secretary General Kofi Anan. The next year UNDP wrote a Human Development Report which focused on SEP and praised Thailand and the former King for its implementation. In a review of the report, Kevin Hewison (2008, p. 214) described the concept as “so broadly defined that it really is whatever one wants it to be”. In 2016 the head of UNDP, Helen Clark, further commended Thailand for their work with SEP in regards to the agenda 2030 goals. These rewards are often brought up in the Prayuth’s weekly televised address to the country titled “From the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy to Sustainable Development Goals”. In his address on the 12th of October 2018, Prayuth starts by listing various awards the late King had won and connected it to the NCPO’s policy platform as such:

“My beloved citizens, the current administration espouses the royal philosophies and apply them in all respects, especially the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy which has been incorporated into the 20-year strategic plan and the national reform initiative.” (Prayuth, 2018)

The weekly address is an opportunity for the NCPO to spread the message of SEP and its reception from the world to the Thai population. In fact, the campaign to spread SEP to other nations are often reported in Thai newspapers. For example, in November 2017, Matichon, one of the largest Thai language newspapers, reported about Don’s state visit to Myanmar. There he declared Thailand’s commitment in solving agricultural and developmental problems in Rakhine state through the SEP. Matichon (2017a) also reported about the King of Lesotho’s, Letsie III, state visit to Bangkok, where he admired King Bhumibhol for SEP and stated that it had solved the country’s food crisis. SEP would continue to be a leading principle for the people of Lesotho. The economics newspaper, Thansettakij (2017), had an article about different royal development projects all over the world, giving examples of Bhutan, Tonga, Jordan, Myanmar, Indonesia and Afghanistan. The article praises King Bhumibhol for being able to spread his wise philosophy all over the world.

The wisdom of "His Majesty King Rama VI" in development, which aimed at raising the quality of life of people, to free them from poverty, and to raise their well-being and to be independent according to the royal initiative, the sufficiency economy, has been successful not only in Thailand but also spread widely in many countries around the world. Like the rain that brings cool moisture to remote deserts. The development concepts that combine knowledge, morality and self-awareness has been rooted in foreign lands, ready to blossom for a better life of the world population. (Own translation)

It is evident that the NCPO has been using SEP in foreign policy that is more extensive and different than previous governments. Analyzing SEP as a discursive political tool, the next

section will review the content of nine major foreign policy speeches that relate to SEP by the NCPO to see how and why it is used this way.

6. Findings

SEP is found in many ways that relate to foreign policy. Yet speeches in international forums are foreign policy practiced towards an audience that does not have an interest in the direct state of Thailand's domestic political scene. In a way it is the practice of foreign policy most disconnected from domestic politics in regards to its intended audience. SEP takes a center stage in many of these speeches which begs the question how and why?

With the previous history section as a backdrop, the subsequent sections analyze nine speeches given by spokesmen of the NCPO in five different international conferences. The content of the speeches was categorized into five themes, namely, 1. Thailand's role in the international community, 2. the monarchy, 3. Forward Engagement Policy, 4. values of the NCPO, and 5. localization of SEP.

6.1. Thailand's role in the international community

The first theme relates to Thailand's attempt to be part of the international community and the junta's self-image. Thailand actively seeks to be part of many organizations and to take on more responsibility in those organizations it is already a part of. For example, Thailand lobbied to be part of the UN security council in 2016 (Prayuth, 2015) and part of ECOSOC in 2018 (Virasakdi, 2018). It is highlighted that Thailand has partaken in 20 different UN peace keeping missions (Tanasak, 2014; Virasakdi, 2018) and that it was an active chair of the G77 (Don, 2016a).

However, the center piece of the NCPO's narrative of SEP is its application for the SDG.

“It [SEP] can also be used as a means of achieving the SDGs. For example, because it encourages people to live a sufficient life in accordance with personal capacities and capabilities as well as fosters good business practices that focus on good governance, sustainable commercialism and responsibility to society, it fits in with SDG 12: responsible consumption and production.” (Don, 2016b)

This quote is from the handover ceremony for Thailand's chairmanship at the G77 meeting where Don (2016b) continues to explain that SEP “encourages a holistic farm management system that aims to minimize farmers' vulnerability and promote sustainability, food security, water preservation and biodiversity. This aligns with SDG 1: Poverty and SDG 2: Zero Hunger.” In every speech the importance of sustainable development and the SDG are emphasized, and SEP is given as Thailand's alternative development idea to fulfill the goals.

The NCPO portrays themselves as champions of sustainable development, going so far as to call themselves experts, offering to help other nations establishing development projects (Prayuth, 2018). 20 development projects are spotlighted as an example of good practice from Thailand's side.

“Additionally, Thailand has shared its experiences and lessons learned in overcoming socioeconomic challenges through His Majesty the King's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) as an alternative development model that takes a people-centred approach and emphasizes moderation, reason, resilience, virtue, knowledge and inclusiveness. That Thai model has so far been applied and adapted to fit the national context in over 20 developing countries.” (Prayuth, 2016)

The efforts to build partnerships in development cooperation is part of the NCPO's characterization of Thailand as a bridge builder. That is, someone in between developing countries and developed countries. At the ACD Prayuth highlights bilateral projects in regards to “official development assistance”, training in combatting illicit drugs and training in technical support and ICT. In the same speech Prayuth volunteered Thailand as a “prime mover in promoting approaches to inclusive and sustainable development.” and followed it with claiming that “Thailand believes that we stand in good stead to serve as bridge-builder among different groups of countries and regional platforms.” (Prayuth, 2016).

This image of Thailand as a bridge between countries corresponds well with Thailand's self-image as a “middle country”, which places them in the nexus of high income nations such as the US and China, and developing countries like Laos and Myanmar.

“We often expect the strongest to help the weakest and the most vulnerable. But given the widening gap between the strongest and the weakest, we must not overlook what those in the middle can do. This middle group of countries actually constitutes the majority. They may be strong enough to stand on their own feet while still remaining in touch with the instructive experiences of their growth and development. Therefore, they-can serve as a crucial link between the strongest and the weakest.” (Prayuth, 2015)

The culmination of Thailand's strive for partnership, advancement of the SDG and the SEP is the campaign “SEP for SDG” which was introduced at the UN in 2017.

“Thailand has launched the sufficiency economy philosophy for the SDGs partnership so as to encourage the sharing of the sufficiency economy philosophy in advancing the SDGs” (Don, 2017)

What seems to be going on is an extended campaign to have SEP recognized. In promoting sustainable development Thai leaders have often mentioned the ways in which SEP has been

recognized by UNDP. This is a pattern that the NCPO has followed as well with Prayuth (2015) speaking in front of UNGA.

“His Majesty the King's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy has been recognized internationally. In 2006, His Majesty the King was awarded the UNDP Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award in tribute to His tireless efforts to raise the quality of life and welfare of His people and for His country's development”

6.2. The monarchy

The second category relates to the monarchy and especially King Bhumibhol Adulyadej, Rama IX. Since SEP is attributed as his creation which he gave to Thailand, most speeches introduce the concept of SEP through the King.

“Thailand's socio-economic success of the past three decades, its ascension to the rank of middle-income country, and its current status as an equal partner for development, owe a great deal to the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy of His Majesty the King of Thailand. Fondly known as the "Development King," His Majesty has been working tirelessly for over half a century to raise the livelihood of His peoples.” (Prayuth, 2015)

Prayuth is here speaking at the UNGA in 2015. He paints the King as a sort of saint who works for the people and in return is lovingly remembered. He also attributes Thailand's socio-economic success to the King and SEP while connecting it to development. The King is often referred to as wise and whose thought guides Thailand. Hints of the King's wisdom is portrayed in how he views things differently from the traditional economic rational models.

“I view that to country development should not solely focus on economic growth, but it should consider quality of balance and happiness of the people. For instance, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), of His Majesty the King of Thailand, aiming to achieve unity among economic, social and environmental dimensions” (Prayuth, 2016)

King Bhumibhol Adulyadej passed away in October 2017 which made his son, Crown prince Maha Vajiralongkorn the next monarch. The following year the Thai Deputy Foreign Minister, Virasakdi Futrakul, stood in front of the UNGA and listed the different areas in which numbers had proven the junta successful including GDP, tourism, maternal mortality, access to universal healthcare and to education. He linked these successes to Thailand's efforts to realize the SDG and then followed it up with “In our efforts to realize the SDGs, the Royal Thai Government has been guided by His Majesty the late King Bhumibhol Adulyadej's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy or SEP” (Virasakdi, 2018). He portrayed SEP and the King as reasons for Thailand's socio-economic success and also portrayed the junta as his disciples who apply and preach the SEP, even after his passing.

King Vajiralongkorn, or Rama X, is thought to follow in his father's footsteps. Prayuth (2018) said as much at an event for celebrating the coming ASEAN chairmanship:

“As for Thailand, we uphold the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy of His Majesty the Late King Bhumibhol Adulyadej, which His Majesty the King of Thailand has continued to carry forward by using the Philosophy as an approach to promoting development...”.

The statement shows that the NCPO is trying to depict a continuation of their royal patronage after the King's passing. By lifting up the King the NCPO is trying to connect themselves to the monarchy much like the symbiotic relationship King Bhumibhol had with Sarit in the 70s.

6.3. Forward Engagement Policy

Thaksin's FEP as defined by Pavin (2010, p. 35) was a set of goals aimed at positioning Thailand as a regional leader. It's described as two-tiered with focus on both economics and the so called “people-centered diplomacy”. To realize both these goals, Thaksin proposed increasing Thailand's role in the international community through different bilateral and trilateral programs and partnerships.

While the NCPO firmly opposed Thaksin and ran a demonization campaign against him (McCargo, 2017, p. 366) the people-centric approach, of empowering rural communities, and the means to achieve it through partnerships is a major pillar of the NCPO's foreign policy. One interesting aspect is the use of “people-centered”. For FEP, it meant that foreign policy needed to bridge the gap between the grassroots and the international community while closing the gaps on economic disparities. This idea is instead attributed to the King in 2017 by Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai in front of the UNGA.

“In fact, we have long focused on the people of Thailand. Our late King, His Majesty King Bhumibhol Adulyadej, told us to listen to the people and to learn from them. He said that those living in the community know best about their conditions and needs. Development must not be top-down but bottom-up and must vary according to specific contexts. His Majesty laid the groundwork for the people-centered approach through the “sufficiency economy” philosophy, which stresses self-development and places emphasis on everyone's potential to mold their own future and live in harmony with nature.” (Don, 2017)

Although the King might have emphasized a bottom-up development approach already in the 1990's, calling it a people-centered approach can be interpreted as a co-option of Thaksin's “people-centered diplomacy”.

Under Thaksin and the Future engagement policy, Thailand prioritized bilateral and trilateral cooperation's and programs to realize the people-centered approach (Carle, 2015, p. 23). The

importance of cooperation for the NCPO, especially trilateral and bilateral, is emphasized by South-South co-operation and North-South (bilateral) or triangular cooperation (trilateral)

“No single country, even the most powerful or prosperous, can go it alone in that regard. International cooperation — be it North-South, South-South, or triangular — is therefore essential and can be the universal push we need to transform our world.” (Prayuth, 2016)

Most important for Thaksin was Thailand’s immediate neighbors, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos and Malaysia on top. One such initiative was the “Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy” (ACMECS) which included Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos. While being a multilateral cooperation, it really was a way for Thailand to assist their significantly less developed neighbors (Pavin, 2010, p. 162, 166). Such a cooperation under the Junta also exists, but with China and Vietnam added, under the name “Lancang - Mekong Cooperation” (LMC).

“We can look at the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation, which is a framework comprising six riparian states namely Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, People’s Republic of China, Thailand and Vietnam. Within a few short years, this grouping has contributed to promoting sustainable development in the Mekong sub region. Based on trust and confidence, the riparian states have achieved in utilizing the Mekong River as a life-line by focusing in key areas such as poverty eradication and water resource management for the livelihood and well-being of the people.” (Don, 2016a)

This quote comes from Foreign Minister Don in 2016 at the fifth meeting of Foreign Ministers of the CICA, in Beijing. While the conference is mainly an Asian security forum, Don was able to talk about SEP and sustainable development anyway. He did this by first defining security as human security and then offered sustainable development as a solution for issues such as human and drug trafficking.

“Therefore, for Thailand, security and development are two sides of the same coin. Economic well-being and sustainable development reinforce peace and security and vice versa... Perhaps we can explore alternative approaches to sustainable development that we have taken and share our experiences and best practices. If it is of interest to CICA Member States, Thailand is willing to share our experiences with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) as well as its applications.” (Don, 2016a)

The final aspect relates to public-private-partnerships. While not explicitly a part of the FEP, Thaksin’s close connection to the private sector allowed him to establish partnerships in bilateral development projects. Such a project was the highly controversial Bt4 billion soft-loan package offered to Myanmar’s Ministry of Communications, Posts and Telegraphs under the ACMECS economic framework in 2004. Bt600 million was used for the purchase of

services from Shin Satellite, a satellite operator and subsidiary of Shin Corporation the Thai telecommunication holding company founded by Thaksin (Pavin, 2010a, p. 453). While highly criticized as corrupt by the military, the NCPO has continued to encourage public-private-partnership for sustainable development, calling it part of their state ideology, Pracharat.

“In Thailand, we have launched our reforms based on what we have called the “Pracharat Principle” or Public-Private-People Partnership. Under this principle, the people, the government and the private sector have worked closely together to pursue sustainable development.” (Virasakdi, 2018)

It's not out of the realm of possibility that the NCPO value public-private-partnership, bi- and trilateral relations and the people centered approach despite it being a pillar of Thaksin's foreign policy as well. However, Thaksin is the one who established and elevated these concepts in Thai foreign policy. By attributing people-centered approach and partnership to the late King and SEP the junta is essentially rebranding an existing tradition of Thai foreign policy to fit their own narrative.

6.4. Values of the NCPO

The NCPO took control over Thailand in a military coup which was looked on disapprovingly by many countries, especially the U.S. and the EU who imposed sanctions on Thailand after the coup (Pavin, 2014, p. 173-175). The NCPO had to convince the international community that the coup was warranted and that the military were not only justified, but that they were the appropriate replacement of the previous government. In 2014, former Foreign Minister General Tanasak Patlmapragorn stood in front of the UNGA and justified the coup.

“For Thailand, development is not just about GDP. To be sustainable, development must go hand in hand with democracy, human rights and peace and security - the pillars of the United Nations. And it must be allowed to grow in an environment that is free from conflict... Before May 22, we were at a political impasse. We had a dysfunctional democracy. We were in danger of more turmoil. And there was a very real possibility of bloodshed. The opposing political parties were given the chance to save democracy, but they failed because they were unwilling to compromise for the sake of the country. This chain of unfortunate events made the military intervention necessary.” (Tanasak, 2014)

Later in the speech SEP is noted as the NCPO's approach to development work for its ability in “promoting the right values” (Tanasak, 2014). This is directly a way of juxtaposing the NCPO with Thai politicians, portraying the NCPO as more responsible and the opposition as dangerous politicians. SEP and how it is connected to the NCPO's politics as a way to portray themselves as moral leaders. Describing the SEP in opposition to the economic capitalist

system paints the latter as immoral. At the handover event for Thailand's chairmanship of the G77, Don (2016b) described the SEP as such:

“Although called a "Philosophy," the King's notion of Sufficiency Economy is more a practice – a model for sustainable development that focuses on transforming the economics of exploitation into the economics of moderation and resilience” (Don, 2016b)

The common reasoning from the NCPO follows a simple logic; the SEP espouses moderation, prudence, resilience, morality, wisdom and self-reliance and the NCPO lets SEP be the guiding principle and strategy of national development (Prayuth, 2015). Ergo the NCPO champions the values which builds the SEP. It is emphasized that the SEP is the leading philosophy behind major policy documents in Thailand

“Based on the sufficiency economy philosophy, the Royal Thai Government envisions the lives of our people and the life of our nation as stable, prosperous and sustainable. Our key national frameworks, namely, the 2017 Constitution, the 20-year National Strategy Framework and the twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan, have all been formulated to focus on people first” (Don, 2017)

6.5. Localization of SEP

While the origin, content and values have been discussed in the previous categories, the question of where it is supposed to be used is featured heavily in the speeches. The NCPO often reiterates that the idea of SEP can be applied to all sectors and at all levels (Don, 2016b). Yet the main ways in which SEP is described is either how it applies to the individual or community. There is also an emphasis on how it should be homegrown and based on local wisdom.

“The SEP teaches us that development must be home-grown and rooted within each citizen in order to be sustainable. In other words, strength from within builds strength from without. The Government has therefore focused its resources to empower households and communities through our policies in community banking, community land deeds, community forest, lifting household debts, and providing universal health coverage.” (Virasakdi, 2018)

This quote shows how the NCPO uses the terms homegrown approach, individual responsibility and community to locate SEP in Thailand. Although universal health coverage was famously initiated by Thaksin and many community banking projects were co-opted by the royal projects (Heis, 2018; Walker, 2010, p. 242), the NCPO uses SEP to highlight these localities which implies a narrative objective.

The home-grown narrative is brought up at the ACD after Prayuth describes two alternative development models, SEP and Gross National Happiness in Bhutan, as being depending on

their “own context, capacity, and limitation. Therefore, we have to seek home grown approaches to development that are the right paths for our countries” (Prayuth, 2016). This can be interpreted as the NCPO’s way of rationalizing SEP as a Thai concept, to guard it from scrutiny. In trying to expand the notion of what is acceptable as growth the argument is that every nation need to come up with their own development approach.

According to the NCPO, the SEP should be applied in communities. It is seen as a basic unit for the government’s development work. Communities, in turn, are important since they are imbued with local wisdom.

“To make our people prosper - economically, socially and culturally the Government will strengthen social and cultural relations, and will empower communities by encouraging them to combine local wisdom with science, technology and innovation so that they remain competitive in the world market” (Prayuth, 2015)

This is done through what Don (2017) calls a “decentralized area-based development policy to empower those who will be affected and create a space to appreciate local wisdom and knowledge.” However, since SEP “encourages people to live a sufficient life in accordance with personal capacities and capabilities” (Don, 2016b), and it is the sufficient lifestyle that makes communities prosper, the responsibility for the communities wellbeing is put on the individual.

7. Analysis

There is support from the empirics in imagining SEP as a tool for political legitimacy which relates directly to the domestic political scene. However, since the target audience is the international community and with the junta’s attempt in spreading the SEP through partnerships, there seems to be other motives behind deploying the SEP as well. The following sections analyses the findings of the empirics in the context of domestic legitimacy and foreign recognition.

7.1. Domestic legitimacy

To understand the relevance of SEP in domestic politics two variables within FPA have been chosen as extra valuable, namely those of domestic political contestation as well as culture and identity.

Starting with the first variable we look at the domestic political scene the NCPO find themselves in. The coup of 2014 deposed the government of Niwatthamrong Boonsongpaisan on the 22nd of May. He served as acting Prime Minister after former Prime Minister Yingluck

Shinawatra was forced to step down on charges of corruption by the constitutional court. Prayuth Chan-Ocha and the NCPO took over control of the government. Despite promises of election, Thailand's regime type under the NCPO from 2014-2018 can be described as authoritarian.

Johannes Gerschewski (2013, p. 18) suggests that to keep stability and retain power in an authoritarian system, states use a mix of co-optation, repression but also legitimation. There are many examples of the NCPO using co-optation and repression to maintain power. When martial law was imposed in 2014, the NCPO could bypass laws and regulations to facilitate the operations of business elites and appointed political elites in positions in government from major political parties (Marshall & Sawitta Lefevre, 2016; Prajak, 2019a). At the same time the NCPO maintained strict repression of civil and political liberties with reports of imprisonment and abuses of vocal dissidents. Heavy restriction on freedom of speech and assembly were especially enforced and over 100 people were arrested on lese majeste (insulting the monarchy) charges, mostly for posting or sharing critical commentary online. Still, due to a democratic deficiency, the NCPO had to find alternative ways to legitimacy (Human rights watch, 2019, p. 573-578).

The three forms of legitimacy, as outlined by Panuwat (2017), which the NCPO has decided to pursue is what he calls royal legitimacy, performance legitimacy and reform legitimacy.

Royal legitimacy relates directly to the monarchy. The monarchy is highly regarded in Thai society. That is because there has been a concerted effort by the military to have the monarchy be an institution of reverence since the Sarit era. This has been done by portraying the King as someone who have accumulated "barami", karmic moral authority. This relates to the culture and identity of NCPO and the narratives they tell about the monarchy. By portraying King Bhumibhol as a wise man who's the reason for Thailand's social and economic accomplishments, the junta is appealing to the King's barami. By spreading the narrative of the wise, moral strong king, the junta also connects themselves as the protector of the monarchy. Culture functions both as a value preference, but also as a human strategy to gain approval by having action meet cultural preferences that the Thai population value.

Performance legitimacy relates to the NCPO's endeavor to portray themselves as superior to previous governments, especially to the Shinawatras. In a way, the coup can be seen as a reaction to the Shinawatras attempt to shift power from the traditional elite, which were connected to the monarchy, to their own networks (McCargo, 2005, p. 500-501). Since the

military have traditionally been counted in the monarchy network, political changes under the NCPO have often been strategically implemented to further their own power consolidation while painting the Shinawatra clan and politicians in general, as enemy of the people (Pavin, 2011, p. 1019-1021). The category related to the values of the NCPO shows the narrative of the junta as morally good as they follow the pinnacles of SEP. However, the narrative also portrays what they are not: corrupt followers of the unfair neo-liberal capitalist system. These characteristics are instead directed towards irresponsible politicians, a subtle implicit hint at the Shinawatra clan and their followers.

The final form of legitimacy suggested by Panuwat (2017) is reform legitimacy which relates to the Thai notion of “pa ti roop”, which translates to reform in English. This is a word that conveys seriousness and intelligence according to Panuwat and is mainly the objective of the National Twenty-year Strategy. The strategy, together with other important policy documents, are said to be guided by the SEP. Panuwat (2017) connects this with the NCPO expansive plan to “reform” various aspects of the country’s politics, economy and social life.

This effort can be connected to the category of the localization of the SEP. Since there is an emphasis of the SEP being for the community and individual, this is where SEP reform is implied to take root. Romanticizing the pure community, imbued with local wisdom, portrays it as uncorrupted by domination and conflict. Since these communities are not subjected to similar scrutiny as other modern societies there is a danger that narratives praising them might lead to a dismissal of other ideas connected to modernity and development, like democracy (Aram Ziai, 2004, p. 1048).

The individual’s moral responsibility by adhering to the values of SEP is also highlighted in this category. It fits well with Rose’s (1999, p. 478) idea of etho-politics, where the individual is portrayed as the responsible actor for the community’s well-being.

This is the second variable in Wolfram Schaffars (2018, p. 403-407) argument that the NCPO are using SEP to justify authoritarianism. The junta romanticizes development in local communities and encourages reform there while prompting people to live by a moral code which values of moderation, for the benefit of the community. By connecting moderation to austerity the NCPO could create weak societies that are easier to control, much like the fascist system in Portugal under Salazar, where state narratives of communities sought to justify an enlightened authoritarian leader. There is not enough evidence from the speeches to back up the accounts of Schaffar. Such motives are most likely nothing that will be explicitly shared to

the public if it was true. Besides, democracy does play a part in the junta's narrative as they promise a return to democracy. On the other hand, it's hard to see a democracy which embraces etho-politics. If the junta orders all citizens to use wisdom and morality to facilitate a moderate life, then there is no way for people to complain about the government. If they fail economically it is either because of their lack of wisdom and morality or because they are too greedy. Thus, rejection and suppression of dissent appears legitimate in order to combat greed and incompetence.

Linkage politics suggest that the domestic scene spills over into foreign policy as decision makers are affected by conditions at home. This analysis suggest that that is true as many narratives used for political legitimacy in Thai domestic politics is mirrored in the speeches the NCPO gives in international forums. The content of those speeches and the narratives they reflect are further disseminated to the Thai population through the weekly televised addresses and through famous Thai newspapers.

7.2. International recognition

The narratives in the analysis of domestic politics stem from the idea that the NCPO was searching for political legitimacy. However, the assumption that all narratives essentially follow a domestic politics logic diminishes the need for foreign policy. There needs to exist value in participating in the international forums beyond internal power struggles, or otherwise Thailand would not need to participate at all. That value must also be able rationalize a change in traditional foreign policy as we've seen happen with regards to SEP. While legitimacy amongst states is not a well-researched area within international relations, recognition theory is (Daase, Fehl, Geis, & Kolliarakis, 2015; Gustafsson, 2015; Ringmar, 2007; Wolf, 2011). From the perspective of recognition, the analysis examines what prompted a change in the NCPO's self-narrative, what those narratives changes into and what kind of recognition is sought, thin or thick.

As previously discussed, there was an attempt from the start to justify the 2014 coup. This was done by blaming politicians and portraying the junta as morally righteous for adhering to the SEP. Yet the idea of royal legitimacy and barami, which appears to be a central component in the junta's strife for domestic legitimacy, are indigenous concepts to Thailand that has little to no value in the international arena. This is what Gray (1991, p. 72-74) calls the "antinomy", the negotiation between the west and Thai idea of the cosmic order. The junta needed to gain recognition for their rule in the international community but could not appeal to the same ideals as in Thailand.

Pavin (2014, p. 173-175) discussed the international sanctions which Thailand was met with after the coup, especially from the U.S. and the EU. These sanctions can be interpreted as a rejection of the NCPO as justified rulers, as they are not democratically elected. An emphasis on the SEP could, like in the domestic scene, function as a way to portray themselves as morally just and other politicians as corrupt and irresponsible, trying to convince the international community of the coup's necessity.

However, that kind of blame game against politicians is only explicit in 2014, the year of the coup. Emphasis has since shifted to the SEP. The first category, of how the NCPO is portraying the role of Thailand, highlights the notion of SEP as the ultimate tool for achieving the SDG. This is a way of adapting the narrative of SEP to fit with the values of the UN. That is why Thailand portrays themselves as experts in sustainable development, as this is one of the pressing issues that the UN is dealing with. The organization is willing to give praise for good practice as they've done in the past for SEP, through the UNDP.

The SEP is being spread to different countries and Thailand offers themselves as experts who can help countries with their sustainable development initiatives. There is, however, an emphasis from the NCPO who suggest that sustainable development approaches need to be homegrown and adapted for the context it will be applied to. This kind of argumentation effectively hinders scrutiny of the concept as criticism can be ignored on account of context specificity. It is an interesting reflection apropos the antinomy of negotiating western and Thai ideals, that Thailand would try to convince the international community of SEP as a Thai concept. This can be counted as a sort of thin recognition as Thailand tries to have their narrative accepted as different from the rest of the international community. This recognition is, however, not an antagonistic recognition, but rather a supportive one, where the NCPO hopes to lift Thailand up as a role model for sustainable development through SEP.

The NCPO's quest to spread the SEP is new, but the tool they utilize to do it is not. They want more partnership, especially through south-south cooperation and trilateral cooperation's. This fits rather well with the image of Thailand as a bridge builder and a middle country. The bridge builder narrative stems from the idea of Thailand as the link between developed and developing countries, the strong and the weak. SEP fits in to this narrative as the basis for partnership with other countries. This narrative paints Thailand as an altruistic country who helps weak, underdeveloped countries, but who is not yet far gone from their time as an underdeveloped country. In ways of knowledge, the NCPO has portrayed Thailand as a more appropriate cooperation partner than the more prosperous countries in the west.

This narrative would have made sense during the Thaksin era as he stated clearly that he wanted Thailand to take a center stage in regional politics. Nonetheless, it is the NCPO that is pushing the image of middle country and bridge builder. This can be due to the striking observation of how much Thaksin's FEP seems to be co-opted into the narrative of SEP. People-centered diplomacy becomes the King's people centered approach, bilateral and trilateral partnerships becomes south-south and triangular cooperation and the business side of politics become public-private-partnerships. Recognition theory states that a nation needs to feel a sense of continuation in order to feel secure in its identity, which is its ultimate goal(Gustafsson, 2015, p. 121). In the case of the SEP, co-option seems to be a technique used to rebrand something popular under Thaksin to fit with the SEP narrative through which the NCPO rationalizes many of their foreign policy decisions.

In terms of thin and thick recognition the NCPO can be said to mainly be searching for the latter. While showing an active participation in the UN system and even adapting the SEP to be applicable with SDG, Thailand is trying to be accepted on the terms of the UN, bending with their value. This could be counted as thin recognition. However, there seems to exist a need to have the NCPO's self-narratives, including the SEP, to be accepted as fundamentally different from other nations, mainly developed western countries. The SEP symbolizes many aspects that would not be tolerated in the international system, such as the idea of royal legitimacy as well as a fundamentally different civil-military relation that enables coup d'états. While these aspects are not lifted in the speeches, other aspects, that speaks to the values of the UN, are. By having SEP recognized as a homegrown Thai concept, portrayed as a force of good in the world, it similarly recognizes the NCPO's self-narrative of righteous leaders of Thailand.

8. Conclusion

The NCPO came to power in 2014, headed by Army General Prayuth Chan-Ocha. As they toppled a democratically elected government and substituted it with an authoritarian regime, there existed a need for popular sovereignty, political legitimation. The main opposition target for the NCPO was the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was toppled in a coup in 2006, and the subsequent continuations of his political party. The 2014 coup was targeted against Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra. Politicians connected to the Shinawatras were painted as corrupt, both morally and financially. To distinguish themselves from the Shinawatras and to legitimize their rule as morally just, the NCPO put the SEP as a centerpiece in their domestic rhetoric's, but also in their foreign policy.

This thesis has examined the way in which the concept of SEP is used in Thai foreign policy. In particular, the research has analyzed changes to foreign policy in regards to SEP starting from 2014, when the NCPO toppled the sitting government in a coup d'état. Nine different foreign policy speeches were subjected to a qualitative content analysis. The categories that emerged were: 1. the role of Thailand in the international community, 2. the monarchy, 3. Forward Policy Engagement, 4. the values of the NCPO, and 5. the localization of SEP. These categories were analyzed from a two-pronged foreign policy analysis theoretical framework consisting of domestic political legitimacy and international recognition. For this thesis the actor, or foreign policy decision maker, was the NCPO. There was a particular focus of the variables of domestic political contestation, culture, and national identity.

The SEP espouses moderation, reasonableness and immunity. It is seen as an alternative development approach in which the community and individual play a central role to live with enough to prevent dire consequences from external effects yet live to be content with what one has. To do so one must have knowledge and morality. The SEP was coined by the late King Bhumibhol Adulyadej in 1997, as he criticized the neo-liberal capitalist order in the shadow of the Asian financial crisis. The reason that the King's word had such an impact is because of the historical ties between the monarchy and the military, dating back to the 1950's. A concerted effort by then military dictator Sarit Thanarat to make the monarchy an institution of reverence. A huge campaign by the military to have the King be portrayed as someone who had accumulated great karmic power and authority through his moral strength, *barami*. The portrayal of the King as someone who was morally good, created a need for leaders to gain royal legitimacy, something the King would give to the military. This cultural variable has been important for the military ever since the 1950's. This answers the posed question about the history of SEP as a political tool.

It is through this background that we see a shift in Thai foreign politics where the SEP takes center stage in the NCPO's narratives they tell at international forums. This answers the sub-question of whether the usage of SEP in foreign policy is a shift from previous Thai governments. The main difference in NCPO's usage of the term is that they want to spread the SEP to other countries. By analyzing nine foreign policy speeches from 2014-2018 at different events, this thesis has looked at how the SEP is used to get a better understanding of why it is used.

To answer the sub-question regarding the ways in which there been an increased use of SEP in foreign policy, the thesis looked at its use in policy documents as well in domestic political

discourse. Being the longest established authoritarian government since the establishment of SEP in 1997, the NCPO has clearly increased its use of SEP in domestic politics, by example making it a central pillar of its state ideology. Similarly, the use of SEP has also been increased in foreign policy speeches. The analysis shows that many of the elements which makes the SEP valuable in domestic politics also slips into the narrative of foreign politics. The monarchy and portrayal of King Bhumibhol as a wise King is heavily featured and so is the values which the SEP advocates, namely moderation, prudence, resilience, morality, wisdom and self-reliance, as well as statements of where the SEP should be applied, in communities and in the individual.

The monarchy category can be connected to the significance of the symbiotic relationship between the military and the monarchy. A central pillar in the junta's legitimacy desires rely on the image of the military as protectors of the monarchy, who are held in great esteem by the people because of the late kings accumulated barami. By promoting the SEP, the junta also associated themselves to the values it espouses. The domestic motivations could be interpreted as being both to demonize their opposition, the Shinawatras and the politicians connected to them, but also to portray themselves as morally just leaders. The localization of SEP in communities and individuals can be connected to post-development critique in which the community is romanticized for its pre-modern nature and western modernity and ideas like democracy, are disregarded as well. Similarly, the individual's moral responsibility can be linked to the concept of etho-politics where individuals are encouraged to live according to the principles of the SEP. Especially with regards to moderation as a form of austerity policy. This gives way for the NCPO to create a country that is easier to control under an authoritarian system.

While the idea of linkage politics stipulates that contents of foreign policy is affected by domestic politics, the direct audience for a for a foreign policy speech is the international community. The thesis, therefore, analyzed the contents of the speeches through the lens of international recognition theory. From the perspective that the junta is seeking recognition for their social narratives from other states it becomes apparent that some goals are the same, mainly that the junta wants recognition for their rule as just. Having such a close connection to the SEP, and then having the SEP being internationally recognized, is an indirect way of recognizing the NCPO as leaders of Thailand. The recognition is more likely to be accepted as it is adapted to work for the SDG. Thailand's role as a middle country and bridge builder

also plays into this narrative, by way of offering partnership and cooperation projects with other nations to work towards realizing the SDG through the SEP.

Many of the elements of the NCPO's portrayal of the SEP can also be connected to Thaksin's FEP, such as people centered diplomacy, public-private- partnership as well as focus of bi- and trilateral cooperation's. This is a strategy in which popular policies by the Thaksin government are co-opted into the NCPO's narrative of SEP in world politics. These understandings indicate that the NCPO is seeking thick recognition, where in they seek to be accepted for being different from other states. While the coup was condemned by the many western countries, including traditional allies, the NCPO sought recognition for SEP through the SDG in order to gain acceptance for the leadership of the junta by the international community. The SEP in relation to the SDG allows the NCPO to move on to regular political business instead of debating its legitimacy. Once other nations collaborate or include the NCPO in these discussions, they also begin to recognize them. This links back to the enthusiasm of partnership and collaboration and the idea of becoming a bridge between strong and weak countries.

It should be stated that this thesis is limited in scope and approach. The analysis looks only at the linkages between domestic politics and through the narratives the NCPO displays in international forums. It does not make any attempts in evaluating the practicality and effectiveness of SEP, nor how government resources are distributed as a result of SEP. Instead the thesis looks at how the junta has used the SEP as a discursive political tool. For future research that could build on this thesis there are two suggestions.

First off, the thesis has an implicit assumption that the SEP has not actually been institutionalized in the Thai government system, as the concept is too vague and requires a high degree of interpretation to be practical. The expansion of the SEP in the Thai government system, however, indicated that it is the aim of the NCPO to institutionalize SEP in order to solidify their power. Further research regarding these strategies and their success or lack thereof is recommended for further investigation.

Finally, this thesis has not reviewed in what way the NCPO's SEP strategy has been received, neither domestically nor internationally. Further research on the Thai public's opinions of SEP in regards to the NCPO as well as its effectiveness in international politics with regards to sanctions, aid and partnership are ways to further build on the findings of this thesis.

9. References

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