

Exploring the Social Construction of IT Policy—Thailand and Singapore

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ABSTRACT *This paper explores the nature of two IT policies, one in Singapore and one in Thailand. The analysis employed suggests that IT policies are socially constructed and thus reflect discourse and ideologies that are pervasive in society. As such then a comparison of the two policies should reflect a difference. This paper argues that the differences between the Singaporean and Thai national IT policies reflect differences in the discourses that frame the social construction of the policy in each case. This paper argues that one fundamental difference between the IT policies implemented in Thailand and Singapore is that the Thai policy is introspective reflecting a deferent society, whilst Singapore's is outward looking and pointedly global, reflecting a society markedly more extrovert. In analysing the text of the two policies it is argued that IT policy reflects a discourse framed by the state, which in turn represents the dominant discourse in society.*

Keywords: policy, discourse, culture, state, ideology, IT policy.

Introduction

This paper explores the nature of a national IT policy and suggests that such an IT policy is a reflection of the society in which it is formed and is socially constructed within the ideologies which frame that society. In the first part of the paper I explore what policy analysts have said about the nature and purpose of policy from a socially critical perspective. This framework is then used to facilitate an examination of two very recent policy statements from the governments of Thailand and Singapore.

In undertaking this type of analysis, I will suggest what is creating and socially constructing different views about IT and its role in an economic context where the promotion of economic and social development is of primary concern. In the final section of this paper I will suggest that examinations of policy in this way have implications at the micro-level of organisations where IT and IS processes are also infused with politics and non-rational behaviour. It can be validly argued that an alternative analysis, which suggests a longer historical perspective, might better explain how state formed policies might differ. However, the construction of new policy, in this study in 1998, might reflect a newer form of the state and thus suggest that actions taken in the present embrace the historical, cultural and political ideologies and practices and are inclusive in any modern framework.

State Formation and Modernisation in Thailand and Singapore

The modern states of South East Asia were forged by 'colonialism, nationalist movements and the more recent technocratic developmentalist programmes of authoritarian

elites'.¹ The modern states of South East Asia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, exude a confidence in their own values, a somewhat paternalistic authoritarianism, and have a strong sense of their own futures, albeit somewhat abruptly challenged by the monetary crisis that rocked the region in October 1997.

As part of this development, rapid economic and social progress has forged in South East Asia a perception of growth and social development previously unparalleled in human history. There is a prevailing discourse that suggests a belief in the benevolence of free markets.² This is argued to be fundamental to the political engagement and facilitation of governance in the modern South East Asian economies. It can be further suggested that expanding markets and the use of high tech devices are 'interpreted as cultural systems that are used in the construction of modernity'³ and that the economic and social focus of the South East Asian nations is on market corporatism, market socialism and high tech developmentalism. 'Market expansion and unfettered capitalism are primary goals, government agencies are being corporatised and the state is increasingly being seen as just another corporation'.⁴ Governments in these nations persist with market hegemonies that suggest that 'no economic growth is failure' and that human needs are replaced by a view of society as human resources. Markets are socialised and embraced by government policy and action. This suggests that there are some significant cultural differences in the ways human resources, human needs and perhaps even IT are viewed. Recent research⁵ suggests that IT processes are viewed in ways that differ significantly from those suggested by current IT research published in the West. In the textual analysis that follows, these themes and/or discourses are explored as they are represented in the texts of national IT policies in Singapore and Thailand.

Such analysis builds upon and complements previous research which argues that information technology and economic success in Asia has been to some extent driven by the long-term orientation of Confucianism,⁶ by the planned intent of government strategy⁷ and by the demands on international trade.⁸ The objective of this paper is not to reject history or its lessons, nor to imply that it is not relevant in the current context. Rather, this paper explores, in an alternative form, the nature of policy text as it reflects the state that framed that policy. It does not reflect ostensible or articulated policy alone.⁹ The nature of both Thai and Singaporean national and IT policy reflects the reality of the state in 1998. The deconstruction of policy text reveals an attempt to discover real policy in a framework that accepts that political action drives the intent of policy and engages that reality through the text itself. How that policy is reconstructed at the micro- or organisational-level is still to be unravelled as business and government organisations interpret the policy and attempt implementation.

A Conceptual Framework to Examine National IT Policy

Policy analysts have examined both the nature and purpose of studies on policy development and implementation from a political and socially critical perspective. Increasingly, such scholars have incorporated into their analysis an examination of the context of the policy, and have expanded the parameters in which policy development and implementation can be viewed. 'Describing types of policies serves to highlight the issues of power, control, legitimacy, privilege, equity, justice and above all, values so embedded in the concept of policy'.¹⁰

The policy process reflects underlying ideologies and values¹¹ that direct and dictate the thrust of the decisions themselves. Concepts such as power, control, legitimacy, privilege, justice and equity affect the perceptions and ideological judgements underpinning the policy and the perceptions of its meanings to those who the policy is directed

at. In this context the policy process cannot be divorced from the economic and political ideologies, conflicts and interests which are an integral part of it.

Politics cannot be differentiated from policy making and analysis.¹² Bureaucrats and elected officials play a central and complex role in the policy process and cannot be separated from it either.¹³ Understanding the nature of political action in policy becomes crucial because the political sphere has the resources to make policy development and implementation more successful, at least to some extent. Factors such as fear of redundancy, fear of challenging an existing record, the 'vested interests' of bureaucrats, routine, uncertainty, and the organisational costs of change (such as time-tabling change, employing new staff, reorganisation of staff) have a dramatic effect on what is intended in the solution of a policy problem.¹⁴

Policy development and implementation, then, is essentially political and non-rational.¹⁵ It is influenced by pluralistic inequality associated with sectional interests, power and factions. The meanings implicit in the economic system extend into social relations and constructs, and into personal consciousness.¹⁶ Politicians are very often concerned with sectional or constituent interest for their own preservation, and thus are often unwilling to embrace the notions of whole society goals, or needs, or the broad view required for perfect rationality in the policy process.¹⁷ This makes policy messy. The realities of self-preservation, influence, political dogma, sectional interests, conflicts, compromises, factionalism, fanaticism, resistance to change, pragmatism, financial constraints, errors and misinterpretations all create a complexity in the policy process that denies simplification and generalisation.

Concepts derived from an understanding of the social, political and economic context of policy can assist the researcher to gain understanding about how reality is created in society and how it is then sustained. A study of policy development and implementation, I would argue, should examine the variables and actions that affect, and make up, human behaviour. Policy 'implementation is interpreted as an expression of accommodation to institutional realities'.¹⁸ The policy process is both influenced by, and influences, human behaviour. Individuals can subvert and/or avoid attempts at regulation. Unintended, unanticipated or unacknowledged consequences often result from human behaviour within policy.¹⁹ These can affect subsequent actions, decisions and/or the level of tension between different interest groups involved in the policy process. Such consequences elevate the importance of non-rational and subjective elements in the policy process and heighten the impact of human behaviour as it modifies decision making within policy processes.

One extension of this view is that policy comes about by an intent of some group to change the behaviour of their own group, another group, or society as a whole.²⁰ Policy development and implementation involves values imposition and the realisation of an ideology in the form of a programme. This policy programme will be designed to motivate, reproduce or attempt to create change in social behaviour, or it will be used to present a picture of change that represents only tokenism. The implementation of these programmes, I would suggest, is often an iterative one as participants seek to impose ideologies and values on others. Policy then becomes socially constructed.

An analysis of policy, I would argue, should attempt to inform about who is trying to legitimate and perpetuate their power, and who is excluded from the policy process and why. This perspective seeks to find the meaning behind action and to explain the outcomes and effects of the policy process from an understanding of both what actually happened within the development and implementation process, and the subjective elements of human social action within that process.

Political conflict, and the subsequent trade-offs that result, plays a paradoxical role in

the policy process,²¹ often resulting in compromises in the final outcomes of policy development and implementation. Such compromises come about because of the contradictory nature of value choice in policy; choice between long- and short-term social goals, between social revolution and reform, or between helping those in need or altering the sources of need.

Policy is implemented in an environment influenced by ideologies which spawn values and beliefs, some of which are known, recognised and obvious to the actors involved, whilst other influences are not recognised, nor obvious. Yet it is argued that 'all social actors know a great deal about what they are doing in processes of interaction; and yet at the same time there is a deal which they do not know about the conditions and consequences of their activities, but which none the less influence their course'.²² The interaction of both known and unknown influences which affect the behaviour and actions of those involved in policy implementation occurs in various, often interacting, arenas.²³ In arenas of influence, decisions are mapped out and made by influential coalitions, or by individuals. In arenas of practice, policy is interpreted, recontextualised and implemented.

The traditional view of implementation as 'putting it into practice'²⁴ should be replaced by notions of policy 'interpretation' or 'recontextualisation',²⁵ which take into account contestation and the complex translation of an idea into practice. Practice is influenced by resistance, subterfuge and conformity, which are often iterated throughout implementation of policy. The people within a nation and members of organisations are not the receivers or implementers of policy, but rather the 'recreators' of policy, which is formed and reformed through on-going contestation. Implementation can involve contestation and 'the translation of an idea into practice' as well as interpretation and recontextualisation.²⁶ This view of policy suggests that in a South East Asian context the state is fundamentally central in policy. There is no decentring of policy text or discourse. Rather, there is an implicit discourse of the state in control in the South East Asian situation. The following discussion attempts to evaluate the national IT policies of both Thailand²⁷ and Singapore.²⁸

The National IT Policies of Thailand and Singapore

In this paper I am trying to seek out what the nature of the IT policies are and attempt to discover how the policy was constructed, what motivated that policy, how that policy was perceived, and what fundamental elements of human social action were involved. This study of policy implementation will be concerned with addressing the subjective elements and influences on human social action, in this case accepting a prevailing discourse of high tech developmentalism. This will provide the researcher with the opportunity to compare practice with existing theory and to contribute to debate about policy. In essence, it is important to gather data about policy and to analyse the different forms and developmental paths it may take and then make suggestions about what strategies are effective in developing and implementing IT policy.

From the textual analysis of the two IT policies and the Electronic Transactions Bill 1998 (Singapore) it is apparent that certain themes are evident and that specific discourses exist which frame the nature of the policy and restrict interpretation of the intent, enactment and implementation of the policies.

In the analysis of each national IT policy it is clearly apparent that in Singapore there was a drive to formalise IT processes immediately. From the establishment of a government focus group on e-commerce (Electronic Commerce Hotbed) in August 1996, to the establishment of an Electronic Commerce policy committee in January 1997, to

the enactment of policy in law in April 1998 represents a commitment to formalisation of electronic trading. It reflects acceptance and recognition of that pervasive discourse of high tech developmentalism. One formalisation of the policy is the enactment of the Electronic Transactions Bill 1 (1998). This law will:

- give power to agencies to issue legally recognised electronic signatures;
- provide for electronic verification of signatures;
- put electronic signatures and records on a par legally with written signatures and records;
- spell out rights and obligations of electronic service providers;
- define electronic contracts and put them on a par legally with written contracts;
- allow government departments and statutory boards to accept electronically filed documents without amending existing laws;
- give relevant agencies powers of investigation and enforcement in e-commerce matters;
- provide the basis for electronic signatures to be recognised across borders; and
- give legal protection to data sent over networks.

In Thailand the policy response is far less formal. There is no accompanying Act. There is no immediate proposal to create a legal framework in which to conduct e-commerce. In fact, the entire national IT policy of Thailand reflects a totally different perspective to that of Singapore.

The Thai National IT Policy is introspective. It focuses on relating progress in IT to the needs of Thailand in the social and economic development of its population. The needs are not immediate and the focus is on doing IT the Thai way. The policy pays little attention to the immediate and essential needs of business and trade outside of Thailand. The Thai policy states:²⁹

The widespread use of IT therefore holds promising potential to spread economic activity, democratic principle, wealth distribution, and social benefits across every region of the country, thus greatly enhances the possibility of reversing the migration trend to Bangkok Metropolis and stems the tide of ensuing social ills.

IT might also help to reduce pollution and traffic, and could facilitate telecommuting from home or a nearby telecommuter center.

Widespread and affordable rural communications networks could provide on-line information or serve as the vehicle to deliver public services to remote rural residents such as distance learning and telemedicine. Telephones, electronic mail and fax can, in addition to traditional postal service, be used to instantly gather citizen's opinions or problems.

IT must be viewed as a tool for achieving broader national objectives, both social and economic. IT is definitely not merely an end in itself.

IT development must be so geared with an aim firmly in mind to reduce the substantial gap between the information 'haves' and 'have-nots', not to further widen it. For, it is all too easy for the affluent and the better-educated segments of society to gain most from the use of IT, whereas the city-poor and the rural residents alike are more likely to be left even further behind.

The applications of IT in support of national development can create greater equal opportunity and provide benefits for all segments of society.

In contrast, the Singaporean National IT Policy reflects the entrepot, trading nature

of Singapore. It also reflects its international focus and accepts that the problems and issues associated with e-commerce and IT are problems of business and trade. The Singapore policy reflects an immediacy that something has to be done now; and reflects an acceptance of doing e-commerce and implementing a national IT policy that fits in, and works with Western systems and practices.

The Singapore National IT Policy sets the following objective.

The Electronic Commerce Policy Framework clearly sets out the policy objectives of the Government to work with the private sector to provide a conducive legal and operational environment for businesses to engage in Electronic Commerce in Singapore; and to anchor Singapore as an international Electronic Commerce hub ... Commercial code of conduct must be in harmony with international practices ... the global nature of the Internet Electronic Commerce make it imperative for domestic policies to be in line with those in the international environment.

Throughout the texts of the two policies studied there are a number of recurring themes that reflect the various ideologies which underpin state action in policy in both Singapore and Thailand. Each of these ideological underpinnings speaks various discourses, which enable the state to enforce direction and policy and strengthen market corporatism for economic good, market socialism for common good and high tech developmentalism as an expression of being 'developed' or 'developing'. Such policy statements reflect attempts by the state to subject the population to their will and direction—a centring rather than decentring social process.

Textual analysis of the Singapore National IT Policy suggests that the prevailing discourses represented are:

- acceptance of globalisation and market corporatism;
- promotion of government control, flexibility and market socialism; and
- high tech path to development and regional dominance.

Acceptance of Globalisation and Market Corporatism

There is substantial evidence in the Singapore National IT Policy and accompanying Act which suggest that the Singapore policy makers view IT as a strategy for business development. The policy reflects a view that business must take the lead and initiate the economic effects of IT.

The Internet and global information infrastructure is fast gaining worldwide prominence because the private sector is driving it. Business must take the lead. Commercial code of conduct must be in harmony with international practices.

Throughout the Singapore National IT Policy there is substantial evidence to support a view that there is a position which supports the existence of a discourse of market corporatism. Singaporean government initiatives to engage in Electronic Commerce forms, as part of their functionality, are listed. Private sector IT initiatives which support sectoral, information and commercial activity are promoted.

... a range of products catering to different target users have been launched. These include National Contact Information System (searching for people information), Business Information Locator (looking up business related information), Calendar ONE (directory of events in Singapore) and Shopping Village (finding merchants and bargains by consumers).

Promotion of Government Control, Flexibility and Market Socialism

The Singapore National IT Policy is emphatic in the central, controlling and facilitating role of government. Of the six principles that underpin the IT Policy and the Electronic Transactions Act, five are concerned with the role of government. The other relates to the lead business must play. The principles are stated as follows.

1. Government should put in place a legal framework which provides for certainty and predictability.
2. Government should provide a secure and safe environment.
3. Government through joint venture pilots and experiments with Private Sector to expedite Electronic Commerce growth and development.
4. Government should pursue innovative, liberal and transparent policies pro-actively.
5. Consistency with international regimes, international cooperation and interoperability are necessary for Electronic Commerce to thrive.

In addition the National IT Policy indicates that there will be simultaneous amendments to existing laws, namely the Computer Misuse Act and the Copyright Act. Perhaps more importantly in highlighting the nature of control desired on the part of the Singaporean government is evidence in the policy for the licensing of Public Sector providers of electronic business applications under Regulation PS21 of the public sector regulations and within the regulatory framework of existing Certification Authorities. The policy states:

Netrust has been established as the first CA in Singapore to issue keys for digital signatures.

Further, the Singaporean IT Policy and the enabling Act establish Electronic Commerce Infrastructure and Electronic Commerce supporting services under government control. This controlling framework will establish and maintain technical standards, develop logistical support for Electronic Commerce activities locally and internationally, and enhance overseas linkages. The enabling act, the Electronic Transactions Act (1998) has been designed to be 'in-line with fluid international developments in this area.'

High Tech Path to Development and Regional Dominance

Singapore views its role in IT, as it does its role in trade, as being geographically central. This could be argued to be an extension of a discourse of dominance within the region.

... to anchor Singapore as an international Electronic Commerce hub.

Electronic Commerce is global in nature. Government policies have to be proactive, innovative to establish a friendly and internationally oriented Electronic Commerce hub. The traditional concepts of imports, exports and cross-border trade, their rules and regulations need to be reviewed and adapted to meet a fast growing electronic market-place.

... with reference to joint venture pilots and experiments with the private sector. Such proactive initiatives are essential to position Singapore to benefit as early movers and shakers.

Further, the Singapore National IT Policy reiterates Singapore's commitment to an outward looking perspective about trade and Electronic Commerce and to a key role for government in facilitating and maintaining established and proposed links.

High speed backbone networks are being deployed beyond our shores (for example,

Canada–Singapore IT Collaboration Agreement will establish a physical network connectivity to support collaboration in research and development, education and learning, industry and exchange and Electronic Commerce between Canada and Singapore). Other initiatives include the establishment of high-speed T3 Internet links between Singapore and the US. It is recommended that we continue to expand physical telecommunication linkages with other countries and cities for mutual benefits.

This commitment to globalisation and the establishment of Singapore as an IT hub includes policy to establish a scheme to encourage high quality IT providers.

To attract major international businesses to hub their Electronic Commerce activities in Singapore, the Approved Cyber Trader (ACT) scheme was proposed. The package of incentives under the ACT scheme would encourage companies to set-up their international Electronic Commerce marketing and trading system. This would create the necessary critical mass of players in Singapore. The scheme also helps local companies to regionalise and expand their businesses in the region and beyond. The ACT Scheme was announced by Minister of Finance during Budget 1998.

Such initiatives follow others which have focused on an IT driven, outward focused IT policy. Singapore was the first in the world to complete a VISA Secure Electronic Transaction (SET) in April 1997 and the first in the world to support the dual brands of MasterCard and VISA SET transactions in June 1997. Commercial deployment of SET has been initiated in March 1998. The policy continues:

CashCard for Open Network E-Commerce (C-ONE) was launched in January 1998. This innovation ... makes Singapore among the first in the world to introduce smart card-based payments in cyberspace.

Singaporean IT policy can then be viewed as representing Singapore as central to the development of IT within South East Asia, as being a mutual development of the Singaporean government collaboratively with the private sector, and as being fundamental to further economic development for the nation. This view perhaps reflects the economic progress Singapore has already made and the visionary nature of the Singaporean government in the way it maintains control over economic progress and the value adding nature of that economic progress within Singapore. Thailand has not experienced the sustained development of Singapore. The Thai history of development is vastly different. Colonialism was not an issue. With such cultural and historical differences one would normally expect policy to reflect this.

Thai National IT Policy

Textual analysis of the Thai National IT Policy suggests that the prevailing discourses represented are:

- high tech path to development—commitment to internal social and economic development and equality of primary concern and establishment of Thailand as regional hub as a secondary one; and
- promotion of government control and market socialism but the Thai way.

High Tech Path to Development

The Thai National IT Policy focuses substantially on the social and economic development of the Thai population. The overwhelming focus of the policy is introspective.

Through a host of new technologies: computers, data communications, and electronic media, IT offers new possibilities and opportunities to support the quest for:

- A well educated population and a well-being society
- A more effective rural development and wealth distribution program
- A better environment and natural resources conservation effort
- A new direction to build economic strength and social harmony.

Expressed differently, there is substantial evidence of the discourse which suggests that social and economic development is of primary importance and this is iterated, supporting previous arguments about the iterative nature of policy.³⁰ Examples of this in the policy include:

For us to utilize the full potential of IT, to achieve the widest possible use across all social sectors and geographical regions in the country, three fundamental prerequisites must be in place and function together. They are:

- A national information infrastructure
- A well-educated populace and adequate IT manpower
- A dare to dream and a resolve to act.

In the 15 pages that make up the Thai National IT Policy there is only one reference to a view that such policy development is concerned with enhancing the Thai position as a hub in the region. However, it is to see IT as a support for the modernisation process associated with existing National Development Goals established in the current 8th National Development 5 Year Plan. The policy states:

Thailand now stands at the crossroads. We must set out to develop the country into a modern regional hub in Southeast Asia for:

- Financial services
- Manufacturing and commerce
- Transportation and tourism
- Human resources development

Unlike Singapore, there is no endeavour to promote Thailand as an IT hub.

The Thai National IT Policy establishes specific agenda which reflect a discourse of social and economic development within Thailand as a prime focus. The policy states:

Invest in an equitable information infrastructure to empower human ability and enhance life quality.

Invest in people, build a literate populace and an adequate information technology manpower base.

Throughout the Thai National IT Policy, there is reconfirmation of the need to support internal development as a means of creating equitable access for the population to all modern resources and processes. The policy establishes a number of strategic objectives that illustrate this. They include:

Embark on a five year Rural Thailand Communications Expansion and Modernisation Program.

... rationalise through legislative amendments, all communications rates for a more equitable access in order to meet all basic and some value added service needs of the widest segments of society.

In all future major communications projects, government must ensure a reasonable share of the benefits be given to the rural region.

Accelerate the supply of IT manpower at all levels to eliminate the current critical shortage and to meet the expected huge demand growth in future.

Make IT an integral tool in education and training at all levels.

Intensify IT manpower production at all levels.

This discussion suggests that there is a somewhat different focus from the Singaporean IT policy which was external in focus and driven by a need to continue the place of Singapore in a world scene, economically. There could be two explanations for this. Perhaps the most obvious is the historical development and modernisation process of both countries. Singapore has a colonial history based on trading. It has, as a nation, developed into a post-modern state where there is a real complexity or plurality in the society. It is distinctly multi-cultural and supports a variety of cultures within a nationalistic view of the role of the state as dominant. Cultures are expressed independently of the state and encouraged by the state to maintain the differential natures. Singapore, through its historical links and its geographical position, has been an economy open to trade.

In Thailand the state has really not moved from the modern to the post-modern. Plurality is rare. There is a mono-cultural view of society and culture. Government planning focuses on 5 year plans, long ago abandoned in Singapore. In Thailand there is no impact of colonialism as there was none. There is a national language, Thai, rather than the Singaporean view that residents can be multi-lingual with Malay as the national language co-existing with English, Mandarin and Tamil. The Thai economy, unlike Singapore, has been protective against imports and export driven. However, this difference between the two economies is not really enough to explain the differences in IT policy. They only reflect the reconstruction of cultural practice and discourse in the state. There is a richer explanation. Textual analysis has suggested that pervasive ideologies and discourse within both countries are reflected in the policy text. This invariably reflects more than historical trading relationships and the structure of either country's economy.

Promotion of Government Control and Market Socialism but the Thai Way

Thailand has a proud history which reflects not only substantial social and economic development and long national traditions, but which also reflects a pride in never being colonised.³¹ This has engendered a view of doing things, doing business the Thai way.³² This is reflected clearly in the Thai National IT Policy:

Equally importantly, we must dare to dream, to paint visions of new applications, new ways of doing things in ways that suit us most. That we cannot import or copy wholesale from elsewhere.

Maintaining the tradition of a focus on market socialism within Southeast Asia, the National IT Policy of Thailand aims to

Invest for good governance

This is further reiterated in the strategies of the policy document in statements like:

Seize and make fuller use of new opportunities offered by IT by all public agencies in order to deliver good and efficient services to all citizens, whereby setting a good example as an active IT user to society, while simultaneously improve substantially the effectiveness of governance as well.

More specifically, the policy states:

To earmark no less than 200 million baht a year to develop or procure relevant and easy-to-use common applications such as in searching public information from state databases, exchange of electronic mails, on-line declaration and payment of fees and taxes, application for licenses, and other public services provisions.

In addition, there is some evidence, albeit less noticeable than for governance, which supports a view that market corporatism is also an aim:

Provide top priority supports in particular to SMEs everywhere in order to build a strong and thriving local information industry from hardware, software, contents, to a whole range of information and other necessary supporting industries.

Conclusion

The textual analysis of the two IT policies of Singapore and Thailand shows that there are different discourses in operation. The Singapore policy supports acceptance of globalisation and market corporatism, promotion of government control, flexibility and market socialism and a high tech path to development and regional dominance. The legislative and implementative actions taken by the Singaporean government have been swift and positive. On the other hand, the Thai National IT Policy reflects acceptance of a high tech path to development, a commitment to internal social and economic development, a commitment to equality as a primary concern, acceptance that the establishment of Thailand as a regional hub is secondary, and recognition of government control and market socialism, but the Thai way.

These differences perhaps reflect different levels of economic development and both countries being at different stages of the development process. The difference also reflects differences in the historical pattern in the economic linkages through foreign investment, through intra-regional trade organisations and/or through the ethnic trade fabric of inter-nation Chinese trading and investment. In addition, there are substantial cultural differences between the two countries. Thailand has a long history of Thai cultural development unimpeded by any colonial interference. Thailand is essentially mono-cultural and traditional values infuse all levels of Thai decision-making, Thai social action and the construction of Thai social practice. In Singapore, the history is one of very recent Chinese and Indian migrations under an initial British colonial rule and a democracy less than 50 years old. The laws and policy practices within Singapore reflect the modernity of recent economic development infused with Western ideology, framed by Eastern, particularly Chinese, cultural practices which has subsequently embraced a plurality of multiple cultures and multiple ideologies, essentially a post-modern state.

Thai culture is traditional. The modernities of recent economic development have been framed and absorbed within an existing culture that has moulded those practices to the 'Thai way'. There has been little acceptance that any other culture is or should be dominant. Nor is there any acceptance that other ideologies and pluralistic discourses can exist above or outside of existing Thai culture. Thus the Thai national IT policy reflects an introspective view rather than the outward looking one of Singapore. What this suggests about the strategies that any one nation should adopt in the development and implementation of IT policy is therefore dubious. Culture and the nature of cultural practice in any one country suggest that any dominant discourse such as the role of IT, can be and invariably is affected by the nature of culture. In the Thai context, IT policy has been manipulated to fit existing Thai practices. In the post-modern state of Singapore, IT has been embraced as another means of achieving development in a pluralistic set of methods available to the nation state.

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