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DOES THE LAW RESTRICT PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO CONTROL THE COVID19 INFECTIOUS DISEASE IN THAILAND

¹ Korakod Tongkachok, ²Thongphon Promsaka Na Sakolnakorn, ³Teeraporn Tongkachok

¹ Faculty of Law, Thaksin University, Thailand

²Faculty of Management Science, Silpakorn University, Thailand

³Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Thaksin University, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

In order to study the legal measures to restrict people's rights to control against COVID 19, the research results indicated that legal measures are important measures to prevent the epidemic that the government has to enforce and announce to the people as a strict implementation and cooperation with officials. With no legal measure to control the situation, people may not cooperate in providing true information and attending for treatment. There can be various types of business operations gathering people together or protest, which result in more serious and uncontrollable epidemic situation. This will have serious consequences on the overall safety of the public, the economic and social impact inevitably. Thailand needs to enforce special laws that empower government officials to prevent, correct, suppress and deal with violent situations, which may affect the national stability. Therefore, Thailand needs to find a way to integrate all public and private sectors to protect the safety of human beings, which is more important than personal freedom.

1. Introduction

In the middle of globalization that has brought a drastic change in the way of life of people in society, especially borderless communication and information exchange, as well as system of international economic and security relations. In terms of economy, it can be seen that each state becomes more dependent on each other. This causes international and inter-regional cooperation that encourages each country to interact in international trade and investment, resulting in many movements of people resources. However, in terms of national security and stability of international relations, the influence of globalization is also a major contributor to the changing threats of security, raising concerns on many international society related issues. In terms of threats under globalization (Ferhani, & Rushton, 2020), there are more diverse and complex features than the previous security threats caused by the state and invasion, such as terrorist problems, human rights violation, environmental problems, natural disasters. This includes public health or health problems, such as epidemic and emerging diseases (Velavan, & Meyer, 2020), which are not limited in an area and scope, but it can spread across state borders or regions as it is also linked to other threats (Chen, Zhang, Lu, Guo, Zhang, Zhang, & Lu, 2020).

During the severe epidemic around the world, it is an emergency beyond everyone's expectation (Jain, 2019). When a serious disease strikes (Heywood, & Macintyre, 2020), it is important to find a response plan as quickly as possible, especially the legal measures that will be implemented to deal with the current situation of COVID-19, a global public health problem (Kondoch, 2019). Due to the widespread of the disease from one country to another, with many deaths and infected people, this affects the economy, investment and tourism industry. To solve the problems, in addition to issuing public health measures, legal measures are another tool used to control the spread of the disease as well (Nomani, Rauf, Ahmed, Faiyaz, Khan, & Tahreem, 2020).

The contagious epidemic crisis does not only have economical damage (Bradlow, & Park, 2020), but it also has a significant effect on states as a threat to the national security as well. Although, it is clear that the rapid and severe epidemic of the contagious disease is a direct threat to the health security of all citizens within the country. The health security is an integral part of human security, which the state has a duty to protect (Idrovo, & Manrique-Hernández, 2020). The awareness on the issue can be seen from the case of uncontrollable infectious disease spreading to many areas around the world with increasing number of infections and deaths that are of concern. Also, with the end of the Cold War that changes the views on national security threat, the issue of health security becomes an even more important agenda for the state. This can be seen from efforts to develop the country's public health system to prevent, control and respond to epidemics, as well as building regional and global health and public health cooperation (Meyer, T. 2020). In addition, the epidemic crisis is a threat that undermines government confidence. Therefore, in order for everyone to realize the importance of the prevention and control of the infectious diseases effectively with the best benefit of the people, each country has set a strategy and guideline for the implementation to be aware, prevent and control the diseases. The approach or strategy that is used as a tool to solve the problem is law, which each country determines measures and approaches

differently. Therefore, the research aimed to study the laws and regulations related to the management of COVID 19 situation in Thailand, and to study the problems and obstacles arising from law enforcement related to the control of infectious diseases.

2. Literature Review

The essence of knowledge reviews for collecting and studying laws related to the control of infectious diseases included the essence of International Health Regulation 2005. The international Health Regulation (Wilson, Halabi, & Gostin, 2020) had its purposes to prevent (Stuckelberger, & Urbina, 2020), control infectious disease (Sokolowski, 2020) and other health hazards (World Health Organization WHO. 2020) that have possibilities to spread internationally by emphasizing measures (Parmet, & Sinha, 2020), and determining special provisions (Burci, 2020) for the operation at the International Disease Control Checkpoint at country entry channels (Meier, Habibi, & Yang, 2020), including land, ports, airports, related to vehicle control, border products, luggage, person, cargo, other goods, parcel, postage cargo container, cargo handling area. All operation was conducted with health measures (Giubilini, Douglas, Maslen, & Savulescu, 2018) to limit the spread of the disease by requiring state parties (Menon, Rosenfeld, & Brush, 2018) to enforce the laws or regulations (World Trade Organization, 2020).

The principles of enforcing state power in crisis (Kelly, 2020) was regarded as a part of the general principles on the enforcement of state power in unusual situations (El Said, 2020). The analysis of the laws that were governed by these two principles of state power showed that the provisions of the enforcement of power in a crisis (From, A. I. D. S. 2020) will generally be applied to specific situations, including provisions aimed at non-political situations, such as situation related to natural disasters (Albrecht, 2018), (Rittichainuwat, Nelson, & Rahmafitria, 2018), situation related to severe disease epidemic (Ng, & Li, 2018), etc.

3. Methods

This research was conducted using document review method by studying and collecting information from the journal, academic articles, research report, various related publications, and information from electronic media, in-depth interviews from administrative staff, disease control officer, doctor, police officer and group chat of people affected by the COVID 19 situation in Thailand. In addition, the data was analyzed using descriptive method by analyzing and synthesizing content gathered from both domestic and international information.

4. Results

The content of the current the Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015) obviously showed that almost all main measures used to control the outbreak of COVID 19 over the past several months were attributed from the Infectious Diseases Act. For example, the quarantine of group or person exposed to disease (Studdert, & Hall, 2020); not being allowed to enter or exit places or vehicles (Chaitiang, 2020); closing market, community spaces, entertainment venues or schools; the surveillance and prevention measures for international infectious diseases; and setting up international infectious disease control checkpoints.

There were also a number of committees of infectious diseases scaling from national level, provincial level and Bangkok area (Sections 11, 20 and 26), which were structured according to decentralized principles. This allowed each province to determine appropriate measures for the situation in its own area (Barisri, Sukperm, Masarakham, Nilphai, & Lammana, 2020) for flexibility with no need to enforce the same measure to the entire country. Meanwhile, as a result, some economies could continue the businesses with no need to pause or stop like the nationwide declaration of emergency situations.

In the past COVID 19 prevention situation, there were only "curfew" and "shutdown of the airspace" measures. Closing airspace was the power of the power of the Civil Aviation Authority according to the Air Navigation Act. Until now, it has been argued that the announcement of closing the airspace is the absolute power of the Civil Aviation Authority or is it the power as stated in the Emergency Decree (Mukti, & Ramdhani, 2020). Finally, the "curfew" that was the main reason for the renewal of this Emergency Decree previously has now been canceled. To announce another curfew, other law with a less degree of rights deprivation could also be enforced as a replacement, for example the Internal Security Act 2008, which also gave the power to restrict people from leaving accommodation as well, including allowing checkpoints to close transportation.

The Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015) had no provisions to deal with serious and severe infectious diseases spreading rapidly all over the world, especially COVID 19, the Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015) (Department of Disease Control. 2020). The National Committee on Infectious Disease was assigned to determine, plan system and guideline for surveillance, prevention and control of infectious diseases for government agencies (Bilder, Postal, Barisa, Aase, Cullum, Gillaspy,... & Morgan, 2020). Provincial Disease Committee operated in accordance with the Infectious Diseases Act. Then, National Committee on Infectious Diseases had the authority to consider and approve action plans for surveillance, prevention and control of infectious diseases or epidemics, and submit to the Cabinet for approval (Tossawut, & Mahiwan, 2020). However, authority in making policy, guideline and action plan for the prevention and control of general infectious diseases was unsuitable for the widespread and severe global spread of the COVID-19 infectious disease. Thus, there needed to have a health care system for critical conditions (Raksakaeo, 2020).

Thailand therefore declared a state of emergency according to the 2005 Emergency Decree on Public Administration in the Emergency Situation on 25th March 2020. The Emergency Decree might allowed the state with excessive absolute powers (Lebret, 2020), because the authority of minister was transferred by 4.Issues of relevant laws temporarily to the powers and duties of the Prime Minister. Although it only related to the authorization, approval, command or support for prevention, correction, suppression and control in emergency situations. For this reason, the available Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015) alone could not be used to sufficiently resolve the current epidemic situation of COVID 2019. The announcement of the Emergency Decree on Government Services in Emergency Situations 2005 in Thailand accelerated the administration of the country in terms of consolidation of decision-making power (Laikram, & Phaladej, 2020). It could reinforce some work that the enforcement of the Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015) alone cannot complete the problem solving in time (MeBerschmidt, 2020). For example, the case of restricting people from leaving their accommodation in the country (Atalan, 2020), or the announcement of curfew from 3^{rd} April 2020 to 14^{th} June 2020.

Based on research results, the first issue was the committee under the Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations 2005 (Office of the Council of State OCS. (2020), which in this research was later called Emergency Decree, which had differences from the National Infectious Diseases Committee. The Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015) was comprising of 30 people, while the Emergency Decree had 19 people in Emergency Management Committee. The 2 committees would only have 5 same positions, including Permanent Secretary for Defense, Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Interior, Commissioner of the National Police, and Director-General of the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation.

It was noticeable that whether the announcement of the Emergency Decree caused the lack of knowledge and expertise among committee in medicine and public health or not. The National Committee on Infectious Diseases under the Infectious Diseases Act was comprised of director from the Medical Council representative, the Nursing Council representative, the Medical Technique Council representative, hospital representative, committee with knowledge, expertise and experience in public health, disease control and other useful areas of disease prevention and control, with the Minister of Public Health as the chairman of the committee.

The second research result was that the use of the Emergency Decree was due to the unrest situation in the southern border provinces, which was designed primarily to solve issues of state security and peace. Meanwhile, the Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015) was founded on the basis of International Human Rights Law, where Thailand announced ratification on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) on 5th September 1999, which was enforced on 5th December 1999 with 170 current affiliated countries (Tiwari, 2019).

The text of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights addressed economic, social and cultural rights as, for example, the right to self-making decision, the rights to non-discrimination, the right to education, the rights to work and the rights related to health. The rights related to health in accordance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Section 12, was provided as follows.

1. The states parties of the present covenant approved the right of everyone to access the highest possible standard of health and mental health.

2. The procedure for implementation of this present covenant by state parties was to accomplish and complete this right, including:

(a) finding ways to reduce pre-natal and neonatal mortality and the healthy development of children,

(b) improvement in all areas of environmental and industrial hygiene,

(c) prevention, treatment and control of endemic diseases, local diseases and other diseases, and

(d) creating conditions that insure medical services and providing medical care to everyone with illness.

When Thailand had an obligation under the international rules on economic, social and cultural rights with regard to prevention, treatment and control for this epidemic, the state was required to implement. That said, national law was enacted as the Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015), which had a very important role in the control of infectious diseases.

When it was necessary to close the country, the government announced the implementation of a state of emergency in accordance with the Emergency Decree on Public Administration in the Emergency Situation 2005. This was a law enforced in the southern border provinces of Thailand. As it was related to the security and not the infectious disease, so there was a study for differences between the two laws in the prevention, treatment and control of epidemics for Coronavirus 2019 infectious disease.

- People are not allowed to leave their accommodation within the specified period.

This issue is not prescribed in the Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015).

The Emergency Decree on Public Administration in the Emergency Situation 2005 prohibits any person from leaving the accommodation within the specified period, unless permitted by the competent official or being an exempted person (Section 9 (1)).

- Any community activities or gathering is not allowed at any place.

This issue is not prescribed in the Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015).

The Emergency Decree on Public Administration in the Emergency Situation 2015 prohibits people from gathering together at any place or participating any action inciting unrest (Section 9 (2)).

- Prohibiting presenting news that may cause fear, or intentionally distort information leading to the wrongdoing in an emergency situation affecting state security.

This issue is not prescribed in the Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015).

The Emergency Decree on Public Administration in the Emergency Situation 2005 prohibits the distribution of news, spreading newspapers or anything that contains messages that may cause fear or distort information intentionally, resulting in misunderstandings in the emergency situation affecting state security (Section 9 (3)).

- Prohibiting the use of transport routes, vehicles or transportation conditions.

The Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015) prescribes conditions for the use of vehicles to control infectious diseases at the international infectious disease control checkpoint (Section 39).

The vehicle owner or rider who enters the kingdom from the locality or port is required to perform and act in accordance with the set conditions (Section 40).

The Emergency Decree on Public Administration in the Emergency Situation 2005 prohibits the use of transport route, vehicles or determines transportation conditions for routes or vehicles (Section 9).

- Prohibiting the use of buildings or the entering or presence in any place.

The Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015) prohibited any person from entering or exiting isolated places, unless

permission from the communicable disease control officer has been obtained (Section 34(7)).

The Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015) prohibited to enter the houses, tenements, places or conveyances where the dangerous communicable disease or epidemic has occurred or is suspected of having occurred for the purpose of surveillance, prevention and control to prevent the transmission of the disease (Section 34 (8)).

The Emergency Decree on Public Administration in the Emergency Situation 2005 prohibits the use of buildings or the entering or presence in any place (Section 9(5)).

- Entrance, exist and investigation for residential places.

According to the Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015), to perform in accordance with this Act, the infectious disease control officer is authorized to enter any vehicle, building or place at time during sunrise to sunset, or during the working hours of that building or place for inspection and control as stated in this Act (Section 45 (2)).

Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations 2005, in case of an emergency situation, the Prime Minister has the power to issue and announce regulations to the competent official with authority for search, demolition or destruction of buildings and structures or obstructions as necessary in the operation and implementation to stop and terminate serious events as soon as possible, as if slow action may not solve the incident in time (Section 11 (4)).

5. Discussion

The implementation of Thai laws in case of the Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations 2005 might enable to solve the problem faster than the specific law to control normal infectious diseases. However, the use of the law in emergency situations also had caution in the use of state power to restrict people's rights and freedoms that must be in accordance with the proportion only as needed.

It could be seen that both laws have the common features, which are to restrict certain rights and freedoms of people in order to solve the seriousness of the situation of the coronavirus epidemic and return it to normal soon for the public health and life benefits. However, the Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations 2005 will limit the presentation of news and media, which may cause misunderstanding in an emergency situation or news affecting the state security. Also, the state has the authority to examine and control communication system as well. Both of which are not listed in the Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015).

In addition to the Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015) that has no issued news and media monitoring requirements (Ungsuchaval, & Kumlungpat, 2020), it is considered that the Communicable Diseases Act B.E. 2558 (2015) would set the scope of the requirements to be more precise and clear than the Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations 2005. That said, most of the objectives of the requirements are specified to be very precise and clear.

Although, it could be seen that the implementation of these two laws are considered to support the problem solving of the coronavirus 2019 situation, it is an additional measure prescribed in the Infectious Diseases Act. However, it is important to use the power under the Emergency Decree on Management of the Emergency Situation that must not be too restricted for civil rights. The principle of the law must be in accordance with the principle of proportionality and the use of legal authority to solve problems as necessary and appropriate, since the origins of the two laws are very different.

The use of power during a crisis can be defined by describing through a general theoretical process in regards to different implementations. The use of state power during a crisis is primarily aimed at considering unusual circumstances that may be national or local crisis. For how long the state power will be implemented this way is depended on the severity of the situation. As a result, the principles in the normal state operation that must respect the law shall be weakened, especially the effects in terms of the rights and freedoms of people.

Consequently, the COVID 2019 outbreak is a situation that affects public peace and safety which requires strict and urgent measures to control the spread of the disease. In addition, there is a private stock of essential goods needed for surveillance and control of the outbreaks, prevention and treatment, as well as the private stock of consumer goods and necessities for people daily life, which must be controlled in order to prevent a shortage that will worsen the suffering of people. In this case, it is necessary to take urgent measures to maintain the safety and peacefulness of the people life.

The first time - Thailand has to implement the Royal Decree of Public Administration in Emergency Situations 2005, Section 5. Therefore, the Prime Minister with cabinet approval announced the implementation of the state emergency in every area throughout the country from 26th March 2020 to 30th April 2020.

The second time - The government has extended the period of implementing emergency situations to 31st May 2020 to take necessary measures to prevent and control the outbreak of Coronavirus 2019, including prohibition of people from leaving their accommodation during a period of time, restriction of travel and journey into the country, prohibition of entering areas with risks of disease, and prohibition of the using buildings or places with risks of disease. This includes solving the situation through the COVID-19 situation management center by the responsible chiefs and competent officers in each department who are performing strict duties and authorities as assigned. However, the situation of such outbreaks around the world, including Thailand, has not yet over. It appeared that many countries still face epidemic outbreaks and high numbers of infected population, which when loosening or canceling the control measures, the new wave of disease outbreaks was found at a severe level.

The third time – For the unified, fast and efficient correction of the government's emergency situation in order to maintain the safety of people life, it was important and necessary to extend the period of emergency situations declaration. In the meantime, the government monitored and assessed the situation closely in order to prevent and control the spread of such infectious diseases effectively, as well as determined or loosened measures as appropriate with consideration to maintain a normal life of the people.

The fourth time - Later, further enforcement of emergency declarations continued in all areas throughout the country from 1^{st} June 2020 to 30^{th} June 2020.

The fifth time – As the state of emergency was announced in all areas throughout the country from 26^{th} March 2020, which extended its period to 30^{th} September 2020, the implementation was gradually and carefully loosened in order to drive and recover the national economic system. This was for the economy not to be interrupted by the new wave of outbreak due to the stopping of epidemic control measures, as has been found in many countries around the world.

The sixth time – Previously, it appeared that the situation of the disease outbreak in various countries, especially those bordering Thailand, has become more serious. There are many foreigners smuggled into work in the country without permission through natural channels by skipping local immigration, port or station, where requiring them to pass a public health screening before entering the country. As a result, the risk of group infection without knowing the source of the disease is increasing, which may lead to a widespread outbreak within the country. Therefore, there is a need to control such outbreaks in the country, which will affect the security of the country's public health, economy and society that is still in sensitive condition. It is necessary to extend the period of declaring the state of emergency in all areas of the country one more time for the unified, fast and efficient measures for emergency situations with an aim to maintain safety of people life and health. Therefore, the period of the emergency declaration enforcement in every area throughout the country was extended from 1^{st} to 31^{st} October 2020.

The seventh time - There is now a new wave of disease outbreaks in some areas and provinces of Thailand. The government needs to tighten and raise all necessary measures to solve the situation in a timely manner in order to prevent further widespread. With the authority of the Royal Government Administration in Emergency Situations 2005, the main measures and requirements included no entry to areas with risks of disease, authorizing the provincial governor to close the place of with risk of disease, prohibiting people from gathering in crowded places, restricting foreign workers to move or relocate, strictly enforcing disease prevention measures, authorizing each provincial governor to issue regulations on disease control by enforcing an announcement of emergency situations in every area throughout the country until 15th January 2021.

The situation of the outbreak of coronavirus 2019 was still very serious as it could be seen from the continued increase in the number of confirmed cases worldwide. It also appeared that the outbreak of the disease has become uncontrollable in many countries bordering Thailand. Although the government has carried out disease screening and testing in accordance with strict public health measures at the entrance channels and outside the country according to the law, but it appears that foreigners from countries with severe disease outbreaks smuggled into the Kingdom illegally through the natural channels continuously. In addition, new confirmed cases of infection detected in foreigner coming from countries with severe outbreak result in a very high risk that it could lead to group outbreaks without knowing the source of the disease and widespread within the country. With public health information, it was found that the disease have mutated, while vaccine and drug production to prevent and treat the disease have not been successful.

6. Conclusion

Special legal measures during an emergency situation restrict the rights and freedom of people in order to handle situations flexibly and efficiently. In some cases, the legal measures reflect the problems arising from the operation of government officials in the emergency situation who used such powers, especially measures to restrict the freedom of people from leaving accommodation during the state of emergency, in a country with emergency state that needs to give more power to government officials in order to manage and solve the serious infection situation as quickly as possible for the state security and the peace of the people. In addition, the Royal Decree of Public Administration in Emergency Situations 2005 that mainly relates to people part are as follows; prohibiting people from leaving accommodation within the specified period, prohibiting people from assembly or gathering together,

prohibiting the presentation of news, distribution or sharing of books, publications or any other media with the intention of distorting information, prohibiting the use of transport routes, vehicles or transportation and route conditions, prohibiting people from using building, entering or staying in any place, and evacuating people from the specific areas for safety by the person in charge of responsibility, the owner or manager of the establishment. Activities outside the accommodation and public gathering must comply with the measures to prevent disease, the regulations issued in accordance with Section 9 of the Royal Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations 2005, order of the Situation Management Center for the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), announcements and manuals of the Ministry of Public Health, the responsible agencies, and the advice of provincial governors, etc. The implementation of public health measures under the emergency declaration in every district and locations throughout the country has been succeeded to control the outbreak of infectious coronavirus 2019, and recognized around the world. In the transition period to reduce the COVID-19 outbreak, the situation has emerged so rapidly and severely in many countries around the world, causing significant loss. With self-defense to survive by adjusting to new living behaviors, these new things have become the new normal in terms of food, hygiene, education, communication and business.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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