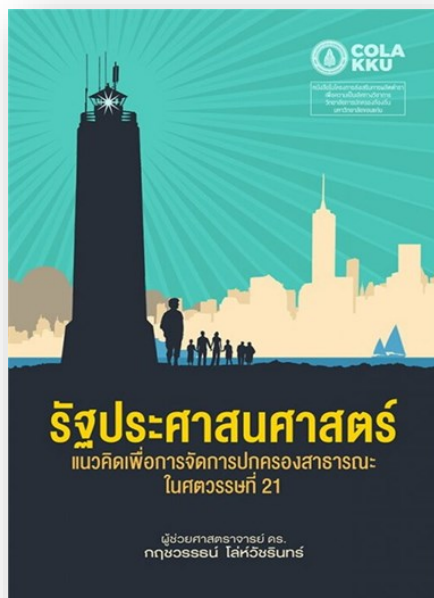


บทวิจารณ์หนังสือ (Book review)

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กฤษวรินทร์ โล่วชิรินทร์. (2564). รัฐประศาสนศาสตร์: แนวคิดเพื่อการจัดการปกครองสาธารณะในศตวรรษที่ 21. ขอนแก่น: วิทยาลัยการปกครองท้องถิ่น มหาวิทยาลัยขอนแก่น.



Lowacharin's book *Public Administration: Concepts for Public Governance in the 21st Century* examines the overall state of current public administration concepts and related issues by attempting to link public administration approaches and theories with contexts and case studies from Thailand and other countries. This book can serve as the main fundamental textbook in introduction to public administration courses, especially in the Thai context.

This book consists of four main parts, divided into 11 chapters. Part I, "Introductory Public Administration," contains two chapters. Chapter 1, "Public Administration in Daily Life," describes the overall nexus between the state and human activities, explaining how states or governments relate to their citizens' lives. It clearly illustrates the government's role in citizens' lives from before birth until after death and the importance of governments in managing the state and citizens. The author then provides a definition of public administration, which is discussed in several dimensions, and its development in Chapter 2, "Fundamentals of Public Administration." This chapter mainly addresses definitions of public administration from the United States but also adds some definitions from Thai scholars. Based on the definitions of public administration generated by Thai scholars, in this book, the author defines public administration as a "subject with regards to the application of concepts, theories, and approaches from political science, management science, and law to successfully manage organizations, policies, affairs, and public resources" (p. 41).

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In Part II, the author invests effort into detailing the development of public administration concepts, starting with the concept of old public administration (OPA) in Chapter 3. This chapter clearly explains the definitions and important theories of the politics–administration dichotomy, bureaucracy, and scientific management. Some limitations of these theories are briefly discussed at the end of the chapter. In the same vein, Chapter 4 explicitly addresses the main ideas of new public management (NPM), a term referring to the “reform of public administration with the aim of enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness in the preparation and delivery of public services” (p. 76). This chapter also explains how the concepts of NPM are distributed across the globe and NPM’s applications to Thailand. A comparison of OPA and NPM is illustrated. Practical problems in NPM application in terms of ethics, responsibility, and the role of the citizen as consumer are discussed in the last section of this chapter. Chapter 5 then clarifies the meanings, main concepts, and importance of governance and new public service (NPS). The author categorizes the elements of good governance by incorporating definitions from several international organizations (e.g., ADB, IDB, OECD, World Bank, UNESCAP). A comparison of the differences among OPA, NPM, and NPS is highlighted as the main content of this chapter.

Part III, “Selected Issues in Public Administration,” focuses on the main role of government in several related sectors - for example, public services, public policy, organizational management, intergovernmental relations, and public finance and budget. Overall, this part provides a simple overview of major concepts in public administration, with brief explanations. Chapter 6 broadly explains issues related to the relationship between governments and economic systems, such as market and mixed economic models, economic stabilization, public goods, market failures, and market structure. To solve public problems in society, governments attempt to find possible alternatives for such problems. In Chapter 7, the author explains the meaning and importance of public policy, which has become an interesting domain within the study of public administration, and discusses related disciplines. This chapter recognizes the public policy process, institutions and actors in such processes, policy instruments, and factors affecting governments’ policy decisions. Some models for analyzing public policy are briefly explained, such as the elite, group, institutional, system, organized anarchy, and rational models. The last section then presents a overview of problems in Thailand’s public policy process.



In Chapter 8, concepts related to organizational management are clarified. Following the same pattern as previous chapters, Chapter 8 mainly highlights organizational management definitions, elements, and theories and types of organization. The author classifies governmental organizations in Thailand into five types, namely government agencies (i.e., central, provincial, and local administration), state enterprises, public organizations, organs under the constitution, and autonomous universities. This chapter also highlights the role of private organizations and non-governmental organizations, with some examples. In Chapter 9, the author argues that intergovernmental relations are “all activities or interactions, both formal and informal, that occur between all types and levels of government agencies” (p. 197). This chapter provides insightful explanations of concepts such as types of state, decentralization, subnational government, structure of intergovernmental relations, and case studies from Thailand. The author suggests that early Thai government had vertical intergovernmental relations, like the unitary state, but that this relationship has become more complex over the last two decades since Thailand introduced its decentralization policy. The final chapter in this part, Chapter 10, deals with issues related to public finance and budget. This chapter offers an excellent background and principles for explicitly understanding how governments use public finance tools to achieve a country’s economic goals. The processes of budget adoption and approval in Thailand are clearly illustrated, and taxes as government revenue and its system and types are explained. The author concludes by proposing eight principles for a good tax system: fairness, political responsibility, adequacy, administrative simplicity, economic efficiency, enforceability, transparency, and flexibility.

Part IV, “Concluding Remarks,” contains only one chapter, which sheds light on new frontiers and issues related to public administration. The author highlights the future of public administration in Chapter 11, which starts by introducing the concept of the “future of government” proposed by Zeger van der Wall. It describes the “VUCA” situations - Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity - that are expected to affect public administrators around the world in the 21st century. The author then presents current global megatrends (e.g., individualism, emerging economies, climate change, urbanization) in addition to the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals. The main concepts and models of e-government and digital government are also addressed. The author states that the application of e-services in the local government context in Thailand is out of date, especially on official



government websites. At the time of writing, e-services were available on just 52.2% of Thai municipalities' websites, and those that were available were limited to only basic services, such as inquiries and comments. A new avenue of public administration issues related to the concept of the "smart city" is also briefly addressed and explained through the example of smart city development in Thailand. The author shows the example of Khon Kaen City Development Company, which integrated the concept of transit-oriented development in building a light rail transit system in Khon Kaen Province. This development mechanism is the prototype of smart city development in other cities in Thailand. The chapter then proposes the characteristics of public administration in the near future, which might include the issues of collaborative governance and co-creation. Finally, the author concludes that public administration is a subject that periodically encounters existential crises. Throughout its development over more than a century, public administration has been adapted to many disruptive situations. However, with the megatrends and various threats occurring in the 21st century, public administration is again facing challenges and must overcome them.

Overall, this is a very comprehensive book that thoroughly covers all the important concepts and issues in public administration, especially in the 21st century. It could be a must-read book in the public administration field, especially for undergraduate students, since it sheds light on major fundamental concepts and issues that students can use as a basis for understanding more advanced public administration theories. A major merit of this book is its integration of case studies from Thailand as the main example for each concept, since there are relatively fewer works that highlight public administration in the context of developing countries. Specifically, in Chapters 9 and 10, the author writes a very insightful explanation of intergovernmental relations and public finance and budget. The deep discussions of these concepts and issues were excellent and instructive for all readers, reflecting and highlighting the author's expertise in these areas of study. Another merit of the book is its inclusion of current content and trends for public administration studies in Chapter 11. To the best of my knowledge, this book offers the most innovative coverage of public administration issues to date, especially within the realm of public administration books in Thailand. This provides students with fundamental knowledge and could also inspire interested readers to continue with further studies. This book should be commended for being well written and clear, with a



logical flow between each chapter. It has the potential to contribute to studies of public administration in the context of developing countries. The thorough discussions of several concepts and issues are instructive for readers.

That said, some issues in this book should be further addressed. First, throughout the book, the inclusion of more current empirical evidence in the field should be considered, since including such evidence could help readers more clearly understand how to apply such concepts and issues to analyze public administration-related phenomena. In particular, including the author's works may make this book unique and more differentiated from other public administration books in the Thai context. Moreover, a comparison of evidence from developed and developing countries should be considered. Specifically, Chapter 2 lacks definitions from other regions, such as other parts of Asia and Europe, and it is unclear how public administration in such regions developed and grew compared with public administration in the United States and Thailand. Throughout Chapters 4, 5, and 6, it is unclear how to apply the OPA, NPM, and governance/NPS concepts to public administration research. The development of public administration concepts through the Minnow brook conference should be discussed, as well. Second, new theories and issues should receive more attention. Specifically, Chapter 7 would be improved by including new theories and approaches for public policy analysis—for example, the advocacy coalitions framework, institutional analysis and design framework, multiple streams approach, narrative policy framework, policy diffusion theory, policy feedback theory, and punctuated equilibrium theory. In Chapter 11, issues such as artificial intelligence, blockchain governance, social equity, and transnationalization of public administration should be further considered, as these will increase utilization in public sectors in the near future (Aoki et al., 2022; McDonald et al., 2022).

Again, I commend the author's effort and endeavors in this book. It is one of the most complete public administration books with regard to the Thai context, and readers, especially undergraduate students, should not miss it.



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