

Announcement: Thailand Joins the Space Race...!

Hadrien T. Saperstein, researcher at Asia Centre.

17th December 2020

On the 16th of December, 2020, the Minister of Higher Education, Sciences, Research and Innovation, Dr. Anek Laothamatas, made the bold announcement that Thailand will inaugurate its new space program next month¹ officially entering into the so-often attested “space race.”² The program will focus on building the country’s first domestic spaceship for the purpose to orbit and explore the moon within seven years.³ Arriving shortly after the successful return to Earth of China’s Chang’e 5 twenty-three-day sampling expedition of the Moon,⁴ the Minister added that the new space program will follow in the footsteps of four other states in the Indo-Pacific region – China, India, Japan and South Korea – in an effort to transition Thailand from a developing country to a developed country.⁵ Some observers remain skeptical not only about the negative impact of diverting limited resources away from the domestic economy already worsened by the Covid-19 global crisis period, but, also, about whether the adopted approach and projected capabilities can compete against major powers already active in the space domain.⁶ In a response to both the announcement and subsequent skepticism, Asia Center will launch over the coming weeks a series of articles on the legal, strategic and political implications of Thailand entrance into the space race. Stay tuned...!

And if you want to know more about Thai’s space power and Thailand-related issues, read the following articles of Hadrien Saperstein respectively published in East Asia Forum, in Future directions and at the Lowy institute:

<https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/12/12/thailands-space-program-drifts-out-of-chinas-orbit/>

<https://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/thailand-progressive-movements-failed-counter-coup-attempt/>

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/reckoning-thailand-s-indigenous-defence-industry>

¹ Rédaction Thaïlande, “Le projet de programme spatial thaïlandais sous le feu des critiques,” *Toutelathailande*, Dec. 16, 2020.

² Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, “China extends terrestrial rivalries into orbit with new space race,” *Nikkei Asia*, Aug. 23, 2019.

³ Maya Taylor, “Minister says Thailand plans to build spacecraft to orbit the moon within 7 years,” *The Thaiger*, Dec. 15, 2020.

⁴ Andrew Jones, “China’s Chang’e 5 enters lunar orbit for historic attempt to return moon samples,” *Space.com*, Nov. 28, 2020.

⁵ Staff, “อีก 7 ปี! ไทยตั้งเป้าสร้างยานอวกาศบินโคจรรอบดวงจันทร์,” *Thai PBS*, Dec. 15, 2020.

⁶ Staff, “ฮือฮา! ไทยฝัน 7 ปี ส่งยานอวกาศไปดวงจันทร์ จริงหรือหลอก?,” *ThairathTV*, Dec. 16, 2020.