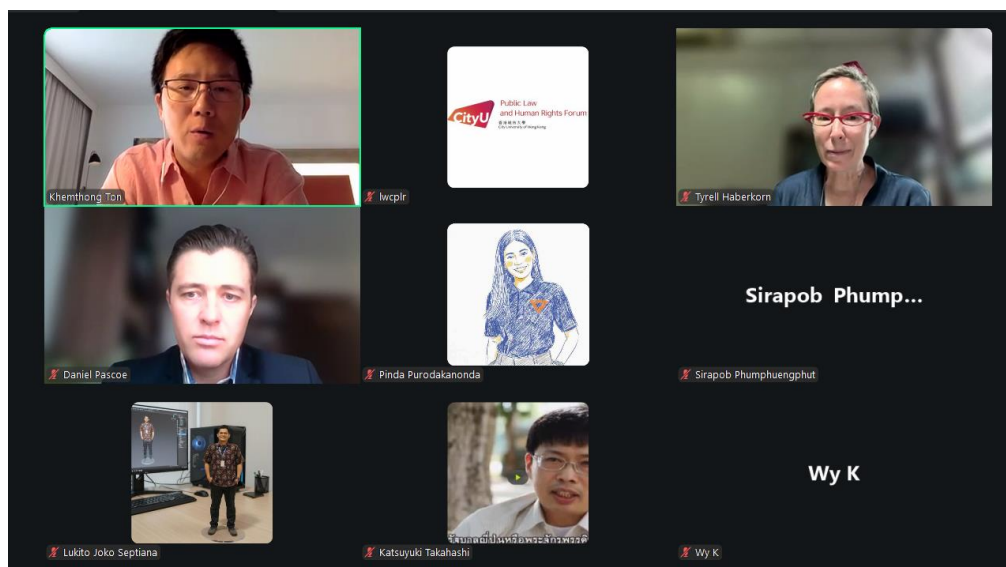


## CPLR Book Review Seminar Series (6) Dictatorship on Trial: Coups and the Future of Justice in Thailand

25 June 2026

On 23 June 2026, the Public Law and Human Rights Forum (CPLR), in collaboration with the Asia Pacific Law Review, held the sixth edition of the Book Review Seminar Series, reviewing the book “*Dictatorship on Trial: Coups and the Future of Justice in Thailand*”. The seminar was moderated by **Prof. Daniel Pascoe** (Associate Professor and Associate Director of CPLR, City University of Hong Kong). The book was reviewed by **Prof. Khemthong Tonsakulrungruang** (Assistant Professor, Chulalongkorn University), followed by a response from the author, **Prof. Tyrell Haberkorn** (Plaenert-Bascom Professor of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison).



In his presentation, **Prof. Tonsakulrungruang** shared his in-depth review on the book, praising its systematic examination of how multiple Thai courts supported military coups through their judicial decisions. He commended the book for challenging conventional wisdom by suggesting that coup cycles persist not merely due to political corruption, but because the entire judiciary system actively endorses them. **Prof. Tonsakulrungruang** further highlighted that the book successfully uncovers an “authoritarian legal culture” whereby courts consistently employ illogical legal reasoning to prioritise authoritarian clauses over human rights provisions and thereby justify the junta’s actions. He noted that this reflects deeper shortcomings in traditional Thai legal

education, emphasising the urgent need for courage and innovative natural law approaches among lawyers to hold dictators and dictatorships accountable. His full review is available on the Asia Pacific Law Review website via the following link:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10192557.2026.2675814>

Subsequently, **Prof. Haberkorn** explained the book's origins, which are deeply rooted in long-term courtroom observation in Thailand under the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) regime. She explained her methodology, which was inspired by feminist legal scholars who rewrite existing decisions from a more just perspective. Working in collaboration with Thai human rights activists to develop alternative logical frameworks, interpretations of evidence, and conclusions, **Prof. Haberkorn** demonstrated how she found surprising space for human rights guarantees within an otherwise authoritarian legal framework. Addressing the question of why Thai judges have traditionally failed to issue just decisions, she attributed this failure to Thailand's pervasive authoritarian legal culture plus to external factors, noting that achieving true justice requires systemic changes not just within the courts, but also in the streets and in parliament.

In addition, the seminar also explored the inherently political nature of court observation in Thailand and the institutional design of the judiciary. The speakers discussed the physical and logistical challenges of court observation, noting that Thai courts have made independent observation increasingly difficult by prohibiting note-taking and demanding identification from observers. **Prof. Haberkorn** shared her unique experiences as a foreign female observer, noting a shifting demographic in observers, moving from elite actors to ordinary democratic activists, highlighting court observation as a vital form of popular legal education. Additionally, both speakers addressed the varying degrees of political influence across the Thai judiciary, noting that the Constitutional Court remains far more susceptible to political meddling than the Court of Justice, due to Senate confirmation requirements.

The seminar was followed by a dynamic Q&A session, where participants actively engaged on topics regarding judicial appointment processes and court access restrictions. To conclude the seminar, closing remarks were delivered by **Prof. Pascoe**, who expressed gratitude to all the participants, including the audience. The Public Law and Human Rights Forum looks forward to your attendance at the next edition of the Book Review Seminar Series.

For more information about the book reviewed in this seminar, please visit:

<https://www.sup.org/books/asian-studies/dictatorship-trial>