Civil Society Organizations in Opposition to Healthcare Commercialization: Protecting Access for the Poor and Middle Class in Malaysia

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Abstract
This article examines the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in contesting healthcare commercialization in Malaysia. The article uses a novel framework to analyze the emergence of CSOs to protect the interests of the disadvantaged against commercialization initiatives. CSO action has expanded following the formation of social networks and election into parliament of individuals who share their views to oppose healthcare commercialization in the country. Against the odds, the evidence suggests that a significant presence of CSOs has emerged to challenge healthcare commercialization. Political changes have also given CSOs the opportunity to campaign for the protection of the interests of the disadvantaged in Malaysia’s healthcare development processes.

Keywords
civil society, commercialization, healthcare, Malaysia, public utilities

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reach a wide spectrum of Malaysian society, has managed to expose many government healthcare commercialization initiatives.

Hence, if the processes of democratization that took a new turn in 2008 are to leave an indelible mark in the social health history of Malaysia, one can expect either the existing government to embrace more the role of CSOs or face further erosion of support from the voters. Although Chee (2008) had argued that CSOs only enjoy a small opening against the powerful forces of government and the commercial sector, the struggle against the promotion of healthcare commercialization cannot be underestimated. The Malaysian experience should serve as an example for other developing countries that are also promoting commercialization. The role of CSOs can be an important third force that could check the predatory powers of the state, as well as its alliance with big businesses as it can play what Jessop (1990) and Skocpol (1994) refer to as the developmental role to protect the interests of the disadvantaged.

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Notes
1. The tragedy of commons refers to the clash between individual utility and that of collective utility that is finite. Thus, as individuals attempt to maximize their individual utility, it eventually results in the erosion of the system that is finite (Hardin, 1968).
2. Tenaga Nasional Berhad is the largest and main energy and electricity provider in Malaysia.
3. Specialists from all four hospitals reported that they charge commercial rates (interview by telephone by authors on April 10, 2010). These were follow-up questions after the survey (University of Malaya, 2010) had been completed.
4. The Association of Private Hospitals Malaysia (APHM; 2015) was established in 1972.
5. Interviews with two management officials of two large private hospitals in Kuala Lumpur conducted on June 12, 2015.
6. Chee Heng Leng, Cecilia Ng, and Tan Ka Kheng were detained in 1987 under the Internal Security Act (ISA) for opposing the radioactive waste dumping activities of Asia Rare Earth (ARE) in Papan ("Detained 2 Years!", 1988).
11. Interview conducted on June 15, 2013, in Kuala Lumpur. Tian Chua was also the director of the Labour Resource Centre when he was arrested for civil disobedience in 1998.
12. Interviews conducted over the phone on September 16, 2013, from Kuala Lumpur.