

## Chapter 3

### Thai NGOs and alternative development

[T]he recent literature on social movements, which has usefully clarified what in vulgar Marxism were seen as direct and unproblematic relations between crises and social movements, itself has serious shortcomings. Multiple meanings and collective identity formation do not cohere *automatically* to yield a social movement as an automatic response to a situation of crisis. By contrast, exploring contradictions as material *and* discursive gives to poststructural theory what is often missing, a sense of concrete reality. For example, the search for “meaning” is not conducted in a purely personal, introspective way, nor in a social vacuum, but under definite material and social conditions. These conditions are reflected on, and appear in, the formation of meaning [emphasis as in original].

R. Peet and M. Watts<sup>1</sup>

This chapter provides an overview of the history of Thai people-centred NGOs – especially those which have undertaken development activities in rural areas – and their “alternative development” concepts and approaches. It aims to provide general information about Thai NGOs and particularly about those in Chiang Mai province and Mae Rim district. It includes a description of the NGOs and what they have done so far to help peasants to empower themselves amidst the competition over productive resources in the Thai rural transformation process.

The chapter begins with the emergence – before the 1973 uprising – of different philanthropic social groups both within and outside the sphere of the state. Although some groups collapsed for various reasons, others have continued to undertake social activities in accordance with their different philosophies over many years. The chapter then focuses on social movements which formed after the 1973 uprising. The people-centred NGOs claim their origins in these movements which were the first to be established outside bureaucratic or business control.<sup>2</sup> Next it highlights the NGO movement in the 1980s and explains the influences stimulating the growth, expansion and development of the people-centred NGOs. This section also provides an overview of the development concepts embodied in the “alternative development” strategies which have been adopted by the NGOs to help the marginalised people empower themselves. After briefly describing NGO practices in the rural areas of Thailand, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Peet and Watts, 1993, “Development Theory and Environment...”, p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> Some “NGOs” have been formed by the initiative of bureaucrats, such as the National Council on Social Welfare of Thailand or *samakhom sangkhom songkhro: haeng prathet thai*, or of business, such as the Thai Environmental and Community Development Association or *samakhom sangsan thai* locally known as “The Magic Eyes” (*ta wiset*).

final section outlines the debates concerning past NGO performance in implementing “alternative development” strategies.

The main argument here is that recent development concepts and practices have not been the product of a single unified theory. Rather they have emerged through an iterative process of NGOs relations and interactions with different social actors, especially social adversaries, and from the NGO reassessment, “creative borrowing, or wholesale appropriation” of earlier theories and patterns of movement.<sup>3</sup> As a social movement in the form of collective protest will be exhausted over time, it is necessary for the NGOs to assess the problematic relationship between a social crisis and mass movement to discover how social meaning is constructed in the social and political spaces of daily life, how collective activity is formed, maintained and altered, by whom, and in what situation. Such an assessment by the NGOs would help them to go beyond an abstract or idealistic view of society to a more realistic understanding of social situations.

### **Social groups and activities before the 1973 uprising**

Before the 1973 uprising, there were broadly four types of social groups actively concerned about the people’s welfare. These included: private voluntary organisations (PVOs) or social-welfare groups; the CPT revolutionary party; socio-economic development groups; and student groups. Some of these continue to conduct their activities whereas others have ceased to exist for various reasons such as lack of clear objectives, internal problems and lack of funding.

Western style social-welfare activities in Thailand were limited and, where they existed, were mainly conducted by PVOs established by individuals from the Thai élite and foreign mission organisations. As shown in Appendix III, which outlines the formation of NGOs since the 1890s, an early example of philanthropic endeavour was an orphanage (*sathan songkhro: dek kamphra*) founded by Princess Suddhasininat in 1890. Shortly after, in 1893, the Thai Red Cross (*sapha kachat thai*) was established under the patronage of Queen Sripatcharinthra to provide health care and social relief.<sup>4</sup> In 1908, the Makane Institute was founded in Chiang Mai by the Presbyterian Mission to care for lepers.<sup>5</sup> From 1931, the Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP) extended its social

<sup>3</sup> Touraine, 1971, *The Post-Industrial Society...*, ch. 2; Said, 1991, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, ch. 10; and L.M. Salamon, 1994, “The Rise of the Non-profit Sector”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 4 (July-August), pp. 109-122.

<sup>4</sup> Phumtham Wechayachai, 1984 (2527), “Ongkan phatthana ekkachon: Adit, patjuban, anakot: Rao ja pai thang nai kan” [The Non-Government Organisations: Past, Present, Future: Which Way Are We Going?], [in Thai], *Pajarayasan*, Vol. 13, No. 5, pp. 21-28.

<sup>5</sup> Malee Suwana-adth, 1991, “The NGO Sector in Thailand and the Potential Role of NGOs in National Development”, SVITA Foundation, Bangkok, Thailand.

services to include welfare handouts to meet the basic needs of poor people, as well as health care and education for Catholic families in Chiang Mai. The Catholic schools established from that time included the Sacred Heart, Regina and Montford.<sup>6</sup>

Overall there was little development of Thai philanthropic organisations. There were, however, the works of well-to-do individuals and Buddhist monks and the role of the temple in Thai society. Traditionally, Thai people offered alms to the Buddhist monks and the temple provided food, shelter and education to the poor who were regarded as “the unfortunate” (*khon chok rai*). Thus, the monks generally played a significant role in providing welfare handouts to those in most need which in turn reduced the burden of social welfare on the state.

Nonetheless, during the late 1920s, there was considerable discussion among Thai intellectuals who had studied abroad and had experienced first hand European-style representative systems (e.g. in England, France and Germany), aimed at initiating political reform in Thailand. The Thai economic problems – partly affected by the Great Depression – became a major influence stimulating Thai political change from Absolute Monarchy to Constitutional Monarchy in 1932, led by a group of intellectuals under the banner of the People’s Party. The political change, or what Dr Pridi Phanomyong, a leader of the Party, called “revolution”, had the ultimate aim of promoting the citizen’s welfare. Pridi considered “the Constitution as the key to unlock the door, opening the opportunity for the citizens to have a say in the government process [and] to make it serve their demand [sic]”.<sup>7</sup> Pridi’s attempt to initiate political change and to restore the constitution was to ensure that the royal family and foreign investors were subject to the same laws as the common people.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the constitution became a tool to open a political space for the people in the Thai political structure.

Not only did more social-welfare groups emerge after the 1932 political change, other kinds of secular organisations also arose. The Protestant Church of Christ Foundation (CCF) was aware of the consequences of Thai economic change following the 1931 economic survey by Zimmerman and its own experience of the potentially negative impact of the economic changes on the Thai peasants. The CCF believed that the

---

<sup>6</sup> Catholic Council of Thailand for Development (CCTD) and Netherlands Catholic Organisation for Development Cooperation (CEBEMO), 1990 (2533), *Kan damrongyu kho:ng chumchon: Krabuankan to:su lae phatthana: Ko:rani suksa klumphatthana khet jo:mtho:ng sun sangkhom phatthana chiang mai* [Community Existence: The Process of Struggle and Development in Chomthong District, Chiang Mai], [in Thai], Research Report, Bangkok: CCTD, pp. 32-33.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Somsak, 1993, “The Communist Movement in Thailand”, p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> See further details of the 1932 political change in B. Batson, 1984, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam*, Singapore: Oxford University Press; Kulap Saipradit, 1975 (2518), *Bu’anglang kanpatiwat 2475* [The Background of the Revolution in 2475 (1932)], [in Thai], Bangkok: Tawandaeng; and Thak Chaloemtiarana (ed), 1978, *Thai Politics 1932-1957: Extracts and Documents*, Vol. 1, Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand.

livelihood of rural people would be disrupted by the form of “development” led by urban élites as had happened in many Western countries.<sup>9</sup> The CCF, therefore, set up the Rural Life Department (RLD) in 1943 to organise farmer interest groups in Chiang Mai and Nan provinces and to train them how to manage their own cooperative group activities.<sup>10</sup> In 1951, the Chiang Mai Catholic Church extended its work with Northern Thais to include Karen minority groups. The missionary activities included education, health, rural settlement for the landless and the promotion of agricultural occupations. The Church’s approach to help the poor began to shift from welfare handouts to urging the people to form their own interest groups and to become involved in development activities.<sup>11</sup> The Catholic Council of Thailand for Development (CCTD), which would be an important player later, was established in 1958 (but registered only in 1973).

The limited development of social-welfare groups in the 1940s and immediate post-war period was, however, overshadowed by political responses to emerging socio-political issues. After World War II, the Thai people were concerned about the country’s socio-economic problems, in part caused by the Allies’ demands that the Phibun Government pay war reparations. Also, after Thailand joined the new United Nations Organisation, which included the communist Soviet Union, the Government in 1946 abolished the Anti-Communist Act which had been in place since 1933.<sup>12</sup> This provided a political space for Thai intellectuals – albeit a small number – and the common people who were concerned about the country’s socio-political problems to search for ways to tackle the problems. These intellectuals, especially left-wing journalists, writers and university students, introduced Marxist approaches to analyse the social relations of production in Thai society. Workers began to form and expand labour unions such as Central Labour Union (CLU) and Bangkok Labour Union (BLU), while students began to set up their organisations such as the Student Group of Thailand (SGT) and the Thai Youth Organisation (TYO).<sup>13</sup> Although these activities were undertaken by only a small number of people and were confined mainly to the big cities, they had considerable influence in altering the system of thought of many educated people away from the views dominated by the royal family and aristocrats.

---

<sup>9</sup> L.C. Judd, 1987, *A Vision to Some... A Case Study of Rural Development Activities by an NGO in Thailand: The Rural Life Department of the Church of Christ in Thailand, 1961-1970*, Research Report Series No. 18, Payap University Centre for Research and Development, Chiang Mai, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Activities included revolving fund projects, training about modern agricultural methods and cooperation with government officials, especially from the Rice and Livestock Department. The Rural Life Department (RLD) had operated these activities until it collapsed in the mid-1970s due to internal problems.

<sup>11</sup> CCTD and CEBEMO, 1990 (2533), *Kan damrongyu kho:ng chumchon...*, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> See details in Chanwit Kasetsiri (tran), 1978, “Report of the Commission on the Alleged Communism of Luang Pradit Manutham”, in Thak (ed), *Thai Politics 1932-1957...*, pp. 186-237.

<sup>13</sup> Kasian Tejapira, 1992, “Commodifying Marxism: The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927-1958”, PhD thesis (Political Science), Cornell University, pp. 269-294.

The lack of rural representation in mainstream political parties at that time encouraged the CPT to redirect its work to organise small-scale and landless peasants in the countryside.<sup>14</sup> The CPT gained the support of urban intellectuals and established a political link between these intellectuals and the rural poor. Between 1948 and 1952, the CPT claimed that it had mobilised peasant groups in seven provinces in the Northeast and one province in the South.<sup>15</sup> The CPT employed tactics which were later used by some student and NGO activists in organising peasants' groups, although for a different objective. The CPT assigned cadres to settle, with a low profile, in a village and to befriend and to help villagers tackle their problems. In some areas where there was an existing conflict between villagers and officials, the CPT work was very effective. For instance, Thaphya village in Palian district of Trang province was claimed by the CPT as "a party village".<sup>16</sup> Not only did the CPT win the hearts and minds of the villagers, its influence convinced a number of students, local politicians and journalists to become its allies. The increase in political activities prompted the Phibun government to reintroduce the Anti-Communist Act in November 1952 to control what it saw as the growing influence of the CPT. However, the Act did not stop the CPT activities nor the relationship between students and intellectuals and the CPT. These continued and were significant, as we shall see, in the political unrest between 1976 and 1979.

As well as the political activities of the CPT which directed attention to the welfare of the poor, there was in Thailand from the 1950s, as in other so called Third World countries, a new pressure for economic development based on the 'growth' ideology. The World Bank and UN Agencies were key promoters of new theories of development through economic growth. This was accompanied by a belief that benefits of economic growth would 'trickle down' to the less well-off in society. Nevertheless, the optimism was short lived and a reassessment of growth theories during the first UN "Development Decade" of the 1960s revealed the failures of the benefits of growth to reach the poor. In Thailand, Dr Puey, an economist and Thammasat University Rector, and a number of university academics and public servants were concerned as to how "the fruits of economic growth should be shared more equitably by people in the urban

---

<sup>14</sup> Although not outlawed between 1946 and 1952, the CPT remained effectively an underground movement. Some writers argue that the CPT was initially set up in the 1930s by a group of Chinese in Thailand to campaign for the recognition of the Chinese migrants. It later expanded its activities to include disadvantaged Thais. Its work was gradually recognised and supported by some prominent Thai intellectuals such as Jit Phumisak (an academic and writer); Atsani Phollajan (a poet and public servant); Khro:ng Jandawong (a teacher); and Udom Sisuwan (a writer). See Pasuk and Baker, 1995, *Thailand...*, pp. 291-296; and Somsak, 1993, "The Communist Movement in Thailand".

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 255-260.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

slums and rural areas”.<sup>17</sup> These intellectuals played an important role in encouraging the formation of groups to promote socio-economic development. Puey set up the Graduate Volunteer Project (GVP) (*khroṅkan bandit asasamak*) in 1966 to create “the next generation and successive generations... to be equipped with the knowledge and the ideals to assume the burden of the struggle for a better society”.<sup>18</sup> Two years later, he helped establish the Thai Rural Reconstruction Movement (TRRM) which became an advocate of community development in which rural populations were encouraged to participate. The ideas and assistance to set up the TRRM came from Dr Y.C. Yen, a Chinese-American scholar.<sup>19</sup> In 1974, a year after the 1973 uprising, Puey initiated the Mae Klong Rural Development Project with the cooperation of three leading universities in Bangkok (Kasetsat, Thammasat and Chulalongkorn) to train university graduates in inter-disciplinary approaches to work in rural areas. These projects – designed to counter the effect of growth theory – became working models for some NGOs in the early 1980s.

Two other important organisations pioneering community development ideas in the early 1970s were the Komol Khimtho:ng Foundation (KKF) and the CCTD. The KKF was established in 1971 with the help of Sulak Sivaraksa, a social critic, and became an organisation where young idealists worked to promote social awareness in a community following the ideas of the late Komol.<sup>20</sup> The CCTD placed its emphasis on human development guided by Pope Paul VI’s encyclical in 1967 and sought to counterbalance the materialistic orientation created by the growth economy and its proponents. Moreover, a group within the CCTD adopted the “Theology of Liberation” or “*Thewasat haeng kan plodplo:i*” and used a “conscientisation” or “*kan pluk jit sammuk*” approach as a means to convince ordinary people to participate in their

---

<sup>17</sup> L.D. Stifel, 1984, “Recollections of Dr Puey”, in Komol Khimtho:ng Foundation (KKF), *A Siamese for all Seasons: Collected Articles by and about Puey Ungphakorn*, Bangkok: KKF, p. 14. During the late 1950s, the Thai government supported the establishment of two important social-welfare organisations – the National Council on Social Welfare of Thailand under the Patronage of H.M. the King and the National Council of Thai Women under the Patronage of H.M. the Queen. See Yupha Wongchai, 1988, “The Study of a Model Non-Government Coordinating Organisation: The Case Study of the National Council on Social Welfare of Thailand, the National Council of Women of Thailand and the Thai Volunteer Service”, Research Report, Faculty of Social Administration, Thammasat University, Bangkok.

<sup>18</sup> Stifel, 1984, “Recollections of Dr Puey”, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> See Phumtham Wechayachai, 1987 (2530), “Kan phu’ngton-eng nai sangkhom thai: Thatsana lae prasopkan no:k rabop ratchakan” [Self-Reliance in Thai Society: Viewpoints and Experiences from the Non-Government Sector], [in Thai], Research Report, Pridi Phanomyong Institute, Bangkok.

<sup>20</sup> After graduating from the Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, Komol Khimtho:ng became a primary school teacher in a remote and sensitive area of Surat Thani province where he was shot dead. Rumour had it that he was gunned down by a CPT cadre who mistakenly believed that he was a government spy. At that time in 1971, I was one of the first-year students in the Faculty where the discussion about Komol’s ideals influenced many student activists to develop their teaching careers outside Bangkok.

community activities and decide by themselves what was good for them.<sup>21</sup> However, development workers, at that time, had little experience in working with people at the community level in accordance with a human development concept rather than using a welfare handout approach. They were also limited by the political situation (see Chapter 4).

The emergence of student groups began, too, in the early 1970s, as independent groups of university students, each consisting of 20-30 members. These were formed both on and off campuses to discuss a wide range of social issues and to express their dissatisfaction with the military government in handling the country's socio-economic affairs. These included groups such as *Sapha kafee* (Coffee Council) of Kasetsart University; *Sapha nadom* (Dome-building Council) and *Setthatham* (Ethical Economics) of Thammasat University; *Klum fu'nfu SOTUS mai* (New SOTUS)<sup>22</sup> of Chulalongkorn University; *Phrajangsiao* (Crescent Moon) of Silapakorn University; *Khon run mai* (New Generations) of Ramkhamhaeng University; and *Waranchathat* (Perspective of Forest People) of Chiang Mai University.<sup>23</sup> Inter-university groups such as *Suksit Siam* and *Nisit naksuksa burana chonnabot* (Students' Group for Rural Reconstruction) were also formed to exchange ideas across academic disciplines and from liberal to radical sources.<sup>24</sup> The latter group was one of the pioneers in exploring village life and diversity, social differentiation among villagers and social relations between the villagers, landowners and middlemen. Most members of this group were student leaders who came together to share their feelings against the military regime. Some students had connections with *Sunklang nakrian haeng prathet thai* (The High School Students' Centre of Thailand).<sup>25</sup> The discussions within these different groups were wide ranging and involved all sorts of issues. For some students the meaning of

---

<sup>21</sup> See G. Gutierrez, 1974, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. by Sr C. Ina and J. Eagleson, London: SCM Press; P. Freire, 1975, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Education; CCTD, n.d., "Evolution of the Catholic Council of Thailand for Development", Fact Sheet, Bangkok; and CCTD and CEBEMO, 1990 (2533), *Kan damrongyu kho:ng chumchon...*, pp. 24-26.

<sup>22</sup> Standing for "Seniority, Order, Tradition, Unity and Spirit".

<sup>23</sup> These students were influenced by intellectual discussions, books and magazines. For example, a special issue of *Social Science Review Journal* edited by Suchat Sawatsri was released entitled *Phai lu'ang* (the yellow threat) criticising the Thai free trade economy allowing Japanese commercial goods flooding the Thai domestic markets. The *Sapha nadom* group launched a book called *Phai khao* (the white threat) against the expansion of US political influence over Thai government meanwhile the *Waranchathat* Group published a book under the title *Phai kheio* (the green threat) highly criticising the military regime in Thailand. Interview, INT-071-STU, 6 January 1993, Chiang Mai.

<sup>24</sup> I was a member of this student group which is known as *Klum Burana* (literally translated as "reconstructionist group").

<sup>25</sup> Its members included, for instance, Dr Thongchai Winichakul, who is now Assistant Professor and Visiting Fellow at Cornell University; Khem Maru'khaphithak, a former student leader and a small-business man in Chiang Mai; and Santisuk Sophonsiri, who was a researcher at the Pridi Phanomyong Institute in 1986.

life was a main concern for they did not want to be corrupted by the existing norm and system. For others, social, economic and political issues – especially the presence of US military bases in Thailand – attracted their interest for they felt a responsibility to help to shape the country's future direction. The discussions did not reach beyond concrete situations to any particular social theory. Although some small groups of three to five students might secretly get together to discuss radical revolutionary ideas such as the *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (e.g. “On Practice” and “On Contradiction”) or Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution*, such groups were not common in this period.

Socio-economic problems, especially unemployment, the urban rice shortage and the rise in the cost of living also became crucial issues in the early 1970s. Although the political system was not really open – for it was controlled by the Thanom-Prapath military regime (1964-1973) – the urban middle classes, led by university students, began to express their discontent against the government (see Chapter 2).<sup>26</sup> A network of student movements developed between Bangkok and regional centres. Student leaders in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, for example, coordinated rallies on various occasions.<sup>27</sup> Early in 1973 when the Bangkok students set up the NSCT, the students from Chiang Mai University, Mae Jo Agricultural College, Chiang Mai Teachers' College and other teacher colleges in Phitsanulok, Tak and Lampang provinces similarly formed the Northern Students' Centre (NSC). These student organisations aimed to mobilise students and urban workers for social justice and more equitable wealth distribution through representative democracy. When the members of *Khum riagro:ng ratthammanun* (literally meaning the Group Organised to Demand a Constitution) organised a rally calling for a constitutional system to replace the military regime, thirteen members of the group were arrested. Further rallies were then held to unconditionally demand that the Thanom-Prapath government release those arrested. Eventually the student demands for their release led to the uprising in 1973 of the urban middle class with the support of people from regional city centres. While Bangkok became the centre for protesters from various provinces of the Central Plain, from the Northeast and the South, Chiang Mai became the centre for protesters from the Northern provinces. The political movements helped to aggravate the internal conflicts among military leaders which finally led to the toppling of the Thanom-Prapath government in October 1973.

---

<sup>26</sup> See also Girling, 1981, *Thailand...*, ch. 2.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, to protest against the overwhelming supply of Japanese goods in the domestic markets; the US military using Thai territory to protect its interest in Cambodia; and the Thai military breaking forestry laws by hunting endangered animal species in the Thung Yai National Park in Kanchanaburi province. See Bartak, 1993, “The Student Movement in Thailand, 1970-1976”.

In summary, prior to 1973, we can see that different groups had tried to address the issue of the people's poverty from different perspectives. While the monks were conducting traditional social-welfare activities, including education and shelter for the poor, based on the alms-giving tradition (*kan hai than*) of Buddhist teaching, a few foreign-styled philanthropic organisations were also being established. Christian missionaries set up schools and hospitals; some of which addressed the needs of the helpless (e.g. lepers). The schools provided an opportunity for the common people to have an education. Few of the Thai élite considered the people's poverty in relation to socio-economic and political changes occurring in Thailand and, thus, overlooked any potentially negative impact these changes might have on the rural population.<sup>28</sup>

However, different groups of reformists, "anti-system radicals" and "revolutionaries" did emerge to respond to social problems arising in rural Thailand as a result of changes in the political economy.<sup>29</sup> For instance, some university academics and bureaucrats were active in starting up socio-economic development activities, while students formed social movements and organisations. The social actors, such as managers, technicians, lawyers and other professions, in this period came from the middle class which had been created since the early 1960s as part of the state's efforts to boost economic growth.<sup>30</sup> The closed political system under the military regime and the feeling that the government was not addressing social problems seemed to be important factors which increased the proportion of "anti-system radicals" in the cities and led to the disruption of the government. Thus, the October 1973 uprising became a landmark in Thai political history because it dismantled the unity of the Thai military regime and opened up the Thai political system to enable various actors and groups ranging from ordinary people to private entrepreneurs to participate.

## **Social movements after the 1973 uprising**

### **Rural democratisation, 1973-1976**

Between 1973 and 1976, although NGO type activities began to appear, there were no formal Thai people-centred NGOs. Rather, there were many small groups of individuals who came together in a common cause and went together to the countryside and set up development groups in contact with the common people. In a sense they represented an organisation (or NGO) only in the context of the actual projects which

---

<sup>28</sup> Interview, INT-154-NGO, 26 March 1993, Bangkok.

<sup>29</sup> Girling, 1981, *Thailand...*, pp. 165-166.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 175-186. Created through the expansion of education system, especially the establishment of universities both in Bangkok and regional centres (see Chapter 2).

they set up or in which they were involved. Although these groups conducted development activities independently of organisational control, they did maintain links with particular universities and religious organisations which supported them. This early stage of Thai NGO development was basically experimental in nature. Many had a short life of two or three years due to financial shortages and especially to the political turmoil resulting from the 1976 coup.

Two general approaches to socio-economic reform and political mobilisation were used by concerned social actors to tackle rural poverty. Socio-economic development groups aimed to improve rural livelihood according to an integrated rural development model which sought to link different aspects of rural development such as health, education, agricultural occupation and self-help organisation into the one project.<sup>31</sup> Examples of the groups, which Puey advised, were the Thai Rural Reconstruction Movement (1968-1976) in Chai Nat province; the Mae Klong Rural Development Project (1974-1976) in Ratchaburi, Suphan Buri, Samut Sakhon and Petchaburi provinces; and the Mae Taman Cooperative Village Development Project (1974-1976) in Mae Taeng district, Chiang Mai province, run by a youth group in cooperation with the Komol Kimthong Foundation. The FNS, a German NGO, with the cooperation of the Northern Agricultural Office employed several social activists as mediators to help implement its Integrated Rural Development Project (1975-1981) in Samoeng district, Chiang Mai province. In addition, the socio-economic development groups included Health Care projects initiated by two general practitioners, Dr Wichai Chokwiwat and Dr Aphichet Naklekha who extended health services outside the normal areas of their practices in Phayakkhaphum Phisai district, Maha Sarakham province and in Phrao district, Chiang Mai province respectively.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, religious organisations began to transform their traditional role in education and health to become involved in 'participatory development' activities. Examples of the organisations set up in Chiang Mai were the Foundation for Education and Development of Rural Areas (FEDRA) established by a senior monk in 1974 and the Diocesan Social Action Centre (DISAC) founded by a Catholic priest a year later. The nature of their development activities was based on pioneering trial and error approaches aimed at achieving socio-economic reform.

The political mobilisation groups believed that rural poverty was caused by the ruling élite 'exploiting' the poor and neglecting to distribute the national wealth equitably. While conducting socio-economic activities, they also stimulated the formation of people's groups by encouraging an awareness among the poor that they were being

---

<sup>31</sup> The model was later accepted for use in the Fifth Plan (1982-1986).

<sup>32</sup> See details in Phumtham, 1987 (2530), "Kan phu'ngton-eng nai sangkhom thai...".

taken advantage of by the influential rich people such as landowners and middlemen. Examples of politically oriented groups were seen in the rural development work of Somkit Singsong and Prasoet Jandam in Sapdaeng village, Mancha Khiri district, Khon Kaen province; and the People for Democracy Group (PDG) led by Thirayuth Bunmi, a former Secretary-General of the NSCT. The PDG identified areas of injustice and brought them to the attention of the government. The case of the Na Sai people, whose houses were burnt to the ground by a group of government soldiers, was one of the examples which the PDG brought to public attention. The Union for Civil Liberty (UCL), a human rights organisation established in 1973 by upper and middle-class university intellectuals helped to publicise this event in the hope that this sort of abuse of military power would be reduced and eventually controlled by public opinion.

Student activists also played an important role in political mobilisation. The student activities began in April 1974 when 3,000 students, with 12 million baht provided by the State University Affairs Bureau, conducted the Campaign for Dissemination of Democracy (*khrongkan ronnarong lae phoeiphrae prachathippatai*) in 580 selected districts in preparation for the proposed national elections in 1974.<sup>33</sup> The main task was to inform the rural population about the system of representative democracy and the election processes (which had been absent from Thai politics under the military regimes in the 1960s). During the campaign, the students became aware of the economic hardships facing the rural population and began to give voice to the people's grievances. In March 1974, student activists, with the backing of the NSCT, supported a protest by peasants from Phitsanulok province demanding that the Sanya government increase the price of paddy and help solve conflicts between the peasants, landowners and moneylenders. The government responded to the demands by increasing the price of rice and set up a committee to investigate the conflicts over resources, especially land takeovers by moneylenders who claimed this as a right if the peasants failed to pay off accumulating debts.<sup>34</sup>

Apart from the CPT, students were the first to help organise peasant groups to protect their interests in the growing competition over productive resources. During the ten-day-sit-in demonstration at Thammasat University in December 1974, 2,000 peasants from many provinces of the Central and Northern regions agreed to establish a people's organisation – the PFT. The establishment of the PFT was largely supported by *sahaphan naksuksa seri haeng prathet thai* [The Federation of Independent Students of Thailand (FIST)]. In 1974 also, the national assembly passed a new Land Rent Control Act.<sup>35</sup> The Act allowed landowners to collect only one-third of farming output as land

---

<sup>33</sup> See Morell and Chai-anan, 1981, *Political Conflict in Thailand...*, ch. 6.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222.

rent. It also required a six-year rental contract to give security to the tenant. The landowners could not cancel the contract unless a tenant “failed to pay his rent for two consecutive years”.<sup>36</sup> The students used the 1974 Land Rent Control Act as a means to set up PFT branches in many lowland areas of the Central Plain and Northern regions.<sup>37</sup>

While tenants welcomed the Act, small-scale peasants who rented out their lands were reluctant to comply with the law because their profit from the rent was reduced by the conditions of the Act. As a result, the students’ action to get the Act implemented caused social conflict between the tenants and small-scale landowners rather than with “big landlords” (*jaothidin yai*) as the students had anticipated. Having seen this, government officials were quick to accuse the PFT of being a front organisation of the CPT. The officials did not accept that “ordinary, poorly educated Thai farmers would form and lead such an effective organisation and be so articulate in their statements and demands”.<sup>38</sup> As the PFT’s members were growing, officials and some landowners and influential persons whose interests were undermined by the peasants’ movement began to react violently against the PFT’s expansion. A number of PFT leaders were assassinated between March 1974 and August 1975 but nobody was charged. Of those assassinated, six were the PFT leaders from Chiang Mai including Intha Sribunroeng from Saraphi district and Jar Jakkrawan from Mae Rim district.<sup>39</sup>

Noticeably, the social groups set up to achieve rural democratisation from 1973 to 1976 were initiated by Thai intellectuals. Most of these came from middle-class backgrounds and had received Western-style education which introduced them to liberal democratic ideas and traditions which they synthesised with Thai culture.<sup>40</sup> According to the perception of the middle class, the Western model of parliamentary democracy seemed to be an ideal model for the Thai political system. However, the approaches proposed by various intellectual groups were different. Reformist groups tried to help the people empower themselves in order to eradicate their poverty through socio-economic models of integrated rural development. On the other hand, politically oriented groups,

---

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>37</sup> Interview, INT-071-STU, 6 January 1993, Chiang Mai.

<sup>38</sup> Morell and Chai-anan, 1981, *Political Conflict in Thailand...*, p. 224.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 225-228. See also Kanoksak Kaewthep, 1987, *Bot wikhro: sahaphan chaona chaorai haeng prathet thai* [An Analysis of the Peasants’ Federation of Thailand], [in Thai], Bangkok: CUSRI; and Chamaiphon Suwatthi, 1989 (2532), “Botbat sathanaphap kho:ng ongko:n sitthi manutsayachon nai kanmu’ang thai: Suksa ko:rani samakhom sitthi seriphap kho:ng prachachon” [The Role and Status of Human Rights Organisation in Thai Politics: A Case Study of Union for Civil Liberty], [in Thai], MA thesis (Political Science), Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, p. 101. Chamaiphon says that many social activists were assassinated including 36 peasants, 5 workers, 12 politicians, 12 students and 18 journalists with nobody being charged by the authority.

<sup>40</sup> For example, academic articles and speeches of Dr Puey Ungphakorn demonstrate this synthesis.

especially among students, focused their activities on creating people's organisations which would pursue their objectives through collective actions, and demand that the government address the growing problem of poverty.

Both radicals and reformists criticised the ways in which the other conducted their development activities. The reformists argued that among the radicals, "extreme leftist" students ignored the use of traditional culture as a means to fulfil political aims and that they were not flexible enough in response to different issues.<sup>41</sup> The radicals, on the other hand, claimed that the reformists' attempt to solve socio-economic problems without changing the asymmetry of power relations between the rulers and the ruled would merely strengthen the power of the central state over the peripheral society. Their emphasis, therefore, was on the need to directly challenge the political structure and to campaign for change – with violence if necessary. From my experience of involvement in social activities during that time, most left-wing students tended to absorb the literature and subsequently find evidence in Thai society and structures to support the radical objectives. Szamuely's writing about the experience of Russian intelligentsia suggests a similar pattern to the experience of the Thai intelligentsia during the mid-1970s when he says that: "it was not the sight of actual human suffering which led them to espouse revolutionary doctrines, but rather the study of revolutionary theory which opened their eyes to the existence of social injustice and cruelty".<sup>42</sup> Although the students had good intentions to help empower the people, their political means created strong opposition from a number of "right-wing" groups such as the "Red Guard", "Nawaphon" and "Village Scout".<sup>43</sup>

The issues of development, equity and improving the lot of the poor were, in the climate of the period, overwhelmed by ideological conflicts between the "right" and "left" factions.<sup>44</sup> A number of reasons prompted the Thai ruling élite to end the rural democratisation activities in the mid-1970s. First, the political changes in favour of the socialist regimes in Indochinese countries alarmed them and they feared that Thailand would be the next country to fall to the communists, especially when Thai socialist parties won 37 seats in the 1975 national election. Secondly, investors of capital, both

---

<sup>41</sup> Morell and Chai-anan, 1981, *Political Conflict in Thailand...*, pp. 174 and 175.

<sup>42</sup> T. Szamuely, 1988, *The Russian Tradition*, London: Fontana Press, p. 209.

<sup>43</sup> See an excellent discussion concerning ideological conflicts during this period in A. Turton, 1984, "Limits of Ideological Domination and the Formation of Social Consciousness", in A. Turton and S. Tanabe (eds), *History and Peasant Consciousness in Southeast Asia*, Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology Studies, No. 13, pp. 19-73.

<sup>44</sup> P. Hirsch, 1993, "Competition and Conflict over Resources: Internationalisation of Thailand's Rural Economy?", Paper presented at Thai Studies Group Annual Conference on: "The Globalisation of Thailand", ANU, Canberra.

Thais and foreigners, declined to invest in Thailand during this period due to the political turmoil.<sup>45</sup>

Most social activists who had wished to see social equity lacked the experience to understand the diversity of local situations in which they chose to work. For instance, the students' campaign against "big landlords" in some areas of the Upper Northern region caused conflicts between small-scale landowners and tenants. The student and PFT leaders subsequently lost the people's support and became isolated by the majority. While such shortcomings could have been overcome in time, more critical to the emergence of NGOs was that the authorities began to see them as a front organisation of the CPT. While the nascent NGOs learned a great deal from their trial and error approaches and received strong inspiration from the people, they also encountered a lot of difficulties in their pursuit of rural democratisation. As the ideological conflict between the "right" and "left" factions appeared overwhelming, they were forced to close down by the 1976 coup.

### **Political conflicts, 1976-1979**

The political climate was repressive under the Thanin government (1976-1977).<sup>46</sup> The arrest of student leaders, some university lecturers and officials, and, more importantly, the accusation that Puey was a communist suspect "drove some 3,000 students into the hands of the Communist Party of Thailand, pushed many intellectuals into exile abroad, and silenced most other liberals".<sup>47</sup> Any political space for negotiation and meaningful reform within the political structure during this period seemed to be limited. Nevertheless, some intellectuals continued to play an interventionist role to break the ground of political conflict and to stimulate the Thai social system to increase its capacity to transform itself.

The social problems after the 1976 coup affected a wide range of ordinary citizens whose family members either were arrested, disappeared, were killed or fled to join the CPT in the jungle. In response to these problems, religion-based NGOs were established to help alleviate the people's sufferings, for instance, requesting the release of the 'political prisoners' and visiting the people who lost family members in the political conflict. The NGOs which were set up during the mid-1970s included the

---

<sup>45</sup> Girling, 1981, *Thailand...*, pp. 206-228.

<sup>46</sup> For instance, Article 21 of the National Administrative Reform Council (NARC) replicated Marshall Sarit's Article 17, giving the Prime Minister wide-ranging powers of suppression. Moreover, the Anti-Communist Act was re-enforced and its power expanded by the NARC Order No. 22 giving authorities the rights to detain whomsoever is regarded to be "a danger to national security" (*phai sangkhom*) for up to six months without trial.

<sup>47</sup> Prudhisan Jumbala, 1986, "Political System and Nation-Building in Thailand", Paper presented at the workshop on: "Political System and Nation-Building in ASEAN", Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore, p. 51.

Coordinating Groups of Religions for Society (CGRS), Justice and Peace (J&P) and Asian Cultural Forum of Development (ACFOD). In response to socio-economic problems in rural areas, some NGOs began to re-emerge, for example the Integrated Development Project for Poor Children in Uthai Thani province, the No:ngno:i Integrated Rural Development Project in Chai Nat province and the Khwae Rabom-Siyat and Huai Namsi Development Project in Chachoengsao province. These three rural development projects were formed by three former members of the TRRM which had been closed down in 1976. These newly established NGOs claimed that they were apolitical organisations which focused their work only on the promotion of models of integrated projects covering farming systems, health and education.

At the same time, the closed political system drove ‘left-wing’ intellectuals, especially students, to help strengthen the CPT force and strategy. At the local level, they aided CPT strategies by activities such as organising nursing courses to train young CPT cadres from peasant backgrounds so that they would be able to give some basic medical services to the people in remote areas. The students also helped conduct study groups to discuss a number of issues concerning the CPT’s strategy and tactics such as the CPT’s ten-point policy, class struggle, and the ‘seven chapters of revolution’ (*patiwat jet bot*). In addition, some students created songs and music from everyday phenomena to enrich the CPT’s revolutionary culture. Moreover, the intellectuals from various occupations including politicians, students, workers and farmers joined hands to set up *khana kammakan prasanngan kamlang rak chat rak prachathippatai* or “Committee for Coordinating Patriotic and Democratic Forces” (CCPDF) on 28 September 1977 as the nationalistic movement to struggle for representative democracy supposedly side by side with the CPT. As a consequence, the CPT received substantial support from both within the country and overseas as a patriotic party, “not a minority movement or a regional insurgency” as claimed by the government.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, however, the intellectuals gained considerable knowledge about the diversity in Thai peasant society and skills through working with poor people in remote areas. The knowledge and skills gained in this period would influence, to a certain extent, the NGO approach to people’s problems later on.

Not long after its establishment, the CCPDF leaders and other intellectuals began to have difficulties in working with the CPT. A number of factors resulted in the

---

<sup>48</sup> Gawin Chutima, 1990, “The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Thailand (1973-1987)”, Occasional Paper No. 12, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Kent at Canterbury, p. 86; see also T.A. Marks, 1991, “Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in Structural Perspective”, PhD thesis (Political Science), University of Hawaii, pp. 298-330; and Udom Sisuwan (Pho: Mu’angchomphu, pseud), 1989 (2532), *Su samo:raphum phuphan* [To the Phuphan Battlefield], [in Thai], Bangkok: Samnakphim Matichon, pp. 303-306, 341-350, and 377-392. See Udom’s different perspective concerning the analysis of Thai society in Udom Sisuwan (Aran Phromchomphu, pseud), 1979 (2522), *Senthang sangkhom thai* [The Path of Thai Society], [in Thai], Bangkok: Akson.

departure of intellectuals from the CPT's revolutionary party. First, conflicts occurred between the CCPDF and CPT leaders in analysing socio-economic and political changes in Thai society. The CCPDF intellectuals argued that the CPT's socio-economic analysis failed to recognise increasing capitalist development because its "ideological worldview overpowered its strategies".<sup>49</sup> They also argued that the CPT adopted its analysis from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) showing its lack of intellectual independence from the CCP and inability to lead the Thai social movement towards representative democracy. Secondly, the CPT did not recognise the CCPDF as a partnership. The CPT considered that the CCPDF's members were not composed of "proletariat" (such as peasants and workers) but of "petite bourgeoisie" whom it saw as having "weak characteristics of individualism, indecisiveness and liberalism".<sup>50</sup> Thus, the CPT assumed that the CCPDF would be unable to lead the revolutionary movement towards "democracy" for the proletariat.

At the same time, the government began to change its policy to cope with the communist expansion by using political pardon rather than military suppression. After staging the 1977 coup to overthrow the Thanin regime, the Kriangsak government (1977-1980) tried to reduce political tensions between the "left" and "right" forces. Not long after the finalisation of the 1978 Constitution, the Kriangsak government passed the 1979 Amnesty Bill which allowed those who had been arrested and were awaiting military trial to be released in numbers. In addition, "the olive branch was also extended to those who had gone to the hills and allied themselves with the CPT".<sup>51</sup> There was no doubt that the government's change of policy from military suppression to political amnesty encouraged those intellectuals who were in conflict with the CPT to return to their home towns, resulting in decreased support for the CPT. The government's passing of the 1979 Amnesty Bill cannot be considered in isolation from the role of the so called "democratic soldiers" who influenced the government to normalise the ideological conflicts between the "left" and "right" factions.<sup>52</sup> When the Prem government (1980-1988) took power from the Kriangsak regime, it carried on the political normalisation policy by announcing Prime Ministerial Orders 66/2523, 65/2525 and 47/2529 to countervail the revolutionary movement led by the CPT.<sup>53</sup> The

---

<sup>49</sup> Marks, 1991, "Making Revolution...", p. 404.

<sup>50</sup> Gawin, 1990, "The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Thailand...", p. 70.

<sup>51</sup> Prudhisan, 1986, "Political System and Nation-Building in Thailand", p. 54.

<sup>52</sup> Pasuk and Baker, 1995, *Thailand...*, ch. 10; and Marks, 1991, "Making Revolution...", pp. 385-400.

<sup>53</sup> Suchit and Kanala explain that "order no. 66/2523 was issued in 1980 to be a policy to suppress the communist guerilla warfare; the subsequent order no. 65/2525 was issued in 1982 to be a detailed implementation plan of the policy appearing in the first order". In so doing, the orders suggest that the Army had to use "political policies leading military operations to suppress the CPT", meaning that, in order to win over the CPT, the political activities have to work "hand in hand with the military operations". Suchit Bunbongkarn and Kanala Sukhaphanij-Khanthaprab,

government strategy also included giving special attention to the poor in remote areas, who became a prime target group in the Fifth National Development Plan (1982-1986).

In summary, the social movements in rural Thailand between 1973 and 1979 fell into two main categories supporting either socio-economic development or politically oriented approaches to development. The socio-economic approach included integrated rural development activities, health care and education. The politically oriented approach included the establishment of the PFT, a people's organisation, which struggled both within and outside the existing political structure to create Thai representative institutions in which ordinary citizens could have a say concerning government policies affecting them.

While these approaches were generally implemented separately at that time, the CGRS, a human rights NGO established in 1976, was able to use both cultural and political means to call for social justice for the people. The CGRS used non-violent means (*santi withi*) to pursue its political campaign. It also sought the cooperation of leaders from different religious groups and of the London-based Amnesty International (AI), to put pressure on the government to release political prisoners. The CGRS's success demonstrates the interrelation of cultural and political approaches in the Thai social movement during the political turmoil in the mid-1970s when any meaningful reform under the suppressive regime was extremely difficult. However, the political normalisation adopted by the government in the early 1980s did help to reduced the conflicting relations between the "left" and "right" factions and largely between the state and society as well as giving a political space for discussion and mediation. Nevertheless, in the early stages of reconciliation, there still appeared political mistrust between government officials, peasant leaders and social activists, especially the NGOs who had adopted an attitude of opposition to the state and capitalism.

---

n.d., "National Security and the Contemporary Political Role of the Thai Military", Mimeo, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, pp. 6-8.

Prime Minister Order no. 47/2529 issued in March 1986 was designed for the Army to deal with the "united front of the CPT" or CPT supporters. Suchit Bunbongkarn, 1987, "The Military in the Participant Politics of Thailand", Paper presented at the Third International Conference on Thai Studies, ANU, Canberra.

The reconciliation between "the Left" and "the Right" was organised by a group of "democratic soldiers" (of the Fourth Army Regiment, Southern Thailand) with the cooperation of a number of the CPT's ex-cadres. Both sides used *phithi kraduk khaobua* or funeral ceremony generally conducted by the Southern Thais, to gather the remains of both government and guerrilla soldiers regarded as the warriors of their own classes so that the relatives of both sides could perform the ceremony together. *Phithi kraduk khaobua* was believed by some members of the Army and ex-cadres as a cultural means of forgiveness in the reconciliation process which supposedly goes beyond the ideological conflict. See Colonel Bancho:n Chawansin and Comrade Chuang (nom de guerre of Thongchai Suwanwihok), "Kraduk Khaobua", [Funeral Ceremony Practised by Southern Thai People], [in Thai], *Matichon Weekly*, various issues.

## NGO movements in the 1980s

### Growth and expansion

Since the early 1980s, there appeared an increasing number of NGOs which expressed their concern in respect of socio-economic, political and, later on, environmental aspects of development. According to a TVS survey in 1987, there were 136 NGOs working at different levels from local to national with the objective of promoting the people's role in developing Thai society.<sup>54</sup> Some were registered with the government whereas many others undertook their development activities without registration for fear of being threatened by the government. Of the 136 NGOs, 103 were involved in activities and services for rural communities. In 1990, a joint survey undertaken by the social research institutes of three universities (Chulalongkorn, Chiang Mai and Khon Kaen) revealed that there were 375 NGOs working in response to the problem of people's poverty. Of the 375, about 220 NGOs were actively working with rural populations.<sup>55</sup> Thus, from 1987 to 1990, the number of NGOs overall had increased three-fold whereas the number of NGOs working in rural communities increased seven-fold. A number of factors contributed to the NGO growth and expansion of activities in the 1980s.

First, as mentioned above, the Thai government had begun to change its strategy, since the late 1970s, to cope with social unrest – particularly that led by the CPT. It had addressed social conflicts in Thai society and persuaded various factions to cooperate in developing the nation. As the economy suffered from the oil crises in 1973 and 1981 and the business sector had not yet expanded to give skilled employment opportunities, some university graduates sought to work, for the time being, in the “third” or NGO sector.

Secondly, many social activists, who had departed from the CPT, were still socially committed and searching for other alternatives. They either joined or helped to set up new NGOs. For instance, one such group of idealists set up *Asom Wongsanit*, a constructed ‘community’ where they could explore the way of living in an egalitarian society. They initially received financial support from the Sathiankoset-Nakhapraphip Foundation.<sup>56</sup> Some former activists joined the TVS, established in 1980, to conduct training activities for volunteers who wished to work with and open up opportunities for

<sup>54</sup> Thai Volunteer Service (TVS), 1987, *The Directory of Thai Non-Government Organisations*, Bangkok: Samakkhisan Co.

<sup>55</sup> CUSRI, SRI and RDI, 1990 (2533), *Directory of Public Interest Non-Government Organisations in Thailand*, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.

<sup>56</sup> Established with the help of Sulak Sivaraksa, a social critic. One of the members was Somchai Suwansri or “Mr Intelligentsia”, an editor of *Pajarayasan* magazine in the early 1980s. *Asom Wongsanit* has in part become a Buddhist retreat for social activists. *Bangkok Post*, 23 December 1994 and 10 April 1996.

the disadvantaged. The first TVS Director was Jon Ungphakorn, the eldest son of Puey who had initiated the GVP in 1966. Although the TVS activities were conducted in a similar fashion to the GVP, its scale of operation and range of development practice were wider than the GVP. Other activists participated in the UCL, re-established in 1981 by concerned university intellectuals and officially registered as an association in 1983.<sup>57</sup> One of the early tasks of the UCL was to set up a branch in Chiang Mai to give legal assistance and training to those peasants who were being politically harassed by local authorities due to the political mistrust mentioned above.

Thirdly, the Thai NGOs received encouragement from international organisations both in terms of “alternative development” ideas as well as financial support. Since the late 1960s, the growth theory had been challenged on various fronts due to its failure to trickle down to the poor in developing countries. This had prompted a search for an alternative development approach and a shift in strategy to focus on the problems of the disadvantaged in rural areas.<sup>58</sup> In 1969, the ILO launched the “basic minimum needs” and “people’s participation” strategies aiming to tackle the problem of unemployment in Third World countries. In 1973, the World Bank endorsed the “basic minimum needs” approach and added that it should be pursued along with a “redistribution with growth” strategy. In addition, the liberal-radical and Christian-oriented intellectuals in Western Europe and the US began to depart from revolutionary movements to organise “antiauthoritarian community movements at the grass-roots level”<sup>59</sup> for they saw the ideological conflicts between “the Left” and “the Right” barely enhanced the people’s livelihood. From the early 1980s, therefore, donor NGOs from developed countries were seen as reputable and effective in their small-scale work with the poor and began to receive large amounts of funding from their governments. They, therefore, sought new projects to support and new concepts and approaches to explore with new social actors – people-centred NGOs.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, most Thai NGOs began to redefine their objectives in response to social situations in the early 1980s. Being disillusioned by the CPT, they came to believe that Western-style representative democracy was an ideal model for creating distributive justice as its theory allowed for the public to scrutinise the performance of government

---

<sup>57</sup> An approach which the UCL committee tried in order to avoid being suspected by the authorities, especially the Internal Security Operation Command (ISOC).

<sup>58</sup> For the movement of NGOs in developed countries, see Brodhead, Herbert-Copley and Lambert, 1988, *Bridge of Hope?...*, p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> Touraine, 1988, *Return of the Actor...*, p. 147.

<sup>60</sup> For instance, Community Aid Abroad (CAA), an Australian donor NGO, which had a link with the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (Oxfam), a donor NGO in the UK, gives strong support to the principles of participation in development.

and the political structure. Jon, the TVS's Director during the 1980s, expressed the view that:

The [Thai] NGOs do not hold any ideology... but a belief that the right direction of development would occur from the people's participation in every aspect of the society... The social development process relies upon the democratic ideology and consciousness of people from all walks of life in studying social problems and searching the way to tackle them on the basis of understanding and respecting the rights of one another.<sup>61</sup>

There may have been a rather naive view among many NGOs that "people's participation" was a panacea for creating social development and representative democracy. However, during the early 1980s when people's power was absent and the movement of the "left-intellectuals" had collapsed in the Thai political scene, the articulation of "people's participation" and "alternative development" discourse conveyed important social meanings for socially concerned actors to join the NGO activities.<sup>62</sup>

In summary, various factors stimulated the growth and expansion of Thai NGOs in the early 1980s. The most important of these were: the government's political normalisation policies to cope with the 'insurgency' led by the CPT; the number of idealistic activists who consequently were freed to pursue activities to help eradicate the people's poverty; the growing recognition of the NGOs in international development agencies and donor government programmes. It was high time for social activists to articulate social meanings of "alternative development" and "people's participation" to attract Thai public support and to draw financial resources from overseas funding agencies to assist new projects proposed by Thai NGOs.

### **Development of people-centred NGOs**

The majority of NGOs in the early 1980s were small-scale, comprising 3 to 5 persons and set up by Thai development practitioners. They were concerned about local socio-economic problems and how to help local people tackle their own problems. Along with these small, development-oriented NGOs were a number of human rights NGOs whose activities dealt with political campaigns and legal assistance to the poor. As Bantho:n noted, however, the activities of neither the development-oriented nor human rights NGOs were well coordinated.<sup>63</sup> Between 1981 and 1984, as Kha-ne argued, the NGO workers tended to become involved in the discussion and criticisms of development principles – especially regarding the relative merits of social-welfare and

---

<sup>61</sup> Jon, 1986 (2529), "Khabuankan ongkan phatthana ...", p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> Interview, INT-148-NGO, 17 March 1993, Bangkok.

<sup>63</sup> Bantho:n O:ndam, 1993 (2536), "Ongkan phatthana ekkachon kap prachathippatai thai" [The NGOs and Thai Democracy], in Sungsidh and Pasuk (eds), *Chonchanklang bon krasae prachathippatai thai*, pp. 307-320.

participatory development approaches, and the analysis of social problems – with little concrete practice resulting.<sup>64</sup> Between 1984 and 1988, however, an increasing number of NGO practitioners became ‘fed up’ with the continuous intellectual controversy as to how to “conscientise” villagers and to form “networks of people’s organisations” and began to explore existing issues in their particular locality. They shifted discussion among the NGOs away from broad principles towards development practices based on their experiences in the field. The main area of discussion concerned the people’s indigenous knowledge in operating different models of integrated farming, and efforts to draw on the past experience of the elders to cope with rapid rural change occurring in the villages. Seeing this, some academics and NGO leaders believed that the concepts of “village community” and “popular wisdom”, which emerged from these analyses and discussions, could be used to counterbalance the penetration of capitalist development.<sup>65</sup>

The social and political movement of the late 1970s had an impact on the NGO movement in the 1980s. The failure of the politically oriented approach in the 1970s made many NGO leaders reluctant to relate development activities to any political agenda.<sup>66</sup> An NGO leader based in Chiang Mai revealed at least three factors causing the NGO aversion to political activity in the early 1980s. First, most NGOs were afraid of being suppressed by the authorities. Secondly, they disagreed with the revolutionary movement, especially in relation to the use of violent means. Thirdly, there were personal conflicts between socio-economic reformist and politically oriented NGO leaders in leading the NGO movement. The reformists accused the radicals of “using NGOs as a tool to advocate their political agenda”.<sup>67</sup> The controversy between the

---

<sup>64</sup> Kha-ne Kittikowit, 1989, “The History of Small-Scale Rural Development Organisations in Thailand”, Thai Social Development Fund (TSDF), Bangkok.

<sup>65</sup> See Seri Phongphit (ed), 1986, *Back to the Roots: Village and Self-Reliance in a Thai Context*, Culture and Development Series 1, Bangkok: RUDOC; Seri Phongphit and K.J. Hewison, 1990, *Thai Village Life: Culture and Transition in the Northeast*, Bangkok: Mooban Press.

While the use of “village community” and “community culture” ideas continue to prevail, by the late 1980s, when a large number of development projects concerning infrastructure were being built by the Thai government to convince both domestic and foreign entrepreneurs to invest in the Thai countryside, the NGOs began to move towards political campaigns and policy advocacy through their networks to lessen the adverse impact on the people resulting from rapid change in the countryside.

<sup>66</sup> As some intellectuals considered the movements of students, NGOs and environmentalists were taking different directions, I sought the views of those whose experiences were involved in social movements since the mid-1970s. An NGO leader working in Khon Kaen province argued that there was a relationship between these movements which was carried on through the exchange of ideas and experience (Interview, INT-033-NGO, 24 November 1992, Chiang Mai). A Bangkok-based NGO worker, who was a former student leader during the 1970s, argued strongly that there was a connection between student, NGO and environmentalist movements through visionary social activists. She said that these activists were “hard to create” and “hard to die down” and she valued them like “the salt of the earth” (*klu’a kho:ng phaendin*) (Interview, INT-150-NGO, 22 March 1993, Bangkok).

<sup>67</sup> Interview, INT-155-NGO, 18 July 1994, Perth.

“culturally oriented wing” and the “political economy wing” began to decline in the mid-1980s when a group of young and energetic NGO workers persisted in criticising a development approach which separated practice from theory and culture from politics. Their questioning of the future direction of the NGO movement in response to people’s problems prompted many NGOs to assess their past experiences.<sup>68</sup>

The nature of NGO movements is highly varied and complex. No single formula or model covers a wide range of NGO complexity and fragmentation. To analyse the NGO work, one must understand the development of each NGO over time, what inspires its development activities, with whom it affiliates itself, its scope and level of operation, the focus of its development work and why it shifts its focus from time to time. In the next section, I shall describe the development of individual NGOs and highlight the relationship between NGOs which work on the ground (community-based, grass-roots NGOs) and their networks at the regional and national levels. The network activities include policy advocacy, research and training and were aimed at supporting the NGOs working at the grass-roots level. The connection between the NGOs working in the study areas in Mae Rim district, Chiang Mai province and Bangkok will be brought out in my description. A survey done by three social research institutes in 1990 revealed that 79 of the total 220 NGOs, or 36 per cent, worked in the Upper Northern region and, of these, 51 NGOs worked in Chiang Mai province alone.<sup>69</sup> In the 1980s, five conducted development activities in Mae Rim district. I chose to study four of the five NGOs as their activities were interrelated in the three villages under study.

### **Examples of NGOs on the ground**

#### *Chiang Mai Diocesan Social Action Centre (CM-DISAC)*

The Chiang Mai Diocesan Social Action Centre (CM-DISAC, hereafter called DISAC) is currently an offshoot of the Bangkok-based CCTD and has connections with the MEP. DISAC was set up in 1975 and has had Fr Niphot as its Director ever since. Fr Niphot came from a farmer family in Phayao province and received a six-month training at the International Organisation for the Development of Peoples (INODEP), in

---

<sup>68</sup> The opinion of these NGO leaders and young NGO workers confirms my argument that the reluctance to accept the NGOs as sub-species of social and environmental movements means NGOs have less ability to play an interventionist role to help people empower themselves culturally and politically. As far as I have studied the Thai NGO movement, I observe that the Thai NGO operations have moved transitionally between welfare handouts, participatory development and policy advocacy through networking, and between socio-economic, political and environmental movements. To emphasise a particular topic or issue such as participatory development and environmental movement might be a focus of some studies whereas the NGO current approach and action cannot be considered in isolation from the past experience of social movements.

<sup>69</sup> CUSRI, SRI and RDI, 1990, *Directory of Public Interest Non-Government Organisations in Thailand*.

Paris, where he became involved in the International Movement of Christian Students (IMCS). Through these activities, he was influenced by the “Theology of Liberation” and “conscientisation” approaches to community development. During the mid to late 1970s, DISAC’s work was influenced by structural analysis and “conflict confrontation” led by a Marxist political economy approach.<sup>70</sup> In the early 1980s, DISAC began to recognise that the political economy approach was useful for analysing the overall social structure but too rigid to explain the diversity occurring in a locality.<sup>71</sup> Through its experience of working with various groups of rural populations, DISAC discovered that villagers struggled to maintain their own culture. What concerned the Karen hilltribes, for example, more than not having enough rice to consume all year round, was that their language would not be taught in primary schools run by the central government and that the wisdom of the elders would not be passed on to younger generations.<sup>72</sup> A group of Northern Thais in Chomthong district, Chiang Mai, asked DISAC to work in their village and help them organise themselves to cope with rapid rural change in their community.<sup>73</sup> As the “left intellectual” Catholics in Western Europe started to detach themselves from the “radicals” to form local people’s groups at the grass-roots level in the 1970s,<sup>74</sup> this action appears to have influenced DISAC to conceptualise a “community culture” (*watthanatham chumchon*) approach in the Thai context (see DISAC activities in Chapter 4). Since the early 1980s, Thai NGOs have pursued this approach in their community development activities.

#### *Foundation for Education and Development of Rural Areas (FEDRA)*

The Foundation for Education and Development of Rural Areas (FEDRA) was established in 1974 by *Phra Dhammadilok* (Jan Gusalo), a Buddhist monk in Chiang Mai. The inspiration to establish FEDRA derived from the monk’s experience in operating the Metta Suksa school which he had founded in 1959 to provide free education to children who came from poor families with the expectation that they would go back to develop their own communities. His welfare handouts were in vain

<sup>70</sup> CCTD and CEBEMO, 1990 (2533), *Kan damrongyu kho:ng chumchon...*; pp. 23-25. See excellent articles showing the influence of structural Marxism which created the debate in the Thai development context in C.J. Reynolds and L. Hong, 1983, “Marxism in Thai Historical Studies”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1, November, pp. 77-104; and L. Hong, “*Warasan Setthasat Kanmu’ang: Critical Scholarship in Post-1976 Thailand*”, in Manas Chitakasem and A. Turton (eds), *Thai Constructions of Knowledge*, London: The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, pp. 99-117.

<sup>71</sup> Niphot Thianwihan (Bunthian Tho:ngprasan, pseud), 1988 (2531), *Naeokhit watthanatham chumchon nai ngan phatthana* [The Concept of Community Culture in Development], [in Thai], Bangkok: CCTD, pp. 90-91.

<sup>72</sup> Interview, INT-009-NGO, 31 October 1991, Chiang Mai.

<sup>73</sup> CCTD and CEBEMO, 1990 (2533), *Kan damrongyu kho:ng chumchon...*; and Kanjana Kaewthep, Ariya Sewatamara and Sornchai Vichitporn, 1991, *Community Existence: Struggling and Development Process of Chomthong District, Chiang Mai*, Bangkok: CCTD and CEBEMO.

<sup>74</sup> Touraine, 1988, *Return of the Actor...*, pp. 142-147.

because most of the students sought jobs in the cities after finishing school rather than returning to their home villages. Inspired by a Thai Catholic priest and supported by retired officials, the monk founded FEDRA to help more directly to reduce people's problems in rural areas.<sup>75</sup> Since then, he has overseen FEDRA activities as its Chairperson.

*Phra* Dhammadilok set four objectives to direct FEDRA community development work. They included: the promotion of people's agricultural occupation (*songsoem kasiko:n*); technological training and experiment (*mung so:n witthaya*); self-improvement through religious practice (*damrong satsana*); and the development of local areas (*phatthana tho:ngthin*). The monk further advised FEDRA workers and rural people that it was essential to cultivate right understanding and self-development while solving economic problems. He believed that "*setthakit jitjai to:ng kae khai pro:mkan*", or literally "the problems of economy and spirituality must be solved together". In attempting to solve these problems amidst rapid rural transformation, the monk also advised his workers to consider and choose carefully where appropriate between "traditional" and "modern", as he said: "*mai long kho:ng kao; mai mao kho:ng mai*" (Don't be fascinated by the old ways; don't be confused by the new ways).<sup>76</sup> In 1989, the Saman-Benja Saengmali Foundation awarded *Phra* Dhammadilok the distinction of being recognised as a "development monk" (*phra nakphatthana diden*) who had encouraged local monks to help villagers develop their communities.<sup>77</sup> However, since the late 1980s, he has realised that rural changes are so rapid that FEDRA finds it difficult to invent a strategic plan to help rural people cope with the changes.<sup>78</sup>

#### *Appropriate Technology Association (ATA)*

The Appropriate Technology Association (ATA) was established in 1979 by a group of academics from sociological and engineering disciplines. Its formation was influenced by an appropriate technology approach to rural development problems in developing countries. The concept was initially deployed in India by Mahatma Gandhi and later recognised by UN agencies (e.g. UNICEF, WHO, ILO) and the World Bank which

<sup>75</sup> Interview, INT-050-NGO, 22 December 1992, Chiang Mai.

<sup>76</sup> Vanpen Surarerks, 1989, "Issues and Experiences in the Use of Community Participation by NGO in Rural Development Programmes in Thailand: An Analysis and Evaluation of the Foundation for Education and Development of Rural Areas – FEDRA", in Vanpen Surarerks (ed), *Thiraru'k 72 pi phra thepkawi 26 November 2532* [The Commemoration of the 72nd Birthday of *Phra* Thepkawi, 26 November 2532 (1989)], Chiang Mai: FEDRA, pp. 76-116.

<sup>77</sup> Vanpen Surarerks, 1989 (2532), "Prawat phra thepkawi" [The Resumé of *Phra* Thepkawi], [in Thai], in *ibid.*, pp. 13-14; see also Somboon Suksamran and Polsuk Jirakraisiri, 1983, "The Political Impacts of the Sangha Social Service Programme: An Evaluative Study", Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

<sup>78</sup> Interview, INT-137-NGO, 26 February 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

encouraged their related agencies to implement such approaches in their development programmes.<sup>79</sup> The ATA sought to bring together the concepts of “community participation” and “appropriate technology” and to put these into practice in the Thai context. It aimed to deploy an appropriate technology approach to development as an alternative to the large-scale technology being transferred from developed countries which Thai engineers regarded as “over mechanisation” and inaccessible to the majority of farmers.<sup>80</sup> Its projects were designed to reduce the cost to villagers of agricultural investment. These projects included small hydro-power generators to generate electricity for small-scale village rice mills and electric ovens for drying and preserving agricultural produce for sale. As a result of forest degradation affecting the water supply to small hydro-power generators (see Chapter 4), ATA shifted its focus in the late 1980s, encouraging villagers to plan for resource conservation and management.

#### *Project for Ecological Recovery (PER)*

The Project for Ecological Recovery (PER) was set up by a group of NGO workers (from the TVS), forestry officials and academics with environmental concerns in 1986, after the 1985 Eco-Forum discussion and the protest against the construction of Namchon hydro-electric dam in Thung Yai Narellan National Park, Kanchanaburi province.<sup>81</sup> In the mid-1980s, PER activities were centred primarily on using a community participation approach to encourage local people to manage and protect forest resources. Since the late 1980s, as the government has begun to build infrastructure facilities (especially dams and roads) to provide for new capital investment in regional Thailand, PER has moved away from its local, grass-roots community participation activities to conduct wider political campaigns at the regional and national levels. The shift in PER’s strategy was aimed at what it saw as the government’s promotion of economic growth at the expense of natural resources and the rights of local settlement.

### **Example of NGOs working higher up**

#### *Union for Civil Liberty (UCL)*

---

<sup>79</sup> P. Harrison, 1980, *Third World Tomorrow: A Report from the Battlefield in the War against Poverty*, London: Penguin Books, pp. 137-139.

<sup>80</sup> Gotham Arya, 1991 (2534), “Kanchai theknoloyi nai kan phatthana chonnabot” [The Use of Technology in Rural Development], *Theknoloyi thi mo:som* [Appropriate Technology], [in Thai], Vol. 1, pp. 11-28; see also Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD), 1990, *Promotion and Transfer of Appropriate Technology among Asian NGOs*, Report at the Workshop jointly organised by ATA and ACFOD, 11-12 March, Bangkok, Thailand.

<sup>81</sup> J. Rush, 1991, *The Last Tree: Reclaiming the Environment in Tropical Asia*, New York: The Asia Society, pp. 73-78; and Pinkaew Leungaramsri and Noel Rajesh, 1992, *The Future of People and Forests in Thailand after the Logging Ban*, Bangkok: PER.

The Union for Civil Liberty (UCL), a human rights NGO, was initially established in November 1973 by a group of intellectuals, only a month after the October 1973 uprising.<sup>82</sup> Its aim was to enhance understanding about the rights and freedom of Thai citizens, especially the recognition of the rights of unskilled workers and peasants to share in the country's economic development. *Sitthi seriphap* (Rights and freedom) monthly magazine became a means to represent the voice of these disadvantaged people. However, after the 1976 coup, the UCL was closed down by the Thanin government which accused the UCL of being a political agitator.

As soon as the political climate appeared to be normalised in 1978, the intellectuals and like-minded professionals did not hesitate to reorganise the UCL and carry on advocating the people's rights and freedom. In 1980, the UCL's work was undertaken by four separate divisions for the promotion of workers' rights, the promotion of peasants' rights, legal aid, and documentation and dissemination. A year later, it expanded its work to the Upper North to provide legal assistance to the peasants who were accused by the authority of being "*phai sangkhom*" [literally means being dangerous for the society] when they stood up for their own rights. The first UCL Northern office, called *Ban Hingho:i* (Firefly House), became a centre for Chiang Mai NGO workers to consult on their work difficulties and help each other out. Later, this group started up the Northern Development Workers' Association (NDWA) to provide a supportive role for NGO workers in the Upper Northern region. An NGO veteran emphasised to me that the Upper Northern NGOs had to give credit to the UCL for its visionary strategy which led to the establishment of the NDWA.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, the UCL moved to its present-day office because its activities had expanded to cover legal training and assistance for farmers and other human rights campaign activities. Besides its connection with the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee, the UCL, which was registered as an association in 1983, currently has five different regional offices in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Ubol Ratchthani, Nakhon Si Thammarat and Songkhla.<sup>84</sup>

#### *Coordinating Group of Religions for Society (CGRS)*

The Coordinating Group of Religions for Society (CGRS), another human rights NGO, was set up after the 1976 coup by a group of Buddhists and Christians, both Thais and foreigners, who advocated non-violent means to advance social justice in Thai society.

---

<sup>82</sup> Namely, Prof Saneh Charmarik, Prof Rawi Phawilai, Dr Suthira Thompson, Dr Gothom Arya, M.R. Prudhisan Jumbala and Police-Major Anan Senakhan.

<sup>83</sup> Interview, INT-124-NGO, 19 February 1993, Chiang Mai.

<sup>84</sup> Union for Civil Liberty, n.d., "Sip pi samakhom sitthi seriphap kho:ng prachachon" [Ten-Year History of the Union for Civil Liberty], [in Thai], Bangkok: Prayunwong Co.; UCL 1992 (2535) Brochure, [in Thai], Bangkok.

This approach was created as an alternative to violent approaches conducted by both the government and its opponent – the CPT. Between 1976 and 1979, Nicholas Bennette, one of the founders of the CGRS and an educational adviser to the Ministry of Education, had become the CGRS supervisor to oversee its cultural-political campaign activities – especially for the release of eighteen political prisoners detained after the coup. The CGRS also worked closely with the London-based AI to advocate human rights issues. Since the early 1980s, the CGRS has expanded its activities into three divisions dealing with religious and non-violence principles, human rights campaigns, and the development of rural livelihood. The CGRS differs from the UCL in its emphasis on organisational activities. The CGRS applies a mixture of religious, legal and political approaches in its development activities whereas the UCL is firmly oriented towards a political and legal approach. However, both NGOs played an active role in setting up the Coordinating Committee of Thai NGOs on Human Rights in 1983 to advocate and defend the rights of women, children and the powerless. They also work in cooperation with like-minded lawyers in different institutions, in particular the Central Institute for Legal Aid (*sathaban klang chuailu'a prachachon thang kotmai*), a non-profit legal organisation, and politicians in the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee.<sup>85</sup>

#### *Thai Volunteer Service (TVS)*

The Thai Volunteer Service (TVS), an NGO whose work is to provide support to other grass-roots NGOs, was set up in 1980 by a group of nineteen NGOs and was registered as a non-profit foundation in 1986. Its activities are similar to those of the GVP, but it has a wider area of operation. Its principle objectives are to recruit and train young people to be volunteers to work with other people-centred NGOs; to disseminate information concerning NGO social development activities; and to enhance the cooperation between government agencies and NGOs on social issues. The main activity of the TVS is the Volunteer Programme but it also undertakes secondary activities such as seminars, publication and administering the Thai Social Development Fund. The TVS provides not only training but also financial support for the volunteers to work with any NGO they select for a period of two years. Between 1980 and 1990, the TVS recruited and trained over 300 volunteers to serve over 50 grass-roots NGOs.<sup>86</sup>

The quality and quantity of the volunteers have varied over time. Sujittra, a training officer, told me that from the early to mid-1980s, most volunteers were urban, middle-

---

<sup>85</sup> See details in Parichat Walaisathian, 1987 (2530), “Rai-ngan kan pramoenphon kan damnoen ngan kho:ng klum prasan ngan satsana phu’a sangkhom” [Evaluation Report of the Coordinating Group of Religion for Society’s Performances], [in Thai], Faculty of Social Administration, Thammasat University.

<sup>86</sup> For further details see, TVS, n.d., “TVS Report for 1989-1990”; and “TVS and the Thai NGO Movement: A Review of the Past Decade”, Bangkok.

class university graduates with social-activist backgrounds, and had considerable analytical skills in explaining social and political situations in the national and international arena. Since the mid-1980s, however, there has been a shift in the TVS volunteer composition. Most volunteers in this period were graduates whose major courses were concerned with rural and community development and who came from regional universities and teacher-training colleges. Although they had less experience at the macro level of social and political analysis and social movement activities, they found it easier to identify the needs of rural communities than did the urban middle-class volunteers.<sup>87</sup> This later generation of volunteers – who have less experience of political mistrust of government – is inclined to feel at ease with local government officials but might find it difficult to differentiate between the government's and the people's agenda.

*Northern Development Workers' Association (NDWA)*

The Northern Development Workers' Association (NDWA) was set up in 1983 by a group of NGO workers who worked in small-scale NGOs in the Upper Northern region and who did not know where to turn to for assistance when they faced problems in their activities. The NDWA's main objective is to provide a social space for NGO workers (and on occasions, community leaders) to discuss their problems and share their experiences. Between 1986 and 1989, the NDWA supported the establishment of two small-scale projects, namely the San Kamphaeng Rural Development and the Northern Community Culture for Development Study Projects which received three-year financial support from the LDAP – a bilateral aid programme between the Thai and Canadian governments.<sup>88</sup> As a forum for NGO workers and community leaders to get together to sort out various approaches and tactics to tackle rural development problems, the NDWA has become a spearhead for the NGO movement in the Upper Northern region.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Interview, INT-148-NGO, 17 March 1993, Bangkok. Sujitra Sutdieokrai, a TVS training officer had spent most of her life working for a better Thai society. Although she knew that she had incurable cancer in the early 1990s, she still took little rest for her own sake. One of her works was the book called: *Mae Jan: Sainam thi phanplian* [Mae Jan: A Changing Stream] which was published in Thai in 1991 [2534] by Praphansan Publishing House. She passed away in 1994.

<sup>88</sup> See Anek Narkabutra, 1990 (2533), "Bot wikhro: lae botrian thi samkhan ko:ngthun phatthana tho:ngthin thai-khaenada" [An Analysis and Important Lesson Concerning Local Development Assistance Programme between Thailand and Canada], Final Report, Bangkok: LDAP.

<sup>89</sup> See details in Montri Kanphumman, 1989 (2532), "Rai-ngan phon ko:rani suksa chomrom nakphatthana phaknu'a" [A Case Study Report of the Northern Development Workers' Association], [in Thai], Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Science, Chiang Mai University.

*NGO-Coordinating Committee on Rural Development (NGO-CORD)*

The NGO-Coordinating Committee on Rural Development (NGO-CORD) was established in 1985 by cooperative effort between a group of NESDB government officials and NGO representatives. Its main objective is to become a forum for the exchange of ideas and experience among rural development NGOs and for dialogue between NGO practitioners and official development planners of the National Rural Development Coordination Centre (NRDCC) within the NESDB.<sup>90</sup> In 1991, the NGO-CORD, which has not yet been registered, had 220 rural development NGO members. It has its headquarters in Bangkok and four branches in regional city centres. The NGO-CORD/Upper North based in Chiang Mai has become a centre to promote cooperation between government agencies and 51 NGOs working in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun, Lampang, Nan, Phayao and Mae Hong Son. The NGO-CORD/Lower North and Central Plain based in Phichit acts as a centre for NGOs working in Nakhon Sawan, Uthai Thani, Chai Nat, Suphan Buri, Ayutthaya and Chachoengsao. The NGO-CORD/Northeast based in Khon Kaen coordinates a number of small-scale NGOs working in sixteen Northeastern provinces. The NGO-CORD/South based in Songkhla links small-scale NGOs working in Southern provinces. It was expected that the direct channels between the NGO-CORD networks and official agencies would help small-scale, grass-roots NGOs to bring up concrete social problems to be discussed and negotiated with policy planners and government departments at the regional and national levels.<sup>91</sup> However, in practice this has not worked as expected. This will be discussed in Chapter 6.

*Local Development Institute (LDI)*

The Local Development Institute (LDI) was established in 1990 by a group of Thai intellectuals who succeeded in persuading the Thai and Canadian governments to channel over 100 million baht in bilateral aid through LDAP to support NGO community development projects. Its main objective is to enhance the local self-reliant capacities of grass-roots NGOs, people's organisations and local educational institutions to be in balance with the national economic development. The LDI's activities include research projects which emphasise the problems of national resource utilisation and allocation, rural migration and forest destruction; financial assistance to over 50 community development projects run by NGOs, POs and regional educational

---

<sup>90</sup> Notably, the forum is organised in a similar fashion to the JPPCC (see Chapter 2).

<sup>91</sup> See NGO-Coordinating Committee on Rural Development (NGO-CORD), 1990 (2533), "Sarup samatcha prajam pi" [A Summary of Annual Assembly], [in Thai], 18-19 July, at YMCA, Chiang Mai; NGO-CORD, 1992 (2535), "Kan prachum samatcha kor por or phor chor pi 2535" [The 1992 Meeting of NGO-CORD Assembly], [in Thai], 28-29 April, Golden Dragon Hotel, Nonthaburi; and NGO-CORD/Upper North, 1992 (2535), "Rai-ngan prajampi" [Annual Report], [in Thai], January-December, Chiang Mai.

institutes; the building of NGO and PO networks and institutionalisation.<sup>92</sup> The financial assistance from LDI has helped to secure a number of development projects run by small-scale NGOs which have pioneering characteristics in rural development.

*Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF)*

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF) formerly called Friedrich Naumann Stiftung (FNS) was set up in 1958 by the German Liberal Democrat Party to support social development activities following a liberal democracy philosophy. It began to work in Thailand in 1975.<sup>93</sup> Its social activities at the time were to fund university academics to conduct research projects on social and political issues and to set up integrated rural development projects in some provinces of the Upper Northern region in cooperation with concerned officials in the Northern Agricultural Office, Chiang Mai (see Chapter 4).<sup>94</sup> The FNS integrated rural development activities have become models for the community development activities of a number of Thai NGOs. Between 1983 and 1993, the FNS was not only a major funding resource for FEDRA, but also influenced some FEDRA integrated rural development activities. Since 1987, FNS has shifted its support from university academics to NGO workers and farmer leaders as its main target groups. In this way, the FNS expects to be able to help people build up their self-reliant capacity, with communities following their own choice free of the domination of any large-scale organisations.<sup>95</sup>

In summary, since the early 1980s, the development of people-centred NGOs has shown some important patterns. First, there has been a connection between student and NGO movements from the early 1970s onwards through personal contacts. In response to rapid changes shown in forms of competition over productive resource use and allocation, the NGO movement has broadened its approach to include social and environmental issues. PER's history illustrates this point. Secondly, the recent development activities of NGOs do not emerge as new arrangements from a single, unified theory but have resulted from the reassessment of old concepts and practices. DISAC and FEDRA are good examples of organisations which have modified social-welfare handouts into a participatory development approach, albeit with difficulties. Thirdly, since the early 1990s, there has been a shift in NGO personnel from urban, middle-class social activists to rural graduates from regional universities and teacher

---

<sup>92</sup> LDI, 1992 (2535), Brochure, [in Thai], Bangkok.

<sup>93</sup> Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF), 1991, "Programme of the Exchange Forum between the Thai NGOs and Representatives from the German Parliament", Fact Sheet presented on 15 October at a meeting in the G.M. Hall, Sasanives, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

<sup>94</sup> See Phanomwan and Tips, 1988, *Non-Governmental Organisations' Planning and Implementation...*, pp. 54-60.

<sup>95</sup> Interview, INT-141-NGO, 10 March 1993, Bangkok.

colleges, as shown by the TVS. As political distrust between the government and NGOs is declining, the new generation of NGOs might have less difficulty in working with the government than the old. However, some NGO workers of the new generation might find it difficult to discover the hidden agendas of mainstream technocrats and private entrepreneurs if they have little analytical understanding of the asymmetric power relations between the ruling and the ruled.

## **Empowerment through alternative development**

### **Concept**

The term “alternative development” was designed by development thinkers and practitioners in the early 1970s to counterbalance the “growth” ideology. In the 1980s, the term “sustainable development” was invented to link the issues of development and environment and, subject to various interpretations, generally appeared in the publications of the World Bank and of grass-roots movements. The meaning of “sustainability” is unclear, as Rigg comments:

It offers a means, an end, and a justification, all rolled into one ill-defined term. At an academic level, such an overarching reach is useful; but at the practical, applied level it harbours dangers, and “sustainability” is fast becoming yet another word without a clear meaning.<sup>96</sup>

Like many other ideas, the “alternative development” and “sustainable development” concepts travelled from one place to another and became “both a fact of life and a usefully enabling condition of intellectual activity”.<sup>97</sup> Sustainable development is subject to interpretation,<sup>98</sup> and “alternative development” is, according to Friedmann, an “ideology” which seeks to rectify the asymmetry of power relations between the rich and the poor socially, economically and politically and aims to reconstitute the social structure “through forms of everyday resistance and political struggle that insist on the rights of the excluded population as human beings”.<sup>99</sup> Thus, the “alternative development” approach becomes:

a process of social and political empowerment whose long-term objective is to re-balance the structure of power in society by making state action more accountable, strengthening the powers of civil society in the management of its own affairs, and making corporate business more

---

<sup>96</sup> J. Rigg, 1995, “Introduction”, in J. Rigg (ed), *Counting the Costs: Economic Growth and Environmental Change in Thailand*, Singapore: ISEAS, p. 8.

<sup>97</sup> Said, 1991, *The World, The Text, and The Critic*, p. 226.

<sup>98</sup> See Phra Dhammapidok (Prayudh Prayudhto), 1995 (2539), *Kan phatthana thi yangyu'n* [Sustainable Development], [in Thai], Bangkok: KKF. See also NESDB, 1996 (2539), “Kan pramuan kham niyamsap naeokhit lae thitthang phaen paet” [Development Concepts and Direction in the Eighth Plan: Terms of Reference], [in Thai], Bangkok.

<sup>99</sup> Friedmann, 1992, *Empowerment...*, p. 13.

socially responsible. An alternative development insists on the primacy of politics in the protection of people's interests, especially of the disempowered sectors, of women, and of future generations that are grounded in the life space of locality, region and nation.<sup>100</sup>

Although “sustainable development” has been mentioned by many Thai academics since the early 1990s, it has not influenced the Thai NGOs as a leading development ideology to the same extent as the idea of “alternative development”. An Alternative Development Studies Programme (ADSP) was established in 1982 by a group of social scientists and has been run by the Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute (CUSRI) ever since. Its main objective is to be a forum for NGOs to discuss “alternative development” concepts and strategies in the Thai development context. However, the concept itself has not yet been well defined by the ADSP but is subject to interpretation by individuals and NGOs. Some of them use the term “alternative” to identify any development activity – such as an agricultural practice which recognises models of mixed farming and uses less mechanisation, chemical fertiliser and insecticide – which is different from “modern” agriculture methods.<sup>101</sup>

Since the early 1980s, the Thai NGOs have deployed “alternative development” strategies such as “people's participation”, “community culture”, “self-reliant development” and “community forestry”. Noticeably, these approaches aim to help the “disempowered sector” in the civil society to strengthen themselves, and emphasise the elements of “people” and “community” in development. For instance, Turton, an anthropologist who did research projects in Upper Northern Thailand, suggested in the mid-1980s that besides increasing production, poor people should be able to control their production and to have power to control their own future. He also argued that the “popular participation” concept, defined as “the organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations, on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control”<sup>102</sup> gave a political place for the underprivileged poor to increase their power in controlling not only economic benefits but also a wider range of human and social issues such as community health and education. Prudhisan argued that the ultimate aim of Thai NGOs, which he called “non-bureaucratic groups”, was not only to encourage people to participate in the activities of the state but also to attempt to influence the government's decision and policies for the benefit of the people.<sup>103</sup> However, in the early 1990s, some academics

---

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>101</sup> For example, the term *kaset thanglu'ak* or “alternative agriculture” used by the Technology for Rural and Ecological Enrichment (TREE), an appropriate technology NGO working in Suphan Buri province, Central Plain.

<sup>102</sup> A. Turton, 1987, *Production, Power and Participation in Rural Thailand: Experiences of Poor Farmers' Groups*, Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), p. 3.

<sup>103</sup> Prudhisan Jumbala, 1987, “Interest and Pressure Groups”, in Somsakdi Xuto (ed), *Government and Politics of Thailand*, London: Oxford University Press, pp. 132-162.

argued that NGO attempts to implement “alternative development” strategies were not so successful because they had little analytical understanding of the diversity of rural communities and the nature of the state and market economy.

From his experience working with a number of hill minority groups and Northern Thai people in the 1980s, Fr Niphot Thianwihan encouraged Thai NGOs and other development practitioners to adopt a “community culture” approach which recognises the relationship among people, between people, production and environment, between people and their spiritual beliefs, and the role this could have in development (see discussion about “community culture” in Chapter 4).<sup>104</sup> He argued that a “culture” was not a fixed phenomenon but had been produced and reproduced continuously by rural people through socio-economic changes over time. He also claimed that it was an ideological reproduction to counterbalance the effect of capitalist culture being imposed from outside.<sup>105</sup> I agree with Niphot when he says that the “culture” is reproduced continually. However, I am sceptical that the reproduction of culture is used only to combat the intrusion of “capitalist culture”.

Galtung, a Buddhist and a peace research scholar, interpreted “self-reliant development” as “a pattern of regeneration through one’s own efforts, of fighting dominance by beginning to rely on oneself, meaning the individual self and the collective Self [sic] with others in the same position”.<sup>106</sup> He argued that a self-reliant development approach depends on people’s participation because the people are the masters of their own decisions in determining their needs and creating their solutions.<sup>107</sup> Some local intellectuals in Thailand explored the “self-reliant development” approach in the Thai context. Yu Suntho:nthai, an ex-monk from Surin province, applied a

---

<sup>104</sup> Interview, INT-009-NGO, 31 October 1991, Chiang Mai.

<sup>105</sup> Niphot, 1988 (2531), *Naeokhit watthanatham chumchon...*, p. 91. See also Chatthip Nartsupha, 1989 (2532), “Naeokit watthanatham chumchon” [The Concept of Community Culture], in Jakkrit Chumwatthana and Ukrit Patthamanan, *Saithan haeng khwamkhit* [The Stream of Thought], [in Thai], Bangkok: The Committee for Organising Academic Activities in Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of *Khun* Warunyupha Sanidwongse Na Ayutthaya, pp. 47-72; and Chatthip Nartsupha, 1991, “The Community Culture School of Thought”, in Manas Chitakasem and A. Turton (eds), *Thai Constructions of Knowledge*, London: The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, pp. 118-141.

See interesting discussion about culture in R.M. Keesing, 1989, “Creating the Past: Custom and Identity in the Contemporary Pacific”, *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 1, No. 1&2, pp. 19-42; and D. Mitchell, 1995, “There’s No Such Thing as Culture: Towards a Reconceptualisation of the Idea of Culture in Geography”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 20, pp. 102-116.

<sup>106</sup> J. Galtung, 1980, “Self-Reliance: Concepts, Practice and Rationale”, in J. Galtung, P. O’Brien and R. Preiswerk (eds), *Self-Reliance: A Strategy for Development*, London: Bogle-d’Ouverture Publications, p. 23. See also Kanjana Kaewthep and Kanoksak Kaewthep, n.d., *Kan phu’ngton-eng: Sakkayaphap nai kan phatthana kho:ng chonnabot* [Self-Reliance: Capacity in Development of Rural Community], [in Thai], Bangkok: CCTD.

<sup>107</sup> Galtung, 1980, “Self-Reliance...”, pp. 26-34.

Buddhist teaching of “*patiyat* (to study), *patibat* (to practice) and *patiwet* (to analyse and evaluate results)” to explore an integrated farming system suitable for his own land and environment. He grew rice, vegetables and fruit trees, and raised fish, pigs and chickens, allowing plants and animals to grow together and to depend on each other. Agricultural production of this kind predominantly ensured household consumption rather than marketing profits. However, Yu did not reject the market economy system because he sold his surplus produce. Wibun Khemchaloem of Chachoengsao was another example. He sold part of his land to clear off his accumulating debt and began to explore a “self-reliant development” approach on the remaining land using family labour and capital with little agricultural inputs from outside. Based on agricultural and forest products to provide basic needs, especially food and traditional medicine, for family members, Wibun developed a system of agro-forestry (*wana kaset*) which demonstrated the living interdependence between man and environment. He was interested in managing home-grown resources and planned to set up a “community industry” (*utsahakam chumchon*) for selling chemical-free products.<sup>108</sup> While many NGOs seem to advocate “self-reliant development” as if it would break off from the Thai socio-economic structure, the “self-reliant development” implemented by these local people could be interpreted as a temporary detachment from the current system of market economy by drawing strength from the past in order to “hurl” themselves towards the future.<sup>109</sup>

Since the late 1980s, the government has launched regional development policies and begun to build infrastructure facilities to stimulate economic growth in the regions. The government’s efforts have produced an increase in competition over the use of and access to land and other related resources between investors of capital, officials and rural dwellers. In response to the increasing competition over resources, Thai intellectuals have proposed concepts and practice for managing natural resources.<sup>110</sup> The concepts of “community forest” (*pa chumchon*) and “alternative agriculture” (*kaset*

<sup>108</sup> Interview, INT-013-VIL, 6 December 1991, Chachoengsao; see also *Athit Weekly*, 21-27 April 1995 (2538), pp. 36-38 and 28 April-4 May 1995 (2538), pp. 39-41.

<sup>109</sup> Touraine, 1977, *The Self-Production of Society*, p. 324; and Friedmann, 1992, *Empowerment...*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>110</sup> For example, Dhira Phanthumvanit and T. Panayotou, 1990, *Natural Resources for a Sustainable Future: Spreading the Benefits*, Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) Year-End Conference on “Industrialising Thailand and Its Impact on the Environment”, 8-9 December, Ambassador City Jo:mtian, Chon Buri; P. Hastings and Chatchawan Boonraksa, 1990, *Integrated Information for Natural Resource Management*, TDRI Year-End Conference, 8-9 December, Ambassador City Jo:mtian, Chon Buri; Chanuan Rattanawaraha (ed), 1992 (2535), *Kaset yangyu’n: Kasettrakam kap thammachat* [Sustainable Agriculture: Agriculture and Nature], [in Thai], Bangkok: Alternative Agriculture Network; Montri Janthawong (ed), 1992 (2535), *Wanakaset: Phu’a khon lae singwadolom* [Agro-forestry: For People and Environment], [in Thai], Bangkok: Alternative Agriculture Network; and Withun Lianjamrun (ed), 1992 (2535), *Kasettrakam thang lu’ak: Honthang rod kho:ng kasettrakam thai* [Alternative Agriculture: The Prospect of Thai Agriculture], [in Thai], Bangkok: Alternative Agriculture Network.

*thanglu'ak*) have influenced NGO practitioners and guided their grass-roots environmental movements in Thailand. The concept was based on resource management which emphasised the rights of local people to have access to resource allocation and utilisation with minimal interference from the state.<sup>111</sup>

A number of useful studies were undertaken to argue for community rights over natural resources. These studies detailed the ways of life of different local populations, their histories, cultures and relationships with environment.<sup>112</sup> The main objective of the studies was to provide a political space for the marginal people to participate in the resource management which was being pursued by government officials. While these studies focused on local people's histories, cultures and attitudes towards resource allocation and management, they seem to neglect the dynamic interrelations between the state, village community and market over time. Thus, the descriptions and discussions were out of perspective.<sup>113</sup> These studies were, therefore, criticised for bypassing the state and the market (see further details in the last section of this chapter). However, to make the analysis of political ecology more dynamic and viable in rapidly

---

<sup>111</sup> LDI, 1992, "Community Forest: Declaration of the Customary Rights of Local Communities: Thai Democracy at the Grass-roots", Bangkok: Ammarin Printing Group, p. 26.

<sup>112</sup> See Saneh Chamarik and Yot Santisombat (eds), 1993 (2536), *Pa chumchon nai prathet thai: Naeothang kan phatthana: Pa fon khet ro:n kap phap ruam kho:ng pa chumchon nai prathet thai* [Community Forest in Thailand: A Trend for Development: Tropical Rain Forest and the Comprehensive Picture of Community Forest in Thailand], [in Thai], Vol. 1, Bangkok: LDI; Saneh Chamarik and Yot Santisombat (eds), 1993 (2536), *Pa chumchon nai prathet thai: Naeothang kan phatthana: Pa chumchon phaknu'a* [Community Forest in Thailand: A Trend for Development: Community Forest in the Northern Region], [in Thai], Vol. 2, Bangkok: LDI; Saneh Chamarik and Yot Santisombat (eds), 1993 (2536), *Pa chumchon nai prathet thai: Naeothang kan phatthana: Pa chumchon nai phak tawan o:k chiangnu'a* [Community Forest in Thailand: A Trend for Development: Community Forest in the Northeast Region], [in Thai], Vol. 3, Bangkok: LDI; Choemsak Pinthong (ed), 1992 (2535), *Wiwatthanakan kho:ng kan bukboek thidin thamkin nai khet pa* [The Evolution of Land Settlement in the Forest], [in Thai], Bangkok: LDI; Pinkaew Leungaramsri, 1996 (2536), *Phumpanya niwet wittahaya chon phu'nmu'ang: Suksa ko:rani chumchon kariang nai pa thung yai narasuan* [The Ecological Wisdom of Local People: A Case Study of Karen Community in the Thung Yai Naresuan Forest], [in Thai], Bangkok: PER; Pinkaew Leungaramsri and Sutharin Khunphon, 1996 (2536), "Khit choeng sangkhomwittahaya lae manutsayawittahaya: Wiwatha wa duai ru'ang sapphayakho:n suanruam" [Sociological and Anthropological Concepts: The Common Property Discourse], [in Thai], Paper presented in the Sixth International Conference on Thai Studies, 14-17 October, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

<sup>113</sup> In fact, this phenomenon is not unusual if considered from the history of development studies. During the First and Second "Development Decade" in the 1960s and 1970s, the role of the state was emphasised by the UN and its agencies such as UNDP, FAO and WHO to pursue economic and social development. However, in the 1980s, the emphasis was moved to the role of the market to stimulate economic effectiveness. See G.M. Meier, 1984. *Emerging from Poverty: The Economics that Really Matters*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Since the turn of the 1990s, nevertheless, development theorists have begun to realise the interrelationship between the state, market and civil organisations as interdependent determinants in development. See Peet and Watts, 1993, "Development Theory and Environment..."; A.D. Janvry, E. Sadoulet and E. Thombecke, 1993, "Introduction: State, Market, and Civil Organisations: New Theories, New Practices, and Their Implications for Rural Development", *World Development*, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 565-575.

changing situations, some academics have begun to use a social interaction approach to understand the movements of different social actors and how they create social meanings in everyday phenomena, form their collective activities in response to crisis situations and to political agendas in respect of resource management.<sup>114</sup>

The central aim of “alternative development” strategies is to help individual members of the disadvantaged groups to empower themselves at the household, community and other levels psychologically, socially and politically. The concepts are largely designed to focus on working with ‘community’ and ‘people’ rather than the state and business. This will be shown in the next section, dealing with NGO practice.

### **Practice**

Since the early 1980s, most Thai NGO activities have sought to alleviate the people’s economic hardship at the household and community levels. The activities have included a range of projects such as rice banks, buffalo banks, revolving funds, leadership training, group formation and networking, and seminars to exchange ideas and experience among rural people across regions. The NGOs have claimed that these projects have been implemented with care and attention to the process of small-scale peasants setting up their groups and creating activities in harmony with the people’s needs.

Rice bank projects were initially designed to combat the shortage of rice for year-round consumption which afflicts many villagers throughout Thailand, often as a result of high land and buffalo rents. After building a rice barn for storage – either donated by the members or initially provided by the NGO – the villagers who have agreed to participate elect four to five people to a rice bank committee to oversee the rice bank activities. The members also set the rules for borrowing rice and the rates for repayment, for instance, if 5 thang of paddy is borrowed then 6 thang is to be returned to the rice bank. The rice bank activity introduced by the NGOs is generally attractive to villagers because of the low interest rates compared to those charged by individual rice lenders and/or money lenders, some of whom ask for 9 thang returned on a loan of 5 thang.<sup>115</sup> If rice is left in the barn unborrowed at the end of a year, the members can decide to sell the surplus for cash to be used for different purposes.

Buffalo bank projects were set up to provide assistance to poor peasants who otherwise had to rent an animal to work in the rice field. Without this help, tenants especially

---

<sup>114</sup> For example, Chusak Witthayaphak, 1996 (2535), “Naeo kan wikro: choeng niwetwitthaya kanmu’ang” [Political Ecology Approach and Analysis], [in Thai], Paper presented in the Sixth International Conference on Thai Studies, 14-17 October, Chiang Mai, Thailand; and Lohmann, 1995, “No Rules of Engagement...”.

<sup>115</sup> Interview, INT-094-VIL, 19 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

would find it difficult to produce enough rice to provide for their household consumption if they had to pay a large portion of the rice produced for both land and buffalo rents.<sup>116</sup> Each NGO organised different ways to obtain buffaloes. For example, the No:ng Kha Yang Foundation of Rural Development (NKYFRD) in Uthai Thani purchased the buffaloes with Foundation money received from overseas funding agencies. However, FEDRA bought buffaloes with donations from well-to-do Thai people who wanted to gain merit through alms-giving (*kan hai than*).<sup>117</sup> The buffalo banks operated similarly to the rice banks with members electing a committee to oversee the provision of buffaloes provided by the NGO to the villagers most in need. However, as some small-scale peasants began to use machinery to work in the fields there was less demand for the buffaloes. These were sometimes passed to the peasants with little land who would look after and sell any offspring to gain capital for agricultural investment.

Agricultural revolving fund projects were another activity set up by NGOs to provide a financial resource for villagers' agricultural investment. In these projects, NGOs lent a small amount of money to villagers who could not get loans from banks because they had no collateral. The interest rate from the project was designed to be a lot lower than that of the bank or other commercial sources. For instance, the villagers paid 10 to 12 per cent per year interest through the revolving fund project compared to 20 per cent if borrowed from commercial banks or money lenders. After the villager returned the capital, the interest was set aside into a fund managed by a village development committee set up by the villagers. Whether or not the interest accumulated into a large amount depended on, as FEDRA believed, the way in which the committee and villagers solved their economic problems together with improving social values (e.g. diligence, frugality, devotion and solidarity). The amount of money accumulated from the interest could become a source of agricultural investment or used for some other purpose agreed by the villagers.<sup>118</sup>

In response to immediate problems faced by the rural poor – especially the destruction of their local environment and the increased cost of agricultural investment – the NGOs proposed the adoption of “alternative agriculture” practices used by those such as Yu, Wibun and many others.<sup>119</sup> Farming practices of this kind, the NGOs believed, would ensure enough food for household consumption in the first place with the possibility of

---

<sup>116</sup> About 50 thang or 500 kg for a buffalo rent per season in Uthai Thani province; see Hirsch, 1990, *Development Dilemmas in Rural Thailand*, p. 170.

<sup>117</sup> See further discussion in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 and details in Vanpen, 1989, “Issues and Experiences in the Use of Community Participation...”, pp. 84-85 and 100-101.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93-102; Kanjana, Ariya and Sornchai, 1991, *Community Existence...*, ch. 3.

<sup>119</sup> See Seri Phongphit and R. Bennoun (eds), 1988, *Turning Point of Thai Farmers, Culture and Development Series 2*, Bangkok: Thai Institute for Rural Development (THIRD).

selling excess produce as a secondary objective only. The NGOs also considered that by using methods of organic farming or of permaculture, a small-scale cultivator would be able to use his own land and family labour to become self-sufficient, thereby reducing the amount of investment. The advantages from the NGO perspective were that the villagers would have chemical-free produce to consume and there would be less pressure on and degradation of the local environment.

The NGOs argued that they were able to bring about some human and social development at the same time as conducting economic activities to help reduce the peasants' financial problems and rising landlessness due to debt foreclosure. Through their projects, they helped villagers to design rules and regulations both to run economic activities and to cultivate "trust" and other social values among people in the same positions and between the rich and the poor.<sup>120</sup> The NGOs claim that they had succeeded, to a certain extent, in changing some people's behaviour through group discussion and advice. Moreover, the NGOs encouraged unorganised villagers to form their own groups and cooperatively run economic activities at the community level. They also encouraged the people to link into networks of various kinds such as kinship, integrated farming techniques, cattle raising, weaving and community forest movements. The NGOs considered that they had helped the people's group formation and networking and that their movements contributed to the struggle for democratisation at the grass-roots level. At the same time, they encouraged villagers to explore new agricultural techniques suitable for their farming environment and claimed that they had encouraged technological change in some localities.

However, since the late 1980s, the NGOs have begun to realise that the struggle at the community level is not enough on its own to help the disadvantaged to have access to resource allocation and utilisation. They have also realised that there is a need for policy advocacy and change at the national and international levels. As a consequence, they have sought to engage the mass media, like-minded public servants, politicians and international funding organisations in their efforts to put pressure on the Thai government to recognise human development needs and to provide social services – especially in health and education. The NGOs have begun to arrange a political space for meeting, discussion and negotiation, when appropriate, between rural people, politicians and policy planners. Consequently, they have organised collective protests more often than in the early period. During these protests, they have used cultural and political approaches to draw the attention of the media and the public to village issues. For example, in 1989, about 2,000 Pakham villagers and NGO workers, with the support of the local monk *Phra Prachak Kuttachitto*, protested against a local logging

---

<sup>120</sup> E. Cox refers to "trust" as "social capital". E. Cox, 1995, *A Truly Civil Society: The 1995 Boyer Lectures*, Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) Books.

company which they claimed was cutting down valuable species of timber in the Dong Yai Conservation Forest, Buri Ram province – allegedly with military protection.<sup>121</sup> To protect the trees from being felled, the villagers used pieces of the monk’s saffron robe to tie around the trees. This might be interpreted as a form of psychological empowerment among the protesters because, once the trees were so “ordained” (*buat tonmai*), illegal loggers (e.g. ordinary people employed by the company) would not cut the trees for fear of committing a “sin”.<sup>122</sup> More importantly, the ordained trees helped mark the forest boundary and protect it from being encroached upon by logging companies. A second example involved the alleged invasion by a private entrepreneur into the Mae On conservation forest in Chiang Mai in 1990. The NGO workers and students helped Hwai Kaeo villagers organise a demonstration at the Thaphae Gate in Chiang Mai where the villagers performed a ritual of roasting and grinding chillies and salt to curse those who encroached on the forest. The people’s tactic, which Scott calls the “art of resistance”, drew attention from and scrutiny by the public and media.<sup>123</sup>

A third example showing “scaling-up”<sup>124</sup> activities was a protest against the construction of the Pak Mun Dam in Ubol Ratchathani province. On 13 October 1991, NGO activists from PER organised a meeting between villagers and the World Bank Executive Directors (EDs) on the occasion of the World Bank/IMF Annual Meeting in Bangkok. The participants included 70 villagers, representing 903 families whose properties would be removed by the dam site construction; 8 EDs from the Netherlands, Japan, Canada, England, the US, Germany, Austria and Australia; and some 20 Thai and foreign media members. On 18 October, the PER workers and the villagers asked the Bank representatives to visit the construction site. The Bank staff went there and discovered that the construction of the Pak Mun Dam was very controversial. The officials from the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) who were responsible for the dam construction had also miscalculated the number of village households to be evacuated and, therefore, underestimated the amount of compensation to be given to the villagers. The visit of the Bank staff put pressure on the officials to do a proper job. However, it did not stop the construction of the dam (which was finished in 1993).<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> For his effort to save the Dong Yai Forest in Buri Ram province, *Phra Prachak* later faced legal charges which forced him to leave the monkhood. While waiting to clear the charges against him, he stayed at the *Asom Wongsanit*, a Buddhist retreat for social activists. *Bangkok Post*, 10 April 1996.

<sup>122</sup> The “People’s Forum” Conference Fact Sheet; see also Chapter 2.

<sup>123</sup> *Khao Phiset*, 19-25 February 2533 (1990), pp. 28-29.

<sup>124</sup> M. Edwards and D. Hulme, 1992, “Scaling-up the Development Impact of NGOs: Concepts and Experiences”, in M. Edwards and D. Hulme (eds), *Making a Difference: NGOs and Development in a Changing World*, London: Earthscan Publications Ltd., pp. 13-27.

<sup>125</sup> My direct participation in the meeting of 13 October 1991; *The Nation*, 14 and 23 October 1991; *FEER*, 17 October 1991.

The NGOs also organised a number of conferences and seminars to inform the public about the government promotion of industrialisation in the regions, often at the expense of the local people. At the same time, NGOs sought ways in which conflicts over resources between rural people, officials and private entrepreneurs could be reduced or eliminated. For example, on 22-25 March 1991, the NGO-CORD/Lower North and Central Plain organised a seminar on contract farming involving 60 peasants, a delegate from the Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operatives (BAAC) and another from Department of Agricultural Science, as well as two business agents from CP and the Agro-As Company. The seminar pointed out that peasants were often disadvantaged because they had less access to information and control over productive resources. It also suggested that officials rarely acted as a mediator between rural people and business and often lacked any idea as to how to intervene in the competition over resources.<sup>126</sup> In October 1991 while the World Bank and the IMF were having their annual meeting in Bangkok, the NGO-CORD collaborated with a number of Thai and foreign NGOs to organise a conference on: “The Impact of Economic Growth on Rural Areas: People’s Forum” at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. In contrast to the Bank’s promotion of economic growth policies, the Forum emphasised the “people-oriented development” as the first priority. The forum argued that global economic activities were approaching the limits of the eco-system and called for a “radical change in production and consumption patterns and in the process of development”.<sup>127</sup> Between 6 and 10 December 1992, the ADSP, LDI, NGO-CORD and many other NGOs cooperated to organise a conference on: “The People’s Plan for the 21st Century (PP21)” at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. The PP21 Thailand was held to follow up the PP21 Japan in 1989 which aimed to stimulate social movements in Japan. The PP21 Thailand aimed to forge networks of alliance in the Asia-Pacific region “to create an alternative world and to overcome the present Northern [industrially developed countries] domination”.<sup>128</sup> As a participant in both conferences, I found the social interactions between people who shared similar views of the world very stimulating. Amidst the social relations and interactions, as Said writes, “ideas and theories travel—from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another. Cultural

---

<sup>126</sup> NGO-CORD/Lower North and Central Plain, 1991, Report of the seminar: “Kaset krop wongjo:n” [Contract Farming], [in Thai], 22-25 March, Phichit.

<sup>127</sup> Declaration of the People’s Forum 1991, Bangkok. See also the conference documents presented in the form of case studies on different themes such as “water”, “forests”, “agriculture” and “industrialisation/urbanisation”; and Withun Panyakun (ed), 1991 (2534), *Ekkasan prako:p kanprachum wethi chaoban* 34, [The People’s Forum 91: Conference Document], [in Thai], Bangkok: NGO-CORD, Social Development Studies Centre (Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University), Political-Economy Centre (Faculty of Economics, Thammasat University).

<sup>128</sup> NGO-CORD, 1992, “Making the People Visible; More Power to the People”, Paper presented at the conference “People’s Plan for the 21st Century (PP21)”, 6-10 December, Bangkok; see also Withun Panyakun (ed), 1992 (2535), *Tamnan prachachon: Saithan su sattawat thi 21* [The People’s Legend: Moving to the 21st Century], [in Thai], Bangkok: NGO-CORD.

and intellectual life are usually nourished and often sustained by this circulation of ideas...”.<sup>129</sup>

In summary, the NGO movement has been shaped over time. At the early stage of its development, the NGOs discussed broad issues of social problems; their development concepts and approaches; and the ways in which they could build up their networking and help people strengthen themselves. “Back to the roots” became a catch phrase in the mid-1980s which encouraged small-scale NGOs to explore individual ideas while studying local history and culture.<sup>130</sup> During this period, too, the NGO discussion shifted from abstract concepts to more concrete issues such as the operation of rice banks, buffalo banks, revolving funds and the techniques of “alternative agriculture”. From these concrete issues, people’s networking has been gradually formalised from village community up to regional levels, bound together by development activities (such as groups of handicrafts, rice banks and buffalo banks), kin relations and exchange of farming methods.<sup>131</sup> In the late 1980s, the situations of competition and conflicts over natural resource use in the countryside were other factors which influenced Thai NGOs to lobby the government to reform its development policies and to reduce the negative impacts on rural populations. In responding to the people’s problems in rural areas, the NGOs conducted activities covering various dimensions of development and formulated the people’s groups and networking on a wider scale than in the 1970s. However, since the early 1990s, the NGOs have realised that although collective protest is a useful form of resistance it is limited and, in time, exhausts itself. They have also realised that there is a need to address and approach various problems differently as they emerge from different causes. Nevertheless, the NGOs are still finding the way to do so.

### Some debates and comments

With regard to the past performances of the NGOs, a number of issues have been raised by socially concerned intellectuals. First, a number of leading Thai academics (who have worked closely with NGOs) and veteran NGO workers have criticised NGO performance, saying that most NGOs had little analytical understanding of the complicated rural transformation process in which they were involved. They have also said that the NGOs needed to develop their analytical skills in relation to the complex situations of industrialisation and commercialisation in rural Thailand rather than dogmatically adopting an ideological guideline.<sup>132</sup> In early 1993, Jaroen

<sup>129</sup> Said, 1991, *The World, The Text, and The Critic*, p. 226.

<sup>130</sup> See Seri (ed), 1986, *Back to the Roots...*

<sup>131</sup> Anek, 1990 (2533), *Jutplian kan phatthana chonnabot...*, p. 53.

<sup>132</sup> TVS, 1991 (2534), *Thotsawat... ongkan phatthana ekkachon thai* [A Decade...: The Thai Non-Government Organisations], [in Thai], Bangkok: TVS, pp. 13-14, 18, 21, 32, 38, 43, 46 and 85.

Khamphiraphap from LDI told me that it was not often that the new generation of NGO workers studied social reality in the Thai context. Rather they learnt from experience as relayed by senior NGO workers, accepting this at face value.<sup>133</sup> Jaturong, a former TVS training officer and currently working with the FNS, revealed that NGO training in the past was based on stories of charismatic NGO leaders so as to convince newcomers to join the NGO activities and to follow the example set rather than encourage them to think for themselves.<sup>134</sup> Bantho:n O:ndam, a former NGO-CORD Secretary-General, said that the NGOs in general were “anti-intellectual” and “anti-establishment” and it was difficult for them to otherwise develop an “analytical mind” to understand complicated situations of rural transformation.<sup>135</sup>

Secondly, it has been argued that the NGOs are good at working with people at the community level while bypassing the state and sidelining the market. Three Thai intellectuals namely Prof Saneh Charmarik, Prof Prawase Wasi and *Khun* Srisawang Phuawongphaet criticised the NGOs for not attempting to deal with government officials and other development counterparts. Prawase argued that because most NGOs were driven by ideological myths of altruism and social commitment, the NGOs were more inclined to be arrogant and as a consequence, they were unlikely to be flexible enough to cooperate with officials and other actors.<sup>136</sup> Rigg, a geographer who works on rural change in Thailand, also claimed that the NGOs sidelined the state and market.<sup>137</sup> He cited Friedmann’s assessment of an alternative development ideology which he said theoretically placed grass-roots development approaches in distrust of the state and defines it as the people’s enemy because:

It is bureaucratic, corrupt, and unsympathetic to the needs of the poor. Often, it is in the hands of military and civilian élites who treat it as their private domain. Alternative projects are therefore frequently designed to bypass the state and to concentrate instead on local communities, which are considered moral and autonomous. People are said to possess ultimate wisdom about their own lives. For many “alternative” advocates, the voice of the poor cannot be in conflict with itself; it speaks truly...

Although an alternative development must begin locally, it cannot end there. Like it or not, the state continues to be a major player. It may need to be made more accountable to poor people and more responsive to their claims. But without the state’s collaboration, the lot of the poor cannot be significantly improved. Local empowering action requires a strong state.<sup>138</sup>

Rigg claimed that it was misguided for the NGOs to separate peasants and the market. He cited research projects by Bowie and Koizumi to support his argument that rural

---

<sup>133</sup> Interview, INT-151-NGO, 23 March 1993, Bangkok.

<sup>134</sup> Interview, INT-143-NGO, 10 March 1993, Bangkok.

<sup>135</sup> Interview, INT-142-NGO, 10 March 1993, Bangkok.

<sup>136</sup> Interview, INT-018-ACA, 29 October 1992, Bangkok.

<sup>137</sup> Rigg, 1994, “Alternative Development Strategies...”, p. 23.

<sup>138</sup> Cited in Friedmann, 1992, *Empowerment...*, p. 7.

Thai people had been engaged in market exchange at an early period long before the 1855 Bowring treaty was signed to trade with Western countries. He concluded that to find the solution to the problems of people's poverty and environmental degradation, the NGOs might need to work through the political and economic system.<sup>139</sup> That is to say the NGOs need to understand actor and system relations and work with different actors to reform the system.

Thirdly, the NGO perception is largely influenced by the "agrarian myth" of the past. Dr Armin Goldschmidt, the German Representative of the FNS based in Bangkok, told me that most NGO workers, who were educated middle-class people from urban centres, were inclined to see village life in very romantic ways and try to construct a Utopian society.<sup>140</sup> Dr Walter Skrobanek, the German-born Southeast Asia Regional Representative of Terre des Hommes in Bangkok, supported Goldschmidt's idea. He added that the NGO idealisation of the past and portrayal of the village community as egalitarian was misleading. With little recognition of the overall process of rural transformation, many NGO economic projects became a sort of preparatory stage for capitalist development.<sup>141</sup> Pho:nphilai Loetwicha who had spent six years working as a researcher with the Rural Development Documentation Centre (RUDOC), an NGO supporting group for rural development, asserted that her past research projects had sought to glorify the past and were simply inward looking. She proposed that the studies for guiding NGO practice to achieve "alternative development" in the future needed to give more attention to social relations and interactions in the present-day information society.<sup>142</sup>

Finally, the NGOs work is more successful in remote rather than urban areas. Gohlert pointed out that the NGO "community culture" approach in the 1980s was the "most effective in the villages farthest removed from the urban centres".<sup>143</sup> Anek Narkabutra supported Gohlert's finding and gave some reasons why most NGO workers went to work in remote areas. These included: 1) anti-modernisation attitude; 2) the idealisation of village community; 3) funding support; and 4) charismatic NGO activists

---

<sup>139</sup> Rigg, 1994, "Alternative Development Strategies...", p. 23; see also K. Bowie, 1992, "Unravelling the Myth of the Subsistence Economy: Textile Production in Nineteenth Century Northern Thailand", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 4, pp. 797-823; J. Koizumi, 1992, "The Commutation of *Suai* from Northeast Siam in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 276-307; and J. Koizumi, 1994, "Some Observations on the Economic Administration of King Rama I", Paper presented at the 13th International Association of Historians of Asia (IAHA) Conference, 5-9 September, Sophia University, Tokyo.

<sup>140</sup> Interview, INT-141-NGO, 10 March 1993, Bangkok.

<sup>141</sup> Interview, INT-154-NGO, 26 March 1993, Bangkok.

<sup>142</sup> Interview, INT-150-NGO, 22 March 1993, Bangkok.

<sup>143</sup> Gohlert, 1991, *Power and Culture...*, p. 91.

and village leaders working in those areas. Anek revealed that while many young and idealist NGO workers wanted to help poor people eradicate their poverty in the Northeastern region, some Western funding agencies funded these NGOs to help control the social situations in areas of communist influence.<sup>144</sup> This reminds me of Friedmann's argument when he puts NGO projects into a mainstream perspective:

In virtually every case these projects' aim is eminently practical: they respond to a specific local need, their methods are experimental, and their immediate results are often encouraging. But in a mainstream perspective... they do not count as "development" writ large. Rather they are seen as a form of poverty alleviation and, in some ultimate sense, an inexpensive means of social control.<sup>145</sup>

Friedmann argues further that even though an alternative development ideology is initially designed in response to the needs of a particular locality, its ultimate aim is "to transform the whole of society through political action at national and international levels", or otherwise the alternative development would remain "encapsulated within a highly restrictive system of power, unable to break through to the genuine development it seeks".<sup>146</sup>

Kemp, an anthropologist working on Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries, did not deny the usefulness of a concept of community if it implied "the ability [of the people] to manage [their] internal affairs and to deal with the outside world as a group".<sup>147</sup> He added, however, that one had to understand the fact that "community" was "an ideological construct rather than an empirical reality" and the failure to recognise this "supported a number of false dichotomies such as between peasants and cities which distort the real nature of the relationship".<sup>148</sup> Kitahara points out that the settlement of a "frontier society" in the Central Plain in the Ayutthaya period did not occur as a result of the villagers' free will but was subjected to state laws, especially the "The Law of the Three Seals" (*kotmai tra sam duang*).<sup>149</sup> Thus, the relations between the village and the state cannot be analysed in isolation.

---

<sup>144</sup> Interview, INT-003-NGO, 24 October 1991, Chiang Mai.

<sup>145</sup> Friedmann, 1992, *Empowerment...*, p. 140.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>147</sup> Kemp, 1988, *Seductive Mirage...*, p. 24.

<sup>148</sup> Kemp, 1989, "Peasants and Cities...", p. 6.

<sup>149</sup> A. Kitahara, 1990, "Revival of Frontier Society at the Turn of the Century in Central Thailand" Paper presented at the Fourth International Conference on Thai Studies, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Kunming. See *Kotmai tra sam duang* [The Law of the Three Seals], 1962, 5 vols., [in Thai], Bangkok: Khurusapha.

The people in Chiang Mai and other Lannathai Kingdom areas were subject to the Laws of King Mangrai (*mangrayathammasart*). See Aroonrut Wichienkieo and G. Wijeyewardene (trans and eds), 1986, *The Laws of King Mangrai* [Mangrayathammasart], Canberra: Department of Anthropology, RSPAS, ANU.

Dr Anek Laothamatas, a former social activist and currently a political science lecturer at Thammasat University, disapproves of the NGO bipolar systems of thought which view the village and the city as separate, because this dichotomy becomes less distinguishable in the present-day society as transportation and communication have rapidly developed into the hinterlands. Anek argues that the failure of representative democracy in Thailand derives from the contrasting perceptions of “democracy” between the majority of people in the countryside and the middle class in the cities. He encourages the Thai NGOs to bridge the gap between the village and the city in order to construct a truly representative democratic system. That is because “democracy” does not imply only group formation and consultation among villagers but also includes electing, lobbying and watching the performance of the people’s representatives from the local to national levels.<sup>150</sup>

Friedmann argues that: “Strong states tend to have strong civil societies”.<sup>151</sup> By “strong states”, Friedmann does not refer to authoritarian states, but to those which have a truly representative system of democracy in place and help transform the people’s demands into social policies and practice by mediating different social interests. He also argues that the NGOs could play an interventionist role to help strengthen both civil society and the state in three ways. First, they could disengage the central government from problems which are better handled by local government. Secondly, they could create public institutions which are more “responsive to the diversity of locally and regionally articulated needs”. Thirdly, they could create a democratisation process from the grass-roots levels.<sup>152</sup>

Since the late 1980s, the NGOs have begun to think about the relation between village community and the wider development context in which the community sits. At least two factors stimulated the change in NGO perceptions. One was the changing situations in rural areas bringing intensive competition and conflicts over natural and productive resources. The other was the encouragement from funding agencies prompting the Thai NGOs to scale-up to advocate the reform of government policies. However, it seems that “scaling-up” activity is rather more spontaneous than pre-planned.<sup>153</sup>

Finally, during the period of open political system, many Thai NGOs adopted collective protest in response to conflicts over resources in rural Thailand as the scale-up action

---

<sup>150</sup> Anek Laothamatas, 1995 (2538), *So:ng nakhara pracha thippatai: Naeothang kan patirup kanmu'ang setthakit phu'a pracha thippatai* [Two Areas to Create Democracy: The Direction in Political and Economic Reforms for Democracy], [in Thai], Bangkok: Samnakphim Matichon.

<sup>151</sup> Friedmann, 1992, *Empowerment...*, p. 134.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>153</sup> Edwards and Hulme, 1992, *Making a Difference...*, p. 14.

advised by funding agencies. Jaroen criticised these NGO attempts to scale-up in the early 1990s. He argued that most NGOs were still influenced by the movement of the left-wing activists in the 1970s and their forms of collective protests. These NGOs, therefore, found it difficult to transform social demands into social policies which were accepted by different interest groups.<sup>154</sup> Prawase agreed with Jaroen's comment on some NGO scale-up performances and explained that NGOs quickly adopted the form of collective protest to address rural resource conflicts because: "they are very emotional for they work closely to the people's problem. Without putting the problem in perspective, the NGOs are unlikely to speak a language which is understood by policy planners".<sup>155</sup> Prawase suggested that the NGOs needed to seek help from academics or otherwise they would be unable to bring concrete problems into a framework of social policy reform. He also added that the NGOs needed to learn, along with the people, how they had solved their problems in everyday phenomena and difficult situations.

These criticisms have been broadly directed at the Thai NGO community since the turn of the decade. It is important, as Rigg suggests, to examine the NGO practice over time "beneath the ideology and generality".<sup>156</sup>

### **Concluding remarks**

To provide general knowledge about the Thai NGOs and their performances, this chapter has given an overview of the history of Thai people-centred NGOs, especially those which work in rural areas. It reveals that VOs, NGOs, POs and other non-state agencies have been established and transformed by various social actors under different socio-political conditions. Their establishment and transformation are, by and large, designed and influenced by several factors which include: crisis situations within the country; outside influences from churches, charismatic scholars, overseas funding agencies and the lessons from social movements in various countries; and government's approval or disapproval of those organisations over time. The emergence of the NGOs independent of bureaucratic and business control in the mid-1970s and the expansion of the NGOs since the early 1980s demonstrate the relevance of these factors.

---

<sup>154</sup> Interview, INT-151-NGO, 23 March 1993, Bangkok.

<sup>155</sup> Interview, INT-018-ACA, 29 October 1992, Bangkok.

<sup>156</sup> J. Rigg, 1993, "A Reply to Kevin Hewison", *World Development*, Vol. 21, No. 10, p. 1712; see also K.J. Hewison, 1993, "Non-governmental Organisations and the Cultural Development Perspective in Thailand: A Comment on Rigg (1991)", in *ibid.*, pp. 1699-1708; and J. Rigg, 1991, "Grass-Roots Development in Rural Thailand: A Lost Cause?", *World Development*, Vol. 19, No. 2 and 3, pp. 199-211.

The chapter has also provided an overview of the concepts of “alternative development” constructed by concerned scholars and NGO leaders as guidelines for the NGOs in helping ordinary people empower themselves. Moreover, it has briefly explored the NGO development performances in relation to “alternative development” strategies. It reveals, in support of my argument, that recent development concepts and practice have not emerged as new arrangements but rather emerged iteratively from the NGO relations and interactions with different social actors especially “social adversaries”, and from the NGO reassessment, or “creative borrowing, or wholesale appropriation” of earlier theories and patterns of conduct.<sup>157</sup> For instance, the criticism of the welfare handout approach led to the formulation of a participatory development approach. During the relatively closed political system and mistrust between the government and NGOs in the early 1980s, such participatory approaches were not often possible, and some NGOs made an attempt to go beyond being only providers of development projects to see themselves as a sub-species of social movement and to act as a ‘bridge’ between socio-economic and cultural issues and the political process. However, during the open political system and intensified competition over resources in the late 1980s, many NGOs began to draw a link between socio-economic, cultural and political aspects to formulate their social movements. At the same time, they were inclined to adopt only a collective protest form of movement while failing to capture “interaction between systems of thought”<sup>158</sup> in everyday politics in response to crisis situations. As a consequence, they have not yet been able to transform concrete problems faced by the people into the social and political reforms endorsed by different concerned parties. Some criticisms have been made not only of NGO development practice but also of the inadequacy of the narrow interpretation of alternative strategies. Nevertheless, while the criticisms are still controversial, there is encouragement to closely examine what the NGOs have done in dealing with the transformation of rural Thailand in the past two decades.

---

<sup>157</sup> Salamon, 1994, “The Rise of the Nonprofit Sector”, p. 121; Touraine, 1971, *The Post-Structural Society...*, p. 117; and Said, 1991, *The World, The Text, and The Critic*, p. 226.

<sup>158</sup> Lohmann, 1995, “No Rule of Engagement...”, pp. 211-234.