

**NGOs, Peasants and the State:  
Transformation and Intervention in Rural Thailand, 1970-1990**

by  
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## **Declaration**

Except where otherwise acknowledged in the text and footnotes,  
this thesis represents the author's original research.

Signed

Rapin Quinn

**To John Girling**  
**with my deepest gratitude**

## **Preface and Acknowledgments**

This thesis is formulated from the wisdom of social theorists who had experience in social conflicts and movements and refused to subordinate their knowledge to the predominantly established order of either ‘the state’ or ‘the market’. It is also formulated from my own journey in participating in and observing social and environmental movements in Thailand since the early 1970s. It is the continuing project from my MA thesis, entitled: “People’s Participation and the State: A Study of the Role of the NGOs in the Thai Development Process”, completed at the Asian History Centre, the Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University. While the MA dissertation is about development debates, human-rights NGOs, the ‘people’ and the Thai state, the PhD project is based on an area-study approach. It examines transformation and intervention in three selected villages in Thailand where a multiplicity of social actors from the spheres of ‘the state, economy and civil society’ compete to control productive resources through various means; and a group of ‘people-centred’ Thai NGOs working in the areas are some of the actors in a complicated social theatre. This thesis does not claim that the NGOs can do everything, or that their alternative development strategies are the most progressive. Rather it encourages readers to see complicated social relations and to consider the development practices carried on by different actors and organisations, including the NGOs, in perspective. To do this, I believe, helps us to find new meanings, new actors and new agendas in creating a law-based society.

My interest in NGOs began after I left a revolutionary movement led by the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in the early 1980s. Human rights NGOs impressed me by the way they committed themselves to represent the leaders of farmers and workers who stood up to protect their rights and freedom and were in trouble with the authorities. On the one hand, many grass-roots NGOs have helped recover the voice of the powerless (e.g. small-scale and landless peasants, wage workers, tribal minorities and children), explored development alternatives to assist peasants to cope with socio-economic changes, and formulated people’s organisations and networks to defend the people’s interests. On the other hand, I was sometimes disillusioned by those NGO workers who ignored political issues while focusing on socio-economic problems alone; some behaved in a way little different from the incompetent bureaucrats they criticised. Nevertheless, the majority within the Thai NGO movement are still active in seeking to make Thai society functional for the underprivileged. They are important actors in social and environmental movements in contemporary Thai politics. Whether their significance endures will depend on their performance in the process of development.

The process of producing a dissertation is as important as the outcome. Many people assisted me throughout the period of pleasure and pain in writing this thesis. Academics from various disciplines inside and outside the Australian National University (ANU) spared time to discuss with me as our common interests grew. Families and friends gave me enormous moral support. Villagers, NGO workers, Thai academics and government officials shared exciting ideas, interesting experiences, laughing, joking and gossiping. Without this varied support, it is unlikely that this thesis could have been finalised.

The deepest gratitude goes to Dr John Girling, my supervisor, who retired from the International Relations Department, ANU, and has lived in France since 1992. When I was swimming across the sea of information and nearly drowning, he helped me map out a direction during my visit to him at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore in 1993. His trip to Canberra in early 1996 was a blessing as my second draft of the thesis was underway. His interest in theoretical debates in relation to the development process in Thailand, and elsewhere, helped balance my perspective in considering concrete social relations beyond the abstract controversies of two grand theories (namely ‘modernisation’ and ‘structural Marxism’). Over a number of years, our discussions have continued through personal communications between Toulouse and Canberra.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to three advisers – Professor Ben Kerkvliet, Emeritus Professor Maev O’Collins of the Political and Social Change Department, and Dr Gehan Wijeyewardene of the Anthropology Department, ANU – who joined the supervisory panel in mid-1993 after I had completed fieldwork in Thailand. Ben pointed out major themes and encouraged me to sharpen my arguments as he saw from my data that I had something more “punchy” to say. Maev carefully read drafts of the thesis and patiently helped me clarify my ideas and expression. Gehan helped check the accuracy of information concerning my selected study areas in Chiang Mai province and gave me every assistance I requested.

In mid-1993, I also received valuable intellectual stimulation from Professor Richard Peet of Clark University, Dr George Aditjondro of Satya Wacana University in Central Java and Dr Bill Standish of the Political and Social Change Department, ANU. Richard recommended recent publications on development, environmental and social movements. George suggested that I read literature on social movement by Professor Alain Touraine, a French sociologist, whose dynamic analysis of social change and movement has captured my attention. Bill introduced me not only to ‘middle ranged theories’ but also a perspective that: “The world is a comedy for those who think, a tragedy for those who feel”.

Friends in Australia assisted me in many ways. Lively companionship came from Ian Heywood, Keith Mitchell, Neville Minch, Jenny Sheenan, Ian Faulkner and especially Kay Dancey who patiently turned my confused maps into neat and readable ones. Dr Thaweeporn Vasavakul from the Political and Social Change Department, ANU, gave useful comments on the first draft. Frances Daly and Dr Jim George from the Political Science Department, ANU, stimulated theoretical discussions. Dr Junko Koisumi from the Pacific and Asian History Department, ANU, and Kalaya Charoenrit (Lek) of Monash University provided information to fill some gaps.

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The Department of Human Geography provided scholarship, space, services and other facilities. I very much enjoyed theoretical discussions in the Reading Group which PhD colleagues collectively set up and carried on (and off). Professor R.G. Ward kindly facilitated all necessities required for this thesis to be submitted. Dr B.J. Allen chaired the supervisory panel. Professor D.K. Forbes, my former supervisor, spared time to discuss some theoretical issues whenever he visited the ANU. Winifred Loy provided administrative services. Barbara and David Banks have been very understanding and helpful and I highly appreciate their contribution in editing this thesis.

Finally, special acknowledgments are deserved by my family. Postcards and words of encouragement were sent to me from Melbourne, Wagga Wagga and Bangkok. Peter Quinn, my husband, has tirelessly read draft after draft, accompanied me to Thailand during the fieldwork for six months and widened my perspective through scholarly discussions. Our common interest, sense of humour and shared values across cultures have been immensely fruitful in the process of writing this thesis. His love and support are the most valuable of all.

## **Abstract**

This study examines people-centred Thai NGOs trying to help peasants empower themselves in order to compete better in conflicts over land, water, forest, and capital, during the 1970s to 1990s. The study investigates how the NGOs contested asymmetric power relations among government officials, private entrepreneurs and ordinary people while helping raise the people's confidence in their own power to negotiate their demands with other actors.

The thesis argues that the NGOs are able to play an interventionist role when a number of key factors coexist. First, the NGOs are able to understand local situations, which contain asymmetric power relations between different actors, in relation to current changes in the wider context of the Thai political economy and seize the time to take action. Secondly, the NGOs are able to articulate a social meaning beyond the dominating rhetoric of the 'state' and the 'capitalists' which encourages the people's participation in collective activities. Thirdly, while dealing with one problem in social relations and negotiation with local environment, the NGOs are able to recognise new problems as they arise and rapidly identify a new political space for the actors to renegotiate their conflicting interests and demands. Fourthly, the NGOs are able to recreate new meanings, new actors and reform their organisations and networks to deal with new situations. Finally, the NGOs are able to effectively use three pillars of their movement, namely individuals, organisations and networks to deal with everyday politics and collective protest.

The case studies in three villages in Northern Thailand reveal that the NGOs were able to play an interventionist role in specific situations through their alternative development strategies somewhat influenced by structural Marxism. The thesis recommends that the NGO interventionist role be continued so as to overcome tensions within the NGO community, for instance, between the NGOs working at the grass-roots level and the NGOs working at regional and national levels (including NGO funding agencies); local everyday conflicts; and the bipolar views of a society among the NGOs expressed in dichotomous thinking between 'rural' and 'urban', 'community' and 'state', conflict and order, actor and system.

The fragmentation of NGO social and environmental movements showed that there is no single formula or easy solution to the problems. If the NGOs want to continue their interventionist role to help empower ordinary people and help them gain access to productive resources, they must move beyond their bipolar views of a society to discover the middle ground to search for new meanings, new actors, new issues and to create again and again counter-hegemony movements. This could be done by having abstract development theories assessed and enriched by concrete development practices and *vice versa*. Both theorists and practitioners need to use their own imagination to invent and reinvent what and how best to continue.

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## Explanatory Notes

### Transliteration

The system of transliteration used in this thesis follows the “General System of Phonetic Transcription of Thai Characters into Roman”, republished in Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, 1963, *The Nature and Development of the Thai Language*, 2nd edition, Bangkok, pp. 32-36. The difference between short and long vowels is not indicated. However, some symbols are simplified for the reason of typographic convenience. For example, ‘o’ is written as ‘o:’; ‘oi’ as ‘o:i’; ‘ch’ as ‘j’; ‘æ’ as ‘ae’; and ‘œ’ as ‘oe’. The conventional spelling is retained and non-italic is applied for some units of measurement and place names, for example, ‘baht’, ‘rai’ and ‘thang’, ‘Amphoe Muang’ not ‘Amphoe Mu’ang’; ‘Chulalongkorn University’ not ‘Julalongko:n University’. Personal names follow personal usage of the individuals, for example, Sopon Thangphet not Sophon Thaengphet; and Kanjana Kaewthep not Kanjana Kaothep. In addition, the province and district names are based on Office of the Prime Minister and Thai Royal Scholars’ Institute, 1977 (2520), “Kan khian chu’ jangwat, khet, amphoe lae kingamphoe” [The Writing of the Names of Provinces, Metropolis, *Amphoe* and *Kingamphoe*], Bangkok, pp. 65-106.

### Units of Measurement

#### Area measure

1 <i>tarangwa</i>	= c. 4 sq m
1 rai	= 400 <i>tarangwa</i> or c. 0.16 hectare
1 hectare	= 6.25 rai

#### Volume measure

1 thang (unhusked paddy grain)	= c. 20 litres or 10.1 kg
1 sack (of rice)	= c.100 kg
1 acre	= 2.2 rai

#### Currency

\$ US 1	= 21 baht in the 1970s
	= 25 baht in since the mid-1980s
\$ A 1	= 20 baht

## Acronyms

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission
ABU	Animal Breeding Unit (of the Royal Thai Army)
ACFOD	Asian Cultural Forum on Development
ADSP	Alternative Development Studies Programme
AI	Amnesty International
AIT	Asian Institute of Technology
ANU	Australian National University
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
ATA	Appropriate Technology Association
ATI	Association of Thai Industries
B.E.	Buddhist Era
BAAC	Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives
BLU	Bangkok Labour Union
BoI	Board of Investment
CAA	Community Aid Abroad
CCF	Church of Christ Foundation
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCPDF	Committee for Coordinating Patriotic and Democratic Forces
CCTD	Catholic Council of Thailand for Development
CDA	Constitution Drafting Assembly
CEBEMO	Katholieke Organisatie voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking Nederland (Netherlands Catholic Organisation for Development Cooperation)
CGRS	Coordinating Group for Religion in Society
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CLU	Central Labour Union
CM-DISAC	Chiang Mai Diocesan Social Action Centre
CP	Charoen Phokkhaphan
CPD	Campaign for Popular Democracy
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
CUSO	Canadian University Service Overseas
CUSRI	Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute

DDC	Democracy Development Committee
DISAC	Diocesan Social Action Centre
DOAE	Department of Agricultural Extension
DOLA	Department of Local Administration
EDs	Executive Directors
EGAT	Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand
EOI	Export-Oriented Industrialisation
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
FEDRA	Foundation for Education and Development of Rural Areas
FEER	Far Eastern Economic Review
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
FIST	Federation of Independent Students of Thailand
FNF	Friedrich Naumann Foundation
FNS	Friedrich Naumann Stiftung
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GONGO	Government Organised Non-Government Organisation
GSO	Grass-roots Support Organisation
GVP	Graduate Volunteer Programme
HYVs	High Yield Varieties
IAHA	International Association of Historians of Asia
IASCP	International Association for the Study of Common Property
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMCS	International Movement of Christain Students
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INODEP	International Organisation for the Development of Peoples
ISEAS	Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore)
ISI	Import-Substitution Industrialisation
ISOC	Internal Security Operation Command
J&P	Justice and Peace Commission for Development
JPPCC	Joint Public-Private Consultative Committee
KKF	Komol Khimtho:ng Foundation
LDAP	Local Development Assistance Programme
LDI	Local Development Institute

MCC	Multiple Cropping Centre (Chiang Mai University)
MEP	Missions Étrangères de Paris
MP	Member of Parliament
MSO	Membership Support Organisation
NARC	National Administration Reform Council
NDWA	Northern Development Workers' Association
NEC	National Executive Council
NEDB	National Economic Development Board
NESDB	National Economic and Social Development Board
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NGO-CORD	NGO-Coordinating Committee on Rural Development
NIDA	National Institute of Development Administration
NKYFRD	No:ng Kha Yang Foundation of Rural Development
NPKC	National Peace Keeping Council
NRDC	National Rural Development Committee
NRDCC	National Rural Development Coordination Centre
NRDDC	National Rural Development and Decentralisation Committee
NSC	Northern Students' Centre
NSCT	National Student Centre of Thailand
NSM	New Social Movement
OXFAM	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
PDG	People for Democracy Group
PER	Project for Ecological Recovery
PFT	Peasants' Federation of Thailand
PO	People's Organisation
PP21	People's Plan for the 21st Century
PSC	Public Service Contractor
PVO	Private Voluntary Organisation
RDI	Rural Development Institute (Khon Kaen University)
REDD-BARNA	Norwegian Save the Children Fund
RFD	Royal Forestry Department
RID	Royal Irrigation Department
RLD	Rural Life Department
RSPAS	Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies

RUDOC	Rural Development Documentation Centre
RwG	Redistribution with Growth
SAL	Structural Adjustment Loan
SAP	Social Action Party
SBGA	Soya Bean Growers' Association
SFT	Student Federation of Thailand
SGT	Student Group of Thailand
SRI	Social Research Institute (Chiang Mai University)
TAO	Tambon Administration Organisation
TBA	Thai Bankers' Association
TCC	Thai Chamber of Commerce
TDRI	Thailand Development Research Institute
TDSC	Thai Development Support Committee
TEI	Thailand Environment Institute
THIRD	Thai Institute for Rural Development
TREE	Technology for Rural and Ecological Enrichment
TRRM	Thai Rural Reconstruction Movement
TSDF	Thai Social Development Fund
TVF	Thai Volunteer Foundation
TVS	Thai Volunteer Service
TYO	Thai Youth Organisation
UCL	Union for Civil Liberty
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
VO	Voluntary Organisation
WCCARD	Thai NGO Committee on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development
WHO	World Health Organisation

## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Aim and arguments

The author of the Gita suggests that the one eternal truth which we are seeking, from which all other truth derives, cannot be shut up in a single formula.

S. Radhakrishnan<sup>1</sup>

In order to find the real meaning of the changes they observe, intellectuals, and above all sociologists, have only to go back to the great tradition of their profession: discovering what is hidden, and forgetting themselves and their background so as to re-establish the distance that allows the historian or the ethnographer to construct an analysis. ... This is not the time to announce the decline of industrial society and to dream of a new equilibrium after a period of great transformation and accelerated growth. ... Since 1968, we have gone through every stage of social change. We have seen the demise of industrial society..., and the emergence of the purely liberal project of reconstructing a new society; it is high time we learned to describe and analyse the cultural modes and the social relations and movements that give them a form. ... If we are to rediscover the idea of modernity, we must begin by recognising the existence of a new society and new historical actors.

A. Touraine<sup>2</sup>

Intellectuals who are concerned with social and spatial inequality often talk about ‘empowering’ the poor and, both radical and non-radical among them, try to find the way to do so from their different perspectives and circumstances.<sup>3</sup> This thesis is about such attempts. It aims to search for evidence of the empowerment of the ‘common people’ (e.g. small-scale cultivators, tenants and landless peasants) by ‘people-centred’ Thai non-government organisations (NGOs) in the context of socio-economic and political changes between 1970 and 1990 in the Thai countryside. The thesis will show how, through their intervention, Thai NGOs have been able to contribute to such

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<sup>1</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, 1975, “An Introductory Essay”, *The Bhagavadgita*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> A. Touraine, 1995, *Critique of Modernity*, tran. by D. Macey, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 253. Touraine’s perception of social change is similar to what Girling says:

We have now nearly come full circle: from the naive expectation of democracy with development in the 1950s, to underdevelopment in the 1960s, followed by selective development (with or without democracy) in the 1970s, and selective democracy (with or without development) in the 1980s.

J.L.S. Girling, 1987, *Capital and Power: Political Economy and Social Transformation*, London: Croom Helm, p. 212.

<sup>3</sup> See J.P. Lewis *et al.*, 1988, *Strengthening the Poor: What Have We Learned?*, New Brunswick: Transaction Books. The development approaches, according to Lewis’ summary, are productivity and subsidies, centre-periphery: structuring the system, spatial strategies, growth and equity, women in development, project design and management as well as poverty and environment.

empowerment. It will not provide “magic bullets”<sup>4</sup> or ready-made formulae to be replicated by other NGOs. Rather, it will reveal the complicated reality of social relations and conflicts among the different actors who compete to utilise and control productive resources (e.g. land, forest, water and capital) in rural Thailand. It will show that the social relations and interactions among these actors create social transformation and intervention in everyday phenomena. The process of the transformation and intervention is ongoing. The NGO search for a political space to help the people empower themselves may start with one problem and then another new problem may arise.<sup>5</sup>

The focus of the thesis is on the people-centred Thai NGOs working in rural Thailand which play an interventionist role to provide a political space and opportunity for the common people to achieve their basic needs and to maintain their social values amidst the rural transformation process. The study shows that the Thai NGOs are similar to NGOs in many other developing countries in that they use the same rhetoric of “travelling theory”<sup>6</sup> (e.g. people’s participation, alternative development and empowerment). However, the outcome of the Thai NGO experience is different from that of other NGOs’ because of the particularities of the Thai situation.

This study will contribute to the understanding of the complex reality of development problems from the late 1960s to early 1990s and of the NGO interventionist role. For those who have limited knowledge of people-centred and indigenous NGOs, this study will reinforce the view that, although the NGOs are small, they are important as new historical actors which are outspoken about social inequality and the asymmetry of power relations between the rich and the poor. For those who have heard little about NGOs, this study will provide an insight into their nature and will identify some of their limitations.

The central argument of the thesis is that amidst the complicated reality of power relations, key actors from three interdependent spheres of “the economy, civil society and the state” seek to control, accumulate and secure for themselves the allocation and utilisation of productive resources.<sup>7</sup> Their actions produce and reproduce social transformation as they respond to social tensions. As the power relations between the state, business and ordinary people are asymmetrical, the people-centred Thai NGOs,

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<sup>4</sup> J. Vivian, 1994, “NGOs and Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe: No Magic Bullets”, *Development and Change*, Vol. 25, pp. 167-193.

<sup>5</sup> K.R. Popper, 1994, *Knowledge and the Body-Mind Problem: In Defence of Interaction*, ed. by M.A. Notturmo, London: Routledge, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> E.W. Said, 1991, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, London: Vintage, ch. 10.

<sup>7</sup> J. Urry, 1981, *The Autonomy of Capitalist Societies: The Economy, Civil Society and the State*, London: The Macmillan Press.

which have emerged largely outside bureaucratic and business control since the mid-1970s, have sought to empower the common people to help themselves gain access to and utilise productive resources through programmes of socio-economic, political and cultural intervention. The NGO interventions have produced a political space for the common people to create their own strength through their own rationalisation of their situations. To be able to play an interventionist role depends on a number of key factors. First, whether the NGOs have an historical and contemporary understanding of local politics, cultures and situations in a ‘community’ in relation to current changes in the Thai national political economy. Secondly, whether the NGOs are able to articulate social meanings or discourses, distinct from the dominating rhetoric and practices of the ‘state’ and the ‘capitalists’, to encourage the people’s participation. Thirdly, whether the NGOs are able to recognise social relations and tensions between various actors and to continually and rapidly identify a political space for the actors to negotiate their demands and interests. Fourthly, whether the NGOs are able to capture and cope with tensions by articulating new social meanings, creating new actors and reforming their organisations and networks. Finally, whether the NGOs are able to link three pillars of their movement, namely individuals, organisations and networks, to deal with everyday politics and collective protest. To study the NGO interventionist role, the thesis examines how social meanings are constructed; how collective actions are formed, by whom, and in which situations. The study investigates three sets of key concepts to analyse the interventionist role of people-centred Thai NGOs. They are: the social relations between actors and system (e.g. organisations, institutions and agencies); the social meaning and action synthesis; the time and space correspondence.

The study will show that the NGOs often find constraints which prevent them from playing an interventionist role in power relations and creating development alternatives derived from the grass-roots level. These constraints arise from two important issues. First, amidst competition over resources, the NGOs may encounter rapidly and continually altering social relations and tensions between social actors including villagers, bureaucrats, the military and businessmen, as well as between these actors and the NGOs themselves. There are also important tensions between the villagers themselves due to their diverse and changing needs; between the NGOs working on the ground (or at the grass-roots level) and the NGOs working at regional and national levels including NGO funding agencies. These social tensions have occurred over time and in different situations at the local level and have been subject to different influences from the regional, national and international levels.

Secondly, in the 1980s, the NGO perceptions, generally guided by “alternative development strategies”, tended to be based on bipolar systems of thought or “binary

oppositions”<sup>8</sup> such as the dichotomy between ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ areas, ‘indigenous’ and ‘scientific’ knowledge, ‘village’ and the ‘state’.<sup>9</sup> This meant that the NGOs could easily overlook the significance of a local situation (or place) unless it fitted the dichotomy and provided the NGOs with evidence to criticise the deficiency of the government’s economic and social policies. The NGOs struggled against the state and capitalists while paying little attention to solving the tensions between themselves and the people with whom they interacted in everyday events. Stresses within the NGO community seemed to be thought of as ‘internal problems’. Occasionally, some of these tensions became major factors interrupting NGO work or even undermining NGO integrity. Financial dependence on overseas funding agencies became one of the key factors contributing to their inability to analyse local situations because they were expected by the funding agencies to find a neat, linear and comprehensive solution to complicated development problems.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the NGOs found it more difficult to analyse and deal with everyday politics than to organise collective protest because conflicts shifted, situations changed, agreements ceased to be honoured and new forms of conflict arose subtly and rapidly. Paying little attention to analysing the social relations and tensions in everyday politics, the NGOs at times became a force, through their development activities, for stimulating agricultural change in line with the very government policies to which they were opposed. Confusion, frustration and disillusionment became factors influencing some NGO workers to turn their backs on the organisations and on the work to which they once had personal commitment. Some NGOs, however, were able to overcome such problems and in the process found new actors, new meanings and new directions for organisational reform.

### **Definition of the term NGO**

The term non-government organisation is used to identify a special kind of philanthropic organisation whose activities are pursued independently of government administration. The NGOs generally represent the cause of the underprivileged in the so-called Third World countries and regularly challenge governments which neglect their responsibility to give social services to the people. Before the early 1980s, in Western countries such as Australia, Canada, the US and Switzerland, most independent philanthropic organisations of this kind, whose activities dealt with social

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<sup>8</sup> P. Waterman, 1996, “Beyond Globalism and Developmentalism: Other Voices in World Politics”, *Development and Change*, Vol. 27, p. 177.

<sup>9</sup> J. Rigg, 1994, “Alternative Development Strategies, NGOs and the Environment in Thailand: A Critique”, *TEI Quarterly Environment Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Also occurring in other developing countries. See, e.g. Vivian, 1994, “NGOs and Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe...”, pp. 167-193.

problems within their native countries, preferred to call themselves “voluntary organisations (VOs)” rather than NGOs because the former suggested less hostility towards the state than the latter.<sup>11</sup> While the term VO was used in these Western countries to refer to organisations responding to domestic social problems, the term NGO was generally used for organisations which addressed social-relief problems occurring overseas, especially in Third World countries.<sup>12</sup> However, since the early 1990s, NGOs have been increasingly recognised for their work as “poverty alleviators” by the UN, international funding agencies (especially the World Bank and the IMF), and national governments. As a consequence, a much wider range of organisations, including VOs, have begun to adopt the term NGO partly to gain recognition and to receive funding support. The term NGO nowadays covers organisations, in both developed and developing countries, whose works are administratively separate from government and business agencies.<sup>13</sup> In many cases, governments are funding large portions of NGO development activities and it has become increasingly difficult for recipient NGOs to challenge their governments’ policies as in the past.

In Thailand, we were inclined to adopt the term NGO rather than VO for our domestic grass roots development organisations and put them in the category of “*ongko:n phatthana ekkachon*” (private development agencies). Jon Ungphakorn, a former Director of the Thai Volunteer Service (TVS – later changed to Thai Volunteer Foundation – TVF), identified two distinct types of Thai NGO operating during the early 1980s. These were charitable organisations on the one hand and “participatory development” organisations on the other.<sup>14</sup> He went on to show the position of these two categories of Thai NGO in relation to state authority and to demonstrate that the latter was more likely to be critical of the state than the former.

The need for NGOs to deal with social problems derived from the widespread negative impact of economic and social changes is evidenced in both developed and developing countries alike.<sup>15</sup> Since the early 1970s, Western ‘donor’ NGOs have offered financial

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<sup>11</sup> J. Lissner, 1977, *The Politics of Altruism: The Study of the Political Behaviour of Voluntary Development Agencies*, Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, Department of Studies.

<sup>12</sup> See also D. Scott, 1981, “*Don’t Mourn for Me – Organise...*”: *The Social and Political Uses of Voluntary Organisations*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin; and E. Schmidt, J. Blewett and P. Henriot, 1981, *Religious Private Voluntary Organisations and the Question of Government Funding: Final Report*, New York: Probe Third World Studies.

<sup>13</sup> Most NGOs in developed countries such as Australia, the US and Netherlands generally seek access to official funds to deal with social problems both domestic and overseas.

<sup>14</sup> Jon Ungphakorn, 1986 (2529), “Khabuankan ongkan phatthana ekkachon nai prathet thai” [The Movement of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) in Thailand], [in Thai], *Pajarayasan*, Vol. 13, No. 5, November-December, pp. 13-20.

<sup>15</sup> See T. Brodhead, B. Herbert-Copley and A. Lambert, 1988, *Bridge of Hope? Canadian Voluntary Agencies and the Third World*, Ottawa: The North-South Institute; and E. Garilao,

assistance to indigenous or ‘recipient’ NGOs in developing countries. Some, such as the Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO), Norwegian Save the Children Fund (REDD BARNA) and Friedrich Naumann Stiftung (FNS – later called Friedrich Naumann Foundation – FNF), set up offices in Thailand and other developing countries and engaged local staff to implement various programmes of assistance. However, while these foreign organisations have played a role in Thai development, my interest is in indigenous Thai NGOs which have been formed by the Thais themselves to deal with crisis situations in the Thai development context according to their own vision and capacity. During the mid-1970s, these Thai NGOs emerged from student and academic circles as independent groups trying to tackle socio-political problems largely resulting from the “era of development” (*samai phatthana*) led by a market economy model (see Chapters 2 and 3). Because of the undemocratic governments in Thailand and risk of political suppression at the time, the indigenous NGOs needed, and received, the moral and financial support of overseas donor NGOs, enabling them to survive the difficult political period and to maintain their autonomy.

### **Why people-centred Thai NGOs?**

Many scholars believe that social movement and intervention approaches are key factors in helping ordinary people to empower themselves and alleviate their poverty. Korten, for example, argues that: “Social movements have a special quality” because they are motivated by ideas, social energy and “a vision of the better world” rather than money and organisational structures. The intervention, according to Korten, can be “described as an attempt to ‘empower’ the village people”.<sup>16</sup> Clark also sees the significance of social movements and intervention in their potential to influence the reform of official structures and to “democratise” development institutions and processes.<sup>17</sup> Both scholars refer to NGOs as important agents to carry on the mission of empowering the people.

However, when it comes to practice, the scholars whose studies are concerned about NGOs agree that a certain category of NGO has the potential to play an interventionist role and even lead social movements. Korten includes four types of organisations in this category. They are VOs, public service contractors (PSCs), people’s organisations

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1987, “Indigenous NGOs as Strategic Institutions: Managing the Relationship with Government and Resource Agencies”, *World Development*, Vol. 15 (Supplement), pp. 113-120.

<sup>16</sup> D.C. Korten, 1990, *Getting to the 21st Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda*, West Hartford: Kumarian Press, pp. 124 and 118.

<sup>17</sup> J. Clark, 1991, *Democratising Development*, London: Earthscan Publications, pp. 36 and 75.

(POs) and government organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs).<sup>18</sup> Korten suggests that POs and VOs (which I refer to in this thesis as NGOs) would be more inclined to play an interventionist role than PSCs and GONGOs.<sup>19</sup> Clark includes six types of organisation in his NGO category. These are relief and welfare agencies, technical innovation organisations, PSCs, popular development agencies, grass-roots development organisations and advocacy groups and networks.<sup>20</sup> He does not identify which types of NGOs have most potential to play an interventionist role. Rather he argues that: “NGOs should not resist opportunities to work with government and to forward their vision of development”.<sup>21</sup> Carroll, however, offers a different categorisation of NGOs. He separates the category of POs from NGOs based on their different membership.<sup>22</sup> POs, he notes, are composed of the people themselves whereas NGOs are composed of outsiders who work with those people. Carroll therefore calls POs “membership-support organisations” (MSOs) while referring to NGOs as “grass-roots support organisations” (GSOs). It is this second group, the GSOs, which I call people-centred NGOs in this thesis. Carroll goes further and divides GSOs into three different types of organisation in terms of their affiliations. They include “public-private entities”, “civic organisations (including GSOs and MSOs)” and “non-profit businesses”.<sup>23</sup> In line with Korten, Carroll considers that the GSOs and MSOs are more likely to provide “services allied support to local groups of disadvantaged rural or urban households and individuals” than the others.<sup>24</sup> Instead of mentioning intervention, Carroll prefers to refer to the NGOs as playing an “intermediary” role. The categorisation of different types of NGOs is important and useful because each category performs different roles across time and space. In the following section, I shall explain the various places in which NGOs can locate themselves and which category of NGOs I shall select for my study.

Although structural Marxism contributes to the discovery of the asymmetric power relations which are hidden beneath “the impersonal categories” of administrative, economic or even theoretical analysis; it is a macro-level theory and lacks a recognition of the particularities of time and space dimensions necessary to provide a political space for different actors to negotiate and mediate their conflicting interests.<sup>25</sup> As a

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<sup>18</sup> Korten, 1990, *Getting to the 21st Century...*, p. 2 and ch. 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>20</sup> Clark, 1991, *Democratising Development*, p. 40.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>22</sup> T.F. Carroll, 1992, *Intermediary NGOs: The Supporting Link in Grass-roots Development*, West Hartford: Kumarian Press, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> Touraine, 1995, *Critique of Modernity*, pp. 243 and 322.

consequence, a number of academics began to discuss the interacting relationships between agents of the state, economy and civil society.<sup>26</sup> The relationships, Slater argues, “are not seen as separate levels but as interlocking spheres of social relations and political practices”.<sup>27</sup> Rather than adopt the classical Marxist argument that the “state” is subordinate to the “economic base”,<sup>28</sup> Thrift and Forbes argue that each sphere interacts as an independent entity and “can become *determinant* in different places at different times”.<sup>29</sup> Following this approach, we could argue that NGOs can locate themselves in relation to the state, the economy, or civil society, and use this as a basis for identifying types of NGO.<sup>30</sup> Some NGOs, for example, have close relations with the state and work in the area of social-relief handouts with minimal challenge to the government policies and practice which might contribute to the creation of the needy – these would be Korten’s GONGOs, or Carroll’s “public-private entities”.<sup>31</sup> Those NGOs associated with business would be inclined to work cooperatively with private enterprise and commercial markets, albeit representing the universal value of social justice and equity. Korten and Clark call these NGOs “public service contractors”, while Carroll terms them “non-profit businesses”.<sup>32</sup> Next are those NGOs whose origins emerge independently from bureaucratic or business control and affiliate themselves directly with the common people in civil society. This third classification fits Carroll’s categorisation of GSOs and Korten’s VOs. It also includes what I refer to as people-centred NGOs and I have elected to study these for two main reasons. First, their declared objective is to ally themselves with and to work on behalf of marginal groups within the Thai population. Secondly, their characteristics, main activities and networks seem to suggest that they have more potential than the other two categories mentioned above to help the common people to strengthen themselves.

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<sup>26</sup> They are, for example, Urry, 1981, *The Autonomy of Capitalist Societies...*; N. Thrift and D.K. Forbes, 1986, *The Price of War: Urbanisation in Vietnam, 1954-85*, London: Allen and Unwin; D. Slater, 1989, *Territory and State Power in Latin America*, London: MacMillan; Girling, 1987, *Capital and Power...*; and P. Hirsch, 1994, “Where Are the Roots of Thai Environmentalism?”, *TEI Quarterly Environment Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2, April-June, pp. 5-15.

<sup>27</sup> Slater, 1989, *Territory and State Power in Latin America*, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> See M. Rader, 1979, *Marx’s Interpretation of History*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. xix-xx.

<sup>29</sup> Thrift and Forbes, 1986, *The Price of War...*, p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> See Korten, 1990, *Getting to the 21st Century...*; and N. Uphoff, 1993, “Grass-roots Organisations and NGOs in Rural Development: Opportunities with Diminishing States and Expanding Markets”, *World Development*, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 607-622.

<sup>31</sup> Korten, 1990, *Getting to the 21st Century...*, p. 2 and ch. 9; and Carroll, 1992, *Intermediary NGOs...*, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Korten, 1990, *Getting to the 21st Century...*, pp. 102-104; Carroll, 1992, *Intermediary NGOs...*, p. 12. In Thailand, for example, the “Magic Eye” was initiated under the patronage of the Bangkok Bank and receives donations from big business such as the Shell Company and others. It organises clean up campaigns but does not seriously challenge the role of big business companies which pollute the environment.

## NGO Studies

Western scholars who have studied the NGOs working in Thailand and other Third World countries offer both interesting arguments and provocative ideas. In *Power and Culture*, Gohlert studies the response of the Thai NGOs and their networking to alleviating the people's poverty. He emphasises the usefulness of the NGO concept of "community participation" in the decision-making aspect of the development process and claims that "regardless of the outcome, this is valuable in itself".<sup>33</sup> He argues, too, that the poor themselves have "power" which exists in their Buddhist "indigenous culture" and enhances the people's confidence to cope with the socio-economic changes and intrusion from outside. Gohlert's argument interests me because Buddhist philosophy provides an insight into the "interdependent arising" of continuous change as well as the causes and effects of change in its "Four Noble Truths"<sup>34</sup> which offer a way to analyse and then tackle a problem. The first suggests the need to recognise a problem which is called *dukkha* or "suffering"; the second, *samudaya*, declares the need to observe the origins of the suffering; the third, *nirodha*, expresses the need for commitment to overcome the suffering; and the fourth, *magga*, proclaims the eightfold path which can be used to solve the problem.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Gohlert asks whether Buddhist philosophy could provide the ways to search for an alternative development approach.

In her thesis: "Buddhism, Morality and Change", Darlington studies how a people-centred NGO used selected Buddhist principles to deal with rural economic change. She concludes that a crucial problem of the community development approach used by the NGO, is that it seems to focus on ideological belief and neglects to "take into serious account the larger external political and economic forces which impact on village life".<sup>36</sup> She also notes that while the NGO was implementing its community development approach, there were social tensions between villagers and the NGO and

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<sup>33</sup> E.W. Gohlert, 1991, *Power and Culture: The Struggle against Poverty in Thailand*, Bangkok: White Lotus, p. 189.

<sup>34</sup> P. Kearney, 1994, "Freedom and Bondage: An Exploration of Interdependent Arising and the Interdependently Arisen in Early Buddhism", BA (Letters with Honours), Faculty of Arts, Deakin University.

<sup>35</sup> Gohlert, 1991, *Power and Culture...*, ch. 7; Piyadassi Thera, 1995, *The Buddha's Ancient Path*, Taipei: The Cooperate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation and W. Rahula, 1974, *What the Buddha Taught*, New York: Grove Weidenfeld.

<sup>36</sup> S.M. Darlington, 1990, "Buddhism, Morality and Change: The Local Response to Development in Northern Thailand", PhD thesis (Anthropology), University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, pp. 227-228.

among the villagers themselves. These social tensions will be documented in Chapter 6 of my thesis.

Rigg gives an overview of the Thai NGOs' alternative development concepts and performance in relation to social and economic change. In his article: "Alternative development strategies, NGO and the environment in Thailand", Rigg proposes a provocative but interesting critique of the alternative development strategies of Thai NGOs. He believes that development must include "empowerment" and "participation" or otherwise it "is not development at all".<sup>37</sup> He argues that the alternative strategies created by NGOs to pursue development are "ideologically driven" rather than constructed from complex reality of socio-economic changes. The NGO development strategies, according to Rigg, are constructed from the polarities of thought in "a multi-dimensional world" shown in the NGO concepts of the "traditional" versus "modern" village and the NGO practice of sidelining the state and market while defending village community.<sup>38</sup> Rigg encourages the Thai NGOs to scrutinise the ways in which they have perceived and implemented their development strategies because the reality is "likely to be far more complex and less clear-cut than commonly presented in the literature" and in particular because the common people with whom the NGOs work rarely see the world in the form of such binary oppositions.<sup>39</sup> After exploring what the NGOs did in my area of research, I have to share Rigg's view as my fieldwork spells out the complexity of social relations and tensions between different actors.

In his book: *Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development*, Friedmann argues that in the search for local empowerment, NGOs cannot bypass the state and concentrate only on local communities. He adds that the NGOs have to make the state more accountable and responsive to the poor people.<sup>40</sup> He goes on to argue that the creation of alternative development strategies is never complete and has to be seen "as the continuing struggle, in the long *durée* of history, for the moral claims of the disempowered poor against the existing hegemonic powers".<sup>41</sup> Friedmann's argument shows that there is no such thing as a simple, orderly and comprehensive solution to development problems – as Vivian says: "No Magic Bullets".<sup>42</sup> The arguments of Friedmann and Vivian helped me to see a dynamic process of change and to recognise

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<sup>37</sup> Rigg, 1994, "Alternative Development Strategies...", p. 17. See also P. Hirsch, 1990, *Development Dilemmas in Rural Thailand*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, pp. 12-16.

<sup>38</sup> Rigg, 1994, "Alternative Development Strategies...", pp. 24, 19, 22 and 23.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24

<sup>40</sup> J. Friedmann, 1992, *Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development*, Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Vivian, 1994, "NGOs and Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe...".

that the interventionist role of people-centred Thai NGOs never ends. This, however, leaves open the question of how the intervention starts and is to be pursued, by whom, and in what form. In the conceptual framework section, I will consult the literature concerning social movements which are “largely ignored in the field of development”.<sup>43</sup>

Although Western scholars see the significance of helping local people empower themselves, some are inclined to avoid dealing with this mission or try to find a quicker way to achieve the people’s empowerment. For instance, Farrington claims that to help build local people’s capacity to deal with their own development problems is a “slow process” and “difficult to evaluate”.<sup>44</sup> Korten’s view is that empowerment can be done only in limited areas and requires the continued presence of the NGOs.<sup>45</sup> In his book: *Getting to the 21st Century*, Korten appeals to NGOs to consider “four generations” of development strategies which are referred to by many Western writers.<sup>46</sup> The first strategy is the relief and welfare role of the NGOs in delivering direct social services such as health care, food and shelter to the poor people. The second is the use of small-scale, self-reliant community development focusing on the social energy of the NGOs to help the poor people develop their capacity to meet their own needs. The third strategy is sustainable system development through the creation of policies and institutions which help facilitate local development action. The fourth is the development of people’s movements including the creation of people’s organisations and networks.<sup>47</sup> However, these “four generations” are derived largely from a donor or funding agency perspective and there is risk that they may mislead such NGOs by encouraging them to demand that recipient NGOs move in an orderly way from one step to another, regardless of the need to work in different ways in different political arenas. Without understanding local politics and situations, the pressure from funding agencies to comply could prove to be counterproductive. Moreover, the people-centred NGOs working on the ground might be uncomfortable with such demands because they have to interface closely with local authorities in everyday politics. My data will reveal that the actual intervention of people-centred NGOs embraces Korten’s “four generations” of development strategies which are, in fact, intermingled. The intervention is performed by three pillars of the NGO movement: individual NGO workers, organisations and networks (see Chapters. 4, 5 and 6). The NGO fieldworkers

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<sup>43</sup> Korten, 1990, *Getting to the 21st Century...*, p. 127.

<sup>44</sup> J. Farrington *et al.* (eds), 1993, *Non-Governmental Organisations and the State in Asia: Rethinking Roles in Sustainable Agricultural Development*, London: Routledge, p. 23.

<sup>45</sup> Korten, 1990, *Getting to the 21st Century...*, p. 120.

<sup>46</sup> For example, Gohlert, 1991, *Power and Culture...*; and L.C. Judd, 1988, *In Perspective: Trends in Rural Development Policy and Programme in Thailand*, Research Report Series No. 41, Payap University Centre for Research and Development, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

<sup>47</sup> Korten, 1990, *Getting to the 21st Century...*, ch. 10.

often capture concrete issues and call for the reform of organisations, policies and the reorientation of development approaches to enhance people's action to control their livelihood.

In his working paper: "NGOs in Indonesia: Popular Movement or Arm of Government?", Eldridge observes that while funding agencies (and especially the World Bank) request NGOs to "cooperate" with governments, the NGOs may be used "... as part of a new strategy of capitalist penetration into less accessible hinterlands around the Third World".<sup>48</sup> My study will show that Eldridge's observation applies also to the activities of a number of Thai NGOs and NGO workers whose development activities helped to create socio-economic change in line with the very government objectives which they in fact opposed.

In his recent book: *Non-Government Organisations and Democratic Participation in Indonesia*, Eldridge studies a wide range of activities conducted by Indonesian NGOs and highlights the significance of the NGOs in applying core development concepts such as "self-reliance", "participation" and "democracy". He puts forward a number of propositions governing NGO practice. First, he claims that to understand NGO practice it is necessary to link their ideology and actions. Secondly, NGO practice requires the integration of their political and developmental spheres of actions if they want their work to be effective. Thirdly, the legitimacy of NGO practice lies in their being able to contribute to pioneering "innovative and participatory strategies in the fields of social and economic development".<sup>49</sup> There is a risk, as Eldridge points out from Indonesian NGO experience, that if NGOs become involved in the macro-level development agenda, they may lose their understanding of the needs and aspirations of the common people at the grass-roots levels.<sup>50</sup> Eldridge identifies "four paradigms" or "models" which he says Indonesian NGOs use to mobilise popular participation in relation to the government, they are: cooperation, critical collaboration, avoidance of involvement, and opposition.<sup>51</sup> The last model emerged from Indonesia's "new radicals" who criticised "big NGOs" for having "lost their vision and sense of mission to pioneer alternative models of development and to build an opposing movement to represent the poor".<sup>52</sup> However, it is necessary to consider on a case-by-case basis whether the four

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<sup>48</sup> P.J. Eldridge, 1989, "NGOs in Indonesia: Popular Movement or Arm of Government?", Working Paper No. 55, Department of Politics, Monash University, Melbourne, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> P.J. Eldridge, 1995, *Non-Government Organisations and Democratic Participation in Indonesia*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, p. 11.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-38.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

paradigms can be clearly separated from one another and whether the criticism of the “new radicals” is valid.

In general, I found that most studies of NGOs by Thai scholars tended to be prepared by researchers who were supporters of the NGO programmes and activities. They described NGO project formulation, implementation and evaluation, and cooperation between the government and NGOs in Thai rural development.<sup>53</sup> However, only a few contained a substantive analysis of Thai NGOs as social movements. Among these, Dr Suthy Prasartset and Gawin Chutima argued that people-centred Thai NGOs emerged as a “critical social movement in Thailand” because they carry on the process, which they inherited from the former generations of social activists, of constructing a representative democratic society.<sup>54</sup> Dr Amara Pongsapich and Nitaya Kataleeradabhan examined the history of Thai people-centred NGOs and argued that they had played a critical role in “... promot[ing] empowerment of the people” by putting pressure on the government and calling for “radical reforms to enable the transfer of resources to the poorer sections of the society”.<sup>55</sup> These Thai scholars generally claim that the Thai NGOs are significant social actors in assisting ordinary people to gain access to resource allocation and in creating pressure on the government to reform representative institutions. Nevertheless, these scholars rarely provide any details or systematic analysis of NGO practice or address any problems within the Thai NGO movement itself.

However, in *Jutplian kanphatthana chonnabot lae ongko:n phatthana ekkachon thai* [Turning Point of Rural Development and Thai Non-Government Organisation], Anek Narkabutra describes the adverse impact of economic development on rural populations and the role of Thai NGOs in promoting self-reliant development and “local wisdom”.

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<sup>53</sup> For example, Sompong Chareonsuk, 1990, “Small NGOs in Northern Rural Thailand: An Organisational Review”, MA thesis (Social Planning and Development), Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Queensland; Phanomwan Yoodi and W.E.J. Tips, 1988, *Non-Governmental Organisations’ Planning and Implementation to Promote Rural People’s Organisations in Thailand*, Local Development Assistance Programme (LDAP), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Embassy of Canada, Bangkok; Werachai Narkwiboonwong and W.E.J. Tips, 1986, “Project Identification, Formulation and Start-Up by Non-Governmental Rural Development Organisations in Thailand”, Research Monograph No. 10, Division of Human Settlements Development, Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Bangkok; Manimai Tongkawate and W.E.J. Tips, 1985, *Coordination between Governmental and Non-Governmental Organisations in Thailand’s Rural Development: A Study of Planning and Implementation of Integrated Rural Development at the Local Level*, Research Monograph No. 5, Division of Human Settlements Development, AIT, Bangkok.

<sup>54</sup> Suthy Prasartset, 1995, “The Rise of NGOs as Critical Social Movement in Thailand”, in Jaturong Boonyarattanasoontorn and Gawin Chutima (eds), *Thai NGOs: The Continuing Struggle for Democracy*, Bangkok: Thai NGO Support Project, pp. 97-134; and Gawin Chutima, 1995, “Thai NGOs and Civil Society”, in *ibid.*, pp. 135-144.

<sup>55</sup> Amara Pongsapich and Nitaya Kataleeradabhan, 1994, *Philanthropy, NGO Activities and Corporate Funding in Thailand*, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute (CUSRI).

He remarks that some NGO fieldworkers lack an analysis of local situations (or social relations and tensions among different social actors). He adds that some NGO workers are too sensitive to criticism and as a result, they are less able to recognise the limitations of their projects and organisations.<sup>56</sup>

Sompong Charoensuk, a Chiang Mai-based NGO leader, reveals that since the mid-1980s, when the Thai political system became more open, many NGO activists in Northern Thailand have spent their time attending meetings, seminars and workshops in the city rather than working closely with their target groups in rural areas. He argues that this phenomenon is not an internal problem of each NGO but indicates, rather, that these NGO activists find it more difficult to analyse and deal with everyday politics than to be involved in collective activities and discussion.<sup>57</sup> My thesis intends to examine the relationship between everyday politics and collective protest in the process of NGO intervention.

Since the early 1980s after departing from a ‘revolutionary’ movement, I began to recognise that the complexity of social reality and social relations could not be covered by a single grand theory. During the late 1980s when I did my MA thesis: “People’s Participation and the State: A Study of the Role of NGOs in the Thai Development Process”, I discovered the inadequacy of the two main social schools of thought, namely the modernisation and Marxist theories, to explain socio-political change in the Thai development context.<sup>58</sup> The social theorists from both schools had been competing to demonstrate the superiority of the explanatory power of their particular theoretical beliefs in analysing complicated social reality. Indeed, their debates seem never ending. In this regard, I agree with Girling when he argues that “the fragmentation of practice” indicates “the fragmentation of theory”;<sup>59</sup> or in other words, the complicated social reality can hardly be covered by a single formula of thought.

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<sup>56</sup> Anek Narkabutra, 1990 (2533), *Jutplian kanphatthana chonnabot lae ongko:n phatthana ekkachon thai* [Turning Point of Rural Development and Thai Non-Government Organisations], [in Thai], Bangkok: LDAP. It should be noted here that there are few systematic studies on Thai NGOs in the Thai language for several reasons. First, NGO fieldworkers seldom write about their experiences. Secondly, those who do write well are more likely to be engaged in doing research on socio-economic and political changes in rural Thailand and on people’s response to the changes rather than on the Thai NGO movement *per se*. The actual role of Thai NGOs in rural development is often assumed by concerned academics rather than analytically clarified. See further discussion on the Thai NGO practice in Chapter 3.

<sup>57</sup> Sompong Charoensuk, 1995, “Uneven Dependency: A Situational Analysis of Northern Thai NGOs”, in Jaturong Boonyarattanasoontorn and Gawin Chutima (eds), *Thai NGOs...*, pp. 77-87.

<sup>58</sup> Rapin Eiamlapa, 1990, “People’s Participation and the State: A Study of the Role of NGOs in the Thai Development Process”, MA thesis (History), Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University (ANU).

<sup>59</sup> Girling, 1987, *Capital and Power...*, p. 205.

As we have seen from the summary of NGO studies, most scholars agree that the empowerment of people with the capacity to control their own future is important. However, as Carroll argues, what is “not clear and not documented is how this capacity is acquired in the first place”.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, as Hulme notes: “very little has been documented about the ability of the third sector [or NGOs] to achieve, or not to achieve, the redistribution of social and political power”.<sup>61</sup> This thesis, therefore, attempts to fill the gap. It will investigate how the Thai NGOs have interacted with their target groups at the grass-roots level, with the NGO networks and with the power centres (particularly the state and business) in the process of rural transformation. It will examine how social meaning is constructed; how collective action is formed, by whom, and in which situation. It will also show the various difficulties the NGOs have encountered while performing their mission of local empowerment. In the practice of intervention, the NGO work often starts with one problem and ends up with another, new problem and becomes an on-going dialectical process of learning while helping the people empower themselves.

### **Questions, concepts and analysis**

My thesis seeks to establish that people-centred Thai NGOs are able to play an interventionist role in rural transformation. More specifically, it seeks to find out how Thai NGOs have intervened in competitions and conflicts, (or sometimes cooperation), which take place among various social actors, over the control of productive resources (e.g. land, water, forest and capital) in rural areas. The study will describe the NGO history – mainly since the late 1960s – and will examine their interventionist role within the context of three separate villages. It will analyse the changing social relations and tensions emerging as a result of rural transformation and, more importantly, NGO interventions to provide a political space for the common people to empower themselves. It will closely examine how social meanings are constructed in daily life; how collective actions are formed, maintained and altered, by whom, and in which situations. The key concepts in this thesis are social relations, transformation, tensions, movement and intervention. Before examining social movement and especially intervention, it is important to understand what constitutes social transformation. Essentially, the concept implies a process which may be seen from various perspectives as a shift from traditional beliefs to rational thinking.

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<sup>60</sup> Carroll, 1992, *Intermediary NGOs...*, p. 180.

<sup>61</sup> D. Hulme, 1994, “Social Development Research and the Third Sector: NGOs as Users and Subjects of Social Inquiry”, in D. Booth (ed), *Rethinking Social Development: Theory, Research and Practice*, Essex: Longman Scientific and Technical, p. 253.

Among various studies concerning social change and movement, I find the most dynamic and, therefore, most powerful explanation comes from a group of political sociologists whose scholarship is concerned with social relations, conflicts and intervention.<sup>62</sup> For instance, Touraine argues that social transformation is not produced by the state or capitalists or common people acting alone. Rather it is constituted by the “movement” of social actors struggling to control what he calls “historicity” or “the set of cultural, cognitive, economic and ethical models” which constitute social relations, institutions and practice.<sup>63</sup> Under movement, Touraine and Melucci cover a range of human actions from everyday phenomena to collective activities and protest.<sup>64</sup> None of the actors involved in these human actions controls the complete meaning of social relations and interactions in which they are involved. All that they can do is to attempt to communicate, negotiate and struggle to extend their control over social meaning and try to make the social system function according to their rationalisations. The movements of social actors in time and in space create not only the social transformation but also the capacity of the “human society” to form and transform its functioning through social conflicts or, in other words, to stimulate society to produce itself “through its political and social struggles, its inventions and its conquests”.<sup>65</sup> Touraine’s explanation interests me because, on the one hand, some intellectuals (e.g. “the Left”) who explain the society only in the form of permanent crisis, repression and inequality seldom offer a practical proposal for constructing socio-political reform. On the other hand, other intellectuals (e.g. “the Right”) who explain society purely in terms of social change are unlikely to make proposals which are critical of asymmetric power relations. As Moore says, in the worst scenario, intellectuals may easily “become mere technicians selling their skills to any unscrupulous power-seekers who want to manipulate society for their own ends”.<sup>66</sup> I shall investigate the social relations and tensions among the social actors who influence social transformation, especially those who intervene in the social conflicts, and attempt to create representative institutions

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<sup>62</sup> They are, for example, A. Touraine (a French sociologist), A. Melucci (an Italian sociologist and psychologist) and N. Long (a rural sociologist, Netherlands). In addition, a number of scholars from other disciplines working on the issues of social conflict and social movement include A. Escobar (anthropologist), S.E. Alvarez (political scientist) and S. Tarrow (political scientist). Geographers whose works deal with the social movement issue include R. Peet, M. Watts and J. Friedmann.

<sup>63</sup> A. Touraine, 1988, *Return of the Actor: Social Theory in Post-Industrial Society*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 40 and 41.

<sup>64</sup> A. Touraine, 1995, “Beyond Social Movement?”, in S.M. Lyman (ed), *Social Movements: Critiques, Concepts, Case-Studies*, New York: New York University Press, pp. 371-393; and A. Melucci, 1989, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, London: Hutchinson Radius.

<sup>65</sup> Touraine, 1988, *Return of the Actor...*, p. xxi; and A. Touraine, 1977, *The Self-Production of Society*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 449 and 456.

<sup>66</sup> B. Moore, 1953, “The New Scholasticism and the Study of Politics”, *World Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 124.

which will assist ordinary people to scrutinise development policies or decision-making processes affecting them.

Since the mid-1980s, a number of scholars have reconsidered the notion of “social movement”, for example, Touraine argues that the usefulness of the concept is that: “it helps one to rediscover social actors where they have been buried beneath either structural Marxist or rational theories of strategies and decisions”.<sup>67</sup> The difference between the “old” and “new” social movements, according to Touraine, is that while in the past social movements were motivated by “the images of an ideal society”, the “new social movements (NSMs)” are influenced by the analysis of actual socio-cultural and political relations in the process of social transformation and of environment.<sup>68</sup> Escobar and Alvarez also distinguish between the old and new social movements. They define the old social movement as a struggle led by the working class and its revolutionary parties to control the state’s power, whereas they refer to the new social movement as a struggle to open socio-cultural and political space in which “a multiplicity of social actors establish their presence and sphere of autonomy in a fragmented social and political space”.<sup>69</sup> Society, therefore, is shaped by the plurality of the struggles and the vision of social actors involved in social activities. In discussing NSMs, Melucci has little objection to those social theorists mentioned above. He defines a social movement as a struggle ranging from everyday phenomena to collective activities and protest, and argues that the collective actions are not the starting points but rather outcomes of social movements. He also suggests a social analysis to explain how the outcomes have been collectively formed, maintained and altered over time.<sup>70</sup>

From the redefinition of NSMs, we can see that the social movements appear across time and space in different forms. For instance, the ruling élites urge the common people to “modernise” themselves and to abandon all forms of resistance to the modernisation process. However, some people, who do not want to comply with the élite’s wishes, may defend themselves, through their social movement, by drawing their strength from the wisdom of the elders so that they can move independently towards their chosen future. Others may choose to defend themselves against “modernisation”

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<sup>67</sup> A. Touraine, 1985, “An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements”, *Social Research*, Vol. 52, No. 4, p. 782.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 778-784.

<sup>69</sup> A. Escobar and S.E. Alvarez, 1992, “Introduction: Theory and Protest in Latin America Today”, in A. Escobar and S.E. Alvarez (eds), *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy and Democracy*, Boulder: Westview Press, p. 3. See also F. Calderón, A. Piscitelli and J.L. Reyna, 1992, “Social Movements: Actors, Theories, Expectations”, in *ibid.*, pp. 19-36.

<sup>70</sup> A. Melucci, 1994, “A Strange Kind of Newness: What’s ‘New’ in New Social Movements?”, in E. Laraña, H. Johnstone and J.R. Gusfield (eds), *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 106.

by forming collective protest, or even becoming involved in rebellion. The socio-political circumstance becomes a key factor which will facilitate or prevent the formation of a movement and influence the form of any movement which does emerge.<sup>71</sup>

A social movement can be neither reduced to a single issue, such as a pay claim, nor can it be simply a political lobby group, nor completely organised.<sup>72</sup> It is “an attempt on the part of a collective actor to gain control of a society’s ‘values’ or cultural orientations by challenging the action of an adversary with which it is linked by power relations”.<sup>73</sup> That is to say, the social movement is neither an answer to a problem nor a solution to a conflict. Rather it is an action through which social actors challenge the domination of social relations, or the asymmetry of power relations, between the rulers and the ruled.

In this thesis, I generally apply the definition of NSMs as my conceptual framework. Specifically, when I refer to social intervention, I mean an attempt by social actors struggling in social conflicts to construct a fair and functional law-based society. To be able to play an interventionist role, the actors have to be:

capable of rising above mere claims and even above political negotiations in order to acknowledge, and to assert, themselves as producers rather than consumers of social situations, as capable of questioning social situations rather than merely responding to them.<sup>74</sup>

The social actors, in particular the NGOs in this thesis, need to understand ‘the rules of the game’, for instance, how the processes of government administration and of business work in a locality and higher up, in order to be able to inquire into the social situations in which they participate. The rules of the game are usefully explained by Standish (following Bailey’s argument) when he points to the need for a “statesman” (a social actor) to understand the rules of politics in order to maintain political power:

No statesman is effective unless he knows the rules of attack and defence in the political ring. His interest is in finding out what these rules are, both in particular cultures and cross-culturally... Only after we understand the rules can we start evaluating the behaviour and so in the end come to a judgement on the men, if we wish to do so.<sup>75</sup>

The interventionist role does not occur spontaneously. The social actors have to make an attempt to understand social relations, conflicts and movements and how they

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<sup>71</sup> Touraine, 1977, *The Self-Production of Society*, pp. 314, 324, 355, 359 and 377.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 315 and 349.

<sup>73</sup> Touraine, 1995, *Critique of Modernity*, p. 239.

<sup>74</sup> Touraine, 1988, *Return of the Actor...*, p. 11.

<sup>75</sup> W.A. Standish, 1992, “Simbu Paths to Power: Political Change and Cultural Continuity in the Papua New Guinea Highlands”, PhD thesis (Political Science), Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPAS), ANU, p. 14.

change and shift across time and space. Moreover, they have to be able to understand how to create social meanings or rationalisations which rise above the rhetoric of the establishment. In addition, they have to understand the very moment for their action in a particular place. The intervention never ends. That is because once situations change, conflicts shift and new problems arise, new forms of intervention will be required continuously.<sup>76</sup> Instead of finding a ready-made formula to be replicated, I propose three sets of key concepts to analyse the interventionist role of the NGOs. These are actor-system relations; social meaning-action synthesis; and time-space correspondence.

### **Actor-system relations**

Since the mid-1980s, academics from different disciplines (particularly sociologists and political scientists) have begun to recognise the importance of actors and system relations.<sup>77</sup> For example, Long and van der Ploeg, rural sociologists, criticise the modernisation and neo-Marxist theories because they “represent opposite positions ideologically”.<sup>78</sup> That is to say, both theories view social change as resulting from the influence of the state and international market on peripheral societies and, thus, tending to be linear. This represents a determinist and externalist view of social change. Moreover, both theories are unlikely to consider the role of social actors who struggle for a political space to discuss, negotiate and reform social structure. In “the structuration theory”, Giddens, a sociologist, proposes the framework to analyse human agency together with social structure. Instead of considering a structure as a pattern of external constraints undermining human capacity, Giddens defines it as organised rules and resources which social actors produce and reproduce in their day-to-day activities continuously across time and space. Instead of seeing human agency as an individual, subjective actor, he believes that “all human beings are knowledgeable agents”.<sup>79</sup> Touraine also develops similar thematic concepts. However, while Giddens takes a

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<sup>76</sup> A. Melucci, 1988, “Social Movements and the Democratisation of Everyday Life”, in J. Keane (ed), *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*, London: Verso, p. 251.

<sup>77</sup> For example, A. Callinicos, 1989, *Making History: Agency, Structure and Change in Social Theory*, Cambridge: Polity Press; S. Hays, 1994, “Structure and Agency and the Sticky Problem of Culture”, *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 57-72; and R.L. Doty, 1996, “Re-examining the Agent-Structure Problematique in International Relations Theory: A Post-Structural Contribution”, Paper presented at the 37th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, San Diego, California, 16-20 April.

<sup>78</sup> N. Long and J.D. van der Ploeg, 1994, “Heterogeneity, Actor and Structure: Towards a Reconstitution of the Concept of Structure”, in Booth (ed), *Rethinking Social Research...*, p. 63; see also N. Long, 1992, “From Paradigm Lost to Paradigm Regained? The Case for an Actor-Oriented Sociology of Development”, in N. Long and A. Long (eds), *Battlefields of Knowledge: The Interlocking of Theory and Practice in Social Research and Development*, London: Routledge, pp. 16-43.

<sup>79</sup> A. Giddens, 1984, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 281.

point of departure from a “self-identity” or “care of the self”, Touraine relates “the self” with otherness in terms of social relations.<sup>80</sup> He perceives a structure as “the conditions of social order and integration”<sup>81</sup> and defines an actor in relation to the “subject” as “a dissident, a resistance fighter”.<sup>82</sup> Hence, the actor, according to Touraine:

is not someone who acts in accordance with the position he occupies, but someone who modifies the material and, above all, social environment in which he finds himself by transforming the division of labour, modes of decision-making, relations of domination or cultural orientations.<sup>83</sup>

Touraine insists that the correspondence between system and actor cannot be analysed in isolation from the asymmetric power relations. He argues that “post-modernism” asserts actors according to cultural differences but not social relations. He criticises “post-modernism” for disregarding the existence of social conflicts. For example, the ways of organising information and communication can be used to increase the flow of data as well as money and power. He, therefore, regards: “the phenomena emphasised by post-modern thought as crisis situations rather than as lasting innovations”.<sup>84</sup>

Touraine also criticises other schools of social thought in order to construct the thematic concept of actor and system relations. For example, he says that the structuralist-functional school, which emphasises social integration and disintegration, is inflexible. That is because a degree of uncertainty always exists for actors to change institutional rules, values and norms. He asserts that structural Marxism is right to underline the state’s mechanisms of political and cultural control over its subjects but “the main error of this approach... is to deny and ignore the ubiquitous existence of actors”.<sup>85</sup> He encourages social actors, especially intellectuals, not to be divorced from the system but to develop “the autonomy of civil society” in relation to the state. That is to influence public opinion to make the state more responsive to its claims. He also encourages social actors, through their movements, “to transform social conflicts into institutional rules”<sup>86</sup> which help representative democracy to have a strong function in managing conflicting interests.

Since the mid-1980s, few scholars have discussed in depth the actor-system relations in the Thai development context. However, instead of focusing on the actor-system

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<sup>80</sup> Touraine, 1995, *Critique of Modernity*, p. 263.

<sup>81</sup> Touraine, 1988, *Return of the Actor...*, p. 154.

<sup>82</sup> Touraine, 1995, *Critique of Modernity*, p. 264.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>85</sup> Touraine, 1985, “An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements”, p. 771.

<sup>86</sup> Touraine, 1988, *Return of the Actor...*, p. 151.

reactions *per se*, Lohmann examines the interactions between systems of thought from different social actors.<sup>87</sup> This will be elaborated upon in the next section.

### Social meaning-action synthesis

In the early 1970s, development theorists and practitioners agreed to implement alternative development approaches (e.g. “people’s participation”, “self-reliant development” and “community culture”) to help local people strengthen their capacity to counterbalance the power of the state and market economy. In the early 1990s, however, debates and criticisms concerning these approaches have been widespread among academics and development workers. As I mentioned above, Friedmann and Rigg argue that the alternative development strategies focus on local people and community while overlooking the relationship between people, the state and market economy.<sup>88</sup> Escobar shares this view:

Rather than searching for development alternatives, they [development theorists] speak about “alternative *to* development”, that is, a rejection of the entire paradigm. They see this reformulation as a historical possibility already underway in innovative grass-roots movements and experiments. In their assessment, these authors share a number of features: a critical stance with respect to established scientific knowledge; and the defense [sic] of localised, pluralistic grass-roots movements...<sup>89</sup>

Peet supports Escobar’s position concerning the bipolar systems of thought among the scholars who “romanticise” indigenous knowledge systems and present it as superior to scientific knowledge. Peet, therefore, encourages development thinkers and practitioners to develop critical thinking and discourse, for instance, “to make ‘science’ serve the interests of the oppressed”.<sup>90</sup>

To construct an alternative development approach, one needs to, as Waterman suggests: “combine scepticism of the intellect and optimism of the will”.<sup>91</sup> That is to have faith

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<sup>87</sup> L. Lohmann, 1995, “No Rules of Engagement: Interest Groups, Centralisation and the Creative Politics of ‘Environment’ in Thailand”, in J. Rigg (ed), *Counting the Cost: Economic Growth and Environmental Change in Thailand*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), pp. 211-234.

<sup>88</sup> Friedmann, 1992, *Empowerment...*; and Rigg, 1994, “Alternative Development Strategies...”.

<sup>89</sup> A. Escobar, 1992, “Imagining a Post-Development Era? Critical Thought, Development and Social Movements”, *Social Text*, No. 31/32, p. 27.

<sup>90</sup> R. Peet, 1993, “Development Theory in Crisis”, Paper presented at the Department of Human Geography, RSPAS, ANU; see also R. Peet and M. Watts, 1993, “Development Theory and Environment in an Age of Market Triumphalism”, *Economic Geography*, Vol. 69, No. 3, pp. 227-253. For the elaboration of the latter article, see R. Peet and M. Watts, 1996, “Liberation Ecology: Development, Sustainability, and Environment in an Age of Market Triumphalism”, in R. Peet and M. Watts (eds), *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*, London: Routledge, pp. 1-45. For another perspective, see A. Agrawal, 1995, “Dismantling the Divide between Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge”, *Development and Change*, Vol. 26, pp. 413-439.

<sup>91</sup> Waterman, 1996, “Beyond Globalism and Developmentalism...”, p. 179.

in the innovation of grass-roots development and, at the same time, consciously learn to doubt various categories of social ideologies and practice.<sup>92</sup> In Buddhist tradition, we learn that the Buddha himself urged his disciples to challenge his own teaching as he encouraged Kalamas:

It is proper for you, Kalamas, to doubt, to be uncertain... Do not go upon an authoritative tradition; nor upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon rumours; nor upon what is in a Scripture; nor upon speculative metaphysical theories, reasons and arguments; nor upon a point of view; nor upon special reasoning; nor upon accepting a statement as true because it agrees with a theory that one is already convinced of; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration "our teacher says thus and so". Kalamas, when you yourself know: the [sic] things are bad; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill, abandon them.<sup>93</sup>

In the Thai development context, Lohmann encourages development practitioners, especially Thai NGO workers, to look beyond the bipolar systems of thought or of society towards a new social discourse and action (e.g. language, ways of reaching consensus, of settling conflicts and so on) which different social actors and groups (e.g. politicians, bureaucrats, investors of capital and villagers) use at different places and times in competition and conflicts over productive resources.<sup>94</sup> On a case-by-case or issue-by-issue basis, Lohmann argues that the interaction between different systems of thought may lead to the development of "a third system of thought",<sup>95</sup> or what Bhabha calls "the third space".<sup>96</sup> The "third space" or "middle path" in Buddhist terms does not lie simply in the binary oppositions between 'modern' and 'traditional'; between 'rural' and 'urban'. Rather the "third space" is "a process of hybridity" which gives rise to "a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation".<sup>97</sup>

A question arises as to how a social meaning is constructed to draw people's participation and, in some cases, to organise collective activities to reach consensus or settle conflict over resources. Melucci suggests that the social meaning "... constructed from the elaboration in daily life of alternative meanings for individual and collective behaviour is the *principal activity* of the hidden networks of contemporary movements and the *condition* for their visible action [emphasis added]".<sup>98</sup> Melucci also argues that social meaning needs to be produced and reproduced continually by social interveners because the social relations and tensions always change, the conflicts often shift and

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<sup>92</sup> Touraine, 1977, *The Self-Production of Society*, p. 452.

<sup>93</sup> Cited in R. Heinze, 1977, *The Role of Sangha in Modern Thailand*, Taipei: The Oriental Cultural Service, p. 195.

<sup>94</sup> Lohmann, 1995, "No Rules of Engagement...", p. 212.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>96</sup> H. Bhabha, 1990, "The Third Space", in J. Rutherford (ed), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 207-221.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>98</sup> Melucci, 1994, "A Strange Kind of Newness...", p. 107.

new problems or “new forms of domination are constantly emerging”.<sup>99</sup> It is necessary for the social interveners to create critical thinking or “rationality”.<sup>100</sup> That is to learn from and search for mistakes and prejudices in social ideologies and practice.

### Time-space correspondence

As social scientists try to make their research findings more dynamic and closer to the social reality, they begin to take the time and space analysis into account. The debates among them help enrich existing social science disciplines. For example, Giddens argues that the notion of time-geography, which refers only to the routinisation of daily life, is inadequate to explain the relations between social actors in a political space over time. He says that while observing social interactions, one should be able to interpret an actor’s motivation. That is because: “if agents are only players on a stage... the social world would indeed be largely empty of substance”.<sup>101</sup> Considering the notion of space, Giddens defines it as a setting of interactions rather than a landscape. Here, Giddens tries to bring together sociological and geographical analysis in order to construct his structuration theory.

As occurred elsewhere, the debates about “community” have been an important issue in the Thai development context since the early 1980s and reflect a time-space relationship.<sup>102</sup> For instance, Kemp points out that a “village community” is ideologically constructed and suggests that researchers should examine complicated social reality rather than being distracted by a dogma.<sup>103</sup> Like McVey, Chayan argues that the state “cannot extend its arms effectively” to control the village.<sup>104</sup> The villagers do not necessarily oppose the state’s directives. In studying Nong Ngam village in Nakhon Prathom province, Utong argues that a consequence of capitalist development

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<sup>99</sup> Melucci, 1988, “Social Movements and the Democratisation...”, p. 251.

<sup>100</sup> Popper, 1994, *Knowledge and the Body-Mind Problem...*, p. 134.

<sup>101</sup> Giddens, 1984, *The Constitution of Society...*, p. 125.

<sup>102</sup> P. Hirsch, 1993, “Introduction: The Village Revisited”, in P. Hirsch (ed), *The Village in Perspective: Community and Locality in Rural Thailand*, Social Research Institute (SRI), Chiang Mai University, pp. 1-8.

<sup>103</sup> J.H. Kemp, 1993, “On the Interpretation of Thai Villages”, in *ibid.*, pp. 81-96; J.H. Kemp, 1991, “The Dialectics of Village and State in Modern Thailand”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 312-326; J.H. Kemp, 1989, “Peasants and Cities: The Cultural and Social Image of the Thai Peasant Village Community”, *SOJOURN*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 6-19; and J.H. Kemp, 1988, *Seductive Mirage: The Search for the Village Community in Southeast Asia*, Comparative Asian Studies 3, Centre for Asian Studies, Amsterdam: Foris Publications. See also A. Etzioni, 1996, “Positive Aspects of Community and the Dangers of Fragmentation”, *Development and Change*, Vol. 27, pp. 301-314.

<sup>104</sup> Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, 1993, “Traditions of Village Studies in Thailand”, in Hirsch (ed), *The Village in Perspective...*, pp. 9-38; and R.T. McVey, 1988, “Change and Consciousness in Southern Countryside”, in H.T. Brummelhuis and J.H. Kemp (eds), *Strategies and Structures in Thai Society*, Amsterdam: Anthropological and Sociological Centre, University of Amsterdam, pp. 109-137.

in this village is to help provide sufficient work for villagers to remain in the village.<sup>105</sup> She also concludes that one should concentrate more on the actual socio-economic changes and how villagers are affected by and respond to these rather than constructing a “uniform sense of community, which may be alien to local situations”.<sup>106</sup> The discussion about Thai village community here shows an attempt by academics in Thai studies to incorporate the time-space analysis in their research projects.

Buddhism also includes the notion of time and place in its texts. In *Sappurisadhamma*, the Buddha identifies seven characteristics of a mindful person. They are to understand cause (*ru het*), consequence (*ru phon*), self (*ru ton*), moderation (*ru praman*), proper time (*ru kan*), place or community (*ru chumchon*), and difference (of each individual) (*ru bukkhon*).<sup>107</sup> To understand time does not only refer to clock time but extends to each different moment when a particular situation occurs or auspicious things come to be present.<sup>108</sup> To understand the place means to understand the people’s feelings and needs in each assembly in order to construct a social meaning for communication. However, Buddhism is used and interpreted by different people from different social classes for their own interests. During the late-1970s, it was largely ignored by Thai left-wing intellectuals who claimed that the Buddhist religion was subject to the domination of the state.

Nonetheless, Buddhism becomes a source of cultural orientation for those who study and practice it to construct a social meaning and action in daily life. In the early 1980s, *Phra Pho: Pan*, a Chiang Mai monk, went against the mainstream of the monkhood. He studied *dhamma*, the Buddhist teaching, and went out to help villagers construct small weirs and water channels, or *mu’ang fai*, for irrigating their rice fields. *Phra Pho: Pan* rationalised his action by recalling the past experience of the Buddha when he had to deal with the case of a water dispute among his relatives:

When Sakkaya and Koliya royal families had a conflict over the use of water, they invited the Lord Buddha to settle the dispute between them. Putting on a saffron robe might not be appropriate, the Buddha, therefore, disguised himself as a commoner to mediate the dispute. ... I am a peasant. When I go somewhere [i.e. to help villagers build *mu’ang fai*], I dress up in black clothes as the Buddha did.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Utong Prasasvinitchai, 1993, “The Thai Village from the Villagers’ Perspective”, in Hirsch (ed), *The Village in Perspective...*, p. 71.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>107</sup> *Phra Rajavaramuni* (Prayudh Prayudhto), 1975 (2518), *Photjananukrom phutthasat* [A Dictionary of Buddhism], [in Thai], Bangkok: Mahachula Buddhist University, pp. 173-174.

<sup>108</sup> R.B. Davis, 1984, *Muang Metaphysics: A Study of Northern Thai Myth and Ritual*, Studies in Thai Anthropology 1, Bangkok: Pandora, ch. 3.

<sup>109</sup> S. Tanabe, 1986 (2529), *Nung lu’ang nung dam: Tamnan kho:ng phunam chaona haeng lanna thai* [Wearing Saffron Wearing Black: Legend of a Peasant Leader of Lanna Thai], [in Thai], Bangkok: Samnakphim Sangsan, back cover.

*Phra Pho*: Pan not only referred to the past action of the Buddha to rationalise his role outside the monastery but also recognised time and place to play an interventionist role. As he explained:

I have a strong motive to help peasant brotherhood to obtain a good life. ... To struggle for the public interest, we should sometimes “tang lak” [referring to thinking thoroughly before making a move]. ... If we can’t go directly, we go indirectly. If we can’t go above, we go beyond. At the moment, I have to stop. When I shall decide to move again depends on a proper opportunity and time.<sup>110</sup>

*Phra Pho*: Pan’s action for the ‘public interest’ shows three thematic concepts of social intervention which I have presented above. First, as a social actor, he had the strong will to challenge the domination of the Thai bureaucratic system in order to help maintain the village settlement. Secondly, he had a strategic vision of change through which he could elaborate and rationalise social meanings in daily life as a basis for individual and collective activities. Finally, he recognised time and place as important factors in determining whether or not he should intervene in social tensions between villagers and the authority.

In summary, amidst competition over the use of productive resources, I argue that the people-centred Thai NGOs seek to play an interventionist role to provide a political space for the common people to build up their own capacity to negotiate their own access to resource allocation and utilisation. I also argue that to tackle the people’s problem, the NGOs have to make an effort to enable them to play this role. Intervention occurs when the following elements are present in a given situation. First, the NGOs take into account actors and system correspondence. That is to say the NGOs understand the situations in terms of the social relations and tensions among social actors attempting to legitimise, secure and accumulate productive resources. Secondly, the NGOs are able to produce and reproduce social meanings from everyday politics as a basis for organising individual and collective activities in order to challenge the domination of existing power. As social relations and tensions constantly change and shift, the NGOs need to be able to redefine the new political space for negotiation, to reproduce new social meaning, to search for new social actors, to implement organisational reform and to reconstruct NGO networks. Thirdly, the NGOs are able to recognise the time and space analysis and determine whether the circumstances are right for them to pursue their intervention and what form that intervention should take.

I have constructed the above three sets of key concepts to analyse NGO intervention from the wisdom of those who have been concerned with social change and

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

movements, and from my past experience in Thai social movements.<sup>111</sup> However, intervention is never permanent because it depends on the situation in which the power relations lie. In addition, NGOs need to go beyond their bipolar systems of thought and search for “the middle path” or “the third space” for discussion, negotiation and mediation, to be able to empower “the autonomy of civil society and of its actors”.<sup>112</sup> To challenge power domination through the empowering process may start with one problem and end with another, new problem.<sup>113</sup>

## Methodology

To study the NGO intervention in competition over the use of productive resources among different actors from the state, economy and civil society between the late 1960s and 1990s is a complicated task. It requires an understanding of the transformations which have taken place in rural Thailand in a given period. It is necessary to understand what influences socio-economic change; what the consequences of change have been and how the rural people have responded. It is then necessary to identify the forms of competition, conflicts or cooperation which have emerged as a result of change and to understand the role that the NGOs have played in response to them. Although I intend to focus my study on the NGO intervention, I cannot pursue this aim without, in the first place, defining the different situations of rural change and the sorts of competition and conflict over resources which these changes have produced. To facilitate this, I recognised early in my research, the need to carefully select a study area which included the following criteria. First, the area would be the subject of identifiable economic change, it would embody situations involving competition, conflicts or cooperation over the use of productive resources between social actors such as government officials, private entrepreneurs and rural people (focusing on small-scale and landless peasants). Secondly, the NGOs would have been working in the area over a period which had required them to respond to the rural changes and to interact with other social actors in the three thematic clusters. Thirdly, there would be existing documents concerning rural transformation and NGO history in the chosen area.

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<sup>111</sup> I was involved in social movements since I was a first-year student at Chulalongkorn University in 1971. While working as a school teacher, I helped set up a teacher group and then joined a revolutionary movement between 1975 and 1980. After leaving the countryside for Bangkok, I resumed my academic work, in 1983, by working as a research assistant on two projects concerning Thai democracy at the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University. After the termination of the projects, I worked with the Union for Civil Liberty (UCL), a human-rights organisation, between 1985 and 1986 when I began to see people-centred NGOs as new actors in the Thai social movements.

<sup>112</sup> Touraine, 1988, *Return of the Actor...*, p. 158.

<sup>113</sup> Popper, 1994, *Knowledge and the Body-Mind Problem...*, p. 11.

In 1991, I was inspired by the arguments of Chatthip about the transformation of rural Thailand and of McGee concerning “desakota” in Asian countries. Chatthip perceived that the transformation in rural Thailand had occurred in different stages in different areas. They were, subsistence agriculture shown in the Northeastern and the Southern regions; the mixture between subsistence and commercialised agriculture shown in the Northern region; and commercialised agriculture shown in the Central Plain. Chatthip was also inclined to construct the autonomy of a “village community” to counterbalance the power of the state and market economy by arguing the existence of community and culture.<sup>114</sup> His idea had been largely accepted by Thai NGOs. However, McGee’s idea of “desakota” which referred to “village” (*desa*) and “city” (*kota*) in Indonesia (or *ban* and *mu’ang* in Thai) seems to challenge the separate analysis of village and city carried on by a number of Thai academics and NGO leaders. McGee defined “desakota” as “regions of an intense mixture of agricultural and non-agricultural activities that often stretch along corridors between large city cores”.<sup>115</sup> The “desakota” areas were typified by: dense populations primarily engaged in small-scale cultivation while interacting with the city through accessible transportation and communication systems; a high level of non-agricultural activities; high mobility of the people and goods due to relatively cheap and convenient transportation; mixed land use between agricultural and non-agricultural activities; an increased level of female labour in income-generating activities; and having become a “grey area” for development planners and practitioners because it did not easily fit the rural-urban dichotomy.<sup>116</sup>

Between 1991 and 1992, I used the criteria presented above to identify a possible study area. After surveying Suphan Buri and Chachoengsao provinces in the Central Plain and Chiang Mai in the Upper North during October and December 1991, I finally chose Chiang Mai province to be the site of the study. Chiang Mai had been identified in the Fourth National Social and Economic Plan (1977-1981) as one of the growth centres in the region. As a result of the government promotion of economic growth activities in Chiang Mai, competition and conflicts over the use of resources between villagers, officials and investors of capital have increased significantly. Also, various types of NGOs have been working in Chiang Mai for up to 20 years, covering my study timeframe.

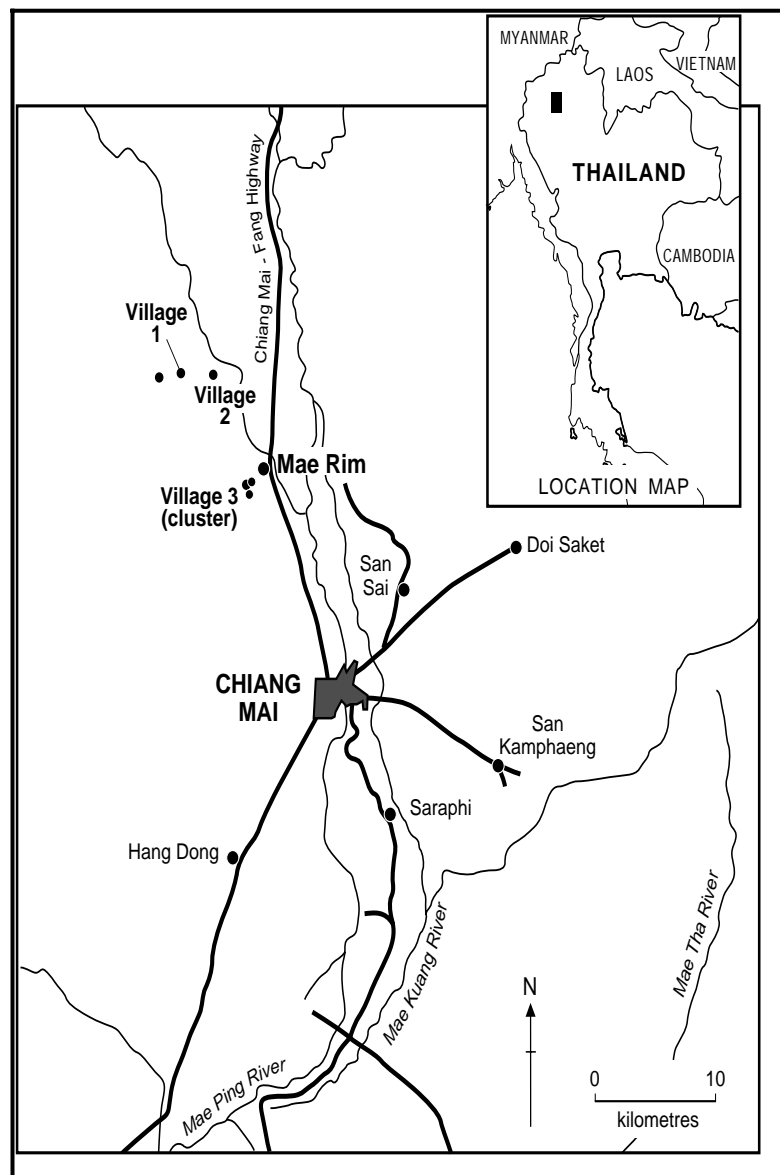
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<sup>114</sup> Chatthip Nartsupha, 1990 (2533), *Setthakit muban thai nai adit* [The Economy of the Thai Village in the Past], Bangkok: Samnakphim Sangsan.

<sup>115</sup> T.G. McGee, 1991, “The Emergence of *Desakota* Regions in Asia: Expanding a Hypothesis”, in N. Ginsburg, B. Koppel and T.G. McGee (eds), *The Extended Metropolis: Settlement Transition in Asia*, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, p. 7.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

After further research at the district level, I chose Mae Rim district, about 16.5 km from Chiang Mai city, as my study area. I then selected three villages in Mae Rim district (see Map 1.1). These were preferred for several reasons. First, they presented different manifestations of competition, conflict or cooperation over the use of productive resources such as land, forest, water and capital. Secondly, a range of actors was involved in the villages including bureaucrats, the military, private entrepreneurs, villagers and NGOs (see Chapters. 4, 5 and 6). Thirdly, they provided examples of the different approaches to intervention employed by NGOs; and finally, primary source documentation was available, some prepared at the village level, showing social, economic and ecological changes which would be adequate for my purpose.



Map 1.1 Location of the Three Villages under Study.

Source: Adapted from Tanabe, 1994, between pp. 24 and 25.

Data collection was drawn from documentary research, interviews, observation, maps and photos. I investigated a wide range of documents such as government plans, policies and reports prepared at national, regional and local levels; NGO reports, newspapers; seminar papers and secondary data such as articles, monographs, dissertations and books. I used interviews to search for information beyond the record of existing literature and to clarify controversial arguments and issues. Some 43 NGO workers, 59 villagers, 15 officials (including a military leader), 13 academics both in Chiang Mai and Bangkok, 5 business agents, and 3 funding agency representatives working in Thailand were interviewed. The interviews applied an oral history technique which I had learned during 1985 and 1986 while working with the Thai Study Project at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. I encouraged interviewees to tell their stories and experiences of socio-economic and political changes between 1970 and 1990. Information on each village was then arranged in chronological order and categorised into economic and political aspects of changes and responses. Unclear or missing information became a matter for further investigation. (Some related field research is included at Appendix I).

The thesis investigates what the NGOs have done at the grass-roots level especially during the 1980s. It does not aim to evaluate any NGO projects or performance. Rather, it intends to examine the ways in which a small number of representative NGOs have played an interventionist role in social relations and tensions among different actors from the three spheres of the state, economy and civil society in each selected village. There will be lessons in the analysis for the NGO sector as a whole as they seek to find ways to empower the poor. It is high time, as Touraine and Melucci argue, that we investigate how social meanings are constructed, how individual and collective activities are formed, by whom, and in which situations, and how these activities are maintained and altered over time.

### **Outline of the thesis**

Chapter 2 provides the contextual situation of the Thai rural transformation process for the study of NGO intervention. It introduces the discussion of rural transformation in Thailand saying that socio-economic and political changes, conflicts and responses to the changes are interacting activities in the rural transformation process, and that social relations and interactions between different actors and systems of thought would give a political space for discussion, negotiation and mediation to reach consensus and to settle conflicts. To demonstrate these arguments, the chapter provides a snapshot of the changes, conflicts and responses in rural Thailand in general, in Chiang Mai province and Mae Rim district in particular.

Chapter 3 examines the historical development of people-centred Thai NGOs – especially those which have conducted their philanthropic activities in the three selected villages in Mae Rim district. It also examines the alternative development approaches used to achieve their claimed objective of helping ordinary people to empower themselves. It argues that much has been adopted, adapted and created from past experiences of social movements and that some NGO leaders have begun to recognise problems in the movement. These include a lack of analytical understanding of local situations and social relations between different social actors, a tendency to adopt collective protest in response to social problems, and a lack of experience in dealing with everyday politics. The Thai NGOs have found fragmentation more than unity in their social practice.

Chapter 4 investigates the intervention of four NGOs in competition over productive resources in a forest-fringe village. It argues that when the NGOs understand local situations in relation to the wider context of socio-economic changes at the national and international levels and, more importantly, different systems of thought, they are likely to manage better the various conflicting interests between social actors. In so doing, the NGOs could, to a certain extent, turn competition into cooperation in resource management.

Chapter 5 examines NGO intervention in competition over the use of productive resources in a commercialised agricultural village. It argues that when the NGOs are able to capture the nature of social relations and tensions between social actors, it is possible for them to construct a social meaning and form collective activities. While the NGOs are capable of dealing with social tensions between villagers and their adversaries, they find it difficult to handle subtle social tensions within the organisations and among villagers.

Chapter 6 explores NGO intervention in conflict over land in a ‘suburban’ village. It shows how NGO workers help villagers construct a social meaning and organise collective protest against the military takeover of the village land. It argues that the NGO intervention could not be seen in isolation from individual NGO workers, their supporting organisations and networks extending from the village to the nation. While some NGO workers see rural areas as an amalgamation between traditional and modern cultures, between rural and urban areas, many others still perceive them as separate and distinct in terms of a dichotomy between traditional and modern, rural and urban. This difference results in tensions among NGO workers.

Chapter 7 summarises the thesis findings that an NGO interventionist role occurred when NGO actors moved beyond their pre-designed development projects to address social tensions in a particular situation and to help the people construct a social meaning

from their daily life so that they could respond collectively to their problems. NGO intervention helped provide a political space for people to gain self-confidence, to improve management skills and general knowledge; to effectively discuss, negotiate and mediate their rights over resource use and allocation, particularly with their social adversaries. However, there were a number of problems to which people-centred NGOs had to overcome. For instance, they had to discover how to maintain economic effectiveness while promoting their social and ethical values; to understand and deal with social conflict and order; to analyse 'actor' in relation to 'system'; and to cope with socio-economic change in the context of rural and urban interpenetration. Changing contexts and uncertainties require new energy, creativity and imagination. Alternative development is never complete. I, therefore, argue that an interventionist role needs to be a continuing process.

## Chapter 2

### Rural transformation in Thailand

Society can no longer be defined as a set of institutions, or as the effect of a sovereign will. It is the creation of neither history nor the Prince. It is a field of conflicts, negotiations and mediations between rationalisation and subjectivation, and they are the complementary and contradictory faces of modernity.

[A]ny 'modern' society must be seen as the product of its own activity, and must therefore be defined in terms of a certain mode of self-production.

A. Touraine<sup>1</sup>

This chapter summarises the transformation in rural Thailand from the early 1960s to the early 1990s with an emphasis on the Upper Northern region, Chiang Mai province and Mae Rim district, thus setting the context for studying NGO intervention. It argues that socio-economic and political changes, competition and conflicts – especially over productive resources – and responses to these changes are intertwining activities in the process of rural transformation. No single factor causes the changes in rural Thailand. Rather they are produced and reproduced by the movements of social actors representing the three spheres of the state, economy and civil society at the local, regional and national levels. In competing to accumulate wealth and power in the Thai capitalist society, various actors seek to legitimise their actions by creating social meanings, rules and institutions and implementing them across time and space. The movements of social actors make a society transform and function through the on-going process of conflict resolution and the creation of representative institutions to handle conflicts of interest between different actors. In other words, the social relations and conflicts between actors stimulate “the self-production of society” and increase the capacity of a social system to transform itself “from tradition to modernity, from beliefs to reason”.<sup>2</sup> Amidst social relations and conflicts among social actors from different organisations and institutions, there appears a political space for negotiation, mediation and intervention. The particular political outcome will somehow reflect whether subordinate classes gain from a negotiation process.

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<sup>1</sup> Touraine, 1995, *Critiques of Modernity*, pp. 358 and 360.

<sup>2</sup> Touraine, 1977, *The Self-Production of Society*, pp. 323 and 456; Touraine, 1988, *Return of the Actor...*, p. xxi.

Although the changes produce positive impacts, such as the wider availability of commodities and educational and health-care services, they also produce negative impacts on rural populations. As the social relations – which contain a power dimension – between actors from the state, economy and civil society are asymmetrical, it is likely that powerful élites and their organisations and networks can impose socio-economic change upon, and take advantage of, ordinary citizens. Since the beginning of the 1990s in particular, competition and conflicts over the use of natural and productive resources between social actors has spread widely in every region of rural Thailand. Through the expansion of transportation and communications, local communities have been gradually incorporated into the national and global economic and political systems. The kinship relations which have, in the past, provided a strong hub for social functions among rural residents have become too fragile in some situations to maintain social obligations across time and space.<sup>3</sup>

Villagers' responses to the changes in rural Thailand have been varied during the past three decades. As the ruling élite urged ordinary citizens to modernise economically, socially and politically, some villagers opposed the changes which they believed would have a negative affect on their livelihood. Others found a middle ground, albeit with difficulties, between their traditional culture and the modern administration and economic systems. As they saw their well-being subject to the changes, they sought to interpret and reinterpret their traditional culture so that they would be able to move away from being dependent within the present-day social system while working towards a hopefully better future.<sup>4</sup> These people tried to empower themselves so that they would be able to survive in a context of increasing competition over resources

Having seen this, socially concerned groups of intellectuals, including people-centred NGOs, attempted to intervene in the competition over resources so as to provide a political space for the people to negotiate their interest with the state and capitalists and to make the Thai social system more equitable. These intellectuals have struggled to understand the complexity of local situations in relation to changes in the wider context. However, changes are neither unilinear nor universal, for they depend on the different patterns of social relations in specific situations. To be able to play an interventionist role to help the ordinary people, it is necessary for the intellectuals to be able to see beyond different systems of thought so that they can discover new models of knowledge and new visions for creating social policies and to be able to have them implemented through like-minded actors and their networks over time and across space. The Thai intellectuals and NGOs are still seeking the way to do so (see Chapter 3).

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<sup>3</sup> P. Cassell (ed), 1993, *The Giddens Reader*, Standford: Standford University Press, p. 301.

<sup>4</sup> Touraine, 1977, *The Self-Production of Society*, p. 324.

Transformation, conflicts and responses are the key concepts of this chapter. The discussion covers the period from the early 1960s, when the Thai state replaced its policy of developing state enterprise with a policy of promoting development of the private sector, which was expected to create economic growth, to the early 1990s, when the private sector development began to expand extensively into remote areas. In what follows I shall, first, describe actors from three clusters of the state, economy and civil society and define the terminologies, such as ‘state’, ‘government’ and ‘rural transformation’, used in this thesis. Secondly, an overview of the Thai rural transformation between the early 1960s and the early 1990s will be given. Finally, the transformation in the Northern region with specific reference to parts of Chiang Mai province and Mae Rim district will be described. The description of the transformation, at both the national and local levels, will refer to the influences stimulating major socio-economic changes, the agents of change and the socio-political consequences of the changes. It will also demonstrate my argument that changes, conflicts and responses to the changes in the rural transformation process are the causes and effects of intertwining activities among social actors and, that in a relatively open political system, there appears a political space for negotiation, mediation and intervention in search for conflict resolution among social actors.

## **Actor-system relations**

### **State actors**

The term ‘state’ in this thesis refers to a single, undivided nation like Thailand which is “an amalgam of social, political, ideological and economic elements organised in a particular manner”.<sup>5</sup> It is not a federation or union of states. Petras points out the difference between the state and “government” as follows:

The state refers to the *permanent* institution of *government* and the concomitant *ensemble of class relations* which have been embedded in these same institutions. The permanent institutions include those which exercise a *monopoly over the means of coercion* (army, police, judiciary) as well as those that control the *economic levers* of the accumulation process.

The “government” refers to those political officials that occupy the *executive* and *legislative* branches of government and are subject to renewal or replacement. There are various types of government classified along several dimensions. For example, there are civilian or military regimes; elected or self appointed regimes. Various kinds of *regimes* pursue different socio-

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<sup>5</sup> K.J. Hewison, 1993, “Of Regimes, State and Pluralities: Thai Politics Enters the 1990s”, in K.J. Hewison, R. Robison and G. Rodan (eds), *Southeast Asia in the 1990s: Authoritarianism, Democracy and Capitalism*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, p. 169.

economic strategies. Various types of regimes need to be specified: terrorist or liberal, capitalist authoritarian, democratic socialist [emphasis as in original].<sup>6</sup>

It is misleading to perceive the state and its apparatus (bureaucratic and judicial institutions) as neutral.<sup>7</sup> The state, Poulantzas argues, has a dual nature and role. It has a moral obligation to respond to the demands of and to protect its citizens on the one hand. On the other hand, it can be mobilised and utilised by dominant classes to legitimise their power and secure their resources, through institutional rules and cultural values, at the expense of subordinate classes.<sup>8</sup>

It is also misleading to view as ‘strong states’ only authoritarian states. The strong state may refer to a healthy democratic state which is able to transform its political priorities into rules and regulations governing different conflicting interests. Hewison, Robison and Rodan remark that a democratic state should embody certain objectives (and guarantees); for instance, to ensure equality under the state’s laws, to create legal guarantees for ordinary citizens to participate in formulating the government’s plans and policies, and to legally support the people’s political freedom to scrutinise the performance of government officials and institutions including the executive and bureaucratic systems.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the strong state could be referred to as a law-based state which guarantees its citizens’ rights and liberty and, at the same time, “essentially underpins the prevailing hierarchies of power embodied in the social order”.<sup>10</sup>

Actors in the state category can be divided into at least four groups: bureaucrats (including technocrats), the military, politicians, and quasi-officials. Each group is composed of various actors who perform different functions. For instance, politicians theoretically act as representatives of their electorate whereas the military’s duty is to defend national security. Bureaucrats are there to advise the government, implement government policies and bring government services to the people. Many bureaucrats are in positions of authority and can enforce rules and laws as they apply to ordinary citizens. However, while bureaucrats are basically absent at the village level, the quasi-officials “act as links in the networks connecting peasant and national groups”.<sup>11</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup> J. Petras, 1989, “State, Regime and Democratisation Muddle”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 26. Hewison, Rodan and Robison also explain the difference between “the state”, “state apparatus”, “regime” and “government”. See K.J. Hewison, G. Rodan and R. Robison, 1993, “Introduction: Changing Forms of State Power in Southeast Asia”, in Hewison, Robison and Rodan (eds), *Southeast Asia in the 1990s...*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> N. Poulantzas, 1978, *State, Power, Socialism*, tran. by P. Camiller, London: Lowe & Brydone Printers, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Hewison, Rodan and Robison, 1993, “Introduction...”, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> C. Keyes, 1979, “Local Leadership in Rural Thailand”, in C.D. Neher (ed), *Modern Thai Politics: From Village to Nation*, Cambridge: Schenkman, p. 202. Not only the sub-district head

quasi-officials include *kamnan* (sub-district head) and *phuyaiban* (village head).<sup>12</sup> *Kamnan* and *phuyaiban* are elected by villagers. Neher points out that while *phuyaiban* acts as the government's "ears and eyes", he also acts as the villagers' representative. Thus, *phuyaiban* may come under considerable pressure emerging from their conflicting roles.<sup>13</sup>

In the late 1980s, many bureaucrats and government officials left the public sector to join the private sector due to the more interesting and challenging work and more attractive rewards. At the same time, however, some young, energetic public servants began to demonstrate a less paternalistic outlook with more liberal ideas. Some military officers in later generations showed more of a tendency to be professional rather than political soldiers. The changing attitude among government officials derives from a wider range of education both in Thailand and overseas, the growing middle classes, and the major political conflicts and resolutions occurring in the Thai society over time.

### Economic actors

Since the political change in 1932, Thai governments, both civilian and military, have been influenced by economic nationalism and expanded the role of government to create and control some key enterprises and manufacturing.<sup>14</sup> They have done this, on the one hand, in an attempt to reduce the economic power of royalist groups. On the

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and village head perform this role, Keyes also includes monks, teachers, village-based health officials and village traders. See also M. Moerman, 1979, "A Thai Village Headman as Synoptic Leader" in *ibid.*, pp. 229-250.

<sup>12</sup> *Phuyaiban* is called *kae ban* in a Chiang Mai village.

<sup>13</sup> C.D. Neher, 1979, "Section III: Rural Political Process: Introduction", in C.D. Neher (ed), *Modern Thai Politics...*, p. 195. While their allowances are minimal, the duties of *kamnan* and *phuyaiban* cover "a dizzying array of functions". As the villagers' representative, *phuyaiban* has to chair village ceremonies, improve village infrastructure, arbitrate village disputes, and try to satisfy villagers demands. As a government's representative, *phuyaiban* has to attend officials meetings, inform villagers about government policies and arrest law breakers such as murderers, thieves, illegal gamblers. He has to keep the records of people's birth, death, mobility; and of events including flood, fire and other disasters. Moreover, he has to chair the village committee which acts as the village governing body. For these services, he receives an honorarium from the Ministry of Interior of 1,090 baht per month (Interview, INT-079-VIL, 13 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai. Neher recorded that in the 1970s a village head received a monthly remuneration of about US\$ 3.75-7.75 or 80-160 baht). *Kamnan* has a wider range of duties than *phuyaiban*. For example, he has to submit periodic reports to the district office on the people's birth, death, marriage, divorce, disease, mobility, land survey, taxation and military conscription. As the chair of the sub-district council (*sapha tambon*), he is entitled to call meetings to propose to the district head where and how the government budget for village development should be allocated.

<sup>14</sup> Between 1938 and 1944, Suehiro reveals that the government gained control of several categories of industries and business, which were regarded to have direct impact on the people's livelihoods, such as rice milling and related industries (insurance and shipping services), distribution of imported and domestically produced goods, and commercial banking business. See A. Suehiro, 1989, *Capital Accumulation in Thailand 1855-1985*, Tokyo: Kuuki Kikaku Co., pp. 9-10.

other hand, as it was unlikely that private Thai entrepreneurs would emerge without assistance, the government feared that Chinese and other foreign investors would control the national economy.<sup>15</sup> To earn export income, Thailand became a supplier to the international market of primary products such as rice, tin, teak and rubber.<sup>16</sup> The Thai economy, however, suffered a growing trade deficit during the Cold War period, especially in the 1950s. Besides being required to pay war reparations due to its alliance with Japan in World War II and facing the decline of international markets for primary commodities after the Korean War in 1953, Thailand also faced drought and poor harvests during 1952 and 1958.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, there was the adverse impact of the rivalry between domestic political groups, namely the Phin-Phao faction on one side and the Phibun faction on the other. The economic and political crises left little option for Thailand other than to accept proposals from the World Bank and a number of US business agencies which favoured the privatisation of government-owned enterprises.

The private sector, which refers to organised informal and formal economic activities by either individuals or incorporate entities, covers a wide range of social actors ranging from individuals to joint ventures.<sup>18</sup> At the local level, they include village vendors, itinerant traders, middlemen, salesmen and large-scale merchants, mostly Chinese, who provide advance loans to farmers for investment in agricultural commercialisation. These merchants operate traditional ricemill and sawmill industries in regional city centres.

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<sup>15</sup> J.C. Ingram, 1971, *Economic Change in Thailand 1850-1970*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 229.

<sup>16</sup> Ingram revealed that the paddy-planted area increased from 20.1 million rai, between 1930 and 1934, to 34.6 million rai in 1950 and argued that:

The vast extension of rice cultivation was carried on almost entirely by the Thai themselves. The Chinese and other immigrants did not become rice growers in competition with the Thai. Furthermore, the land was brought under cultivation by individuals acting on their own initiatives, and not to any significant extent by government or private settlement programmes. As they saw the possibility of earning cash incomes by growing rice, individuals began to clear and plant new land. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Ingram might be partly correct in revealing the expansion of rice cultivation area and the people's enthusiasm to grow rice for cash income. However, after World War II, Thailand had to deliver "1,500,000 metric tons of rice free of charge as a sort of indemnity for her part in the war" according to the agreement signed between Great Britain, Thailand and India on 1 January 1946. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>17</sup> K.J. Hewison, 1989, *Bankers and Bureaucrats: Capital and the Role of the State in Thailand*, Monograph Series 34, New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, p. 93. See also Yang Jian, 1990, "A Historical Analysis of Thailand's Industrialisation", Paper presented at the Fourth International Conference on Thai Studies, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Kunming.

<sup>18</sup> Kraiyudht Dhiratayakinant, 1990, "Partnership in Development: An Exploratory Analysis of the Relative Role of the Public and Private Sectors in Economic Progress of Thailand", Paper presented at the Fourth International Conference on Thai Studies, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Kunming.

As state enterprises have been taken over by private ventures since the early 1960s, there has been an increase in the number of foreign and domestic business groups in Thailand. However, it was not until the mid-1970s that investors of capital from Chiang Mai and Bangkok and their joint ventures began apace to open bank branches, shopping centres, hotels, restaurants and movie theatres all over Chiang Mai city.<sup>19</sup> Since the mid-1980s, as the government has promoted agro-industries, brokers from agri-business companies, some of whom resigned from government extension officer positions to join private companies, have increasingly approached farmers and encouraged them to become engaged in contract farming. These brokers claim that contract farming provides a secure market for farmers, something which middlemen are unable to do. They say that they manage cash cropping from the start to the final process of marketing. That is to say, after the company determines the type, size and colour of agricultural products, the brokers would arrange for farmers to produce the goods to the standards required by the company.

### **Actors in civil society**

Civil society is an ambiguous concept. The Gramscian notion of civil society refers to intermediate groups between the economic system and the state's apparatus of power. The relationship between the state and civil society is not always adversarial but changes over time and across space.<sup>20</sup> However, in present-day society, the civil society is inclined to be used to counterbalance the power of the state and economic system. The civil society is composed of both social and political systems such as schools, universities, the media, religious institutions, civic associations, trade unions, political parties and NGOs.<sup>21</sup> By and large, they are products of economic development and the influences of social and political reforms. However, the civil society is not a formula for reform. It is what the members of civil society think and do that makes reform possible or not.<sup>22</sup> The members of civil society in developing countries like Thailand include groups, such as peasants, wage workers, minorities, monks, journalists, writers and other concerned intellectuals and development practitioners, mostly from middle-class backgrounds, who wish to promote the rights and freedom of the marginal in their area of action and help redress their hardship.

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<sup>19</sup> Anchalee Singhanetra-Renard, 1982, "Northern Thai Mobility 1870-1977: A View from Within", PhD thesis (Geography), University of Hawaii, ch. 6.

<sup>20</sup> J. Keane, 1988, "Despotism and Democracy: The Origins and Development of the Distinction between Civil Society and the State 1750-1850", in J. Keane (ed), *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*, London: Verso, pp. 35-71.

<sup>21</sup> Friedmann, 1992, *Empowerment...*, pp. 26-31.

<sup>22</sup> J.L.S. Girling, 1993, pers. comm. (letter dated 20 December). See also Girling, 1987, *Capital and Power...*, pp. 43 and 95-97.

Gramsci argues that everybody is potentially an intellectual in the sense of having and using an intellect, but that not everyone is an intellectual by social function.<sup>23</sup> He divides intellectuals into two categories: traditional and organic. Traditional intellectuals, such as monks, teachers, civilian and military officers, as well as technicians whose social functions are related to the state and business, are unlikely to challenge the existing power. However, organic intellectuals, such as social activists and some charismatic individuals, are those who commit themselves to represent the “people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug” and to raise public awareness of social problems as well as to challenge the power of the state and business which causes, or fails to solve, the social problems.<sup>24</sup> The latter category of intellectuals includes the people-centred NGOs which, as an important part of civil society, attempt to make a more democratic society possible.

### **Rural transformation**

Hart and others provide a useful analytical framework of “agrarian transformation” to illustrate how small-scale peasants in Southeast Asian countries have shifted their occupation from wet-rice agriculture to non-farming activities. Most importantly, the agrarian transformation framework postulates the asymmetry of power relations between the state and peasants and the expropriation of productive resources, through ‘local power’, from rural areas.<sup>25</sup> However, some critics point out the framework’s shortcomings. For instance, Bowen, an anthropologist, argues that many authors view the state as a “monolithic” entity instead of identifying a particular circumstance and conflict between regions and ministries as a determinant influencing agrarian change.<sup>26</sup> In line with Bowen, Omvedt argues that the “agrarian transformation” framework, which is influenced by traditional Marxism, needs to be broadened to handle “the challenge of reality”.<sup>27</sup>

By rural transformation, I refer to the process in which social actors from different spheres of the state, economy and civil society interrelate to negotiate and struggle to control, as much as possible, the elements of rural production. These social

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<sup>23</sup> A. Gramsci, 1971, “The Intellectuals”, in Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith (eds and trans), *Selections from Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 5-23.

<sup>24</sup> E.W. Said, 1994, *Representations of the Intellectuals*, London: Vintage, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> G. Hart *et al.* (eds), 1989, *Agrarian Transformations: Local Processes and the State in Southeast Asia*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>26</sup> J.R. Bowen, 1991, “Book Reviews”, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 154-156.

<sup>27</sup> G. Omvedt, 1994, “Review Essay: Agrarian Transformation, Agrarian Struggles, and Marxist Analyses of the Peasantry”, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 26, No. 3, pp. 47-60.

interrelations subsequently result in socio-economic, cultural, political and ecological changes. There are sometimes conflicts and responses (in the form of negotiation, mediation and intervention) to the conflicts which cause changes, both positive and negative, in areas which are administratively separate from (albeit influenced by) a city municipal centre. This framework of rural transformation, I believe, does allow different perceptions of the actors involved in development to unfold. Then, a political space for discussion and negotiation between the actors can emerge and widen in the search for new common ground, or in conflict resolution. I use the term ‘pattern’ of change as I believe it is significant, as evidence shows, that small-scale peasants are able to shift their agricultural practices back and forth between subsistence and commercial production as long as they still own or have access to land resources. The term ‘stage’ of change would imply that farmers abandon farming entirely and irreversibly for other occupations.

### **The promotion of the private sector to replace state enterprise**

The economic crisis and internal political conflicts in the 1950s were some of the main reasons why the Phibun government was toppled in the 1957 coup led by General (later Field Marshall) Sarit Thanarat.<sup>28</sup> When Sarit came to power in October 1958, he sought to win public support by claiming that his government was different from the previous one because it would create a “modernised state” and “economic progress” through a “revolution” (*patiwat*). By “revolution,” he referred to the termination of the state enterprise model inherited from the political changes introduced by the People’s Party in 1932 and the restoration of the Thai people’s fundamental values. These values, Sarit claimed, lay upon the three ideals of nation, religion and king (*chat, satsana, phra maha kasat*).<sup>29</sup> Sarit set up and used the “Revolutionary Party” (*khana patiwat*) to issue a number of legal edicts in the form of “Revolutionary Party Proclamations” (*prakat khana patiwat*) to pursue his task. The Party became a crucial state apparatus to restore law and order during the absence of parliamentary democracy. Moreover, Sarit adopted the World Bank’s advice to promote private enterprise, especially through foreign investment, as the main means to create national economic growth. Although the Bank’s advice was based on Rostow’s anti-communist strategy, Sarit had little hesitation in adopting it for two main reasons. On the one hand, he received foreign aid and loans to stimulate the downturned national economy, and on the other hand, he

<sup>28</sup> The Thai economy during the 1950s was in a depressed condition. Thailand suffered growing trade deficits because the prices of the primary commodities for export (rice, teak, tin and rubber) in the world market stumbled. The state-led enterprises were unprofitable and growing at a slow pace because they were largely subject to rivalry between political factions. See details in Suehiro, 1989, *Capital Accumulation...*, pp, 137-152. A list of Thai governments since 1932 is at Appendix IV.

<sup>29</sup> Thak Chaloeontiarana, 1979, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, Bangkok: The Social Science Association of Thailand.

could destroy the economic base of his political rivals whose interests were engaged in the state-sponsored industries.<sup>30</sup>

Sarit's discourse on "revolution" opened up a new era of capitalist development in Thailand. It was marked by the objective of creating a middle class. Sarit believed that:

the revolutionary system is the best way to build up the nation, to stabilise society, to build a middle class that is greater in numbers than other classes.

My [r]evolutionary [s]ystem calls for building up of a strong middle class such as exists in small countries in Europe... I shall move towards this goal with determination and my utmost ability because I believe that to the extent we succeed in building up the middle class to the same extent will we succeed in building a new society for Thailand, a society that is happy. The national economic plan has this aim [brackets as in original].<sup>31</sup>

The economic plan, which was one of the Bank's recommendations, was soon underway. In 1959, Sarit reorganised the National Economic Council set up in 1950 into the National Economic Development Council to supervise the newly-established National Economic Development Board (NEDB – which became the National Economic and Social Development Board or NESDB in 1972) in drafting and carrying out a series of five-year plans.<sup>32</sup> Since then, Thailand's socio-economic development has been in accordance with the five-year plans which have brought together the policies and projects influencing rapid changes in rural Thailand.

### **Industrialisation and agricultural commercialisation**

In the 1960s, two economic development plans were implemented during the military regimes of Sarit and Thanom-Praphat respectively (See Appendix II). During the first phase of the First Plan (1961-1963), the Sarit government prohibited state enterprise from participating in business activities which directly competed with the private sector, and sought to provide infrastructure, such as water supply, electricity, transportation and communication facilities, to support private industries.<sup>33</sup> The government replaced the 1954 Investment Promotion Act with the 1960 Investment Promotion Act and established the Board of Investment (BoI). The 1960 Act was not attractive to foreign investors because the benefits offered by the government were considered too small (e.g. a two-year income tax holiday, the right to land ownership and some import duty

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<sup>30</sup> Suehiro, 1989, *Capital Accumulation...*, p. 180.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted from Hewison, 1989, *Bankers and Bureaucrats...*, p. 96.

<sup>32</sup> Suehiro, 1989, *Capital Accumulation...*, p. 179. The First National Economic Development Plan (1961-1966), will be referred to by its short title in the text as the "First Plan", and subsequent plans will be referred to as the "Second Plan", "Third Plan" and so on. The First Plan was in two phases covering the periods 1961 to 1963 and 1964 to 1966. Only the latter phase was published.

<sup>33</sup> Following the Revolutionary Party Proclamation No. 33 dated 5 December 1958. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

exemptions). As a result, the government revised the Act in 1962 to provide more benefits and privileges to investors and promised to expedite promotional assistance. The government offers included a five-year income tax holiday period, exemption from duty and tax on imported raw materials and capital goods, and wider ranges for profit repatriation.<sup>34</sup> Under the Import-Substitution Industrialisation (ISI) strategy, the government reconstructed the tariff system to protect infant manufactures and industries, especially those of foreign firms. However, while the government was offering privileges to private firms and industries, it was silencing the labour movement by issuing Proclamation No. 19 dated 30 October 1958 abolishing the Labour Act of 1956 and ruling out the fundamental rights of workers to protest and form labour unions.<sup>35</sup>

After Sarit died in 1963, the Thanom-Praphat regime carried on the second phase of the First Plan (1964-1966) with minimal change from the approach of the previous government. However, while giving priority to the promotion of private enterprises in urban areas, the First Plan (1961-1966) provided few details of development programmes in the countryside other than the expansion of infrastructure such as water supplies and roads for transporting crops to the market.<sup>36</sup> The Second Plan (1967-1971) sought to maintain the level of economic growth as the first priority. Its scope was broader than that of the First Plan. Besides the expansion of infrastructure facilities, the Plan sought to develop agricultural research into the modernisation of farming techniques in order to increase productivity, to initiate manpower and employment planning through education and training, and to promote regional and local development.<sup>37</sup>

The First and Second Plans produced mixed results and outcomes. The government did complete a number of development projects – especially large-scale infrastructure schemes. After the Chao Phraya Dam (Chai Nat province) was built in 1957, the Royal Irrigation Department (RID), established in 1914, finished building three dams, namely, the Phumibol (Tak province), Kaeng Krachan (Phetchaburi province) and Sirikit

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<sup>34</sup> K.J. Hewison, 1985, “The State and Capital Development in Thailand”, in R. Higgott and R. Robison (eds), *Southeast Asia: Essays in the Political Economy of Structural Change*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 279.

<sup>35</sup> Suehiro, 1989, *Capital Accumulation...*, p. 179.

<sup>36</sup> National Economic (and Social) Development Board (NEDB/NESDB), 1964, *The First National Economic Development Plan (1961-1966): Second Phase (1964-1966)*, Bangkok: NEDB, Office of the Prime Minister. See also Judd, 1988, *In Perspective...*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>37</sup> National Economic (and Social) Development Board (NEDB/NESDB), 1967, *The Second National Economic Development Plan (1967-1971)*, Bangkok: NEDB, Office of the Prime Minister.

(Uttaradit province) in 1964, 1966 and 1972 respectively.<sup>38</sup> The Highways Department, established in 1934, built approximately 12,000 km of new roads and upgraded or repaired about 23,000 km of national and provincial roads.<sup>39</sup> The Department of Agricultural Extension (DOAE), established in 1969, worked to improve livestock and inland fisheries and to control pest and crop disease. The government also opened regional universities such as Chiang Mai University (North), Khon Kaen University (Northeast), both in 1964, and Prince Songkhla (South) in 1967. Each of these universities set up a Faculty of Agriculture, with help from New Zealand, Australia, Canada and Israel, to expand the research services and to promote agricultural commercialisation in rural Thailand.<sup>40</sup>

However, many studies criticised the government's implementation of rural development in the 1960s. For instance, Demaine noted that the government's provision of large-scale infrastructure was often badly managed and poorly coordinated among departments and agencies and that the people's lands were taken with little compensation. He also claimed that much of the infrastructure facilities and services went to support 13 US military bases set up in Thailand during the Vietnam War.<sup>41</sup> Muscat and Thak argued that the government's chief priority (as between economic development and military mission to suppress "communist insurgency") was unclear and there were few concrete long-term guidelines for the changes in the Thai socio-economic structure provided by government.<sup>42</sup> Judd argued that as Thailand became more involved in the Vietnam War, the government tended to focus on security issues rather than rural development.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The Royal Irrigation Department (RID) was formerly called *krom khlo:ng* in Thai or the "Canal Department" in English during the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910). In 1914, King Rama VI (1910-1925) changed its name to be *krom totnam* or "Irrigation Department". Judd, 1988, *In Perspective...*, pp. 43 and 111.

In Chiang Mai, RID completed four dams namely Mae Faek (1928-1936), Mae Ping Kao (1937-1941), Mae Kuang (1948-1954) and Mae Taeng (1963-1972). Anchalee, 1982, "Northern Thai Mobility...", p. 176.

<sup>39</sup> Judd, 1988, *In Perspective...*, p. 124. See also P.J. Rimmer, 1971, *Transport in Thailand*, Department of Human Geography, RSPAS, ANU.

<sup>40</sup> Judd, 1988, *In Perspective...*, ch. 6. Ingram noted that, between the early 1950s to late 1960s, paddy rose from 35.1 to 42.2 million rai whereas other cash crops, such as maize, cassava, kenaf and jute, rose from 5 to 20.5 million rai as a result of irrigation development, seed improvement, chemical fertilizer and agricultural machines (e.g. small tractors and water pumps). Ingram, 1971, *Economic Change in Thailand...*, pp. 237, 239 and 263.

<sup>41</sup> H. Demaine, 1986, "Kanphatthana: Thai View of Development", in M. Hobart and R.H. Taylor (eds), *Context, Meaning and Power in Southeast Asia*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 98.

<sup>42</sup> R.J. Muscat, 1966, *Development Strategy in Thailand: A Study of Economic Growth*, London: Praeger, p. 282; and Thak, 1979, *Thailand...*, p. 230.

<sup>43</sup> Judd, 1988, *In Perspective...*, p. 48.

Academics also argued that the government's promotion of the industrial sector was done at the expense of the agricultural sector. They pointed out that the agricultural share in the GDP dropped from 37 per cent in 1961 to 29.8 per cent in 1971 while the industrial share rose from 19 per cent to 26.2 per cent during the same period.<sup>44</sup> The relative decline of the agricultural sector, which had absorbed four-fifths of the labour force, was accompanied by rising unemployment and migration of rural people to urban areas in search of work. While the Plans indicated that the industrial sector would provide plenty of new jobs, the actual outcome was disappointing. The BoI revealed that only 9,000 jobs were being created annually whereas there was a potential labour force of about 2.5 million. While the government promoted large-scale companies owned by foreign and domestic entrepreneurs to solve the unemployment problem, Suehiro argued that small domestic firms had employed more people than the big industries encouraged under the Plans.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the criticisms mentioned above, a positive outcome of the government's promotion of economic development during the 1960s was the expansion of the Thai urban middle classes. The number of executive and managerial administrators increased from 26,000 in 1960 to about one-quarter of a million in 1970. Technical professions expanded from 174,000 in 1960 to 284,000 in 1970.<sup>46</sup> About half a million of the urban population had become economically and socially middle and upper-middle class in the Thai social structure. Approximately 10 per cent of rural populations were no longer solely farmers and landlords as they extended their income-generating activities beyond their farm gates as vendors, traders and brokers between small-scale peasants and officials.<sup>47</sup> The regional universities provided an opportunity for students "from a small-town lower-middle class [who], in their generation, for the first time in Thai history gained access to higher education".<sup>48</sup>

### **Student and popular movements**

During the late 1960s, student movements, which had become politically significant in the Northern hemisphere, especially in France and the US, began to trigger political and

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<sup>44</sup> K.J. Hewison, 1987, "National Interests and Economic Downturn: Thailand", in R. Robison, K.J. Hewison and R. Higgott (eds), *Southeast Asia in the 1980s: The Politics of Economic Crisis*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, p. 53; and G. Abonyi and Bunyaraks Ninsananda, 1989, *Thailand: Development Planning in Turbulent Times*, Asia Papers No. 3, Toronto: University of Toronto-York University Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, p. 27.

<sup>45</sup> Suehiro, 1989, *Capital Accumulation...*, pp. 183-186.

<sup>46</sup> J.L.S. Girling, 1981, *Thailand: Society and Politics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 173.

<sup>47</sup> Werasit Sittitrai, 1988, "Rural Transformation in Northern Thailand", PhD thesis (Political Science), University of Hawaii, p. 281.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted from Pasuk Phongpaichit and C. Baker, 1995, *Thailand: Economy and Politics*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, p. 301.

social challenges to governments in general.<sup>49</sup> A similar course also emerged in Thailand when university students, influenced by Western-style education and democracy, began to challenge the Thanom-Praphat military regime. The first main challenge was made when the government promulgated the 1968 constitution and scheduled the national election for February 1969. In December 1968, students from 15 universities and colleges formed the Student Volunteers' Group for Observing the National Election (*klum naksuksa asasamak sangketkan lu'agtang*), the first openly political activity in nearly a decade. The Group urged the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT), initially formed in 1965, to take on a more political role in response to socio-economic problems. After Thirayuth Bunmi, an engineering student, became the NSCT Secretary General in 1972, the NSCT started its political movement by launching a ten-day campaign against Japanese goods flooding the Thai market. This target represented concerns that the government was selling out the Nation to foreign investors and local people were not benefiting. The campaign aroused Thai nationalism and identity and, more importantly, stirred up other student groups to extend their role and networking into the political arena (see also Chapter 3).

The Thanom-Praphat government found it difficult to handle a Western-style parliamentary system. Some MPs revealed evidence of corruption in large-scale projects undertaken by the Royal Irrigation and Highways departments. They voiced disapproval of military demands for an increase in arms spending and instead requested more funds to support development programmes in their constituencies. Moreover, they threatened not to approve the government budget bill. Unfamiliar with an open political system, Field Marshall Thanom complained: "Never, in my long political career, have MPs caused such trouble to government administration as in these recent times. Some of them even attacked me over my private affairs".<sup>50</sup> Eventually, he decided to scrap the 1968 constitution and dissolved the parliament in November 1971 by staging a coup against his own government.<sup>51</sup> Then, he set up the National Executive Council (NEC) to rule the country under a Thanom-Praphat *junta* which included Colonel Narong Kittikhachorn, Thanom's son and Field Marshall Praphat's son-in-law.

The autocratic performance of the NEC leaders alienated concerned university students, academics and politicians, who eventually played a leading role in bringing down the *junta*. For example, when the NEC leaders proposed placing the judiciary under the

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<sup>49</sup> See A. Touraine, 1971; *The May Movement: Revolt and Reform*, tran. by L.F.X. Mayhew, New York: Random House.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted from Pasuk and Baker, 1995, *Thailand...*, p. 300.

<sup>51</sup> At that time, I was a first-year student at the Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University and went to join the demonstration organised in front of the University Meeting Hall against the government discarding the constitution and dissolving the parliament.

control of the Minister of Justice, and thereby subverting the independent power of the judiciary by placing it under the administrative system, there was widespread resistance from legal professionals, academics, the media and students which forced the NEC to back down on its proposal.<sup>52</sup> Next, when in June 1973, the NEC leaders attempted to extend Thanom's military service beyond his 60-year retiring age in September 1973, some student leaders from Ramkhamhaeng University organised a protest.<sup>53</sup> As a result of the protest, nine students were expelled from the University by Dr Sak Phasukniran, the Rector at that time. In response, the NSCT organised a student protest against the dismissal of the students. Up to 50,000 people, mostly from the urban middle class, joined in the protest.<sup>54</sup> For fear of widening the social unrest, the government reinstated the nine students and accepted the resignation of the Rector following the protesters' demands.

As the discontent of the urban population towards the military government grew, a group of thirteen social activists pressed the government to promulgate a new constitution. Losing patience, the government arrested the activists on 6 October 1973. The detention prompted some 2,000 students, initially led by Seksan Prasoeikul, a Thammasat University student, to protest at *Lan Pho*, Thammasat University.<sup>55</sup> Later, the NSCT took charge of the demonstration which moved to the Pramain Ground in front of the University as the number of demonstrators increased. On 13 October, there were reportedly 400,000 protesters demanding the release of the thirteen social activists and condemning the military regime's handling of the country's affairs.<sup>56</sup> The protesters included students from high schools, technical colleges, and universities, and a large number of the urban middle class who faced economic problems, especially from the rice shortages occurring in that year.<sup>57</sup> The government agreed to release the social activists but wanted to suppress the demonstrators by force. Although the use of force was not approved by General Krit Sivara, the Army Commander-in-Chief at that time, groups of police and soldiers beyond his command opened fire against the protesters in front of the Royal Palace and on Ratchadamnoen Avenue. The killing, with the loss of many hundreds of lives, prompted the King to intervene by asking Thanom, Praphat and Narong to leave the country so as to calm the mass hostility.

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<sup>52</sup> Revolutionary Decree No. 299 was set up by the Thanom-Praphat *junta* to implement this proposal. See E. Bartak, 1993, "The Student Movement in Thailand 1970-1976", Working Paper No. 82, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, Melbourne, p. 8.

<sup>53</sup> The students picked up the scandal of illegal hunting by Army leaders in the Thung Yai Naresuan National Park to politically ridicule the extension of Thanom's military service. The scandal appeared in the press in May 1973.

<sup>54</sup> Bartak, 1993, "The Student Movement in Thailand...", p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12 and 13.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> Girling, 1981, *Thailand...*, p. 64.

However, the 1973 uprising was a significant event in Thai history because it not only brought down the military junta but also dismantled the unity of the military domination over Thai society.

The mid-1970s was a period of open political system in Thailand. Morell and Chai-anan recorded that there were 501 workers' strikes in 1973 and 323 student demonstrations from November 1973 to September 1974 in every region of Thailand, excluding Bangkok.<sup>58</sup> Pressure from concerned intellectuals, the media and the public influenced the government to reform representative institutions. One of the political reform bodies was *Khana kammakan patirup kanmu'ang nai rabo:p ratthasapha* (Committee for the Political Reform in a Parliamentary System) led by Dr Chai-anan Samudhavanija, a scholar from the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) at that time. However, attempts to pursue the political reform or *patirup kanmu'ang* during this period was not successful due to the rejection of those who were in power and political "polarisation" between the 'right' and the 'left' factions.<sup>59</sup>

During the political campaign for the 1975 general election, student activists voiced the grievances of disadvantaged peasants, especially those who lived and farmed in lowland areas of the Central Plain and Northern regions. Many peasants were losing their land in the process of agricultural commercialisation because they had to pay increasingly high rents on land and buffalo and often ended up losing their land due to debt foreclosure. Having seen the people's problems, the students helped the peasants set up the Peasants' Federation of Thailand (PFT), a people's organisation, in 1974. After encountering opposition from some local elite groups (*klum itthiphon*) and local government officials, the students and peasant movement adopted more radical political approaches to tackle the socio-economic problems being faced by the underprivileged. As a result, the movement was quickly attacked by right-wing forces of opposition such as "Red Gaur" (*krathing daeng*), "Village Scout" (*luku'a chaoban*) and *Nawaphon* and, later, was further weakened by conflicts within the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) which led to its demise (see further details in Chapter 3).

### **Recognition of social consequences**

As social problems increased in many Third World countries, including Thailand, international agencies recognised the failure of the growth theory and formulated a new strategy to tackle the problem. In 1969, the International Labor Organisation (ILO)

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<sup>58</sup> D. Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija, 1981, *Political Conflict in Thailand: Reform, Reaction, Revolution*, Cambridge Mass.: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, Publishers, pp. 158, 160 and 188.

<sup>59</sup> Information obtained from the interview with Prof Chai-anan in 1983 when I worked as a research assistant for the Thai Study Project at Chulalongkorn University. See *ibid.*, ch. 5; and Girling, 1981, *Thailand...*, p. 196 and fn. 27. Chai-anan received his professorship at Chulalongkorn University.

urged development agencies to carry out economic development to meet the people's basic minimum needs. In 1973, Robert McNamara, the then World Bank's president, encouraged Third World governments to adopt Redistribution with Growth (RwG) as a development strategy. The Bank would give loans to developing countries whose proposals indicated that their development programmes met the Bank's requirements of distributing benefit and services to the rural populations. The recognition of social consequences by the international agencies, in turn, influenced the formulation of social and economic plans in developing countries.

In Thailand, the Third Plan (1972-1976) included proposals to address social problems which had emerged during the First and Second Plans. These included family planning and income-generating policies for rural areas. The Plan proposed the provision of agricultural credit for farmers and demarcated agricultural extension zones where cash crops and livestock would be most suitably produced. It also urged the private sector to take some responsibility to help solve social problems (such as unemployment, poor working conditions and moral decline).<sup>60</sup> These problems, as stated in the Plan, largely emerged from the rapid expansion of private sector industrialisation.

The Fourth Plan (1977-1981) recognised a number of crucial socio-economic and ecological problems which were emerging, for instance, the increasing number of landless peasants, the destruction of forest for agricultural purposes, and the conflicts over land use, especially in the Central Plain and the North. Moreover, it claimed that the problem of insurgency was stretching out across remote areas, especially the Northeast, where 52.5 per cent of the population were in "sensitive areas" compared to 9.4 per cent in Central Thailand.<sup>61</sup> In order to solve these problems, the Plan proposed to create more jobs in rural areas, to start new land settlement projects, to provide information on labour markets to farmers and to provide vocational training for youth. The Plan recommended, too, the rehabilitation of natural resources through management programmes and encouraged the private sector – in particular NGOs which operated social-welfare services – to help rural residents obtain their basic needs.

Although the period covering the Third and Fourth Plans was largely dominated by political and security issues, the economic problems which resulted from the decline of

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<sup>60</sup> National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), 1972, *The Third National Economic and Social Development Plan (1972-1976)*, Bangkok: NESDB, Office of the Prime Minister, pp. 26-27 and 200.

<sup>61</sup> National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), 1977, *The Fourth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1977-1981)*, Bangkok: NESDB, Office of the Prime Minister, pp. 150, 157-158. "Sensitive areas" were designated by the military and government as areas which could be potential targets for CPT activities. They were generally poor areas (sometimes but not always close to national borders) with significant economic problems for peasants.

US military spending after the Vietnam War and the rising price of crude oil in 1973-74 and 1979-80 prompted the government to seek advice and assistance from technocrats and business groups.<sup>62</sup> These economic crises gave a political space for domestic business classes not only to participate in national politics but also to influence development plans and policies in favour of their own interests.

### **The rise and expansion of domestic business groups**

At least two situations contributed to the rise of domestic business groups. First, after the 1973 October uprising, domestic business entities, such as those involved in manufacturing commodities, commercial banks and agro-industries, were reluctant to forge business links directly with the military élites due to the restrictions imposed by the civilian government and criticism from the press and the public. Thus, the business entities began to organise their own interest groups and political parties to enter national politics.<sup>63</sup> Secondly, the Thai economy between 1974 and 1979 faced two serious problems in the decline of US military aid and the increase in imported value of crude oil. The government invited technocrats from business backgrounds to help manage the national economy. Suehiro argues that Thailand would have faced a deficit of about 17.2 billion baht in 1976 if there had not been an export boom in agricultural products. The export boom helped the government to gain some 23 billion baht between 1972 and 1976. Thailand encountered the second round of crude oil price increases in 1979. At the same time, the agricultural exports from agri-business groups helped the government ride out the economic crisis.<sup>64</sup>

The success of agro-industry emerged from the cooperation between the “local exporters of agricultural products, leading local commercial banks, multinational enterprises, and the government”.<sup>65</sup> The younger generation of industry investigated new technology, improved management skills, and developed new products and markets. For instance, in 1978, the Charoen Phokkhaphan (CP) company arranged a joint-venture contract with Arbor Acres, a transnational Rockefeller agricultural company, which provided CP with technological know-how in livestock breeding as well as access to export markets. CP also received financial support from the Bangkok Bank (of the Sophonphanich family) as well as having access to the Bank’s marketing networks in Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia, Taiwan, the Middle East and the US.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> P.G. Warr, 1993, “The Thai Economy”, in P.G. Warr (ed), *The Thai Economy in Transition*, Hong Kong: Cambridge University Press, p. 31.

<sup>63</sup> Anek Laothamatas, 1988, “Business and Politics in Thailand: New Patterns of Influence”, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 28, No. 4, April, pp. 451-470.

<sup>64</sup> Suehiro, 1989, *Capital Accumulation...*, p. 267.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>66</sup> Hewison, 1989, *Bankers and Bureaucrats...*, p. 144.

In 1979, 90 per cent of poultry exports from Thailand came from CP. Thus, the government began to promote agro-industries in the Fourth Plan, again in the Fifth Plan and would later promote them as a first priority in the Sixth Plan.<sup>67</sup>

Other domestic business groups, which had kept a low profile in the period of military patronage, began to play a greater role in the Thai political economy. In 1977, three leading business associations, namely the Thai Chamber of Commerce (TCC), the Association of Thai Industries (ATI) and the Thai Bankers' Association (TBA), formed a Joint Standing Committee on Commerce, Industry and Banking. To do this was to "develop an institutional linkage with the state" and channel their common interest into the policy-making process.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, the Committee successfully suggested to the Kriangsak government (1977-1980) that it set up a consultative entity through which they could have a regular dialogue with policy makers. In 1981, the Committee lobbied the Prem government (1980-1988) to set up the Joint Public-Private Consultative Committee (JPPCC) which included cabinet ministers, representatives from TCC, ATI and TBA. The JPPCC, therefore, became the main policy forum for the government and business to discuss economic development policies while the NESDB, the national planning board, acted as the Committee secretariat.<sup>69</sup> The government accepted the role of JPPCC because it had more potential than other groups in the society to boost economic growth which had stagnated from the late 1970s until the mid-1980s.<sup>70</sup>

The agri-business groups and their networks, such as the banks, industrial and commercial groups, aimed to gain raw materials, cheap labour, business locations and other resources in rural areas. Politicians from business backgrounds lobbied the government to pass legislation to demarcate zones for cash cropping. This would have resulted in the control of land and labour by the business classes through the parliamentary system. Although Ammar, a prominent agricultural economist, disagrees with giving control over land and labour resources to the business classes, he argues that "Thai agriculture is now at a crossroads".<sup>71</sup> Due to the problems of inadequate land policy and population-land ratio constraints, Thai "horticulture", he says, may need more capital and technologically intensive approaches. That is because: "No longer can

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<sup>67</sup> Suehiro, 1989, *Capital Accumulation...*, p. 268.

<sup>68</sup> A. MacIntyre, 1990, "Business-Government Relations in Industrialising East Asia: South Korea and Thailand", Australia-Asia Paper No. 53, The Centre for the Study of Australia-Asia Relations, Division of Asian and International Studies, Griffith University, Queensland, p. 30.

<sup>69</sup> R.J. Muscat, 1994, *The Fifth Tiger: A Study of Thai Development Policy*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, pp. 183-84.

<sup>70</sup> Anek Laothamatas, 1992, *Business Associations and the New Political Economy of Thailand: From Bureaucratic Polity to Liberal Corporatism*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), ch. 4.

<sup>71</sup> Ammar Siamwalla, 1993, "Agriculture", in Warr (ed), *The Thai Economy...*, p. 114.

the government be content to let the farmers grow any crop on whatever land, have middlemen transport it to Bangkok and then collect a toll only when it is exported".<sup>72</sup> It was a challenge for the government to design a legal and regulatory framework which would be able to manage conflicts of interest between business and small-scale peasants.

### **Export promotion**

In the mid-1980s, the World Bank urged the Thai government to implement Export-Oriented Industrialisation (EOI) and structural adjustment strategies to reform its economic structure and increase productivity for export.<sup>73</sup> It recommended in its 1984 Country Study that the Thai government should reform five major areas, namely, resource mobilisation, monetary policy, energy, industry and agriculture, to achieve economic stability at both domestic and international levels.<sup>74</sup> In support of the structural adjustment policy presented in the Fifth Plan (1982-1986), Thailand received two special Structural Adjustment Loans (SALs) from the World Bank, in 1982 and 1983 respectively. In its 1986 Report, the Bank noted that the trade deficit had increased to \$US 9.4 billion (equivalent to 5.3 per cent of GDP) between 1981 and 1985 and foreign debt had risen to \$US 14.9 billion (long-term debt \$US 11.7 billion and short-term debt \$US 3.2 billion, equivalent to 39 per cent of GDP) in 1985. Thus, it insisted that, in the Sixth Plan (1987-1991), the Thai government should give a firm commitment to bringing down the current deficit by cutting back government expenditure, increasing tax revenue by 15-16 per cent of GDP, improving public investment programmes and promoting export growth.<sup>75</sup> The Bank also suggested that, following structural adjustment policies, human development resources in the forms of health and education should be reduced since the first priority was to increase

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>73</sup> The World Bank realised that the Import-Substituted Industrialisation (ISI) strategy, which nursed infant industries in the 1960s, reached a "saturation point" especially in terms of consumer goods in domestic markets. Developing countries were ready to produce commodities for export. The Bank, therefore, emphasised Export-Oriented Industrialisation (EOI) and structural adjustment strategies to guide economic development in Third World countries. In order to earn more export value, the structural adjustment strategy recommends that developing countries put their economic houses in order. A range of measures include the control of inflation and trade deficits, the increase of national saving, the encouragement of the private sector to develop national economies of developing countries while cutting down the number of public servants and government-funded social services.

<sup>74</sup> World Bank, 1984, *Thailand: Managing Public Resources for Structural Adjustment*, The World Bank Country Study, Washington D.C.: The World Bank.

<sup>75</sup> World Bank, 1986, *Growth with Stability: A Challenge for the Sixth Plan Period*, A Country Economic Report No. 6036-TH, Vol. 1, Washington D.C.: The World Bank, p. 8.

investment for promoting export.<sup>76</sup> Some important points from the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Plans follow.

The Fifth Plan (1982-1986) proposed that the main development objective should be met through the adjustment of economic structures to cope with changing conditions in the world economy. It proposed that capital investment be moved from Bangkok to regional centres. It also stressed the need for “poverty alleviation” for the one-fourth of the rural population who lived in “absolute poverty”, especially in the Upper North and Northeast. The Plan proposed the setting up of a National Rural Development Committee (NRDC) as a coordinating body in which officials from four ministries participated to coordinate development activities and services in target areas covering 216 districts out of a total of some 5,000 districts in rural Thailand. The Plan also emphasised the need for cooperation between private sector and government agencies to alleviate poverty in rural areas.<sup>77</sup>

Although the Sixth Plan (1987-1991) recognised the failure of economic development to reach the marginal rural population in the past, it continued to stress the need for the private sector to improve production in order to increase Thailand’s competitiveness in the international market. It promoted both agricultural and industrial productions for export as the first priority, showing that the government incorporated the EOI strategy suggested by the World Bank in its development policies. However, the Plan did begin for the first time to recognise the need for multidimensional approaches to rural development problems and the need to involve various actors in the decision-making process. It, therefore, encouraged coordination between government agencies, people’s organisations and NGOs in responding to the actual conditions and the people in a particular area.<sup>78</sup>

Even though the government had attempted in the Fifth and Sixth Plans to address the problem of rural poverty from a social perspective, their main economic strategy was to promote export industries (including agro-industries). The more the government encouraged the private sector to take the initiative in creating economic growth while limiting its own role as an arbitrator, the more there was penetration by investors of capital into rural areas, inevitably resulting in competition and conflicts over productive resources between investors of capital and rural populations. This situation was once

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<sup>76</sup> World Bank, 1984, *Thailand: Managing Public Resources...*, p. 247.

<sup>77</sup> National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), 1982, *The Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1982-1986)*, Bangkok: NESDB, Office of the Prime Minister.

<sup>78</sup> National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), 1987, *The Sixth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1987-1991)*, Bangkok: NESDB, Office of the Prime Minister.

pointed out by Dr Pridi Phanomyong, a leader of the People's Party, who argued that: "To let private citizens do the economy by themselves, competition will occur and in the end those who possess wealth will overcome those who do not...".<sup>79</sup> To minimise the competition and conflicts, Pridi concluded, the state should intervene to direct and manage the national economy. However, the degree of state intervention, he added, would depend on a country's situations over time.<sup>80</sup>

While the Seventh Plan (1992-1996) continued to propose an economic growth strategy fuelled by the private sector, it also began to address various problems in rural areas and to find some measures to remedy the problems. The Plan proposed the ambitious aim "to promote Thailand to become the region's economic and financial centre".<sup>81</sup> It stressed the development of regional centres and encouraged industries and services to move to the regions by improving infrastructures throughout the country. It also pointed to crucial problems which it recommended the government should handle with care. These problems included: first, income disparities. The Plan pointed out that the income share of the richest 20 per cent of the population had increased from 49.3 per cent in 1975/1976 to 54.9 per cent by 1987/1988 while the income share of the poorest 20 per cent declined from 6.1 per cent to 4.5 per cent in the same period.<sup>82</sup> Secondly, there were regional disparities emerging as a primarily rural society transformed to a more urbanised one. The rural transformation, it said, would have social consequences such as the disruption of rural family unity, high urban crime rates, and so on. Thirdly, it recognised the destruction of natural resources, especially the national forest areas, which had declined from 109.5 million rai or 34 per cent of total land area in 1978 to less than 90 million rai or less than 28 per cent by 1989.<sup>83</sup> Hence, the Plan proposed measures to address social and environmental problems. For instance, it suggested strengthening the role of the local authorities in the management of pollution treatment systems and empowering them to collect a service charge according to "polluter-pays-principles".<sup>84</sup> It also suggested promoting a greater role for people's organisations and NGOs in formulating national resource management projects.<sup>85</sup> However, although the Plan recognised social and environmental problems resulting from economic

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<sup>79</sup> Quoted from Somsak Jeamteerasakul, 1993, "The Communist Movement in Thailand", PhD thesis (History), Department of Politics, Monash University, p. 91.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>81</sup> National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), 1992, *The Seventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (1982-1996)*, Bangkok: NESDB, Office of the Prime Minister, p. 6.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

development over the past three decades, it recommended the government play only a supporting role while strongly stressing the role of the private sector as the engine of national economic growth.

### **Factors stimulating export-led growth**

Besides the Plans, there were other important factors stimulating the export-led growth and the development of regional centres during the early 1980s and early 1990s.

First, the Prem government (1980-1988) experienced relative political stability. It survived two abortive coups staged by the “Young Turks” in 1981 and 1985 respectively. However, it received support from the “Democratic Soldiers” group who had been the architects of the counter-insurgency strategy. The group, led by General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, attempted to reform the rice trade and a state-owned fertiliser project and to develop irrigation resources and local infrastructure through the Green Isan Project (*khrongkan isan khieo*).<sup>86</sup>

Secondly, the Prem government decided to move towards the export-led industrialisation advocated by foreign creditors, politicians with business backgrounds, technocrats, bankers and potential exporters to boost economic growth. It devalued the baht by 14.7 per cent in November 1984 and the link with the US dollar was replaced with “an undisclosed ‘basket’ of currencies of major trading partners”.<sup>87</sup> By the end of 1987, it allowed the baht to “float downwards resulting in an effective devaluation of around 20 per cent”.<sup>88</sup> This made Thailand attractive for investors from Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong who were looking for low-cost production sites in Southeast Asian countries. They began to invest in Thailand in 1985 and this increased rapidly in 1988. Later, some of the investment was in joint ventures with domestic Thai companies.

Thirdly, as Thailand’s former ‘socialist’ neighbours, namely Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, changed their policies to adopt capitalist free market development approaches in the 1980s, the Chatchai government (1988-1991) allowed Thai domestic business groups to invest and trade with these countries according to his slogan of “changing the battlefield into a marketplace”. At the same time, the government launched a strategy to improve regional growth centres following the Fifth Plan. The government sought to develop the Northeast into an industrial centre, the North into a tourist centre, the South and the East into exporting centres, and the Central Plain and

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<sup>86</sup> Pasuk and Baker, 1995, *Thailand...*, ch. 10

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

Lower North into agricultural-export centres. The development strategy of the Chatchai government was designed to persuade foreign investors to invest in Thailand rather than in the former socialist countries. The government strategy involved over 100 projects of rural infrastructure in every region.<sup>89</sup>

The development of infrastructure and other facilities attracted investors of capital both in Thailand and from overseas. In 1988, the total investment in the Northeast was 11.86 hundred million baht. In 1989, the official estimate of the investment was about 5 thousand million baht.<sup>90</sup> The foreign investors were interested in not only investing in Thailand but also using it as a “springboard” to access the neighbouring Indochinese countries.<sup>91</sup> In developing infrastructures, Thailand received both foreign loans and aid from various countries, for instance, the UK offered a 4,000 million baht grant and a 7,000 million baht loan; Denmark proposed to assist an agricultural investment project worth 600 million baht; and Japan invested 40 million baht in steel wire production.<sup>92</sup> Thus, compared with the previous two decades, industrialisation and commercialisation in Thailand from the late 1980s widened in terms of volume of investment and scale of operation.

Fourthly, since the late 1980s, cheap labour seemed to be more readily available. As the proportion of GDP from the agricultural sector declined to 12 per cent in 1993, the contribution from industry, manufacturing and services increased by 38, 26 and 50 per cent respectively in the same period.<sup>93</sup> The marginal of the Thai rural population moved to the big cities in search of additional income from non-farming activities. The closure of forest frontiers by the government to remedy the problem of forest depletion also resulted in more rural migration into urban areas. Moreover, unskilled cheap labour came also in the form of migrants from the neighbouring former socialist countries to work on construction sites in the cities.<sup>94</sup>

Fifthly, the Chuan coalition government (1992-1995) offered special privileges to those business firms which located outside Bangkok. For instance, in April 1993, the BoI offered “additional import-duty exemptions and extended tax holidays to investors

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<sup>89</sup> See *Athit Weekly*, 1995 (2538), various issues.

<sup>90</sup> Yang Xiao-Hui, 1990, “On Thailand’s ‘Green Northeast Project’ ”, Paper presented at the Fourth International Conference on Thai Studies, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Kunming, p. 155.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>93</sup> Pasuk and Baker, 1995, *Thailand...*, p. 153.

<sup>94</sup> More than half a million migrants from Cambodia, Laos and Burma sought to work in Thailand. The Thai government decided to let them work in 39 provinces. Chitraporn Vanaspong, 1996, “Importing Problems?”, *Bangkok Post*, 21 July, p. 17.

willing to locate outside greater Bangkok and its surrounding provinces”.<sup>95</sup> The stimulation of export-led growth was, however, not without impact on the rural population, nor without resistance from rural people.

### **Social conflicts and movements**

Social conflicts unfolded in every region during the period of relatively open political system in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A report by the Interior Ministry recorded that 713 rallies arranged by people’s organisations occurred in 1994 – 204 protests were in the Northeast, 161 in the North, 151 in the South, 82 in the Central Plain and 115 in and around Bangkok.<sup>96</sup> The report also noted that there were 694 rallies in 1995 and argued that the number of protests was likely to increase unless the government devised and implemented effective approaches to tackle the socio-economic problems faced by the poor.<sup>97</sup> Due to the limited space here, I shall provide only a brief summary of several prominent protests arising during the period. The circumstances of the May 1992 political crisis are also presented to provide some background illustrating why there is a strong call for social and political reform among Thai intellectuals and NGOs.

Social movements in the form of collective protests were used by poor people to express grievance when their livelihoods were threatened by the government’s promotion of economic growth without giving due attention to the social consequences. The protests were centred around conflicts over resource use and allocation. Nevertheless, the conflicts involved different actors and organisations and derived from a multiplicity of causes in different situations. The key issues were largely concerned with poor people’s access to resources (such as land and forest), their working conditions and housing. The agents depriving villagers of resources were the military, government officials or businesses. The methods of protest chosen varied from confrontation to political lobbying.

The conflict between villagers living in Thaplan National Park and the Second Army Region had complex causes originating from the plan to relocate the villagers to make way for a “reafforestation” programme.<sup>98</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s, the military had

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<sup>95</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review* (hereafter *FEER*), 14 April 1994, p. 23; *Bangkok Post*, 27 May 1996.

<sup>96</sup> The Report was cited in the *Bangkok Post*, 21 April 1996.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Due to the long-standing encroachment in the national forest by illegal logging, farming, and the government’s construction of infrastructure (such as large-scale dams and roads), the forest area was reduced from 109.5 million rai or 34 per cent of total land area in 1978 to 90 million rai or less than 28 per cent of the total land area in 1989 (The Seventh Plan, 1992, p. 3). As a result, the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) initiated a long-term programme to maintain 40 per cent of the total area in Thailand under forest. One of the RFD’s activities was to expand eucalyptus plantations by planting a fast-growing species like *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*. P. Hirsch and L.

allegedly encouraged landless peasants to encroach on and farm in the forest as a way of keeping the ‘communist insurgency’ at bay. However, after the decline of the communist movement, the government decided to address the problems of forest depletion. The people were subsequently pushed out of the forest to permit the expansion of a eucalyptus plantation by the Royal Forestry Department (RFD). A group of Dong Yai villagers (Pakham district, Buri Ram province) resisted eviction by burning down some parts of the plantation and the eucalyptus nursery in 1989 and 1990.<sup>99</sup> The military’s Land Resettlement Project, initiated in 1990 by the Second Army Region, local MPs and provincial governors from 17 provinces in the Northeast, helped relocate the villagers out of the forest. The military officers involved in the Project allegedly facilitated the issue of concessions to some logging companies to cut down about 6,500 trees.<sup>100</sup> When the villagers were reluctant to move, the military adopted forced relocation. It began to forcibly relocate No:ng Yai villagers onto the cassava plantations of Satakhian villagers (of Soengsang district, Korat province) who protested strongly. The Dong Yai villagers, led by *Phra* Prachak, came to urge the No:ng Yai villagers not to move off their land, thereby resisting the military’s relocation. The Dong Yai villagers then clashed with a group of military. We can see that this conflict involved the people from three villages, the RFD, and the military from the Second Army Region, and, on a number of issues ranging from the extension of a eucalyptus plantation, alleged illegal logging and the use of violent approaches to village relocation. Wherever the military’s Land Resettlement Project was conducted in the Northeast, it provoked villagers’ protests similar to the above example (a similar relocation plan was adopted by the military in Village 3; see Chapter 6).<sup>101</sup>

The mass demonstration led by the Forum of the Poor is another good example. In 1996, between 5,000 and 12,000 protesters from various provinces (such as Si Sa Ket, Nong Khai, Udon Thani, Khon Kaen, Yasothon, Roi Et, Ubon Ratchathani and Surin) rallied for several days in front of the Parliament House, Bangkok, to put pressure on the government to tackle their problems which they claimed arose from different kinds of government ‘development’ projects. Factory workers from Samut Sakhon, Nakhon

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Lohmann, 1989, “Contemporary Politics of Environment in Thailand”, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 24, No. 4, April. *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, known as “River Red Gum”, is a native of inland Australia.

<sup>99</sup> *Khao phiset*, 22-28 April 1991 (2534), pp. 26-27.

<sup>100</sup> *Khao phiset*, 16-22 September 1991 (2534), pp. 28-30. The military’s Land Resettlement Project was known in Thai as *Khronkkan jat thi thamkin hai kap ratsado:n phu yakrai nai phu’nthi pa sa-nguan su’amsom* or shortened as “khor jor kor”. See also Local Development Institute (LDI), 1992 (2535), *Pa, thidin lae khor jor kor: thang o:k thi pen tham* [Forest, Land and Khor Jor Kor: A Fair Way Out?], [in Thai], Bangkok: LDI; and *The Nation*, 17 September 1991.

<sup>101</sup> Due to the protests by villagers, students, the media and NGOs, the military’s Land Resettlement Project was terminated on 3 July 1992 following the cabinet’s decision dated 23 June 1992. *Athit Weekly*, 28 January-3 February 1994 (2537), pp. 25-27.

Prathom and Samut Prakan provinces came to join the protest. The protesters made a number of demands which included calling on the government to settle land disputes with the state authorities; to provide “fair compensation” for villagers affected by dam constructions and the expansion of eucalyptus plantations; to improve conditions for workers; and to provide housing for slum dwellers.<sup>102</sup> Due to the different nature of the demands, the protesters divided themselves into four groups to negotiate with four ministers (Science, Technology and Environment; Public Health; Interior; and Agriculture and Cooperatives). Owing to the range of complex issues to be negotiated in each group, the results were far from satisfactory for the parties concerned.<sup>103</sup>

Unlike the conflicts in the countryside, the 1992 May crisis had a clear-cut unified purpose; that is, to oppose the military’s interference in politics. The interference started when a group of military under the banner of a National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC) staged a coup to oust the Chatchai government in February 1991. The NPKC, led by Generals Sunthorn Khongsomphon and Suchinda Kraprayun, appointed a Constitution Drafting Committee to write the 1991 Constitution. This constitution stipulated that the Prime Minister need not be an elected MP, but could be designated by the Senate. It also gave the NPKC power to appoint 270 out of 360 Senators (most of the appointees were military officers).<sup>104</sup> After forming a coalition government, the pro-NPKC political parties moved to support Suchinda for Prime Minister although he had not stood for an election (see related issue in Chapter 5). The appointment of Suchinda prompted, in the first place, a hunger strike by Second Lieutenant Chalath Vorachath, a former MP, followed by peaceful rally (from 4 to 10 May) organised by the Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD), Student Federation of Thailand (SFT) and several NGOs. The protesters demanded constitutional amendment.

As Suchinda did not keep the promise to amend the 1991 constitution, the number of protesters grew to some 200,000 and spread to regional cities such as Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, Surat Thani and Songkhla. At this point, the demonstrators called for his resignation and demanded constitutional amendment. Sungsidh and Pasuk note of the demonstrations that: “The typical member of the ‘mob’ was a well-off, well-educated, white-collar worker”.<sup>105</sup> Although the military government adopted violent means to

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<sup>102</sup> *Bangkok Post*, 21 April 1996 and 11 August 1996.

<sup>103</sup> *Bangkok Post*, 21 April 1996.

<sup>104</sup> International Fact-Finding Mission, 1992, “Crisis in Democracy”, Report of an International Fact-Finding Mission to Thailand on the Events of 17th-20th May in Bangkok, written by a network of regional NGOs based in Hong Kong, p. 6.

<sup>105</sup> Sungsidh Piriyaarangsarn and Pasuk Phongpaichit, 1993, “Introduction: The Middle Class and Democracy in Thailand”, in Sungsidh Piriyaarangsarn and Pasuk Phongpaichit (eds), *Chonchanklang bon krasae prachathippatai thai* [The Middle Class and Thai Democratisation], [in Thai], Bangkok: The Political Economy Centre, Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, p. 28.

suppress the mass movement, it could not stop the flow of information and communication channels (in particular mobile phones and Internet) between protesters and their supporters around the globe. The media attention world-wide was one of the important factors putting pressure on the military to step down and let the tide of ‘liberal democracy’ continue to flow.

### **Social and political reform**

Many studies recognise that social conflicts are legacies of past rapid but uneven development. Girling, for example, correlates the outcomes of past development as “twin peaks” and “disturbing shadows”.<sup>106</sup> The “twin peaks” refer to the achievement of economic growth, the growth of civil society and democratisation whereas “disturbing shadows” are cast by the social costs of rapid industrialisation, conflicts over resources and centralisation of power. The “money politics”, by which Girling refers to the activities of “trading power for wealth, and wealth for power”, is one of several factors causing the weakness of the system.<sup>107</sup> The “money politics” involves a range of conduct from political candidates buying votes to enter the parliamentary system to self-serving bureaucrats and cabinet ministers who abuse public resources for private gain. Concerned Thai scholars, such as Prof Prawase Wasi and Prof Chai-anan Samudhavanija, feared that without social and political reform, the present system might collapse if it were unable to fulfil the demands of the majority poor to tackle complicated socio-economic problems affecting them.

The attempts of Thai intellectuals, development planners and practitioners – in particular NGOs – to stimulate social and political reform to handle social conflicts are seen in, at least, three main areas. First, the Eighth Plan (1997-2002) emphasises “human development” as the main objective of national development while promoting economic growth as the first priority in regional areas. It aims to promote manpower in science and technology by increasing the budget for research and development. It also aims to strengthen the role of family and community. The National Institution for Children and Family Development initiated by Mahidol University will help the Department of Community Development in the Ministry of Interior to recruit and develop personnel experienced in family and childhood development. The National Rural Development and Decentralisation Committee (NRDDC) will receive special approval from the government to monitor the efficiency of the rural development administration. The Plan seeks the cooperation of the private sector, people’s organisations and NGOs to remedy rural poverty and to encourage resource protection

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<sup>106</sup> J.L.S. Girling, 1996, *Interpreting Development: Capitalism, Democracy, and the Middle Class in Thailand*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 77-91.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-40.

and environmental management.<sup>108</sup> Although the Eighth Plan seems to deploy an outlook of human-centred development, its aims may not be fully achieved as the personnel and mechanisms to implement and monitor the Plan are still inadequate.

Secondly, between 1992 and 1994, Thai academics and NGOs called for “decentralisation” of power and local level political reform to provide a political space for local people to participate in resource protection and management and to tackle the problems of conflict over resources in rural Thailand. However, the “power play” in the Chuan coalition government (1992-1995) and in the Ministry of Interior was apparent in the debate over two possible approaches to decentralisation. One was the election of the provincial governors: the other was the legal establishment of *tambon* (sub-district) councils.<sup>109</sup>

The proposal for direct election of provincial governors was subject to greater opposition than that for the establishment of *tambon* councils. The government decided to support the less controversial latter proposal.<sup>110</sup> In November 1994, it passed a bill to raise the legal status of *tambon* councils to that of a legal entity able to levy and collect taxes, to enter into commercial contracts and receive funds from the central government.<sup>111</sup> A *tambon* council which was able to collect local revenue of 150,000 baht in three consecutive years would be given the status of *Tambon*

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<sup>108</sup> National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), 1997, *The Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001)*, Draft Version, Bangkok: NESDB, Office of the Prime Minister.

<sup>109</sup> The *tambon* council (or *sapha tambon*) is an administrative unit of local government. It is chaired by *kamnan* or sub-district head (elected by local people) and comprises *phuyaiaban* or village heads from each village in the sub-district, a sub-district doctor, a primary school teacher and an ex-officio member. A secretary of the *tambon* council is appointed from among government officials working in the sub-district. The *tambon* council is concerned with local-level development programmes.

Before the *Tambon Council and Tambon Administrative Organisation Act of B.E. 2537 (1994)* was enacted, a *tambon* council was not legally recognised administrative body. Under the new law, the council has authority to make independent financial decisions. See Medhi Krongkaew, 1995, “The Political Economy of Decentralisation in Thailand”, *Southeast Asian Affairs*, Singapore: ISEAS, pp. 343-361.

When working as a school teacher in Korat province in 1975, I was appointed as the secretary of a *tambon* council.

<sup>110</sup> The Chuan coalition government was split into two factions over the debate on direct election of provincial governors. Palangdham and Solidarity parties campaigned for the direct election of provincial governors whereas Democrat and New Aspiration parties wanted to move cautiously as Chuan Leekphai, the Prime Minister at that time, argued: “The Interior Ministry must be given time to work on this, since the distribution of administrative power to the provinces does not involve only the election of governors”. Chuan’s argument, albeit rational, inevitably supported a group of conservative top-rank bureaucrats in the Ministry of Interior who strongly opposed the decentralisation of power. However, Anand Panyarachun, former Prime Minister, had a different view when he remarked that: “Some people have suggested in the provinces that those provinces which are ready to hold such elections should go ahead and do it, while those not yet prepared to stage them should be allowed to wait”. *Bangkok Post*, 30 January 1994.

<sup>111</sup> Medhi, 1995, “The Political Economy...”, p. 350.

Administration Organisation (TAO) which allowed the separation of legislative and administrative functions, thus creating a form of local self-government. However, some critics, including NGOs, argue that the legislation still gives limited decision-making power to local people as provincial and district authorities retain control over the *tambon* councils and TAOs through the Ministry of Interior's hierarchy and have the right to dissolve the bodies under specified circumstances.<sup>112</sup>

Finally, since June 1995, a group of Thai intellectuals have organised themselves under the banner of the Democracy Development Committee (DDC), led by Prof Prawase and called for the full commitment of the public to push for political reform. The DDC's aim is to create a law-based society. More concretely, it tries to prevent rampant vote-buying politicians from entering the parliamentary system and to scrutinise executive administrators at all levels to preclude corruption.<sup>113</sup> The political reform began with amendment of Article 211 in the 1991 Constitution ensuring that a special committee to draft a new constitution would be legally established.<sup>114</sup> Trying to win support from urban middle classes, the unstable Banhan government (1995-1996) had to accept the DDC's proposal for the political reform. After many months of debate about who and how many would be on the new drafting committee, the amendment bill was eventually passed with overwhelming support from both the House of Representatives and the Senate on 14 September 1996.<sup>115</sup>

The amendment bill allows the establishment of the Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA). The assembly, composed of 99 members, is made up of two groups. The first includes 76 representatives elected by the parliament from each province; the second 23 academics appointed by the parliament.<sup>116</sup> The drafting of the charter will cover: guaranteeing and promoting individual freedom and fundamental rights; more even distribution of wealth and power; amending legislation to allow better governance; increasing public participation in politics at all levels and encouraging civic duties.<sup>117</sup> The charter is expected to be finalised in August 1997.

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 349-350; and P. Hirsch, 1994, "The Thai Countryside in the 1990s", *Southeast Asian Affairs*, Singapore: ISEAS, p. 326.

<sup>113</sup> *Bangkok Post*, 15 June 1995 and 3 October 1995.

<sup>114</sup> *Bangkok Post*, 6 August 1995.

<sup>115</sup> *Bangkok Post*, 15 September 1996 and various issues about the debate whether or not the new drafting committee should include politicians especially *Bangkok Post*, 6 August 1995 and 30 June 1996.

<sup>116</sup> *Bangkok Post*, 9 July 1996. Among 23 academics, eight experts are in political science and public administration, eight in public law and the rest have political experience in some ways, for instance, in government administration and in drafting constitutions in the past.

<sup>117</sup> *Bangkok Post*, 28 January 1997.

The constitutional amendments are only part of the political reform. Dr Kaosan Atipho, a law lecturer from Thammasat University says that the political reform does not aim to achieve “clean politics” but to encourage ordinary people to be aware of their own rights to development.<sup>118</sup> Jamie Retell, an observer of Thai politics, argues that the political reform does not end only at “a few simple constitution amendments” but that there must also be “an increase in the average level of education in the less developed areas of the country and a fundamental redistribution of wealth to such places”.<sup>119</sup> This task requires a great deal of ‘political will’ from the government to make it happen – or otherwise the reform would fail to tackle social conflicts resulting from rapid socio-economic and political changes in a peaceful way.

## Regional transformation

### Upper Northern region

Following topographies and popular cultures, the Northern region is composed of two parts: the Upper North and Lower North.<sup>120</sup> The Upper Northern region is mountainous. About 5.2 million rai or 8 per cent of the total area is lowland; 18.9 million rai or 29.6 per cent is upland; 39.8 million rai or 62.4 per cent is highland. The population includes hilltribes (Karen, Hmong, Lisu and others), and the Northern Thais or *khonmu'ang* who speak *Khammu'ang* or “Northern Thai dialect” and have their own culture distinct from the Thais in other regions. The Lower North is about 13.5 million rai or 32.1 per cent lowland; 13 million rai or 30.9 per cent upland; and 15.6 million rai or 37 per cent highland.<sup>121</sup> The people in the Lower North have a language in which dialects are mixed between Northern and Central Thai.

In the late 1960s, the Thai government initiated regional development plans assisted by a number of foreign experts. The initiatives began in the Northeast in 1968, the North

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<sup>118</sup> *Bangkok Post*, 30 June 1996.

<sup>119</sup> J. Retell, 1995, “Political Reform Entails More Than Constitutional Amendments”, *Bangkok Post*, 20 August, p. 22.

<sup>120</sup> The Upper Northern region includes nine provinces namely Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, Lamphun, Lampang, Phayao, Nan, Phrae and Tak and covers an area of 63.9 million rai or 60.3 per cent of the whole Northern region. The Lower Northern region is composed of eight provinces namely Khamphaeng Phet, Nakhon Sawan, Phichit, Phitsanulok, Phetchabun, Sukhothai, Uttaradit, and Uthai Thani.

<sup>121</sup> Northern Development Centre, NESDB, 1992 (2535), “Okat lae naeothang kan phatthana phaknu'a nai raya kho:ng phaen phatthana chabap thi jet por sor 2535-2539” [Opportunity and Direction of Development in the Northern Region during the Seventh Plan, B.E. 2535-2539 (1992-1996)], [in Thai], Chiang Mai, p. 1.

in 1970 and the South in 1973.<sup>122</sup> With assistance from the Israeli government, the Northern Development Centre produced the 1973 Northern Regional Plan which proposed to promote agro-industries, urban growth centres, industrial estates and tourist industries in line with the national development plans. To develop agricultural commodities for export, the 1973 Plan sought to extend intensive multiple croppings and adopt more advanced farming technology in lowland areas.<sup>123</sup> The 1973 Plan also suggested setting up industrial estates. This was followed by the 1989 and 1992 Northern Regional Plans which proposed industrial estates for a number of provinces such as Chiang Rai (clothing, jewellery), Lampang (pottery, agricultural machinery) Nakhon Sawan, Phitsanulok and Phrae (agro-industries).<sup>124</sup>

The proposal to set up regional growth centres appeared in the Fourth and Fifth Plans but implementation only began from the Fifth Plan onwards. The Plans nominated Chiang Mai and Phitsanulok (Fourth Plan), Nakhon Sawan (Fifth Plan), Chiang Rai and Lampang (Sixth Plan) as regional growth centres.<sup>125</sup> The Plans specified the provision of better infrastructure to attract new industries into the regions. However, following the Seventh Plan, the 1992 Northern Regional Plan proposed to develop urban together with rural areas in order to maintain the “stability” of economic growth. That was because, in the past, the growth of urban areas had been promoted at the expense of the rural sector. Chiang Mai province is well-documented in terms of both agrarian transformation and rural-urban interrelations.

### Chiang Mai province

Chiang Mai province is situated in the Chiang Mai-Lamphun valley (sometimes called the *Maenam Ping* valley) and shares a common boundary with Burma to the north, Mae Hong Son to the west, Tak and Lamphun to the south, Lampang and Chiang Rai to the east.<sup>126</sup> Chiang Mai has a 12,566,910 rai or 20,107 sq km area which was divided into

<sup>122</sup> Judd, 1988, *In Perspective...*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>123</sup> Northern Development Centre, NESDB, 1973 (2516), “Rai-ngan kan wangphaen phatthana phaknu’a” [Report of Development Planning in the Northern Region], [in Thai], Chiang Mai, pp. 4, 8, 11, 31, 32, 35, 105 and 189.

<sup>124</sup> Northern Development Centre, NESDB, 1992 (2535), “Okat lae naeothang...”; and Northern Development Centre, NESDB, 1989 (2532), “Pradenlak lae okat kan phatthana phaknu’a” [Main Points and Opportunity for Development in the Northern Region], [in Thai], Chiang Mai.

<sup>125</sup> Since 1996, NESDB planners have changed their idea from developing each important province as a regional growth centre to promoting a group of provinces (*klum jangwat*) in each region. The Northern group of provinces includes Lamphun, Chiang Mai, Lampang and Mae Hong Son. See National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), 1996 (2539), “Phaen yutthasat kan longthun klum jangwat” [Strategic Plan for the Investment in Provincial Groups], [in Thai], Draft, NESDB, Bangkok.

<sup>126</sup> Chiang Mai has a long history as the centre of the Northern region. It was the capital city of the Lanna Thai kingdom long before Bangkok was established as the centre of administration of the Siamese kingdom. Chiang Mai became the administrative centre of *Monthon Phayap* or

19 districts, 192 sub-districts and 1,628 villages as of 1989.<sup>127</sup> The Muang district, where Chiang Mai city is located, is administratively called *thetsaban nakho:n* (municipal area) or “urban place”.<sup>128</sup> The city is surrounded by six satellite districts namely Mae Rim and San Sai to the north, Doi Saket and San Kamphaeng to the east, Saraphi and Hang Dong to the south (see Map 1.1). The population of Chiang Mai province was about 1.15 million in 1980 and 1.38 million in 1990.<sup>129</sup> In 1980, 8.8 per cent lived in urban areas whereas the other 91.2 per cent resided in rural areas.

There appear a number of interesting studies concerning socio-economic and political changes and impacts on the rural population at different times and places in Chiang Mai.<sup>130</sup> However, recent studies encourage new researchers and policy planners to extend their perspectives so as to understand complicated social relations in both rural and urban areas. For instance, Werasit uses a “rural transformation framework” to study changes in two villages of Saraphi district, Chiang Mai, because it helps him to understand different perspectives of different actors (such as government officials, villagers, traders and even the author himself) involved in the changes. The study, he believes, provides a socio-political space “...for other interpretations to be made and analysed” so that an explanation close to social reality could be obtained.<sup>131</sup> In line with Anchalee, Ritchie sees social mobility between Chiang Mai and the surrounding rural areas as a “rural-urban interpenetration” via the flow of commodities, luxury goods, agricultural commercialisation and labour.<sup>132</sup> Ritchie’s study shows that the

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“Northwestern region” under Bangkok’s supervision in 1796. Since 1900 when the region was fully incorporated under the Bangkok administration, Chiang Mai has maintained its importance as the centre of the Upper Northern region. See G. Wijeyewardene, 1985, “Great City on the Ping River: Some Anthropological and Historical Perspectives on Chiang Mai”, *Political Science Review*, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Academic Series No. 6, December 1984-May 1985, pp. 86-112.

<sup>127</sup> Office of Chiang Mai Province, 1989 (2532), “Banyai sarup jangwat chiang mai pi 2532” [Brief Description of Chiang Mai Province in the Year 1989], [in Thai], Provincial Office, Chiang Mai, p. 5/1.

<sup>128</sup> Anchalee, 1982, “Northern Thai Mobility...”, p. 50.

<sup>129</sup> Northern Development Centre, NESDB, 1992 (2535), “Okat lae naeothang...”, p. 9.

<sup>130</sup> For example, Anan Ganjanapan, 1984, “The Partial Commercialisation of Rice Production in Northern Thailand (1900-1981)”, PhD thesis (Anthropology), Graduate School, Cornell University; Anan Ganjanapan, 1989, “Conflicts over the Development and Control of Labour in a Northern Thai Village”, in G. Hart *et al.*, *Agrarian Transformation...*, pp. 98-122; A. Turton, 1989, “Thailand: Agrarian Bases of State Power”, in *ibid.*, pp. 53-69; A. Turton, 1989, “Local Powers and Rural Differentiation”, in *ibid.*, pp. 70-97; Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, 1984, “Cultural and Ideological Reproduction in Rural Northern Thai Society”, PhD thesis (Anthropology), The School of Education, Stanford University; and S. Tanabe, 1994, *Ecology and Practical Technology: Peasant Farming Systems in Thailand*, Bangkok: White Lotus.

<sup>131</sup> Werasit, 1988, “Rural Transformation...”, p. 443.

<sup>132</sup> Ritchie cites a 1988 survey by Bhansoon and Vasant to show that 51.85 per cent of workers in Chiang Mai came from surrounding areas and 42.77 per cent of the workers live within a 45-minute travel zone. M.A. Ritchie, 1996, “From Peasant Farmers to Construction Workers: The Breaking Down of the Boundaries Between Agrarian and Urban Life in Northern Thailand, 1974-1992”, PhD thesis, Department of Sociology, University of California at Berkeley, p. 113.

peasants of Ban Lek in Mae Rim district who live close to the city seek non-farm activities to enable them to sustain their farms. He encourages researchers and policy planners to widen the scope of study to include non-farm activities as part of village life because boundaries between rural and urban areas nowadays are hard to distinguish.<sup>133</sup>

Besides the increase in population, Sopon argues, following Sanay, that four factors have contributed to the physical expansion of Chiang Mai city especially since the 1960s.<sup>134</sup> They were, first, the stimulation of central government development plans and policies; secondly, the improvement in transportation, education and communications; thirdly, the investment by domestic and international companies; and fourthly, the availability of labour for the industrial and service sectors.<sup>135</sup> After the implementation of the First Plan, the pattern of expansion of Chiang Mai is seen in two periods.

The first period was in the 1970s and 1980s (see Map 2.1). The government developed infrastructure and expanded educational institutions to stimulate economic growth in the region. For instance, during the early and mid-1960s, the government developed the Chiang Mai-Fang road, improved interprovincial bus terminals, and established Chiang Mai University and Chiang Mai Teachers' College. The "growth points", namely, daily markets, bus terminals and educational institutions, encouraged investors of capital from Bangkok and elsewhere to open businesses (e.g. hotels, restaurants, banks and housings) in Chiang Mai. As the city expanded to the north and to the west, some Thai-Chinese land speculators and wealthy government officials sought to buy land in the line

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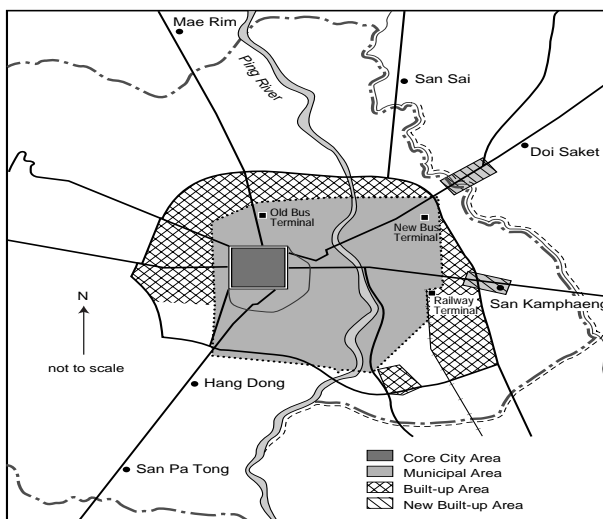
See also M.L. Bhansoon Ladawan and Vasant Siripool, 1987 (2530), *Phonkrathop kho:ng khrongkan phatthana mu'anglak thi mi to: phu'nthi doi ro:p: Ko:rani sukka mu'ang chiang mai* [The Impact of the Regional City Development Project upon Outlying Areas: A Case of Chiang Mai City], [in Thai], Research Report, Social Research Institute (SRI), Chiang Mai University.

In the case of Malaysia, Brookfield and others study the physical coexistence between the city and village which they describe as "the interpenetration of city and countryside" because neither is wholly rural nor wholly urban, but both coexisted. See H. Brookfield *et al.*, 1991, *The City in the Village: The In-Situ Urbanisation of Villages, Villagers and Their Land Around Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*, Singapore: Oxford University Press.

<sup>133</sup> Ritchie, 1996, "From Peasant Farmers...", p. 364.

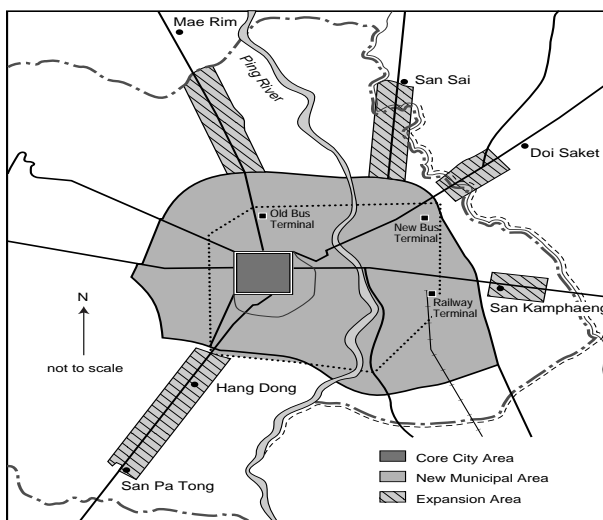
<sup>134</sup> Sopon notes that between 1970 and 1980, a 5.2 per cent of annual population growth rate in suburban areas was recorded by the Department of Local Administration (DOLA). Sopon Thangphet, 1993, "The Impact of Urbanisation on Local Resource Management: A Case Study of an Indigenous Irrigation Community in Northern Thailand", MA thesis (Urban Studies), Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Sydney, p. 46.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.



Map 2.1 Expansion of Chiang Mai City and Surrounds from 1970 - 1980.

Source: Sopon, 1993, p. 47.



Map 2.2 Expansion of Chiang Mai City and Surrounds from 1980 - 1993.

Source: Sopon, 1993, p.50.

of city expansion.<sup>136</sup> Due to the absence of effective government land-use planning and control over urbanisation, much fertile lowland was transformed into non-agricultural purposes, such as housing, or left idle awaiting some high-profit urban development project.<sup>137</sup>

The second period was between the 1980s and early 1990s (see Map 2.2) when several important factors influenced the rapid expansion of Chiang Mai. First, as the government began to promote Chiang Mai as a growth centre in the Upper Northern region in the early 1980s, concerned academics and development planners were afraid that Chiang Mai would become a “primate city” like Bangkok. They therefore proposed the development of surrounding districts as “satellite towns” to reduce the density of population and industrialisation.<sup>138</sup> In 1987, Dr Phairat Decharin, the late provincial governor, focused his work on the city’s expansion.<sup>139</sup> The main roads linking the city and surrounding districts were subsequently improved, providing easy access to transportation and communications. Secondly, between 1988 and 1993, the Thai economy recovered from recession, (caused partly by the increase in oil prices during the late 1970s and early 1980s), and experienced a high economic growth rate of about 10 per cent per annum.<sup>140</sup> Rapid economic growth obtained from agricultural exports, industrial and service sectors prompted investors both in Thailand and overseas to expand their investment in regional cities such as in Chiang Mai. As shown in Maps 2.1 and 2.2, two major corridors in the north (Mae Rim and San Sai districts) and the south (Hang Dong and San Pa Tong districts) expanded more than others because they have better physical environments, social services and infrastructure.<sup>141</sup>

Without effective government control over land use planning, land speculators, urban developers and investors bought well-irrigated agricultural lands and transformed them into housing projects, factories, tourist resorts and golf courses. They then put pressure on the government to improve infrastructure and other facilities. Many land transfers

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<sup>136</sup> Anchalee, 1982, “Northern Thai Mobility...”, p. 246.

<sup>137</sup> Sapon, 1993, “The Impact of Urbanisation...”, p. 46.

<sup>138</sup> Suri Bunyanuphong and Atsadang Porananon, 1986 (2529), “Naeothang kan phatthana phu’nthi mu’ang bo:riwan kho:ng mu’ang chiang mai” [Proposal for Developing Dormitory Towns of Chiang Mai], [in Thai], SRI, Chiang Mai University.

<sup>139</sup> Phairat Decharin, 1991 (2534), “Kan sang mu’ang mai kho:ng jangwat chiang mai: Hetphon lae kan damnoenkan” [The Expansion of Chiang Mai Province: Rationale and Working Process], *Anuso:n ngan phraratchathan phoengsop Dr Phairat-Associate Professor Suphap Decharin* [The Commemoration on the Occasion of the Funerals of Dr Phairat and Associate Professor Suphap Decharin], [in Thai], Bangkok: DOLA, pp. 90-104. Dr Phairat and his wife died in a plane accident on 26 May 1991 in Suphan Buri province.

<sup>140</sup> Pasuk and Baker, 1995, *Thailand...*, p. 152.

<sup>141</sup> Sapon, 1993, “The Impact of Urbanisation...”, p. 49.

involved local officials, such as sub-district heads and village headmen or ‘local powers’, acting as brokers between small-scale peasants and land buyers. The peasants sold their lands for various reasons, for instance, to pay off debts, or because of drought, or they were forced to sell their land because access to transportation was blocked when all the adjacent land was sold.<sup>142</sup> There was considerable competition and sometimes conflict over land and related resources impacting on my study areas in Mae Rim district, as will be explained below.

### **Mae Rim district**

Mae Rim district is about 16.5 km north of the centre of Chiang Mai city.<sup>143</sup> However, since the new Chiang Mai provincial office was moved to a location 8 km north on the Chiang Mai-Fang highway in 1982, the distance between Mae Rim district and Chiang Mai administrative centre has been reduced to only 8.5 km. Mae Rim district shares common boundaries with other districts, for instance, with Mae Taeng to the north, San Sai to the east, Muang and Hang Dong to the south and Samoeng to the west. Transportation between the city and the district is via the Chiang Mai-Fang highway. The road was built following an old caravan trade route from Chiang Mai to Burma in 1927 and upgraded as a highway in 1989.<sup>144</sup> Other main roads connect Mae Rim with Samoeng to the west and with San Sai to the east. A number of laterite feeder roads link Mae Rim and its sub-districts.

The location of Mae Rim is on the west bank of the Ping river at about 324 metres above sea level. Its area is about 495 sq km and it slopes from high lands in the north, west and southwest down to flood plains in the east and south. Its water resource includes three main streams, namely, Nam Mae Rim, Nam Mae Sa and Nam Mae Raem. It has two conservation forests which cover 226.5 sq km or 45 per cent of the district area.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Somkit Kaeothip, 1989 (2532), “Kan suksa choeng nayobai kho:ng phonkrathop jak kan khayaitua kho:ng chumchon mu’ang to: kan plianplaeng kho:ng saphap setthakit sangkhom lae kan jatkan sapphayakho:n kaset: Ko:rani suksa chumchon mae jo amphoe san sai jangwat chiang mai” [Policy Study on Impacts of Urbanisation on Changes in Socio-Economic Conditions and Agricultural Resource Management: A Case Study of Mae Jo Community, San Sai District, Chiang Mai Province], [in Thai], MA thesis (Agricultural Technology), Mae Jo Agricultural Technology College, Chiang Mai, p. 139.

<sup>143</sup> Office of Chiang Mai Province, 1986 (2529), *Prawat mahatthai suan phumiphak: jangwat chiang mai* [Regional History of the Ministry of Interior: Chiang Mai Province], [in Thai], Chiang Mai: Thipphanet kanphim, p. 95.

<sup>144</sup> Anchalee, 1982, “Northern Thai Mobility...”, pp. 144-152. Interview, INT-105-VIL, 24 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>145</sup> Suri Bunyanuphong, 1986 (2529), “Phaen kan chai thidin kho:ng amphoe mae rim jangwat chiang mai” [Land Use Planning in Mae Rim district, Chiang Mai Province], [in Thai], SRI, Chiang Mai University, pp. 14 and 19.

Mae Rim is composed of 11 sub-districts (*tambon*), 71 villages (*muban*), and 1 *sukhaphiban* (literally translated as “sanitary administration area” where infrastructure is well developed) which covers Rimtai and part of Mae Sa sub-districts.<sup>146</sup> In 1986, it had a population of 64,610. Of these, 95 per cent were Northern Thais or *khonmu’ang*, and 5 per cent were hilltribes such as Lua, Karen, Hmong, Yao and Lisu. About 80 per cent of the population were engaged in agriculture whereas the other 20 per cent were traders, public servants and wage workers. Approximately 90 per cent of the population were Buddhists; 9 per cent were Christians; and the rest were animist. There were 44 temples and 2 churches in the district.<sup>147</sup> Since the early 1980s, people from the cities, such as Bangkok and Chiang Mai, have purchased land and some have migrated to live in Mae Sa, Pongyaeng and Donkaeo sub-districts which are in the line of Chiang Mai city expansion.<sup>148</sup> At the same time, rural people began to earn off-farm income in the city to support their families in rural areas.

#### Interrelations between peasants, market and the city

The socio-economic history of Mae Rim district shows the interrelations between peasants, market and the city. For instance, in her research on Mae Sa village in Mae Sa sub-district, Anchalee found that in 1900 there were about 40-50 houses settled on the northern bank of Mae Sa river. Land was mainly used for growing glutinous rice and other items for household consumption such as soya bean (for making *thua nao khaep* or “fermented wafers of dried soya bean”<sup>149</sup>), vegetables, native tobacco and fruits. During the dry season, some women were engaged in weaving and making clothes while others made the daily trip to markets in Chiang Mai city to sell fruit, vegetables, betel nut, tobacco and forest products (mushrooms, bamboo shoots, herbs, honey and *miang* tea; see more details in Chapter 5). Most of these forest products were bought from Pongyang villagers who lived on the hills to the west of Mae Sa Village.<sup>150</sup> These village traders, mostly female, left the village daily about 2 a.m., reached the city markets at dawn and returned to the village in the late afternoon for lunch. Citing Freeman’s observation, Anchalee noted that Chiang Mai markets were almost all run by female village traders.<sup>151</sup> Some adult and juvenile males, however, went to work as seasonal wage workers in *miang* gardens on the hills, while others

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<sup>146</sup> Eleven sub-districts in Mae Rim are: Rimtai (including 5 villages), Rimnu’a (4 villages); Sanpong (8 villages); Khilek (7 villages); Huai Sai (5 villages); Mae Raem (10 villages); Pongyang (9 villages); Mae Sa (4 villages); Donkaeo (5 villages); Mu’angkaeo (6 villages); and Saluang (8 villages). Suri, 1986 (2529), “Phaen kan chai thidin...”, pp. 19 and 21.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21 and 24.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>149</sup> Anchalee, 1982, “Northern Thai Mobility...”, p. 141.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

joined caravan traders travelling from one Thai province to another or, sometimes, between Thailand and neighbouring countries such as Burma and Laos. Villagers viewed these off-farm activities as an opportunity for “adventure, fellowship, popularity, and prominence as well as profit”.<sup>152</sup> There were the interdependent relations between peasants, Chiang Mai city and markets, and the village traders who travelled between Thailand and neighbouring countries.

### Roads, cash crops and modernisation

The introduction of new transport infrastructure, technology and private agricultural investment encouraged socio-economic changes in Mae Rim district. After the Chiang Mai-Fang highway was built in 1927, Mr Sibō Wutthidet, locally known as *Jaono:i* Sibō, encouraged villagers to build a village feeder road from Saluang No:k village of Saluang sub-district, where his sawmill was located, to No:ng Waen village of Mae Taeng district, so that he could transport timber from his sawmill to outside markets.<sup>153</sup> Villagers agreed to build the road because they would be able to have access to transportation to hospitals, schools and markets in the city.<sup>154</sup> In the late 1930s a local investor set up a tobacco kiln at Saluang No:k village and urged villagers to switch over from growing native tobacco to producing Virginia-Richmond tobacco after completion of the rice harvest (see Chapter 5). Some villagers began to grow the new species of tobacco. Others began to cut and collect firewood (*tat lua*) to earn cash income from the tobacco kiln.<sup>155</sup> However, villagers rarely felled big trees even for building their houses for fear of being punished by *jaonai* (referring to officials) until the early 1960s, when the villagers saw that the *jaonai* allowed private entrepreneurs to log timber, especially teak, in the Saluang forest. They then began to cut timber to build their

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

<sup>153</sup> Interview, INT-105-VIL, 24 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai. Later on, *Jaono:i* Sibō pioneered a coconut plantation by using a tractor to work alongside elephants. Unfortunately, the plantation failed. The land had been left idle for the time being until a rich farmer from Lumphun bought the land, diverted it into small plots of rice field and sold them to villagers who were engaged in small-scale rice farming. The failure of the coconut plantation of *Jaono:i* Sibō provided an example of land transformation from subsistence to commercialised farming and *vice versa*. This failure did not mean that agricultural commercialisation came to an end.

Another example involving members of the royal family tried to experiment with ‘modern’ agriculture. In the early 1930s, *Jao* Dararassami, a consort of King Rama V (1868-1910), asked *Jao* Chu’n Sirorot to start experimenting with modern agricultural technique near her palace, “*Khum jao sabai*”, in Rintai sub-district (near the present-day District Office). *Jao* Chu’n bought a piece of lowland, about seven rai, in Haui Jo village, where he grew cabbages using a plough, a harrow and an animal to work in the field. These tools and techniques such as soil treatment were new to the Northern Thai farmers in those days. See Nongyao Kanjanajari, 1990 (2533), *Dararassami: Phra prawat phra ratchaya* [Dararassami: A Biography], [in Thai], Chiang Mai: Suriwong Book Centre, pp. 175-179.

<sup>154</sup> Interview, INT-105-VIL, 24 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai; Interview, INT-116-VIL, 27 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>155</sup> Interview, INT-103-VIL, 23 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

houses because they thought that they might miss out on using the valuable forest resource.<sup>156</sup>

As roads linked the city and villages, local shopkeepers brought consumer goods (such as imported cotton prints, soap, tinned sardines, canned milk and cigarettes) to sell in the villages. Many of these consumer goods were attractive to the villagers who sought the cash income to purchase them. Chinese merchants acted as middlemen and encouraged villagers to expand areas of cultivation by renting rice fields from neighbours to grow cash crops, especially fresh vegetables. Villagers in lowland areas of Mae Rim responded to the encouragement because they saw the possibility of profit from selling fresh vegetables. In December 1941 when the Phibun government allowed Japanese troops to pass through Thailand into Burma, a British colony at that time, some of the troops used the Chiang Mai-Fang route and needed fresh vegetable supplies from the villagers. The people of Mae Sa and other villages in Mae Rim began to grow fresh vegetables for sale.<sup>157</sup> By the late 1940s, some villagers along the Chiang Mai-Fang route began to shift from self-sufficiency in favour of involvement in the market-oriented economy. As roads linked the villages with city markets, schools and hospitals, they became one of the symbols of rural modernisation for some people. For others, they facilitated the transportation of natural resources (teak and other timbers) and labour from the villages to the cities.

#### Competition over lowland resources

Since the early 1960s, the value of land has increased as it has become an important asset for investment and profit making. Rental rates on low fertile land suitable for agricultural commercialisation have also increased (see Chapter 5). The price of lowland with good infrastructure and suitable for housing and industrial uses has grown markedly as capital investors and officials, who came from Bangkok to work in Chiang Mai in universities and government departments, sought to buy “land within commuting distance of the provincial centres a [sic] most desirable investment”.<sup>158</sup> In 1976 about 25 absentee landowners, including the provincial governor, bought land in Mae Sa sub-district.<sup>159</sup> Also at this time, Mae Sa villagers who lived close to the city began to pursue both on-farm and off-farm activities so that they could afford to make ends meet. The high land price was attractive to some peasants who sold their lands. However, many peasants did not really want to sell their lands but were forced by

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<sup>156</sup> Interview, INT-113-VIL, 27 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>157</sup> Anchalee, 1982, “Northern Thai Mobility...”, pp. 172-173.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243. This situation of land transaction also happened elsewhere. For an example in a Southern village, see McVey, 1984, “Changes and Consciousness...”, pp. 109-137.

difficult situations (e.g. the fluctuation of agricultural prices, the uncertainty of climate and the increase of household expenditure) to sell. Those who had difficulties selling their crops and subsequently could not pay back capital loans decided to sell their lands to pay off debt and to avoid foreclosure.

Also during the mid-1970s, well-to-do farmers became involved in fruit orchards promoted by agricultural extension officers. The farmers began to expand the area of cultivation into the forest on the western side of the district where the climate was cooler and more suitable for fruits, such as longan, lychee and mango, than the eastern plain (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Land use in Mae Rim District in 1969 and 1977.

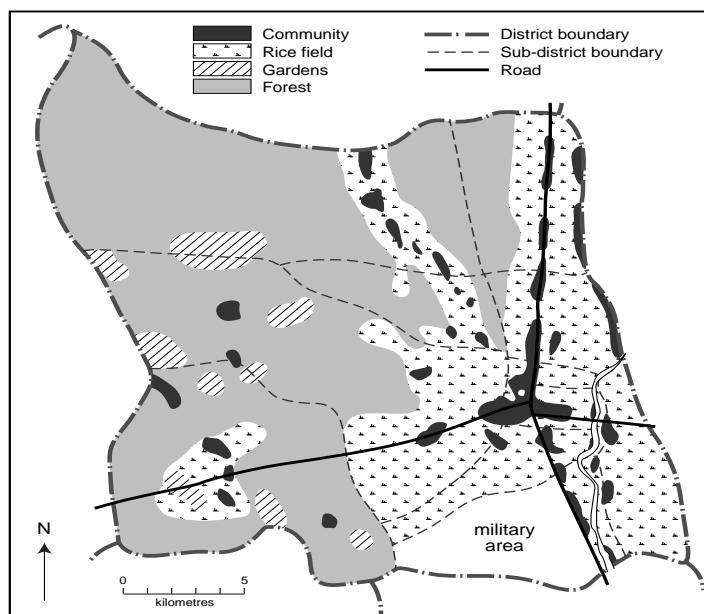
Land categories	1969		1977	
	Land size (sq km)	Percentage	Land size (sq km)	Percentage
Settlement	31.5	6.36	35.9	7.25
Rice field	119.1	24.06	83.7	16.91
Fruit orchard	20.4	4.12	80.3	16.22
Forest	238.2	48.12	204.3	41.27
Others*	85.8	17.34	90.8	18.35
Total	495.0	100.00	495.0	100.00

\* Such as military areas, roads and rivers.

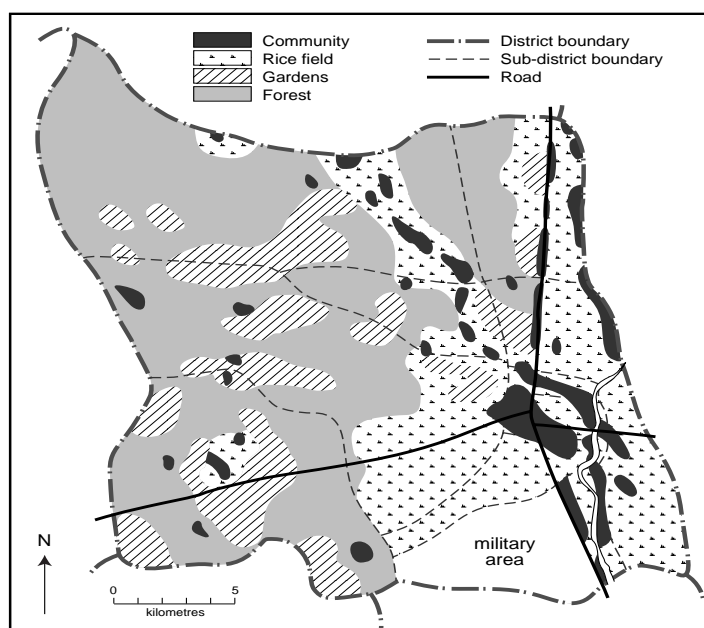
Source: Adapted from Suri, 1986 (2529), p. 42

Table 2.1 divides the use of land in Mae Rim district into five categories. They include settlement, rice field, fruit orchard, forest and others (such as military areas, roads and rivers). Between 1969 and 1977, forest land area reduced from 238.2 to 204.3 sq km or a reduction of 6.85 per cent of the total area. Rice field shrank from 119.1 to 83.7 sq km or a reduction of 7.15 per cent of the total area. However, the amount of land used for fruit orchards, settlements and others rose markedly. For instance, the orchards expanded from 20.4 in 1969 to 80.3 sq km in 1977, an increase of 12.1 per cent of the total area (see Maps 2.3 and 2.4 on the next page). The situation of competition over land use between landowners and tenants, between landowners and land speculators from the city, and the fluctuation of agricultural prices frustrated small-scale peasants who gained little benefit from agricultural commercialisation. This situation prompted some lowland peasants in Mae Rim to participate in the peasant movements organised by the PFT.

Participation in the PFT was evident mainly in lowland areas where the peasants were engaged in double and triple cash cropping such as in Saraphi, San Pa Tong and Mae



Map 2.3 Land Use in Mae Rim District – 1969.  
Source: Suri 1986 (2529), pp. 44



Map 2.4 Land Use in Mae Rim District – 1977.  
Source: Suri 1986 (2529), pp. 45

Taeng districts in Chiang Mai province.<sup>160</sup> In these areas, conflicts often arose between landowners and tenants over the high land rents and between small-scale peasants and moneylenders over high interest rates. Although a peasant leader was assassinated in Mae Rim,<sup>161</sup> a former social activist (currently a high-rank government official) who used to work with the Mae Taman Cooperative Project (1973-1976; see Chapter 3) in Mae Taeng district told me that the peasant movement in Mae Rim district was limited to a few who lived and farmed in the lowlands of Rimitai and Rimnu'a sub-districts.<sup>162</sup> Villagers whom I interviewed recalled little of the PFT movement in the area (see related issue Chapter 5).

#### Promoting Mae Rim as a dormitory district and tourist venue

The expansion of Chiang Mai city to the north and relocation of its administrative centre in the north in 1982 made Mae Rim more accessible to the expanding city and its services. The city expansion also resulted in improvement in the socio-economic infrastructure between Chiang Mai and Mae Rim and in Mae Rim district itself. The infrastructure development included the upgrading of the Chiang Mai-Fang highway in 1989, the building of Chiang Mai's Nakho:nphing Hospital 1 km north of the Provincial Office, the improvement of Dararassami Camp hospital in Rimitai sub-district and 16 Sub-district health offices (*anamai tambon*), and the opening of 51 schools (47 primary and 1 secondary under the Ministry of Education, and 3 privately owned kindergartens) across Mae Rim district.<sup>163</sup> Electricity and water supplies also spread across the district, albeit unevenly. Most villagers in the area under study welcomed the government improvements to infrastructure and social services.<sup>164</sup> In addition to improved health and education services, villagers were now able to commute daily between their villages and the city. Some of them found work in the city as public

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<sup>160</sup> See Werasit, 1988, "Rural Transformation..." (Saraphi district); Chayan, 1984, "Cultural and Ideological Reproduction..." (Mae Taeng district); Anan, 1984, "The Partial Commercialisation..."; and Anan, 1989, "Conflicts over the Deployment...", pp. 98-122 (San Pa Tong district).

<sup>161</sup> Morell and Chai-anan noted that Jar Jakrawan (of Mae Rim district) was assassinated on 13 June 1975. Morell and Chai-anan, 1981, *Political Conflict in Thailand...*, p. 227. An informant told me that he was only injured, but I could not trace any further information during the fieldwork.

<sup>162</sup> Interview, INT-145-GOV, 13 March 1993, Bangkok.

<sup>163</sup> Suri, 1986 (2529), "Phaen kan chai thidin...", p. 32.

<sup>164</sup> Data received from interviewing villagers in three villages under study. Especially an elderly lady whose son was born crippled admired transformation and facilities improved by the government. She blamed the condition of a village dirt track for causing her son to be born disabled. She gave birth in a cart while riding to a city hospital. When she reached the hospital, her baby was in a bad condition beyond medical aid. She named him *Lo*: meaning "cart wheel" to remember his difficult birth condition.

servants, teachers, technicians and wage workers whilst residing in the villages (see Chapter 6).

Although the people in Mae Rim district were predominantly rice cultivators, from the early-1970s some people in the lowlands moved away from rice farming for household consumption to become engaged in cash crops such as fresh vegetables and fruit. Since the early-1980s both lowland and upland farmers have become involved in cash crops such as soya bean, banana, jackfruit and chilli.<sup>165</sup> However, people in upland areas of Saluang sub-district have generally maintained the practice of producing rice and other crops for household consumption as the first priority and selling only surplus produce. Also, during the same period, non-agricultural activities were increasing in the district (see Map 2.5). In 1986, Suri noted that there were 106 rice mills, 3 timber retailers, 4 tobacco kilns, 2 earth tile factories, 7 cement tile factories and 10 sand suppliers.<sup>166</sup> Some villagers worked in these factories full time for daily wages whereas many others sought occasional jobs for extra income beyond their farm gates.

Since the mid-1980s the tourist industry has been strongly promoted by the government in the Upper Northern region and in Chiang Mai. A number of tourist resorts have been built in Mae Rim district, such as the “Mae Sa Valley”, “Suanrin”, “Tonto:ng” and “Erawan” resorts (see Map 2.5). Other tourist and recreational venues, such as a butterfly farm, a snake farm, an orchid farm and two golf courses (“Green Valley” and “Lanna”), have been built and developed to attract foreign tourists. Most of the lowlands suitable for agriculture along the Chiang Mai-Fang highway were taken over by six housing estate projects in the mid-1980s.<sup>167</sup> Non-agricultural activities have increased at the expense of the agricultural sector and subsequently undermined the interdependent relations between peasants and the city.

Amidst the rapid transformation in rural areas in the 1980s, villagers felt resentful that their secure livelihood in their home villages was being disrupted by competition over the use of village land and by socio-economic pressures and differentiation. Sapon and Somkit comment in their dissertations on the impact of the city’s expansion on two rural communities in San Pa Tong and San Sai districts that there is an increase in competition and conflicts over land use and occupation.<sup>168</sup>

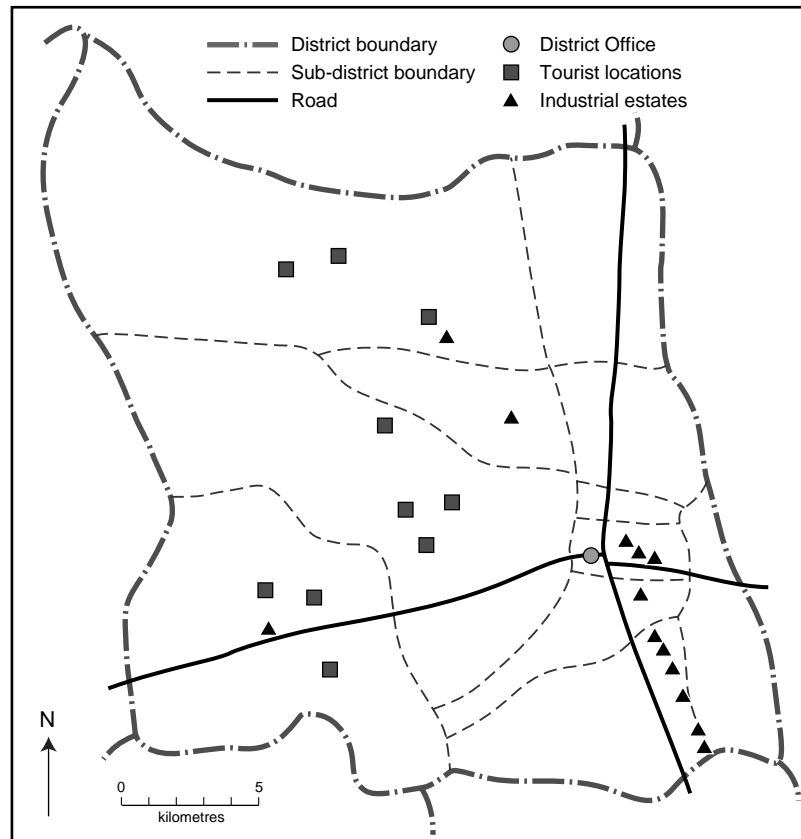
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<sup>165</sup> In 1984, agricultural trade amounted to 144 million baht including rice (43.3), soya bean (30.8), mango (15), longan (9.6), lychee (8.5), garlic (8), cauliflower (7.5) and tobacco (5.7). Suri, 1986 (2529), “Phaen kan chai thidin...”, p. 28.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>167</sup> Suri Bunyanuphong, 1988 (2531), *Ban jatsan nai jangwat chiang mai: panha kan chai thidin lae kan jat sing bo:rikan* [Housing in Chiang Mai Province: Problems of Land Use and Infrastructural Services], [in Thai], SRI, Chiang Mai University.

<sup>168</sup> Sapon, 1993, “The Impact of Urbanisation...”; and Somkit, 1989 (2532), “Kan sukxa choeng nayobai...”.

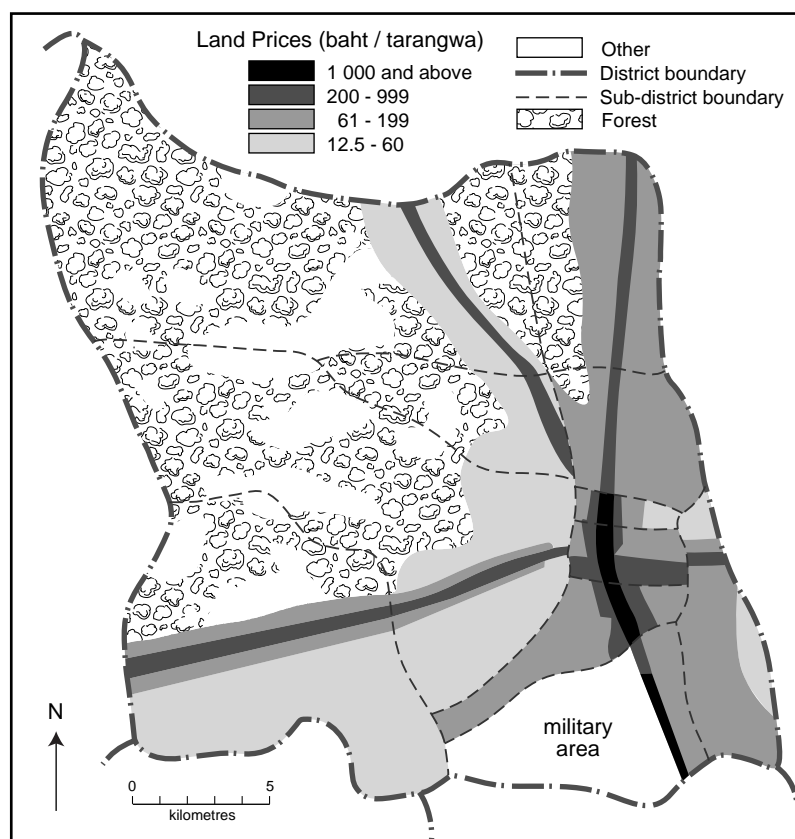


Map 2.5: Industrial Estates and Tourist Locations in Mae Rim District in 1986.

Source: Adapted from Suri, 1986 (2529), p. 30.

### Increasing competition over land, forest and water resources

The expansion of Chiang Mai city increased the demand on land use for housing, recreation and other non-agricultural purposes. The new demand on land raised land prices in Mae Rim district as a whole. Map 2.6 illustrates land prices in Mae Rim in the mid-1980s.



Map 2.6: Land Price in Mae Rim District in 1986.

Source: Adapted from Suri, 1986 (2529), p. 64.

It shows that in 1986, the price of land varied between 12.50–1,000 baht and above per *tarangwa*<sup>169</sup> depending on access to infrastructure, transportation and other facilities. The land along both sides of the Chiang Mai-Fang highway to a depth of about 40 m yielded the highest price of between 1,000 and 3,000 baht per *tarangwa* or about 400,000-1.2 million baht per rai. Similar land along the Mae Rim and San Sai road cost about 1,000 baht per *tarangwa* or 400,000 baht per rai. The land near the military restriction area around Mae Raem and Mae Sa sub-districts was valued at between 125 and 2,000 baht per *tawangwa* or about 50,000-800,000 baht per rai (see Chapter 6). The upland (sometimes including forest land) in Saluang sub-district cost between 20 and 65 baht per *tawangwa* or 8,000-26,000 baht per rai (see an example of land transaction in Chapter 4).<sup>170</sup> However, in 1992, the land near Mae Sa falls had increased up to 2 million baht per rai.<sup>171</sup> The problems of agriculture, such as high

<sup>169</sup> *Tarangwa* is a unit of land measurement in Thailand. One rai is equal to 400 *tarangwa*; 2.2 rai equivalent to 1 acre; or 6.25 rai equivalent to 1 hectare.

<sup>170</sup> Suri, 1986 (2529), “Phaen kan chai thidin...”, pp. 60, 64, 65, 66 and 70.

<sup>171</sup> Interview, INT-130-GOV, 22 February 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

investments with low returns, coupled with the problem of water shortage, influenced many farmers to sell their land as the prices appeared so attractive. After the mid-1980s, there was increased competition over land used for either agriculture or non-agricultural activities such as housing, tourist resorts and recreation in Mae Rim district. The competition aggravated the land dispute between the Thai Army and villagers who lived in the line of the city expansion in Mae Raem sub-district (see Chapter 6).

In the late 1980s, government policies to promote economic growth included financial measures giving more loan credit to private entrepreneurs.<sup>172</sup> The credit allowed the entrepreneurs to speculate in land transactions and manipulate land accumulation in lowland, upland and forest areas, often through the assistance of corrupt politicians and authorities. Some ‘local powers’ (such as village heads, sub-district heads and even district heads) became agents in these land transactions.<sup>173</sup> In 1991, over 100 cases of forest encroachment occurred in Mae Rim district and many of those responsible were top-ranking military officers and entrepreneurs from Bangkok.<sup>174</sup> However, many local officials disagreed with the government policy and disapproved of the misconduct of politicians and officials as they saw the public interest being destroyed. However, they were unable to speak out because they were in a position of “*nam thuam pak*” (literally translated as “having water over the mouth”).

The government also promoted agro-industries run by the private sector in the form of contract farming or *rabop kaset khrop wongjo:n*, through which an agri-business company manages the whole process of agricultural production from start to finish. This form of contract farming involved the agri-business company, a bank and the farmers. The company designated what kinds of agricultural produce were in demand in the market and organised farmers to grow those products using the services of its brokers, some of whom were former extension officers who had resigned from the public service to join the private sector. According to villagers interviewed in early 1993, the company brokers instructed them on the period of planting and method of cultivation, and provided seedlings, chemical fertiliser and insecticide, as well as capital loans guaranteed by the company. The price paid for the crops was determined by the company. The farmers became producers who effectively provided land and labour for the company. After the agricultural produce was sold on the market, the company kept an amount to pay off the bank loan plus interest and an amount to cover the cost of all

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<sup>172</sup> Thongrot Onchan, 1992, “Land Speculation, Rural Land Market Operations and the Effects on Forest Lands”, Paper presented at the Fourth Annual Common Property Conference, organised by the International Association for the Study of Common Property (IASCP), 15-19 June, Manila.

<sup>173</sup> Interview, INT-032-GOV, 19 November 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai; Interview, INT-109-GOV, 25 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>174</sup> Interview, INT-045-GOV, 14 December 1992, Bangkok.

productive inputs provided by the company. The remaining money then belonged to the farmers. The farmers who were successful in contract farming were encouraged by the company to become brokers in the village. The government development planners viewed the contract farming system as a model of income-generating practice for Thai farmers.

Farmers, however, had different views towards contract farming. Some well-to-do farmers in a village under study said that they were offered capital investment by agribusiness companies; they only used their land and labour to produce cash crops for the waiting markets.<sup>175</sup> Other farmers were, however, sceptical about the contract farming process but had no better option in the production process.

In the late 1980s when many more villagers were engaged in agricultural commercialisation (e.g. fruit orchards and contract farming), a water scarcity problem began to emerge and led to competition and conflicts over the available water resource. For instance, the leaders of Village 2 had a dispute over water with a Hmong tribal group who had fruit orchards on an upland area of the Suthep-Pui range, a natural boundary between Saluang and Mae Raem sub-districts, located to the north and the south of the range respectively (see Chapter 5).

#### Increasing socio-economic pressure and differentiation

People in the three villages said that they had felt a lot of pressure upon themselves, their families and communities. They recognised that, in the past five years, they had become very “exhausted” or “*id*” in the Northern Thai dialect. For instance, a woman from Village 2 found herself so busy that she said she hardly had time to stop to talk with her neighbours. She said she had to earn additional income (from needlework and handicraft) to cope with the increasing household expenditure and the education of two children.<sup>176</sup> Another woman who lived in Village 3 told me that her husband earned a daily income by driving a motorcycle taxi while she earned additional income by selling fresh vegetables at the city market. She had only 3-4 hours sleep at night because she got up at 2 am to go to the market. To cope with the present-day household expenditure, she said, she needed two incomes for her family of three adults and two children.<sup>177</sup> A man from Village 2 was resentful that the unity of his family was under pressure because his wife had to do shift work in a factory located in the city. They hardly had time to discuss family matters.<sup>178</sup> Elderly people complained that the young

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<sup>175</sup> Interview INT-102-VIL, 23 January, 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>176</sup> Interview, INT-114-VIL, 27 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>177</sup> Interview, INT-036-VIL, 30 November 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>178</sup> Interview, INT-115-VIL, 27 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

nowadays had jobs in the city and rarely came to join village ceremonies such as *wai phi pu nja* (paying respect to ancestors). This ceremony is held annually for family members on the mother's side, in principle to support those who have difficulty helping themselves (see chapter 5).<sup>179</sup> Due to increasing economic pressure, the kinship relations among community members, as Giddens argues, become too fragile to carry on social functions and obligations over time.<sup>180</sup>

Attending village ceremonies and meetings, I observed the increase in social differentiation among rural populations. This was not a new phenomenon as it has been documented in many studies. What interested me was the particular situation in each village and how people dealt with the differentiation. Among the three selected villages, it was most distinctive in Village 2, as the inhabitants had been involved in agricultural commercialisation to a greater extent than the other two villages (see Chapter 5).

#### Responses to the changes

Responses to the socio-economic changes in Mae Rim district had come not only from the villagers who were affected, but also from some local officials who saw the resultant negative impact on the society as a whole. The promotion of regional growth in the late 1980s frustrated some public servants who were concerned about the long-term public interest, and especially those whose work was directly involved with social-welfare services and environment problems. They found that investors of capital extended housing and businesses without proper infrastructure but later demanded that officials develop those facilities. The officials found themselves unable to cope with such demands due to limited budgets and personnel. The private entrepreneurs would then lobby to get the facilities they wanted through the joint private and public committees at the district level. Local officials sometimes responded by ignoring the claims and shifting meetings without notice to avoid being lobbied.<sup>181</sup> To protect the state forests from being encroached upon by private entrepreneurs, some forestry officials tried to speed up planting in government teak plantations as a way of clearly establishing the state forest boundaries (see Chapter 4). Although many officials wanted to protect the public interest, they were unable to ensure that the government laws and regulations were adhered to.

The response of villagers to the changes was varied. From my observations, there were at least three types of response: adaptation, resistance, and waiting to see whether the

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<sup>179</sup> Interview, INT-100-VIL, 22 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>180</sup> Cassell (ed), 1993, *The Giddens Reader*, p. 301.

<sup>181</sup> Interview, INT-032-GOV, 19 November 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

new ways would work before trying them. The first occurred when villagers were able to creatively adjust to modern aspects of the Thai society over time. Village 2 (in Chapter 5) provides an example of this. In response to modern administration, villagers maintained a social organisation which operated through three key traditional leaders of a village community: *kae wat*, *kae fai* and *kae ban*. *Kae wat* or “a religious leader” was a person from whom villagers sought advice to help them tackle their problems. *Kae wat* also led meditation practice four times a month on *wan phra*, or the day on which Buddhists get together to practice *Dhamma* (Buddhist teaching). The aim was for villagers to have a chance to talk over their problems and calmly handle them.<sup>182</sup> *Kae fai* was a leader who looked after the traditional irrigation system. Although the government provided money to build small weirs and water channels to irrigate rice and other cash crops, Village 2 still maintained the traditional *mu'ang fai* system for the maintenance and management of the water resource. *Kae ban* was a leader who oversaw the people's well-being and order in a village community. After the village committee was introduced by the central government, *Kae ban* became one of the committee members looking after the village welfare. In Village 2, *Kae ban* – currently called *phuyaiban* (village head) – was a charismatic leader who was able to adjust to the modern form of administration. Of the three villages under study, this village demonstrated the most distinctive adaptation to the socio-political changes.

The second response to change – resistance – is manifested in different forms shaped by local situations in relation to the national political context. Chapter 6 discusses different forms of resistance found in Village 3. Since 1940, the villagers have resisted the Army taking over their land. The forms of resistance have ranged from “everyday forms of peasant resistance” to open conflict over land use and allocation.<sup>183</sup> The “everyday forms” included: refusal to return official land occupation documents by hiding them from the authority; refusal to move off the land by negotiating to pay land rent as demanded by the authority; the search for a superior (patron) in the Army whose

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<sup>182</sup> Interview, INT-103-VIL, 23 January, 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>183</sup> J.C. Scott, 1986, “Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance”, in J.C. Scott and B.J. Tria Kerkvliet (eds), *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance in Southeast Asia*, London: Frank Cass, pp. 5-35. Kerkvliet defines “everyday resistance” as:

what people do short of organised confrontation that reveals disgust, anger, indignation, or opposition to what they regard as unjust or unfair actions by others more wealthy or powerful than they. Stated positively, through such resistance people struggle to affirm what they regard as just or fair – or less unjust, less unfair – treatment and conditions. They are expressions of people who perceive injustice but for various reasons are unable or unwilling to push for improvements in an organised, direct manner. These reasons generally include the perception that they lack sufficient control or power or that the effort to gain more power in order to be more assertive would be too costly to themselves, their families, or other valued resources and conditions. They are, or at least consider themselves to be, limited to activities that indirectly, surreptitiously, or obliquely attempt to gain some of what they regard as rightly theirs.

B.J. Tria Kerkvliet, 1986, “Everyday Resistance to Injustice in a Philippine Village”, in *ibid.*, p. 108.

authority balanced that of the Army officers and who promised to protect the village interest; and the selection of a village head who had the potential to negotiate the village interest with outsiders. Such forms of resistance had been pursued during the period prior to the mid-1980s when the political system was under the military regime. However, in the early 1990s, when the Army announced it would take over the village land, the villagers decided to organise themselves in the form of a collective protest against the land takeover by the Army. The protest was conducted during the open political system when the military power was subject to civilian law and order.

The third pattern of response – wait and see – has occurred in different places, on different issues over time. For instance, when NGO workers introduced alley-cropping techniques in Village 1 in the mid-1980s, only two villagers decided to cooperate with the experiment. These two were in a better economic position than the others and could afford to take a risk. The others cooperated with local forestry officials by working in the official teak plantation for a daily wage, and with the NGOs by patrolling the Mae Rim Conservation Forest every fortnight, and by keeping an eye on any activity related to illegal logging. Moreover, some villagers joined meetings and conferences organised by NGOs and university academics to keep themselves informed about government policies and practices affecting their villages. One of the issues which struck me was the discussion among village leaders from different places concerning the establishment and status of the Sub-district Council following the 1994 Sub-District Council Act.<sup>184</sup> They said they would like to wait and see how it worked. It seems to me that it might take them a while to learn how it would operate in practice and to work out how they could participate in a new political space which the central government had just opened up at the sub-district level.

### **Concluding remarks**

To provide a contextual basis for studying NGO intervention, this chapter has demonstrated that socio-economic and political changes, competition, conflicts and responses to the changes are interrelated movements constituted by different social actors from various organisations across time and space. After identifying social actors from three spheres in a capitalist society, the chapter has sketched influences stimulating rural transformation from the 1960s to the early 1990s by examining national social and economic plans, regional development plans, key social actors and socio-political consequences in each decade. The situations of rural transformation

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<sup>184</sup> The meeting held on 22-24 November 1992 at the Chiang Mai Teachers' College by a group of Chiang Mai-based NGOs which received funding support from the Social Research Institute (SRI), Chiang Mai University.

have been presented in a national context and regionally with reference to Chiang Mai province and Mae Rim district. The chapter has shown that the movements of social actors and their organisations have made Thai society transform and function in a spiral, as it were, through periods of conflict and order (or social disintegration and integration). For instance, we can see that, in the past three decades, the national social and economic plans have reflected the attempts of development planners and practitioners not only to adjust the Thai development direction to cope with socio-economic changes imposed from both outside and within the country, but also to achieve a balance between the economic and social dimensions of development through socio-political reform. Nonetheless, actors in the sphere of the state have been tied by bureaucratic rules and regulations and felt powerless to tackle rural poverty.

The chapter has shown that since the early 1960s when the Thai government adopted the modernisation approach to development and emphasised the private sector to boost economic growth and the market economy, Thai society has experienced socio-economic changes in two main periods: before and after the mid-1980s. At the early stage of capitalist development, key actors in the private sector were mainly foreign companies from the US, Europe and Japan. Not until the mid-1970s did domestic entrepreneurs emerge and begin to strengthen their interest groups as well as to lobby the government to adopt policies in favour of their business interests. Since the mid-1980s, Thai domestic entrepreneurs have started “taking on the world” and expanding into regional growth centres and penetrating into rural enclaves.<sup>185</sup> To support the economic boom, the government has played a role by extending infrastructures into every region. The transportation and other facilities have resulted in closer links between urban and rural areas on the one hand; on the other hand, they have resulted in the increase of competition and conflicts over natural and productive resources between villagers, officials and investors of capital.

However, a number of social actors mostly from middle-class backgrounds have perceived and reacted to the unfavourable impacts of the changes upon the common people and the society as a whole. These social actors, such as student activists, concerned academics, lawyers, journalists, doctors and NGO workers, have tried, over time, to create pressure “for the development of representative institutions” and to invent a political space for those who are excluded from the past development to “take part in decisions affecting them”.<sup>186</sup> Seeking the cooperation of actors from the other

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<sup>185</sup> Pasuk and Baker, 1995, *Thailand...*, p. 164.

<sup>186</sup> J.L.S. Girling, 1988, “Development and Democracy in Southeast Asia”, *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 332; see also K.J. Hewison, 1996, “Emerging Social Forces in Thailand: New Political and Economic Roles”, in R. Robison and D.S.G. Goodman (eds), *The New Rich in Asia: Mobile Phones, McDonalds and Middle-Class Revolution*, London: Routledge, pp.137-160.

two spheres, these concerned actors, whom Girling calls “the ‘intermediate’ forces of civil society”,<sup>187</sup> have intervened in various socio-political situations to make society function and transform itself from authoritarian to democratic regimes; from belief or myth to reason. For example, in the mid-1970s, the student and popular movement was one of the key influences in dismantling the military regime. Later, the alignment of prominent intellectuals and social activists with the CPT revolutionary force was one of the factors prompting certain members of the Thai élite to change their strategy by moving away from suppression to reconciliation. Since the mid-1980s, intellectuals and development practitioners have put pressure on the central government to amend the 1991 Constitution, to decentralise government power to local government so that the Thai political structure will be more responsive to the various kinds of conflicts over resources occurring at different times and places.

Unlike the 1960s, when the closed political system hardly allowed any meaningful reform, the political space for discussion and negotiation since the late-1980s has been emerging and widening (except for a brief period in early 1992). However, intellectuals and development actors, especially NGO workers, need to make an attempt to search for this political space in relation to different representatives from other social groups, institutions and even “social adversar[ies]”.<sup>188</sup> Especially at the local level, when social relations between actors intermingle and rapidly diverge in different situations, the NGO workers must make a greater effort to understand local situations in relation to the wider context of political economy and to intervene at an appropriate time and place.

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<sup>187</sup> Girling, 1988, “Development and Democracy...”, p. 332.

<sup>188</sup> A. Touraine, 1971, *The Post-Industrial Society: Tomorrow's Social History: Classes, Conflicts and Culture in the Programmed Society*, tran. by L.F.X. Mayhew, New York: Random House, p. 132.

## 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

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<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

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<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.

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<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

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<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

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<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 Silpakorn 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

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<sup>21</sup> See G. Gutierrez, 1974, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. by Sr C. Inda 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.

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<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

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<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

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<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 (*khongkan ronnarong lae phoeiphræ 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

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<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,

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<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

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<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

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<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

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<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

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<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.

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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

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<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

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<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

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<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

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<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)*

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<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.

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<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-

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<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>

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<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

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<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

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<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

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<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. Prudhisana 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

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<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> Prudhisana 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

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<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*

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<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

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<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

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<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

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<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

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<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 Hai 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>

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<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

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<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

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<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

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<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.

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<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

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<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.

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<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.

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<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.

## Chapter 4

### Cooperation to manage natural resources in a forest-fringe village

Any process of democratic transformation must necessarily take into account this difference between the structures of representation and the demands or interests of the represented: a project of democratisation intended to be 'progressive' or 'radical' is forced to imagine the social and political means of controlling this difference.

A. Melucci<sup>1</sup>

When people-centred NGOs began their work in the early 1980s, their general attention was given to the promotion of agricultural development in favour of the rural poor (e.g. small-scale and landless peasants). Although the NGOs had been aware for some time of environmental degradation resulting in part from the increase of agricultural commercialisation, the environment as such did not become a focus of their attention until the late 1980s. This chapter aims to investigate the interventionist role played by NGOs as they responded, on behalf of the villagers, to emerging competition over forest, land and water resource use between villagers, officials and private entrepreneurs. It also looks at the impact on village livelihood and local environment of this competition which has been a consequence of the significant economic and social changes taking place in Thailand in the past twenty years.

The chapter focuses on the development work of four NGOs in a forest-fringe village northwest of Chiang Mai during the 1980s. It describes the changes occurring in the village which have resulted in villagers becoming more involved in agricultural commercialisation over time. As a consequence of this, the competition between villagers and other parties over access to village resources has escalated. This has also meant that greater pressure has been put on villagers to achieve a livelihood through expanded production. At the same time, it has put increased pressure on the environment. The chapter traces the activities of four NGOs in the selected village with particular attention to their response to the growing competition over resources and environmental issues, and describes the NGOs' attempts to use people's participation and community culture concepts in formulating projects to assist the villagers to maintain their livelihoods. The study identifies a number of actors who have interests in the village resources and who, in various ways, compete for access to them. These include outside commercial interests and government officials as well as local entrepreneurs and villagers. Finally, it discusses the role that the NGOs have played in

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<sup>1</sup> Melucci, 1988, "Social Movements and the Democratisation...", p. 252.

relation to the various actors in the competition over natural resources through their programmes of assistance to the villagers.

The chapter argues that the NGOs are less likely to relieve competition over resources when they introduce externally designed programmes than when they have come to understand local politics, cultures and situations in accordance with current changes in the national political economy. When the NGOs recognise the shortcomings of their own development approaches and the different interests of actors from different organisations (or places of origin) in the competition over resources, they are more likely to use social and political means to handle the differences. The study will show that the NGOs have played an interventionist role in helping the villagers of Village 1 to formulate a natural resource management plan in a watershed area. However, some issues emerging from the study suggest that it is necessary for the NGOs to go beyond their bipolar systems of thought to search for the “the third space” in analysing the relations between the state and village, between everyday politics and collective action, between traditional and modern farming methods.

### **Village context**

Village 1 is located about 40 km northwest of Chiang Mai city. It was settled by a small group of migrants from different lowland villages in 1963 but only officially recognised as a village (*muban*) in 1982. The village is at an altitude of about 500 to 600 metres and lies in a small valley surrounded by partially degraded forest. Access is by a rough laterite feeder road linked to the Chiang Mai-Fang highway. The road is difficult for vehicles to negotiate especially in the rainy season. There is a Lua village about 4 km higher up the mountain in what the RFD classifies as *phu'nthi kan o:k*, or “excised area”, because the Lua village had existed there long before the Forest Conservation Act 1964 was enacted.<sup>2</sup> Under the Act, the Lua were able to have land title deeds on the basis of their long-term occupation and use of the land. However, the people of Village 1 were outside the excised area and were only able to use degraded forest for settlement and cultivation by agreement with forestry officials but without the possibility of legal ownership. The RFD considered that Village 1 was located in a watershed area of the Mae Rim Conservation Forest.

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<sup>2</sup> An “excised area” is determined according to Ministerial Rule No. 12, B.E. 2507 (1964) issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, under the Forest Conservation Act of 1964.

For general knowledge about the Lua and their relations with the Northern Thais and with the environment, see P. Kunstader and S.L. Kunstader, 1992, “Population Movement and Environmental Changes in the Hills of Northern Thailand”, in G. Wijeyewardene and E.C. Chapman, *Patterns and Illusions: Thai History and Thought*, Department of Anthropology, RSPAS, ANU, pp. 17-56.

In the early 1990s, the population of Village 1 was a little over 100. As shown in Map 4.1, it comprised about 30 households located along the village road compared to about 20 households in the mid 1980s.<sup>3</sup> The villagers farmed about 300 rai of land, one quarter of which was made up of small lowland parcels in the valley floor while the rest was on steep slopes and forest.<sup>4</sup> From the early to mid 1980s, each family occupied about 2-3 rai of lowland and up to 10 rai of upland for cultivation purposes. The villagers were small-scale cultivators; however, in the mid 1980s when the price of land boomed, many sold their right of land use (without any land title document) to private entrepreneurs from Bangkok and Chiang Mai. Two Bangkok entrepreneurs have since built their houses in Village 1. One is located near the school in the middle of the village. The other is situated between Village 1 and the Lua village. When I did my fieldwork in early 1993, most villagers had become wage workers employed by local forestry officials to cultivate a state-owned teak plantation nearby. They earned about 55 baht per day. Those who did not sell their land rights, struggled to cope with rapid economic and social changes and to maintain their livelihoods.

The site of Village 1 was once a camp for the employees of Thai Phatthana Logging company. Singha, the village founder, was a former worker with the company which had received a concession to cut timber in the Mae Rim forest in 1954. After finishing his contract with the firm, Singha came back to this area in 1963, cleared and occupied about 3 rai of low fertile land and about 30 rai of upland and initiated the village settlement. He urged relatives and friends from lowland villages nearby to come and settle with him. In 1965, six peasants who had either insufficient land to cultivate for household consumption, or had lost their lands for various reasons, moved up to the new village. In the 1970s, settlers came from other distant provinces such as Udon Thani, Buri Ram, Chachoengsao and Suphan Buri through various village connections. Such migration seems to have been common in Thailand, especially from the 1960s when land resources began to be squeezed by population growth and the expansion of agricultural commercialisation which forced rural populations to seek new land for cultivation.<sup>5</sup> Settlers also came from other districts of Chiang Mai including a group of

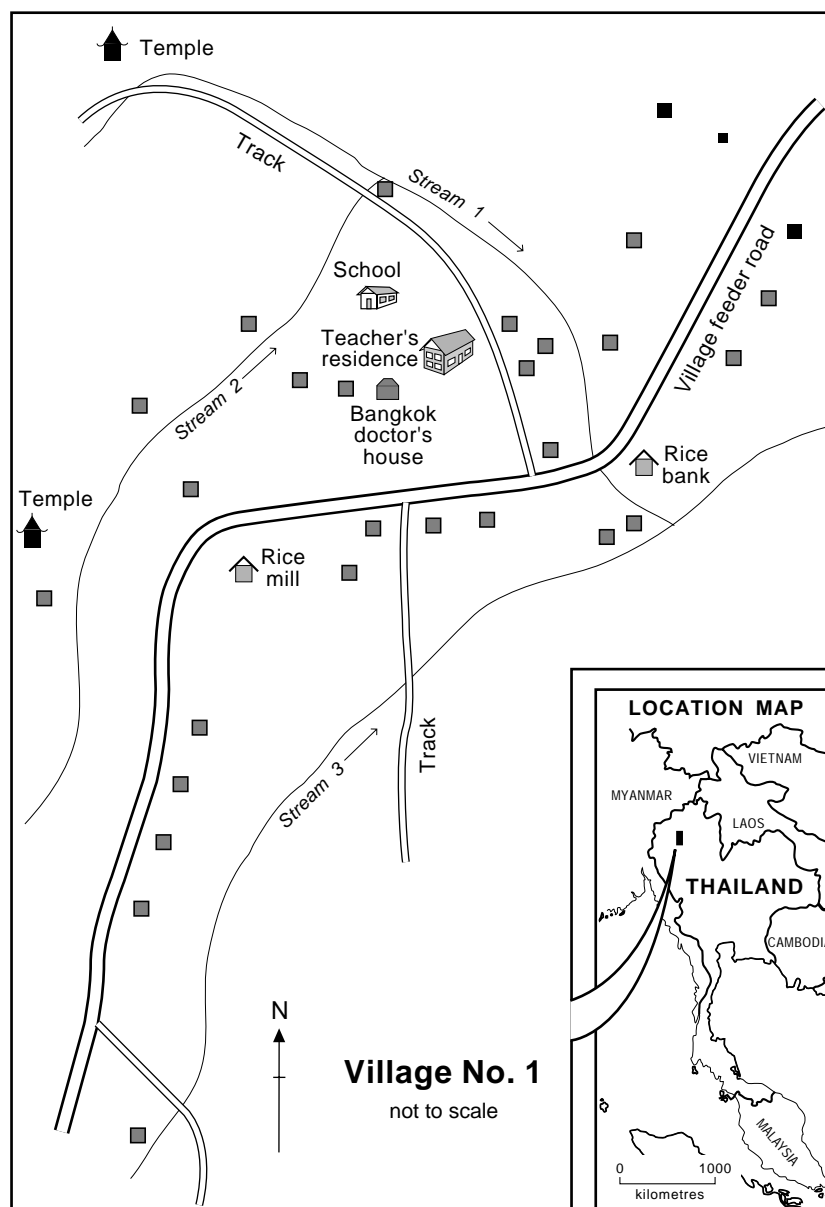
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<sup>3</sup> Fieldwork in 1993; see also SRI, 1985 (2528), *Laksana thang setthakit sangkhom lae prachako:n amphoe mae rim jangwat chiang mai* [The Characteristics of Economy, Society and Population of Mae Rim District, Chiang Mai Province], [in Thai], Report No. 28-2-170, SRI, Chiang Mai University, Appendix, n.p.; Niphot Thianwihan, 1983 (2526), “Prasopkan thamngan phatthana kho:ng sun sangkhom phatthana sapha khatho:lic: Ko:rani sukxa [village 1] chiang mai” [The Working Experience in Development of the Diocesan Social Action Centre (DISAC): A Case Study (Village 1), Chiang Mai], [in Thai], DISAC, Chiang Mai.

<sup>4</sup> Also fieldwork in 1993. According to the SRI Report, in 1985 villagers farmed about 200 rai of both lowland and highland. It should be noted that this is an estimated figure because forestry officials have not yet surveyed the land in this village.

<sup>5</sup> The history of settlement in Chiang Mai suggests that in the past, the people moved downward from the hills to the lowland for cultivation. However, in the 1960s, as occurred in Village 1, the people began to move back up to the hills to farm in degraded forest. See different natures of forest settlement in Hirsch, 1990, *Development Dilemmas in Rural Thailand*, chs 3 and 4; and

tribal people (four families) who sold their land in Mae Ai district cheaply for quick cash and moved to Village 1 in the mid 1980s.



Map 4.1 Village 1

The new settlers had close relations with the nearby Lua villagers. As well as learning productive skills and techniques of highland agriculture from the Lua, the new settlers shared natural resources (especially forest and water) with them. Before Village 1 was declared an independent village in 1982, the Lua village headmen had been asked by the District to administer and deliver social services (e.g. health and education) to the new settlers. Until the mid 1970s, there appeared to be harmony between the villages over the use of natural resources. This harmony gradually declined, however, when

other migrants including Hmong, Karen and Northern Thais moved into the watershed area to clear and occupy land at about 1,200 metres above the sea level. This was above the Lua village which is located about 800 metres above the sea level.

People who settled in Village 1 after 1965 told me that the forest had only become depleted after separation from the Lua village in 1982. Singha argued that the main reason for forest depletion was not due to the new settlers, who did not have powerful equipment to chop down trees, but rather, the forest was degraded by the logging companies' abuse of the forest resource and the negligence of some forestry officials who did not ensure that regulations were followed. He recalled that:

From 1965 to 1975 the forest was not yet degraded... Forestry officials initially came to mark the trees which they allowed to be cut down. Capitalists [literally translated from *naithun*] came after to supposedly cut down the marked trees. Without any inspection by the officials, the capitalists cut other trees including teaks which were not marked. Illegal loggers also brought in outsiders to cut and saw timber. By the time the village was [officially] established in the early 1980s, the forest was completely degraded.<sup>6</sup>

The main problem facing the settlers in the early years was that they could not produce enough rice for year-round consumption. This was not as a result of land shortage, forest degradation or other environmental problems. Singha claimed that even though the land was fertile, rice farming was difficult and not productive:

Our crops appeared with uncertain results. Some years were good. Some years were bad. We could not leave our farm to earn money elsewhere. We had to weed several times a year in the wet-rice fields and plant other crops to ensure our food sufficiency.<sup>7</sup>

This situation, which is typical for new rice land, continued into the early 1980s. Although the people tried to subsidise their food needs with income from cash crops and timber cutting, some still had to borrow paddy from nearby lowland villagers at interest rates of up to almost 90 per cent to meet their household consumption needs.<sup>8</sup> Singha was afraid that if this situation continued the villagers might sell their land to pay off accumulating debt as he had seen occurring in many other lowland areas. He, therefore, sought a way to solve the problem of rice shortage and decided to explore setting up a "rice bank" which he had heard about from *phra thudong* (a monk who travelled to find a peaceful place, often in a forest, to practice meditation). Singha approached a number of organisations before DISAC finally agreed to set up a rice bank project. The village founder believed that the project would solve the rice shortage problem. However, at that time, there was still a great deal of mistrust of students and NGO workers by the military and bureaucrats who often suspected them of being part of the so called 'communist insurgency' problem in remote areas. The

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<sup>6</sup> Interview, INT-094-VIL, 19 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> For example, for 10 thang of paddy borrowed, a ricelender asks for 18 to 20 thang to be returned. One thang of unhusked paddy grain is equal to approximately 20 litres or 10.1 kg.

political mistrust inevitably caused officials in Mae Rim district to be suspicious of DISAC workers and a group of Chiang Mai University students who had been invited to the village to build a school.

## NGO involvement and activities

### Linking handouts with participatory development

DISAC undertook an economic survey while setting up a rice bank project in Village 1. According to the DISAC report prepared by Fr Niphot in 1983, 13 out of 21 households farmed 2-3 rai of wet-rice, which was too small to produce enough rice for their year-round consumption. DISAC recorded that the villagers, therefore, grew sugar banana, jackfruit and chilli on the steep land nearby to earn a cash income to enable them to buy additional food and clothing. They also chopped down trees to make firewood and charcoal for sale. DISAC argued that environmental degradation was likely to increase in this village due to the fact that:

Every household which had young labour was engaged in cutting timber [illegally] to subsidise their cash income. Often, they cut timber to pay off their debt because they had no cash in hand.<sup>9</sup>

DISAC, nonetheless, felt obliged to respond to the villagers' urgent request for assistance to address the rice shortage problem. As it had done in other villages, DISAC offered eleven sacks of rice to start the rice project. Ten families were reluctant to join DISAC activities due to rumours claiming it was *khao kho:mmunit* ("communist rice") – a term used by villagers which arose from government propaganda designed to prevent rural people from supporting non-official individuals and groups which the government believed might help the expansion of communist influence in remote areas. However, eleven families did decide to join DISAC despite the government propaganda.

DISAC tried to link its assistance with a participatory development concept.<sup>10</sup> It believed that the people should create and run their own 'development' by themselves instead of waiting for social-welfare handouts.<sup>11</sup> In practice, DISAC did not know how it should encourage the people to participate in their own development. It, therefore, asked the villagers to contribute to the rice bank. The participating villagers agreed to give either 2 thang of paddy or 60 baht cash and these contributions were used to buy

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<sup>9</sup> Niphot, 1983 (2526), "Prasopkan thamngan phatthana...", pp. 8-9 and 10.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 3 for explanation.

<sup>11</sup> As many NGO workers say: "Give him a fish; he eats for a day. Teach him how to fish; he eats forever".

about 70-80 thang of paddy from the Lua village. The rice purchased was then put in the rice bank. At the first meeting, the villagers also agreed with DISAC to establish a village development committee composed of four members and chaired by Singha, to take care of the rice bank activities. In this way, DISAC believed it was linking the practice of handouts with participatory development.

However, applying the concept was difficult because social relations between actors are not only complex but also rapidly and constantly changing. In Village 1, two problems emerged to draw the participants away from the DISAC project. One was the on-going political suspicion existing between government and NGOs which made many villagers tentative about participation in the DISAC project. The other was the internal conflict between village leaders – Singha and Win – both of whom sought the village head position and consequently distracted the villagers from the real purpose of the DISAC project and introduced tension between local officials and NGO workers. Singha and Win hoped to win votes by calling on outsider support. Win, who was the acting ‘village head’ in the period before the village was formally established, sought the support of district head and other officials, whereas Singha hoped to gain support by acting as a traditional patron and defending the village livelihood through the implementation of a DISAC rice bank project.

Singha invited NGOs, academics and university students to help develop the village. After a group of Chiang Mai University students finished building a school, the villagers went to Mae Rim District Office (*thi wakan amphoe mae rim*) and asked the District Head to send a teacher to teach their children. The ‘development’ activities of villagers, students and NGO workers were, however, of concern to officials who suspected such activities were part of an alleged communist infiltration in rural areas. To put the village under government control, the District Head, therefore, allowed Village 1 to be formally established in 1982 even though there were fewer than the 40 households normally required.<sup>12</sup> However, Win became the first village head (locally called *Pho:luang* or *kae ban*) without serious competition as Singha was over the 60-year age limit set by the Local Administrative Act for formal headship. Win also worked as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the government in the village and sought to implement its laws and orders.

The rivalry between the two men discouraged people from participating in the rice bank project and made it difficult for DISAC to continue its presence in the village. As Chair of the development committee, Singha did not allow *Pho:luang* Win to join the rice bank even though he did not have sufficient rice for his family’s consumption. At the same time, however, Singha allowed his relatives and friends to borrow rice from the

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<sup>12</sup> Interview, INT-092-VIL, 18 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

rice bank although they were not members and lived outside the village, regardless of the agreement that only members could borrow from the bank. As a result, Singha's management of the rice bank came under the scrutiny of its members. This eventually aggravated the tensions between villagers who, as migrants from different places, divided into factions. DISAC was quick to recognise this problem and tried to solve it by consultation with the villagers. At the same time, however, DISAC was facing severe financial problems which prevented it from engaging in further activities.<sup>13</sup>

This was a turbulent time in the village's history. It came to a head when the spirit of *Jaopho: Kaeo*, which the villagers believed was taking care of them, 'occupied' the body of a female villager and through her condemned the disunity and called for a change in behaviour. The tension between villagers lessened after the spirit expressed its concerns. The DISAC Director, Niphot, believed that the use of the spirit represented a revival of "community culture" in response to the divisions in the village. However, the spirit accused DISAC of causing the dispute and this made Niphot realise that there were some Buddhists who feared that the villagers might become Catholic if DISAC continued working in the village. Fr Niphot did not want to see religious rivalry develop and, therefore, invited FEDRA, a Buddhist organisation, to take over the village rice bank in 1982.

In summary, although DISAC was early in recognising that environmental problems would increase in this village if the villagers continued chopping down trees and exploiting forest land, it had, first and foremost, to respond to the villagers' immediate rice shortage problem. At that time, therefore, the environment was not a focus of NGO activities. The key development approaches articulated in the early 1980s by NGOs were to help the peasants cope with economic and social change by providing assistance in promoting agriculture and to strongly oppose the domination of the powerful 'state' over the village. Furthermore, the political situation of mistrust between the government and NGOs affected the relationship between the NGOs and the villagers (e.g. through the accusations of "communist rice"). As outsiders, the NGOs had to spend time finding ways to avoid tensions between themselves and the villagers before they could turn their attention to potential environmental degradation problems.

#### **Attempting to help maintain village settlement in the forest**

FEDRA's main development approach in this village was to cooperate with officials while trying to maintain its independence in decision makings. Unlike DISAC which attempted to strengthen the power of the traditional village leader (the village founder), FEDRA worked through official channels with the village head and stayed in touch

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<sup>13</sup> CCTD and CEBEMO, *Kan damrong yu kho:ng chumchon...*, pp. 36-37.

with more senior government executives. *Pho:luang* Win had to perform his duty properly for fear of being scrutinised by the district head. Singha became quiet due to the lack of external support. He was further limited and found it difficult to move around after having one leg amputated due to his illness from diabetes. As a result, the rivalry between Singha and *Pho:luang* Win declined.

While FEDRA administrators were accustomed to charitable handout approaches, some younger FEDRA fieldworkers were influenced by the concepts of “participatory development” and “community culture”. They applied these ideas in their development projects in the belief that such approaches would encourage villagers to live in harmony as a society and with the environment. While FEDRA outlined its main development principles and activities to the villagers, it also allowed space for the fieldworkers to be able to explore their development approaches. Initially, FEDRA wanted to ensure that villages stayed intact and people were not forced off their land. To ensure this, it believed that the villagers had to be able to meet their immediate needs and, to this end, FEDRA decided to continue with the DISAC rice bank project in Village 1.

In the first meeting between FEDRA representatives and interested villagers in 1983, the FEDRA Chairperson explained the Foundation’s main principles and why it supported projects such as rice banks, buffalo banks and revolving funds.<sup>14</sup> He also addressed the particular situation of Village 1 and asked why there was a rice shortage and why they only grew one crop a year. Some in the meeting replied that because their lands were far away from village streams there was a water shortage in the dry season. They added, however, that they could solve the water supply problem by building a traditional irrigation system (*mu’ang fai*) if they had the financial resources. FEDRA subsequently lent 2,000 baht each from FEDRA’s revolving fund project to ten villagers to enable them to build a weir (*fai*) and dig a water channel (*lam mu’ang*) passing through their land. Knowing that FEDRA had a special budget to assist those who did not have capital for investment in agriculture, the villagers (including some who had already borrowed money to construct the weir), asked to borrow 1,000 baht each from FEDRA’s revolving fund project to expand their production of cash crops, such as soya bean, peanut and chilli, and to assist in raising pigs for sale. FEDRA provided loans with the agreement that the interest would be fed back into a village fund to be run by a new village development committee which FEDRA then helped to set up.

As with DISAC before it, FEDRA had already designed the development projects which villagers were urged to join, and this could not be called “participatory development” in a real sense. Although the revolving fund projects helped many to

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<sup>14</sup> See details in Vanpen, 1989, “Issues and Experiences in the Use of Community Participation...”, pp. 76-116.

stay out of serious debt because of its cheap interest rate (e.g. 10 per cent per year as compared to 60 per cent required by money lenders), the project also became a factor in people's encroachment on the conservation forest to grow more cash crops; a move not anticipated by FEDRA.<sup>15</sup> This came about because villagers were looking for more than a subsistence existence, or even the self-sufficiency envisaged by FEDRA.

Recognising the rising tide of market economy in Village 1, Phithak – a FEDRA worker – believed this would lead to the bankruptcy of the villagers and FEDRA if they could not control the outcomes of the loan projects. He also feared the destruction of the local environment if the villagers continued to encroach on the forest for farming. Phithak, therefore, tried to persuade them to reduce household expenditure – which he hoped would minimise the farming in the forest – and suggested that they should maintain their “community culture” which he interpreted as the people living in harmony with one another and with nature as he believed they had in the past.<sup>16</sup> To implement this approach, Phithak, with the agreement of a number of village women, brought a loom to the village and invited a teacher to teach weaving skills to the women. He hoped that the women would spend some time weaving each day after their work in the field to make clothes for their own domestic use and thereby reduce the need for money to purchase clothes. He was soon to be disappointed when he saw the loom was kept under a villager's house instead of being used. Phithak, therefore, reassessed his “community culture” approach given the reality in Village 1 where the migrants were struggling to keep up with increasing household expenditure (children's education, health, consumer goods and transport together with agricultural investment). He discovered that already in 1985 the villagers were spending about 10,000 to 12,000 baht per month for a five-member household located in this forest frontier. I was informed that the attempt to introduce weaving was not successful because the weaving was seen to be too slow and the women were not convinced that it would meet their needs. There was also quarrelling among the women on issues such as the provision of food and accommodation for the teacher and the care of the loom and equipment.<sup>17</sup> The scheme failed because it did not take account of the real situation of migrant villagers who were trying to meet immediate needs.

FEDRA workers also soon began to realise that environmental problems, such as soil erosion and denuding of the forest, were the result of the villagers' increasing dependence on agricultural cash production in the forest. FEDRA then sought ways to

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<sup>15</sup> Prayat Jaturapho:nphithakkun, 1985 (2528), “Botrian jak ngoen thun mun wian: Suksa chapho: ko:rani: Kandamnoenngan muban samachik” [Lessons Learnt from the Revolving Fund Project: A Case Study of a Village Member's Working Process], [in Thai], Report presented to the TVS, Bangkok.

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 3 for explanation.

<sup>17</sup> Interview, INT-096-VIL, 19 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

restrict this. It believed that a simple solution to the problem would be to maximise income from their existing land. ATA, an NGO whose development activity was the application of “appropriate technology” to help villagers increase their income, was interested in working in a highland village where there was already an NGO working on community participation activities.<sup>18</sup> ATA expected to focus its effort on applying appropriate technology while the other NGO attended to social issues.

In 1985, ATA initiated a soya bean experiment with the people in Village 1 to maximise yields per rai, which they believed would help limit the amount of land in use.<sup>19</sup> In 1986, ATA proposed a small hydropower plant be set up in order to generate electricity for Village 1. The proposal included the establishment of a rice mill for villagers to reduce the cost of milling and save time transporting rice to be milled outside the village, also an electric oven for drying soya bean so that it could be preserved for sale when the price was good.<sup>20</sup> The NGO workers (FEDRA and ATA) also discussed with villagers how they could reduce their expenditure and the logging in Mae Rim Conservation Forest. Both FEDRA and ATA recognised that the technological activities would cause economic and social change in this village. However, while they saw the positive side of generating income and expected this to achieve their objective of helping to maintain the village, they did not recognise the potentially negative side of such activities, namely, more consumer spending rather than saving and even greater pressures on the natural resources.

Villagers took turns to help two ATA engineers construct the small hydropower plant. This practice was regarded by the ATA as representing a “people’s participation” approach simply because villagers contributed labour and discussed some practical matters concerning the landscaping with the ATA engineers. The plant was installed in Village 1 in less than a year, even shorter than the time taken to set up a similar plant in the Lua village the previous year.<sup>21</sup> However, not long after electricity was introduced, salesmen from the Chiang Mai city came to sell various kinds of consumer goods such

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<sup>18</sup> Appropriate Technology Association (ATA) identified Village 1 and, after doing a feasibility study, asked FEDRA for its cooperation. ATA had already received funding from the German NGO “Bread for the World” to set up a small hydropower plant to generate electricity in the Lua village and Village 1. See details in ATA, 1986 (2529), “Kansuksa saphap sangkhom wathanatham lae sethakit [lua village] amphoe mae rim jangwat chiang mai” [The Study Concerning Social, Cultural and Economic Conditions (Lua Village), Mae Rim District, Chiang Mai Province], [in Thai], Feasibility study for the utilisation of a Small Hydropower Project, ATA, Bangkok.

<sup>19</sup> Interview, INT-128-NGO, 20 February 1993, Chiang Mai.

<sup>20</sup> Soya bean seeds could be damaged easily by humidity. Normally, villagers rush to sell them off. Because of this, the soya bean price was lowered by middlemen. If the soya bean seeds were dried, the villagers were able to choose to sell when the price was rising. In this regard, NGOs helped the villagers to have control over their resource and production.

<sup>21</sup> See further details in Sirinporn Chate-thakul, 1990, “Micro-Hydropower Utilisation in Combination with the Heat Generator”, Evaluation Report, ATA, Bangkok.

as colour televisions, videos, stereos and even motorcycles. Some villagers began to buy on credit and, as a result, they immediately needed to earn substantially more cash to afford the goods and pay off debts. This in turn placed greater pressure on existing forest resources as the villagers turned to the forest for extra land for crops or to cut trees for sale.

Since the previous attempt to impose land registration on the villagers had failed, local forestry officials sought an alternative method to consolidate their control over the state forest. They decided to expand government teak plantations into degraded areas thereby establishing the state's control over the land and achieving reforestation. At the same time, they employed villagers as wage workers (55 baht a day) in the belief that this income opportunity would reduce the need to cut timber for cash. Many villagers were satisfied with this source of quick income. The officials also forbade any further forest encroachment and land transactions to private entrepreneurs with the threat that if these continued the villagers would have to be relocated out of the forest altogether.

As a result of this threat, village leaders and NGO workers invited the Project for Ecological Recovery (PER), an environmental NGO, to work in Village 1. The invitation suited PER which wanted to work on environmental problems in a forest-fringe area. The three NGOs (FEDRA, PER and ATA) decided to find a way in which the villagers could continue to live and survive in this village without damaging the forest environment. They wished to demonstrate to the forest officials that the villagers could help conserve the forest and should not be seen simply as agents of destruction. They also sought to help the villagers change their agricultural practice from intensification and commercialisation to more environmentally sensitive alley-cropping and mixed farming methods introduced by ATA and PER in 1986. This is what the NGOs called "alternative agriculture", a model which it hoped would prevent soil erosion and nutrient deficiency as well as creating a sustainable land use method.

Most villagers were reluctant to adopt the NGO techniques. A young peasant who had just started a family said that he could not afford the risk of the new techniques failing. He, therefore, preferred to wait and see whether the "alternative agriculture" approach worked before deciding to adopt the NGO methods.<sup>22</sup> Singha, the village founder, claimed that the methods were "suitable for dry-land agriculture as in the northeast" but not for Village 1. He recalled that previously FEDRA had "lent money to some villagers to dig *mu'ang fai*".<sup>23</sup> Thus, Singha claimed that the land was no longer seen as dry land. However, two middle-income villagers – *Pho:luang* Pa, the new Village Head from 1989, and a son of the former village head, *Pho:luang* Win – agreed to apply

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<sup>22</sup> Interview, INT-093-VIL 18 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>23</sup> Interview, INT-094-VIL, 19 Jan 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

the NGO conservation techniques on approximately one-third of their land. In making this decision they were motivated largely by self-interest – they protected their land in the forest while showing forestry officials that they were making a serious effort to protect the environment.<sup>24</sup>

Up to this time, the NGOs had primarily sought to help villagers maintain their settlement in this forest-fringe village. Guided by their philanthropic ideology, they used their development resources and expertise to support the village agriculture so that villagers would have the basic necessities – FEDRA emphasised its work on economic and social aspects, ATA on appropriate technology to enhance the village economy, while PER addressed the balance of economic and ecological dimensions. The three NGOs expected that the people would be able to help themselves when the NGOs moved out of the village altogether. However, they failed to consider changing situations and attitudes amidst rural transformation. The NGOs' activities in fact became forces which influenced a move towards commercial agriculture and further incursion into the forest areas.

In its 1983 report, DISAC had warned FEDRA to watch out for the “power structure of the community” (*khongsang amnat kho:ng chumchon*). It was afraid that, without an understanding of village leaders, factions, local cultures and the socio-economic influence from outside, FEDRA's development activities could become a catalyst for promoting the market-oriented economy.<sup>25</sup> To a large extent, that is what happened in Village 1. The villagers accepted the modern administration and did not reject the market economy if it helped them to maintain their well-being and increase their economic interest. However, they would not have become involved, to the same extent, in the market economy and agricultural commercialisation in the first place if they had not had enough money to invest in the new crops; if they were unsure about the risk involved; or if the decision to adopt commercialisation was contrary to their traditional norms. When these inhibiting factors were no longer present due to FEDRA's funding support and other assistance, they did not hesitate to become involved in the market economy.

### **Facilitating environmental resource management**

After working in Village 1 for a number of years, the NGOs had learnt the shortcomings in their development approaches. They had come to realise that working separately and focusing on their own organisational philosophies and sectoral programmes in isolation was not successful because aspects of development – social,

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<sup>24</sup> Suporn Amarueckachoke, 1992, “Problems and Prospect of Alley-Cropping on Steep Land”, MSc thesis (Agriculture), Graduate School, Chiang Mai University, p. 57.

<sup>25</sup> Niphot, 1983 (2526), “Prasopkan thamngan phatthana...”, p. 25.

economic, cultural and political – were interwoven and needed to be addressed in context. They also began to recognise the need to become involved with the different actors who had an interest in village development. As an ATA worker argued in retrospect, “it is unrealistic that one NGO undertakes technological activities and waits for the other to raise people’s consciousness”.<sup>26</sup> A PER worker claimed at the time that most NGOs played only a minimal interventionist role as development educators because they believed too much in the “people’s capacity” to understand their own situations and development better than outsiders:

The common belief among NGOs in working with villagers is to let people obtain a self-learning process. That is to say, allowing villagers to think, understand and act by themselves. These NGOs are inclined to refuse any kind of guidance (*kan chi nam*) arguing that development workers should not think on behalf of the people.<sup>27</sup>

He went on to refer to the environmental problem in the watershed area:

The situation of forest degradation in this area does not allow those NGOs not to take any action. If a villager continues or allows others to chop trees, the drought would certainly appear in this area as a consequence. Or if the people ceased to cut timber altogether, where would they obtain their income? This problem had to be solved by trying a new alternative.<sup>28</sup>

The NGO workers from FEDRA, ATA and PER, therefore, agreed to work hand in hand to intervene in the competition over resources between villagers, local forestry officials and private entrepreneurs and to tackle environmental degradation in this watershed area.

The threat by officials in 1985 to relocate Village 1 had put the NGOs in a strong position to convince villagers to seriously consider environmental issues. PER, with the help of FEDRA and ATA workers, undertook a historical study of the forest depletion in both Village 1 and the Lua village. While they were collecting data for their report, they discussed with villagers how their labour had been expropriated by timber producers and some corrupt officials at the expense of the local environment and with no concern for the risks they took (e.g. being arrested by forestry police, injured or killed in the forest).<sup>29</sup> These discussions helped the villagers construct social knowledge of their situation.

The local forestry officials saw that the NGO activities might be helpful to them – especially as the official annual budget for forest management was small and manpower inadequate for patrolling a vast forest area. After discussions with ATA workers, the Forestry Superintendent responsible for the Mae Rim Conservation Forest accepted that

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<sup>26</sup> Interview, INT-086-NGO, 16 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>27</sup> PER, 1987 (2530), “Chaoban kap nak phatthana” [Villagers and NGO Workers], [in Thai], Memo dated 24-25 September, Chiang Mai.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Interview, INT-086-NGO, 16 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

the NGOs were introducing villagers to alternative agricultural techniques which were more friendly to the forest. Forestry officials agreed with the NGOs that environmental degradation would be reduced if alternative agriculture methods, including alley-cropping, mixed farming and biological pest control, proved to be successful. They supported the NGOs in encouraging villagers not to chop down trees and, more importantly, in helping to protect the forest from encroachment by private entrepreneurs who, it was alleged, were organising through their political links to have land in the conservation forest registered corruptly. In many areas throughout the Upper Northern Region, the invasion of the forest by these influential people went beyond the control of local, low-ranking forestry officials.<sup>30</sup>

When ATA completed the hydropower plant in the Lua village in March 1987, the workers from three NGOs (PER, ATA and FEDRA) discussed with the leaders of the Lua village and Village 1 the possibility of initiating an environmental resource management plan in this watershed area. The NGO workers explained that the electricity was generated from the water resource which depended on an intact forest and asked villagers to observe the electrical power output in relation to the water level. They also discussed water use in general. A former village head of the Lua claimed that the rain no longer fell according to its season and that, when it did rain heavily in the mountains, it would run down to flood lowland villages as had not happened before.<sup>31</sup> The people agreed there was, therefore, a need to protect the forest. It seems to me that NGO activities had encouraged villagers to recognise the impact of environmental degradation and the urgent need for forest protection. During my fieldwork, I also heard villagers complaining about the hydro-electricity power fluctuating, causing short circuit and damaging their electrical equipment. They knew that this happened because of the water supply level which would fall if there was extensive use of water for commercial agriculture, especially in the dry season.

The leaders of both villages and the NGO workers agreed to use some elements of traditional culture as a basis for formulating an environmental movement. As the migrants of Village 1 had neither a long history of settlement nor a leader who was able to guarantee the villagers' participation, it was decided to initiate the plan in the Lua village where some traditional leaders still remembered the village history and culture, especially in upland cultivation. Clearing forest land, for instance, was very important to the Lua and there were certain restraints. Before farming upland rice, a Lua leader had to perform a ritual to ask permission from the "lord of land" (*jaothi jaodin*). The Lua avoided cutting big trees by choosing an open area with few trees for fear that the

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<sup>30</sup> Interview, INT-109-GOV, 25 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>31</sup> PER, 1987 (2530), "Banthu'k kan prachum" [Record of the Meeting], [in Thai], dated 28 March, Chiang Mai.

“lord of the forest” (*jaopa*) living in the big trees would harm them. Based on the Lua’s culture of upland production, the NGOs constructed a social meaning of “community forest” referring to a form of “community culture” through which human beings were able to live in harmony with their environment. The NGO workers and villagers intended to use the “community forest” approach to obtain the participation of concerned actors to cooperate in managing the natural resources in this watershed area. They planned an opening ceremony for the hydropower plant – and to use it as an opportunity to win the participation of concerned actors to help map out an environmental management plan.

Over a month before the ceremony was held, the Lua villagers and NGO workers prepared a proposal for land and forest management in order to negotiate with local officials about future settlement in the forest. PER invited a village leader from Thung Yao village, Lamphun province, to discuss the experience of forest protection in his village and how this had helped reduce the negative impact resulting from economic development.<sup>32</sup> The proposal recommended determination (by discussion) of forest boundaries between villages and forest classification. Similar activities were also conducted in Village 1 where it was agreed in principle that the land and forest resources could be divided into two categories. One was the conservation forest (*pa anurak*) which was composed of watershed and evergreen forest. The villagers would set up rules forbidding anybody to chop trees in the conservation forest. The other category was the utility forest (*pa chaiso:i*) where the forest was relatively degraded. It was agreed to allow only certain kinds of trees to be cut in the utility forest and then only for use within the village community.<sup>33</sup> These agreements were incorporated into a resource management plan to be put to a meeting at the opening ceremony for the Lua hydropower plant.

After the religious ceremony held on the morning of 28 March 1987 to open the hydropower plant in the Lua village, a meeting was held at which a Lua leader presented the land and forest management proposal. Those attending the meeting included the district head, a former forest superintendent, sub-district head, five village headmen and villagers. The meeting began with an outline by the former Lua village head of the forest degradation and its consequences such as soil erosion and especially the water shortage which affected the villages. Then, the proposed land and forest management plan was presented along with a set of rules for forest protection which had been previously agreed by the villagers themselves. Having the officials and

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<sup>32</sup> PER, 1987 (2530), “Bunthu’k kan lamdap hetkan kan koet kan anurak pa” [Record of the chronological events concerning forest-resource conservation] April 1986 (2529)-April 1987 (2530), [in Thai], Chiang Mai.

<sup>33</sup> PER *et al.*, 1987 (2530), “Rai-ngan kan samruat sapphayako:n pamai” [Report of the Forest-Resource Survey], [in Thai], May, Chiang Mai.

interested parties present meant that the plan could be discussed and agreed by all parties and could then be implemented. For example, the district head at that time asked for changes to a rule in the plan which said that a village headman would be punished by law if a resident of his village encroached on the forest. He pointed out that legal action could not be pursued against a village head if he himself did not break the law. Thus, the discussion between villagers and local officials helped ensure that the forest protection plan was accepted, in principle, by all parties at the meeting. Subsequently, detailed plans were prepared for each village by the people themselves. PER helped the Lua and residents of Village 1 to conduct their forest survey in 1987 in accordance with the classifications which had been agreed, and to specify village boundaries.

However, competition over land and forest resources in Village 1 continued to intensify in the late 1980s when government policies promoted economic growth through tourism and agri-business. Local brokers and private entrepreneurs from both Bangkok and Chiang Mai sought to buy land in this village to create agri-business ventures and to build holiday houses. *Pho:luang* Win and some local middlemen were active in convincing villagers to sell their lands in order to get commissions from private entrepreneurs for themselves. Local forestry officials saw the potential for rapid forest encroachment if the villagers continued selling land to outsiders who would chop down the forest trees for sale, plant commercial fruit orchards or build tourist resorts. They, therefore, tried to implement a government land title directive of 1985 which allowed only 15 rai of lowlands to be legally registered to a single household head. In this way they hoped to prevent the sale of unregistered land. However, the attempt failed because most villagers refused to register their land and actively protested against the implementation of the directive. One of the protesters told me that villagers were afraid that if they agreed to register their lowlands, they would lose their rights over their highland plots which could not be registered under the 1985 directive.<sup>34</sup> Later, some villagers were resentful that they had missed an opportunity to get their land registered. They felt that they had been misled by *Pho:luang* Win who had big plots of highland but little lowland and would not have benefited to the same degree from the registration provisions. Consequently, the villagers proposed to the district head that elections be held to choose a new village head to replace *Pho:luang* Win. As a result, *Pho:luang* Pa became the Village Head in 1989.

The change of leadership did not convince everyone that their future in the Village was secure. They were uncertain whether the local forestry officials would allow them to stay where they were or whether they would decide to relocate the village out of the forest altogether. Some villagers decided to jointly sell their rights over both lowland

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<sup>34</sup>

Interview, INT-090-VIL, 17 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

and highland plots to a Bangkok doctor and his friend, a manager of Thai Airways, in January and February 1988.<sup>35</sup> The land was sold at about 400 baht per rai and included about a half of the village cultivated land in the degraded forest (about 150 rai). While the doctor's friend used 50 rai of land to grow sweet tamarind, coconut and mango for domestic markets, the doctor left his land idle. Land sales in this village to outsiders occurred from time to time due to a lack of certainty of land ownership and utilisation. The sale in 1988 was a major event in the village history and represented significant evidence of competition over forest land between entrepreneurs, villagers and officials. Perhaps surprisingly, this situation led to cooperation between NGO and officials.

Although the forest and land management plan was agreed in 1987, its implementation activities were slow because, after PER workers opted out of this area in 1988, it took time for the villagers, ATA and FEDRA to establish suitable work arrangements with all parties concerned. In 1991, Bun (an ATA worker) with the help of Chai (a FEDRA worker) took up the forest management activities in addition to their other tasks.<sup>36</sup> As Mae Lo stream was the main stream used by five villages in the watershed area, Bun helped organise the respective leaders to draw a sketch map indicating their forest boundaries because local forest officials did not have a detailed map of the area. Then, the representatives discussed their village boundaries. Moreover, Bun and a group of about 10 villagers patrolled the forest areas around Mae Lo stream every fortnight to make sure there were no breaches of agreed rules. In addition, Bun and Chai encouraged the continuing cooperation between villagers and local forestry officials. Later, they also sought the support of other NGOs from Chiang Mai and Bangkok in the forest management activities to counter external pressure on the forest. Those agencies included the Multi-Cropping Centre (MCC – Faculty of Agriculture, Chiang Mai University), Sammu'n Highland Development Project (RFD), and NGO-CORD. In 1993, Bun told me that he did not know how long he would be able to continue conducting these activities with villagers because financial support was now difficult to obtain as funding agencies had shifted their support to environment activities at the national rather than community level.<sup>37</sup> The villagers themselves were very concerned about their future in the area and tried to seek assistance from other NGOs while cooperating with forestry officials to expand the government teak plantation.

In summary, the NGOs have encouraged villagers to develop a cooperative plan for land, forest and water management. It commenced with the Lua, who still recognised

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<sup>35</sup> Interview, INT-093-VIL, 18 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>36</sup> An ATA worker who helped villagers operate the hydropower plant, rice mill and electric oven. A FEDRA worker followed up the revolving fund, rice bank and buffalo bank projects and helped transport village products such as dried bamboo shoot, soya bean seed and so on to district and city markets.

<sup>37</sup> Interview, INT-086-NGO, 16 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

their culture of the forest settlement, and it extended to other villages around the Mae Lo stream. The motivation for villagers to be involved in resource management was stimulated by PER, FEDRA and ATA, and was accepted by local officials. While the villagers wanted to maintain their settlement in the forest fringe, the officials wanted the villagers to help them protect the forest from being destroyed by illegal loggers and private entrepreneurs who had both economic and political influence.

## Discussion

### Transformation, competition, and intervention

Various forces of both structure and human agency influence the transformation of rural Thailand and can result in competition over the use of natural and productive resources. Between the early 1970s and early 1990s, the Thai political system had moved from a military-dominated regime to a parliamentary coalition. Despite the changes of government, however, the promotion of economic growth has been at the top of the agenda of national development policies since the early 1960s and was particularly strong under the Chatchai government (1988-1991). As indicated in Chapter 2, economic growth had led to uneven development as successive Thai governments had paid little attention to reforming the social and political structures and to ensuring an equitable distribution of the nation's wealth. Village 1 was populated by migrants who had come from various places in search of new land for their survival. Like many others in Thailand, these migrants had been pushed out of their own villages by the increasing competition for land in the spreading market-economy system. They complained about the high interest rates charged by money and rice lenders, a practice generally accepted in Thai society without questioning. In the region of Village 1, roads built to remote areas benefited the logging companies more than ordinary people. A Lua leader told me that the road built in 1975: "was built for 'capitalists' to be able to increase the transportation of timber out of the village" (*naithun khon mai o:k tik tik*).<sup>38</sup> The more the Lua saw this, the more they changed their attitudes towards customary belief and practice. They subsequently reduced their respect for the "lord of the forest" rather than miss out on using forest resources for cash income. Although local forestry officials in some areas were active in enforcing forest conservation laws on illegal loggers and investors of capital, their hands were generally tied because the RFD gave them little support. The influential entrepreneurs could get land in the conservation forest registered through their association with corrupt politicians and bureaucrats in Bangkok. The Forest Superintendent told me he felt like "the meat in the sandwich"

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<sup>38</sup>

Interview, INT-084-VIL, 14 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

when he was expected to perform his duty according to the public demand but could not do so properly because of the corrupt bureaucratic system.<sup>39</sup> Due to changing economic and social conditions, villagers wanted greater access to cash to supplement not only their basic food needs but also education, health services, general household goods and consumer items – all of which were part of the changing way of life. Villages could not go back to what they were. The need for cash income put pressure on villagers to have access to natural resource use while investors of capital had an eye on the same source of supply. This situation showed the increasing competition over the use of natural resources between various actors.

Competition over resources, environmental problems and social tensions were not new issues in Thai rural development. However, they had been obscured by the ideological conflicts between “the Right” and “the Left” until the mid-1980s.<sup>40</sup> After the decline of ideological conflict, NGO activists began to look beyond the ideological priorities and to reinterpret the concrete situation, as we have seen occurring in Village 1. However, the responses of different NGOs varied according to their particular outlooks.

Influenced by the concept of Marxist political economy, predominant among the Thai ‘left-wing intellectuals’ in the early 1980s, DISAC began to set up its rice bank activities while at the same time studying “the structure of power in the community”.<sup>41</sup> In its report, DISAC clearly showed that it understood the situation of individual villagers, the social tensions between villagers and local officials and the tensions among villagers themselves. DISAC took a position against the domination of the state over the village by supporting a traditional leader to counterbalance the power of a formal village head who it considered represented the Thai political structure in the village. However, this, and its opposition to political centralisation, aroused not only mistrust between government officials and NGOs but also tensions among villagers – especially when DISAC distanced itself from communicating with quasi- and local officials.

As distinct from DISAC, FEDRA preferred to cooperate with local officials to deliver social services which were missing in the government approach. As FEDRA concentrated on social integration rather than social conflict, it neither conducted a village study nor paid much attention to analysing social tensions. It presumed that these were caused by the behaviour of individuals rather than the constraints of political and social structure. FEDRA generally created good relations with government officials. However, it had its own internal tensions which have occurred since the early

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<sup>39</sup> Interview, INT-109-GOV, 25 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>40</sup> Hirsch, 1993, “Competition and Conflict over Resources...”.

<sup>41</sup> Niphot, 1983 (2526), “Prasopkan thamngan phatthana...”, p. 25. See also the brief outline of DISAC in Chapter 3.

1980s between 'progressive' fieldworkers and FEDRA administrators concerning alternative development approaches. In particular, some FEDRA fieldworkers were interested in social analysis which was not supported by the organisation.

The other two NGOs, ATA and PER, had their own development agenda in Village 1. ATA's prime interest lay in the application of "appropriate technology" such as the hydropower plant, rice mill and electric oven, as a means to help generate village income. It undertook a comprehensive feasibility study to commence its projects but then focused its work on the technical dimensions of the scheme and expected FEDRA to deal with social problems in the village. PER's interest lay in the environmental issues and it tried to implement a "community forest" concept as a social meaning to stimulate the villagers' awareness of environmental problems and the need to manage natural resources. In so doing, PER encouraged FEDRA and ATA to reassess their approach in the light of the people's changing attitudes and behaviour. Together, the three NGOs were able to see the need to identify and include other development actors with an interest in the development of the village and environmental issues. They, therefore, agreed to reorientate the focus of their activities to intervene and mediate in the tensions between local officials and villagers over access to forest resources as well as to provide economic assistance. The following section deals with the interventionist role of the NGOs in relation to the rural transformation and competition over natural resources in two periods before and after the mid-1980s.

The considerable competition and tensions over natural and productive resources in Village 1 before the mid-1980s occurred on several fronts. Prior to the NGO involvement in this village, competition over access to resources was reflected in the high interest rates charged by money and rice lenders. The rice shortage of the 1960s and 1970s worried the village founder who was concerned that if the high interest rates continued, villagers would begin to sell off their land to pay accumulating debts. He, therefore, sought a way to intervene in the competition between rice lenders and new settlers by asking an NGO to set up a rice bank project.

At the same time, there was tension between forestry officials and the new settlers regarding forest resource use. The officials argued that the settlers were expanding their farming into the forest and, more importantly, were cutting timber illegally. The settlers argued that they did so only for their survival unlike the logging companies which received the government's concession to cut down trees to make profit. They added that they had small tools, such as axes and hand saws, and did not damage the forest as much as logging companies which used large equipment such as electric saws, and trucks for transportation. They also pointed out the failure of forestry officials to discipline logging companies which did not follow the forestry rules. The villagers' claim was not far from the truth, however, as the officials' only response to the

destruction of the forest was to expand the official teak plantation to claim the area of the Mae Rim Conservation Forest and keep it safe from loggers.

Prior to the mid-1980s, the key tensions in Village 1 arose from the political mistrust between local interior officials, student activists and NGO workers. Fearing the expansion of communist insurgency, most authorities were suspicious of ‘outsiders’, especially students and NGO workers, who came to work in remote villages.<sup>42</sup> In Village 1, these suspicions increased after Chiang Mai University students helped to build a school and the villagers demanded that the district head send a teacher. As the district office was slow to do this, the students took turns to teach the children. This made the authorities anxious that political unrest might arise.

When DISAC came to set up a rice bank project in response to the ongoing rice shortage, it was soon in the middle of conflicts. DISAC was regarded with suspicion because it was a Catholic NGO working in the Buddhist community and lacking communication with officials or even quasi-officials such as a village head. The latter factor made it difficult for DISAC to bridge the gap of mistrust especially as bypassing contact with officials was a common practice among social activists during the early 1980s.

The bottom-up people’s participation approach, introduced by NGOs at that time in the form of village development committees, confused most rural people who were accustomed to the officials’ top-down administration, alms-giving and philanthropic activities. The empowerment of the traditional leader did not work in Village 1 because the village founder used his position in the DISAC project against his rival rather than to serve the other members of the project. The rivalry between the traditional (the village founder) and modern leader (village head) stimulated tension among the migrants. This became particularly evident in the episode of the spirit speaking through a female villager and accusing DISAC. DISAC was quick to recognise the growing tensions between the village factions and deferred its activities to settle the disagreement.<sup>43</sup> Villagers later recognised that the DISAC rice bank was important to

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<sup>42</sup> This experience also occurred to me in the mid 1970s when I chose to work as a teacher in a village school in the Northeast Region. However, I was lucky to escape the authorities’ suspicion because of my helpful “patrons”. One was the district head who regarded me as a “younger sister” because we both graduated from Chulalongkorn University where the system of senior and junior was very strong in the 1970s. The other was my school headmaster who was my friend’s father and sympathised with my “unconventional” ideas. In addition, I discovered later on that my grandmother had donated money to build the village school where I worked to “gain merit” (*thambun*). Looking back over my past experience, I have found that staying free of political troubles has depended greatly on the importance of such associations and cultural outlooks.

<sup>43</sup> Fr Niphot was excited when he heard that a female villager broke her silence out of concern about the village dispute. What interests me are the ways in which villagers used different approaches to solve their problems.

the survival of their settlement. It had helped solve the problem of rice shortage and reduced the pressure of high interest rates imposed by rice lenders. Without DISAC's presence in the early 1980s, "we [villagers] would have lost our land to the 'capitalists' and the village would no longer exist".<sup>44</sup> Most villagers I interviewed including *Pho:luang* Win agreed that the economic intervention of DISAC was significant in the survival of the village and came just at the right time.

FEDRA moved into the same situation of tension which had faced DISAC. However, it was not viewed by officials with the same suspicion because FEDRA was a Buddhist NGO coming to work in the Buddhist community. The villagers felt more comfortable dealing with FEDRA because they were not being continually questioned by the authorities about the new NGO's activities and were no longer suspected of supporting 'political agitators'. Economically, FEDRA continued the rice bank activities of DISAC and expanded them to include several projects such as the revolving fund and buffalo bank. The villagers' proposal to construct an irrigation system to increase commercial agriculture with FEDRA financial support was a clear reflection of their expanding needs in the changing rural economy.

In contrast to FEDRA, which intended to minimise socio-economic change in rural areas, ATA recognised that socio-economic change was inevitable and tried to make this beneficial to villagers. In practice, however, ATA focused only on the improved soya bean and alley-cropping experiments, that is, on the technological aspect of change rather than the social and economic dimensions. It overlooked the fact that the change could also benefit businessmen who were in touch with the villagers in the everyday economy, for instance, middlemen buying cash crops from villagers and salesmen selling consumer goods to villagers. The new technical assistance was more efficient and initially meant more production without needing more land. However, this was very quickly reversed when the increased income-generating activities encouraged the village to spend more on commercial goods and eventually to expand their farming into the forest. This impact had not been anticipated by ATA and led to renewed tensions between the villagers and forest officials, but again the NGOs were able to respond creatively to the new situation in the form of a resource management plan.

The new Village Head, with the help of his wife, performed his duty properly and became an active leader engaged in alley-cropping with ATA and PER. The forestry officials strongly endorsed the forest and soil conservation activities. They also expected that the NGOs and people could help them prevent the forest from being encroached on by private entrepreneurs. After the mid-1980s, the problem of mistrust between officials, NGO workers and villagers gradually eased only to be replaced by

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<sup>44</sup>

Interview, INT-094-VIL, 19 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

tension between officials and business concerning access to the forest and other natural resources. This became apparent in the late 1980s when officials realised the limitations in their ability to protect the forest from being extensively encroached upon by business interests. They needed NGO workers to control villagers and to cooperate with them to pursue their duty.

Throughout the period of study and the different stages of change, the relationship between NGO fieldworkers and villagers was sound, and there is little doubt that the NGOs have been able to construct good relationships with the rural people. For instance, a villager told me about the commitment of Phithak, who encouraged the development committee members and other villagers who had little formal education to manage development projects:

He supervised us [villagers] to run all the projects and knew everything about us. He came to work in this village when he was a [Chiang Mai] university student and again when he joined FEDRA in 1984. He spent seven to eight days a month staying in a village hut so that he could discuss with us concerning several development issues which we did not understand and inquire our activities to make us think further. Even though he left FEDRA, he still came to visit us.<sup>45</sup>

Having seen the link between local officials, politicians and villagers, FEDRA tried not to upset the balance of the relationship unnecessarily, however, the field workers were more inclined to question and to challenge FEDRA's approach.

Since the mid-1980s when the NGO ideological belief that "the people can do no wrong"<sup>46</sup> weakened, fieldworkers from both FEDRA and ATA began to realise that they lacked an analysis of people's attitudes and behaviour in relation to socio-economic change. A FEDRA worker reflected:

We know the people, for example, who is who in the village but we do not understand or even learn to analyse their thought and performances in relation to reality.<sup>47</sup>

The reflection highlights the tension arising within the NGO community and a communication gap between the NGO fieldworkers and their headquarters. While NGO projects had already been designed by NGO headquarters, many villagers, whose needs were dependent upon the cash economy, chose to become involved with the project or organisation which was likely to benefit them most. Moreover, some villagers helped shape activities which, they believed, would enhance their income. The weir and hydro-electricity projects were cases in point where FEDRA and ATA conducted development activities responding to the people's needs along the lines of a market-oriented economy. A FEDRA fieldworker accepted that the NGO economic

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<sup>45</sup> Interview, INT-093-VIL, 18 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>46</sup> Friedmann, 1992, *Empowerment...*, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Interview, INT-047-NGO, 19 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

and technological activities turned out to be catalytic factors promoting agrarian change and causing environmental problems. He concluded that:

We cannot claim that the force influencing economic change comes only from official conduct. While solving economic problems along with villagers, the NGOs, too, played a significant role in the process of change. We supported agricultural intensification and commercialisation financially; organised trips for villagers to see various kinds of agricultural innovation; and adopted the techniques without the understanding of the concepts behind. We [both villagers and NGOs] had been struggling for the betterment in the state's framework and mechanism.<sup>48</sup>

How did NGO fieldworkers deal with the situation when they found their development activities becoming forces influencing villagers to conduct agrarian change and forest encroachment? In this case, the fieldworkers from FEDRA, ATA and PER discussed and criticised their own activities which had produced the unexpected results. An ATA worker pointed out that the so-called 'division of labour' among NGOs, which was based on the different expertise of each organisation, neglected the holistic nature of development. For example, one NGO undertook technological activities to help villagers generate their income and waited for another NGO to deal with social problems and forest depletion. What the ATA worker pointed out is that it is important for development theorists and practitioners to understand local situations and networks of social relations among actors in a given context.

The NGO workers also criticised the non-interventionist approach of NGOs concerning the people's knowledge. PER workers pointed out the main problem of forest depletion in this area had existed and been aggravated since the village settlement in the early 1960s. They also noted the tensions between villagers, forestry officials and private entrepreneurs regarding competition over the use of land and forest resources. These problems, they argued, meant that the NGOs must intervene to alleviate the tensions and stop forest encroachment. The critical thinking of NGOs in this case helped them to see that the people's changing attitudes and behaviour were dependent to some extent upon the cash economy.

The NGOs also wanted to challenge the perception of some forestry officials who believed that people were unable to manage forest resources by themselves. According to an ATA worker, a forestry official once argued:

The management of forest resources was not something which villagers were able to do by themselves. It had to be done step by step [following official procedure]. The system which NGOs used was a "communist" system. I understand that we have the same objective of protecting forest but different approaches.<sup>49</sup>

This attitude changed when they realised that they did not have enough resources to pursue the management of forest resources alone. Nor did they have any space to

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Interview, INT-086-NGO, 16 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

relocate villagers. In this situation, the officials wanted the villagers to help them to protect the forest from being destroyed by illegal loggers and encroachment by private entrepreneurs who had both economic and political power whereas the villagers wanted to maintain their settlement in the forest fringe. As far as the NGOs were concerned, they were, as Melucci argues and I quoted at the beginning of the Chapter, “forced to imagine the social and political means of controlling this difference”.<sup>50</sup>

The NGOs demonstrated to local officials that people could live with and manage the forest. In this case, I found some important factors which contributed to the NGO playing an interventionist role. First, the NGOs saw everyday politics as inseparable from organising the people’s environmental movement. In formulating the people’s collective action, the NGOs developed the social meaning of “community forest” from the methods used by the Lua and the Northern Thai people of Thung Yao village in Lamphun province to protect their forest from being encroached upon by investors of capital. They aimed to draw the participation of the villagers living in the watershed area to negotiate a settlement with forestry officials. The NGOs presented the “community forest” approach practically by helping villagers map out village boundaries and set up rules to use the forest and to punish those who broke them.

Secondly, the NGOs and villagers agreed that it was necessary to draw other concerned actors and organisations to participate in the resource management plan. In this way, the NGOs encouraged social actors to recognise not only their social relations but also the current problem of local environmental degradation in the area.

Thirdly, the NGOs and villagers recognised the significance of time and space in bringing together social and environmental movements. They organised a religious ceremony to open the small hydropower plant in the Lua village, which the RFD recognise as an excised area, to show that the Lua had been maintaining some traditional practices and living in the forest long before the Forest Conservation Act of 1964. At a meeting which took place after the opening ceremony their resource management plan was overwhelmingly accepted. However, the plan was just a blueprint. The villagers and NGO fieldworkers had to work out its details and continue their forest management activities. This has been done with some difficulty since the early 1990s due to lack of funding support for the NGOs.

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<sup>50</sup> Melucci, 1988, “Social Movements and the Democratisation...”, p. 252.

### Some issues from fieldwork

First, it is unlikely that the NGO implementation of alternative development strategies to help people empower themselves can bypass the state. During the 1980s, the fieldworkers of four NGOs (DISAC, FEDRA, ATA and PER) had difficulties implementing alternative development strategies with the people of Village 1 – most of whom were migrants from different parts of rural Thailand and possessing different cultures. A PER worker called this village *Ban kaengho* because she felt frustrated by the villagers' endless disagreements.<sup>51</sup> The NGO workers received more support from the villagers when the relationship between the NGOs and officials was recognised and assumed the middle ground of cooperation, not ideological conflict. The villagers seemed to accept the authority of village head, a quasi-official in the modern administration. For example, the school teacher criticised the DISAC workers' approach to community work saying that they often went to, or organised meetings at, the house of the village founder without recognising the village head. He suggested that the DISAC workers should also have visited *Pho:luang* Win because: "*Yang rai khao ko: pen kae ban*" (He was, after all, the village head).<sup>52</sup> When *Pho:luang* Pa, the current Village Head, replaced *Pho:luang* Win in 1989, the villagers seemed to accept the change of leadership and responsibility of the new incumbent, Pa, to take care of this multi-cultural village.

Although the NGOs were successful in helping the Lua and Village 1 residents to formulate a resource management plan in the Mae Lo watershed area, their success could not have been accomplished without the cooperation of local officials and quasi-officials. Local officials, especially forestry officers, sought the cooperation of village leaders and NGO workers as forest keepers to prevent the private entrepreneurs from encroaching into the Mae Rim conservation forest and changing its landscape for commercial purposes. This practical approach to protecting the forest by the forestry officials in Mae Rim district showed an understanding of power relations between different actors.

Secondly, there are more likely to be political rather than technical reasons why two villagers in Village 1 adopted the alternative farming practices promoted by the NGOs. Their reason was essentially to convince the forestry officials that their settlement in the forest did not harm the local environment. They sought to show the officials that they could help to guard the forest. However, the NGO claim that alternative, sometimes called indigenous, farming practices could replace scientific or modern farming

<sup>51</sup> Interview, INT-086-NGO, 16 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai. "*Ban kaengho*" or "*Kaengho* Village" is analogised by a PER worker referring to a Northern Thai dish which has a mixture of many kinds of vegetables and meats. It is because villagers are migrants from different places and composed of different cultures.

<sup>52</sup> Niphot, 1983 (2526), "Prasopkan thamngan phatthana...", p. 21.

methods and help sustain the village livelihood, is debatable. That is because when the NGOs encouraged the villagers to adopt the indigenous farming technique, many villagers, especially the marginal, waited to see if it worked in their environment because they could not afford to take a risk if it failed. In early 1993, the villagers (including those two who had adopted the alley-cropping technique introduced by an ATA worker) were engaged in intensive farming practices while experimenting with organic farming methods. The choice is not simply between two methods of agriculture. The common sense of survival makes the villagers more pragmatic than idealistic in managing the problems of the local environment and their own needs over time.

Thirdly, while the NGO fieldworkers saw a people's environmental movement emerging from the elaboration of social meaning in their daily life as the consequence of relations among humans and between humans and nature, many other NGOs still perceived the people's movement largely in forms of collective protests. Although collective protest is a useful form of political intervention, it is often an outcome of the movement rather than its starting point. As we saw, the resource management plan in the Mae Lo watershed area started from the interpretation of the "community forest" concept in relation to the culture of the Lua. An ATA fieldworker, who helped the village leaders carry on day-to-day forest management activities, argued that it was necessary to have a community organiser to work with the villagers for a time until the people were able to manage by themselves. He also pointed out that many funding agencies preferred to give financial support to NGOs which were conducting environmental campaign activities or policy advocacy at the national and international levels rather than to those which were organising people's environmental movements at the grass-roots level.<sup>53</sup> Without manpower and financial support, the ATA worker was afraid that the embryo of the people's collective activities in protecting the forest might be lost. For some time, we have perceived a 'social movement' only in the form of collective protest. Nevertheless, the formation of the people's environmental movement in the Mae Lo watershed area shows the starting point of social movement as "a general representation of social life".<sup>54</sup> The everyday actions of the people should not be analysed in isolation from the collective activities because they are "two poles" of the social movement.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Interview, INT-086-NGO, 16 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>54</sup> Touraine, 1995, "Beyond Social Movements?", p. 372.

<sup>55</sup> Melucci, 1988, "Social Movements and the Democratisation...", p. 248.

### **Concluding remarks**

This chapter has shown how four indigenous, people-centred Thai NGOs have intervened in competition over resources which affected villagers during the transformation of rural Thailand in the 1980s. Prior to the mid-1980s, competition arose from the declaration of the conservation forest, logging concessions and high interest rates and affected relations between government officials, logging companies, money lenders and rural people. At that time, the issues of competition over resources were dominated by the ideological conflict – from the nation down to the village – between the officials, rural people, university students and NGOs. The people-centred NGOs, which emerged outside the bureaucratic and business domination from the mid-1970s, adopted a people's participation concept against the denial of the people's rights to development from the Thai political structure. Guided by alternative development strategies, the NGOs also adopted a position against the 'state' and 'capitalism' while working with the 'people' in remote areas.

After the mid-1980s, the ideological conflict began to decline and competition over resources became widely spread throughout the countryside. Through trial and error, the NGOs moved from their strong ideological orientation of the 1970s to a more realistic understanding of empirical situations in which various actors were competing to control resources.

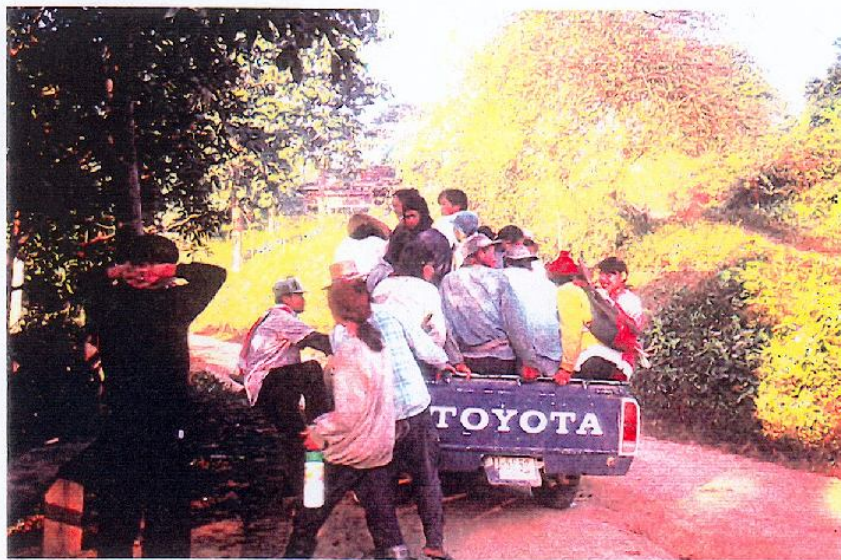
In the transformation occurring in Village 1, the NGOs played an interventionist role, helping to turn competition over resources into cooperation in the form of a resource management plan. The plan became a blueprint for the rural people of different tribes and local officials to prevent the forest in the watershed area from being encroached on further. The NGO interventions in this area have contributed to the understanding and learning process of other NGOs working in similar environments by: emphasising the need to understand local situations and cultures in relation to current changes in the political economy of rural Thailand; constructing the social meaning of "community forest" in relation to the Lua's remaining culture, to gain the participation of all concerned social actors; recognising the relation between social actors and system and trying to make the power visible, negotiable and, therefore, controllable.<sup>56</sup> However, the social meaning is not permanently fixed. Nor is the achievement of NGO intervention. The intervention is an on-going activity, for new situations occur, new tensions arise and new meanings begin to shift over time.

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.



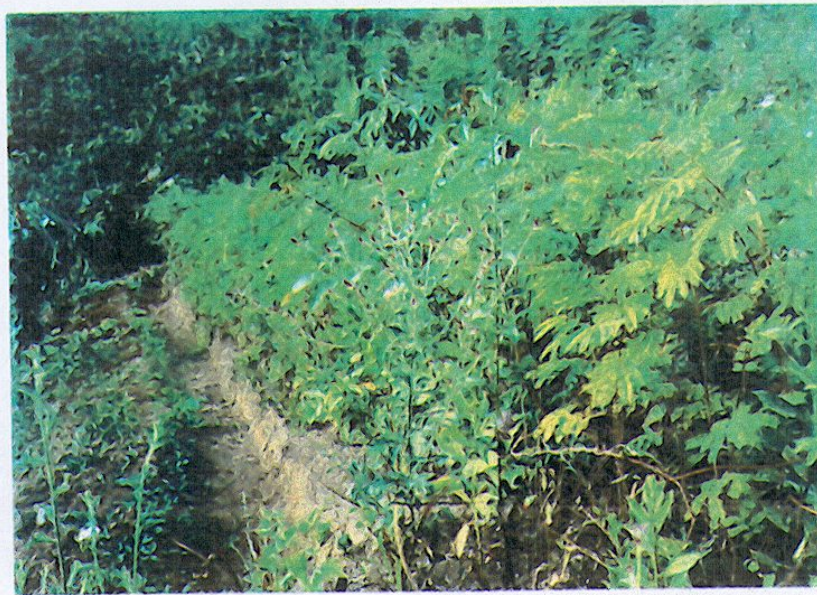
**Plate 1.** Village 1 and its surroundings in early 1993.



**Plate 2** Villagers going to work in the state teak plantation.



**Plate 3** Rice mill set up with assistance of ATA engineers.



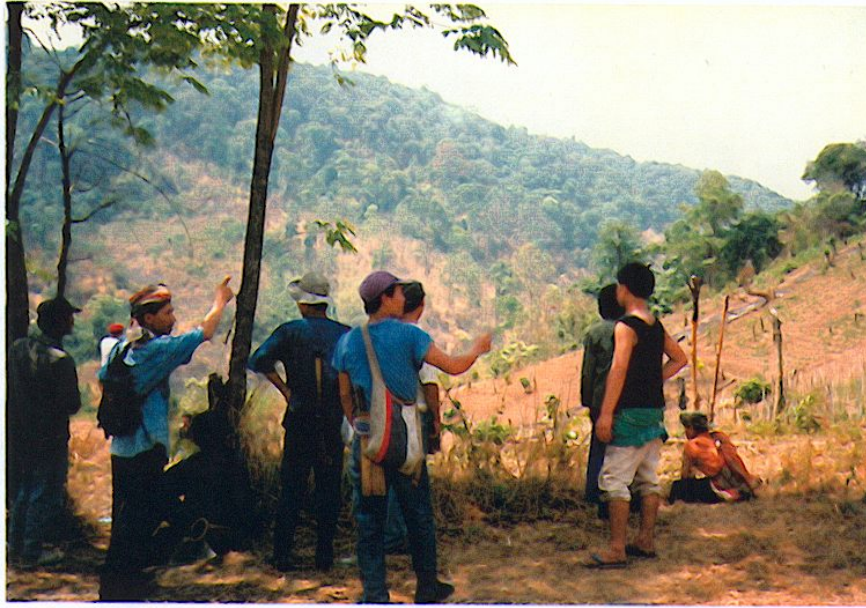
**Plate 4** Alley cropping technique introduced by an ATA worker (agricultural expert).



**Plate 5.** Villagers drawing a map to identify forest and village boundaries.



**Plate 6** Villagers discussing and correcting the village and forest boundaries.



**Plate 7.** Villagers patrolling the forest.



**Plate 8** Villagers having a rest at the ATA worker's residence.

## Chapter 5

### Competition over resources in a commercialised agricultural village

[S]ocial practice... is a process in which the meaning of human action is constructed. ... [M]eaning cannot be permanently fixed; it is always changing such that even the very recognition of identity relies on an ongoing process of articulation of meanings. Dominant hegemonic practices tend towards closure of the social (that is, to project a “society”; for instance, the New World Order); in the process of so doing, however, antagonisms emerge, which in turn make possible the emergence of new actors and discourses.

A. Escobar<sup>1</sup>

This chapter aims to demonstrate how an NGO working at the community level sought the help of other NGO networks operating at regional and national levels to intervene in the competition over the use of productive resources between small-scale producers, government officials and business companies. The NGO intervention helped producers to increase their bargaining power with middlemen and to formulate a people’s organisation. It also provided a political space for representatives of the people’s organisation to negotiate their interests with politicians and business agents. This case occurred in a commercialised agricultural village – Village 2 – where the water resource supply was being affected by forest depletion occurring in Village 1 and other villages in the watershed area.

A description of the social and economic changes in this village reveals that the villagers have been engaged in agricultural commercialisation since the 1930s. The more these people have been involved in the market-oriented economy, the more they have entered into complicated competition over productive resources (capital, land and water) not only among themselves but also with politicians, bureaucrats and business agents. I shall trace the involvement of FEDRA and its NGO networks as they have dealt with the social and economic problems in Village 2 during the 1980s and in so doing also demonstrate how FEDRA elaborated alternative meanings of “community culture” as used in the people’s daily life to achieve their participation and to formulate a people’s organisation which would lead collective protest. The protest opened up a political space for the villagers to negotiate their economic interest and obtain a fair share of resources. Finally, I shall discuss the interventionist role of NGOs in relation to other actors in the process of competition over productive resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Escobar, 1992, “Imagining a Post-Development Era?...”, p. 38.

This chapter argues that when an NGO is able to recognise the pattern of social relations and tension occurring amidst its social practice, it is likely to be able to construct a new social meaning; to search for a new actor; and to formulate or reform an organisation to represent the people. It is also likely to be able to identify a political space for the actors who become involved in a given situation to negotiate and mediate their conflicting interests. This on-going process of recognising social relations and tensions occurs not only between the NGO and other social actors but also within the NGO itself. It is necessary for the NGO to analyse the relations between actors and system and between social integration and social conflicts in a locality rather than analysing them separately.

### Village context

Village 2 is located about 30 km northwest of Chiang Mai city. Its land, about 1,800 rai, is at an altitude of about 300 to 400 m and slopes from the west down to the east of the village. About 30 per cent to the west is steep land and forest hills used for fruit orchards and *miang* (tea) gardens.<sup>2</sup> The rest is lowland in the east used for growing rice and cash crops such as tobacco, soya bean, pigeon pea and, recently, potato. For generations, villagers have built and maintained three small weirs to store water from the mountains to irrigate their crops, especially wet-rice.<sup>3</sup> The villagers are very conscious of the vulnerability of the ecological system in the watershed area especially as Village 2 has a forest boundary on the west with Village 1. They believe that forest depletion in the watershed area was a major factor in a water shortage in Village 2 in the early 1990s.

In 1993, Village 2 comprised about 176 households with a population of 660, compared to 150 households in 1985 (see Map 5.1).<sup>4</sup> Most were engaged in growing cash crops which they sold to middlemen who traded between the village and the city. Several villagers had, recently, begun to be involved in contract farming with some agri-business companies established in Mae Rim and San Sai districts. Compared to other

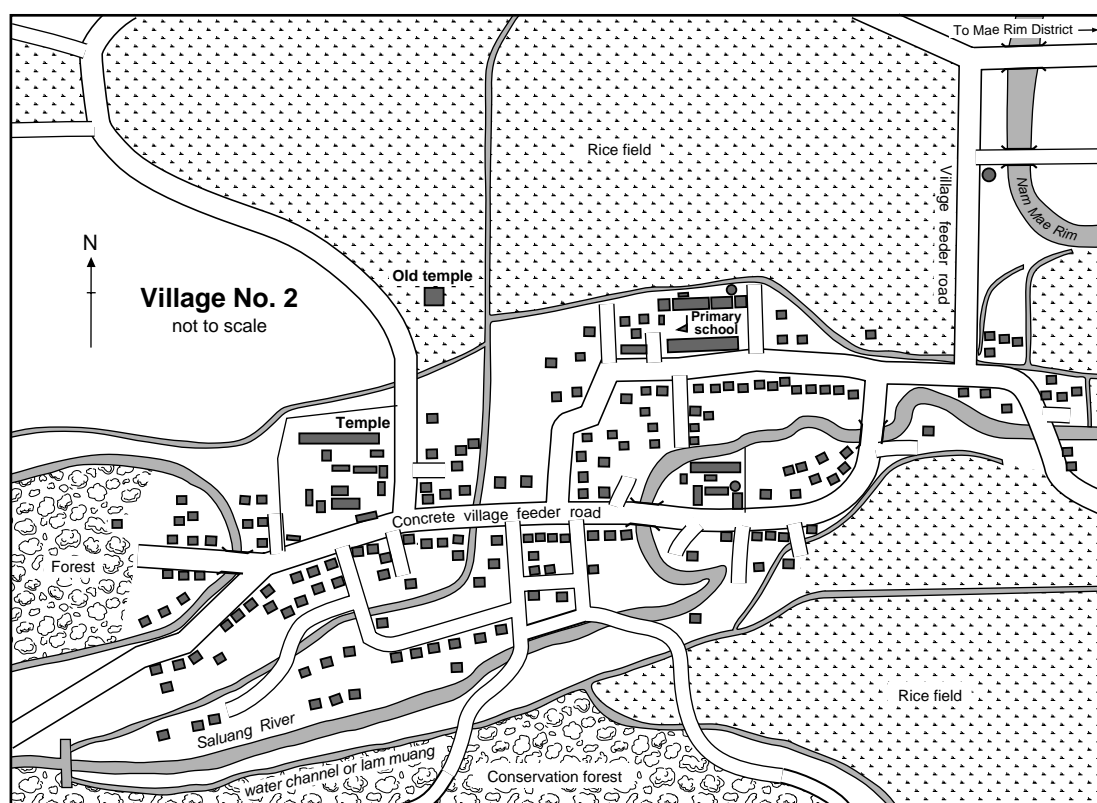
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<sup>2</sup> To obtain information about the development and decline of the *miang* industry in Northern Thailand, one of the comprehensive studies is C. Mougne, 1992, "Survivors and Accumulators: Changing Patterns of *Pa Miang* in the 1970s", in G. Wijeyewardene and E.C. Chapman, *Patterns and Illusions: Thai History and Thought*, Department of Anthropology, RSPAS, ANU, pp. 73-103.

<sup>3</sup> Villagers call the rice farming which depends on traditional irrigation system "*na nam mu'ang*" or "*na nam fai*". In some agricultural areas in the Upper North where the water can be kept naturally without man-made irrigation systems, the villagers call that kind of rice farming "*na nam fai*". Interview, INT-105-VIL, 24 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>4</sup> Interview, INT-108-VIL, 25 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai; and SRI, 1985 (2528), *Laksana thang setthakit sangkhom...*, Appendix, n.p.

villages under study, the social differentiation in Village 2 was the most distinctive. It consisted of four main groups, classified in terms of ownership of land, house and agricultural equipment, and the capacity to earn income or acquire assets. There were 21 households in the first group of relatively high-incomes; 60 households in the second group of middle-incomes; and 65 in the third group of lower-middle-income villagers. The 125 households in the latter two groups made up the majority of villagers who owned from 5 to 10 rai of low and fertile land which they used for commercial agriculture. About 30 households representing over 100 villagers, or one-sixth of the village population, belonged to the fourth group composed of landless peasants who earned their income as wage workers within and outside the village. Village 2 has easy access to transportation; it takes about 40 minutes to travel by minibus to Chiang Mai city via feeder roads and the Chiang Mai-Fang highway. Thus, the villagers and their children are able to commute daily between the village and the city to go to markets, schools, colleges, universities and factories.



Map 5.1: Village 2 and Its Surroundings in 1992.

Source: Map drawn by Damrong Khammun, a village leader.

Most small-scale cultivators were descended from the early generations of settlers and owned, on average, 5 to 10 rai of land. They still maintained traditional practices, such as that of social formation, the “*wai phi pu nja*” ceremony in which the family

members came together for “paying respect to the spirits of the ancestors”<sup>5</sup> and that of “*muat song khao wat*” or the taking of turns among villagers to send food and other basic necessities to the monks in the village temple. However, I observed that people divided themselves into two groups. One comprised landless villagers who lived at the west of the village and most of whom had migrated from other districts of Chiang Mai and were employed by forestry officials in the teak plantations. Since the early 1960s, they had settled here and become tenants and wage earners on village farms. Some had been involved in cutting timber illegally for traders outside the village. The other consisted of small-scale producers who lived at the east end of the village. Their forebears had been there for over 100 years and they were proud of their heritage and accepted responsibility for the survival of the village.<sup>6</sup> Eleven people from this group were members of a village committee (*khana kammakan muban*) appointed by the district head. The committee comprised both informal and formal leaders who were able to use both traditional and modern systems of administration and culture to support their current needs and future expectations. The leaders of the small-scale cultivators tapped external resources and services from both government and NGOs and made them available to other villagers including the landless peasants. Nonetheless, since the early 1990s when small-scale producers faced water shortages – especially during the dry season – relations have become tense with the landless peasants who they claimed caused the water shortage by cutting timber on the hill above the village. The small-scale producers also felt dissatisfied with local forestry officials and accused them of turning a blind eye to the illegal loggers.

The history of this village reveals that the inhabitants have been engaged in commercial agriculture since the late 1930s. The initiative of private entrepreneurs and the support of government policies were key factors in convincing villagers to engage in cash cropping. For instance, in 1938, tobacco production from a tobacco kiln some 2 km from Village 2 began to expand (see Chapter 2). The new manager of the kiln persuaded the villagers to grow Virginia-Richmond tobacco (locally called *ya mo:n*) to replace the native tobacco species which they normally planted after the rice harvest. At that time the government was also encouraging villagers to grow cash crops. In the case of the tobacco business, government-owned radio stations made announcements (*prakat siang tam sai*) offering the new type of tobacco seeds free of charge. They also reported that an increasing number of villagers were successfully growing tobacco as a cash crop. These reports aimed to encourage more people to become involved.<sup>7</sup> In

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<sup>5</sup> P.T. Cohen and G. Wijeyewardene (eds), 1984, “Introduction: Spirit Cults and the Position of Women in Northern Thailand”, *Mankind*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Special Issue 3), August, pp. 249-262; and M.V. McMorran, 1984, “Northern Thai Ancestral Cults: Authority and Aggression”, in *ibid.*, pp. 308-314.

<sup>6</sup> Interview, INT-104-VIL, 23 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>7</sup> Interview, INT-135-BUS, 25 February 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

1943, Tho:ng-in Chaoprayun, a local MP, persuaded villagers to build a feeder road to connect Village 2 with the main road to the city.<sup>8</sup> As the feeder road would not only provide access to transportation for the tobacco company but also for villagers to go to hospitals, schools and markets, they were willing to cooperate.

In the late 1960s, many villagers began to replace native rice species (such as *khao phalek*, *khao phatho:ng* and *khao pe-khao*) with high yield varieties (HYVs – such as *khao kor khor* 4 and 6) introduced by a Sub-district extension officer (*kaset tambon*). One of the reasons that the new strains of rice were accepted was that it had been observed that instead of coming in May, “very often the rains were delayed until July”.<sup>9</sup> This meant that the native species, which took four months to ripen, were not harvested until November. It was then too late to put in a second (cash) crop. The HYV rice was adopted because it would ripen in three months and therefore allow a second crop to be planted. From the mid-1970s, the villagers also began to switch from growing Virginia-Richmond tobacco to soya bean as a cash crop – mainly because the income from soya bean was higher.<sup>10</sup> It was also claimed by a former employee that the kiln owner often took advantage (*ao priap*) of villagers by downgrading their tobacco and giving them a lower price.<sup>11</sup> As a result, when the Sub-district extension officer suggested that the villagers grow soya bean as a new cash crop they had little hesitation in doing so.

As the villagers became increasingly engaged in cash crops which were potentially profitable, they began to make commercial arrangements between themselves and their relatives. A land rent of half of the seasonal production was applied to all tenants including family members. The buffalo rent increased to about 40 thang of rice per season. *Pho:luang* Wan, the village head from 1981 to 1987, revealed that although individual tenants complained of the high rents, they could not change them. He said he had seen some peasants crying because they had nothing left to feed their families after paying rents and other debts to landowners and money lenders.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Interview, INT-105-VIL, 24 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>9</sup> The tenth month of the Northern calendar. Interview, INT-116-VIL, 27 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>10</sup> Soya bean species such as *sor jor* 1, 4, 5 and 6 were used. Soya bean was grown in the North of Thailand traditionally for household consumption. It has become a cash crop in this village since the late 1960s.

<sup>11</sup> Interview, INT-105-VIL, 24 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai. Two villagers claimed that the kiln owner was currently expanding his business to housing and fruit orchards while keeping tobacco as a sideline business. Interview, INT-035-VIL, 25 November 1992; Interview, INT-103-VIL, 23 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>12</sup> Interview, INT-116-VIL, 27 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

When student activists from Chiang Mai University undertook a campaign in Mae Rim district to inform people about the Land Rent Control Act of 1974 (see Chapter 3) they came briefly to Village 2 to ask whether a problem of high rents existed in the village. They intended to use the issue of high rents to convince the tenants and landless peasants to join the PFT, a nationwide people's organisation set up in 1974 to support small-scale producers mostly from the Central Plain and Lower Northern Region. The PFT was established with the support of student activists. However, the villagers they met were mostly landowners who denied any tensions between the tenants and themselves because, they said, they were “dealing with each other following the kinship system” (*khao tham kan tam rabop phino:ng*).<sup>13</sup> The students did not identify the tenants because, at that time, they had little understanding about the complexity of social differentiation among villagers. The students were unable to advance their political campaign in Village 2 because, as an elderly villager recalled, most of the people were “small-scale producers, occupying from 5-10 rai of land” who feared losing income from land rent and consequently did not want to cooperate with the students.<sup>14</sup> A former student leader, who undertook political campaigns in Chiang Mai and Lamphun provinces at that time, endorsed the elderly villager's views. He added that the student movement in the mid-1970s operated on the presumption of class conflict between “big landlords”, or “*jao thidin yai*”, and their tenants. However, most landlords in the North were middle- to small-scale producers occupying not more than 50 rai of land. In the end, the political activities of the students did little more than create tensions between small-scale producers and tenants.<sup>15</sup>

After the students departed without tackling the problem of high land and buffalo rents faced by tenants in this village, *Pho:luang* Wan took responsibility as a village leader to find a source of welfare for the poor villagers. Some years later, he was told about FEDRA and its activities by the “*jaonathi kaset amphoe*” or “district extension officer” who later introduced *Pho:luang* Wan to *Phra* Dhammadilok (Jan Gusalo), the FEDRA Chairperson. When they met, *Pho:luang* Wan invited the Chairperson and FEDRA workers to come to the village to discuss with the poor the ways to alleviate their poverty.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Interview, INT-113-VIL, 27 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>15</sup> Interview, INT-071-STU, 6 January 1993, Chiang Mai. See an explanation of land tenure conditions such as size of land holdings and social relations of land tenure in Tanabe, 1994, *Ecology and Practical Technology...*, pp. 113-121.

## NGO involvement and activities

### Tending the tenants

When FEDRA workers went to Village 2 in 1984, ten years after the student's political campaigns, they found various social and economic activities occurring on several fronts. For example, local officials from four ministries had already organised village householders, housewives, and youth into groups, whose main activity between 1981 and 1983 involved a "clean houses and tidiness" contest between villages (*prakuat muban*) which was seen as a symbol of the "developed village model" (*muban phatthana tuayang*).<sup>16</sup> Many villagers, especially the poor, were frustrated by this officially sponsored "development" because it left them little time to earn their living, and they considered it to be superficial because it did not help reduce their poverty.<sup>17</sup>

After explaining FEDRA's development principles in relation to projects such as rice banks, buffalo banks and revolving funds, the Chairperson gave eleven buffaloes and two oxen to thirteen tenants to set up a buffalo bank project so that they did not have to pay buffalo rent.<sup>18</sup> Unlike many other charitable organisations, FEDRA asked each buffalo caretaker to contribute 3 thang of paddy per buffalo as rent per year. The contribution was kept in a rice bank which was also set up with FEDRA's help. The rice bank provided paddy which villagers could borrow if there was a rice shortage. The twin projects of rice bank and buffalo bank helped reduce the high rent burden on tenants. For instance, under the commercial arrangements in many Northern villages, a tenant had to pay rent of up to 50 per cent of agricultural produce. On top of that he had to pay 35 to 40 thang of paddy to hire a buffalo per season and to pay 18 to 20 thang on a loan of 10 thang of paddy for consumption. In addition, he needed seeds, tools, labour and other agricultural inputs. If a tenant rented 5 rai of land and produced about 60 thang per rai, he would have had 300 thang per season. If he had to repay debt in the commercial system, he would barely meet the family's basic needs for food, clothes, medicine and shelter; quite apart from hospital cost, should there be an accident to a family member. Under the FEDRA programme, however, a tenant would need only 3 thang of paddy per year to hire a buffalo and 12 thang to meet a 10 thang loan and be more likely to meet all household needs. If he had severe problems and was unable to repay a debt, he would also be able to negotiate with FEDRA to extend the period of repayment.

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<sup>16</sup> Such as Ministries of Health, Education, Interior, Agriculture and Cooperatives.

<sup>17</sup> Interview, INT-035-VIL, 25 November 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>18</sup> Interview, INT-116-VIL, 27 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

Buffalo bank projects have been widely implemented by NGOs in rural Thailand. FEDRA's approach was to make use of the Buddhist culture of alms-giving. When well-to-do people from Bangkok and other cities sought the advice of *Phra Dhammadilok* and proposed giving "alms to relieve their sickness and distress" (*thambun to: ayu*), he would suggest that they save the life of a large animal. FEDRA workers would then help these people to purchase an ox or buffalo which was about to be killed in a slaughter house, and donate it to poor peasants who did not have any buffalo to work in the field. Using the Buddhist teaching of "Four Noble Truths" which most people in Village 2 accepted as their "community culture", the FEDRA Chairperson taught that the rich, the poor and the animals all encountered "suffering" (*dukkha*) in different ways. In this case, the rich suffered from illness, the poor from poverty, the animals from being tortured and killed. He, therefore, organised an alms-giving ceremony in which he invited both buffalo donors and caretakers to participate. While performing a ritual buffalo donation, he used the buffalo as a religious "tool kit" (*yu'a*) to educate both the donor and caretaker about "*metta*" or "loving-kindness" and the Buddha's teaching that the individual should "wish for the welfare and happiness of others".<sup>19</sup> In this way, *Phra Dhammadilok* helped the buffalo donors to feel relieved of their sickness and suffering through saving the life of an animal in danger and assisting those less fortunate than themselves. At the same time, it was believed that the buffalo would provide economic support to the disadvantaged landless peasants and help them to survive the threat of food shortage and ever-accumulating debt.

FEDRA's attempt to tackle rural poverty through economic and spiritual approaches was not an easy task. One of the difficulties was that when villagers had shaped the buffalo bank activities to achieve economic efficiency, the initial purpose of social value was lost. The disappearance of social meaning in cases such as this was not always evident and *Phra Dhammadilok*, who had spent most of his life in the monkhood, did not realise what was happening and was thus unable to reconstruct his own teaching accordingly. For example, in 1979, many people from other villages where FEDRA had established buffalo banks, had complained about the poor quality of the cattle donated to them, some of which were untamed, others weak or sick. Some villagers even brought cattle back to FEDRA, which had to change its process of selecting and buying cattle. Instead of buying them from a slaughter house, FEDRA workers and village caretakers would go together to the cattle market (locally called *kad wua*) to select and purchase good quality cattle which would be approved by the "village development committee".<sup>20</sup> As the initial meaning of loving-kindness had

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<sup>19</sup> Acharya Buddharakkhita, 1989, *Metta: The Philosophy & Practice of Universal Love*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Vanpen, 1989, "Issues and Experiences in the Use of Community Participation...", p. 85.

disappeared, FEDRA's buffalo bank projects became a mere economic force for capital accumulation not only for landless peasants but also for other villagers.

### **Shifting from the tenants to mobilise agricultural investment for small-scale cultivators**

When the village leaders, who came from the group of small-scale producers, saw how the tenants benefited from FEDRA's buffalo bank and rice bank projects, they too became interested in obtaining financial assistance from the NGO to raise funds for their own agricultural investment. They understood FEDRA's working processes and realised that if they were to receive FEDRA assistance they would have to contribute their labour or some materials to demonstrate their "participation" in the development. They therefore proposed to build a rice barn with building materials donated by the villagers themselves. Then they asked FEDRA to help set up a rice bank project. FEDRA accepted, and also agreed to set up and provide administrative and financial assistance to village development committees to be run by the villagers. FEDRA believed it needed two committees as it did not want to impose too much work on individuals. A rice bank committee and a buffalo bank committee were therefore set up with five elected members each; some of the latter were also members of the government-appointed village committee. FEDRA allowed those from the official committee to be members of the NGO committees as it did not want to upset relationships between villagers and officials. It was noticeable, however, that there were no representatives of landless peasants on either committee and this could be interpreted as indicating that FEDRA's target group was beginning to move away from the tenants to small-scale producers.

Once the village development committees had taken over the control of the buffalo and rice banks with FEDRA's agreement, the committee used the broad appeal of the traditional ceremony of "*thambun khaomai*" (or "celebrating the new rice") adapting it to mobilise village resources for further investment. In the first year (1984), the rice bank committee stored 200 thang of paddy collected from rice bank members. The members of the rice bank agreed that if any paddy remained in the storage at the end of the year in excess of the members' loans, the committee would sell the remaining paddy for cash. The cash would become available to the members to borrow for agricultural investment purposes.<sup>21</sup>

The village leaders knew also of another source of FEDRA financial assistance, called a revolving fund project. Through this project, loans were provided to villagers to invest in income-generating agricultural activities such as cash cropping and pig raising. FEDRA would first set up a village committee to manage the revolving fund project.

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<sup>21</sup> FEDRA, 1987 (2530), "Rai-ngan muban" [Village Report], [in Thai], Chiang Mai.

Normally, FEDRA would lend from its budget up to 1,000 baht at 10 per cent per year interest compared with the 60 per cent charged by money lenders. The loan was to be repaid to FEDRA but the interest would be retained by the village committee as a saving fund for village investment. The villagers were aware that FEDRA always had problems getting their loan back; neither was any payment of the interest to the committee assured. *Pho:luang* Wan, who was on the revolving fund committee, therefore proposed a tough regime to manage FEDRA's loan. Instead of giving the full amount of 1,000 baht to a borrower, the committee proposed that the 100 baht interest be deducted in the first place, and only 900 baht be provided. If the borrower delayed repayment the committee would increase the interest rate to 30 per cent.<sup>22</sup> FEDRA accepted *Pho:luang* Wan's approach to economic management of the project without questioning the social dimensions of this sort of approach. In this case, *Pho:luang* Wan acted as if he were a bank manager rather than a village leader working in an NGO project with social objectives.

While FEDRA administrators remained more familiar with the "top down" rather than with "bottom up" approaches, FEDRA fieldworkers on the ground were quickly aware of the consequences of the economic projects (rice bank, buffalo bank and revolving fund). For example, tensions emerged between formal and informal village leaders, especially *Pho:luang* Wan and Saen, a young middle-income villager, as each sought to gain recognition from the villagers. Being placed under the village development committee's control, the FEDRA workers found it difficult to know whether the committee used the projects for the disadvantaged. The FEDRA workers saw that FEDRA had in effect shifted its target groups from the tenants and landless peasants to middle and relatively high-income villagers. In part this was because FEDRA's main objective generally was to help rural people to develop and maintain their livelihood in village communities. It was also because FEDRA saw that the cost of production was too high, not only for the landless peasants, but also for the small-scale producers to be able to afford the risk of agricultural investment. FEDRA had, therefore, agreed to assist the wider group of villagers through its development projects. However, after FEDRA's assistance shifted to the better-off villagers, tensions also arose among small-scale producers who were seeking access to funds for agriculture. The fieldworkers asked FEDRA to slow down its economic projects for fear that they might cause more serious problems between key village leaders as had occurred in Village 1. They also urged FEDRA to emphasise the social meaning of its development activities along with the economic objectives in accordance with its slogan: "Economics and spirituality must be used together to solve problems".<sup>23</sup> Some FEDRA committee members heeded these warnings and tried to mediate different interests and misunderstandings between

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Vanpen, 1989, "Issues and Experiences in the Use of Community Participation...", p. 81.

the tenants and small-scale producers, for instance, asking the landowners to have sympathy with the tenants – whose crops had failed due to uncontrollable situations – by reducing the cost of land rent.

As a result of these problems, FEDRA decided to review its project activities in Village 2. However, before the review could begin, village leaders asked FEDRA to help solve the problem growers were having with a soya bean disease which was seriously reducing their cash incomes.<sup>24</sup> FEDRA workers approached the Mae Jo Agricultural College in Chiang Mai for assistance. The College subsequently agreed that a soya bean expert on its staff should investigate the cause of the disease. The expert spent almost two years experimenting in Village 2. By 1985, she had successfully overcome the problem by creating a new species of disease resistant soya bean which was named “Chiang Mai 60”. This had occurred with the support of the sub-district extension officer (*jaonathi kaset tambon*) who was responsible for promoting agricultural commercialisation in Village 2. The villagers were able to make good money (about 250 to 300 baht per thang) from selling the propagating seeds for the new species, which FEDRA workers helped to distribute through its community networks to other villages such as the Lua village and Villages 1 and 3 (see Chapter 6).<sup>25</sup> To help soya bean growers in FEDRA operating areas reduce the cost of production, FEDRA also negotiated with business companies in Chiang Mai for the sale of chemical fertiliser and insecticide at a discount price to the growers. This encouraged the small-scale producers in Village 2 and others who had land, labour and investment available to become involved in growing “Chiang Mai 60”. As the production of the new soya bean increased, growers were able to select the best quality bean to sell as propagating seed and dispose of the rest raw to food factories (for uses such as making vegetable oil and salted soya bean (*tao jieo*)). As a result, the growers further increased their profit from soya bean. Having seen this, the new sub-district extension officer expressed his opinion that the NGO had played a role in helping the villagers to change some traditional beliefs and values and had encouraged them to adopt modern ways of agricultural production (using chemical fertilisers and insecticides). He said that the NGO could help stimulate agricultural commercialisation better than extension officers because it offered financial assistance, which was not available to the officers. He also

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<sup>24</sup> In the mid 1980s when small-scale cultivators in Village 2 had the problem of soya bean disease, *Pho:luang* Kham, a village head, contacted an agricultural company in Chiang Mai to find an alternative crop. The company suggested that the villagers grow *basmati* rice to replace soya bean. Only five villagers adopted the company’s suggestion for a year and gave up because *basmati* rice was not profitable. The company did not follow up with the villagers’ *basmati* rice production because its interest changed to other crops. After the soya bean experiment was successful, these villagers switched from the *basmati* rice to soya bean. Interview, INT-099-VIL, 22 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai

<sup>25</sup> Interview, INT-103-VIL, 23 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

considered that the NGO encouraged the villagers to act confidently in agricultural innovation and commercialisation.<sup>26</sup>

In summary, FEDRA had shifted the focus of its work in Village 2 from the tenants to the middle and relatively high-income groups of villagers. Even though the latter two groups were better off than the former one, they were, nonetheless, disadvantaged by the government's promotion of market economy initiated by middlemen and private entrepreneurs. As far as FEDRA's objective "to promote agricultural producers" (*songsoem kasiko:n*) was concerned, FEDRA had tried to respond to the producers' needs. It had, subsequently, become deeply involved in village agricultural commercialisation, very much in line with government policies. The experience of FEDRA in Village 2 shows how the NGO could become an influence stimulating agrarian change. Some FEDRA fieldworkers were, however, aware of the possible consequences. They were afraid that while implementing economic activities, FEDRA might ignore its social priorities and shift its support away from the disadvantaged whom it intended to serve.

### **Formulating a people's organisation**

While FEDRA fieldworkers were helping villagers to conduct the operations of the rice bank, buffalo bank and revolving fund, they were also observing the relationships between villagers, and between villagers and middlemen from the city markets. The FEDRA workers noticed that the small-scale cultivators of Village 2 still maintained some traditional practices such as paying respect to their ancestors (*wai phi pu nja*) at the annual family reunion, and organising groups to sustain the irrigation system (*rabop mu'ang fai*). These people's practices demonstrated their socio-economic power and the unity embedded in everyday phenomena. They also noticed that – as happened elsewhere in rural Thailand – the growers in Village 2 often received low prices for their products from the middlemen, especially when the individual growers negotiated separately with them. The FEDRA workers, therefore, suggested to the growers that they could fare better if they grouped together to set up a single soya bean price and prevent the middlemen from bargaining with one grower against another.

Following this advice, the soya bean growers received more profit than before and, moreover, appreciated the power of joint bargaining with the middlemen. Having seen this, the FEDRA workers went a step further and proposed forming a "people's organisation" to represent the soya bean growers' interests. The growers of Village 2 agreed with the FEDRA workers and began, in 1985, to organise a soya bean growers' group, initially in the form of an agricultural cooperative. Within a year, the

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<sup>26</sup> Interview, INT-125-GOV, 19 February 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

cooperative had attracted 672 villagers covering 14 villages in Mae Rim and Mae Taeng districts. The FEDRA workers were also quick to move forwards and asked for the villagers' agreement to turn the cooperative into a Soya Bean Growers' Association (SBGA), an embryo for a people's organisation which would act as a focus to unite soya bean growers in two districts.<sup>27</sup> The SBGA was set up with the consent of the people but without government agreement and without being registered. Hence, local officials kept a close eye on it as an illegal organisation which they suspected might cause political unrest.

The FEDRA workers planned to scale-up the SBGA from a village to a national organisation. They also hoped it would become the foundation for a national peasants' council which would be set up as an umbrella organisation of different agricultural cooperatives eventually run by the people themselves. The dream of the FEDRA workers was to recreate a new genuine peasants' organisation to represent the peasants' interests as had been done in the past by the PFT – the outlawed people's organisation of the mid-1970s.<sup>28</sup> This reflected the link between the student activists who set up the early social movement in Thailand and the NGO workers who in the eighties began to form social movements despite the involvement of different social actors and the chronological discontinuity.

The FEDRA fieldworkers not only advised the members of the SBGA on election of the SBGA committee but also helped train the committee members, who had little formal education, to run the SBGA. For instance, when the SBGA members expressed their lack of confidence in the idea of the committee managing their money, the FEDRA workers organised training courses for the committee on several issues such as how to organise a meeting, manage bookkeeping and other relevant subjects. When the committee showed that they were able to run their organisation, the FEDRA workers stood aside and began to undertake other activities to support the SBGA. For example, they organised study tours for soya bean growers to visit companies which used soya bean as raw agricultural inputs to make vegetable oil, soya sauce and salted soya bean. The study tours aimed to encourage the ordinary villagers to understand the process of soya bean production beyond their farm gate and to gather ideas for developing their own cottage industries. The FEDRA workers believed that if the villagers could do

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<sup>27</sup> Prayat Jaturapho:nphithakkun, 1987 (2530), "Prasopkan ngan si pi: Chomrom phu pluk thualu'ang" [Four-Year Experience of the Soya Bean Growers' Association], [in Thai], Paper presented in the seminar: "The People's Movement" held on 18-20 February at the Office of Northern Agriculture, Chiang Mai.

<sup>28</sup> Interview, INT-034-NGO, 25 November 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

this, they would have created their own alternative development based on a self-reliant philosophy.<sup>29</sup>

While the FEDRA male fieldworkers were helping soya bean growers organise the SBGA, the female fieldworkers were helping women villagers establish their own groups under the FEDRA project called “Metta Nari” (meaning “loving-kindness for women”). The project focused its activities on handicrafts, such as crochet, embroidery and appliqué, to produce goods such as tablecloths, bedspreads and other embroideries. The objective of these handicraft activities was to raise additional family income. While running the activities, the FEDRA workers discussed with the women in Village 2 and seven other villages, socio-political issues arising from the impact of rural transformation on the village livelihood. The discussions encouraged the women to appreciate their own capacity to create alternative development.

With regard to economic activities, FEDRA helped set up a shop in the compound of the Temple “Wat Pa Daraphirom”, where FEDRA’s office is located, to sell handicrafts made by the women working in the Metta Nari project. The FEDRA manager helped organise marketing for the sale of handicrafts on behalf of the villagers. With FEDRA’s support, the villagers, including women from Village 2, decided to take turns at running the shop by themselves. Some bought shares, at 20 baht per share, in the Handicraft Cooperative which was then established and operated from the Temple compound. As handicrafts were in demand both within the country and overseas, the Cooperative prospered, although it was not yet registered. Each year, it holds an annual meeting and reports its activities to the grass-roots members who elected the committee to run the Cooperative. In the early 1990s, *Phra* Dhammadilok lent 300,000 baht from the Metta Nari Project to the women’s committee to expand the work of the Handicraft Cooperative into new villages.<sup>30</sup> In so doing, he expected to see the Cooperative become a model for alternative development, based on the concept of people’s “self-reliance”, which FEDRA could promote. I had a chance to witness this in early November 1992 when I was visiting *Phra* Dhammadilok and discussing with him the current transformation in rural Thailand. Two provincial officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives came to ask him to register the Handicraft Cooperative under the Department of Cooperative Promotion. He replied: “*hai phro:m sa ko:n*” or “Let it mature”. In other words, he expected to see ordinary women villagers run their own Cooperative by themselves without official interference. Whether or not the Handicraft Cooperative should be registered depended, he said, on the members of the Cooperative making that decision themselves.

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<sup>29</sup> FEDRA, 1992 (2535), “Phatthanakan klum thualu’ang: Jak adit su patjuban” [The Development of Soya Bean Growers’ Association: From the Past to Present], [in Thai], Chiang Mai.

<sup>30</sup> Interview, INT-052-NGO, 24 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai

In summary, FEDRA helped small-scale producers and female villagers formulate their organisations in the form of cooperatives based on a philosophy of “self-reliant development”. FEDRA put a lot of effort into nursing the embryo of people’s organisations and expected that, in time, villagers would be able to manage their own organisations by themselves, allowing FEDRA to move out of the village altogether. However, the development process is never unilinear and as one problem seems to be solved another emerges. That is, as Melucci argues, because “the differences change, the conflicts shift, the agreements cease to satisfy and new forms of domination are constantly emerging”.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the situation faced by the SBGA changed during the early 1990s when the Thai government decided to comply with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). At the demand of the animal food company associations, the government agreed to remove the existing import quota and allow the import of soya bean residue. While this was in the companies’ interest, it was to have a negative impact on soya bean growers and force them to formulate a response. While the SBGA was suffering this setback, however, the Handicraft Cooperative continued to run smoothly without any interruption.

### **Facing the impact of the free-market economy**

The Thai government’s decision to adhere to the GATT in relation to soya bean imports benefited animal food factories while breaking the relationship between small-scale soya bean growers and vegetable oil refinery companies. Before 1989, the government’s quota system permitted the import of two-thirds of the country’s soya bean needs. The quota arrangements meant that the domestic price for soya bean was higher than the import price. While the soya bean growers benefited from this, it had minimal effect on the vegetable oil refinery companies which were able to pass on the additional cost in the price charged for the soya bean residue they sold to animal food producers. This meant that the animal food factories were bearing the cost of the quota. Between 1989 and 1990, the animal food factories organised themselves into an association and lobbied the Chatchai government to do away with the quota system and to allow the importation of 300,000 tons of soya bean residue per year, especially from the US. The animal food producers’ association threatened that if the government did not comply with the association’s demands, it would have to raise the price of animal food which would result in an increase in the price of meat and thereby impact on the cost of living for meat consumers, particularly in big cities. For fear of losing urban electoral support, the government acceded to the association’s demand and agreed to the importation of residue in early 1990. However, this meant that the vegetable oil companies could not maintain the price paid to small-scale soya bean growers as they could no longer charge the animal food factories the inflated price for residue. As a

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<sup>31</sup> Melucci, 1988, “Social Movements and the Democratisation...”, p. 251.

result, the small-scale producers faced a drop in the price of soya bean from around 9 to 6 baht per kg.<sup>32</sup>

Villagers responded to the declining price of soya bean by looking for new cash crops which would yield a higher price. During this time, a few brokers from agri-business companies were offering contract farming deals to villagers for the production of vegetables such as green beans, pigeon pea, eggplant and potato. Several villagers in Mae Rim and Mae Taeng districts, including some in Village 2, agreed, without written contracts, to grow new cash crops. FEDRA fieldworkers and their NGO networks in Chiang Mai, as well as a few officials from the Northern Agricultural Office, expressed their concern about the verbal contracts being arranged and were afraid that the villagers could be ‘exploited’ by the agri-business companies. Although the villagers were aware of the possible consequences which concerned the NGOs, they had not yet found better alternatives.<sup>33</sup>

The FEDRA workers and their NGO networks tried to keep villagers informed about the situation in relation to contract farming so that the villagers would avoid the pitfalls. For instance, they invited Dr Somphop Manarangsan, an economist from the Political Economy Centre of Chulalongkorn University, to Chiang Mai to explain the impact of government policies on soya bean growers, and the prospects for agri-business in soya bean production. Seventeen participants, both NGO workers and villagers, attended the session. On 9 April 1990, the FEDRA workers and SBGA leaders organised a meeting in Village 2 to discuss the experience of a group of soya bean growers who worked in the agri-business project of the CP company in San Pa Tong district. The soya bean growers of Mae Rim and Mae Taeng districts were made aware that the San Pa Tong soya bean growers had organised a collective protest for the next day to tackle the problem of falling soya bean prices. It was up to the soya bean producers of Mae Rim and Mae Taeng districts to decide whether they would join the San Pa Tong growers’ protest.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> FEDRA, 1990 (2533), “Sarup lamdap hetkan khwam klu’anwai phu’a kaekhai panha ra-kha thualu’ang” [A Summary of Chronological Events in the Movement for Solving the Problem of Soya Bean Price Decline], [in Thai], Chiang Mai. Interview, INT-035-VIL, 25 November 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai; Interview, INT-085-NGO, 15 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai. Associate Professor Aree Wiboonwongse from the Multi-Cropping Centre (MCC) of Chiang Mai University told me that the future of soya bean produce was unlikely to be rosy due the competitive price of agricultural product in the international markets (Interview, INT-126-ACA, 20 February 1993, Chiang Mai).

<sup>33</sup> Interview, INT-116-VIL, 27 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>34</sup> FEDRA, 1990 (2533), “Sarup lamdap hetkan...”.

### **Exercising political power to demand a fair share**

On 11 April 1990, about 50 soya bean growers from 4 districts (Mae Rim, Mae Taeng, San Sai and Chomthong), including some from Village 2, came to join the protest of 500 growers which had started on 10 April 1990 in front of Dhammachai Temple in San Pa Tong district. The protest, led by a sub-district head and a local politician from the Chat Thai Party – Songsuk Phakkasem – demanded that local officials ask the central government to solve the problem of falling soya bean prices. To prompt the government to respond urgently to their problem, the leaders of the protest and NGO workers decided to use the SBGA as the spearhead to unite the protest and negotiate with the government. However, the SBGA needed to be restructured to lead the movement of soya bean growers. After selecting a village head from Mae Taeng district as the president, and a village leader, Saen, from Village 2 as secretary-general, the SBGA launched its first declaration opposing the government's decision to permit the import of soya bean residue and demanding that the government compensate the growers for loss of income.<sup>35</sup>

Dr Subin Pinkhayan, a local MP from the Social Action Party (SAP), who was also Minister of Commerce in the Chatchai government, could not ignore the soya bean growers' protest. On 21 April 1990, he invited representatives of the soya bean producers, a provincial Commerce Ministry official and Songsuk Phakkasem to his Chiang Mai house to discuss ways of addressing the problem. The meeting ended with two proposals. The short-term solution was for the Minister to ask the Public Warehouse Organisation, which was under his ministerial control, to buy soya bean from local producers at a price which covered their cost of investment. The long-term solution was for the Minister to ask the Office of Agricultural Economics in Bangkok to find out the exact cost of soya bean production and to submit to the cabinet a recommendation for further consideration and support.<sup>36</sup> On 22-23 April 1990, the SBGA leaders and NGO workers also surveyed the cost of soya bean production in Mae Rim and Mae Taeng districts so that they could obtain at least a rough figure to compare with the government's.

As a new productive season came closer, most growers desperately needed to know the government's decision and whether they would receive adequate income for the soya bean they had stored pending an improvement in the price. Towards the end of April 1990, they still had not received any information or seen any action from the Minister on the issue. However, many growers were forced to sell their soya bean at the prevailing price, first because it would not keep much longer due to the humidity, and

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

secondly because a new season was approaching and they needed the income to invest in a new crop. They sold their soya bean to CP company at 8 baht per kg even though the price barely covered the cost of production. On 29 April 1990, over 1,000 farmers demonstrated in front of Thaphae Gate demanding urgent resolution by the government of the problem of the decline in soya bean prices.<sup>37</sup> The demonstration was led by the SBGA with the support of NGOs from the local, provincial, regional and national levels including FEDRA, NDWA, UCL and NGO-CORD. The protesters and NGOs decided to send 38 leaders of the soya bean growers from different districts to Bangkok to meet Phong Sarasin, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chairperson of the Food Policy Committee. Ten leaders, including the SBGA committee members, met the Deputy Prime Minister in person. As a result of the discussion, he invited six leaders of the SBGA to attend the Food Policy Committee meeting – which was composed of the representatives from government (Department of Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce) and business (e.g. the representative from the animal food companies' association) – to negotiate on the soya bean price. The representatives from the soya bean growers, officials and business were all satisfied with the outcome of the negotiations. As a result the government agreed to ask the Public Warehouse Organisation to buy soya bean from the domestic growers at 9 baht per kg and to reduce the import quota from 300,000 to 80,000 tons.<sup>38</sup>

### **Encountering a setback in the people's organisation**

The SBGA committee and NGO workers considered that the government's decision was temporary only and that the same problem would re-emerge the following year. Consequently, they planned to mobilise the growers in February 1991 to demand a subsidy from the government for soya bean producers. However, following the coup of 23 February 1991, the NGO workers and village leaders were cautious about political action. They, therefore, had to find a different approach to win government support for an agricultural subsidy for soya bean growers who had been affected by the government's accession to the GATT.

One approach was to use an element of traditional culture to seek assistance from the Provincial Governor. During the *Songkran*, the Thai traditional New Year festival, in April 1991, a group of SBGA leaders and NGO workers went with the Chiang Mai people to join the *rotnam damhua* ceremony held to bless the Governor.<sup>39</sup> While blessing the Governor with fresh and fragrant water, the SBGA leaders and NGO representatives brought to his attention the plight of soya bean growers resulting from

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<sup>37</sup> *Daily News*, 30 April 1990 (2533).

<sup>38</sup> *Thai Rat*, 1 May 1990 (2533).

<sup>39</sup> This ceremony is practiced by the Northern Thais during the traditional New Year.

the government's free trade policies. The Governor agreed to take up the issue on the growers' behalf.

The Provincial Governor asked the Deputy Provincial Governor to hold discussions with the representatives of soya bean growers, provincial officials and business agents in Chiang Mai.<sup>40</sup> The outcome of the meeting was that the Deputy Provincial Governor agreed to ask the Minister of Commerce in the first interim Anan government (February 1991-April 1992) to subsidise the soya bean producers. After waiting for some time, the representatives of the soya bean growers went to Bangkok themselves to submit a petition to the government. The Bangkok-based NGOs, namely the NGO-CORD headquarter and the Thai Development Support Committee (TDSC), helped the representatives to carry out their task.<sup>41</sup> The caretaker government could not deliver any promises before a new government took office after the national election (planned for March 1992), but agreed to pass on the request.

The Samakkhitham Party won the 1992 national election. However, when Narong Wongwan, the leader of the Party, was unable to succeed as the Prime Minister-elect because of drug trafficking accusations made by the US government, General Suchinda, a NPKC leader who did not contest the election, stepped in to become the Prime Minister. When the urban middle class, especially in Bangkok, began to protest against the return of the military leader to power,<sup>42</sup> Suchinda sought political support from people and organisations outside Bangkok. One such organisation was the SBGA in Chiang Mai.

During the April and May 1992 Bangkok protests, Suchinda offered 60 million baht from the Collective Fund for Assisting Agriculturalists (*ko:ngthun songsoem kasetthako:n*) to subsidise the falling price of soya bean for that year. The secretary-general of the SBGA (from Village 2) and FEDRA fieldworkers, however, claimed that the money offered was a political ploy to keep the military in power. They also argued that the money would not reach small-scale producers because they had already sold their crop in April for six to 8 baht per kg. The 60 million baht offered by Suchinda would, however, benefit the owners of warehouse and agricultural companies who saw

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<sup>40</sup> Representatives included the Deputy himself, Provincial Extension Officer, Provincial Agricultural Cooperative Officer, Provincial Commerce Officer and representatives from the Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC), the Provincial Joint Public and Private Consultative Committee and the Provincial Commerce Association.

<sup>41</sup> FEDRA, 1991 (2534), "Sarup hetkan khwam klu'anwai kho:ng kasettakho:n phu pluk thualu'ang pi 1991 (2534)" [A Summary of Events in the Movement of Soya Bean Farmers in 1991], [in Thai], Chiang Mai.

<sup>42</sup> See the background of the 1992 May event in *The Canberra Times*, 20 May 1990, pp. 1, 8, 9, 12 and 13; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 May 1992, pp. 10, 12 and 21 May 1992, p. 8; *The Economist*, 23-29 May 1992, p. 15; *FEER*, 28 May 1992, pp. 10-11 and 12; *Bangkok Post*, 29 November 1992, p. 19.

the value of their stocks rise to 9 or 10 baht per kg.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, the SBGA president and the local politician from Chat Thai Party did not want to support the demonstration against Suchinda for fear of losing the 60 million baht subsidy. The situation was complicated by the secretary-general's claim that the president of the SBGA and his associates (including a local official and businessmen) had built a warehouse to stock 700 tons of soya bean bought from small-scale producers at low prices (6 to 8 baht per kg) whilst the SBGA and NGOs were demanding the government subsidy (which would raise the price to around 9 or 10 baht per kg).<sup>44</sup>

In 1992, the internal disputes among SBGA leaders caused a serious setback for the wider soya bean growers' movement, which was led by the SBGA. Moreover, some officials, especially a provincial extension officer, tried to discredit the SBGA and accused it of being an "illegal association" (*chomrom thu'an*).<sup>45</sup> Due to internal disputes, the SBGA lost the support of its grass-roots members. Nevertheless, the FEDRA Chairperson felt obliged to intervene and to reorganise the SBGA. As the handicraft cooperative run by female villagers had proved successful, the Chairperson asked FEDRA fieldworkers to restructure the SBGA into a cooperative which, he believed, would benefit ordinary producers. During my second period of fieldwork, from October 1992 to March 1993, the cooperative had just started with thirteen villages loosely organised.

With the SBGA's reform introduced by the Chairperson, there emerged internal tensions within FEDRA. The young fieldworkers – especially Phithak (the head of the FEDRA Agricultural Promotion Unit) who had encouraged a political approach of the SBGA – did not agree with the new approach of the Chairperson and were frustrated by some administrators who strongly preferred a non-political approach. Phithak resigned from FEDRA but still continued assisting FEDRA on an occasional basis because of his strong attachment to the monk.<sup>46</sup> The remaining fieldworkers had not yet understood how to analyse local situations in accordance with changes in the political economy of rural Thailand. They tended to adopt a non-political approach fearing that any political action would tarnish the image of the FEDRA Chairperson, who was a senior monk in Chiang Mai.

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<sup>43</sup> *Phujatkan*, 15 June 1992 (2535) and 20-21 June 1992 (2535).

<sup>44</sup> *Phujatkan*, 24 June 1992 (2535).

<sup>45</sup> My observation from attending a meeting between villagers, officials and FEDRA workers on 15 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai. See also *Phujatkan*, 11 December 1992 (2535).

<sup>46</sup> He had been given free education at the Metta Suksa School which was established by the FEDRA Chairperson. After he finished his BA (Political Science) from Chiang Mai University in the early 1980s, he came to work with the Chairperson to help him develop rural communities.

In early 1993, Village 2 encountered a new problem of water scarcity resulting partly from the spread of agricultural intensification and commercialisation and partly as a legacy of forest depletion. FEDRA workers were busy organising the soya bean growers' cooperative while doing little to address the immediate problem of water scarcity.<sup>47</sup> During my stay in Village 2 in early 1993, I found small-scale cultivators were frustrated by competition over the use of forest and water resources between themselves, the landless and illegal loggers. They were also frustrated by the falling price of cash crops and the high cost of investment. Some cultivators began to sell their land to investors of capital – a situation which a village head described as “heartbreaking” (*na jai hai*).<sup>48</sup> Other cultivators felt hostile towards the landless, who they claimed earned their living by cutting trees illegally. Thus, they tried to convince the landless to work in factories somewhere outside the village.

In summary, the SBGA set up by soya bean growers with the help of FEDRA suffered setbacks due to internal conflicts among its leaders and their loss of touch with grass-roots members. The FEDRA Chairperson intervened to reformulate the SBGA in the form of a cooperative, expecting that this would win back the participation of the ordinary producers. The move of the Chairperson disappointed some young active fieldworkers who considered that FEDRA was seeking to avoid involvement in any political orientation. Some of them quit FEDRA leaving inexperienced workers to carry on the task of reforming the SBGA, a task which was to challenge FEDRA's grass-roots analysis and organisational direction. It was also to challenge the FEDRA workers' ability to produce a new social meaning and thus to regain the participation of ordinary people.

## Discussion

### Transformation, competition and intervention

Of the three villages under study, the agrarian change in Village 2 is the most advanced in terms of intensification and commercialisation. Here, the villagers have experienced agrarian change since the late 1930s. The main influences for change were a prince from Chiang Mai, a local MP, and private entrepreneurs with the support of government

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<sup>47</sup> The village committee sought financial support from the Land Development Department in early 1993 to build a weir to store water for irrigating their crops. The weir was built in that year. However, in September 1994, the weir collapsed during heavy rain damaging 30 houses and destroying crops in the eastern lowland of the village. *Athit Weekly*, 30 September-6 October 1994, pp. 24-25. A former village head told me during my visit in October 1996 that the Land Development Department helped pay compensation.

<sup>48</sup> Interview, INT-108-VIL, 25 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

policies as detailed in a series of five-year development plans which have promoted the role of entrepreneurs in creating the wealth of the nation.

In the period up to the mid-1980s, the competition over access to productive resources in Village 2 was mainly related to access to land and to labour inputs (especially buffalos) resulting in problems from increasing rents for land and buffalos. Tensions emerged between landowners (mostly small-scale cultivators), tenants and landless peasants on the issue of high buffalo and land rents; between small-scale cultivators and middlemen on the reduced prices for agricultural outputs; between small-scale cultivators and agricultural business companies on increased prices for agricultural inputs; and among small-scale cultivators in search of a source of capital investment.

The attempt by student activists to intervene in the competition over access to land in Village 2 by recruiting the people to participate in the formation of the PFT failed. In fact, the students were not wrong in identifying rent as an issue or in arguing there was an increasing problem of social differentiation in the Thai society. They simply did not identify their target group and approached the wrong group of people in the village. “If the students went to ask tenants, a fight between the tenants and landowners would have occurred”, a former village head told me.<sup>49</sup> Poor peasants recalled little about the students’ presence in the village although they said they had heard vaguely about the movement of “those who favoured [commun]ism” (*phuak hoe latthi*) existing in some lowland villages of Mae Rim district.<sup>50</sup> Having little knowledge about Thai agrarian society, the students came to the village armed with general perceptions about a structural analysis and class conflict but could not identify the differences in a locality – especially the complicated social relations among rural people, between the people and other social actors. In looking for “landlords” they failed to identify the different levels of land ownership and the social relations in Village 2. Like other social movements elsewhere in the 1970s, the Thai social activists saw “a system without actors”.<sup>51</sup>

Ten years later in 1984 when FEDRA came to the village on the invitation of *Pho:luang* Wan to help the tenants, the FEDRA Chairperson sought to intervene by helping to set up the buffalo and rice banks for the landless. However, he believed that economic assistance alone was not enough and there was a need for spiritual development as well. He tried to use the notion of the buffalo being saved from slaughter as a “tool kit”, or “*yu’a*” as he called it, to educate the people, both rich and poor, and to create a social meaning of *metta* (loving-kindness) so as to teach the

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<sup>49</sup> Interview, INT-116-VIL, 27 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>50</sup> Interview, INT-115-VIL, 27 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>51</sup> Touraine, 1995, *Critique of Modernity*, p. 354.

responsibility to alleviate suffering in all life, animal and human. However, his message seldom reached those people. As one villager explained:

The projects of buffalo and rice banks includes both ethics (*khunnatham*) and stratagem (*ubai*) which encourage alms-giving (*kan hai than*) between the rich and the poor. Nevertheless, these two groups have not yet understood both the ethics and the stratagem of the projects. They need somebody who understands the essence of Dhamma to interpret the meaning and practice of alms-giving in relation to the projects and discuss with them.<sup>52</sup>

When the spiritual development and social meaning message of caring for and of helping those who are suffering was lost, the NGO projects retained their objective of promoting economic development in line with government objectives. A villager compared the government's policies and NGO projects and felt that the NGO projects should have the added dimension of social meaning:

Government policies encouraged every citizen to strive for "good living; good eating" (*yu di kin di*). They did not urge us to acquire only "enough for a good life; enough to eat" (*yu pho:di kin pho:di*). No single government policy in the past tried to persuade us to see the significance of protecting the environment and to live with it in harmony. At the same time, FEDRA taught us about how to produce this crop that crop. Yet it has not taught us about when and where should be "enough" (*ru jak im jak pho:*).<sup>53</sup>

The FEDRA projects also had the problem that they missed their target group – the landless. Two landless tenants told me that they did not have access to the rice bank project because, they claimed, the small-scale producers who ran the committees did not allow them to borrow paddy because they were not project members. They said that they earned hand-to-mouth income daily and, thus, could not afford to contribute an amount of paddy to the rice bank each year. They argued that the FEDRA project came to "help the rich get richer" (*chuai khon ruai tik tik*).<sup>54</sup> A retired teacher who was also a traditional and religious village leader (called *kae wat*) confirmed this opinion. He claimed that an "oligarchy" (referring to the village committee) controlled village resources and rarely delivered to those who were most in need.<sup>55</sup>

Another significant pressure on the villagers throughout the 1980s was the cost of agricultural investment to grow crops such as soya bean, tobacco, green bean and pigeon pea. This was reaching the point where the landless could not afford to invest and take the risk of becoming permanently indebted.<sup>56</sup> Many of the landless, therefore, became wage workers in factories outside the village and no longer participated in

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<sup>52</sup> Interview, INT-118-VIL, 28 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>53</sup> Interview, INT-115-VIL, 27 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>54</sup> Interview, INT-110-VIL, 26 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>55</sup> Interview, INT-104-VIL, 23 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>56</sup> Interview, INT-112-VIL, 26 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

agricultural activities.<sup>57</sup> There was also pressure on the small-scale producers to find adequate funds for investment. FEDRA's principle economic aim was to assist those who were engaged in agricultural production so as to maintain village integrity. The small-scale producers in Village 2 wished to maintain their farming activities and needed FEDRA to provide further assistance through the revolving fund. As FEDRA workers became more involved in assisting small-scale producers, they were dealing with a system of social relations with which they were not familiar.

From the mid-1980s, the competition and tensions over productive resources in Village 2 occurred on several fronts and the scope of the problem was wider than in the past. The competition and tensions were between small-scale cultivators and middlemen on the issue of agricultural price; between small-scale cultivators and business companies (animal food factories), and government decision makers (Ministry of Commerce and the Food Policy Committee); between leaders within the SBGA; and between SBGA leaders and grass-roots members. FEDRA helped address some of these problems but was eventually troubled by the emergence of tensions within the organisation itself.

The FEDRA fieldworkers intervened in the competition between small-scale producers and middlemen on the issue of the selling and buying price of agricultural produce. Initially, as the small-scale cultivators of Village 2 were maintaining their social and cultural practices, FEDRA fieldworkers were able to intervene by developing what they saw as "community culture" as a means of gaining the "people's participation" to achieve higher prices from the middlemen for soya bean. Their success convinced other villagers from different places, who also saw the advantage of collective over individual action, to participate in similar collective action. The time was ripe, therefore, for the FEDRA workers to intervene further by setting up the SBGA in the period when the villagers enjoyed good profits from selling soya bean produce; also, as many officials in Mae Rim district agreed, Village 2 was a place where villagers generally had unity (*samakkhi*), religious values (*khunnatham*), a strong sense of belonging to their community and carefully selected leaders who brought benefits to their community. They were thus able to play an interventionist role in the formulation of the SBGA.

When the soya bean price fell, however, FEDRA could not come up with an effective solution, especially as the tension now extended to include the small-scale soya bean growers, business companies at the national level and government decision makers who had to comply with the GATT free trade agreement and, at the same time, compromise with the domestic business companies (in this case the animal food producers'

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<sup>57</sup> Interview, INT-136-NGO, 26 February 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai. FEDRA projects had to be ceased in some areas because many villagers sold their land out and gave up farming occupation.

association). In the first year (1990), the collective protest led by the SBGA was successful because the Chatchai government saw that the change of its policy was at the expense of domestic soya bean growers. However, after the victory in 1990, the unity of the SBGA began to weaken as some villagers became involved in growing other cash crops, such as green bean, potato and eggplant, in the form of contract farming with agri-business companies. As the villagers shifted to the new cash crops, they were entering into a new network of social and economic relations. In so doing, the villagers argued that they had no better alternative. In the second year (1991), the national politics changed when the civilian Chatchai government was overthrown. The interim government could not make a decision in response to the demand of the SBGA and by the the third year (1992), internal conflicts had emerged within the SBGA committee due to alleged corruption by the SBGA president. As the grass-roots members were by now exhausted by the collective protests and disillusioned by the alleged misconduct of the president, they simply turned away from the SBGA.

This is not an unusual phenomenon for any social movement which is generally made up of organisational leaders and of grass-roots members. Those who are involved in collective action are not entirely equipped with “class consciousness”.<sup>58</sup> Some of them may wish to obtain only limited advantages from a collective protest, such as the increased price of agricultural product, leadership of a political movement as a stepping stone to becoming a local politician, and so forth. The political movement led by the SBGA is not exceptional. The problems faced by a political movement in response to a crisis situation need to be analysed by those concerned to get around the problems in the future. As a FEDRA fieldworker concluded: “No matter where a development project is started up, it is essential that NGO workers have a vision to direct it to serve the people”.<sup>59</sup> I think this rationale should be consistently used to reassess the substance of development concepts and practice.

In summary, FEDRA was successful in playing an interventionist role because it was able to capture social relations and tensions emerging during social practices. It was also able to help set up the Soya Bean Growers’ Association, a people’s organisation, with the expectation that it would help villagers to strengthen themselves in the long run. However, some growers moved to other cash crops and political events interfered in the campaign for better prices. Finally, tensions between the SBGA leaders and grass-roots members meant that FEDRA had to re-analyse the situation to find a new meaning and identify the new actors and networks. Before the members of the SBGA drifted apart, the FEDRA Chairperson intervened to reformulate the SBGA into an agricultural cooperative, a move which received full support from concerned officials at

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<sup>58</sup> Touraine, 1977, *The Self-Production Society*, p. 317.

<sup>59</sup> Interview, INT-085-NGO, 15 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

the Northern Agricultural Office who were content to see the grass-roots members held together and their interests represented.

### **Some issues for further attention**

FEDRA has been working with rural people in Mae Rim and many other districts in Chiang Mai province since 1974. In 1993, it had seventeen fieldworkers conducting rice banks, buffalo banks, revolving funds and other development projects in about 30 villages in three provinces of Chiang Mai, Lamphun and Mae Hong Son. Many workers were the former students of the Metta Suksa School which the FEDRA Chairperson established before his involvement with FEDRA. Receiving free education and welfare, the students felt attached to the Chairperson although some disagreed with his analysis of the causes of transformation and negative impact of change in the villages. The disagreements in social analysis caused tensions within FEDRA.

First, it always emerges from discussion on development that transformation and its negative impact results from either human conduct or the constraints of social and political structure. The FEDRA fieldworker also felt that they had a communication gap with their administrators. They wanted the FEDRA administrators, most of whom were urban middle class, to understand the harsh impact of current development and change on the livelihood of villagers, many of whom were forced off their land and lost their property. They also wanted them to help them tackle problems which they perceived to be imposed by structural constraints. However, other FEDRA workers and administrators disagreed with this approach, arguing that political actions would tarnish the reputation of the FEDRA Chairperson. While the competition over productive resources intensified in the early 1990s, the active FEDRA fieldworkers felt frustrated, as they perceived that FEDRA was becoming inflexible in response to the people's crucial situations, such as the falling price for soya (Village 2) and the land dispute between military and villagers (Village 3). One fieldworker bluntly criticised FEDRA for putting the problem of the projects ahead of the people:

The situations required FEDRA to help solve the people's problem, not the buffalo bank's problem. What FEDRA had done so far was running around in the circle of starting up a development project, and managing and following up the project. Yet, it has not intensively assessed its past experiences in working with local people, officials and businessmen.<sup>60</sup>

Secondly, while the FEDRA administrators put the emphasis on social integration, the FEDRA fieldworkers focused their work on social conflicts and movement. The FEDRA Chairperson disapproved of political protest, due to his personal character and

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<sup>60</sup> Interview, INT-034-NGO, 25 November 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

training as a monk.<sup>61</sup> He was more inclined to look for social integration than to be sensitive to social conflicts and movements initiated by social actors. Meanwhile, FEDRA fieldworkers who dealt with competition and conflicts over productive resources in everyday phenomena were more alert to the potential for social tension than the FEDRA administrators. It seems to me that FEDRA needs to review relations between its administrators and staff members and to consider organisational reform if it is to attract young active workers with a commitment to work with local people. FEDRA also needs to review its interaction with its network to maximise its potential to respond to problems which it may be unable to handle on its own.

Thirdly, as the collective protest led by the SBGA in 1992 faced internal conflicts between SBGA leaders and grass-roots members, it needed NGOs to investigate the problematic relations within a social movement arising from collective activity and crises in a given situation. In so doing, the NGOs might discover a new social meaning, new social actors and a new direction for organisational reform, rather than see the disintegration of the movement.

Finally, the occupants of Village 2 felt concern about the ecological system of their village which is located partly on highlands in the west and partly on lowlands in the East. In this situation, FEDRA needed to consider not only the relations between humans, but also between humans and their environment.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has discussed, from the different events in Village 2, rural transformation and the intervention of social actors, especially FEDRA and its networks, in the competition and conflicts over productive resources (high rents on land and buffalo, as well as the cost of agricultural investment). Before the mid-1980s, competition emerged between landowners (most of whom were small-scale cultivators) and tenants on the issue of high rents for land and for buffalos, which were beyond the capacity of tenants to afford. At the same time, small-scale cultivators were competing with middlemen and agri-business companies and receiving low prices for their agricultural products, while paying a high cost for agricultural investment. To tackle these problems, a village leader invited FEDRA to implement certain development projects. Buffalo and rice bank projects helped reduce tenants' accumulating debts. Having seen the tenants benefiting from FEDRA projects, the small-scale landowners began to seek FEDRA assistance. But, in addressing the competition between small-scale producers

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<sup>61</sup> Interview, INT-008-ACA, 30 October 1991, Chiang Mai.

and middlemen on the issue of low prices for agricultural products, FEDRA shifted its focus from tenants to small-scale cultivators, as its main target group.

From the mid-1980s, FEDRA had become involved with small-scale cultivators who still carried on their traditional culture while adapting some “modern” aspects into their daily life. FEDRA fieldworkers played an interventionist role by helping the small-scale cultivators to create the social meaning of “unity” and “self-reliance” based on the people’s practice of their “community culture”, thus demonstrating the people’s ‘power’ to enhance their profit with middlemen. The small victory of the producers in Village 2 encouraged other growers from different districts to become involved in forming the organisation of soya bean producers, the SBGA, to represent their interest. In 1990, FEDRA workers, their NGO networks such as NDWA and NGO-CORD, and other supporters in Chiang Mai helped the SBGA members scale-up from a village community to tackle the problem of falling soya bean prices at a national level. The scale-up action was not a pre-planned strategy but arose from the links between NGO workers, organisations and networks on a particular issue and situation.

Some key factors influenced small-scale cultivators to move away from soya bean production and to engage in other cash crops and contract farming. First, while the soya bean price continued to fall in subsequent years, SBGA members and NGO workers seemed to be exhausted by collective protest activities. Secondly, the military coup in February 1991 made protesters uncertain about the future of the open-political system in Thailand. Thirdly, the prospect of domestic soya bean production did not look good because it could not compete with cheaper soya bean on the international market and, more importantly, the Thai government would have to comply with the GATT. Fourthly, some SBGA committee members and NGO workers were committed to political means to solve the problem and lost touch with grass-roots members. Fifthly, internal conflicts among SBGA leaders caused a split in the people’s organisation. As small-scale cultivators moved further into the agricultural intensification of contract farming, they encountered the new problem of water scarcity. During this time, two FEDRA fieldworkers resigned. Thus, FEDRA had to leave the new problem in the hands of village leaders to handle by themselves. FEDRA had been busy restructuring the SBGA into a cooperative. Whether the cooperative could engage the participation of grass-roots members depended on whether FEDRA could create a social meaning acceptable to the members while interacting with other social actors in the development process.



**Plate 9.** Villagers planting rice for mainly household consumption.



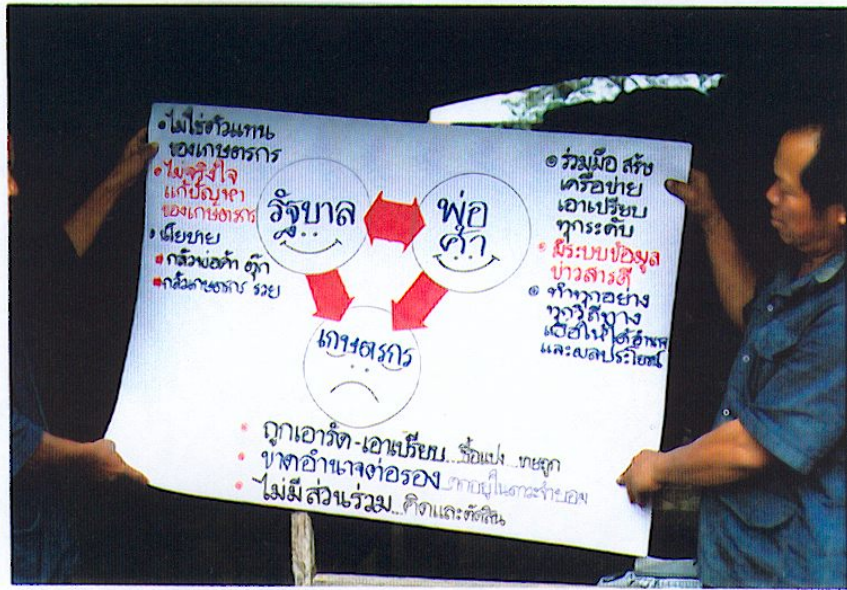
**Plate 10** Harvesting tobacco (Virginia Richmond) after completion of the rice season.



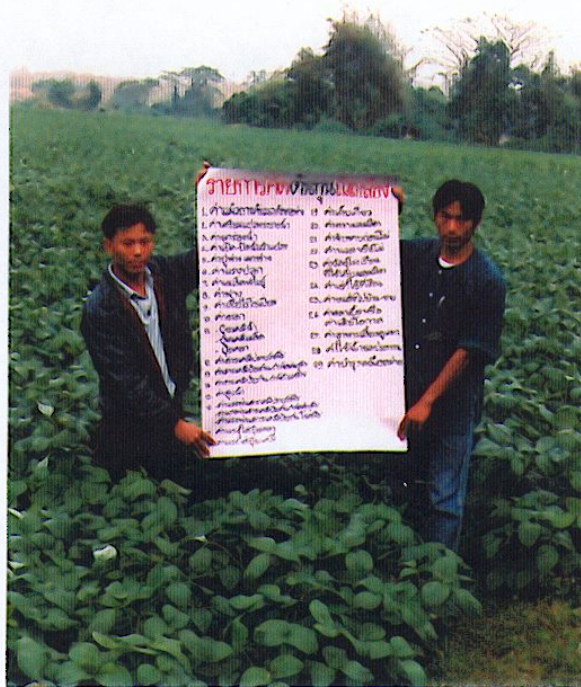
**Plate 11.** The FEDRA Chairperson conducting an almsgiving ceremony between a donor and recipient of oxen (for the buffalo bank project).



**Plate 12** Well-to-do urban couple handing over an ox to a female peasant.



**Plate 13** Soya bean growers' analysis of the asymmetrical power relations between the government, merchants (traders) and peasants.



**Plate 14** Villagers showing the 29 items which contribute to the cost of soya bean production.



**Plate 15.** Protest in front of the Thaphae Gate, Chiang Mai, against the government's decision to allow the import of soya bean residue and the resultant fall in price on the domestic market.



**Plate 16** Soya bean growers signal their victory after the government agreed to set the domestic price they demanded.

## Chapter 6

### Conflict over land occupation in a suburban-influenced village

A university should have a capacity for searching, accumulating and creating knowledge. The way in which the university might help villagers is not to directly terminate the land dispute because it does not have duty and capacity to do so. However, the university could open the gate to understand the people's problem and analyse it, as a neutral body, to offer academic service to the public. The aim is to find a way out which justly satisfies both sides [referring to the military and villagers]. At the same time, that way out may create wisdom in answering similar problems which are injuring the present-day Thai society.

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In this chapter, I shall examine the NGO interventionist role in a land dispute case between the military and villagers in Village 3 which is located near the city of Chiang Mai. The expansion of the city had encouraged investors of capital to purchase plots of land nearby for tourist and recreational facilities. This caused the land dispute to intensify since the military were afraid that villagers would sell land to private urban developers.

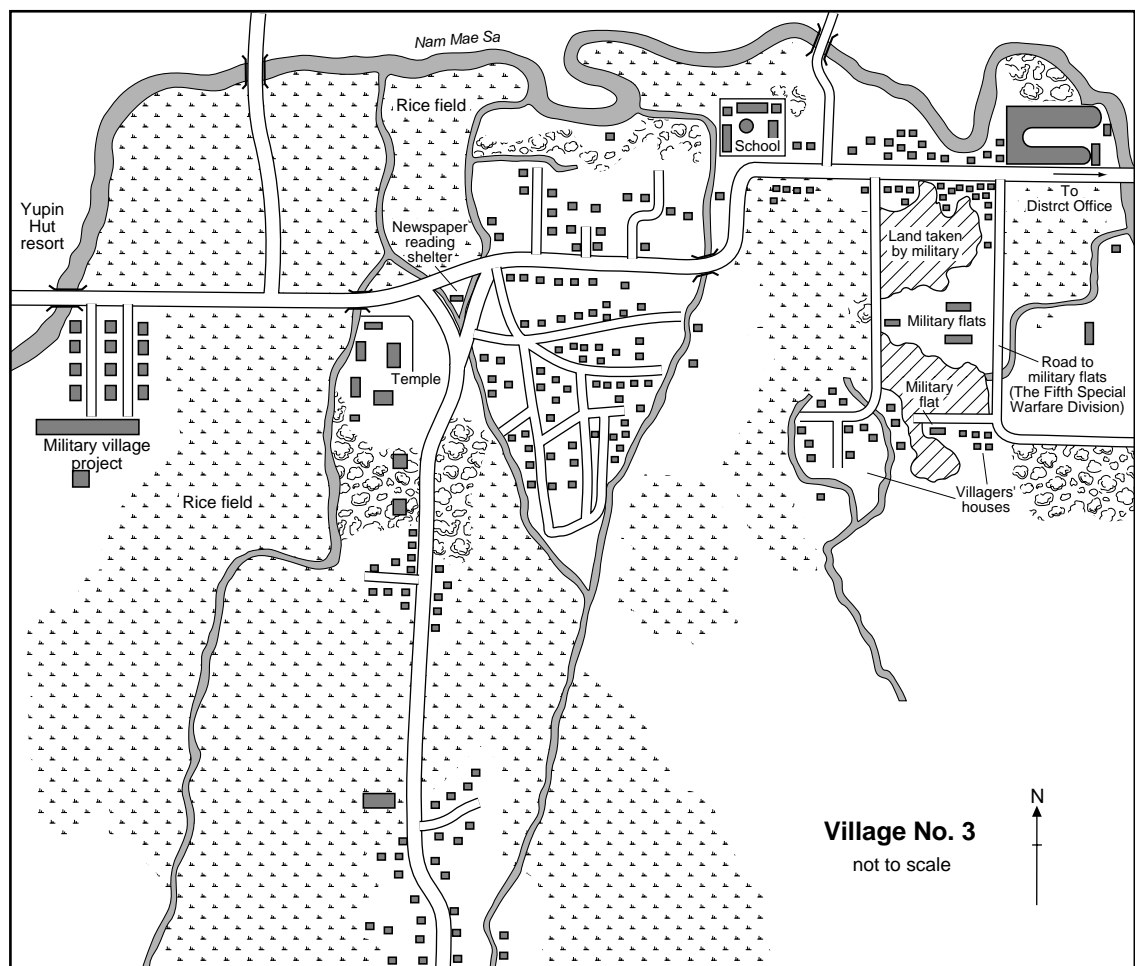
The chapter argues that articulation of a social meaning of "self-reliance" by the villagers and committed NGO workers in opposition to the military's domination becomes a key factor of political intervention. The NGO intervention should not be seen in isolation from individual workers, organisations and networks extending from the village to the nation. Although the land dispute between the villagers and military occurred at the village level, NGO intervention was unlikely to be successful without the prominent support of the media and the public in an open political system. However, while some NGO workers see rural areas as no longer remote but as amalgamated, with traditional and modern cultures and city and village sitting side by side, many other NGO workers perceive rural situations in isolation from modern culture and urban influence. The latter workers are inclined to adopt a conservative and non-political approach in their work. The difference in their approaches to social analysis without consensus results not only in tensions within the organisation but also the departure of many active NGO workers.

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## Village context

Village 3 is situated about 20 km northwest of Chiang Mai and about 3 km from the Chiang Mai-Fang highway.<sup>2</sup> A number of factors make this village different from many others. First, the prolonged land dispute between the military and the villagers has meant there is uncertainty as to the security of village settlement and the development of agricultural commercialisation. Secondly, the dispute has affected the official treatment of the village. Village 3 is, in fact, a cluster of three separate villages, but the officials deal with them as a single administrative unit (see Maps 1.1 and 6.1). An elected village head is in charge of the cluster with the help of two assistants, each elected from the other two sister villages. Thirdly, the village is situated directly in the line of the expansion of Chiang Mai city along the Chiang Mai-Fang highway, with a build up of small industries, tourist facilities and housing.



Map 6.1 Village 3

<sup>2</sup> During my fieldwork in Village 3 in December 1992, I observed that most villagers commuted daily from their village to the city to sell fresh vegetables at *Tonlamyai* market (*talat tonlamyai*), to work at the Green Valley Golf Course, located not far away from the District Office and to earn off-farm income as motorcycle-taxi drivers. It seems to be misleading when Darlington, an anthropologist, argues that: "Most villagers have never gone to the city". Darlington, 1990, "Buddhism, Morality and Change...", p. 62.

Since the late 1980s, Village 3 has become the focus of a struggle for land occupation between the military, the villagers and potential investors. Many investors have already bought land near the village and built tourist resorts, restaurants, a butterfly farm, an orchid farm and other related businesses. It is likely that Village 3 is seen as a prime location for further similar investments. The interest of investors in the area has aggravated the tensions between the military and the villagers as the military feared that if disputed land was sold to influential private investors they would find it more difficult to pursue land claims. The land dispute with the military in Village 3 is not unique in Thailand where similar disputes occur in 55 out of 72 provinces.<sup>3</sup>

The dispute began in 1940 when the Bangkok government issued two royal decrees authorising the Royal Thai Army to expropriate 27,000 rai of “unoccupied land” (*thi rokrang wangplao*) in Mae Rim district for military use. The area included Village 3 land. In a situation where the military and bureaucrats had overwhelming power over rural people who lived in a remote peripheral area, the villagers understood little of what would happen to them. All they knew was that *Khunphra* Thawiprasat, the district head at that time, ordered them to hand in their land ownership documents (*stamp na*) to the District Office. For this, they were promised compensation of 15 baht per rai. Many villagers complied with the order of the district head but a few quietly resisted by hiding their ownership documents away. The people sought to live and farm on the land on the basis that the Army’s Animal Breeding Unit (ABU) (*krom phasomsat*) needed the village to supply food for it. However, the ABU imposed a rental of 15 thang of paddy per year per rai of land cultivated. After 1957, the ABU asked the villagers to pay the rent in cash at the annual rate of 42 baht per rai instead of in paddy. The payment of rent in cash stopped in 1981 as a new unit, the Fifth Special Warfare Section (under the Second Fighting Service Division), prepared to take over the land from the ABU and build its office and residences on the village land.<sup>4</sup> The villagers continued farming their land hoping thereby to prevent the military from taking over the rest of the land. They invited FEDRA to assist them in coping with the economic, social and political pressures imposed upon them. In the early 1990s when the military attempted to claim further land by proposing a plan to move 79 families

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<sup>3</sup> Interview, INT-153-GOV, 25 March 1993, Bangkok. See also Office of the Prime Minister and Royal Thai Army, 2533 (1990), *Khumu’ kan kae Khai panha ko:rani ratsado:n yu a-sai thamkin nai phu’nti sa-nguan huangham kho:ng thahan* [The Manual for Solving Problems Concerning the Case of People Residing and Farming in Restricted Area of the Military], [in Thai], Bangkok.

<sup>4</sup> Interview, INT-055-VIL, 25 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai; NGO-CORD/Upper North, 1992 (2535), “Lamdap hetkan ko:rani thahan lai thi chaoban” [Chronological Events of Land Dispute Case], [in Thai], Chiang Mai. The Royal Thai Army allocated about 8,000 of the 27,000 rai to the Fifth Special Warfare Section in 1985. See Memorandum dated 6 September 1990 (2533) from the Deputy Commander of the Second Special Division to the Commander of the Chiang Mai Army Province.

onto the farmland of their neighbours, the village leaders sought help from a number of NGOs and academics in Chiang Mai and Bangkok.

In 1992, Village 3 was composed of 212 households with a population of about 800. There were 200 households in 1985.<sup>5</sup> The villagers farmed about 1,000 rai of village land situated in a relatively fertile area at an altitude of about 350m above sea level. The land is surrounded by a range of mountains which are the source of three streams running through the three cluster villages all year round. Thus, the villagers have been able to utilise the natural resources of abundant water and fertile land for cultivation. They have received minimal support by way of irrigation systems and other infrastructure from the government due to the land dispute with the military.

Glutinous rice and soya bean were the basic crops for household consumption so far as elderly villagers could recall. A 73-year-old man recalled that when he was a boy, he saw his parents rotate rice and soya bean after the harvest of each crop, as he explained: “taking rice out, putting soya bean in; taking soya bean out, putting rice in” (*ao khao o:k ko: ao thua sai; ao thua o:k ko: ao khao sai*).<sup>6</sup> Around 1960, some villagers began to earn off-farm income by working in a Chiang Mai prince’s lychee garden in Rintai sub-district, which is about 2 km from Village 3. The villagers came to know the Chinese merchant who looked after the prince’s garden. Over a period of time, the Chinese merchant introduced different kinds of cash crops, such as turnip and cabbage, to the villagers. The people began to experiment and the merchant’s nephew became the middleman linking the producers of Village 3 with the Chiang Mai markets.<sup>7</sup> By 1970, the Chinese middleman was providing vegetable seeds, chemical fertiliser and insecticide to villagers on credit and accepting payment when the crops were harvested.<sup>8</sup> Soya bean, which the villagers originally grew for household consumption had, by the early 1970s, also become a cash crop. During the period from the 1960s to the early 1970s, the people had become increasingly involved in cash cropping which signalled a shift in agricultural production from household subsistence to commercialisation. This trend was not irreversible.

The land dispute in Village 3 prevented villagers from expanding their cash cropping further as had occurred in Village 2. As the villagers did not own land certificates, they

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<sup>5</sup> Interview, INT-069-VIL, 29 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai; SRI, 1985 (2528), *Laksana thang setthakit sangkhom...*, Appendix, n.p. When asked about the increasing number of households in this village, the present Village Head told me that the increase was minimal and only from extended families. The migration in this village was also small. The villagers were more inclined to move out of the village rather than to move in.

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to an assistant village head who lent me a cassette about the village history told by elderly villagers.

<sup>7</sup> Interview, INT-061-VIL, 26 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>8</sup> Interview, INT-058-BUS, 26 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

lacked the guaranteed assets necessary to borrow money from established financial institutions to invest in agricultural production. In addition, the military had intimidated the district administrators and prevented them from providing welfare services to Village 3. The military also consistently thwarted the participation of Village 3 in the government's annual budgetary and infrastructure development projects, for example, it banned a weir construction project for irrigation and electricity generation in 1973.<sup>9</sup> Few government officials visited the village cluster, regarding it as "situated in the military area".<sup>10</sup>

Villagers tried various ways to cope with the consequent constraints on their productive resources, especially on land and farm investment. During the Thanom-Praphat military regime (1964-1973) in 1969, the district administrators proposed that the villagers be relocated to a cooperative area in Mae Taeng district, to the north of Mae Rim. In 1972, a group of villagers led by *Pho:luang* Kaeo, a former village head (1957-1982), sought patronage from General Sa-nga Kittikachorn, a high-ranking military officer who was the younger brother of the Prime Minister.<sup>11</sup> General Sa-nga protected the villagers from the interference of the military and hence also from Mae Rim district authorities. As the political climate began to move towards increased democracy, villagers promised their vote in 1975 to a local MP who, in return, agreed to help them lobby the government for funds to build village infrastructure such as a weir to generate electricity and a bridge to allow all-weather access to the village. Although the infrastructure was eventually provided, generally during the period from the mid to late 1970s when there was nationwide political unrest, villagers adopted a low profile and made few demands, fearing both military suppression and communist infiltration.<sup>12</sup> In 1982 after *Pho:luang* Kaeo resigned as village head, *Pho:luang* Jamnuan was elected in his place because he was seen to be outspoken and likely to be good at negotiating with the authorities. The villagers were very pragmatic in selecting their village heads believing that they needed good communicative skills to deal with outsiders and manage the dispute.

From the late 1970s, villagers had observed FEDRA activities and, in particular, that a FEDRA worker was helping young people nearby to grow vegetables and raise ducks and fish to contribute additional cash to family income. The villagers asked *Phrakhru*, the abbot of the village temple, to seek assistance from FEDRA on their behalf. Subsequently, *Phrakhru* invited the FEDRA Chairperson to visit Village 3 and

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<sup>9</sup> Interview, INT-062-VIL, 26 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>10</sup> Letter dated 28 October 1992 from the District Head addressed to the Village Head.

<sup>11</sup> Field Marshall Thanom Kittikhachorn, the Prime Minister from 1964 to 1973.

<sup>12</sup> Interview, INT-056-VIL, 25 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai; Interview, INT-039-VIL, 1 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

organised a meeting between the Chairperson, several FEDRA staff members and a group of villagers who were interested in working with FEDRA.<sup>13</sup>

## NGO involvement and activities

### Organising a youth group

As Alliband argues, community development does not have any “tested corpus of scientific laws or well-grounded theories”.<sup>14</sup> Development workers have to explore how their concepts can be applied and in what circumstances. In the early 1980s, FEDRA was exploring its development principles based on the experience of a 67-year-old monk who had several retired public servants as his advisers. The meeting which had been arranged by *Phrakhru* took place early in 1980, and the FEDRA Chairperson asked villagers about their current problems and how they thought that FEDRA would be able to help them tackle these.<sup>15</sup> Villagers replied that they would like to earn cash income for agricultural investment and that they could not get assistance or loans because of the military land claim. The Chairperson then explained FEDRA’s development principles. One, which he often emphasised, was that: “Economics and spirituality must be used together to solve problems” (*setthakit jitjai to:ng kaekhai pro:m kan*).<sup>16</sup> That is to say, if villagers received economic assistance from FEDRA’s development projects, the Chairperson expected social outcomes, namely that the villagers be diligent (*khayan*), economical (*prayat*), dedicated (*sia sala*) and united in their community (*samakkhi*). Thus, FEDRA’s economic assistance was seen as a “tool kit” (*yu’a*) which the Chairperson expected to encourage social values among the villagers.

Some FEDRA development activities, such as the rice bank, buffalo bank, revolving fund and handicraft projects, were explained to the villagers. To help them increase their agricultural investment, FEDRA would provide 1,000 baht loans without any collateral from its revolving fund project at 10 per cent per annum interest to each household. After the third year of harvesting, a borrower would have to have returned the capital of 1,000 baht to FEDRA while the annual interest would be kept in a village savings fund. FEDRA proposed to set up a village development committee (four to five members) – which was distinct from the village committee (eleven members) appointed

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<sup>13</sup> Interview, INT-041-VIL, 1 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>14</sup> T. Alliband, 1983, *Catalysts of Development: Voluntary Agencies in India*, West Hartford: Kumarian Press, p. ix.

<sup>15</sup> Villagers and *Phrakhru* were not sure of the date and I could not find a record at FEDRA.

<sup>16</sup> Vanpen, 1989, “Issues and Experiences in the Use of Community Participation...”, p. 81.

by the local authorities – to run the revolving fund project and the village saving fund. There was no restriction against an individual being on both committees. The FEDRA Chairperson anticipated that after three years training by FEDRA, the committee would be able to run the project on its own, at which time FEDRA would leave and let the villagers manage their own development.<sup>17</sup>

As happened elsewhere in rural Thailand during the late 1970s and early 1980s, many of the villagers were sceptical of NGOs and their offers of development projects, mainly as a result of government propaganda concerning communist infiltration. Many wondered where FEDRA gained its money and why it would lend it at low interest. This was unusual behaviour from moneylenders. They were reluctant to become involved in a FEDRA revolving fund project, especially after a village head spread a rumour accusing FEDRA of handing out a “communist fund” (*ngoen thun kho:mmunit*).<sup>18</sup> However, in November 1980, ten young villagers from poor families expressed their preparedness to be involved in the revolving fund project.<sup>19</sup> After electing their committee to take care of the project, they used a FEDRA loan to plant vegetables, such as soya bean and turnip, to gain additional cash income for their families. An NGO worker, whom FEDRA asked to take care of the village activity, often paid a visit. He not only discussed problems emerging from the project but also encouraged the young villagers to apply “self-reliance”, which he said was inherent in Buddhist teaching, to manage development.<sup>20</sup> The NGO worker also contacted a government extension officer and soya bean expert from the Royal Project (*khroangkan luang*) to help advise on some agricultural techniques.<sup>21</sup> After several setbacks, the young villagers were able to manage the project successfully and repaid the loan to FEDRA in 1981. At this time the military were concerned only at the prospect of large infrastructure projects and did not take much notice of the NGO work in the village. More importantly, the FEDRA Chairperson was cautious about relations with the military leaders who normally gave respect to him as a senior monk.

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<sup>17</sup> Interview, INT-137-NGO, 26 February 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>18</sup> Interview, INT-051-NGO, 23 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>19</sup> Interview, INT-041-VIL, 1 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai; and FEDRA, 1983 (2526), Annual Report, July 1982 (2525)-June 1983 (2526), [in Thai], Chiang Mai, p. 20.

Darlington said that *Phrakhrū* invited FEDRA to come to Village 3 in 1982. However, she described FEDRA’s first project as a revolving fund which she said was brought into Village 3 in 1980. See Darlington, 1990, “Buddhism, Morality and Change...” pp. 86 and 213.

<sup>20</sup> Interview, INT-062-VIL, 26 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai; Interview, INT-063-VIL, 27 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>21</sup> FEDRA, 1983 (2526), Annual Report..., p. 27.

### Shifting from the youth to adult groups

The success of this project convinced adult villagers that they should approach FEDRA for economic assistance. In July 1981, fifteen adult villagers submitted plans to borrow 1,000 baht each from FEDRA's revolving fund project.<sup>22</sup> The FEDRA Chairperson not only lent the money but also gave them several buffaloes as a form of agricultural investment.<sup>23</sup> The agreement between FEDRA and villagers was different from one village to another. In Village 3, it was agreed that a buffalo caretaker would return the first calf to FEDRA and keep any calves born in the following years. The caretaker also agreed to donate 5 thang of paddy annually which would be kept in a rice bank set up by FEDRA. The members of the rice bank decided to pay 1 thang interest for a 5 thang paddy loan; or in another words, 20 per cent. The period of rice borrowing was between July and August each year. These agreements were made verbally, thus respecting the social trust which it was considered existed among the villagers themselves and between the villagers and FEDRA.

*Pho:luang* Jamnuan, the village head (1983-1986), became a member of the village development committee which was set up with FEDRA's help to run the revolving fund project. He was involved in both governmental and non-governmental positions which were likely to enhance his power to control development channels to this village. The new village development committee also took over the youth activities which soon began to disintegrate.<sup>24</sup> Over the next few years, NGO fieldworkers responsible for development activities in Village 3 encountered various problems resulting from socio-economic change being imposed from outside and also occurring within the village. For example, it was alleged that during this period, *Pho:luang* Jamnuan had withdrawn money from the village savings fund (about 5,000 baht) without the knowledge of other committee members.<sup>25</sup> FEDRA chose not to respond to this misconduct by calling the police to investigate as it did not have enough evidence to make a claim against *Pho:luang* Jamnuan and because its development activities were based on trust and the honesty of villagers. It was, FEDRA said, up to the villagers to handle the problem of the alleged misappropriation by themselves. In addition, FEDRA was afraid that if it dealt with the problem itself, it would degrade the relationship between FEDRA and villagers who participated in the FEDRA projects. This, in turn, put pressure on the relationships between villagers and subsequently prevented others from participating in FEDRA projects. Without effective methods for dealing with tensions among villagers involved in such projects, Darlington argued that this kind of development practice

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>24</sup> Darlington, 1990, "Buddhism, Morality and Change...", p. 213

<sup>25</sup> Interview, INT-051-NGO, 23 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

becomes “symptomatic of the problems of using cultural values in development”.<sup>26</sup> Due to the misappropriation issue remaining unsettled, the youth withdrew from the project. At the same time, the failure of some adult villagers to repay FEDRA loans meant that others, who had waited to observe how the project would work, did not want to participate.

Between 1983 and 1985, *Pho:luang* Jamnuan was also allegedly involved in persuading some villagers to sell land to 20 soldiers to build houses in Village 3. He also facilitated the occupation of 160 rai of farmland by the Fifth Special Warfare Section without compensation to the villagers who lost their land.<sup>27</sup> Allegedly, this was done in exchange for assistance to enable him set up a restaurant in a tourist resort area under military influence.<sup>28</sup> *Pho:luang* Jamnuan’s betrayal infuriated villagers who passed a vote of no confidence in him. The district head organised an election for a new village head. *Pho:luang* Rat was successful and took up the position in 1986.

The alleged activities of *Pho:luang* Jamnuan made it difficult for the other members of the village development committee to accept responsibility for management of the revolving fund project. They consequently asked *Phrakhru*, the abbot of the village temple, to look after the village savings fund (which grew to 47,000 baht between 1981 and 1988).<sup>29</sup> The members of the revolving fund project subsequently agreed to new guidelines for the committee to manage the fund. They decided, in particular, that a new loan should not be granted until all previous loans were repaid. When *Phrakhru* did not release the loan following the agreement, Jamnuan accused *Phrakhru* of breaching the monk’s code of conduct by wanting to engage in economic activities and to create a financial base for his own political career in the future.<sup>30</sup> Due to the accusation, *Phrakhru* asked the committee to manage the fund by themselves.

### **Facing tensions in economic and social practice**

Thailand’s Fourth Plan (1977-1981) designated Chiang Mai as a regional growth centre of the Upper Northern Region (see Chapter 2). The ensuing expansion of Chiang Mai impacted directly on the six districts surrounding the city, including Mae Rim. Many villagers who lived near the town sold their land to developers and changed their careers from on-farm to off-farm activities. Although FEDRA tried to prevent villagers from selling land by promoting agricultural occupations, it was unsuccessful for several reasons. First, the cost of agricultural investment kept on increasing. As well as

<sup>26</sup> Darlington, 1990, “Buddhism, Morality and Change...”, p. 211.

<sup>27</sup> Interview, INT-063-VIL, 27 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>28</sup> Interview, INT-051-NGO, 23 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>29</sup> Darlington, 1990, “Buddhism, Morality and Change...”, p. 215.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 214-215.

purchasing chemical fertiliser and insecticide, small-scale producers had to hire labour for farming instead of being able to depend on their traditional exchange of labour as in the past. The producers also had to pay daily wages equivalent to the minimum wage paid in a local factory. This pushed up the cost of agricultural investment. Secondly, unpredictable seasons had affected crop yields and small-scale cultivators were not inclined to take any further risk in capital investment to develop their farming. Thirdly, the price offered for land by urban developers was so attractive that many villagers decided to sell.<sup>31</sup>

Situated in the line of Chiang Mai's expansion, Village 3 felt the pressure of the developers' land speculation and this also served to aggravate the prolonged dispute between the military and villagers. The villagers realised that since the mid 1980s, they had suffered more from the high cost of living than in the previous decade. They had struggled to attain a cash income to cope with increasing household expenditures on health, education and some commercial goods (e.g. electric rice cookers, televisions, and stereos), but even a middle-income villager could not earn enough to keep up with payments (*ha mai than chai*).<sup>32</sup> A low-income villager felt unhappy (*tuk jai*) when he saw other people enjoying luxury goods which he could not afford.<sup>33</sup> The tensions in Village 3 were therefore related to external factors, such as the high cost of living, land speculation and the military land claim, as well as internal ones between rich and poor villagers.

The social differentiation in the village seems to have been overshadowed by the land dispute problem. In the late 1980s, after the military encroached on parts of the village land, the villagers organised a meeting to express their unity and determination to protect the rest of their land from being taken over. They agreed to divide the remaining land among all the village households, which meant that each household received two rai of land. The main reason for this was to create the sense of belonging and solidarity among the residents. Although many villagers, especially the young, began to earn off-farm income, they still worked their land, treating it as a valuable asset to be protected. Those villagers who worked in Chiang Mai city and Mae Rim district (as public servants, technicians, teachers, gardeners in resorts and orchards, greenkeepers and caddies in the Green Valley Golf Course, and wage workers in the city and on construction sites along the Chiang Mai-Fang freeway) would labour with their wives and children on their farms at weekends and, if possible, on returning home each evening.

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<sup>31</sup> Interview, INT-051-NGO, 23 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>32</sup> Interview, INT-069-VIL, 29 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>33</sup> Interview, INT-064-VIL, 27 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

While continuing to face economic pressure, some villagers claimed that FEDRA economic activities were “slow” and “inadequate” to cope with their daily needs. For instance, a former village head asserted that a 1,000 baht loan from the FEDRA revolving fund could be used up simply growing vegetables for household consumption. He claimed that the amount of money was too little for agricultural investment at that time.<sup>34</sup> Most female villagers whom I interviewed said that the FEDRA handicraft activity no longer interested them because it was too slow to make enough money for the daily spending needs in a family. They explained that it took them at least three to four days to finish a piece of handicraft and to earn 20 to 30 baht from FEDRA compared to 80 to 100 baht a day from selling food or being a wage worker in a resort area. They added that their husbands disagreed with the handicraft activity for the same reason. The male villagers considered this kind of work unsuitable for poor people like themselves who had “to spend tomorrow what we earn today”.<sup>35</sup>

Many villagers declined to become involved in the buffalo and rice bank projects although some others saw them as still viable. In 1988, Darlington recorded that there were 54 buffaloes in the village fields and over 200 thang of paddy stored in the village rice bank.<sup>36</sup> During my fieldwork in December 1992, there were only 19 buffaloes, 13 oxen and just over 100 thang of paddy in the rice bank.<sup>37</sup> Some villagers explained that the amount of paddy and the number of buffalo were declining because there were few people available to look after buffaloes as all family members worked both on-farm and off-farm while their children were going to schools in the city.<sup>38</sup> The few villagers who continued taking care of buffaloes had a different view. They at least expected to earn a lump sum from selling the buffaloes (about 5,000 baht each in late 1980s) to subsidise their otherwise meagre income.<sup>39</sup> Such conflicting views made it difficult for FEDRA to conclude that its activities were no longer helpful to the low-income peasants whom it aimed to help. The daily needs of villagers meant they wanted to earn a quick income. FEDRA projects were too slow in some villagers’ view because they started with small resources and took a number of years to accumulate adequate savings. Villagers who had other options were, therefore, no longer interested in FEDRA projects. The poorer villagers who had no other choice remained with the projects.

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<sup>34</sup> Interview, INT-039-VIL, 1 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>35</sup> Interview, INT-036-VIL, 30 November 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>36</sup> Darlington, 1990, “Buddhism, Morality and Change...”, p. 215.

<sup>37</sup> Interview, INT-046-NGO, 19 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>38</sup> Interview, INT-053-VIL, 25 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai. Her husband received a monthly income from working as a greenkeeper at the Green Valley Golf Course.

<sup>39</sup> Interview, INT-064-VIL, 27 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai; Interview, INT-057-VIL, 25 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

FEDRA fieldworkers tried various ways to help villagers reduce the economic pressures. One example was the introduction of the new species of soya bean from Village 2. However, after enjoying good profit from selling soya bean seeds for propagation, the people suffered losses when the soya bean price dropped in 1989 (see Chapter 5). Some people from Village 3 joined the SBGA protests.

Another example was an attempt to cut out a middleman. The fieldworkers believed that bypassing the middleman would help villagers gain more from their agricultural products through higher returns. In reality, however, to sell produce direct was not so easy as the NGO workers had anticipated. When villagers brought their fresh vegetables to sell directly at the city markets, they came across several problems. For instance, they found it difficult to find a place to sell their produce – selling on the footpath was against the law and they ran the risk of being arrested by municipal police (*tamruat thetsakit*). When a few villagers were fined, their experience frightened others. The villagers were unable to establish marketing networks and to provide a continuous supply of vegetables because of such factors as unpredictable weather conditions and pests. In the circumstances, the villagers could only accept the prices offered by the middleman.<sup>40</sup> A similar attempt to bypass a middleman in Village 2 achieved a satisfactory result, showing that although FEDRA fieldworkers influenced each other in terms of ideas, different situations could yield different results.

To summarise, while government officials refused to provide any assistance to the villagers who lived in the land dispute area, FEDRA played an important role in helping them to cope with economic and social pressures since the early 1980s. Although some villagers found opportunities to earn off-farm income and became less dependent on FEDRA development projects, others who had no alternative source of income still considered FEDRA agricultural promotion activities to be helpful. This conflicting response meant FEDRA could not conclude that its approach was unsuitable for rural development. However, FEDRA's presence in Village 3 gave moral support to the villagers to maintain their settlement; this was perhaps more important than the economic support.

### **Trying to tackle the land dispute problem**

The land takeover by the military during the mid 1980s with *Pho:luang* Jamnuan's help prompted villagers to seek assistance from other independent NGOs. The villagers understood the limitations of FEDRA as a religious, grass-roots organisation whose relations interfaced with officials in everyday phenomena. However, Suk, who was in

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<sup>40</sup> Interview, INT-058-BUS, 26 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai. The middleman claimed that the break between him and Village 3 did not harm his trade because he had many other villages to deal with.

charge of FEDRA activities in Village 3, decided to act outside FEDRA's normal framework of operation. After discussing various ways of tackling the land dispute problem, a group of village leaders went with Suk to consult with representatives of the UCL and NDWA in Chiang Mai.

Under the Prem government (1980-1988), many politically oriented NGOs were reluctant to extend their role because of the prospect of official interference. The UCL, a human rights NGO working in Chiang Mai, was a case in point. For a number of reasons at that time, it could not act further than giving advice about legal issues and procedures. First, it was under pressure from the Internal Security Operation Command (ISOC). ISOC accused UCL of having provided information to AI concerning a group of Thai soldiers who allegedly tortured several Cambodian refugees at the Khao I-Dang refugee camp in Prachin Buri province. This infuriated Squadron Leader Prasong Sunsiri, the ISOC Director at that time.<sup>41</sup> As a result, the activities of UCL were paralysed by ISOC's close surveillance. Secondly, the UCL received little moral support from other Northern NGOs which were not inclined to engage in political issues and tended to discredit a political approach to development.<sup>42</sup> After receiving little support from the Chiang Mai NGOs, the villagers lost the motivation to improve their farm production and livelihood. They "were in despair, working just enough for survival" (*mot alai taiyak, hakin pai wan wan*).<sup>43</sup>

Having nowhere to go for help, the villagers reassessed a Buddhist concept of "self-reliance", often mentioned by FEDRA workers. They developed a social meaning of "self-reliance" as "helping oneself, helping others and uniting ourselves to achieve a legal and political struggle" (*chuailu'a tua-eng, chuailu'a kan-eng, samakhi kan to:su thang kanmu'ang lae kotmai*).<sup>44</sup> More importantly, they turned the meaning into practice to protect their land and other properties. As mentioned above, the villagers agreed to redistribute among themselves the land remaining after the military takeover. Those who received land in the redistribution affirmed that they would work together with other villagers to remove the military interference.<sup>45</sup> The reassessment of the self reliance concept by the villagers themselves revived their collective power.

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<sup>41</sup> Squadron Leader Prasong Sunsiri became the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Chuan government (1992-1995).

<sup>42</sup> Interview, INT-043-NGO, 8 December 1992, Bangkok. During that time, I worked with the UCL. While we were having problems with the ISOC authority, our overseas funding support was running out. These two main problems constrained all UCL activities in the mid-1980s.

<sup>43</sup> Interview, INT-062-VIL, 26 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>44</sup> Interview, INT-063-VIL, 27 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>45</sup> Interview, INT-059-VIL, 26 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

### Formulating collective action to protect the land

Several factors influenced villagers to take collective action to protect further land from being taken by the military. The FEDRA workers and their networks in Chiang Mai and Bangkok played a crucial role in providing a political space for villagers to claim their rights over the land. In 1990, the Bangkok Supreme Commander reportedly gave 14 million baht to the Fifth Special Warfare Section to build a road from its barracks to the main village track which ran eastward to Mae Rim district and westward to the military housing project (*muban khrongkan thahan*). Without investigating the village boundaries, the military cut the road through the rice fields of some villagers.<sup>46</sup> *Pho:luang* Rat wrote a letter dated 25 May 1990 to the Third Army Commander in Chiang Mai asking him to arrange new land to relocate affected village families.<sup>47</sup> He also asked the FEDRA Chairperson to write another letter confirming the village head's letter and requesting the Commander to sympathise with suffering villagers.<sup>48</sup> Then, a group of 30 villagers went to see the Commander and handed in the two letters. As a result, the military suspended the road construction. During my fieldwork in 1993, I met a deputy village head growing vegetables on a mound which was, he said, a part of the unfinished road. As he had only a small piece of land for cultivation he had to take this risk despite the ongoing dispute.

The Third Army Commander responded to both letters by ordering the Chiang Mai Provincial Army Commander (*phubanchakan jangwat thahanbok chiang mai*) and the Provincial ISOC Commander to find a solution to the problem.<sup>49</sup> Four months later, Major-General Thira Lekwichian, the Chiang Mai Provincial Army Commander at that time, presented a proposal to divide the village rice fields in the north of the Village Temple into 95 plots. He proposed to relocate 16 families from the southeast and 63 families from the south of the Temple onto those plots.<sup>50</sup> He also instructed the Commander of the Fifth Special Warfare Section to advise the district head to withdraw the villagers' household registrations (*sammanokrua*) and replace them with temporary documents provided by the military. Moreover, he directed the village head to instruct the 79 families designated for relocation onto the military-managed land, to *jap salak* or

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Letter dated 25 May 1990 (2533) from *Pho:luang* Rat (name used in this thesis) to the Third Army Commander in Chiang Mai.

<sup>48</sup> Letter dated 25 May 1990 (2533) from the FEDRA Chairperson to the Third Army Commander in Chiang Mai.

<sup>49</sup> FEDRA, 1990 (2533), "Sarup khwam klu'anwai ko:rani panha thidin" [A Summary of the Movement Concerning Land Dispute Problem], [in Thai], Chiang Mai.

<sup>50</sup> The proposal was based on the letter dated 6 September 1990 (2533) from Colonel Yutthana Mu'angmangkhang, the Deputy Commander of the Second Special Warfare Division, to the Commander of the Chiang Mai Army Province.

draw lots to select their new plots of land.<sup>51</sup> If the military's proposal had proceeded, it would have affected over half of the village families as the 79 were to be settled on the land of some 20 or 30 other families.

In response, the villagers tried once again to seek help from outside. They approached Jaroen Chaoprayun, a local MP, who sent a letter, together with a villagers' letter of complaint, to the Military Committee in the House of Representatives in Bangkok (*khana kanmathikan thahan sapha phuthaen ratsado:n*) asking it to help the villagers who would be affected by the relocation. The Committee replied on 19 October 1990 that the military had already resolved the villagers' land problem by providing one quarter of a rai of land per family for the village relocation.<sup>52</sup> Having been advised of this, the villagers concluded that the local MP could not help them sort out the land dispute. Nevertheless, they did not give up and approached the provincial governor for assistance. They asked the governor to help them identify the village and military boundaries to terminate encroachments on either side. Without looking into the issue, the governor replied that he had no power to do so; moreover, he claimed that the villagers were illegally occupying military land and ordered the district head to immediately relocate them.<sup>53</sup> The response of the governor disappointed the villagers particularly as he did not even undertake any investigation into their complaint.

Tension over the land dispute erupted again on 5 December 1990 when the Fifth Special Warfare Section forbade villagers to plant any crop on the rice field north of the Village Temple. It also told them to return their household registration and ID cards to the District Office.<sup>54</sup> This frightened the villagers who did not know how to respond to this critical situation. Some of them began to pack their belongings and to move out from the village, despite having nowhere to go. Having seen this, Suk decided to intervene to prevent the village's disintegration. One villager described how the villagers reunited when Suk reminded the villagers of their long history, and their dependence upon "self-reliance" to work and keep the land for the past 50 years and asked why the villagers were going to leave.<sup>55</sup> Encouraged by the NGO worker, the villagers organised a meeting at the small newspaper reading shelter in front of the Village Temple. Together, they discussed the tactics which they could use to stop the military

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<sup>51</sup> The process of "land management" was pursued in a similar fashion to what the Military Land Re-settlement Project had done in other areas of rural Thailand especially in the Northeast (see Chapter 2).

<sup>52</sup> Letter dated 19 October 1990 (2533) from Admiral Siri Sirirangsri, the Chairperson of the Military Committee in the House of Representatives, to Jaroen Chaoprayun, a local MP.

<sup>53</sup> FEDRA, 1990 (2533), "Sarup khwam klu'anwai ko:rani panha thidin".

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Interview, INT-040-VIL, 1 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

interference. Following the meeting, Suk contacted other NGO networks in Chiang Mai and Bangkok while villagers set about preparing for collective action.

On 13 December 1990, about 400 people demonstrated at the District Office to bring public attention to their predicament. As the public outside Bangkok and other big cities respected religious practice, the villagers announced their misfortune through a *tho:dphapa* ceremony by carrying tree branches decorated with their household registrations and ID cards.<sup>56</sup> Instead of quietly taking them back to the district as instructed by the military, the villagers thereby publicly demonstrated their abandonment of citizenship as a result of the failure of the Thai state to take care of its citizens.<sup>57</sup> Some villagers even displayed a red flag over their village politically symbolising a liberated area, just as “communist insurgents” often did in areas under their sphere of political control. The display of the red flag indeed brought the attention of the public and media to the villagers’ distress. It prompted the military to stop further action, while begging the villagers to pull the red flag down.<sup>58</sup>

The different tactics devised by the villagers to resist the military land takeover were supported by many NGO workers from NGO-CORD, NDWA and UCL who also assisted the villagers in putting together a village history covering the causes and effects of the land dispute. They made posters and also produced an exhibition showing the plight of the people living in a situation of conflict with the military.

The FEDRA Chairperson, afraid that a confrontation between the military, villagers, NGO workers and students would occur, tried to intervene by arranging a meeting between the Commander of the Second Special Warfare Division and villagers’ representatives to settle the land dispute. The meeting took place on 15 December 1990, two days after the demonstration. To express peace and non-violence in negotiation, the male villagers decided to stand aside. Fifteen female villagers including young, old and children, all dressed in white, went with *Phrakhru* to negotiate with the Commander. Suk and a female news reporter also accompanied them.

At 2 p.m. on 15 December 1990, the village representatives met Major General Han Phethai, the Commander of the Second Special Warfare Division, in a meeting hall on the second floor. Suk received the Commander’s permission to take photos during the

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<sup>56</sup> The *tho:d phapa* ceremony is a form of merit-making activities which Buddhists organise yearly. The organisers set up a place where they stand a tree branch on which people from all walks of life donate money, soaps, toothbrushes, toothpastes and so on by hanging them on the tree branch which will be taken to the monks in a temple. In this case, the people of Village 3 used the ceremony as a form of resistance against the authority by hanging their ID cards and household registrations on the branches.

<sup>57</sup> *Daily News* 16 December 1990 (2533).

<sup>58</sup> Interview, INT-041-VIL, 1 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

negotiations. Unexpectedly, the Commander questioned whether Suk was behind the village protest. When a soldier present affirmed this, the Commander had Suk removed from the room. He was then dragged down to the first floor where he was badly beaten by several soldiers. *Phrakhru* and elderly villagers cried out begging the Commander not to hurt Suk but their appeals were in vain. An elderly lady, her sister and the female news reporter, ran down to be with Suk who was almost unconscious on the first floor. The soldiers locked them in an extremely cold air-conditioned room for two hours. The elderly lady told me she had been afraid that the soldiers might have killed Suk and she kept on begging the soldiers not to injure him and tried to explain to them the reason why he had accompanied the village representatives:

I have no knowledge. I came here to seek your mercy. I asked him to come with me because I did not know how to explain my grievance to you so that you would be able to understand my problem.<sup>59</sup>

About 5 p.m., *Phrakhru* and other villagers went to find Suk and the three ladies. *Phrakhru* told them that the Commander had not proposed any solution to the land dispute problem. He had agreed, however, to pass on the villagers' letter to the Army Commander in Bangkok. The male village leaders who had stood by for the sake of peace and non-violent approach felt angry about the result of the negotiations. It made them even angrier when they saw that Suk had been badly hurt by the soldiers.<sup>60</sup>

The military violence against Suk gained press attention, and the resultant publicity alerted top-brass military leaders in Bangkok to the risk of damage to the image of the military. The NGOs took this opportunity to bring the land dispute case to the attention of the Deputy Army Commander in Bangkok through his niece who worked with an NGO. General Wimol Wongwanit, the Deputy Army Commander at that time, agreed to meet the villagers' representatives at the Army Meeting Hall in Bangkok on 17 December 1990.<sup>61</sup> At the meeting, he stated that he would send an Army envoy to investigate the case. On 18 December, Colonel Phichai Siriwibun, the Deputy Secretary of the Royal Thai Army, made a short visit to the village from which he concluded that the villagers had invaded military land with the backing of "capitalists"

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<sup>59</sup> Interview, INT-066-VIL, 28 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai. Letter dated 21 December 1990 (2533) from *Phrakhru* to the President of NGO-CORD explaining the event on 15 December 1990. NGO-CORD/Upper North, 1990 (2533), "Nathi to: nathi: Thahan at nakphatthana ongko:n phatthana ekkachon" [Minute to Minute: The Military Injured an NGO Worker], [in Thai], Chiang Mai.

<sup>60</sup> *Sayam Rat*, 17 December 1990 (2533); and NGO-CORD/Upper North, 1992 (2535), "Lamdap hetkan ko:rani thahan laithi chaoban".

<sup>61</sup> Interview, INT-051-NGO, 23 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

and “communists”.<sup>62</sup> The rhetorical discourse of the 1970s resurrected by the Army envoy attracted further media focus and the dispute was reported nationally.<sup>63</sup>

Following the media reports, Colonel Surin Phikuntho:ng, the Director of Logistics who was responsible for this issue, came from Bangkok to Mae Rim district on 24 December 1990. He asked the district head to arrange a meeting in which the new Commander of the Second Special Warfare Division, the district head and village leaders participated to negotiate and hopefully settle the conflict. The village leaders were able to propose, for the first time, that the Army set up a neutral committee to investigate the facts and to identify the land ownership. The village leaders agreed that if it were proved that the land belonged to the military, they would resettle wherever officials decided. However, if it were shown that the land belonged to the villagers, the authorities must give land title deeds to the villagers following the 1985 government land directive. During the fact-finding process, both military and villagers agreed not to resume any action which might provoke confrontation. Colonel Surin acceded to the request for an investigation on condition that the villagers refrain from giving further information to the press, as this was damaging the military’s image.<sup>64</sup>

On 25 December 1990, the Sub-Committee for Solving the Problem of Rural Populations Residing in Military Reserved Areas (*khana anukammakan kaekhai panha ratsado:n yu asai thamkin nai phu’nthi sa-nguan huangham kho:ng thahan*), Office of the Permanent Secretary, took charge of the matter. The Sub-Committee, chaired by Sitthichai Liangchayet, a senior public servant from the Office of the Prime Minister, comprised delegates from the Ministries of Interior, Justice, Agriculture and Cooperatives, Finance, the Royal Thai Army and university academics.<sup>65</sup> It did not include a representative of the villagers, so *Pho:luang* Thit wrote to the Sub-Committee asking it to include at least one.<sup>66</sup> That person should, he argued, be an academic who understood the land dispute problem. He suggested either Dr Chayan Vaddhanaphuti (the Director of SRI, Chiang Mai University at that time) or Prof Saneh Chamarik (the

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<sup>62</sup> *Sayam Rat* 18 December 1990 (2533); NGO-CORD/Upper North, 1992 (2535), “Lamdap hetkan ko:rani thahan laithi chaoban”.

<sup>63</sup> For example, *Daily News*, *Sayam Rat*, *Thai Rat*, *Matichon* and *Bangkok Post*.

<sup>64</sup> NGO-CORD/Upper North, 1990 (2533), “Bantu’k kan prachum Colonel Surin Phikuntho:ng”, [Record of the Meeting with Colonel Surin Phikuntho:ng], [in Thai], 24 December, Chiang Mai.

<sup>65</sup> The Sub-Committee was set up by Office of the Prime Minister and the Royal Thai Army to handle the problem of poor rural people residing in the military reserved areas throughout the country. See also Office of the Prime Minister and Royal Thai Army, 1990 (2533), *Khumu’ kan kaekhai panha ko:rani ratsado:n yu a-sai thamkin...*; and Colonel Surin Phikuntho:ng, n.d., “Thidin nai khwam khro:pkhro:ng kho:ng ko:ngthapbok” [Land under the Control of the Army], The Royal Thai Army, Bangkok.

<sup>66</sup> Letter dated 30 December 1990 (2533) from *Pho:luang* Thit (name used in this thesis) and other village leaders to General Wimol Wongwanit, Deputy Army Commander at that time.

Director the LDI). However, the request was turned down and, as a result, the villagers doubted that their case would be handled fairly.

### Scaling up to seek support from the public and media

While the Sub-Committee investigation was under way FEDRA, with other people-centred NGOs which worked at the regional and national levels, helped the villagers to re-examine the causes of the land conflict. The NGOs undertook a parallel study to ensure that the Sub-Committee investigation would be conducted thoroughly and fairly. Suk contacted the UCL to consult on legal matters, and the NGO-CORD to help organise contacts at the national level. The links between different NGOs in the political arena depended heavily on personal contact and relationship rather than institutionalisation.<sup>67</sup> As the President of NGO-CORD, Saneh was aware of the land dispute and he asked his friend, Niyom Tiwutthanon, a retired judge of the Supreme Court, for advice on legal matters relating to the case.

Niyom's investigation revealed that the legal basis of the land dispute derived from two Royal Decrees (*Pharatchakritsadika*) issued by the Phibun Government to restrict land availability for the military use. They were the Royal Decree Restricting Access to Undeveloped Public-Domain Land B.E. 2483 (1940) and the Royal Decree Specifying the Boundary of Land in Areas Restored in the Locality of Mae Rim District, Chiang Mai Province B.E. 2483 (1940).<sup>68</sup> The government subsequently cited these two Decrees issued under the Restriction of Undeveloped Public-Domain Land Act of B.E. 2478 (1935) and the Expropriation Act of B.E. 2477 (1934) respectively.<sup>69</sup> The Acts indicated that the expropriation and restriction of eminent domain had to be issued in the form of Royal Decree, as well as published in the Thai Royal Gazette, so that the public would have access to the information. The Acts also required that the Royal Decree should: provide reasons for the land expropriation or restriction; specify the officials who would be in charge of the task; identify the boundary of the land to be restored; and include a map showing the land boundary.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Interview, INT-014-NGO, 1 October 1992, Bangkok.

<sup>68</sup> *Phraratchakritsadika kamnot khet huangham thidin nai tho:ngthi amphoe mae rim jangwat chiang mai phuttha sakkarat 2483*; and *Phraratchakritsadika kamnot khet thidin nai bo:riwen thi thi ja wenkhu'n nai tho:ngthi amphoe mae rim jangwat chiang mai phuttha sakkarat 2483*. See *Ratchakitjanubeksa* [Thai Royal Gazette], [in Thai], 16 July 1940 (2483), Vol. 57, pp. 232-233 and 234-235.

<sup>69</sup> *Phraratchabanyat waduai kanhuangham thidin rokrang wangplao anpen satharana sombat kho:ng phaendin phuttha sakkarat 2478*; and *Phraratchabanyat waduai kanwenkhu'n a-sangharimmasap phuttha sakkarat 2477*. See *Ratchakitjanubeksa* [Thai Royal Gazette], [in Thai], 8 April 1936 (2479), Vol. 53, pp. 32-34; and 21 April 1935 (2478), Vol. 52, pp. 47-67.

<sup>70</sup> See *Ratchakitjanubeksa* [Thai Royal Gazette], [in Thai], 1935 (2478), p. 50; and 1936 (2479), p. 33.

Based on these Acts and Decrees, Niyom wrote an article arguing that the land still belonged to the people for a number of reasons.<sup>71</sup> First, the Army's citation of the Act of B.E. 2478 to support its claim ignored the conditions to be complied with by the law. This Act specified that to come under the law, the land had to be "undeveloped public-domain land" (*thidin rokrang wangplao anpen satharana sombat kho:ng phaendin*). In fact, the land had not been a "no-man's land" as claimed by the Army. The rural populations had already occupied the land before the Army's claim. Hence, the Army would need to cite the other Act of B.E. 2477 to endorse its claim. Although this Act allowed the resumption of occupied land, it was specified only for the purpose of mining and of infrastructure building – not for security or other military purposes. Secondly, the Army had not completed the necessary legal procedure required under the Act to occupy the village land. While the military had advised the government to issue two Royal Decrees required to restrict access to the land, and to specify the land boundary, it had failed to have the government pass the legislation required by Article 8 of the Act to expropriate the land. Because of this, Niyom argued that the takeover in 1940 of the village land by the military was "voidable" (*moka*). He strongly argued that the land still belonged to the people, and advised them to return the fifteen baht per rai compensation to the military to terminate the dispute. The conclusion of this former judge of the Supreme Court gave great hope to the villagers who had resisted, for over 50 years seemingly against all odds, surrendering their land to the military.

Contrary to the argument of the retired judge, however, the Sub-Committee asserted on 5 April 1991 that the land belonged to the Army. It also advised the district head to arrange new land in Saluang sub-district for the village's relocation.<sup>72</sup> As a result, the former judge wrote an article to comment on the lack of independence of the Thai judicial system from the administrative power:

The judgement of the Committee was influenced by a lawyer from the Royal Decree Committee Office (*sammakngan khana kammakan kritsadika*) who expressed an opinion that the land belonged to the military.

I feel extremely sad to know that most of the [Sub-] Committee members are lawyers who seldom used the in-depth knowledge in legal consideration of their own except the representative from the Justice Ministry who finely and deeply explained relevant legal concepts and interpretation in the land dispute case. He subsequently reached a conclusion that the land still belonged to the villagers.

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<sup>71</sup> Niyom Tiwutthanon, 1991 (2534), "Ratsado:n bukruk thidin kho:ng thahan ru' thahan yaeng thidin kho:ng ratsaso:n" [The People Invaded the Military's Land or the Military Seized the People's Land], [in Thai], *Sayam Rat*, 30 January.

<sup>72</sup> NGO-CORD/Upper North, 1991 (2534), *Sarup phon kan prachum phijarana ko:rani phiphat thidin* [Summary of the Result of the Meeting in Considering the Land Dispute Case], [in Thai], 5 April, Chiang Mai.

He struggled for maintaining his independent opinion as an arbitrator despite the fact that he is also an government official.<sup>73</sup>

Moreover, the retired judge volunteered to lead an independent Fact Finding Committee organised by the LDI to collect first-hand information from the villagers concerning the land dispute. On 18 May 1991, the Committee, which included 30 participants from different occupations such as lawyers, journalists, academics, NGO workers and university students, arrived in Village 3. The villagers warmly greeted the Committee members and kept them informed about various aspects of their village community.<sup>74</sup> Elderly villagers revealed to the Committee the land occupation documents which they had hidden for the past 50 years. Having seen such evidence, Niyom suggested that they should pursue the case in the civil court. The lawyers affiliated with the UCL and CGRS agreed to follow up the court case with the assistance of FEDRA and NGO-CORD. On 20 June 1991 the Committee released a report of its finding. Journalists from both Thai and English newspapers took up the story and informed the public about the prolonged land dispute case, claiming that, according to the villagers, the military had used a part of the land to build houses for high-ranking officers while preparing another part to be rented by private entrepreneurs.<sup>75</sup>

As a result of the publicity, Colonel Surin came to Mae Rim on 5 July 1991 for the second time to clear up the military image.<sup>76</sup> In a meeting with representatives of the military, officials and villagers, Colonel Surin asked the village leaders and *Phrakhru* to stop the villagers from informing the media about the military land takeover and thus smearing the image of the Army. The village leaders took the opportunity to propose to Colonel Surin that the dispute be handed over to the provincial court. They proposed further that during conduct of the case, both the military and villagers should mark a temporary boundary between them to avoid possible confrontation. In response to this request, on 17 December 1991, the Army instructed the Chiang Mai prosecutor to conduct lawsuits against 210 families accused of invading military land.<sup>77</sup>

As the boundary line had not been marked, a clash between military and villagers was likely. In June 1992, a group of soldiers used a tractor to demolish a villager's fence

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<sup>73</sup> Niyom Tiwutthanon, 1991 (2534), “Ratsado:n mai pho:jai nakkotmai kho:ng rat thi khao khang thahan khap lai ratsado:n” [The People Are Not Satisfied with the State’s Lawyers Who Took Side of the Military Driving Off the People], [in Thai], *Sayam Rat*, 10 April.

<sup>74</sup> This also happened to me a year later during my visit to the village; my queries were fully answered by the villagers’ overflowing responses and clarifications.

<sup>75</sup> *Matichon*, 20 May 1991 (2534); NGO-CORD, UCL, CGRS and NDWA, 1991 (2534), “Rai-ngan khana kammakan truatso:p kho:thetjing” [The Report of the Fact Finding Committee], [in Thai], 20 June, Bangkok.

<sup>76</sup> Colonel Surin Phikuntho:ng, 1992 (2535), “Panha thidin kromrop phiset thi ha amphoe mae rim jangwat chiang mai” [Land Problem of the Fifth Special Warfare Section, Mae Rim District, Chiang Mai Province], [in Thai], 1 September, The Royal Thai Army, Bangkok.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

and to destroy crops in his garden near the site for construction of a military residence to the east of the Village Temple.<sup>78</sup> Accused by the press of abusing its power, the military offered 10,000 baht compensation to the villager for the damage. The villager refused to accept the money. Rather, he wanted the police to arrest the wrongdoers. On 30 June 1992, *Pho:luang* Thit handed in a letter to the district head asking him to delineate the village area from the military domain. This request being ignored, a group of villagers went to Chiang Mai University to seek help. However, they found that the University administrators had ordered security guards to shut the gates to prevent them from entering the campus.

Prof Nidhi Aieosrivongse, a historian at Chiang Mai University, rejected the University administrators' excuse that the villagers might mobilise students to help them protest against the government. Furthermore, he pointed out that the role of university in dealing with conflicts over land occupation was to search for knowledge and propose ways to assist in resolving such problems, occurring widely in rural Thailand since the late 1980s. He drew an analogy with a gate to illustrate his point:

The administrators of Chiang Mai University shut not only the gate but also the access to wisdom which has emerged sharply and widely in the present-day Thai society. They did not want that reality to be related with the university's affairs.<sup>79</sup>

Unable to enter the University, the villagers moved on to seek help from Dr Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Director of the SRI. On 4 July 1992, the SRI organised a meeting between the village leaders, some like-minded academics and NGO workers to find an immediate solution, so as to prevent a clash between the villagers and military. After visiting the village on 9 July 1992, the SRI Director said that he would write a letter to the Cabinet proposing that it allow the people the opportunity for negotiation in respect of this land conflict which fundamentally affected their well-being.<sup>80</sup>

In summary, following their interpretation of "self-reliance", the villagers and NGO workers realised that they had to scale-up to seek support from other elements of civil society, especially the public and media, and to use the bureaucratic and legal system to argue their case. Through various NGO contacts the villagers and NGO workers received essential assistance from individual officials and journalists who stood for the principle of social justice against what they saw as an abuse of power by the military. As a result of the publicity given to the case in a period of open political system, military aggression was reduced to some extent. This gave the villagers and NGO workers an opportunity to seek a political space for negotiation to stop the military taking over the village land. The Army agreed with the villagers' proposal to pursue

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<sup>78</sup> NGO-CORD/Upper North, 1992 (2535), "Lamdap hetkan ko:rani thahan laithi chaoban".

<sup>79</sup> *Matichon*, 11 July 1992 (2535).

<sup>80</sup> *Matichon*, 15 July 1992 (2535).

the land dispute case in the Chiang Mai civil court. During the court procedure, the villagers received legal assistance from members of the provincial lawyers' council and of NGOs such as the UCL and CGRS. Thus, the villagers secured the right to stay in the village while waiting for the court's decision.<sup>81</sup>

## **Discussion**

### **Transformation, conflict and intervention**

The tension between the military and small-scale peasants over land occupation in Village 3 emerged and has been prolonged since 1940 when the Army attempted to take over the village land. It has been heightened since the national development planners proposed to extend Chiang Mai city as a regional growth centre. The growth would embrace six districts, including Mae Rim which would become one of the dormitory town areas (see Chapter 2). Similar to the other two villages under study, the situation of competition and conflicts over productive resources in Village 3 occurred in two periods. In the period up to the mid-1980s, the competition and conflict over resources occurred between the military, bureaucrats, small-scale producers and middlemen. In the second period from the mid-1980s, the major focus was on conflict over land after the military seized land with the help of a former village head. The conflict was even more intense in the early 1990s when the military announced further plans to take over the village land, fearing that the dispute would become more complicated if some villagers sold their land to urban developers.

During the period of the closed political system in the 1960s, a group of village leaders chose a patron and client relationship to protect the village land by asking for help from a brother of the military leaders who was in charge of the development of the Northern region. After the military regime was toppled by the urban middle class and students, and the political system became open in the mid 1970s, the village leaders chose to vote for a local politician who would support the building of infrastructure in their village. In the early 1980s, villagers asked the abbot of the Village Temple to invite the FEDRA Chairperson to help them tackle their economic problems, especially the shortage of agricultural investment. FEDRA thus became a part of the social relations and interaction between the military, officials, villagers, middlemen and investors of capital. While the villagers received little assistance from the government formally, FEDRA played a crucial role in supporting them in different aspects of their everyday lives. In response to the people's immediate needs, the FEDRA workers acted as an

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<sup>81</sup> The action is still proceeding and is likely to take some years yet.

intermediary between extension officers and villagers, by asking government officials to give advice to the villagers concerning agricultural innovation.

While working in the village, FEDRA fieldworkers had to deal with competition and tension between villagers and a village head who betrayed the villagers' trust. FEDRA tried to encourage the villagers to behave in accordance with the social values of trust, honesty and solidarity among themselves but was unsure how to implement these spiritual values, in accordance with the FEDRA Chairperson's belief that economic development projects were "tool kits" to encourage villagers to perform "good deeds". The economic handouts by FEDRA made existing village tensions more complicated so that a number of NGO fieldworkers found they were unable to tackle villagers' social problems. Other NGO workers argued that FEDRA failed in its "tool kit" approach (*long yu'a tua-eng*),<sup>82</sup> due to the lack of social analysis within the village community and failure to implement appropriate projects at the right time. These fieldworkers asked that administrators pay attention to analysing the difficulties they were facing. The result, however, was increasing tension within FEDRA over the validity of its development projects in the context of the land dispute problem.

The dissatisfaction lay in the fact that each side held different approaches concerning the people's poverty, and that neither could find an appropriate approach to local politics in which social interfaces were predominant factors. The FEDRA Chairperson assumed that the poverty derived from individual behaviour such as laziness, and addiction to drugs and alcohol. The FEDRA fieldworkers, however, who were university educated, and maintained social networks with social activists both within and outside universities, were more inclined to assume that the cause of people's poverty lay in the unequal development and distribution of wealth as a result of government policies and priorities. They wanted to help the villagers through the political process, by protesting to the government, an approach which could lead to political confrontation with local authorities.

FEDRA administrators were not keen to consider a 'political' approach for the FEDRA development projects. A FEDRA personnel manager, who had been working with FEDRA since the early 1980s and had rarely been in touch with other NGOs, told me that he had never agreed with group organising activities which he considered to be the same as "*kan jadtang*" (the political mobilisation activities of the CPT). When asked how FEDRA should deal with the influence of urban culture and expansion, the manager explained that FEDRA's main objective was to promote agricultural occupations and rural development.<sup>83</sup> He went on to explain that FEDRA interpreted its

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<sup>82</sup> Interview, INT-086-NGO, 16 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>83</sup> Interview, INT-073-NGO, 11 January 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

areas of operation according to geographical landscapes of highland (*thido:i*), steep land (*thido:n*) and lowland (*thirap*). Although a FEDRA fieldworker suggested considering the area of operation in terms of more or less urban-influenced areas following the notion of regional development, his ideas have not become the basis of the FEDRA development approach.<sup>84</sup> The lack of discussion within FEDRA about developmental approaches to rural transformation over time caused frustration and confusion for the fieldworkers in the areas where socio-economic changes were occurring rapidly and impacting on the people's livelihood. Between 1981 and 1986, five FEDRA workers simply turned their backs on the work to which they had committed themselves due to their confusion and disillusionment.

From the mid-1980s, when the military began to take over village land, the villagers needed FEDRA's support, both spiritually and politically. Due to the land price boom in the late 1980s, the military were afraid that the land in Village 3 would be transferred from villagers to private entrepreneurs. As Colonel Surin argued:

The capitalist (*naithun*) might buy land from villagers and get it registered by some corrupt politicians and bureaucrats. The problem of land transaction to business's hands would be more complicated for the Army to solve than the problem of land occupation by villagers.<sup>85</sup>

He based this on his experience in other dispute areas, especially in Kanchanaburi province, where investors of capital became involved in the land conflict between the military and villagers, and the entrepreneurs used the villagers as "*nang na fai*" or "the first line of defence" to confront the Army.<sup>86</sup> I was curious to know what Suk, who had stood by the villagers to fight for their land, thought about the potential for land transaction in Village 3 if villagers had had the rights to sell. He replied, without hesitation, that the villagers would certainly have sold the land to cope with economic pressures and to enjoy access to consumer goods. Due to the dispute, the villagers could neither use the land for production, nor sell it for profit like other villages nearby in the suburban-influenced area.<sup>87</sup> Suk's response made me think further that if the NGOs intended to help villagers undertake the land claim, they would need to anticipate this issue beyond individual ownership of land title deeds; or otherwise they could simply accelerate the process of landlessness among small-scale producers.

Like many other grass-roots organisations, FEDRA worked daily interfacing with local government officials, traders, urban developers and rural people of different economic and social status. The FEDRA Chairperson had a role which, in some situations, enabled him to intervene to assist those disadvantaged by circumstances. For example,

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<sup>84</sup> Interview, INT-049-NGO, 23 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>85</sup> Interview, INT-153-GOV, 25 March 1993, Bangkok.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Interview, INT-051-NGO, 23 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

he asked FEDRA workers to contact business companies in Chiang Mai to help villagers obtain a good deal in purchasing agricultural inputs such as seeds, chemical fertiliser and insecticide. When the Army began to build the road across the villagers' farmland, he wrote to the Third Army Commander, asking him to carefully consider the plan with regard to the villagers' livelihood. In other situations of conflict, the Chairperson's hands were tied by his role as a senior monk and by his inadequate understanding of social conflict and intervention. "I did not have formal education except the monastery training" (*Luangpho: mai dai phan kansu'ksa thang lok, phan thang phra yang dieo*),<sup>88</sup> he explained to me. He understood the monk's role in helping people affected by economic development but he was probably still searching for an appropriate way to intervene. As *Phra Prachak*, a monk who helped villagers protect the Dong Yai Forest in Buri Ram province from encroachment by a logging company and some corrupt soldiers once said:

Monks do not live in a vacuum. Villagers are affected from all sides by external forces, and we cannot ignore their problems. For me, it isn't a question of whether monks should get involved, but a question of how.<sup>89</sup>

While many NGOs criticised the "non-political" role of FEDRA in response to the land conflict, the villagers argued that they tacitly received the support of the FEDRA Chairperson. While interfacing with local officials and soldiers in everyday events, the Chairperson hardly expressed any obvious support for the villagers but "turned a blind eye" (*tham mai ru mai hen*) towards the conflict while allowing his workers to take action independently.<sup>90</sup> I find two interesting aspects in the villagers' argument. First, it shows how FEDRA played its interventionist role in the land conflict, by allowing individual fieldworkers to participate in the formulation of the collective protest by the villagers. Secondly, the intervention was provided by individual FEDRA workers, and their networks in Chiang Mai and Bangkok. Without FEDRA support behind the scenes, as an umbrella organisation at the community-based level, and as a mediator for negotiation, the interventions would, I think, have been much more difficult to pursue. Thus, the intervention in this case would not have been achieved without the support of the three pillars of the NGO movement, which are the interrelationships between individual workers, organisations and networks.

The successful intervention in Village 3 derived from the following key factors. First, the NGOs, through Suk in particular, helped the villagers to articulate the social meaning of "self-reliance" against the domination of the military. The "self-reliance" notion which had been inspired by former FEDRA workers and later interpreted by

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<sup>88</sup> Interview, INT-137-NGO, 26 February 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>89</sup> *Thai Development Newsletter*, 1994, No. 26, p. 62.

<sup>90</sup> Interview, INT-057-VIL, 25 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

villagers as helping oneself and others in everyday life became the key concept for the villagers to formulate their collective activities. This shows that, even though Village 3 was located near the city and had been influenced by urban culture and economy, the villagers were still able to make use of their traditional culture to help them tackle their most pressing land dispute problem.

Secondly, the NGOs recognised different social actors playing their roles in the fabric of the social structure. As well as having a clear objective to defend their land, the villagers had a group of active village leaders who were also members of the village development committee responsible for the FEDRA development projects. The committee members were composed of villagers from different social and economic backgrounds, such as low-income and middle-income peasants, low-rank officials and technicians who commuted daily between the city and the village. For the collective protest, they received a great deal of help from the NGO network of supporters who had been long-standing social activists since their university days. The NGOs had realised for some time that a village problem could not be solved at the village level alone. To combat the aggression of the military, the NGOs sought the support of other members in civil society such as the media, public servants, human rights lawyers, students and university scholars. This led to negotiations which provided a political space for the village leaders to set out their demands for settling the dispute. This intervention provided great hope for the villagers that they would be able maintain their settlement on the land of their forebears.

Thirdly, it was true in this case, as Touraine and McAdam argue, that the degree of openness of the political system decisively determines the nature of the social and political movement.<sup>91</sup> This can be seen in the nature of the movement organised by the villagers and NGO workers over the course of time in this case. The collective protest was an outcome of the interpretation of social meaning (self-reliance in this case) in daily life. Throughout the period of the land dispute, from 1940 onwards, the villagers and grass-roots NGO workers used “everyday resistance” to deal with local situations where various social actors interfaced (see Chapter 1). They could not, however, mobilise the collective action against the domination of military power until the early 1990s when the national political system had become more open. Although the NGO intervention infuriated the military leaders, including Colonel Surin, they had to reduce their aggression and accept the role of the NGOs and the rights of the villagers to make claims in an open society. Colonel Surin told me that: “If there were no NGOs, the military and villagers would have already settled the dispute case” (*tha mai mi ongkan*

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<sup>91</sup> Touraine, 1977, *The Self-Production of Society*, p. 429; and D. McAdam, 1994, “Culture and Social Movements”, in Laraña, Johnstone and Gusfield (eds), *New Social Movements...*, p. 39.

*phatthana ekkachon thahan kap chaoban khong toklong kan dai laeo*).<sup>92</sup> The public too began to accept that there was a diversity of social interests, especially the rights of the common people over land and, so long as they had enough evidence to prove their continuity of occupation, their right to challenge a military claim in the provincial court.

### **Some issues from fieldwork**

From this case study, some important issues emerge for further attention. First, when we consider how political intervention in the land dispute case was achieved, we can see that the relationship between individual NGO workers, their organisations and networks contributed to the achievement. Although Suk showed courage in taking action beyond the organisational mainstream and becoming involved in political conflict, he would not have been able to accomplish this task if FEDRA had withdrawn its support from him. He might have found the task a lot harder without FEDRA's tacit support. Through their networks, the NGOs working in different political arenas searched for and contacted like-minded social actors in various organisations ranging from NGOs to government departments, to help villagers sort out their immediate problems with the military. Thus, the NGOs played an interventionist role through the linkages between individual workers, organisations and networks from local and regional to the national level. The scale-up activities did not come from a pre-planned strategy.

Secondly, many NGO workers who worked at the regional and national levels claimed that FEDRA was politically passive and did not assist the villagers affected by the military land claim. However, this claim is not entirely correct. Throughout the 1980s, FEDRA had played a significant role in helping the villagers in the land dispute area cope with economic and social pressures emerging from both within and outside. The villagers' everyday resistance against the military domination undoubtedly received support by FEDRA's very presence in the village. At the same time, the villagers' own initiative to undertake collective action was promoted by FEDRA workers over a number of years and provided the inspiration for village cooperation. Thus, the relationship between everyday resistance and collective protest should not be analysed in isolation.

However, I disagree with the FEDRA administrators who chose a defensive reaction towards political action for fear of damaging the image of the FEDRA Chairperson. The departure of 'progressive' fieldworkers from FEDRA showed that such a reaction resulted in a widening gap between FEDRA and those fieldworkers who proposed that FEDRA review its development projects and strategy to cope with the rural

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<sup>92</sup>

Interview, INT-153-GOV, 25 March 1993, Bangkok.

transformation in its areas of operation. For instance, five FEDRA fieldworkers who were responsible for work in Village 3 departed from FEDRA. Some of them encouraged FEDRA to reassess its economic and social activities in relation to changing situations in suburban areas.<sup>93</sup> In December 1992, I asked Suk, the sixth fieldworker who was responsible for the FEDRA projects in Village 3 between 1987 and 1992, how FEDRA had responded to the transformation in Village 3, which is now located in the area of the city's expansion. He revealed that FEDRA had not yet discussed the socio-economic change in Mae Rim and other districts near the city; nor adjusted its development approach to cope with the change; nor did it have anyone mediating tensions between its fieldworkers and administrators.<sup>94</sup> If FEDRA had paid more attention to the request of its fieldworkers, it would probably have found its development activities more able to help villagers cope with the pressure of rapid change.

Thirdly, Suk's argument interests me when he said that if individual villagers owned land in Village 3, they might have sold it to urban developers to cope with their economic pressure. Suk's statement was in line with comments from a veteran NGO worker working with UCL, which also dealt with the land dispute case, who pointed out that the NGOs needed to look beyond the campaign for land ownership to the security of village land utilisation. In her opinion, the NGOs should seek to cooperate with some governmental individuals and institutions which work to secure the land utilisation for small-scale producers.<sup>95</sup> To strengthen the poor and alleviate their poverty, the NGOs need to work beyond a simple counter-government model.

### **Concluding remarks**

This chapter has demonstrated that between the early 1970s and early 1990s, the land dispute in Village 3 reflected rural transformation in two periods before and after the mid-1980s. Before the mid-1980s, the competition over land between the military and villagers appeared in forms of the military: banning a weir project from being built for village irrigation and electricity; blocking the government's annual budget from being distributed to Village 3; buying different blocks of land and building houses here and there in the village, thereby establishing military land occupation and ejecting villagers. Besides the land dispute, competition occurred between villagers and middlemen over

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<sup>93</sup> TVS, 1983 (2526), "Sarupphon kan sammana lae kan pramoenphon kan patibatngan asamak run si krop wara kan thamngan nu'ng pi" [Summary of the Seminar and Evaluation for the Fourth Group of Volunteers after One-year Working Experience], [in Thai], 1-3 June, Chon Buri.

<sup>94</sup> Interview, INT-051-NGO, 23 December 1992, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>95</sup> Interview, INT-044-NGO, 14 December 1992, Bangkok.

the low price given for their agricultural produce; and between the villagers and agricultural companies which charged high prices for chemical fertiliser and insecticide. Amidst the competition over productive resources between villagers, military and business, the villagers seemed vulnerable both to military domination and business exploitation.

Villagers invited FEDRA to help them cope with these socio-economic pressures. The FEDRA fieldworkers found it very difficult to implement socio-economic projects to assist the villagers because they faced not only the land dispute between the villagers and military but also many other tensions between different actors on different issues. For instance, tension arose between FEDRA and a corrupt village head who used FEDRA's loan for his personal gain and thereby inhibited the "participation" of villagers in the FEDRA projects. Tension also occurred between FEDRA and some villagers who claimed that its projects were unlikely to help them cope with increasing economic pressure in the urban-rural-link area. This led to further tension within FEDRA between fieldworkers and administrators on the issue that FEDRA had inadequate analysis of socio-economic change.

After the mid-1980s, competition over land became more intensified than in the past. One of the main factors was the penetration of urban developers into rural areas. This prompted the military to speed up the process of land expropriation for fear that it would have to deal with powerful businessmen rather than powerless villagers, if the villagers sold disputed land to private entrepreneurs. In the early 1990s, the military planned to relocate the villagers who lived to the east of the Village Temple onto the farmland belonging to their neighbours to the north of the Temple. While the villagers did not know how to respond to this, a FEDRA fieldworker, with the support of his colleagues in FEDRA and NGO networks, helped the villagers organise themselves to prevent the military land takeover.

The achievement of the NGOs in playing an interventionist role in this case depended on a number of factors. First, FEDRA helped villagers to elaborate the social meaning of "self-reliance" from their daily life to organise the people's collective protest. Secondly, FEDRA and its networks in Chiang Mai and Bangkok helped the villagers scale-up to seek assistance from different actors in the sphere of civil society such as some retired public servants, university lecturers, lawyers, student activists and journalists. Thirdly, the NGOs had an opportunity during the open political system of the early 1990s to halt the forced village relocation by the military and take the dispute case to the provincial civil court. However, after the land dispute case had been taken to the provincial court, the NGO fieldworkers were confronted with disputes within their organisation and among NGOs at different levels, over the analysis of social change and how to respond to the change. For instance, how would NGOs deal with

problems resulting from interpenetration between rural and urban areas; with the empowerment of local individuals and groups; with the encouragement of economic effectiveness and changes in social values? Can NGOs ignore opportunities for cooperation with the government for example, to secure land rights for small-scale cultivators? These questions remain for the NGOs to take into consideration.



**Plate 17** A female villager driving a motor-cycle taxi to earn additional income to support her family.



**Plate 18** Some villager work at a tourist resort near Village 3 for extra family income.



**Plate 19** FEDRA's handicraft project to help villagers earn additional family income.



**Plate 20** Handicraft products being sold in the compound of Wat Pa Temple, Mae Rim.



**Plate 21** Villagers and NGO workers receiving sacred water (*nam mon*) from the abbot of the village temple before going to protest against the military land take over.



**Plate 22** Posters explaining the cause of the land dispute to the public.



**Plate 23** ID cards hung on a branch of a tree (as is done in the *Tho:d pha pa* ceremony) and carried to the District Office as a form of protest against inadequate state assistance for the welfare of the village.



**Plate 24** Household registration documents were also carried to the District Office as a form of protest against inadequate state assistance for the welfare of the village



**Plate 25** Female elders dressed in white go to negotiate with the military to save the village land. Their presence and attire demonstrate the intention to seek peaceful negotiations.



**Plate 26** Through NGO networks, villagers receive the support of lawyers, intellectuals and university students from middle class backgrounds who undertake fact finding and report to the media

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

The social movement must define itself in terms of its own nature and the nature of its social adversaries as well as of its objectives of over-all transformation, rather than in terms of struggle against models of authority and organisation bound to a pre-industrial or bourgeois society, as opposed to modern forms of economic and social power.

A. Touraine<sup>1</sup>

Theorists and activists — like judges — ‘are in the position of people trying to complete a story begun a long time ago; they don’t have complete freedom of action, since the outlines of the plot are a matter of history, but they do have to use their own initiative in working out how best to continue’.

J.L.S. Girling<sup>2</sup>

In the previous chapters we have seen that development theorists and practitioners agree that development aimed at improving the welfare of individuals and of society, has various coexisting dimensions (economic, social, cultural, political and environmental). In the Thai context, Dr Puey, a Thai economist, says that the essence of development is to provide a suitable living standard for individuals (of various classes) and well-being for society as a whole.<sup>3</sup> *Phra* Dhammadilok, the Chairperson of FEDRA, argues that in pursuing development activities, social values and economic effectiveness cannot be considered in isolation and that the interaction between traditional and modern cultures can enrich present-day living if one understands and uses them properly.<sup>4</sup> NGO fieldworkers have also realised that they are more inclined to focus on their organisational philosophies and sectoral programmes than to recognise the interwoven aspects of development in a locality. An ATA fieldworker comments that to achieve a “holistic” view of development, one must examine a “chain reaction” from one development approach to another. In attempting to address the broad social consequences of development which are of concern to NGOs, an NGO cannot undertake economic or technological development activities in isolation and look to others to attend social and cultural issues. As social relations in a given situation

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<sup>1</sup> Touraine, 1971, *The Post-Industrial Society...*, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> Girling, 1987, *Capital and Power...*, p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> Puey Ungphakorn, 1974 (2517), *Sia chip ya sia sin* [Lose Only Life, Not Dignity], [in Thai], Bangkok: Khletthai Publishing, pp. 105-106.

<sup>4</sup> Interview, INT-137-NGO, 26 February 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

contain asymmetric power relations, the NGO cannot ignore the political aspect in development while tackling the problem of people's poverty.

The means to development are equally as important as the ends. Following Edwards, Rigg argues that the means to development must include the empowerment of ordinary people.<sup>5</sup> As Friedmann points out, the social and political empowerment process, implemented through an alternative development strategy, aims to strengthen the power of civil society while making the state and corporate business more socially accountable and responsible.<sup>6</sup> The finding of the thesis is that empowerment does not and will not occur at all unless concerned social actors play an interventionist role to create it by inquiring into a social situation in which asymmetric power relations are embedded. The process of empowerment involves social conflict, movement and intervention in social relations between different social actors and their adversaries in a given social situation.

However, Brass criticises the notion of "everyday resistance" arguing that even though the forms of resistance are "... directed against the state, both their mode (resistance-not-revolution) and form (the aestheticisation of revolt, or cultural opposition) of mobilisation effectively preclude a realistic challenge to the power and existence of the state itself".<sup>7</sup> He goes on to claim that empowerment at the grass-roots level carried out by NGOs does "no more than work within the limits imposed by (an international) capitalism ... diluting antagonism towards the existing class structure and diverting mobilisation away from other, large-scale and thus more effective forms of action".<sup>8</sup>

This claim may be correct if NGOs do not adequately understand the context of their work and the conflicts in a given situation. However, my study shows that there are different types of NGOs doing development work following their particular perceptions. For the type of people-centred NGOs which I studied, their interventions are not diversionary but essential to the very process of development regardless of the kind of regime (e.g. military or civilian; capitalist or socialist), because they help empower ordinary people to defend themselves against the adverse impacts of socio-economic and political changes.

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<sup>5</sup> Rigg, 1994, "Alternative Development Strategies...", p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Friedmann, 1992, *Empowerment...*, p. 31. See also Chapter 3.

<sup>7</sup> T. Brass, 1991, "Moral Economists, Subalterns, New Social Movements, and the (Re-) Emergence of a (Post-) Modernised (Middle) Peasant", *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2, January, p. 184.

<sup>8</sup> T. Brass, 1994, "Post-Script: Populism, Peasants and Intellectuals, or What's Left of the Future?", *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 21, Nos. 3/4, April/July, p. 253.

The thesis demonstrates social and environmental movements ranging from everyday forms of resistance to collective protest.<sup>9</sup> The movements start from the articulation of social meanings in daily life as “everyday resistance” which could be escalated to collective protest if a tentative conflict is not properly resolved. These two poles of social movement cannot be seen in isolation and “replaced” by either one or the other.<sup>10</sup> It is a contextual situation that determines which form of action should be undertaken by the social actors who “can never be reduced to a function of a system”<sup>11</sup> as Touraine argues:

A social movement is not necessarily revolutionary by nature. It becomes so only if a class struggle comes up against an institutional system that is unable to deal with the state of production and social relations.<sup>12</sup>

It is difficult to identify what “a realistic challenge” to the state’s power is because, as Touraine remarks:

Almost all societies have been penetrated by new forms of production, consumption and communication. Eulogies of purity and authenticity are becoming increasingly artificial, and even when leaders denounce their country’s penetration by the market economy, the people welcome it.<sup>13</sup>

Claiming to work in response to the people’s needs, the NGOs have to conduct their activities within and from the framework “imposed by (an international) capitalism” as Brass argues. However, Brass seems to overlook any positive aspect of modernity which emerged in the process of social transformation by embracing it all as negative because it is “capitalist development”. Touraine, however, affirms that: “Modernity must not be confused with the purely capitalist mode of modernisation” because modernity contains “rationalist vision” which becomes “the most powerful critical weapon against all holisms, all totalitarianisms and all fundamentalisms”.<sup>14</sup>

Edwards makes an interesting point saying that: “We cannot change the world successfully unless we understand the way it works; but neither can we understand the world fully unless we are involved in some way with the processes that change it”.<sup>15</sup> The thesis reveals the ways in which Thai NGOs have been learning, largely since the early 1980s, while trying, through their intervention, to strengthen the power of

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<sup>9</sup> See also Melucci, 1994, “A Strange Kind of Newness...”, pp. 101-130; Peet and Watts, 1993, “Development Theory and Environment...”, pp. 227-253; see also Peet and Watts, 1996, “Liberation Ecology...”, pp. 1-45.

<sup>10</sup> Scott and Kerkvliet, 1986, *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance...*, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Touraine, 1995, *Critique of Modernity*, p. 138.

<sup>12</sup> Touraine, 1971, *The Post-Industrial Society...*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>13</sup> Touraine, 1995, *Critique of Modernity*, p. 201.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 203 and 205.

<sup>15</sup> M. Edwards, 1989, “The Irrelevance of Development Studies”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 1, January, pp. 124-125.

ordinary people and to create, as far as possible, a law-based Thai society. They have carried on their development activities with difficulty and are still in the process of finding a way because socio-economic and political changes are neither unilinear nor predictable. The changes and their impacts have been determined by different patterns of social relations in different social situations.

### **Changes, conflicts and responses**

Socio-economic and political changes, conflicts and responses to the changes are intertwining activities which stimulate a society to transform and open – thereby enabling it to function and serve its members. In the Thai case, socio-economic changes have been more rapid since the government started implementing national development plans in the early 1960s. While giving privileges to the private sector and encouraging it to use the country's vast pool of resources and labour to increase economic growth, the Thai government has played a minimal role in protecting the people's rights to development and access to the country's natural resources. The closed political system and protection given to the private sector – especially foreign companies – prompted the urban middle class to demand a parliamentary system guaranteed by constitution. The socio-political response, in the mid-1970s, led by the urban middle class, opened up the Thai political system so that not only could ordinary citizens voice their grievances and formulate people's organisations, but also domestic business classes enjoyed a great deal of freedom to expand their businesses beyond military control and participate in national politics. However, a plan for "political reform" or "*patirup kanmu'ang*" led by a group of Thai intellectuals, for the first time during the mid-1970s, was aborted due to the ideological conflict between the 'right' and 'left' factions.

As Girling points out, the outcomes of past development in Thailand are mixed blessings. On the one hand, Thailand enjoyed the achievement of economic growth, the increasing significance of civil society and democratisation. On the other hand, various problems followed, for instance, the centralisation of power, competition and conflict over resources, and the destruction of local environments.<sup>16</sup> As this study shows, some

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<sup>16</sup> It may be partly correct to argue that competition and conflicts over resources cannot be blamed only on capitalist penetration into rural areas but also population growth. Werasit's study on rural transformation especially in Chiang Mai shows the relationship between the state policies and performance, capitalist development and population growth and decline over time. His research reveals that among three elements, the implementation of development plans by government officials and expansion of capitalist development by the private sector did more to bring about rural transformation and hardship on rural population than population growth *per se*. Werasit, 1988, "Rural Transformation in Northern Thailand". In addition, from his study on population change in the Northern Thailand, Kunstadter told me that there had been a significant

government officials disagreed with the ways in which private entrepreneurs ‘exploited’ public resources for personal gains. However, these officials found their positions too weak to protect the public interest due to a corrupt bureaucratic system and the power of self-serving politicians. Conflicts over resources, largely caused by the “capitalist development” occurring throughout the countryside, coupled with the military’s interference in national politics in the early 1990s, prompted a group of Thai intellectuals and NGOs to call for political reforms for the second time in the mid-1990s. The ultimate aim was to create a healthy law-based society able to respond to social conflicts and demands and strong enough to accept public scrutiny. It is the political atmosphere of “open society” that gives rise to social and political reform; thus it is worth being protected to allow the reform to be pursued by concerned social actors.

My study of the three villages has shown the interdependent relationship which exists between peasants, the state and market. The relationship has been more evident than in the past through the improvement of transportation and communication in the countryside; the flow of commodities, luxury goods, agricultural commercialisation and labour; as well as the expansion of business activities into rural enclaves. None of these three villages is a purely ‘traditional’ village; each comprises an amalgam of traditional and modern cultures. However, although peasants in the villages generally satisfied their material needs and enjoyed necessary social services – especially health and education – they felt various kinds of pressure upon themselves and their families resulting from competition over productive resources. They realised that they could no longer live as in the past; nor rush to embrace an uncertain future. They needed concerned social actors to help them find the way. While the work of “community culture” theorists has been important in reviving the nearly forgotten life and culture of the people, the notion of village “community” which has been used to help strengthen the people’s power is a socially constructed discourse rather than a fact about society.<sup>17</sup> Thus, there is a need for more discussion about the village community and its relation with the spheres of the state, economy and civil society.<sup>18</sup>

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fertility decline especially among the Hmong tribal groups. Interview, INT-026-ACA, 9 November 1992, Chiang Mai.

Moreover, a recent study on: “The Collapse of Thai Society: The Impact of Family Planning” in the past 25 years by Tiang Phadthaisong shows that the fertility rate is declining in every region. *Bangkok Post*, 22 July 1996.

<sup>17</sup> See an argument of Peet and Watts, 1993, “Development Theory and Environment...”, p. 228.

<sup>18</sup> Thongchai Winichakul, 1995, “The Changing Landscape of the Past: New Histories in Thailand Since 1973”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 99-120.

### **Thai NGO movements**

Social problems and crises in Thai society gave rise to student and popular movements in the 1970s and to the emergence of the NGOs in the 1980s. To some degree, the links with the earlier opposition movement meant that when the NGOs were free to form in the early 1980s, they were somewhat inclined to be anti-state, anti-capitalist and idealistic. They were composed of individuals, organisations and networks which were loosely organised due to their voluntary motivation and anti-establishment attitude.

However, with experience in the field during the 1980s, the NGOs began to realise that their development concepts and practice had not been the product of a single unified theory. Rather they had emerged through an iterative process of social relations and interactions between the NGOs and different social actors, from critical assessment, or from appropriation of earlier theories and patterns of movement. For instance, participatory development approaches did not emerge spontaneously, but from a reassessment of the social-welfare handout practice. Everyday resistance was theorised from an inadequate analysis of why and how peasants rebel.

The emergence and growth of the NGOs determined the nature of their movement. They claimed to be independent from the control of the state, business and any political party while allying themselves with ordinary people, especially the marginal. They were disappointed by the fact that the government's economic and technological programmes had neither improved the well-being of ordinary people, nor created ethical values. They were disillusioned with the government and with the revolutionary party (referring to the CPT) which, they believed, had been driven by an ideological conflict rather than a commitment to help the people tackle their problems and strengthen themselves.

The expansion of the Thai NGOs in the 1980s resulted from not only a more open political system, but also the expansion of overseas financial support. Many overseas funding agencies sought, in the first place, to support 'community development' in sensitive areas near the Thai-Cambodian border and in the Northeast region. However, few such agencies were interested in supporting the organisations (such as FEDRA and DISAC) which had pursued a "community participation" approach with the expectation that it would reach "the poorest of the poor". After discussion and negotiation concerning the significance of the "community participation" approach between some Thai intellectuals and funding agency representatives, a large volume of funding assistance was provided, between the mid to late 1980s, to support local development. A particular example was the Local Development Assistance Programme (LDAP) between the LDI and the Canadian government. Thus, the development partnership

between donor and recipient NGOs involved both funding and the exchange of development concepts and approaches.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, since the late 1980s, funding agencies have shifted their areas of assistance from Thailand to Indochinese countries (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) and their focus of assistance from community participation to campaigns on environmental, gender and AIDS issues as happened in Western countries.<sup>19</sup> In order to gain financial support, Thai NGOs have had to comply with the changing policies of their funding counterparts. For instance, a German funding agency elected to support the NGOs which lobbied the Thai government to change its policies and performance in relation to the local environment, in line with the policies of the German Social Democrat Party from which the agency's main source of funding came. This was a useful cooperation between a German donor agency and some Thai recipient NGOs. However, many other NGOs whose work has been involved in environmental issues, in everyday phenomena, and in responding to community needs, but which are unable to rationalise their action to fit the funding agency's framework, could easily miss such an opportunity.

Scaling-up activities in the form of political and environmental campaigns nation-wide are crucial if Thailand is to tackle the problem of misuse of natural resources by corrupt politicians, bureaucrats and businesses. What the thesis shows is that the scale-up activities must start from a place – often the village – where the people's problems occurred. As Edwards points out, a move to scale-up to higher levels, the process “must grow out of and be based upon participatory research at lower levels” and a link between the NGOs working at the village level and their networks could be made in many ways. Neither global nor local development research and practice “should be privileged” for both have a significant role to play.<sup>20</sup> This argument is demonstrated through the NGO activities in Chapters 5 and 6.

The NGOs presented “alternative development” strategies which they thought would strengthen the people's capacity to help themselves. Economically, they claimed that the high cost of agricultural investment and the introduction of modern farming techniques had led to indebtedness and bankruptcy among small-scale producers. The alternative strategy was to advocate subsistence farming models using intermediate technology and partial commercialisation. Socially, the NGOs argued that the rural development model aiming at economic effectiveness broke down the social and

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<sup>19</sup> The shift of funding support has derived in part from governments in developed countries reducing the spending on social welfare within their own countries and reductions in their foreign aid budgets.

<sup>20</sup> M. Edwards, 1994, “Rethinking Social Development: The Search for Relevance”, in Booth, *Rethinking Social Development...*, p. 285.

cultural values of mutual help and spirituality. The alternative, they said, was to promote a “community culture” approach and revive ethical values through NGO socio-economic projects. Politically, the NGOs criticised the top-down planning and implementation by the state claiming that it resulted in disparities between rural and urban areas; in which case the alternative was to promote the autonomy of community members, with minimal intervention from the state, to plan and practice their own development.<sup>21</sup> The counter-proposals to state-led rural development made by the Thai NGOs were not much different from those advocated by other Third World NGOs.

However, the alternative development strategies, based on the notion of “community”, were under attack from the late-1980s because they were bypassing the state and ignoring the “modernity” aspect of capitalist development. Besides some criticisms of the NGO practice outlined in Chapter 3, Kitahara, a Japanese sociologist, pointed out that when some academics and NGO workers talked about a “community”, they were confused between an empirical description of what a community was and a normative explanation of what a community should be. He also criticised the bipolar systems of thought among development theorists:

Their most serious problem lies in the naive dichotomy of “community” versus “modernity”, and their resultant over-expectation of the former in contrast to easy and total criticism of the latter... One can agree that development at the community level will play an essential part in countering the destructive traits of nascent capitalism in Asia, but the community does not have the power to solve every defect of modernity. These theorists should narrow the gap between their over-idealisation of the role of the community and the objective achievement of the community system in rural development.<sup>22</sup>

It is understandable, Touraine argues, that in the struggle against the domination of established order of the state and market, anti-modernist effects could occur. However, to ignore a “modernity” aspect in the over-all process of social transformation “indicates an inability to see the forest for trees”.<sup>23</sup> That is because “modernity”:

is neither technological progress nor the growing individualism of consumers, but the demand for freedom and the demand of freedom against everything that transforms individuals into instruments, objects or absolute strangers.<sup>24</sup>

For developing countries, Kitahara added, “modernity” had various positive aspects (such as democracy, human rights, freedom and equality before law). These aspects “deserve[d] to stand as ideal goals”.<sup>25</sup> It seems to me that “community culture”

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<sup>21</sup> A. Kitahara, 1996, *The Thai Rural Community Reconsidered: Historical Community Formation and Contemporary Development Movements*, Bangkok: The Political Economy Centre, Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, pp. 78-79.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

<sup>23</sup> Touraine, 1995, *Critique of Modernity*, p. 250.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>25</sup> Kitahara, 1996, *The Thai Rural Community...*, p. 33.

theorists are currently facing the problem of how to overcome what they see as shortcomings in Thai society and, at the same time, protect the positive aspects of the Thai culture from being overtaken by some negative aspects of the Western-oriented modernisation.

To some extent, NGO fieldworkers associated with urban NGO networks seemed to be influenced by alternative development strategies. Nonetheless, while working in a village, the fieldworkers had to adapt development strategies to different local situations and, thus, could not rely upon any uniform and dogmatic theory. To help remedy the people's poverty, *Phra* Dhammadilok advised FEDRA workers not to undertake only "medical formula" (*tamra ya*) but also "medicine" (*tua ya*).<sup>26</sup> His advice could be interpreted as meaning that FEDRA workers should not only follow development doctrines but also assess their practice in relation to concrete social reality. Social interactions between villagers and other NGOs in the village and, especially, the senior monk's outlook on the world helped some active FEDRA fieldworkers recognise the fact that social transformation in a locality was like a running stream; the water flowing and changing from moment to moment was never the same.<sup>27</sup> Very little of the NGO rich experience was documented, showing the absence of a strong link between development theory and practice. That is because, as Edwards notes: "Practitioners do not write, and theoreticians remain in the abstraction of their theories", and as a result, social development research and practice become "two parallel lines that never met and both suffered accordingly".<sup>28</sup>

### **NGO interventionist role**

Amidst competition and conflict over resource use and allocation between social actors from the spheres of the state, economy and civil society, the interventionist role played by the people-centred NGOs during the study timeframe was essential in counterbalancing the establish order (e.g. the 'state' and 'market'). However, there are opportunities for improvement in this interventionist role in the future, which will be summarised later in this section. First, however, the main lessons to be drawn from earlier discussions in this thesis are outlined.

Not every NGO practice is called 'interventionist'. This thesis has demonstrated that for an 'interventionist' role to exist, NGOs must understand social relations and conflicts between social actors competing over resource usage and allocation in a

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<sup>26</sup> Attending the FEDRA Annual Meeting, 22-24 December 1992, Chiang Mai.

<sup>27</sup> Interview, INT-137-NGO, 26 February 1993, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai.

<sup>28</sup> Edwards, 1994, "Rethinking Social Development...", p. 279.

particular locality, and, in the wider context over time. They must also be able to produce and reproduce social meanings – often beyond the dominating rhetoric of the state and capitalists – to attract the people’s participation in development activities, and, more importantly, encourage them to act in everyday forms of resistance and collective action. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 reveal that social movement and intervention could occur at any place, in an open political system, near or far from the city, provided that the people and NGOs have recognised the main problems, identified the conflicts and the key actors, adjusted their approaches and organised their collective activities.

The thesis also demonstrated that, in the process of social transformation, different kinds of social conflict have emerged in dealing with asymmetric power relations between various actors over time. For instance, during the 1970s, tensions occurred between the military and people in Village 3 on the issue of land use and occupation. These tensions grew from the mid-1980s when urban developers and investors began to expand their business activities in the region surrounding the disputed area. The military plan to force the relocation of some parts of the village prompted NGO intervention, as a counterbalancing factor. During the same period, tensions arose also between soya bean growers in Village 2 and middlemen, over the price of soya bean; and these were widened to include relations between government officials, politicians, business association and soya bean cultivators when the government’s decision to allow the importation of soya bean residue reduced the price of the domestic product. By recognising social conflicts, and the rationalisation of different situations, the NGOs were able to find a suitable approach to the conflicts, and assist peasants to regain control over their resources and livelihoods.

Alternative development ideology, created by development professionals in the international arena, and adapted by various development practitioners – including Thai NGOs – in response to the failure of the growth theory, does not totally oppose the ‘market’, but encourages the people to be sensible in dealing with it. The thesis reveals that while the NGOs criticised the state for adopting a market economy model for Thai rural development which, they argued, undermined village self-sufficiency, their own development projects also encouraged villagers to become involved in the market economy. However, assessment of their past local development activities enabled the NGOs working at the village level to adjust their approach to immediate problems, and, more importantly, to achieve a balance between their economic and environmental activities, as shown in Chapter 4.

While the alternative development strategies (e.g. people’s participation, self-reliance, community culture and community forest) inspired the NGOs to help empower the underprivileged, they were not effective unless they were interpreted as social meanings in relation to local situations. For instance, the meaning of “community forest”, as

interpreted by the NGOs, motivated villagers living in the watershed area to formulate their environmental movement to manage and protect forest and other related resources. The meaning of “self-reliance”, introduced by the NGOs and reinterpreted by people in Village 3, became a basis for the people’s collective protest against the military land claim. The study shows that such collective action was an outcome of the elaboration of social meanings in daily life.

The study further shows that this NGO intervention to provide a political space for local empowerment could only occur in an open political system. Also, the NGOs had to analyse time-space correspondence in deciding the action to be taken in any particular circumstance. There was an example of cooperation between local officials, villagers and NGOs over natural resource management in the watershed area when villagers and the NGOs actively sought to bring these actors together, and made use of the occasion of a traditional ceremony, at the opening of the hydropower plant for generating electricity in the Lua village, to discuss a resource management plan. On the other hand, in the case of the military land takeover, protest escalated when negotiation between village and military representatives broke down and ended in violence against an NGO fieldworker. The military’s approach, and its use of violence, in an “open society”, captured the attention of the media and public, and damaged its reputation.

Such political intervention and local empowerment could not have occurred without the support of other members of civil society, who put pressure on the state authorities. The scale-up activities which followed involved the three pillars of the NGO movement, including individuals, organisations and networks, as shown in Chapters 5 and 6. Hence, the role of “community” should not be ideally promoted as equal to, but as a part of civil society.<sup>29</sup> Based on the social construction of village “community, the “community culture” approach accepted by the NGOs:

may be used as a strategic weapon with which to strengthen the villagers’ power to negotiate with outsiders. However, it cannot be taken as a grand reforming plan at the wider national level, as the complex system [of political economy] stretches beyond the scope of the simple community.<sup>30</sup>

The NGOs may be unable to provide an effective solution to rural development unless they critically assess social discourses and power relations among actors in the state, economy and civil society. Although structural Marxism is useful for uncovering the asymmetry of power relations between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ and to develop the notion of social conflict, one of its main defects is the lack of micro-level analysis into complicated and rapidly changing social reality. When a social and/or environmental movement supported by the NGOs in the form of collective protest fails to draw public

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

support or ceases to be an effective means of solving complex problems, it becomes necessary for them to reconsider their social meaning and action in every situation, especially in the current context of rural and urban interpenetration.

This study has suggested that the NGO interventionist role has been successful so far, and, desirably should continue. A number of lessons have been drawn in the course of the study, indicating a need for improvement in certain aspects of the NGOs' approach, and these are now summarised briefly in the paragraphs which follow.

First, while the NGOs effectively handled the conflicts between people and their social adversaries, tensions within and between NGOs were seldom resolved. Disagreement emerged within FEDRA between fieldworkers who wanted to see the organisation taking a more active role in protecting the people's rights to resources, and some administrators who preferred not to upset the powerful for fear of risk to themselves and their organisation. Tensions also appeared between NGOs and their headquarters and networks operating higher up, including some funding agencies. While the NGOs on the ground dealt with social conflicts and needed immediate support from those higher up, the latter were busy working on their own agendas and unable to provide the necessary help. Some funding agencies expected grass-roots NGOs to act in ways which could be in opposition to the people's needs. Thus, asymmetric power relations were likely to occur within the NGO community. Although NGOs encounter problems both within and without, priority should be given to discovering what it is that prevents an NGO from implementing projects which help the people empower themselves. Discussion, negotiation and mediation need to be put into practice at all times not only between NGOs and other actors but also within the NGO community.

Secondly, the NGOs need to work out how to improve economic effectiveness and, at the same time, to maintain social values in each village. Economic development is needed, yet it can result in social stratification, including marginalisation. Social values are also needed for villagers to maintain their common goals and activities. However, social values cannot be used unconditionally. Some of them could inhibit villagers' collective efforts and their approach to tackling conflicting interests among themselves, and between themselves and their social adversaries. A social value which is more heavily based on a model of charismatic leadership than the improvement of systematic structure in a community may be too fragile to cope with rapid economic change imposed from outside. The NGOs need to challenge some traditional 'values', as well as modern ones.

Thirdly, how the NGOs understand and deal with social order and conflict is important and relates to debates between NGO administrators and fieldworkers on whether individuals or social structures provide the primary factor for social transformation. A

structural analysis approach to development problems can lead to the understanding of social conflicts and identification of relevant actors, whilst a behavioural approach tends to claim human misconduct as the main cause of social malaise and environment degradation. The former is inclined to adopt macro-level analysis and examine social conflict in a social system, but lack a concrete sense of complex reality; the latter, on the other hand, tends to adopt micro-level approach and examine social integration rather than social conflict. These two approaches reveal, as Touraine says, the inseparable analysis between actor and system relations.<sup>31</sup> If we take an alternative view of “society as a field of conflicts, negotiations and mediations” between various actors, from different places of origin, in the three spheres of the state, economy and civil society, struggling to rationalise the spheres of autonomy, we will realise that, through space and time, the social structure does not predominantly determine human actions, but is constantly produced and modified by human actions.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, it is important for the NGOs to understand and deal with the issue of rural-urban interpenetration. Thai NGOs, during the 1980s, commonly perceived a distinctive division between ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ areas. Moreover, ‘rural’ was often related to ‘traditional’ whereas ‘urban’ related to ‘modern’ villages.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the interpenetration between the city and the countryside has become more evident in present-day Thai society. The unevenness of spatial development and social problems resulting from rural disparity are well recognised in government plans. In response to these problems, development theorists, planners and practitioners need to move beyond the dichotomy of village ‘community’ and ‘city’, ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ to discuss, negotiate and search for a new solution for action. However, villages close to town centres are likely to be interpenetrated more than those situated in remote areas. The spatial differences also need to be taken into account.

We must conclude that, as long as the NGOs seek to continue to help peasants empower themselves while creating a law-based society, it is necessary for them to move beyond the dichotomy between ‘rural’ and ‘urban’, ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’, village ‘community’ and the state, or beyond their bipolar views of a society, to discover the “third space”, or a hybrid process giving rise to new meanings, issues, actors and networks. That is to consider the socially desirable aspects of development and change from the undesirable in different contexts over time. It is not useful for intellectuals and NGO workers to simply view a society as a system of repression, domination and the

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<sup>31</sup> Touraine, 1995, *Critique of Modernity*, p. 353.

<sup>32</sup> S. Pile and N. Thrift, 1995, “Introduction”, in S. Pile and N. Thrift (eds), *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation*, London: Routledge, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> See J. Rigg, 1994, “Redefining the Village and Rural Life: Lessons from Southeast Asia”, *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 160, Part 2, July, pp. 123-135.

reproduction of inequalities.<sup>34</sup> In the political atmosphere of “open society”, discussion, communication, arguments among members in civil society and interactions with social adversaries would help establish a connection between particulars and universals.

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<sup>34</sup> Touraine, 1995, *Critique of Modernity*, p. 337.

## Appendix I

### Note on Fieldwork

Two field trips to Thailand gave me the opportunity to observe NGOs and other people's movements. During the first, from October to December 1991, I participated as an observer at the national conference on: "The Impact of Economic Growth on Rural Areas: People's Forum" conducted from 8 to 10 October 1991 at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. The Forum, organised by a number of Thai intellectuals and NGOs, became a political space for the common people, whose lives and families had been affected by the government implementation of economic growth policies, to voice their grievances, to the public, the media and the government.<sup>1</sup> On 12 October 1991, I observed a World Bank -NGO Meeting in Bangkok. While the Bank economists talked about the mega-cities growing successfully in Asian countries, the social activists, both Thai and foreign, argued that there was significant unfavourable impact of economic and urban growth on the poor and on the environment. At the end of the session, the Project for Ecological Recovery (PER), a Thai environmental NGO invited the Bank's Executive Directors (EDs) to meet the villagers who were protesting against the intended construction of the Pak Mun Dam in Ubol Ratchathani Province with World Bank funding.<sup>2</sup> In November and December 1991, I surveyed Suphan Buri and Chachoengsao and Chiang Mai provinces as possible sites for research. I found that there was not enough information to pursue my research in Suphan Buri and Chachoengsao, I then focused on and chose Chiang Mai as the site for study.

The second field trip was from October 1992 to March 1993. During this time, I conducted fieldwork at the village level in Mae Rim district and took the opportunity to observe a number of NGO meetings and seminars, including international conferences in Chiang Mai and Bangkok. On 22-25 November 1992, at the Chiang Mai Teachers' College, I observed how NGOs organised people's networks to help people cope with rapid socio-economic changes occurring in Chiang Mai and other Northern provinces. In early December 1992, I attended the international conference: "People's Plan for the 21st Century (PP21)" in Bangkok. The conference became a forum for social actors in

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<sup>1</sup> As I had been away from Thailand for a number of years, it was the first time that I had heard the voice of the poor people being expressed in the auditorium of the most 'traditional' university in Thailand where social-concerned activities were restricted by university administrators during the past 20 years or so.

<sup>2</sup> About 150 people participated in the meeting. They included 70 villagers from 903 families directly affected by the dam construction, eight World Bank's EDs, NGO workers, journalists, academics and concerned foreigners.

the Asia-Pacific Region to get together to find ways to enhance the democratisation process in their own countries, and to protest against authoritarian regimes.

During November 1992 and January 1993, the Chairperson of the Foundation for Education and Development of Rural Areas (FEDRA) kindly gave me permission to stay in the compound of Wat Pa Daraphirom, where FEDRA is located. I was able to observe the NGO development practice on the ground. Often, NGO fieldworkers worked after hours when villagers finished farming. Since 1990, the fieldworkers have had to work according to factory shifts in order to keep in touch with villagers who have switched over from being farmers to wage workers. As the FEDRA areas of operation have expanded in response to more requests for assistance, the responsibilities of fieldworkers have increased while the number of staff members and volume of funding support have decreased. I also had the opportunity to participate in a village committee meeting at which I observed the tensions emerging from competition over the use of productive resource and social differentiation among villagers (see Chapter 5).

On 3-4 March 1993, I observed the meeting of NGO-CORD/Upper North held in Chiang Mai.<sup>3</sup> The main issue in the meeting was to develop further NGO networking and find a strategy for resource management. Following that regional meeting, on 6-7 March 1993, I observed the meeting of NGO-CORD members (from four regions) in Bangkok. The people's problems in each region (both urban and rural areas) were reported. Serious problems about NGO linkages between regions and Headquarters, were raised. While some NGOs in Bangkok criticised regional NGOs for using political approaches more than other methods, the regional NGOs claimed that the NGO-CORD Headquarters in Bangkok was passive, especially towards crisis situations in the countryside. Moreover, the regional NGOs threatened to pull out from the Bangkok umbrella organisation and respond to the people's problems independently according to regional differences.

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<sup>3</sup> Over 100 participants came from small, medium and large-scale NGOs working in various provinces in the Upper Northern region.

## Appendix II Factors Stimulating the Transformation in Rural Thailand

Socio-economic and political conditions	Concept and character of Plan	Actors stimulating economic growth	Socio-political responses
<p><b>1960s</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International political arena is ideologically divided into “capitalist” and “socialist” camps;</li> <li>• Thai political condition is under military authoritarian regimes;</li> <li>• Economic condition is dominated by the agricultural sector, excess labour supply, low level of per capita income, but has natural resources and healthy environment;</li> <li>• Economic aspect of development is dominant and widely accepted by UN agencies and international financial institutions (World bank and IMF);</li> <li>• Import-Substitution Industrialisation (ISI) is recommended.</li> </ul>	<p><u>First Plan 1961-1966</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top down planning;</li> <li>• Has single objective to accelerate economic growth;</li> <li>• Emphasises investment in basic infrastructure and uses project analysis technique;</li> <li>• Focuses on the accumulation of physical capital assets;</li> <li>• Privileges given to investors of capital while silencing political opposition (including trade unions).</li> </ul> <p><u>Second Plan 1967-1971</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Still emphasises economic growth and large scale infrastructure;</li> <li>• Extends agricultural research and regional universities;</li> <li>• Social development (viewed as supporting measures for economic development) is weighted on manpower planning;</li> <li>• A planning approach is shifted to ministerial level that emphasises sectoral analysis.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foreign investors especially from the US, Japan and Europe;</li> <li>• Thai government plays a supporting role by building infrastructure and providing facilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing insurgency in remote areas supported by concerned intellectuals (journalists, public servants, university students) from middle class backgrounds.</li> </ul>

Socio-economic and political conditions	Concept and character of Plan	Actors stimulating economic growth	Socio-political responses
<p><b>1970s</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International agencies (e.g. ILO, World Bank) emphasise “basic needs”, “people’s participation” and “Redistribution with Growth” development strategies;</li> <li>Thai economy is affected by the first oil shock and the decline in foreign aid after the end of the Vietnam war;</li> <li>Political condition is still centralised by the military regime (closed political system).</li> <li>Political instability is recognised after the uprising on 14 October 1973;</li> <li>Problems of income disparities, insurgency, natural resources and environmental degradation.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Third Plan 1972-1976</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focuses on economic growth and monetary stability;</li> <li>Recognises social problems and adopts the so-called “population” policy to reduce population growth rate;</li> <li>Demarcates agricultural extension zones;</li> <li>Emphasises agricultural credit and extension services.</li> </ul> <p><u>Fourth Plan 1977-1981</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focuses on problem analysis to determine policy framework and direction for solving problems in response to political instability;</li> <li>Sets multiple objectives for national development;</li> <li>Supports multi-cropping to replace mono-cropping to avoid rural income fluctuation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foreign investors;</li> <li>The rise of domestic business groups.</li> <li>The domestic business groups create interest groups and associations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The increase of the “middle class” as a result of economic development;</li> <li>Political uprisings, in 1973, in Bangkok and regional cities to oust the Thanom-Praphat military government;</li> <li>There are proposals for political reform, but these fail.</li> <li>Competition and conflicts over land and other productive resources especially in the Central Plain and Northern regions;</li> <li>Conflicts occur between landowners and tenants (landless or near landless peasants), between money lenders and small-scale peasants;</li> <li>The expansion of the CPT widely supported by urban intellectuals, ‘left-wing’ politicians and university students.</li> </ul>

Socio-economic and political conditions	Concept and character of Plan	Actors stimulating economic growth	Socio-political responses
<p><b>1980s</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The World Bank and IMF encourage developing countries to adopt Export-Oriented Industrialisation (EOI) and structural adjustment strategies to pursue economic growth;</li> <li>• The ideological conflict between “capitalist” and “socialist” camps begins to decline;</li> <li>• International economy is stagnant as a result of the second oil shock;</li> </ul>	<p><u>Fifth Plan 1982-1986</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top down planning but is levelled off to regional and area based planning;</li> <li>• Planning approach shifts from project analysis to programming scheme, especially in rural development;</li> <li>• The alleviation of rural poverty through the establishment of the National Rural Development Committee (NRDC);</li> <li>• The encouragement of coordination between government and private sectors to reduce rural poverty</li> </ul> <p><u>Sixth Plan 1987-1991</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasises export led growth;</li> <li>• Uses programming approach, comprising ten major programmes;</li> <li>• Moves to more bottom-up planning to adjust administrative system and review the role of government;</li> <li>• Encourages people’s organisations and NGOs to help solve rural problems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The market is designed to stimulate economic growth;</li> <li>• Foreign companies;</li> <li>• agri-business joint-venture companies;</li> <li>• technocrats;</li> <li>• bankers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The decline of the CPT due to its internal problems and the change in the government’s political strategy to cope with rural insurgencies;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relative political stability.</li> <li>• Economic conditions similar to the Fifth Plan period;</li> <li>• The country is faced with various economic and social problems.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business groups lobby the government led by the elected Prime Minister, General Chatchai Chunhawan (1988-91) to trade with former “socialist” countries;</li> <li>• Economic boom partly as a result of the devaluation of the Thai currency.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competition and conflicts over natural resources in lowland, highland and remote areas of every region; between small scale peasants, government officials and private entrepreneurs;</li> <li>• Conflicts result largely from the government conducting large scale infrastructure at the expense of local communities.</li> </ul>

Socio-economic and political conditions	Concept and character of Plan	Actors stimulating economic growth	Socio-political responses
<p><b>1990s</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ideological conflict between “capitalist” and “socialist” camps declines;</li> <li>• The former “socialist” countries transform their national planning to join in “capitalist” development;</li> <li>• Thai political situation enjoys open political system of parliamentary democracy, human rights advocacy and environmental protection.</li> <li>• The uneven development between economic, social and environment is increasing.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Seventh Plan 1992-1996</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotes Thailand as one of the region’s commercial and financial centres;</li> <li>• Develops infrastructural services to stimulate economic growth;</li> <li>• Recognises income and regional disparities and natural resource destruction;</li> <li>• Proposes “pulluter-pays principle (PPP)”;</li> <li>• Encourages people’s organisations and NGOs to formulate resource management projects.</li> </ul> <p><u>Eighth Plan 1997-2001</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlights “sustainable development” concept;</li> <li>• Promotes economic growth in regional areas as the first priority;</li> <li>• Emphasises human-centred development as the main target of national development;</li> <li>• Focuses on administration, management, and decentralisation of planning to allow greater popular participation.</li> </ul>	<p>As for the former plans.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widespread “money politics” and other forms of corruption;</li> <li>• Military coup in February 1991;</li> <li>• Pro-democracy movement organised by the urban middle classes against the military return to power in May 1992;</li> <li>• Rural resistance against the government’s construction of large-scale infrastructure;</li> <li>• The call for political reform to reduce corruption and “money politics” and military return to power;</li> <li>• Call for political decentralisation.</li> </ul>

Note: Partly adapted from “Development Guidelines of the Eighth National Economic and Social development Plan”, NESDB, Bangkok.

### Appendix III

#### Examples of Thai NGO Establishment Showing their Growth in Relation to Socio-economic and Political Changes

Socio-economic and political changes	Thai NGOs established	NGO activities
The Absolute Monarchy under King Rama V (1873-1910)	1890 An orphanage founded by Princess Suddhasininat 1893 Sapha Unalomdeang (The Thai Red Cross Society) founded by H.M. the Queen Sriphatcharintra	Caring for orphans Helping injured soldiers
The political change from Absolute Monarchy to Constitutional Monarchy in 1932	1932 YMCA 1932 Siam Women's Club 1943 Women's Cultural Club 1947 Women Lawyer's Association 1948 Siamese Association of University Women 1956 National Council of Women in Thailand 1958 Girl Guide Association	Charitable works and professional groups especially women
The political condition becomes difficult under the Sarit military regime (1958-1963); In the early 1960s, the economic system is changed from "economic nationalism" to free-market economy; It was not a climate for development of the Thai NGOs other than charitable organisations;	1958 The Catholic Council of Thailand for Development (registered in 1973) 1960 National Council of Social Welfare of Thailand under the patronage of H.M. the King	
However, attempts for social reform are initiated by some Thai intellectuals to distribute wealth into rural areas and to promote social aspect in development	1966 Graduate Volunteer Project of Thammasat University (founded by Dr Puey Ungphakorn, a UK trained economist) 1968 The Thai Rural Reconstruction Movement (TRRM) - (A national affiliate of the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction - Philippines) 1971 Komol Kimthong Foundation (aided by Sulak Sivaraksa, a UK trained lawyer and Thai social critic) 1973 The Catholic Council of Thailand for Development (registered)	Community development and studying rural issues Youth and community development Community development

Socio-economic and political changes	Thai NGOs established	NGO activities
The 1973 Uprising	1973 Union for Civil Liberties (UCL). It was banned in 1976 but registered in 1983.	Beginning to have political thrust mixed with socio-economic activities
Competition and conflicts over resources are revealed in the mid-1970s by student and popular movements	1974 Cooperative Village Development Project, Mae Taman, Mae Taeng, Chiang Mai 1974 Mae Klong Rural Development Project 1974 Foundation for Education and Development of rural areas (FEDRA) 1975 Chiang Mai Diocesan Social Action Centre (CM-DISAC) 1975 Integrated Rural Development Project, Samoeng, Chiang Mai 1975 Drug Study Group	Community development focussing on socio-economic activities  Health campaign for the poor
1976 Coup d'état	1976 Coordinating Group of Religions for Society (CGRS) 1977 Justice and Peace Commission on Development (J&P) 1977 Asian Cultural Forum for Development (ACFOD) 1978 Duang Prathip Foundation 1978 Kvae Rabom-Siyat Rural Development Project using an integrated development model inspired by the TRRM 1979 The Appropriate Technology Association (ATA)	Politically oriented through religions  Networking  Urban slum dwellers  Community development  Small-hydropower plant for generating electricity, rice mill and electric oven
The political normalisation of the 1980s	1980 The Thai Volunteer Service (TVS) 1980 SVITA Foundation 1980 Thai Inter-Religions Commission for Development 1980 Thai NGO Committee on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) 1980 Traditional Medicine in Self-Caring Project	Training of community development workers  Services and technical advice for small self-sustaining business  Training and seminars for development leaders  Training community leaders, rice banks, savings activities  Traditional health care

Socio-economic and political changes	Thai NGOs established	NGO activities
The expansion of business investment into every region stimulating the increase of competition and conflicts over resource use and allocation	1982 Advance Media for Education and Development (AMED)	Providing visual aid for development education
	1982 Alternative Development Studies Programme (ADSP)	Exchanging ideas and experience to construct “alternative development” strategies
	1982 Thai Development Supporting Committee (TDSC)	Networking at the national level
	1982 Northern Development Workers’ Association (NDWA)	Networking at the regional level
	1982 Nong Kha Yang Foundation for Rural Development (NKYFRD)	Youth training, rice bank and buffalo bank, etc
	1983 Arom Pongpha-ngan Foundation	Development education for wage workers
	1983 Coordinating Committee of Thai NGOs for Primary Health	Primary health care
	1983 Rural Reconstruction Alumni and Friends Association (RRAFA)	Research, seminars and training
	1985 Community Action and Research for Development (CARD)	Studying development and trends in social relations of production at the village level
	1985 Foundation for Women	Women’s refuge rehabilitation
	1985 Joint Fellowship on Rural Development (JFORD)	Community development
	1985 Local Development Assistance Programme (LDAP)	Supporting small-scale NGOs
	1985 The NGO Coordinating Committee on Rural Development (NGO-CORD)	Networking for the NGOs working in rural areas
	1986 Project for Ecological Recovery (PER)	Environmental campaign
1986 Rural Development Documentation Centre (RUDOC)	Disseminate information on rural development	

<b>Socio-economic and political changes</b>	<b>Thai NGOs established</b>	<b>NGO activities</b>
	1988 NorthNet (set up by seven grass-roots NGOs in Chiang Mai) 1990 Local Development Institute (LDI)	Community development “Community Forest” project, supporting small-scale rural development and environment activities.

## Appendix IV

### List of the Thai Governments Since 1932

Manopakorn, Phraya	June 1932-June 1933
Phahon, Phraya, Colonel	June 1933-December 1938
Phibun Songkhram, Colonel	December 1938-July 1944
Khuang Aphaiwong, Major	August 1944-August 1945
Tawee Boonyaket, Mr	August 1945-September 1945
Seni Pramroj, M.R.	September 1945-January 1946
Khuang Aphaiwong, Major	January 1946-March 1946
Pridi Phanomyong, Dr (Pradit Manutham, Luang)	March 1946-August 1946
Thawan Thamrongnawasawat, Luang, Rear-Admiral	August 1946-November 1947
Khuang Aphaiwong, Major	November 1947-April 1948
Phibun Songkhram, Field Marshal	April 1948-September 1957
Pot Sarasin, Mr	September 1957-December 1957
Thanom Kittikhachorn, Lieutenant-General	January 1958- October 1958
Sarit Thanarat, Field Marshal	October 1958-December 1963
Thanom Kittikhachorn, Field Marshal	December 1963-October 1973
Sanya Thammasak, Mr	October 1973-January 1975
Seni Pramroj, M.R.	February 1975-March 1975
Kukrit Pramroj, M.R.	March 1975-April 1976
Seni Pramroj, M.R.	April 1976-October 1976
Thanin Kraivixien, Dr	October 1976-October 1977
Kriangsak Chamanan, General	November 1977-February 1980
Prem Tinsulanon, General	March 1980-April 1988
Chatchai Chunhawan, Major-General	April 1988-February 1991
Anand Panyarachun, Mr	February 1991-April 1992
Suchinda Khraprayun, General	April 1992-May 1992
Anand Panyarachun, Mr	June 1992-September 1992
Chuan Leekpai, Mr	September 1992-July 1995
Banhan Silapa-archa, Mr	July 1995-November 1996
Chavalit Yongchaiyuth, General	November 1996-

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