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The Tasks of NGOs in Rural Development in Northeastern Thailand: the Debate on the Formation of Civil Society

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1 Introduction: the debate on the formation of civil society

In this paper, using a case study of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working for the development of Northeastern Thailand, the author will discuss their expected roles and future tasks in helping form a civil society in the region⁽¹⁾. The first subject of this chapter is the background and circumstances in which the discussion of building a civil society in modern Thailand has surfaced [Kitahara 1999]⁽²⁾.

⁽¹⁾ The sociological definition of “civil society” is the arena of associational activities that are positioned between the state and the people. The people, by voluntary association, perform private and commercial activities as well as public activities, thus becoming directly involved in the formation and maintenance of society. Through associational activities, pluralistic political values are crystallized into parliamentary democracy, and by distinguishing this political system from the authoritarian state, national socialism, and mass society in which the people are trivialized by consumerism, the civil society has a substantial content.

⁽²⁾ The theme of the 7th International Thailand Seminar in 1999 was “Is Thai Society a Civil Society?” Thai researchers and foreign researchers analyzed realities of Thai society and discussed the gap between their own view of a civil society and

Since the currency crisis in the summer of 1997, Thailand's top national issue has been economic reconstruction and political reform. In the media Thai intellectuals have criticized corrupt politics, and the moral ambiguity of economic bureaucrats, which caused the consequent national crisis. They have also called for a democratic society based on new political values, which include traditional Thai culture, Buddhism and the New Theory from the king. The goal is to carry out more liberal social reform, cooperating with an urban middle class, that is to say, a "civil society" [Thirayut 1998]⁽³⁾. However, the Chuan administration, having resolutely implemented an austere fiscal policy and financial system reform under the supervision of the IMF, is indifferent to the demonstrative movement of the Poor Forum, demanding crop price stabilization and debt extension for farmers. Meanwhile, conservative politicians have secured a political foothold among dissatisfied farmers in rural regions who had been given the mere status of safety net for urban unemployed workers. As the new constitution requires that members of Parliament hold a college degree, rural farmers and urban lower-class workers are excluded from parliamentary politics⁽⁴⁾.

the reality, and the resulting problems. However, except for direct protest movements against the government, few talked about the roles of rural residents and farming and working classes in civil society. A critical discussion by Atsushi Kitahara, on cooperative strategies of rural-urban areas envisioned by Thai village community and civil society advocates, is presented in detail.

⁽³⁾ The fourth estate in Thailand looks at specific political issues with extremely normative and ethical views, such as the bridging of the economic gap between central and rural regions, and the political and cultural decentralization of the centralized system. Thirayut's argument on participatory democracy by which opinions from all social groups are absorbed is also idealistic. He seems to underestimate the power of the Thai government and political and economic ruling classes.

⁽⁴⁾ The 1990 school attendance rate shows preschool 10.7%, elementary school gradu

Regarding the history of Thai social development, farmers and laborers have been considered as subjects needing enlightenment on democracy. When only one fifth of the entire national population--urban residents, central government bureaucrats, business people and college students--takes an active part in civil society, it is similar to flying with one engine working. In the general election in January, 2001, the Thai Rak Thai party, led by Thaksin Shinawatra, secured 248 seats, defeating the ruling Democratic Party. Did it simply reflect the dissatisfaction of the people towards the last three years of economic policies? Or did people in rural regions merely jump on the campaign promises the new Prime Minister Thaksin had offered?⁽⁵⁾ An elite civil society tends to be overturned by a populist politician. This situation reflects a trend in opinion that has sought catalysts for building a civil society among intellectuals and emergent middle class in urban areas, and has regarded farmers in villages as merely being on the periphery [Anek 1997: 3–14]⁽⁶⁾.

As economies grew in Asian countries, the new middle class emerged in urban areas. They were observed to be assuming the responsibility of challenging development dictatorship states. A number of citizens took

ates 70.7%, junior and senior high graduates 13.6%, and college graduates 5%. The 1998 college graduate percentage was 12% (including national, private and open universities). Estimated from the National Statistical Office data on population census and school enrollment. <http://www.nso.go.th>

⁽⁵⁾ The campaign promises included a three-year moratorium on farm debt repayment, B1 million-per-village public works projects, and bad loan recovery by the National Property Management Agency. The budgetary allowance was part of political and financial reform. Bangkok Post, January 10, 2001.

⁽⁶⁾ According to Anek, civil-society advocates can be categorized into 1) those who aim to realize democratization through a new constitution, elections and political reform, 2) the communal culture advocate who values “Thai” and “village” and 3) the participatory democracy advocate. Anek himself is of the first group and supports measures by which an individual can mature as a citizen.

to the streets in protest for democracy in countries where military dictatorship were replaced by civil administrations. However, city dwellers with political objectives and actions, and those who can be sociologically categorized as the new middle class are not necessarily the same people. The latter is not yet recognized as a class that is “politically liberal” or “socially conscious.” [Funatsu2002: 27-29, 214-226] It is more of an operating concept of the white collar professional or social class based on income level. In fact, those who constantly protest against the government directly are the social classes who have missed out on the economic boom and whose livelihoods have been destroyed due to government development policy (farmers, laborers and minority ethnic groups), NGOs and students with social interests. The emergent middle class, market economy players and free competition advocates, sharply criticize the government for corruption and for the cozy relationship among politicians, bureaucrats and capitalists. Yet, they are not particularly sensitive about various inequalities existing in the society [Funatsu 2000: 93-101].

As a result of the globalization of capitalism, the new middle class was born and Asian nations are moving towards creating a more democratic civil society. Although those social changes are definite and genuine, the transition from the birth of the new middle class to the formation of civil society to democratization does not occur continuously [Pasuk 2000: 20-27]⁽⁷⁾. To truly understand the formation process of a

⁽⁷⁾ Pasuk has reservations about the recent argument that globalization has reduced the role of the state. She points out that the cozy relationship between business and politics grew and state power remains strong, as is evident in the example of the crackdown on an anti-dam construction movement. The mass media and NGOs will showcase protest movements from lower social groups. Even ethnic minority groups can be citizens of the Thai nation-state through the movement for

civil society, we need to focus more on the social activities of individuals or organizations instead of looking in from outside Asia with a macro point of view.

For the subject of analysis, the author has chosen non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in northeastern Thailand⁽⁸⁾. NPOs rapidly grew between 1960 and 1980 in advanced countries in the West. Receiving their assistance, a great number of NPOs emerged in developing countries from around the mid-1970s, as well as in eastern Europe after the collapse of the Cold-War regimes [Harry 1997: 32-42]⁽⁹⁾. Governments and development assistance agencies have franchised part of the welfare policy and social development projects respectively to NPOs [Salamon 1994: 109-115]⁽¹⁰⁾. In Thailand, NPOs

building a civil society in their regions. A fascinating argument.

⁽⁸⁾ NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and NPOs (nonprofit organizations) are considered virtually the same in this paper. The author follows the name in the source. The definition of NGO and NPO is different in each state. A private organization with public objectives, which is not incorporated in the political system, is defined as an NGO.

⁽⁹⁾ The expectation that NGOs will help create a civil society was not simply a wish among intellectuals. It was institutionalized by the strategic US aid to developing nations. After WWII the United States demanded the assisted nations realize American-style democracy and civil society. The US has urged both from the establishment and the groups within the nations. Under the Cold-War structure, the stability of the assisted nation was deemed a geopolitical priority. U.S. supported NGOs in an attempt to build a civil society from within while also supporting authoritarian development. Currently, the US directly intervenes on a conditional basis. Under those circumstances, the authoritarian development establishment became flexible and decided to acknowledge the presence of NGOs.

⁽¹⁰⁾ According to Salamon, the era of the nation-state that had begun in the late 19th century finished its role by the 1970s because of the exhausted finance of welfare state policies and failures of socialist states. The subsequent theory of the market competition in globalization turned out to be ineffective for social services.

have been valued as boosters of grass-root culture, spokespersons for the people's interests and presenters of alternative policies, as well as a third sector to apply the brakes on state-led or business-oriented development policies [Amara 1995: 261-267]⁽¹¹⁾.

Currently, NGO activists in developing countries are well aware of the vital contribution of NGOs to building a civil society. This is because NGOs are defined as groups of people who urge local residents to participate in the developing process (training of self-governing) and who can legally challenge development policies (demanding the accountability of the administration) [Anuchat 1997: 1-23]. The question is how much of those expectations can NGOs live up to and how many of the expected roles can they play? It is important to fully understand the limits of activities and the roles that the state will allow NGOs to fulfill. It is also important to acknowledge the fact that their activities are easily affected by the relationship between NGO and fund-raising donors (administration, assistance agencies, international NGOs), and the orientation of NGO members and NGO-supporting members [Iwasaki 1998: 27-30]⁽¹²⁾. If we lack this view and overrate NGO's organizational skills and functions, we will quite possibly misjudge practical issues and goals. The objective of this paper is to examine the angle from which we study development NGOs in Thailand, and where practical tasks lie. At the same time, it is also necessary to discuss why the author decided to choose to examine

Currently, an "association revolution" is said to be taking place.

⁽¹¹⁾ Thai NPOs can be divided according to the jurisdiction of public agencies into foundations, associations, business enterprise groups, funeral mutual-aid associations and labor unions. The funeral mutual-aid association is the largest in number [Amara 1997: 47, 79].

⁽¹²⁾ NGO activity and the civil-society arena are regulated by the strength and weakness of the government, political and financial capacities and power structure. And they are all uniquely different.

development NGOs and not those demanding policy changes to the administration by staging demonstrations.

In developing countries, “development” means only policy and a social and political practice. According to some textbooks on the theory of development, the idea and method of development in developing countries have changed from economic to social to human [Nishikawa 1997: 1]⁽¹³⁾. That actually reflects the transition in development assistance policy of advanced nations⁽¹⁴⁾. In advanced capitalist countries, economic development plays a major role in terms of developmental concept. In developing countries, their priorities are state-led human development and social developments. Only in recent years, economic development in developing countries has begun to be undertaken. The reason is that after gaining independence through nationalist struggles against colonialism, it was necessary to first integrate a plural number of ethnic and often conflicting groups into one national culture. Furthermore, it was necessary to form state-made nationalism.

Dictatorial governments in Asia, which had emerged as crisis management systems against the backdrop of the Cold War, created pater-

⁽¹³⁾ In the First Period (1960–80), economic development included the development of social capital and infrastructure. The gap between urban areas and rural villages, and lower and upper classes widened. The environment was destroyed. In the Second Period (1980–90), the satisfaction of basic human needs was emphasized. Their aim was to implement the participatory and environmentally friendly or sustainable development. In the Third Period, after 1990, diverse goals were set, including education, health care, the emphasis on local-level economy, resident participation in development projects, affiliations between NGOs and development agencies, mutual oversight, respect for human rights (against gender or racial discrimination), development education and international understanding.

⁽¹⁴⁾ OECF “Social Development Special: What is Social Development?” ‘Newsletter vol. 63’ June, 1998.

nalistic and authoritarian state systems, making state and social development national policy. However, with the collapse of Cold War regimes, it became increasingly difficult to maintain national development with all-out mobilization (anti-Communist modernization). Governments eventually accepted the demands of social forces such as capitalists and civil groups along with those of the military and bureaucracy. Thus, the content of development policy had changed to economic development, i.e. industrialization, and an expansion of democratic government [Suehiro 1994: 228]. To answer at what point and under what circumstances did the content of development policy change, we need to examine those nations individually. In that respect, a development principle with no reference to the history of social policy is merely an ideal interpretation applied to individual case examples [Kamo 1998]. That would mean overlooking political implications in development practice. The same can be said of regional development by development NGOs. Whether it is education on development through mobilization of residents, the organization of resident groups, or implementation of projects, all include a political vision. In this paper, the author, after defining the position of NGOs in the history of Thai social development, will attempt to describe the development principles of various NGO's and Thailand's dominant development principles.

2 History of Social Development in Thailand

For the word “development,” the Thai word “phattana” meaning social progress or advancement is used. However, since its definition changes depending on the political or cultural context, it is difficult to exactly say what phattana is. Considering the historical fact that only social reforms and cultural innovations have been officially and politi-

cally acknowledged as phattana, this word is merely a discourse in Thailand [Grillo 1997: 11-27]⁽¹⁵⁾. In this section, we will examine what political practices have been regarded as phattana, as well as the history of social development in Thailand, especially in the Northeast, while paying attention to the relationship between development subjects and objects.

Phattana was painted as a development-oriented ideology by Prime Minister General Sarit Thanarat, who deposed then Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram in 1957 by staging a coup d'etat. He would draw up and implement the economic and social development policy from 1961. That was when the word phattana was explicitly used as a political slogan for development. Sarit, by centralizing the power to the prime minister and by abolishing the constitution and parliament, carried out a revolution (patriwat) with a paternal government based on the nation-state, Buddhism and monarchy. His clean and organized (riaproi) political concept was applied extensively, not only to public hygiene but also to policing corruption and crimes, and excluding malcontents. Under this paternalistic leader, "Father Phoo Sarit," the people were urged to contribute to national development with one heart (Saamakkhitham) [Thak 1989].

Sarit even created Thailand's distinct development subjects. After the Constitutional Revolution of 1932, Sarit aggressively utilized the king

⁽¹⁵⁾ The idea of discussing development in terms of discourse came from a view from Third World countries. In their views, universal modernization means Westernization, and industrialization equals marginalization of local by global capitalism. They criticize those terms as reflecting Orientalism and Colonialism. In the Third World, development is a practice that needs cultural legitimization with the goal of achieving political hegemony. Economic development is one of many development discourses and merely a possible developmental result.

and royal family, who had been distant from politics, by urging them to attend national events and make progress inspections in various regions. He created the model of development projects currently patronized by royal family members [Sume 1993: 3-16]⁽¹⁶⁾. At the same time, as part of the cultural and political integration, Sarit had sangha (the national order of Theravada Buddhist monks) engage in missionary work targeting northern hill tribes and other ethnic minorities near the Burma-Laos borders as well as in the Northeast [Somboon 1977: 46-108]. Being a Northeast native, Sarit was very active in developing the region because he feared that after Pathet Lao (a socialist group) had strengthened their power around 1960 in the civil war in Laos, they might affect the public order in the Northeast where Laotians lived. He managed to draw large amounts of military and development aid funds from the United States, who had been looking for an anti-Communist stronghold, in exchange for allowing US air and naval bases in Thailand. Sarit also repressed the Communist Party of Thailand which had a central base in the Northeast region while taking a conciliatory measure of development to the locals.

The Northeast region is locally called Isan, meaning northeastern in Sanskrit. The name derives from the administrative district Monthom (Monthom Isan) established after the Chakri Reform at the end of the 19th century. As the district was called monthom Lao Khao previously, there was a Lao lord state in every Northeastern town (muang) in Thailand. However, after the Thai territory was turned into administrative districts and the Thai state had deprived the lords of the rights of compulsory

⁽¹⁶⁾ Though the details of royal projects are not clear, judging from the government expenditure for the Royal Agency and their property and project revenues, royal patronage projects have been implemented with the budget scale of several hundred million baht. The Royalty's benevolence has been extended to the people on a broad scale.

labor and taxation, they were under the direct rule of the Thai chakri dynasty [Hashimoto 1996: 29-31]. Even in modern times the Isan folk maintain languages and customs of their own. It is said that in 1964 local Lao speakers understood little of the preaching in Thai by a Buddhist monk who was dispatched on the thammathat (a Buddhist missionary) program. Most local residents practice rain-fed rice cultivation and cash crop upland cultivation. Unlike the middle Thai region where land-owners control development, the Northeast has many independent farmers. Thus, if farmland became scarce, households would migrate in search of uncultivated land. Then they would log the forests (owned exclusively) and settle in developed villages. Around 1960 the frontier land fit for rice cultivation vanished, yet most farmers were still able to maintain subsistence farming. Poverty was not as serious a problem in the Northeast as it is now.

In the 1960s the administration of Northeastern development was mostly concerned with the Communist Party. The policy goals of the Regional Social Development Bureau were made by the Ministry of Interior bureaucrats, and their main contribution was spreading slogans urging locals to develop further and have state loyalties [Apichai 1996, Hashimoto 1984]⁽¹⁷⁾. In 1965 the National Order Maintenance Headquarters was set up to deal with neighboring Communist states and insurgents in Thailand, while they decided to use the Ministry of Defense budget for

⁽¹⁷⁾ The goals were to 1) strengthen the tie between villages and village communes (Tambon, the administrative unit between Village and District) and educate residents about self-esteem and social obligations, 2) help increase their income by farming and home industry, 3) assist in terms of living environment, local environment, and maintenance of livelihood, 4) educate them on the democratic and self-governing system, and 5) convince villagers that the state is the central system and encourage them to keep local traditions and customs.

developing remote regions. The goal of the self-support village plan implemented by the Welfare Bureau of the Ministry of Interior was also to maintain order. Currently, there are 5.7 million villagers at 57 sites in 38 provinces. Furthermore, model farms and agricultural cooperatives were established to develop and sell land to peasants, and handle agricultural production, processing, and sales. Rural Development Acceleration Office was set up in six Northeastern provinces in 1966, and the number increased to 52 provinces between 1977 and 1979. Since then, the focus has been on the construction of arterial highways connecting military bases. The rapid pace of regional integration and anti-Communist policy conversely heightened the dissatisfaction of local residents. That is because a large disparity was born between developed villages and other surrounding villages, creating numerous problems, such as lack of compensation for land expropriation and the infiltration of the commodity economy due to the highway network. It was beyond the farm villagers' economic capacities, and caused increasing numbers of indebted peasants.

In implementing economic and social development programs in the 1970s, the importance of developing rural villages was particularly emphasized. In 1975 the Kukrit Pramoj administration spent B2.5 billion on the projects of rural development and new employment creation during the agricultural off-season. They spent B3.5 billion on the Tambon Project in 1976 and B1.6 billion on the Natural Disaster Area Economic Reconstruction Project in 1978. Those programs were designed to allocate budget by district, implemented annually, and develop social infrastructure using the local work force. In 1980 the administration carried out the Rural District Employment Job Creation Project investing B3.5 billion. The reason for these infrastructure and other public works projects was the drought and subsequent fact that farmers began to move into cities in search of work. The rapid-fire pace of those development

programs helped other Thais become aware of how impoverished the Northeast region was. Since then, the region has been the main target area for the Rural Impoverished District Development Project. However, the effects of the series of public development programs were extremely limited.

The chief reason is the nature of Thailand's administrative system. Remote regions are supposed to be ruled by the central government. Interior Ministry bureaucrats are dispatched as province governors or district heads. Administrative offices of provinces and districts are outreach offices of central government ministries and agencies. The development budget for regional administrations is poor and development plans made by the central government are all separately implemented by ministry and agency [Yoshida 1984: 23-27]. Elite bureaucrats who are only indirectly informed of the reality of rural villages send down programs designed to benefit the ministries, while dispatched bureaucrats who are fully aware of the reality maintain ties with central bureaucrats. Self-governing is allowed only on a tambon district village basis. Even the tambon parliament, which receives the rural development tax from the province, is believed to decide its prioritized budget allocation at the discretion of the Amphuu District Head. The relationship between Amphuu District Head, a dispatched bureaucrat, and tambon Head and Village Head, rural regional leaders, tends to be that of patron and client. In other words, Thailand's regional administrations overpower self-governing territories, and thus, rural villages and farmers totally lack autonomous rights and budgetary measures [Kojima 1984: 37-42]. The Rural Agricultural Cooperative that represents their interests is often organized by the administration. The organization rate of 1980 did not even reach 20% [Yamao 1992: 65-69].

3 History of Thai NGOs

Next, we examine the practices of development NGOs that had tried to carry out rural development using methods and concepts different from those of the government. The first development NGO in Thailand was the Thai Rural Reconstruction Project founded in 1969 by Dr. Puey Ungphakorn who had held the post of Thammasat University President. This organization, with the philosophy of life, education, health, self-rule and nonviolence, aimed to improve the economic level of rural villages as part of human development. The main activity was and remains the rural development camp by students⁽¹⁸⁾.

In 1976 foreign NGOs whose main activity were to aid Cambodian refugees near the Thailand-Cambodian border, began to support impoverished peasants in Thailand. The foreign NGOs founded their subsidiary NGOs in Thailand or assisted Thai NGOs for funds. The Thai government became democratic in 1973 when the antiestablishment challenge by students and some left-wing intellectuals proved to be effective. However, they failed to gain sufficient support from the rural and working middle classes, creating an opening for military intervention. From 1976, a number of students and activists went underground, that is to say, fled

⁽¹⁸⁾ He founded the Thammasat University Graduate Volunteer Center in 1970. The center has accepted college graduates interested in development for one year. It offers lectures on developmental organizations and technologies, conducts on-site training, and provides various NGO groups with human resources. In 1974 the center planned the Meklong Integrated Rural Development. Social and educational projects were implemented by Mahidol University (medicine and public sanitation), Kasetsart University (agriculture) and Thammasat University (self-governing by residents) while they were performing action research on rural development. Bangkok Post Outlook, Feb. 10, 1998.

into the forests and hills.

After forcing the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) to fragment by the late 1970s, the government offered an appeasement policy of amnesty to former student activists. Many of the student activists who “came out” decided to work for newly-established rural development NGOs. About the same time the Kriangsak administration began to acknowledge the role of NGO, providing financial aid to the Duan Prateep Foundation, which would receive the Magsaysay Award for the social development project in the Khlong Toey slum. There were two reasons for this. First, since Thailand’s national power grew, overpowering neighboring nations, they were not as wary of the Communist threat as previously and hence were more tolerant of the presence of NGOs. At the same time it is also true that the Thai government found it difficult to take a high-handed attitude towards foreign NGOs. The second reason is that, from the mid 1970s to the 1980s, Thailand’s national goal was to be promoted to the status of Asian NICs (Newly Industrialized Nations) from the status of semi-industrial nation, in other words, an industrialized exporting nation with access to foreign capital.

Although development plans were carried out by individual development administrative agencies in Northeastern villages, as if to demonstrate their significance, the importance of policy was low. As a result, the government officially allowed NGOs to participate in rural development, incorporating their roles into The 6th Economical and Social Development Project of 1987-1991⁽¹⁹⁾. However, from the mid-1980s NGOs strengthened their political hand regarding environmental issues

⁽¹⁹⁾ According to Apichai, there were 50 development NGOs in the mid-1980s, and currently some 350 development NGOs. Small-scale NGOs are not included. In 1984, as a coordinating organ in establishing rural development funds, they organized the NGO Coordinating Committee on Rural Development (NGO-CORD).

and residents' rights protection, and harshly criticized government policies.

In the 1980s the disintegration of the peasantry in the Northeast worsened due to the loss of uncultivated land. The number of landless peasants went up, debts from the mismanagement of cash crop cultivation snowballed, migration of those in search of odd jobs in urban areas began, and deforestation and land reclamation increased. As a result, the sudden decrease of forests led to changes in the ecosystem and caused soil erosion. In 1986 and 1987 Northeastern Thailand was hit by droughts and the King consulted General Chaovalit Yongchaiyut. B40-50 billion was spent on the Northeast Afforestation Project, which was implemented from 1987 to 1991. Simultaneously, research on the cause of water shortage, dam construction, and protection of the forests were discussed, but the discussion revolved mainly around technical matters, making light of social factors. The military, who had lost its role of cracking down on the dissidents in Thailand, surfaced once again in the name of environmental conservation.

In fact, the forest coverage in the Northeast plummeted from 40% (nationally 53.3%) in 1961 to 14.4% (29%) in 1985, and in 1989 domestic logging was prohibited in principle. The Forestry Commission increased the number of designated reserved forests from 1964, banning exclusive ownership within a designated area. In the 1980s the area of reserved forests exceeded the actual forest area. This means that the disparity between the two figures represents land illegally occupied by residents. Traditionally, farmers would claim the exclusive right to own the land by logging the forest and convert it into farmland, but the government policy of legal land registration came belatedly. Thus, the Forestry Commission decided to deem unregistered land "nationally-owned land" for lack of established private ownership, and designated part of the reserved

forest area, which was not actually forest but farmland, as “degraded reserved forest.” Then, they commissioned private firms to plant eucalyptus trees there, giving them the logging rights, and took measures to evict illegally occupying residents. In 1991, under a plan called “Land Reallocation Project,” the military evicted the poor living in the Degraded Reserved Forests [Tasaka 1992].

In the Northeastern region the confrontation and conflict between settling farmers and the Forestry Commission, business dealers or the military increasingly intensified from the mid-1980s. NGOs have supported such movements or struggles as anti-eucalyptus planting, anti-dam construction, and anti-pollution. NGOs awakened farmers’ consciousness about their own rights and solidified their function of watching government policies. Consequently, organizations of local residents and farmers’ movements, which would stage demonstrations in the area of conflicts or in the capital city of Bangkok, have emerged in the 1990s [Funatsu 1997: 237-243, Shigetomi 2001: 164-173].

In February, 1991, the National Order Maintenance group staged a bloodless coup d’etat because of the corruption associated with the Chatichai administration. The next year, general elections were held and Army General in Command Suchinda became the Prime Minister. However, after protests by opposition parties, students, and intellectuals, he resigned taking responsibility for the large number of injured and dead as the result of the crackdown on citizens’ demonstrations. General elections were held in 1992 under the supervision of the Election Oversight Commission organized by the Anand administration. That was when NGOs played a major role [Suthy 1995: 97-134]⁽²⁰⁾. Finally NGOs were

⁽²⁰⁾ 33 representatives were elected from NGOs. Under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior, 30,000 volunteers were mobilized to oversee the national elections. In 1991, the Campaign for Popular Democracy was organized by a

able to make proposals or oversee regional development projects and policies without state oppression [Kawamori 1998: 139-164]⁽²¹⁾. However, from the time the political opportunity structure was opened and the economy expanded, NGOs were faced with new tasks and issues and restructuring their activities such as financial independence.

The above is the outline of how both the administration and NGOs are involved in the Northeast development in Thailand. It is difficult to directly compare individual effects of development. NGOs can assist the area where infrastructure development by the government is lacking. On the other hand, NGOs can also intervene in a large-scale development projects that can affect the ecosystem or livelihood. For each project, the definition of “phattana (development)” can be different. The method of participation-oriented development by local residents is also different, whether it is in line with the administration or local cooperative organization. Yet, those attempts to assist local residents to develop their own village by bringing in outside knowledge, technology and funds have a common thread, whether it is from the paternal government or grass-roots level, such as NGOs.

This paper mainly deals with development NGOs from the perspective of building a civil society, not from the standpoint of development results. Therefore, one needs to evaluate NGO-based development very carefully in order to understand how deeply development projects are

coalition of NGOs, student activists, labor union activists, and other professionals including the media. In 1992 the coalition was reorganized into the Forum for Democracy, launching political PR activities with the Election Oversight Commission.

⁽²¹⁾ Kawamori's observation is suggestive of the limited role of the new middle class in democratization and the division of class in actual civil-society and anti-government movements.

involved in the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the region.

4 Activities of Northeast Thailand Development NGOs

(1) Northeast Thailand Development NGOs Today

In the 1996 Northeast Thailand NGO Conference, activities of the last ten years were summarized. Since trends of those NGOs are similar to those discussed in the previous section, the discussion in this section will be limited to activity categories and general characteristics of Northeast Thailand NGOs. There were nine activity categories of participating NGOs: 1 the Northeast Thailand Agricultural Network Committee (7 groups), 2 Resources and the Environment (11), 3 Residents Groups (4), 4 Women's Clothing & Crafts (11), 5 Rural Industry (1), 6 Human Rights (5), 7 Slums (7), 8 Child Issue (8), and 9 AIDS (6).

Organizing residents by NGOs, and establishing the mobilization forum and network became very active in the 1990s. In 1991 residents from 17 provinces organized the Forest Forum after they were ordered to leave degraded forests. They protested market price drops of cash crops such as cassava. In 1995 the Northeast Thailand Small Farm Forum (membership: 16,000 families) that could stage 3,000 or 4,000-people demonstrations was organized in 1995. The Northeast Thailand Agricultural Cooperative and Resident Development Organization Union were founded in 1994 and 1995, respectively. In the agricultural NGO category, there were 3.4 groups per province on average (researched in 7 provinces). Each group covered 600 households. In the category of Women's NGOs, 9.9 villages per group were examined (24 groups were researched) each of whom covered 124 members on average [khanakamakaan 1997: 32-37, 69-86, 104-105, 189-191].

Next, let us look at the Foster Parent (hereafter FP) Northeast

Thailand branch office in Borabu, Maha Sarakham Province, and their orthodox development methods. The author had an opportunity to research this foreign subsidiary-type NGO and their activities in 1995. The FP is an NGO with a long history, whose activity began in 1983. With abundant funds from donors, FP supplies an annual B2,500 (approx. 10,000 yen)-scholarship fund to 1,859 children, a B6,500 rural development fund to each of 9 tambon districts, and a one-time B500 medical subsidy to the poor within their charge. In addition, FP manages slaughterhouses for the Borabu market, Buffalo Banks, and credit unions. It also supports various industries such as textile, combined agriculture, live-stock husbandry, and sericulture, along with cooperative stores in villages. The five-member staff is stationed at the office, and there are some helpers in each district. The annual budget including labor costs is estimated to reach at least B6 million. In spite of the large scale of those development projects, it is rare to find an entrepreneur in the village or a farmer who can manage one operation without the FP's assistance.

There are some problems to be addressed concerning NGO's roles in regional development. The first problem is the rigid and stereotyped development plan mapped out by the FP administration. They would terminate the project if there were no successful results within the first five years. In one case, a newly-constructed textile factory was converted to a meeting place and some farmers began seasonal migration for work. While their goal is to implement participatory development and utilize the villagers' potential, those villagers are only mobilized to study workshops about problems of the village by being paid labor attendant fees. The second problem is they are completely financially dependent on their donors. Thus, the FP branch has not even tried to become independent. The director pointed out their small budget as an obstacle for development. But there must be a difference in the sense of urgency

between the professional worker who earns a salary beyond that of a civil servant, and the village farmer whose livelihood depends on the development project. Despite those problems, as long as donors keep supplying funds, at least a certain number of workers and farmers will be employed and development can continue.

Currently, a number of Thai NGOs are faced with a serious financial crisis. Since many of them are subsidiary-types under foreign NGOs with ample funds, they were able to hire full-time workers. However, once Thailand's economy surpassed the scale of a developing nation, the donors terminated financial support, causing many NGOs to have financial difficulties [Srisawang 1995: 39, Jaturong 1995: 155-156]. While the NGO network can expand regardless of national boundaries, NGOs can be restricted by one nation's economic growth. Ironically, NGOs are forced to prove the sustainable development that they have been advocating. In short, they must now be supported by volunteer activities such as fundraising events in Thailand. The Thai NGOs are being tested to see whether, as a citizen's voluntary organizations, they can play the role of helping build a civil society. It is said that urban residents, assumed to be the new middle class, were the strong power behind the democratization of 1992 when they reacted swiftly to political and economic problems. Yet, one must wonder how much they care about rural farmers living in the hinterlands. The immediate task of rural development NGOs is to awaken the interest of middle class urban dwellers and to persuade them to support NGO activities. The author questions if current development NGO have been successful directly or indirectly in mobilizing many citizens to the improvement of society.

Now let us look at NGO case examples that aim at the independence of the object of development and developing organizations. NGOs need to maintain their finance with government subsidies, corporate or private

donations, membership fees, and project earnings, to adjust to donors' diversified goals, and to implement activities in line with their group philosophy. Now, under the condition of reduced budget scale, the most effective development method is to support self-help organizations of enterprise and livelihood for local residents. Let us examine the practices of the Panmai Group and Northeast Thailand Development Association.

(2) Self-Help Organization for Women---Panmai (Regional Textile Development Group)

The author studied this group in 1996. Panmai means "spinning wheel of wild silk" and it is a regional textile weaving group founded by an NGO called Appropriate Technology Association (ATA)⁽²²⁾. In general, men, as the household head, take leadership in agricultural work such as wet rice or cash crop cultivation, livestock husbandry, and fish breeding. Wives and daughters are considered to be auxiliary workers. For this reason, development projects of those categories were suitable for increasing the household income, but did not directly link to the empowerment of women. However, since sericulture, silk reeling, dyeing and weaving are traditionally for women, we believed that assisting in those industries to allow women to make their decisions on the production method, technology, and sales in general.⁽²³⁾

⁽²²⁾ The ATA was organized by some teachers and students of the Engineering Department, Chulalongkorn University in 1978. It was incorporated in 1982. Its current activity consists of appropriate environment-minded technology development, education, promotion and special projects. The Local Weaving Development Project (LWDP) is one example. Statistical data is from the author's research and Local Weaving Development Project (ATA in Roi-et), Weaving for Alternatives, 1995.

⁽²³⁾ There are two aspects of the empowerment of women. One is to have an eco-

In 1985 they began their activity from Song Hong Village, Kaset Wisai, Roi-Et Province. The NGO workers' first job was to organize a group of women in a village and help them feel confident in their traditional role in the arts of sericulture, distaff, natural dyeing and weaving. After teaching the business know-how of textile production, NGO workers had them set short- and long-term group goals. Women were also encouraged to solve problems for themselves to establish their own identities and individuality⁽²⁴⁾. Next, they founded a business enterprise named the Panmai Group to let those women handle management and sales operation⁽²⁵⁾.

conomic means to live in the rural society and the other is to express themselves through their own work or activities. Since the educational background directly reflects the economic class in Thailand, there is little gender gap in academic background for the rich. By the same token, in the cities, the female rate is notably high in professional and managerial work. However, in rural villages where educational background merit is distributed scarcely for both men and women, women are undervalued as "non-working women", by gender bias, even though they are involved in farm production and house chores. Women's work was considered to be for their families and not for social purposes.

⁽²⁴⁾ "To develop village women's individual potential, you need to evaluate their activities frequently. NGOs need to learn from the villagers, and vice versa. Make the villagers "central players." Let them learn from actual work experience, and see how closely related social systems are between rural and national levels. For example, show them where village's textile industry is in terms of Thai capitalism and world markets, and ask them how they can expand. Encourage them to experience the village system. Tell them to ask questions if they see any problem (P.S., Panmai Office Head)." P. S. is a 39-year-old native of Ang Thong Province. She became a development NGO worker after participating in student movements at Srinakharinwirot University.

⁽²⁵⁾ The breakdown of the 1992 initial capital contribution is 1) B500,00 borrowing with a 7% interest from ATA, 2) B200,000 from ATA, 3) B400,000 from the Rural Development and Educational Promotion Projects, 4) B23,000 from the Farming Improvement and Rural Development Projects, 5) B38,000 from 300 Panmai

As for the management, the ATA initially handled marketing and financing. Panmai hopes to have a 50% capital ownership by its members, but it still receives support from other NGOs. The encouraging news is that the membership rose to 491 people from the provinces of Roi-Et, Surin and Si Saket in 1993, and the member capital ratio also increased to 31% in 1993 from 25% in 1991. In the meantime, investment from NGOs has tripled, and borrowings from the ATA has doubled, and the total capital reached B2,694,039. There are five sales outlets---three in Bangkok and one each in Kaset Wisai and Roi-Et. The annual profits fluctuated from B312,661 (sales: B1,466,277) in 1991, B544,694 (B2,699, 202) in 1992, to B146,075 (B3,145,140) in 1993. The loss in 1993 earnings was due to the employment of six workers for marketing. Other business projects include management of gas stations and uniform sewing factories⁽²⁶⁾. For the future, they are considering the fraternal insurance (15

Members, and 6) B50,000 from 500 housewives of eight village groups, totally B851,000. The headquarters---the Shareholders' Meeting (shareholders and Panmai members) and Representative Committee (shareholders and 7 Panmai members), and Advisors (NGO) and Workers---supervises production and housewives groups in each village.

As contractual conditions, the following were decided: 1) each member will invest from 1 share (B100) up to 10 shares. When selling products via Panmai, each member will pay a 2% fee; 2) the weaving group will guarantee a credit sale when a member supplies production materials, while the housewife group will be responsible for the textile purchase and the transport to the center; 3) the Panmai Group will sell product materials wholesale to the housewife group and buy textiles by price guaranty. The housewife group will pay an 8% fee to Panmai, and should they make a profit, they will return it to the investors; 4) development NGOs will provide the housewife group with lessons on marketing, management, and production technologies.

⁽²⁶⁾ Gas stations were supplied by Bagcak oil company through the NGO-Coordination Committee (NGO-CORD). 60% of stocks are owned by villagers, 30% by NGOs, and 10% by others. They are now making profits. Gas stations are convenient

to 70 of age, annual insurance B300, death: B50,000, damage: B100,000).

According to Panmai's own data of projects' influence on the 1992 household income on the village level, the average household textile proceeds were B6,425 (average annual household income B27,050) in 7 villages consisting of 6 to 10-year activity, B3,065 (B17,232) in 9 villages of 3 to 5-year activity, and B4,189 (B22,377) in 8 villages of 2 to 3-year activity. The lowest textile proceeds of the mid-term group is attributed to the fact that another NGO began their own activity at the halfway point, causing a conflict between Panmai and the NGO. However, since the average annual income of the first group exceeds that of Northeast Thai farmers (B21,898 in 1991), it is very significant that those women actually had a cash income and were specifically acknowledged within the family and region.

In the meetings of housewives, discussions were held in a lively and bustling atmosphere. "Initially, men in the village were surprised to see those women participating in various activities. They suspected that NGOs were manipulating their women and some even tried to harass us or became uncooperative. But now men have accepted those activities (an NGO worker)." "I'm pleased I don't have to go to the city for work. I can make money here in the village and be with my family (a Panmai member)." "It's fun to have an exchange with other women's groups. I feel more confident when I talk about our activity (a Panmai member)."

In rural villages of Northeast Thailand, parents keep their daughters nearby so that they can hand out farmland to the daughters to get married. Thus, women's range of activity is extremely limited unless they migrate to Bangkok to work. "Due to the low level of education,

for transporting products to Panmai sales bases. The sewing factory subcontracts the sewing of workers' uniforms for the Gas company and affiliated companies, and it is run by the housewife group.

they are vulnerable and few are aware of the Labor Law. Small-scale factories that want to avoid paying the higher labor cost in Bangkok take advantage of those women. They would willingly do subcontracted work such as manufacturing artificial flowers, sewing shirts, simple assembling work of knife blade and handle, polishing diamond and other stones, or ring making for even B30 per day (an NGO worker).” Even if it is a side job, the minimum wage in the Northeast in 1994 was B115. Through Panmai’s assistance, those women became more knowledgeable, discovered their objective status in society, and acquired a method to improve that status through exchanges of information.

Of course, Panmai Group’s operating income is insignificant compared to NGO’s investments and work force. However, the group definitely deserves credit for the successful organization of rural projects for women as well as for their participation in society. The key to their success is marketing in cities with a focus on development of traditional textiles. The ATA funded Panmai and provided its personnel. It was established by mobilizing local residents. Their initial strategy was to expand projects in accordance with social circumstances and residents’ needs. The Panmai is not financially self-sufficient yet because it continues to repay Panmai’s investment loan and a payroll of full-time workers. If they expand the textile group activity to other villages, they will need to provide an initial investment and secure sales routes and markets to fit the increased textile production capacity. The group will not grow if they continue to depend on the ATA for output markets.

Conventionally, NGOs used to depend on foreign NGOs for marketing, including the Japanese “Group to Link Farmers in Thailand Villages Through Handwoven Textiles.” Panmai decided to manufacture fine silk products and open their outlet stores in Thailand, targeting the domestic market. In other words, they elevated the status of crafts

product made in a developing country to the status of industrial products for both domestic and international markets.

(3) Northeast Thailand Rural Development Association

The author studied this organization in 1997. The association was founded in 1992 by Y. T.⁽²⁷⁾. It had an 80% investment by the Save the Children Norway Program and 20% by the Community Aid Abroad with the goals of self-reliance and sustainable development by the people. Initially, the association was managed by 14 workers and nine volunteers. But after the outside support organizations, the Save the Children Norway Program and Community Aid Abroad, stopped their aid, it has been run by Y. T. and a few full-time workers. They make a living by operating experimental farms and by implementing development projects. "We got tired of running the day-to-day management by planning new projects one after another and depending on subsidies. We should operate the way farmers do (Y. T.)."

In addition to the headquarters in Nong Song Hong, Khon Kaen Province, the association has three branch offices in Kutbak, Sakhon Nakhon Province, Waeng Noi, Khon Kaen Province and Thep Sathit, Chaiyaphum Province. There are four categories of development projects.

The first one is the Health Project. Its goal is to spread the method

⁽²⁷⁾ Y. T. is a 42-year old native of Samut Sakhon Province, who is currently working on a master's thesis on social development at Khon Khaen University. Y. T. participated in student movements when studying in the Political Science Department of Ramkhamhaeng University. After graduation, Y. T. worked for two years on the Nutrition Supply Project at Rasi Salai Hospital in Si Saket Province, one year at the Food and Agriculture Organization, and 10 years at Save the Children Norway as an NGO worker. Y. T. is also expert in traditional Thai massage.

of self-reliant holistic medicine that utilizes natural self-healing power. Specifically, it is the combination of traditional Thai medicine⁽²⁸⁾ and Japanese “Kai-igaku” medicine practiced by Ryosuke Uryu⁽²⁹⁾, along with medicinal herb folk doctors, acupressurists and medicine men. Eight folk doctors participated in a two-day training seminar on August 13 and 14, 1997, from across the Northeast region. They confirmed the reports of recovery cases by 1) recuperation of patients, 2) standardizing drug prescriptions, 3) spreading new medical knowledge, and 4) a urine-drinking remedy. “Hospitals send us patients they cannot handle. If more patients like those die at our facilities, we, without a medical license, may be looked at with suspicion (P. P).” “We cannot cure chronic diseases like diabetes, cancer and AIDS, but it is possible to live a long life with diseases (Y. T.).”

They plan to open new clinics in Lam Plaimat, Buri Ram Province, Thepsowthit, Chaiyaphum Province, and within this association. They will also open on Saturdays and Sundays. At the Khao Yai National

⁽²⁸⁾ The general term for the practice of medicinal herbs, traditional Thai massage, herb sauna, and medicine man therapy. It is not as systematized as Chinese medicine.

⁽²⁹⁾ The typical treatment in comfort medicine is to urge chronic disorder patients to practice natural healing with the combination of acupuncture, medicinal herbs, natural food and exercise therapies. Since Uryu founded the World Comfort Medical Network, this practice has spread to 14 countries in South America, Africa and Asia. In Thailand one of Uryu's pupils, A. H., obtained information on Thai medicine from JVC, and since six years ago, has had exchanges with folk doctors P. P. and S. P. in Sanuang Village, Lam Plaimat, Buri Ram Province. S. P. once cured scurvy using A. H.'s methods, which include urine drinking. The local people also showed interest in it, thus attracting attention of the NERDA. Currently, specialists are sent from Japan for biannual training seminars. Research materials: the Agri-Next Editing Dept. [1997: 125-138] and an interview with A. H.

Park in Pak Chong, Nakhon Ratchasima Province, a three-day workshop on self-reliant holistic medicine is held twice a month with a participation fee of B1,000. They limit the number of participants to 10 or less for a better quality of training. Most of the participants who suffer from bronchial diseases come from Bangkok. For the future, they are contemplating building research facilities for medicinal herb seed cultivation and holding a four-month lecture on natural food or probiotics and traditional Thai massages three times a year. A small factory has been built in Sakon Nakhon Province under the auspices of the Postal Savings for International Volunteer Aid Program of the Japan Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications. 34 kinds of medical decoction and capsules (crude drugs of Thai folk medicine) are made there, but they are yet to be put on the market.

The Health Project, a combination of traditional Thai medicine and Japanese folk remedies, helped realize low medical costs. It also fits the ethics of the Northeastern people. In recent years, modern private hospitals with the ICU have been built in provincial capitals and district cities of the Northeast. However, few villagers can afford the high-priced medical cost or high-tech bed equipment. Even with this kind of equipment, serious and chronic diseases may not be cured. In contrast, folk doctors' fees are as cheap as bus fares. For chronic diseases, the self-healing method combined with medicinal herbs and diet therapy is effective. Mental illness is considered in Thai culture to be the act of the spirit "phi" or sign of ancestral spirit. Thus, pacification of spirits or exorcism by medicine men still works for stress-related mental disorders.

The second project is helping "Children to Nurture the Love of Hometown" through participation-oriented learning. Children are divided into groups for each village and they learn from the elderly about agricultural and living methods utilizing traditional customs, culture and

nature. Children will also have a chance to make field trips to factories, stores, district offices and slums, so they become more aware of social problems, and understand economics and politics.

In addition to the above, there are child banks and children's cooperative stores (sawadee)⁽³⁰⁾. Their projects are carried out by the community, school and sawadee headquarters. 30% of the proceeds are used for professional education such as on bookkeeping, assortment of materials and business management. School teachers play the role of supporting these projects. The teachers in Nong Tong Village not only teach in the classroom about life experience and cooperatives but also put them into practice at sawadee stores. However, in Kutbak Village in Sakhon Nakhon Province, sawadee stores have not yet opened due to a lack of cooperation from teachers and village general stores. Thus, children are acting as itinerant peddlers. "Sawadee products are cheaper than those at village general stores. So, some store may fold. But sawadee stores don't have enough capacity to take all the customers from general stores. Villagers like it because things are cheaper now [Kutbak Village Committee Leader]." "The purpose of sawadee is to support children, not to cause trouble for local people. We teach children, 'Because we can live, our society can also exist. Because the society exists, we can also live.'

⁽³⁰⁾ Children can make a monthly deposit at the child bank (or school bank). The amount depends on the child's allowance or the child's discretion. They can also borrow money with a 1% annual interest rate. Sawadee is a cooperative enterprise inside schools with student-and-teacher groups. In the village, villagers---mainly children and young people---organize committees to implement projects. For instance, with a slogan on stores such as, "Boys and Girls, Be Ambitious and Start Your Own Business," children would run the store from 7 to 8 a.m., noon to 1 p.m., and 4 to 6 p.m. The initial capital of B30,000 per store was provided by the Thekyumu Pharmaceutical Group foundation. Next, they collected B50 a share from villagers and requested the village to contribute B100 more.

Parents at general stores also understand sawadee. So, they overlook some decreases in sales (Bun Village Head)."

Children give credit to sawadee: "I learned about bookkeeping, assortment of materials and store management and sales. I can read books now (eight sawadee members)."⁽³¹⁾ In the "Seminar on Management of Sawadee Stores" on September 11, 1998, three problems were pointed out: 1) lack of thoroughness in business policy. Some stores forget this is for educating children and have bargain sales all the time; 2) children tend to be embarrassed about participating in business; 3) the delivery tends to be late or mishandled due to the lack of communication between the headquarters and stores. In response, some measures were suggested: 1) give children more experience in sales work, agricultural production, and crafts making; 2) having wholesale dealers collectively discount the orders from the 21 stores. For that, all stores should have a thorough management of products.

The significance of sawadee is more than just organizing local cooperatives. It has value as an educational practice. In Thailand, "textbook knowledge" in line with the school curriculum is input into children's heads at school and children are required to output that knowledge on tests. For those with no chance to convert that knowledge into a value of educational background, the curriculum must be extremely boring. Children get involved with social life through stores. They

⁽³¹⁾ "There are three adult committee members, one elementary school student and three junior high school students in this village. I watch the store after school till 6 p.m. on weekdays and 3 p.m. on weekends. I also keep books. I prefer talking to people at the store to studying. It's easier to understand business from adult committee members here than from schoolteachers. Here they use easy words and do actual business (a 2nd grade junior high school girl in Saragaao Village)." Sales are B100 to B200 per day.

learn from adult villagers how to do business or how to behave in the community. They get to feel the managerial know-how in a conference when adults set goals and carefully examine the business method and results. This experience and learning method will come in handy when those children leave their village and work in a large organization. In fact a majority of children are destined to leave the villages (only one out of eight sawadee members answered yes to agriculture). The project to nurture what should be called earning and “living power” was a highly-motivated effort. It turned the cliché of NGO---“activating individual potential”---into a program of learning by experience [Jean 1993].

The third project is the Crafts Manufacturing Project. The association manufactures cotton textile products of natural plant dyeing. Two years ago it commissioned export and sales to the project department of “Daichi no Kai (Group to Protect the Land)” in Chiba Prefecture (Daichi, Inc. Founded in 1977; annual sales 9.6 billion yen as of March, 1998). Currently, the association does not have a cotton textile factory. They commission female textile groups in Waeng Noi, Khon Kaen Province and Det Udom, Ubon Ratchathani Province. The annual sales of this project are around B1 million. After subtracting the raw materials cost, necessary expenses, and payroll, 20% goes to the association as project earnings, and 30% goes to the villagers. The remaining 50% is stored as a reserve fund. They tell the villagers now that production can be done during the agricultural off-season and the same amount of income can be earned without going to cities to work.

The fourth project is the Environmental Protection Project. The project area encompasses 60 villages in Sakhon Nakhon, Kalasin and Udon Thani Provinces around the Phu Phan Mountain Range. The association would recommend agroforestry to the farmers, enjoining them to stop logging the forests for farmland for three years. Mixed

farming is beginning to spread in Thailand. They plant trees on the paths between rice paddies combining wet rice, vegetables and fruits. If one farmer maintains 6 rai (1 rai = 1600 square meters) of forest for three years, with 600 families, 10,800 rai of forest can be protected. A total project fund of B5 million for a three-year period is planned to come from the Environmental Conservation Committee of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment.

Initially, the Northeast Thailand Rural Development Association depended heavily on related high-order NGOs and foreign donors. Later, the association switched to the expansion strategy and offered a number of projects to the government and foreign NGOs. They decided to implement a project-oriented management to maintain the organization. After while they turned to a new policy under which each project can be implemented more independently within the range. This complied with the project principle of independence for farmers. The Northeast Thailand Rural Development Association, more aggressively than the Panmai Group, have had exchanges with other NGOs focusing on the innovation of traditional technologies. They put a new medical philosophy into practice as a project, and now are looking at not only rural areas but also city dwellers' needs. In the category of education and management of cooperative stores, their focus is on the development of human resources. The goal of promoting agroforestry is to co-exist with the environment. Their method is to provide local residents with the know-how to put project ideas into operation and then, gradually leave the management to self-reliant groups.

In the summer of 2001, when I visited the headquarters of NERDA, Mr. Y shifted the base of his project to Sakon Nakhon province. The activities of NERDA were transferred to Mr. Kampai, who was a staff living on an experimental farm in Ban Sakaeo. He has continued their

projects such as mixed agriculture and curing by Thai herbal medicine and Japanese methods, and recently he adopted EM planting, that is utilizing effective micro organisms as fertilizer and medicine. He learned this new method at the Yorei center in Nakon Rachasima. Yorei curing and EM planting by the Sekai Kyuseikyo, a Japanese new religion has been popular in the northeastern region for a decade.⁽³²⁾

In Ban Sakaeo, there remains the Dek Huk Tin project including the Sawadee shop. The village headman was greatly influenced by Mr. Y and his activities in NERDA, as well as government development project, so that he initiated several activities such as Village Bank, chicken and cow farming, cultivating mushrooms and making a housewife group for indigenous products.⁽³³⁾

⁽³²⁾ Yorei is the Thai pronunciation of the Japanese word “Jorei.” “Jo” means purifying, and “rei” is spirit. For a member of the Sekai kyuseikyo diseases in patients result firstly from the pollution and weakness of their spirits, secondly from toxic materials that were contained in foods contaminated by chemical substances and agrichemicals. To cure disease, they practice both “Yorei” and feeding agricultural products made from natural farming. Sekai kyuseikyo has strengthened their missionary work in recent years, not just as a new religion, but as an agriculture supporting group, especially by EM farming. In spite of its popularity in Thailand, its scientific evidence has been doubted by agrochemical academics in Japan.

⁽³³⁾ Villagers fondly remembered for Mr. Y and some showed me record notes given by NERDA for practical activities. The legacy of NERDA was not organic and natural farming, and herbal curing facilities. Villagers decided not to continue them after NERDA’ leaving, because they could not make a profit from them. However, the village headman as well as some villagers inherited entrepreneur spirit while NERDA implemented their development activities. Ban Sakaeo, locating 30 minutes from Kohn Kaen city by car, would develop as a village conducting suburban agriculture.

5 Conclusion---New Issues of Development NGOs

Social development projects in Thailand have long functioned as a development-oriented political ideology since PM Sarit Thanarat introduced Thailand's first national development plan in 1961. It means that more practical and essential economic development started belatedly. From around the mid-1980s NGOs began to organize local residents demanding indigenous and subsistence rights directly to the Thailand government. In doing so, NGOs played a very important role in implementing development projects based in the region and in creating economic and political circumstances under which development became possible. One reality of rural development is that unless the central government's policy on development is changed, all those day-to-day development projects cannot produce effective results. In that respect, NGO's role as a political advocate is important. The significance of discussion on rural development in relation to civil society lies in respecting individual values including the regional self-identity as part of development within. Thus, we can evaluate the content of development by examining human rights, self-governing and social equity beyond cultural and regional barriers.

This paper deals with the importance of organizing local residents, marketing to promote projects, using community and traditional and cultural resources, and maintaining NGO's independent status. Once we deal with those factors, development can be implemented more effectively. Not only that, but it is also possible for NGOs to become a sustainable presence. If a region-oriented and independent-minded NGO implements projects based on the global networking of knowledge, technology and capital, those projects may be interpreted as the activity of a civil

society beyond state power. However, this case of success does not live up to the premise that NGOs are there to help create a civil society in remote regions of Thailand.

The Panmai Group focused on women's activities. The Northeast Thailand Rural Development Association limited their activity to children's education, and medical and agricultural categories. That is the reason why they succeeded. In other words, they avoided men's activities, village politics, and direct intervention in public education. Performing NGO activities or organizing people with political motivations would have caused friction with district heads, village heads and villagers in general. Instead, the above NGOs concentrated on everyday-life areas of family, education and medicine, implementing development, but differing from "pattana." In the long run, this is an essential strategy to promote self-reliant individuals or region-based activities.

After the Tambon Municipality Law was enacted in 1994, provincial-level politics now has a parliament, though inadequate, for discussing budget and self-rule [Hashimoto 1999, Kromkaan 1996]. If the ultimate goal of rural development NGOs is to build a civil-society area in the region, they have to get involved with tambon municipalities. Therefore, future tasks of development NGOs include activities they are going to carry out with local self-government⁽³⁴⁾.

⁽³⁴⁾ The tambon Administrative organization is established in this administration-oriented local society, appearing to be in conflict with the direct Interior-Ministry supervision of District Head, Tambon Head and Village Head. Old customs die hard in elections and budget execution. Yet, the political space of this self-governing system has expanded in the social arena between the national government and the people. In addition to the tax revenue of the municipality, the government development budget and job creation funds including the Miyazawa Loan were spent on development. As a result, the development-related budget has

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expanded dramatically [Kitahara 2000: 376-401]. At present, we have observed that development is rewarding construction-related businesses such as concrete road pavement, and villagers are employed on a short-term basis. Whether gain will be extended to the area of social development or not is up to the villagers themselves. If NGO and NPO proclaim to be the spokesperson of the masses, they need to have a new strategy to get involved in the process of realizing local autonomy. That will be the key to their future activity.

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