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[1]

> 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[2]

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.[3] 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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1 S. Radhakrishnan, 1975, "An Introductory Essay", *The Bhagavadgita*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., p. 16.

2 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.

3 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"[4] 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.[5]

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"[6] (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.[7] 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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4 J. Vivian, 1994, "NGOs and Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe: No Magic Bullets", *Development and Change*, Vol. 25, pp. 167-193.

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

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

7 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"[8] such as the dichotomy between 'rural' and 'urban' areas, 'indigenous' and 'scientific' knowledge, 'village' and the 'state'.[9] 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.[10] 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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8 P. Waterman, 1996, "Beyond Globalism and Developmentalism: Other Voices in World Politics", *Development and Change*, Vol. 27, p. 177.

9 J. Rigg, 1994, "Alternative Development Strategies, NGOs and the Environment in Thailand: A Critique", *TEI Quarterly Environment Journal,* Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 17.

10 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.[11] 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.[12] 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.[13] 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.[14] 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.[15] Since the early 1970s, Western 'donor' NGOs have offered financial

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

12 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.

13 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.

14 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.

15 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".[16] 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.[17] 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.

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

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

(POs) and government organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs).[18] 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.[19] 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.[20] 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".[21] Carroll, however, offers a different categorisation of NGOs. He separates the category of POs from NGOs based on their different membership.[22] 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".[23] 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.[24] 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.[25] As a

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

19 *Ibid*., p. 122.

20 Clark, 1991, *Democratising Development*, p. 40.

21 *Ibid*., p. 89.

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

23 *Ibid*., p. 12.

24 *Ibid*., p. 11.

25 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.[26] The relationships, Slater argues, "are not seen as separate levels but as interlocking spheres of social relations and political practices".[27] Rather than adopt the classical Marxist argument that the "state" is subordinate to the "economic base",[28] Thrift and Forbes argue that each sphere interacts as an independent entity and "can become *determinant* in different places at different times".[29] 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.[30] 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".[31] 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".[32] 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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26 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.

27 Slater, 1989, *Territory and State Power in Latin America*, p. 21.

28 See M. Rader, 1979, *Marx's Interpretation of History*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. xix-xx.

29 Thrift and Forbes, 1986, *The Price of War*..., p. 17.

30 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.

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

32 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. Its 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".[33] 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"[34] 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.[35] 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".[36] 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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33 E.W. Gohlert, 1991, *Power and Culture: The Struggle against Poverty in Thailand*, Bangkok: White Lotus, p. 189.

34 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.

35 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.

36 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".[37] 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.[38] 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.[39] 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.[40] 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".[41] 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".[42] The arguments of Friedmann and Vivian helped me to see a dynamic process of change and to recognise

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37 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.

38 Rigg, 1994, "Alternative Development Strategies...", pp. 24, 19, 22 and 23.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 24

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

41 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

42 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".[43]

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".[44] Korten's view is that empowerment can be done only in limited areas and requires the continued presence of the NGOs.[45] 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.[46] 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.[47] 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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43 Korten, 1990, *Getting to the 21st Century*..., p. 127.

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

45 Korten, 1990, *Getting to the 21st Century*..., p. 120.

46 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.

47 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".[48] 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".[49] 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.[50] 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.[51] 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".[52] However, it is necessary to consider on a case-by-case basis whether the four

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48 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.

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

50 *Ibid*., p. 229.

51 *Ibid*., pp. 35-38.

52 *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.[53] 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.[54] 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".[55] 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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53 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 Tongsawate 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.

54 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.

55 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.[56]

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.[57] 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.[58] 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";[59] or in other words, the complicated social reality can hardly be covered by a single formula of thought.

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[56] 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.

[57] Sompong Charoensuk, 1995, "Uneven Dependency: A Situational Analysis of Northern Thai NGOs", in Jaturong Boonyarattanasoontorn and Gawin Chutima (eds), *Thai NGOs...*, pp. 77-87.

[58] 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).

[59] 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".[60] 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".[61] 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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60 Carroll, 1992, *Intermediary NGOs...*, p. 180.

61 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.[62] 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.[63] Under movement, Touraine and Melucci cover a range of human actions from everyday phenomena to collective activities and protest.[64] 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".[65] 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".[66] 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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62 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.

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

64 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.

65 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.

66 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".[67] 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.[68] 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".[69] 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.[70]

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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67 A. Touraine, 1985, "An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements", *Social Research*, Vol. 52, No. 4, p. 782.

68 *Ibid*., pp. 778-784.

69 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.

70 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.[71]

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.[72] 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".[73] 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.[74]

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.[75]

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

72 *Ibid*., pp. 315 and 349.

73 Touraine, 1995, *Critique of Modernity*, p. 239.

74 Touraine, 1988, *Return of the Actor*..., p. 11.

75 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.[76] 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.[77] For example, Long and van der Ploeg, rural sociologists, criticise the modernisation and neo-Marxist theories because they "represent opposite positions ideologically".[78] 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".[79] Touraine also develops similar thematic concepts. However, while Giddens takes a

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[76] 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.

[77] 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.

[78] 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.

[79] 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.[80] He perceives a structure as "the conditions of social order and integration"[81] and defines an actor in relation to the "subject" as "a dissident, a resistance fighter".[82] 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.[83]

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".[84]

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-functionalist 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".[85] 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"[86] 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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80 Touraine, 1995, *Critique of Modernity*, p. 263.

81 Touraine, 1988, *Return of the Actor...*, p. 154.

82 Touraine, 1995, *Critique of Modernity*, p. 264.

83 *Ibid*., p. 208.

84 *Ibid*., p. 250.

85 Touraine, 1985, "An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements", p. 771.

86 Touraine, 1988, *Return of the Actor...*, p. 151.

reactions *per se*, Lohmann examines the interactions between systems of thought from different social actors.[87] 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.[88] 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...[89]

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".[90]

To construct an alternative development approach, one needs to, as Waterman suggests: "combine scepticism of the intellect and optimism of the will".[91] That is to have faith

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87 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.

88 Friedmann, 1992, *Empowerment...*; and Rigg, 1994, "Alternative Development Strategies...".

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

90 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.

91 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.[92] 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.[93]

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.[94] 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",[95] or what Bhabha calls "the third space".[96] 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".[97]

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]".[98] 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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92 Touraine, 1977, *The Self-Production of Society*, p. 452.

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

94 Lohmann, 1995, "No Rules of Engagement...", p. 212.

95 *Ibid*., p. 219.

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

97 *Ibid*., p. 211.

98 Melucci, 1994, "A Strange Kind of Newness...", p. 107.

new problems or "new forms of domination are constantly emerging".[99] It is necessary for the social interveners to create critical thinking or "rationality".[100] 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".[101] 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.[102] 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.[103] Like McVey, Chayan argues that the state "cannot extend its arms effectively" to control the village.[104] 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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99 Melucci, 1988, "Social Movements and the Democratisation...", p. 251.

100 Popper, 1994, *Knowledge and the Body-Mind Problem*..., p. 134.

101 Giddens, 1984, *The Constitution of Society*..., p. 125.

102 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.

103 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.

104 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.[105] 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".[106] 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).*[107] 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.[108] 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.[109]

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105 Utong Prasasvinitchai, 1993, "The Thai Village from the Villagers' Perspective", in Hirsch (ed), *The Village in Perspective...*, p. 71.

106 *Ibid*., p. 73.

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

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

109 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.[110]

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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110 *Ibid.*

movements, and from my past experience in Thai social movements.[111] 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".[112] To challenge power domination through the empowering process may start with one problem and end with another, new problem.[113]

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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111 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.

112 Touraine, 1988, *Return of the Actor*..., p. 158.

113 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.[114] 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".[115] 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.[116]

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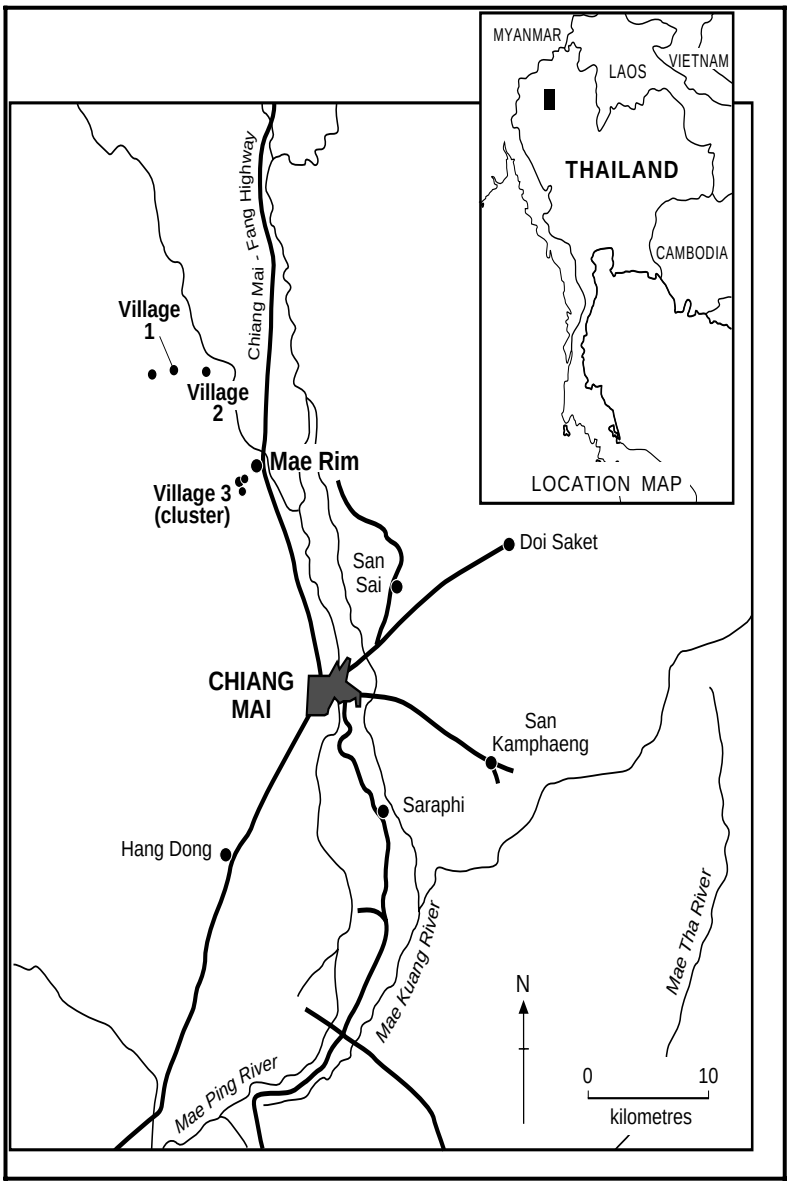
114 Chatthip Nartsupha, 1990 (2533), *Setthakit muban thai nai adit* [The Economy of the Thai Village in the Past], Bangkok: Samnakphim Sangsan.

115 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.

116 *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.