

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

by
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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The Australian National University

March 1997

Declaration

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

Rapin Quinn

To John Girling
with my deepest gratitude

Preface and Acknowledgments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thai NGO colleagues, fieldworkers and coordinators provided me with interesting ideas, exciting experiences, and tolerated my questions. They included Atchara Yupli (Jum), Jaroen Khamphiraphap (Nui), the late Sujittra Suddieokrai (Yong), Ratchada Chaisawat, Chumnum Thatsanakhong, the late Phichai Bunsong, Bunyiam Laosa-ad, Prayat Jaturapho:nphithakkun, Warunrat Charoensap (No:i), Suchada Srithewet, and M.R. Atcharichai Rujawichai (*Phi Mo:m*).

Some Thai academics and officials gave me insights into their ideas and work difficulties. They were Dr Thanet Jaroenmu'ang of Chiang Mai University, Dr Sittipong Dilokwanich from the Faculty of Environment and Resource Studies, Mahidol University, *Ajarn* Bantho:n O:ndam, *Khun* Sopon Thangphet and *Phi* Chu'ang Chatariyakul of the Northern Development Centre, *Phi* Chitti Chu'nyong of the Rural Development Section, the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) and *Phi* Tho:ngthaeng Chuwathiwat of the Agricultural Land Reform Office (ALRO).

Several organisations and people both in Thailand and Australia provided assistance. *Ajarn* Prudhisana Jumbala of the Political Science Faculty, Chulalongkorn University and *Ajarn* Chayan Vaddhanaphuti of the Social Research Institute (SRI), Chiang Mai University provided office space and other services. *Khun* Pradit Daochai of the Northern Development Centre allowed me to occupy a residence located on the Chiang Mai University campus. *Ajarn* Renu and *Ajarn* Yutthaphan Wichasin (*Phi* Id and *Phi* Yut) opened their home and their hearts whenever I reached Chiang Mai. In Bangkok, Suchada and Sanoh O:nsri did likewise. As well as sharing his idea about a 'community culture' approach, *Khunpho:* Niphot Thianwihan kindly allowed me to stay at the Chiang Mai Diocesan Social Action Centre (DISAC). *Luangpho:* Phra Dhammadilok warmly welcomed me to pursue my research with the Foundation for Education and Development of Rural Areas (FEDRA). Sumontha Miller (*Phi* Id) of the Menzies Library, ANU, Vatcharin McFadland (*Phi* Lek) and Pantiwa McCoy (To:i) of the Australian National Library (ANL), never hesitated to provide information in response to my inquiries.

People from the three villages under study were very kind to me. I am grateful to *Ui Yom*, *Phi Mun*, *Maeluang Yom*, *Mae Ngoen*, *Suphin* who shared their meals and let me stay with them during my fieldwork. I am also grateful to *Nian*, *Pho:luang Suthep*, *Ai Kit*, especially *Khru Bunchom* and *Khru Kaeo*, from whom I learnt about village history and culture, as well as attitudes towards politics and Buddhism. *Phrakhru* and *Damrong* kindly gave me copies of village maps. I am indebted to all the villagers who extended their hospitality and gave me their valuable time.

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

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

Abstract

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

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

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

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

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Explanatory Notes

Transliteration

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

Units of Measurement

Area measure

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

Volume measure

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

Currency

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

Acronyms

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

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

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

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