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# **STUDIES IN SOCIAL RELATIONS AND THAI STUDIES**

**BY**

**Jamaree Pitackwong CHIENGTHONG**

**Chiangmai University**

**Chiangmai, Thailand**

# STUDIES IN SOCIAL RELATIONS AND THAI STUDIES

Jamaree Pitackwong CHIENGTHONG

## INTRODUCTION

The birth of capitalism from the last two centuries had produced great impact upon all social relations. As has been remarked, capitalism seems much more "revolutionary" than socialism (cf. Scott 1985:346) and it destroyed a large number of previous normative social relations and their determinants (both abstract and material); and opened up a way for a transformation towards a new establishment of new normative (oftentimes contestable) types of social relations. The determinants of new types of social relations are not only derived exogenously but occurred through inventive, selective, and oftentimes both conflicting and accommodating 'choice' from among various groups or individuals who constitute that society.

For a developing country like Thailand, since after the second world war (or perhaps as early as after the signing of the Bowring Treaty in 1855) there is an urge to 'develop' or 'modernize'. The construction of the nation' and 'nationalism' is also read 'modernization' and 'progress'. The body of knowledge produced after the second world war when 'Thai studies' of 'social relations' first began is preoccupied with tracing the backward traits in 'thai' style relations- trying to identify backward traditional patterns so that solutions or remedies can be provided. The discourse of modernization and development has provided the elites, those who controlled state power to justify their legitimacy in determining and directing the social relations towards the more modernized and westernized capitalistic relations.

However, this dominant discourse was not operating without contest. There emerged in Thai Studies, especially after the 1970s alternative perspective in Thai Studies

trying to represent the voice of the hitherto unrepresented. Shifts in the direction of the production of knowledge also reflected changing social context. When Thailand was still largely 'undeveloped', the production of knowledge seemed to have been geared in the direction of attempts to find solutions to solve 'backwardness' and oftentimes providing, intentionally or not, justification for the ruling elites. At times of great transitions and uprisings like in the 1970s, the body of knowledge then produced reflected doubts and challenges towards dominant discourse. Lately when it seems the country is heading deeply towards globalized capitalistic relations, scholars produced works that questioned and criticized social relations that seemed to be mediated and sometimes determined via money relations. There are some laments over the loss of past moralbound ideology replaced by heartless unconcerned material relations.

The aim of this paper is to try to examine the production of knowledge as well as the changing social context or relations that gave rise to changes in perspectives in the production of knowledge.

## THE DISCOURSE ON TRADITIONALITY AND MODERNITY

### THE FIRST TURNING POINT: CONSTRUCTION OF MODERNITY

In Thai studies it seemed for a long period of time we have been haunted by the image that Thai social relations are loosely-structured. Relationships are not fixed but seem to be flexible according to circumstances rather than frozen or determined by the social position one holds. This is especially true (only?) of relationship within the family. It is now well known that the construction of Embree's paradigm was not based on evidence from intensive fieldwork but it is equally well known that even the Bang Chan school with its intensive fieldwork could not escape from the seduction of the loosely-structured paradigm explanatory power. It has been argued that as Embree was an American Anthropologist, he has been influenced by American anthropological tradition of cultural particularism that refuses universal explanation of cultural development in linear fashion. It is also believed that the work of Benedict, a student of Boas, on Thai Culture and Behaviour which depicts the peculiarity of Thainess must have had some impact on the formation of Embree's

paradigm. Another factor is perhaps Embree's previous experience of field work in rural Japan before the second world war which must have helped him form a contrasting picture between well disciplined, tightly structured social relations among the Japanese in comparison to the Thai relatively undisciplined flexible ways of forming social relations.

The effectiveness of the discourse lies not on the essence of Embree's proposal, but on how it has been accepted into the Thai public. Partly, quite a number of Thai scholars have been trained in American Anthropological tradition and therefore must have come across, if not under the influence, of Embree's model. Even among the Thai administrator class not trained abroad but trained in Thai universities, Embree's ideas must have crossed through into their studies via their instructors. Newspapers also echoed the loosely structured paradigm in popular version, blaming the undisciplined Thai for not knowing how to work in groups because of their over-individualistic character, which explained why Thailand was still undeveloped.

Why do Thai public chose to believe that they are over-individualistic and undiscipline. One answer may be that they (the elites, the emergent middle class) wanted to 'eradicate' all traits of backwardness, among them undisciplinarity, and un rationality. By first identifying what were the problems against development can later solutions be found to solve the problems. (see Sanit 2519BE:234)

Most pioneering sociological and anthropological studies after the war and well into the 60s and 70s reflected very well the concern with the problem of 'change and persistence' of Thai social structure. As modernization theorists have pointed out, modernization and industrialization require modernizing traits in quite a number of area in the social structure, for example, there must be a change in the economic institution where private property and transference of property must be recognized; there must be a market economy where goods and services can be exchanged on a relatively large scale; labour must also be able to move freely. In political institution, a modernizing trends involved political stability and modern legal system. Social attitudes which are susceptible to modernity must accept that social mobility is possible through achievement. Social organization and administration must be based on efficiency rather than personal

preference, and hence 'rationality' in social organization must be recognized. (Moore 1963).

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONALISM AND MODERNITY

In 1989 a conference was held in Monash University in Australia where a number of scholars on Thai studies came to discuss and reflect on the impact of the fiftieth year anniversary of the name change of what is now Thailand from the previous name of Siam (Reynolds 1991:1). The construction of nationalism in the period when Phibun controlled state power was already well known, but the impact of his schema upon the present generation of the Thai public may not have been as widely recognized. The construction of a nation is not just only the construction of a definite geobody, the construction of symbols (eg.,national anthem, flags) to arouse shared sentimentality, but it also involves the construction of an identity' of a Thainess which is different from the otherness. This Thainess is constructed around selection from 'good' past traits in combination of 'good' traits from the west. Hence Phibun invented a national decree on 'culture'which was defined as characteristics that reflected civilization and orderliness, a unity and progress of the nation, as well as good morality in the public..." (cf.Dictionary by the Thai Acadamy).

As Phibun must have realized, a culture , and social relations within it, cannot hang in the air but must involved around a particular way of life, constructed around abstract ideas and mediated by things or 'artifacts'. Whereas nationalism in the West emerged with social slogans of liberty, equality and fraternity, Thai nationalism was constructed around unity. And this unity was in their turn constructed around common heritage and shared struggle since past time when 'we', despite our love of peace, together fought against our enemy to maintain our territory and Thainess.

Phibun's campaigne on the construction of a new culture, despite the fact that it was largely ridiculed in its time (cf.Kukrit 2523B.E.) had produced a much lasting impact than we may have imagined. Though his campaigne that the Thai public should wear a hat when going out may have been discarded, Thai women since then had followed a new culture of wearing a skirt. These are only but a few minor concrete examples.that show that the display of material visibility as a sign of modernity has been encouraged in government

policy. The significance of this new cultural campaign is perhaps the fact that it tried to define what is modernity and what is not, and it authorized the state the legitimacy to determine for the public the direction of progress for the country.

### THE WRITING OF THAI STYLE SOCIAL RELATIONS AND THE ROLE OF THE PAST IN THAI STUDIES.

Three major pieces of work which are significant in the contribution (construction?) in the attempts among scholars to identify the peculiar Thainess as manifested in Thai social relations (structure) must include Akin Raphipattana's *Thai Social Structure in the Early Ratanakosin Period (2512 B.E.)*, an article by Hanks, "Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order" (1962) (which I read second-handedly through Suwanna 2530B.E.), and Tambiah's *World Renouncer and World Conquerors* (1976).

Despite the fact that the authors had depicted the peculiarity of Thainess in their studies, (Akin's patron-clients relations, Hanks' Buddhist concept of merit in the legitimization of power, or Tambiah's galactic and radial polity, ) certain traits of their conceptual formation are influenced by existing prominent traditional scholarly writing. Anderson noticed the similarity of Weber's Ideal Type of Patrimonialism in Akin's analysis (Anderson 1978) while Weber's interests in the associations between social spirits formed around specific religious ideology may have influenced works like Hank's and Tambiah's. At this stage we may note that Weber's preoccupation, not dissimilar to Marx, was in identifying how capitalism had or had not emerge. Hanks's analysis of 'instability in stability' where flexible relations are embedded in Buddhist conceptual framework of past merit attempted to generate an understanding of the lack of fundamental changes in Thai social system while the Patrimonialism model seemed to provide explanation on the lack of the rational legal system.

Of all the three pieces, Tambiah's attempts seemed to have been most successful in depicting changes in the Thai social relations. He did not view the political system as static, noticing the change as the system adapts from 'galactic' to 'radial' polity. At the same time he noticed the change in the underlying teaching of Buddhism as practiced in

Thailand, of how it has tried to adapt itself to explaining rationality. Furthermore Tambiah noticed how changes could be mediated through the flow of 'selected' continuity. In his last chapter he noticed two roles of the past, first, the 'Western notion of purposeful past leading to purposeful future', and second, the use of the past as a sanction against undesired change. Infering to Tambiah's analysis we may come to a conclusion that the drive to modernity and progress in Thailand has perhaps evolved around the selection of past traits to drive and at the same time, check, its motion.

## THE SECOND TURNING POINT

### REINTERPRETING PAST SOCIAL RELATIONS; A MARXIST ANALYSIS.

With the growth of Marxism in a certain sphere in academic interests in the West from around the end of the Second Word War to the Vietnam War, a certain number of Thai people interested in Thai studies had also examined Marxism for application in Thai analysis. Jit Phumisak wrote many analytical work in Thai social relations through Marxist concept of relations of production, including a short piece of poetry which depicted how a labour of a farmer was hardly spent and then appropriated in the form of rice that was consumed by the non-direct producers. The past social relations were constructed around inequality, and the political implication in this school of writing is that this inequality should and must be eradicated. (in contrast to the eradication of undisciplinary, irrationality, over-individuality, as proposed by the modernization school).

Jit's writing which appeared in the late 50s/early 60s when it was quickly suppressed, reappeared among Thai intellectuals in the 70s, at the time of political unrests, perhaps because it provided the analysis that a change in social relations are needed. Apart from the political unrests which manifested itself in the late 1970s, the early 1970s already witnessed many changes and inequality which disturbed many young intellectuals at the time. Wittayakom's widely read four short lines of verses, "I am young, I am ignorant, I am puzzled, I come in search of a meaning, I want to harvest many things, but look, what I

get is only a piece of paper", despite it being an attack on the university education system it reflected very well the emerging new needs of the young generation. Many writing in the 70s, short stories that appeared in popular magazines, many of which written by young people of Wittayakorn's generation and many of whom came from the countryside of petty official parents or farmers or petty traders, depict many conflicting desires, from Wanit Jarungkitanan's story on wanting to go to America (and the difficulty arose from trying to pass a language test and obtaining a visa) to a story discussing bad influences of town upon the countryside (see Anderson and Ruchira 1985). It seemed modernization was appearing,in the forms of material objects such as tall buildings and large roads,among many things; but inequality , especially as seen through the eyes of many young people from the countryside was also manifested. On top of that, many noted the changes in social relations on community base of 'love and support' where everybody knows everybody else to the 'heartless' relations where no one pays attention to anyone except someone with money. Past social relations whether real or imaginary became a desirable alternative to the intolerable and unfair present. This is in contrast to the point of view of the Thais of the previous generation who viewed the past as partly backward and which therefore must be selectively eradicated and selectively modernized. But, despite a nostalgia for the past peaceful existence among the young people , there is also a desire at the same time for a 'true' democratic emancipation, a look ahead for a more promising future.

More serious academic writing in the Marxist tradition originated in the work of Chatthip and Suthy , The Political Economy of Siam 1850-1910, and 1910-32, and followed by Chatthip's edited work of the Evolution of Capitalism in Thailand which includes many pieces of writing of his students. Thai social relations are read through Marxist relations of production and Chatthip captured attention of a relatively large number of young intellectuals though their number was still too small to compete to replace the 'main stream' discourse. The Journal of political Economy was founded in 1978 as a venue for exchange and introduction of new ideas among a small number of young scholars. Within this loose circle, by the early 1980s there have appeared emerging interests away from the analysis of relations of production, or the political economy aspect of it, towards ideological reproduction

and domination (with analytical tools borrowed from Althusser) as well as the analysis of false consciousness and construction of consciousness. The interpretation of past social relations as exploitative has led to the identification of what they call the Sakdina bond, the power relations wherein the old Sakdina ruling class still held control of state power and hence preventing the emergence of the bourgeois class to lead a development towards capitalism.

### **REINTERPRETING PAST SOCIAL RELATIONS : THE SECOND (NON-MARXIST) ALTERNATIVE**

The past as an unchanging social structure with unchanging social relations, awaiting the force of external Westernization to modernize its institutions was contested from a different perspective, roughly in the same period as the emergence of the Chatthip school in the early 1980s. A one-man attempt of a presentation of an analytical alternative, Nithi's *The Bourgeois Literature of The Early Ratanakosin, Period* produced great impact on the analysis of social relations. The work tried to demonstrate Bourgeois thinking or bourgeois rationality which is different of course from Sakdina mentality as represented in the literary work of the Early Ratanakosin. Nithi is perhaps the first among Thai scholars to mention the significance of money in Bourgeois' contest for equality on par with the Sakdina class, citing Khun Chang talking to his servants that he was considered a noble (phu dii) because of his wealth. Nithi of course further noticed that despite the claim for equality with the Sakdina, this claim by the Bourgeois who were principally 'jek' was not extended to the countryside. People with money may be more equal, but people of the countryside with their rough unpolished manner was still made fun of. However, Nithi noted that though emerging, this bourgeois rationality did not become dominant but seemed to have been defeated by the revival of the Sakdina value of the recent absolutist state of Reign Five.

Though reading of either Chatthip or Nithi in the early 1980s one may form an idea that Thailand seemed to have reached the impass of becoming a capitalist society, however, later works from many scholarly tradition and also changing social context (with the growth of export economy) have proved that Thailand is accelerating towards

capitalism. Following Perry Anderson's analysis of Lineages of The Absolutist state, far from being an obstacle to capitalist development, the absolutist state may prepare the ground for the take off of capitalism by readjusting certain social relations as well as in accumulation of capital (cf. Chaiyan 1993, Somkiat 2525 B.E.).

### THE THIRD TURNING POINT

#### GLOBALIZATION, INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THAI STUDIES

Quoting Marx and Engles in The Manifesto, on the revolutionary force of capitalism being at the same time constructive and deconstructive, Lash and Urry (1993) took as their starting point to discuss modernity as a continuously transformed social life of temporal and spatial restructuring. Many Western scholars writing on western modernity or postmodernity also made reference to this revolutionary force of capitalism. Berman's All that is solid melts into air (1990) which derives its name also from Marx's writing, also discusses how modernity has destroyed past social relations through its reordering of space. Large avenues in big city in developed country like Paris or developing country like St Petersbourg of Russia in the nineteenth century, is a reordering of space where free people from all walk of life could come to walk shoulder to shoulder, gazing at others and be gazed at.

Concerning modernity, Anderson's widely read Imagined Communities discusses nationalism as a peculiar cultural construction. It has to be imagined because however small a nation is it is impossible for members to know each other and Anderson cited the role of print capitalism as one factor that have helped to connect people from different space and time to each other and facilitate the imagination of each in a unity of a nation.

More recently in 1993 Anderson produced a small article on The New World Disorder where he discusses the globalizing process that connects the world into one. Labour mobility and transnational investment, a common feature of the present era brought different culture ever closer to each other, which involves a restructuring of identity and social relations .

In Thailand, Thongchai describes 'globalization' as a fever, especially among the

new rich who tried to create a legitimation of their power by claiming to be a part of the global process. In Thongchai's opinion this seems to even distance the new rich from the majority of the population, especially the poor rural dwellers who are not incorporated into the so called 'global village'.

But undeniably, the achievement of the economic growth, an average of 9.9% from 1985-1990 (Nipon 1996: 137), has meant an emergence of a new (extremely) rich and a not so extremely rich but perhaps better than average income earners in a large number who call themselves a middle class.

In 1995, the Matichon publication issued four volumes of collected essays by Nithi into the public. These articles were written mainly in the eighties mostly in the Silapa-Watanatham magazine. Each volume has its own introductory piece written by young well known scholars in the Thai academic circle. The selection of Nithi's old articles in these new collections must have proved that Nithi's name can sell, in other words people (young intellectuals?) do read or perhaps more appropriately, listen to, Nithi.

There are several articles which are very interesting and which tells us how Nithi view the changing direction of social relations in Thailand. First, Nithi noticed the expanding middle class who according to him, is in charge of the development of new Thai culture because they constitute the market which buys cultural products, but these are people who have relatively less control in formal politics. According to Nithi, a nation, to this strata of people, is a political unit which exists dependently on other nations especially through exchanges via trades. Though these people do fight for their right to participate in the country's political system, their fight only concerns their rights, and not necessarily those of the poor rural villagers who also fight, but in isolation and mostly unheard of; and if heard of, not given due attention from the other sector of the society. Second, however, Nithi is rather optimistic with the rising of (middle class?) democracy. In one article Nithi quoted Foucault who suggested that the destruction of absolute state has allowed a light to be shone into every part of every country allowing citizens to gaze at each other and thus controlling each other. Nithi concludes that this process meant the opening up of a broader public space, the area which was before a private territory of the absolute Monarch (Nithi 2538 B.E. : 209).

Third, Nithi seemed very concern with the destruction or disappearance of past peasant culture, reflecting in many rituals which have become devoid of their original meaning as they are now being (supported by the Tourist Organization Agency) performed on a changing social context. Nithi's main worry is that this destruction of the old meaning has not been replaced with an equally meaningful and powerful enough cultural constructs to build up the loss strength of the poor's security nest of old community. Nithi's third point seems to bear a certain similarity to Scott's concern of past morality of the peasant which have been lost (Scott 1978).

Though Nithi is often seen as a lone scholar (cf. Thongchai 1995, or Jiraporn 2539 B.E.) he definitely is not without friends and followers. Though Nithi's writing may be distinctive and his criticism all round may make it difficult to categorize him into any school of thoughts, he is writing in a shared social context with many scholars interested in Thai studies. For example, Nithi's concern with the loss of past morality without replacement is a sentiment shared by many writers writing in the community culture school. So let us now turn to a brief survey of the community culture school.

Among many leading and respectable scholars, Seri's work represented an essence of the concern and analysis of this school. Seri discussed "community" as a past essence or "life" of rural people and a village as a foundation of rural living. But Seri lamented that a village has now become more like a town. In the (old) community members are connected with each other through a direct relationship and they (together) constitute their self reliance. They did not need to depend on society as they do today (Seri 1986: cited in Yukti 2538 B.E.: 79).

Seri's discussion sounded familiar to those who are familiar with Tonnies' notions of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (cf. Parsons 1949) which contrasted two types of ideal types of social relationships of informal and face to face, in comparison with a more formal role based relations in which actors do not have to personally know each other. And this *Gemeinschaft*-like quality of pure Thai village was recognized by Kemp (1991: cited in Anan 2539 B.E.) which rendered Kemp to question what he accused of as being the romanticism aspect of the studies of the community culture school.

More sympathy with the community culture school is perhaps Hirsch's discussion of the conceptualization of a village as a 'discourse' where each contenders of the discourse (state vs. the community culture school) utilize the concepts in their own ways to pursue their respective goals. (cf. Anan 2538B.E.) Writing about Thai natives writing on their own history, Thongchai (1995) remarked that the work of Thai scholars on their own society is perhaps partly a discourse produced not only as a scholar but also as a Thai who is a part of the Thai society, each has their desire to propose change and interpret 'facts' from their places and perspectives within Thai society. A recent seminar on Thai senior thinkers in 1996 where many senior Thai scholars' hopes and inspiration are discussed revealed how each seemed to feel responsible for their society. (Apart from a few papers, their academic achievement was only trivially discussed). (cf. Jintanapap suu pii 2000).

In another criticism of the community culture school, it has been suggested that writers in this school tried to depict a picture of an ambiguous but peaceful past as a technique of representation (Yukti 2538 B.E.). We may recall that this is perhaps not a new venture in Thai intellectual tradition. Many short story writers in the 1970s had also discussed past peaceful ways of life which seemed lost forever once they have set foot into town. The same scenario was presented in many modern Thai folk songs (pleng luk tung). So in a certain way the Thai community culture school does not seem to be standing alone but seemed to be operating and speaking from a shared social context and sentiments that long for past peaceful social relations whether 'real' or imaginary.

Apart from concerns with the destruction of past morality and past peaceful social relations or the concern over the destruction of the *Gemeinschaft* side of the social relations, the emergence of a modern society (the *Gesellschaft* side) is also a preoccupation among many scholars writing in Thai studies. Many pieces of writing on these issues may be found in the newspaper, discussing consumerism among the teenagers or despising 'false community' mediated through monetary relations where everything is being bought and sold (cf. Attajak 2539B.E.).

As Nithi remarked, the expanding middle class in the Thai society held control over the determination of new Thai culture because they constituted the market which buys

cultural products, and as Kasien tried to analyze in his recent article on "consuming Thainess", what these people are buying are not just products but the symbols associated with the products. Thongchai once remarked that as Thais are pre-occupied with "modernity" and of establishing a modern identity, we chose to construct (and perhaps buy) what would represent us as modern. But this modernity is slightly complicated and has become much more sophisticated than it was for Thais in the past. Whereas in the past to be modern (and therefore superior) is to buy and display Western products, the superiority of the modern time among Thai must be to buy and display what is modern as well as Thai. This is superior not only because it is modern but because it is exclusive and authentic. Nobody else but Thais can display modern Thainess.

To bring us back from consumerism to social relations, at this stage we may say that the concerns over consumerism is closely related to concerns over changing social relations. As once remarked by Lukacs, in the mature stage of development of capitalism, it is not only labour that has been commodified, but commodification is generalized to all social relations (cf. Ulin 1991:76). And perhaps this is why all that is solid melts into air. Even love can be bought. People do not even know how to naturally love but have to be taught the 'art of loving' (cf. Eric Frohm's best seller in the U.S. and translated into Thai). (see also a brief discussion on this in Atthajak 2539 B.E.) While Lukacs was preoccupied with raising the consciousness of workers so that they realized the objective condition of their exploitation (and Thai writers concerned with the problem of consciousness are for example Kanjana 2526 B.E.), there is a shift, for example as in the recent writing of Kasien, to use a different approach to view commodification of all social relations as a representation of a new type of social relations, and how meanings are constructed or perceived by each individual whom we may now call a consumer.

#### THE FOURTH TURNING POINT : A NEW TREND IN THAI STUDIES

#### POWER RELATIONS AND SUBJECT AND SUBJECTIVITY IN THAI STUDIES

Vandergeest makes a remark that the study of modernity seems to be preoccupied with two aspects of social forces which may seem oppositional, that is on the one hand, social scientists paid attention to the limitation of capitalism such as the Weberian iron cage

or foucauldian discipline and regulation; but on the other hand, social scientists are also interested in the more emancipatory movement within capitalism such as de Tocquiveille's revolutionary democracy or democratic participation as discussed by LaClau and Mouffe. Despite it being seemingly oppositional, however, Vandergeest remarks that they are dual processes that occur simultaneously. In the same paper he also remarks that changes taking place in the wider sphere like the National or global spheres also produce impact upon changes at the local level. In his opinion, Anderson's analysis of the imagined communities paid emphasis on the role of print capitalism and the middle class in the emergence of nationalism without touching upon such impact on the rural sector. On the other hand Scott's emphasis of changes, and ideological struggles taking place in the local arena does not give due weight to the impact of nationalism and the claim of citizenship on the part of the rural inhabitants. According to Vandergeest, the emergence of a nation state with the change of social status of the majority of people from 'royal subjects' to that of 'citizenary' does produce an impact on the rural inhabitants who demand more rights as citizens. While there is an attempt by the state to regularize these citizens, as he shows in the case study from Satinpra in the south of Thailand, as through the use of legal forces, the villagers, who now conceive of themselves as a citizen can demand citizenship right, making their demands on the same law codes. The regulatory force can at the same time be reinterpreted as an emancipatory force. In this respect we may say that Vandergeest's work is one of the pioneering efforts in Thai studies to discuss power relations through the concepts of subject and subjectivity.

As a matter of fact, in 1984 Turton wrote about the "limits of ideological domination" where he attempted to demonstrate that the so called 'dominant ideology' can never forever be dominant. He discussed the process of 'interpellation' a process wherein domination (by dominating forces) is attempted through repetitive doctrination, combined sometimes with appeals, though occasionally with threat and physical force to form a subject out of an individual. However, as people are imaginative, they have ways to reinterpret and use the same ideology to fight back against the dominating force. For example, while 'nationalism' may be used as a controlling ideology against any act that the

dominating forces may define as a threat to national security, the subjects thus under control may make a list of their own invention that certain acts, for example, corruption, is more a threat to national security; and hence those in control of state power if failing in the accusation from below as being corrupted may not be immuned to hold on their monopoly of the love of the nation, and hence, their state power. In this sense, Turton's work has also touched upon the analysis of power relation and formation of subject and subjectivity.

In 1991 Manas and Turton edited a book on Thai constructions of knowledge which includes collection of articles that discuss power relations through formation of subject and subjectivity. Tanabe's paper on the 'Spirits, power and the discourse of female gender' attempts a discussion on the formation of female subjects while Turton's own work on "invulnerability and local knowledge" may be seen as an attempt on the discussion of the formation of male subjects.

At roughly the same time, *National Identity and Its Defenders*, edited by Reynolds (1991) shows an attempt to discuss how Thai nationality as an identity or subject is constructed through a distinctive process of the construction of Thainess as against Otherness.

## CONCLUSION

The change in the social relations in Thailand, roughly speaking is changes from the traditional relations - ascribed status base, to that of a more modern one, -which is achievement base. Though it may be too reductionist a statement to say that the development follows the modernization handbook, a certain direction that Thailand is heading seems to suggest that the statement may not be without truth, though of course much more complex processes have been occurring all along. Within this development process, there is a reluctance on the one hand to cling to the past, peaceful way of life, while at the same time there is a desire to be more westernized and hence 'modern'.

Since after the second world war Thailand has been pushing rapidly into the globalized economy. During the time of Luang Phibun it has been observed that the nationalism project of Luang Phibun could not be separated from the discourse of

modernity and progress (Vandergeest 1993: 142). Though some scholars may have viewed Buddhism as an obstacle to modern development, many scholars were convinced that Buddhism has been reinterpreted as supportive of modern development, and that the role of Buddhist monks as developers of modernity should not be underestimated (cf. Reynolds 1972, Tambiah 1976). 'Modern' Buddhist teaching emphasized 'hard work' as an ethic which is complementary to capitalist development (Vandergeest 1993). It was even remarked that Buddhist monks were incorporated harmoniously within the capitalist development process as quite often monks do have a role to perform in the opening ceremonies of modern business enterprises and given an offering in cash (Sulak 1981, cited in Turton 1988).

A reading of "The Bourgeois Literature" writing by Nithi some times in the early 1980s traced the development of Bourgeois thinking as manifested in the literature in the early Ratanakosin period, which gave rise to Bourgeois type of social relations. Bourgeois thinking emphasized hard work, a virtue of having wealth or 'money', and including more mundane (scientific) thinking of this worldliness and this worldly possible achievement, in contrast to the loathing of physical work, the condemnation of working for money (though not at money per se), and the thinking of the other-worldliness and accumulation of past merit as justification for present being of the Sakdina class. However, Nithi observed that where the Bourgeois may assert the right to be treated more equally, this demand was not extended to all kinds of social relations (town and country, men and women) but restricted only to the contest to be treated on par with the Sakdina class.

In modern time, with the acceleration of capitalist development, it has been observed that there is a change in the fundamental concept of time from a more relaxed pre-capitalist 'natural time' recognition to a more precise measurement of clock time and sometimes even of money time (cf. Turton 1984, 1988) - and this took place even in the rural area. Villagers who returned from factory work from town brought with them the 'modern' concept of time. In the changing rural areas it was observed that festivals are sometimes not held on ground of 'lack of time'. The general atmosphere is the quickening tempo of work of two or even three cycles of crops a year, which makes it necessary for

replacement of human labour who can no longer perform fast enough task, to machinery.

Rapid industrialization resulted inevitably to the influx of migration from rural areas into town - both in the form of unskilled or skilled labour seeking either temporary or permanent employment in town, as well as the young people seeking education who later form themselves into a category of white collar workers. These two categories of workers, the rootless free labour from the countryside formed a substantial composition of residence of Bangkok which was estimated as no less than 8 millions in the 1990s. They entered into a new form of social relations of the impersonal, anonymous, faceless type of the 'Gesellschaft', of a large city- a different kind of setting of space from the smaller unit of the countryside that they were accustomed of.

Apart from the category of the new urban dwellers there are still a relatively large number of people at the fringe of development, the marginals, the poor people in the rural area and poor unskilled workers in the urban area. Discussing the 'New Poverty Line' Medhi (2536 B.E.) stated that, though the number of poor people below the old poverty line may have been reduced, but as the standard and cost of living in the past twenty years had risen new indices are needed to construct a new poverty line. And when these new indices are taken into consideration, the number of people below the poverty line are still fairly large. The problem of poverty and inequality is still a critical issue facing Thailand.

Within this social context where 'the static world of the peasants of old has crumbled', 'the world beyond the reach of scientific reasoning' has to give way to the new capitalist force. 'Performance in the broad Thai essence (not only stage performance) degenerated and would only be kept in museum, because this performance cannot take place out of its (familiar) social context (which has already been changed)' (Nithi 2538B.E. (b) : 91).

On the one hand, there is a nostalgia to go back in search of our 'root' - to revive good 'traditional' way of Thai life. This urge to reconstruct traditional Thai community is not a unique Thai experience. Scott's writing of the claim to return to old Islamic virtue of the socialized produce in the form of Zakat by the poor peasant in a Malaysian village, and their complaints of the heartless stingy capitalist landowners is but one example of the utilization

of the 'weapons of the weak'.

Quite in contrast to the community culture school there are people who argue that conflicting forces between 'old and new' may not be a 'problem' since they together form a driving force of an always dynamic social relations (cf. Thongchai 2538 B.E.). These conflicting forces may even help to provide a release from the old oppressive force also called 'tradition'. However, one should be aware of the claim of the new domination, the new globalization discourse as proposed by the new middle class who try to assert their ascension into power by controlling and guiding social relations to their advantage through the image of 'modernity'.

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**AMONG DRAGONS, GEESE AND TIGERS:  
THE THAI ECONOMY  
IN GLOBAL AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVES**

**BY**

**Pasuk PHONGPAICHIT**

**Faculty of Economics  
Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand**

# AMONG DRAGONS, GEESE AND TIGERS: THE THAI ECONOMY IN GLOBAL AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

Pasuk PHONGPAICHIT<sup>\*</sup>

From 1980 until the Asian economic crisis in 1997 the Thai economy ranked among the fastest growing in the world. As a result, study of the Thai economy is no longer a local preserve. Thailand is now part of the global debate on the nature of economic change, and particularly on the dynamics of Asian economic growth. This debate has been populated with animals, both mythical and real. Japan has been pictured as the leader of a flight of geese. South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong were dubbed as the Four Dragons or Asian Tigers. In the early 1990s Thailand along with Indonesia and Malaysia were sometimes called the little dragons or tigercubs.

This paper discusses approaches to the Thai economy during the economic boom years of the 1980s to 1995. These approaches cover a broad spectrum, with both local and international perspectives. The first part of the paper outlines the on-going global debate on the dynamics of Asian economic growth, especially the exchange between the World Bank and a group of economists at the UNCTAD. The second part focuses on local approaches: the management approach of the Bank of Thailand; the liberal neo-classicism of the Thai Development Research Institute (TDRI); the institutional approach among economists in Thai universities; the political economy view at Chulalongkorn University; and new approaches among Thai non-government organisations (NGOs).

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<sup>\*</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit, Associate Professor, Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University.

## **PART I: GLOBAL DEBATE ON THE DYNAMICS OF ASIAN ECONOMIC GROWTH**

### **The World Bank's Miracle Study**

In 1993 the World Bank (WB) published *East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy*. This special, high-profile WB report set out to draw conclusions from the experiences of high performing Asian economies, for application as policy lessons for other developing countries. The eight Asian economies covered in the WB study were Japan; the four first-tier NICs of South Korea (Republic of Korea), Taiwan (the Republic of China), Singapore and Hong Kong; and the three second-tier NICs of Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. These were identified as the eight East Asian miracle economies because they had all achieved rapid economic growth and structural change, especially since the 1960s. The WB also cited other indicators of high achievement, such as high rates of GNP per capita, declining poverty levels, a rise in life expectancy, and an improvement in the human resource development index.

According to the WB, the success of the three second-tier NICs was based on promotion of export-oriented industrialisation, trade liberalisation and foreign direct investment. Their major strategies had been: support for private enterprise operating freely in a market economic system; investment in education to improve the quality of human resources; and an open policy towards capital movement. The government's role was confined to macroeconomic management and human resource development. The governments had not taken any direct role in the economy, with the exception of some investments in state enterprises which the WB advised should be phased out by privatisation. The WB recognised the need for governments to intervene to safeguard the environment in the interests of long-term 'sustainable growth'. But the WB advised governments to use the price mechanism (the idea of 'polluter pays') rather than direct controls.

The WB argued that economic stability is necessary for economic growth because it promotes foreign capital inflow and increases the competitiveness of exports, the heart of export-oriented industrialisation. The WB especially praised Thai policy-

makers for adhering to strict macroeconomic management based on a balanced budget, conservative fiscal and monetary policies, and a stable baht, and for maintaining a relatively open economy which welcomed foreign direct investment.

The WB emphasised that governments should reduce their intervention in the economy and let the market mechanism have full play. The WB argued that government intervention distorted the market, prevented optimal resource allocation, and generated wasteful 'economic rent'. The WB particularly objected to direct intervention in setting industrial policies (such as providing low interest rates for small and medium firms in specific industries, subsidies to enterprises for export production). The *Miracle* report argued that the second-tier NICs were able to achieve rapid economic growth through industrialisation without an industrial policy.

The WB extended its non-interventionist stance to social policy. It opposed active interventions to solve problems of income distribution, and argued that better equity could be achieved by a mixture of expanded education and long-run 'trickle-down'. For those living below poverty lines, the WB granted the need for government to provide safety nets, but cautioned that these policies should not cause an undue burden on the government budget. On political development, the World Bank argued that the market mechanism operates best in a democratic environment. But it declined to suggest ways to promote democracy.

At the close of the *Miracle* study, the WB advocated minimum government intervention in the economy, absence of industrial policy, integration with the world economy, and limited social policy intervention as a model for emulation by other less industrialised countries wishing to develop.

#### The UNCTAD View

A group of economists at UNCTAD<sup>1</sup> took particular objection to the WB conclusions about government roles in the industrialisation of Asian countries.<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Included in the group are such as Professors Alistair Sugh, Robert Rowthorn, H.J. Chang and Gabriel Palma at the University of Cambridge; K.S. Jomo at the University of Malaya, Pasuk Phongpaichit at Chulalongkorn University.

<sup>2</sup> On first-tier NICs alone there is a vast literature based on the two competing paradigms of 1) neo-classical market-oriented explanations, and b) the statist explanations which belong to the genre of new political economy. See a neat

UNCTAD group challenged each of the main points of the WB argument: the role of industrial policy, the relationship with the world economy, the role of economic 'rents', and the content of social policy.

The UNCTAD group argued against the view that Asian experience proved that countries could industrialise without any industrial policy. The group viewed industrial policy in broad terms as state intervention to promote specific industries. The group analysed the experience of first-tier NICs in promoting intermediate and capital good industries, particularly the case of South Korea in the 1960s. The Korean government used preferential subsidised loans directed to priority sectors; subsidised inputs for specific firms; and promotion of large monopolies so that firms could achieve scale economies where necessary. Other industrial policies used by the first-tier NICs included measures to promote national saving; controls on imports and foreign capital flow in order to promote local rather than foreign firms; and management of domestic investment for greater efficiency in the use of scarce resources of capital (Chang, 1994: 108-118). Summing up the UNCTAD case, one writer concluded:

There is now widespread acknowledgement of the role of the state in East Asian late industrialisation and of considerable variation in the role, nature and extent of government intervention, and how all this has changed over time (Deyo, 1987; White, 1988; Amsden, 1989; Wade, 1991; Chang, 1994).<sup>3</sup>

Further, the UNCTAD group challenged the WB view that foreign investment was critical to growth and that the best way to attract foreign investment was to keep the economy open and well-integrated with the world economy. The UNCTAD group argued that the first-tier NICs regulated the degree of integration with the world economy, welcomed foreign investment only into strategic sectors, and where necessary defended local capital from the full brunt of international competition. As one of the group concluded:

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summary of this debate in Chowdhury & Islam, 1993: ch.3.

<sup>3</sup> Jomo K. Sundaram, 'Industrial Policy in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia: Lessons from Growth and Structural Change in the Second-Tier Asian Newly Industrialising Countries', mimeo of report prepared for UNCTAD (Faculty of Economics, University of Malaysia, 1996), p. 137.

... these countries achieved strategic integration with the world economy by integrating up only to the degree and in those spheres where it was desirable for them to do so in order to promote long-term economic growth.<sup>4</sup>

However, the UNCTAD group conceded that foreign direct investment had played a more important role in the experience of second-tier NICs than in the case of first-tier NICs. Nevertheless statistics show that only Malaysia has had a high share of foreign direct investment in total investment. In Thailand foreign direct investment contributed only 10 percent of total investment in the 1990s. The UNCTAD group also conceded that industrial policy had been less significant in the case of second-tier NICs, but denied that there had been no industrial policy at all. Moreover the group argued that the weakness of industrial policy had resulted in a relatively shallow industrial structure and limited technological capabilities.

Next the UNCTAD group challenged the WB view that government interventions inevitably created economic 'rents' which were more likely to retard than accelerate growth:

... some of the motives for state intervention may be described as 'rent-seeking behaviour' and are 'wasteful' in the sense that rent is necessarily dissipated entirely... as suggested by neo-classical economic analysis (e.g. Krueger 1974). But uncorruptible government and forward-looking policy makers would... strengthen state capacity and the quality of industrial policy (or government intervention) in such a way as to structure rents more effectively to achieve desired economic policy objectives and minimise unnecessary and undesirable rentier activity as well as rent dissipation due to rent-seeking activities.<sup>5</sup>

An UNCTAD-group economist working on South Korea argued that rent transfers may well enhance rather than undermine growth. If capital flight is discouraged, the

<sup>4</sup> Ajit Singh, *How Did East Asia Grow so Fast? Slow Progress Towards and Analytical Consensus*, Discussion Paper No 87 UNCTAD, Geneva, 1995, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> Jomo, *Industrial Policy*, p. 138

greater concentration of wealth associated with such rentier activity may actually raise corporate savings, thus accelerating capital accumulation, growth and structural change. Rents may also work as incentives for investment. Conversely, deregulation and other aspects of economic liberalisation may weaken the incentives for domestic investment without guaranteeing to enhance foreign investment.<sup>6</sup> In sum, economic rent may not be harmful to the economic growth process if it is channelled into productive investment. The neo-classical economists' argument against economic rent rests wholly on the assumption that rentiers will not invest in productive activity.<sup>7</sup>

Next the UNCTAD group challenged the WB perspective on social policy. The UNCTAD economists argued that history showed growth failed to 'trickle down' through society, and that government intervention was necessary to steer the economy and society towards more desirable goals. They pointed out that the first-tier NICs did not concentrate on growth alone, but also on improving social securities and welfare of the rural and poor people. Japan invested heavily behind policies which reduce the gap between urban and rural (through rice subsidies scheme and other policies). Singapore developed the most elaborate social security system in the world. In South Korea, after the first spurt of industrial growth, planners made it a priority to reverse the widening gap between urban and rural incomes. South Korea went from being one of the most unequal to one of the most equal societies in a matter of years.

The UNCTAD group argued that the second-tier NICs had lagged behind the first-tier NICs on social policies. Their governments had not paid sufficient attention to the issue of poverty and income distribution. Thus industrialisation in the second-tier NICs had led to a worsening in income distribution. In Thailand for instance the Gini coefficient deteriorated from 0.479 in 1981 to 0.543 in 1992.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> H.J. Chang, *The Political Economy of Industrial Policy* (London : Macmillan, 1994)

<sup>7</sup> On this point about economic rent Khan has argued that most works on economic rent neglected the possibility that the gain from economic rent may be higher than the loss from its wastefulness if it was invested productively. See Mustaq Husain Khan, 'Clientelism, Corruption and Capitalist Development: An Analysis of State Intervention With Special Reference to Bangladesh', Ph.D thesis, University of Cambridge, 1989.

<sup>8</sup> Medhi Krongkaew, *Khwam plianplaeng noi saphawa khwam yakjon lae kan krajal raidal noi prathet thai pi 2505/6 tung pi 2533* [The Change in the Poverty Conditions in Thailand 1902/3 - 1992], (Faculty of Economics, Thammasat

At one end of the global debate among economists on economic development strategy, the WB supports the market mechanism, and minimum roles for government except in human resource development, infrastructure, promotion of foreign investment and macroeconomic management (along conservative lines). The WB argues that industrialisation can occur without government designing industrial policies. It is best to leave entrepreneurs to operate under a market framework. Problems of poverty and income distribution will be overcome through trickle down effects without the need for subsidies and similar policy interventions.

At the other end of the global debate, the UNCTAD group is more sympathetic to the statist approach to economic development. Industrial policy is an effective means for government to intervene in the market to promote industrial expansion. The government also has important roles to play in maintaining a 'strategic' level of integration with the world economy, in promoting productivity, and in designing social security and social welfare schemes to combat problems of poverty and inequality.

The UNCTAD group conceded that second-tier NICs development relied more on foreign direct investment, and less on industrial policy, but suggested this may have resulted in a growth pattern which is not sustainable for the long term. The resulting industrial structure is not very deep and technological capability is inferior to what was achieved in South Korea in comparable periods. Further the fact that government of ASIA NICs were less interested in social policies has resulted in a worsening in income distribution despite the rapid economic growth experience. In these respects the 'quality' of growth of the first-tier NICs where government was more active, is superior to that of the second-tier NICs where governments have not been as active and where more reliance was placed on foreign direct investment.

## PART II: LOCAL VIEWS IN THAILAND

In the late 1980s, it became clear that Thailand's economy had entered a phase of rapid change. Since then, there has been a large volume of writing on the changing structure of the Thai economy, the social impact of economic change, and future prospects. This paper considers five major groups of writings on the Thai economy

during its recent phase of accelerated growth between 1960 and 1995:

1. The 'management' view represented by economists at the Bank of Thailand;
2. The liberal neo-classicism view represented by leading economists at TDRI;
3. The institutional approach among economists in Thai universities;
4. The political economy School at Chulalongkorn University; and
5. The NGO's view.

This categorisation is an invention for the purposes of this paper. It is a device for showing the spectrum of views. It does not claim to be exhaustive or authoritative. Clearly, the five different categories are rather different. Only the Chulalongkorn group can be considered a 'school', and even this group is internally divided. TDRI is an institution which depends on a changing roster of consultants. The NGOs are a loosely connected group of people with widely diverging views. Furthermore, there is a high degree of overlap between these categories. Several in the institutional group have worked for TDRI. Some of the Chulalongkorn group are associated with the NGOs. The categorisation is designed to illustrate the range of approaches, rather than to fix individual writers under specific categories. Finally, the treatment of each approach cannot attempt to be comprehensive. The aim of the paper is to offer a sampler of differing views from the various approaches. For this purpose, the paper concentrates particularly on some major works which have appeared since the major change in the Thai economy in the mid-1980s until the mid-1990's.

The first point to make is about the relationship between these local approaches and the international debate on the Asian economies. The Bank of Thailand and TDRI approaches belong at the WB end of the spectrum. The institutional economists and to some extent the political economy group may be roughly aligned with the UNCTAD view. But the relationship between the international debate and the local debate is very tenuous. While Thailand has been included as one of the second-tier NICs covered by the international debate, Thai economists have scarcely participated in the debate at all, and have not reflected the debate in their own writings to any significant extent.

This rift stems from fundamental differences in focus. The international debate is about *economic growth*, and particularly about strategies and policies for engineering growth. Most Thai economists have tended to take economic growth for granted. Indeed,

all of the approaches more or less agree that the acceleration of the Thai economy has been the result of *imported growth*. The focus of the Thai economists has been on managing the consequences of this imported growth. In this respect, they have focused on two major areas: *stability* and *equity*. The spectrum of Thai approaches is defined by the different weight that each approach gives to each of these two elements.

The Thai approaches share a similar view on what has happened to the Thai economy. Before 1984-5, Thailand already had a strong momentum of growth based on exploitation of natural resources and import-substitution in a relatively stable environment marked by conservative macroeconomic management. The acceleration of the past decade has been the result of closer integration with the international economy, resulting in a rapid process of 'catch-up' spurred by foreign investment. Economists in all schools point out that the recent boom indicates Thai economic great potential to grow. This potential has been shaped by three major factors: the power of private enterprises; the quality of the labour force; the readiness of government to promote competition within the context of the free market mechanism in order to realise the potential of the economic system.

The speed and scale of this process has created two types of problems. First, the rapid change in the structure of the economy, and the closer integration with the outside world, have made the economy more difficult to manage. This is shown by the growing difficulties of macroeconomic management, the pressures on the stability of the baht, the rising current account deficit (and investment-savings gap), and the difficulties in managing international capital flows.

Second, the impact of growth has been very uneven, resulting in a severe maldistribution of income and welfare. The post-1985 acceleration has been confined to the urban economy, while agriculture has stagnated.

While the different approaches concur on this outline picture, they differ considerably on how it should be interpreted, and on what strategies are needed for the future.

#### The management approach

The 'management approach' is this paper's shorthand title for the views of the

Bank of Thailand (BoT). These views are important not only because of the Bank's regulatory function, but also because of its role as a centre of education and analysis on the economy. In the absence of strong economic ministries, the BoT has taken a prominent role in defining economic policy. The BoT has also acted as a training ground for many economists whose subsequent careers have been in business, academia or other parts of the technocracy. The BoT has also sponsored research, run journals, and acted as an open advocate of certain economic strategies.

Much of the theoretical underpinning of the BoT view derives from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. These bodies have cultivated their relationship with the BoT through training and advice. Their influence over the BoT has waxed and waned over time, but was especially powerful in the early 1980s when Thailand was heavily dependent on these institutions' financial support. Both because of the BoT's role, and because of these strong institutional links, the BoT aligns very closely with the WB view of economic growth strategies.

In its analysis of the roots of Thailand's growth, the BoT view puts special stress on the contribution of conservative macromanagement. Careful management of the fiscal position and of the balance of payments have resulted in a stable baht and low inflation. These in turn have been the preconditions for growth over the long term.

Historically the Thai economy has always been powered by external demand. From around the 1950s to the 1970s foreign grant aid and other capital inflow played a crucial role in helping the government balance the budget. In the 1980s and 1990s direct foreign investment and portfolio investment provided the impetus of the economic boom. The Bank of Thailand believes that Thailand must promote foreign direct investment and foster the link with the global economy in every way because these are the major sources of economic growth.

The management approach recognises that the recent spurt of growth has brought with it problems of poverty, resource competition and deterioration of natural resources and environment. However, it follows the WB view that the income gap will eventually be overcome by trickle down, helped by some limited fiscal policies and investments in education. The much larger problem, according to this approach, is the management of economic stability under changed conditions. This has both internal and

external dimensions. Internally, Thailand suffers from a low savings rate which results in a tendency towards deficits on the current account and high dependence on foreign capital inflows. Externally, the international financial market has become virtually unregulated and highly unstable. Long-term capital (e.g. direct investment) is rapidly being displaced by short-term capital (portfolio, bank loans). As a result of the interaction of these internal and external factors, Thailand has a growing dependence on short-term capital flows to finance long-term investment.

The ultimate solution to this problem, according to the management view, is for Thailand to increase its savings rate. But this is a long-term policy. For the short-term, managed exchange rates, some control over the flow of short-term capital and occasional credit squeezes are seen as the major policy measures. Economists in this approach still believe that strict conservative fiscal and monetary policies is crucial to maintain the overall macroeconomic stability.

They believe in policies which keep the value of the baht stable to give confidence to exporters and foreign investors. One of the strategies emphasised is to aim for a high turn over of exports in order to cope with the increased imports and rising current account deficit. Flotation of the exchange rate to regulate the capital flow is to be avoided as it may harm exporters. But in recent years there has been a greater pressure from the private sector for the BoT to move towards more exchange rate flexibility as a means to manage short-term capital movement and inflation.

Since the mid 1990s, the liberalisation and expansion of the financial sector is seen as the best way to increase the availability and reduce the cost of capital for export expansion and infrastructure projects. It also has the effect of countering the monopolistic power of local commercial banks.

The approach of the management economists is strictly neo-classical and functional. Their main concern is to maintain high growth with economic stability. Distribution and the issue of quality of life are secondary to their concerns.

#### **The liberal neo-classical view of TDRI.**

The Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) was formed in 1984, on the cusp of the economic boom, 'to conduct policy research and disseminate results to the

public and private sectors'. As a research and consultancy institute for government departments, TDRI has played an active role in policy-making. Through its series of Year-End Conferences and a large publishing drive, TDRI has played a major role in defining the debate on the Thai economy and its future prospects. While the Institute's papers and publications cover a wide variety of topics and views, there is a core agenda which emerges particularly from the work of the Institute's two directors, Ammar Siamwalla and Chalongphop Sussangkarn, and some of their long-run associates such as Mingsarn Santikam.<sup>9</sup>

The WB has been a donor to TDRI, and many of its core members have spent time as staffers or consultants to the WB. In addition, some senior BoT figures have served on TDRI's Board. In terms of the international debate, TDRI falls well to the WB end of the spectrum. It strongly supports the view that conservative macromanagement has contributed to Thailand's growth. It attributes the spurt of growth largely to liberalisation and foreign investment. On the key issue of industrial policy the TDRI has explicitly taken the WB line opposing the need for industrial policy in Thailand.

However, as a consultancy body rather than a regulatory institution, TDRI has been free to take a broader view of Thailand's economy. This has resulted in some significant differences of emphasis from both the BoT and the WB. It is these differences that merit the title 'liberal neo-classicism' for the TDRI approach.

#### **TDRI and sustainability**

TDRI departs from the BoT view, and from the other Thai approaches, in having a

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<sup>9</sup> Almost every year since 1986 TDRI has organised a Year-End Seminar focusing on current economic issues. A list of the seminar topics show a trend moving away from strict economic and technical issues to a mix between economic, social and political ones:

- 1986 Resource and Management
- 1988 Income Distribution and Long-term Development
- 1989 Thailand in the International Economic Community
- 1990 Industrialising Thailand and Its Impact on Environment
- 1991 Educational Options for the Future of Thailand
- 1992 Thailand's Economic Structure Towards Balanced Development
- 1993 Who Gets What and How
- 1995 Challenging for the Future Participation.

specific concern with economic growth. Moreover in this respect, the TDRI parts company with the WB and in some ways adheres to the UNCTAD line that growth which is highly dependent on foreign investment runs the risk of being unsustainable.

One of TDRI's first major projects was to develop a macro model for simulating Thailand's growth. Further, one of TDRI's long-running concerns has been the need for technology transfer. Mingsarn Santikarn demonstrated that foreign firms investing in Thailand were often positively reluctant to transfer technology. TDRI advocated policies which would make technology transfer a condition of investment promotion, and which would encourage firms to invest more heavily in R&D.

Subsequently, TDRI has adopted a broader concern for 'sustainable growth' and has concentrated on the problem of changing comparative advantage. Thailand is definitely losing its comparative advantage in labour-intensive export industries. Between 1991 and 1995 the rate of growth of labour-intensive export products has declined while those of medium and high- tech industries increased (at 20-40 percent a year). By 1995 the total value of medium and high tech-industrial export products was higher than that of the labour-intensive industries. The future high growth industries will be computer parts, electronic products, transport vehicles and machinery parts. Thailand took twenty years to lose its comparative advantage in labour-intensive industries. For how many years it can continue to be a base for production of medium and high-tech export products?

The highest risk lies in the fact that all the medium and high tech- products mentioned are invested and designed by foreigners. The high rate of export growth merely results from increased foreign investment in those products on Thailand soil in the last 7-8 years. The decision to produce, what and by how much, is entirely in the hands of foreigners. It is neither controlled by the Thai government nor by Thai entrepreneurs. Thailand's part in all this has been to create a favourable environment to attract these foreign investors. Thailand is merely a production base for export of these products. This is not a satisfactory state of affairs. The future strategy must be to make sure that Thai entrepreneurs and government have more definite roles in the decision making process of these industries. Yet the TDRI shies away from suggesting that Thailand should have an industrial policy (see also TDRI Master Plan of Industrial

development for Thailand). On this it has taken the World Bank line. The major strategy proposed is merely the emphasis on the transfer of technology. That means develop the technological capability of human labour in Thailand.

### **TDRI and equity**

TDRI also departs from the BoT management approach over equity. TDRI made 'Income Distribution and Long-term Development' the theme of its second Year-End conference in 1988, and returned to the same theme in 1992 with 'Thailand's Economic Structure: Towards Balanced Development'. TDRI does not deny the importance of trickle down effects, but argues that the very rapid shifts in Thailand's economy have created structural problems which result in a severe degree of inequity. Such inequity is a threat to social stability and a potential threat to the sustainability of growth. Hence TDRI advocates more positive policy-making to overcome these structural problems and improve equity.

TDRI has advocated two main approaches to the equity problem: investment in agricultural growth, and investment in education.

Before becoming TDRI's first director, Ammar Siamwalla had a long-term career interest in agricultural policies. Thailand's prior pattern of agricultural growth with virtually unlimited supplies of land, created a rural sector with high population and low productivity. Thailand's industrialisation based on foreign investment and relatively capital-intensive technology has created a relatively small industrial sector with high productivity but limited use of labour. While the city prospers, many are stranded in the low-productivity and low-income rural sector. Large numbers of these participate in the urban economy part time through short-term migration. But in 1995, 60 percent of the total population had their base in the rural sector, and by 2020 TDRI predicted that this would still be 40 percent.

TDRI has advocated investment in agriculture as a means to alleviate the income gap without prejudicing overall growth. TDRI advocates dissemination of higher-value crops through research and extension activities.

Ammar's deputy and successor, Chalongphob Sussangkarn, has been prominent as an advocate of educational policies which will simultaneously promote

growth and equity. He calculated rates of return to different levels of education to prove that investment in education would have a positive pay-back for both the economy and the individual. As the industrial economy began to take off, TDRI specialised in manpower projections which encouraged government to accelerate its investments in education in order to forestall shortages of skilled and educated labour.

### **TDRI and politics**

TDRI's role as an advocate for policies to create sustainable growth has gradually drawn the Institute to take a view on politics. It appears TDRI has become increasingly pessimistic about the possibility that the sort of policy reforms it advocates will be adopted within the current political structure.

In the early 1990s, TDRI published analyses which showed policy-making was constrained by the dominance of sectional interests over the parliament and cabinet. In 1993, these views were summarised at the Year-End Conference on 'Who Gets What and How'. Two years later, the conference examined ways to broaden the range of public participation in policy-making. In May 1996, TDRI presented 'Thailand Vision 2020', a generally positive and optimistic view of the nation's past development and future prospects with a strong emphasis on the political framework required for future success.

TDRI's model for Thai politics is a form of democratic pluralism which creates the environment for technocrats to manage the economy and society in a rational and fair manner. Vision's review of past success attributed a high degree of importance to the quality of the bureaucracy. Thai élites sent their offspring to study in good educational institutions both at home and abroad. As a career in the bureaucracy was prestigious, it attracted many of the leading lights of the well-educated people. The Thai bureaucracy was thus able to become a core body to determine appropriate and effective development policies on a continuing basis. For the future:

Thai politics must develop to become a full democracy with transparency in its administration, efficiency and maintenance of social justice.

Politicians and bureaucrats must be good men, capable, having moral

integrity and ethical, so that people can think of them as dependable.<sup>10</sup>

In order to ensure the development of politics and administration to achieve the above vision the TDRI report outlines three major non-economic factors which must be enhanced.

First, different groups in society must be promoted to become the core forces to push for a reform in politics and public administration. But it is hoped that these forces will push for change in a peaceful way. The democratic trend in all parts of the world could contribute to this smooth transition. What might happen in the year 2020 is a search for measures to punish politicians and government officials who have tainted behaviour, as what has been happening in South Korea in 1995/6.

Second, there has to be a development within the political system so that it reaches the international standard of practice. Politicians should receive reasonably high and regular income and good welfare, comparable to those working in the private sector. There will have to be a reform in the electoral system in order to reduce the cost of election and eradicate vote buying. The reformed system should attract good men to enter politics more than now. The bureaucracy must also be reformed in order to keep up with the globalising trends. Privatisation, decentralisation and transparency are some of the key words used in discussing the reform of the bureaucracy.

Third, a system of checks and balances is needed to ensure accountability within the bureaucracy and political system. The system must be within government, and between citizens and government. The public has the right of access to information in politics and in bureaucracy so that they can monitor what is going on directly. The media must have full freedom. They must operate under a condition of competition. They play an important role in pushing government and bureaucracy to be accountable to society. They must also develop themselves and work with moral integrity. It is hoped that the alertness among the people in all these things will lead to different types of neutral organisation (*ongkorn thi pen klang*) in order to monitor and hold politicians and government accountable to the public.

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<sup>10</sup> TDRI, *Thailand Vision 2020*, presented at the Sirikit Hall on May 15, 1996 (TDRI, 1996), p. 47.

### Economists with an institutional approach.

While the TDRI approach places a high degree of emphasis on social policies, it still displays a WB-style emphasis on market-oriented and 'market-friendly' policies, and its political analysis imagines a democratic pluralism as idealised as a perfectly competitive market. Among many other Thai economists who still work within a basically neo-classical framework, there is another approach which allocates a more positive role for policy-making and which takes a more instrumental view of politics. For convenience, we have grouped these as the 'institutional approach' on grounds that these economists are interested not only in the design of policies but also in the institutional structure required to carry them out.

The economists in this approach are scattered widely across the Thai university network.<sup>11</sup> However, it can be argued that their densest concentration and their spiritual home is at Thammasat University. The two leading figures which we will consider here, Medhi Krongkaew and Rangsan Thanapompan, are both Thammasat economists. Thammasat was founded in 1934 as the 'University of Moral and Political Sciences'. It considers itself as the premier university for social sciences including economics. Dr Puey Ungpakorn, who was rector of Thammasat in the 1970s, helped to mould the intellectual traditions in which the current generation of Thammasat economists worked. Dr Puey was a prominent Governor of the Bank of Thailand who helped to develop some of the BoT's traditions of macromanagement. He was also one of the founders of the NGO movement and an advocate of more equitable growth through local participation. Finally he became a central political figure during the upheavals of the 1970s, and was

<sup>11</sup> An important volume from this group is Medhi Krongkaew (ed), *Thailand's Industrialisation and Its Consequences* (London: St Martin's Press, 1995). Also the works of Rangsan Thanapompan, especially his recent collected volume: *Anijsa laksana khong sangkhom thai*. Works of other writers in this approach will be discussed where relevant, such as *The Direction for Economic Reforms in the 1990s*, edited by Tirana Phongmakhaphat of Chulalongkorn University (1991). Also the papers from the annual Symposium of the Faculty of Economics, Thammasat University; the topics of these seminars since 1989 illustrate the group's focus: If Thailand Turned NICS, What Would Thai People Get? (1989); Does the Existing Law Promote or Retard Thai Economy (1990); Human Market: Men Are Not Pure Labour Power (1991); International Trade of Thailand in the 1990s (1992); Revolution in Public Finance for Economic Reform (1993); Thai Economy in the Year 2000 (1994); The Distribution of Growth in Thailand 1995; Thailand and Asia in the 21st Century (1996).

ultimately forced into exile for his liberal sympathies. His legacy combines a commitment to rigorous policy-making, with a concern over equity, and a realisation of the interconnection between politics and economics.

### The case for interventionism

In their analysis of the processes leading to Thailand's spurt of rapid growth, the institutional approach differs from the BoT and TDRI in three important respects: some doubt on the strategy of outward-oriented growth; more emphasis on the role of policy in bringing about change, and more emphasis on the interaction between policy-making and private entrepreneurship.

Rangsan Thanaponphan at Thammasat University argues that the results of the adoption of export-oriented growth strategy are not always desirable:

The adjustment of the economic strategy from import substitution to an adoption of export-oriented industrialisation did not reduce Thailand's dependence on imports. Indeed Thailand's dependence on imports has increased. This is especially so during the height of the economic boom....The balance of trade deteriorates during periods of economic boom. During periods of economic slow-down, this external dependence declines and the balance of trade deficit improves markedly. ....Therefore the problem of balance of trade deficit can only be solved with attempts to reduce Thailand's dependence on imports.<sup>12</sup>

Rangsan believes that the increased dependence of the Thai economy on trading and investment relations with a few economic powers such as the US and Japan, and the growth of big businesses, have contributed to the worsening of the current account deficit, the persistence of poverty and the deterioration of natural resources and the environment.

In the long phase which preceded export-oriented industrialisation, according to the institutional approach, government helped to build the bases for future growth

<sup>12</sup> Rangsan Thanaponphan, *Anitja laksana sangkhom setthakit thai* [The Uncertainties of Thai Society and Economy] (Bangkok: Kobjai Publishing, 1993), p. 43.

through the import-substitution strategy. In addition, government paved the way for export-oriented growth by shifts in trade and promotion policies in the mid-1980s.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in this policy-making process, the private sector played an important role. In the early 1980s, corporate interests pushed for better institutional access to policy-making, and used this access to accelerate the trend towards export-oriented growth.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, the institutionalists advocate a more positive role for government in the changed conditions after 1985. They argue that industrialisation has had deep and extensive impact on society and economy which demand an increased role for government.

Economic changes led to a need for a reform in the taxation system. This might in the future mean a greater role for the legislative branch in fiscal-policy formulation, greater fiscal autonomy for local government, and reform in property taxes.<sup>15</sup> On the development of monetary policy, Naris anticipated various reforms which could have extensive repercussions on future financial development, such as the liberalisation of commercial and other financial institutions, the lifting of interest-rate ceiling, the relaxation on the holding of commercial bank deposits, and policy implications of the growing importance of external finance.

Because of rapid industrialisation, urban areas and population grew rapidly in the 1980s. Bangkok became the centre of production, wealth and power.<sup>16</sup> For the whole economy, the proportion of population living below the poverty line declined between the 1970s and the late 1980s. In 1988 the poverty incidence was 22.6 percent with more than 11 million being considered poor. More recent studies show the poverty incidence declined to 18.6 percent in 1990 and to 13.7 percent in 1992. By 1992 there were still 7.85 million Thai people living below the official poverty line. Income inequality has also

<sup>13</sup> Suphat Suphachalasai in Medhi Krongkaew (ed.), *Thailand's Industrialisation and Its Consequences* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Kraiyudh in Medhi (ed.), 1995.

<sup>15</sup> Direk in Medhi ed. 1995.

<sup>16</sup> Rimmer in Medhi ed. 1995.

increased. The Gini co-efficient increased from 0.479 in 1988 to 0.543 in 1992.<sup>17</sup> These two phenomena are direct results of policies that favoured large-scale capital-intensive firms over small-scale labour-intensive firms, and manufactured products over agricultural products, resulting in reduced welfare for workers in the agricultural sector.<sup>18</sup> Medhi further argues that structural changes mean the poverty line should be revised upwards to the point where 20.9 million people, or 36.5 percent of the population, would fall below it.<sup>19</sup> Medhi argued that the poverty issue will continue to be Thailand's major problems for sometime to come, and that this fact demands more positive policy interventions.

Furthermore, in projecting growth to the year 2000, Medhi & Direk predicted large-scale changes which will increase the need for government intervention.<sup>20</sup> These changes include shortage of water and labour in agriculture, the changes in technology in industry, increased competition from developed and developing countries in the case of service industry, an increased demand for energy due to urbanisation, the increased demand on government's budget, and possible increased interference from politicians on the work of the authorities dealing with the management of economic stability. The management of the economy will become more difficult as the engine of economic growth slows down, and the consumerist society sets in. The gap in income distribution will widen, and the government will face new social demands.

The economic analysis of the factors behind the rapid economic change among

<sup>17</sup> Medhi Krongkaew, *Khwam plianplaeng nai saphawa khwam yakjon lae kan krajal raidai nai prathet thai pi 2505/6 tung pi 2533* [The Change in the Poverty Conditions in Thailand 1902/3 - 1992]. (Bangkok: Thammasat University, Faculty of Economics, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Pranee in Medhi ed. 1995.

<sup>19</sup> More than 3/4 of the heads of household among the poor work in agriculture. The majority of the household heads were in the older age group of over 50. Most have no education or only elementary education. Medhi Krongkaew, 'Sangkhom thai kap kan krajal ogat lae raidai' [Thai Society and Distribution of Opportunities and Income], presented at the Symposium XVIII, Faculty of Economics, Thammsat University, March 30-31, 1995, pp. 1-19.

<sup>20</sup> Medhi Krongkaew & Direk Pathamasiriwat (1994), 'Setthakit k.s.2000' [The Economy in the Year 2000], presented at Symposium XVII, Bangkok: Faculty of Economics, Thammasat University.

economists of the institutional approach is not so different from the TDRI approach. But their views on the roles of industrial policies and the roles of government in affecting changes and improving the quality of development differ from the TDRI quite markedly.

The institutionalist economists believe in government's intervention more than those at TDRI. On industrial policies, they are more positive that government intervention in designing industrial policies is instrumental in affecting industrialisation in Thailand.<sup>21</sup> On agriculture, they advocate the development of higher-value crops, and solution to the problems of land tenure. On poverty eradication and reducing income inequality, Medhi and some of other institutionalist economists are quite prepared to press government for direct intervention in public provisions for basic safety nets or basic needs in the form of direct transfers, price support for farmers, subsidies on inputs, and more drastic measure like land reform as adopted in Taiwan and Japan.<sup>22</sup> The government should also design particular policy and measures for 'target groups' of the poor, the lowly educated, the elderly who cannot help themselves. A leading economist in this school points out that the government can now afford to take on the role of a 'rat sawatdikan' [welfare state] as the government's fiscal position is sound enough to allow this.<sup>23</sup> Decentralisation of fiscal management in favour of the locality in provincial areas is also advocated. TDRI as represented by Dr Ammar was not prepared to go that far and took a rather strict neo-classical line on these issues.<sup>24</sup>

#### Institutionalists and politics

As with the TDRI approach, the institutionalists recognise that the potential for effecting change through governmental interventions depends on politics. But whereas

<sup>21</sup> See for instance Suphat in Medhi (ed) 1995, and Paitoon Wiboonchutikula, 'Thailand's Industrialisation: Past Performance and Future Issues' (Bangkok: Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Articles by Tirana and Medhi in Tirana Phongmakhaphat (ed.) (1991), *Thitthang kan patirup neyobai setthakdi thai noi thotsawat 1990* [The Direction for the Reform of the Thai Economy in the 1990s] (Bangkok: Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> Medhi Krongkaew, 'Sangkhom thai kap kan krajai ogat lee raldai', p. 1-31.

<sup>24</sup> Ammar in Tirana, 1991: 74-81.

TDRI hopes for democratic pluralism and efficient bureaucracy, the institutionalists try to extrapolate from trends in the politics of the present. They argue that the impact of rapid industrialisation on politics has been marked. Civilian bureaucrats and the military have aligned themselves with businessmen to promote capitalistic industrial development against the interest of the agricultural population. Rapid industrialisation created all kinds of conflicts, such as between business sector and the agricultural sector. These conflicts have tended to overwhelm the old organs of government resulting in an 'institutionalised anarchy'. However, Thailand continues to 'muddle through' by a constant process of negotiation between powerful political forces.<sup>25</sup>

Rangsan Thanapomphan<sup>26</sup> has set the interaction of economic and political change in a wider perspective:

Thai society is undergoing a rapid transformation, which is a direct result of the economic catching-up process. The government's economic policies along the line of 'laisser-faire' (*seriniyom*) with regards to production, commerce, and international finance, increase the degree of openness of the economy. The outward-oriented strategy has meant the Thai economy is now being dragged along with globalisation trends, with government having very little control.

The strength of capitalist economic power is causing an erosion of the patron-client relationship. It is being replaced by a relationship based on financial transactions and contractual relationships. At the same time capitalist forces are turning everything into commodities, and destroying all personal, human relationships.

Capitalist forces are promoting individualism and consumerism. People are adhering to survival of individual (*tua khrai tua man*). The idea of helping one another is replaced by selfishness. The culture of economising and thrift, as well as the work ethic, are being destroyed.

<sup>25</sup> Chai-Anan in Medhi ed. 1995.

<sup>26</sup> Rangsan Thanapomphan, *Anlja laksana khong sangkhom thai* [The Uncertainties of Thai Society] (Bangkok: Amarin Printing and Publishing, 1995) [A collection of articles printed in Phujatkan raiwan, between 1991-1994, under the column "Jek tha phrajan thung sanamluang"].

Many people can get by without having to labour because they receive income from speculating on the stock market and on land deals. In the midst of all these changes, the under-privileged and those with little opportunities have become more isolated in their fight against poverty and other problems.

The struggles in the sphere of culture and politics have become more intensified. The fight between authoritarianism and liberal democracy is not at a final stage. But the society cannot yet achieve a system of liberal democracy. The present political system can be described as "patronage democracy" (*rabop prachathippatai uppatham*). Power is shifting from the old bureaucratic group, especially from the military, to the electorate. But politicians are still appropriating the economic surplus. The difference is that previously it was only the bureaucracy who did this. Now it is also the ruling elites who come up by election.

The globalising trend not only increases economic links between Thailand and other economies. It also creates cultural links. The information technology age means that Thailand's culture, customs and world views are undergoing tremendous changes.

Rangsan is against patron-client relationships. He sees capitalist development as destroying these relationships. But he regrets that they are being replaced by relationships based on money and contracts. He sees it as destroying personal, family relationships. On culture and politics he detested the authoritarian roles of the old bureaucratic polity paradigm. While capitalism and the present democratic system bring in changes such as a decline of authoritarianism and especially the decline of the military in politics, they are merely being replaced by elected politicians, who now reap the economic surplus and usurp their power. Capitalism is bringing in individualism and destroying even personal and family relationship.<sup>27</sup>

#### The political economy school at Chulalongkorn University.

<sup>27</sup> See also the articles by Suntaree, Pranee and Sirilaksana in Medhi ed. 1995.

The political economy school at CU is a product of the October 14 event, which led to a revival of interest in deploying Marxist approach to analyse the economic and social change in Thailand. The name *Setthasat Kanmuang* which denoted a group of economists at CU became known to the public by mid 1977 after members of the group joined together to write a regular column in a daily newspaper presenting a Marxist analysis of economic and social problems.<sup>28</sup> In 1978, Chatthip Nartsupha and Suthy Prasartset applied the Marxist methodology to Thai economic history in the two volumes of *The Political Economy of Siam*. From 1981 the group issued a journal, *Warasan Setthasat Kanmuang*.<sup>29</sup> In 1990, the group founded The Political Economy Centre within the Faculty of Economics at CU. The Centre has held seminars and published studies analysing current changes and future changes.<sup>30</sup>

Whereas the TDRI and institutional approaches came through economics to an appreciation of the role of politics, the political economy approach starts from the proposition that politics and the economy are inseparable.<sup>31</sup>

While members of the school are varied in terms of their emphasis and

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed early history of the Political Economy Group see Preecha et al (1983).

<sup>29</sup> Naphaphorn Atiwanitchayaphong, *Phatthanakan khwamkit setthasat kan muang thai tangtae po.so 2475-patjuban* (Bangkok: Sangsan publishing, 1988) has given a systematic account of the development and contribution of the political economy school of thought at CU up to 1988.

<sup>30</sup> Six annual seminars have been held with the proceedings subsequently published: *Polawat Thai* [Thai Dynamics], 1991; *Rat, Thun Jao Pho Thongthin Iee Sankhom thai* [State, Capital, Local God Father and Thai Society], 1992; *Chon Chan Kiang bon Krasae Prachathippatai Thai* [The Middle Class and Democracy in Thailand], 1993; *Krajai Amnat Yang Rai Sang Prachathippatai* [Decentralisation and Democratisation in Thailand], 1994; *Lokaphiwat kap Sangkhom Setthakit Thai* [Globalisation and Thai Economy and Society], 1995; and *Jit Samnuk Iee Udomkan: Khabuankan Prachathippatai Ruam Samai*, [Consciousness and Ideology: Democratic Movement in Contemporary Thailand], 1996.

<sup>31</sup> At a seminar in 1980, Chatthip defined the major features of political economy approach as consisting of three main elements: (1) Giving special consideration to the structure of the whole system because the relationships between parts are more important than characteristics of each part; (2) Giving special consideration to the evolution/development of the whole system because this makes theory linked to the lives of people in society. This means theory can be used to analyse the cause of events and phenomena correctly because the analysis lies deep in historical underpinning; and (3) Giving special consideration to conflicts within the whole system in order to identify the sources of change. In other words dialectical materialism is the basis of the process of change. See Chatthip in *Warasan Setthasat Kanmuang*, 13:2, 1980.

aspirations, the group has several things in common: a concern for social justice and the rights of the poor and under-privileged; a methodology for analysing Thai society in terms of *processes of change*, class analysis, and conflict. The group now tries to go beyond the old fashioned study of class, and some members to adopt modern class analysis to understand the process of capitalist development in Thailand.

#### **Political economists on the nature of the recent boom**

The political economists agree that the root cause of the recent boom lies in the opening up of the Thai economy and its close linkage with the global economic system. But they provide elaborate explanations of the effects of this process. The Thai economy has been boosted by the inflow of foreign direct investment, which in turn induced further local investment and local consumption.<sup>32</sup> But while industry expanded, it did not develop much in terms of technology and sophistication. Foreign investment came in to make use of cheap labour and natural resources, which Thailand has in abundance. Some labour shifted from agriculture into labour-intensive, low-wage industry and services. Growth was caused by increased trade based on comparative advantages of labour and resources.

Most neo-classical economists consider that the current account deficit is an inevitable outcome of an export-oriented open economy. Political economists, however, argue that the persistent deficit reflects the inability to shift the production structure from labour-intensive and low-tech industries into intermediate and capital goods industries which require advanced technologies and expertise on the part of workers. This pattern of industrialisation is a direct outcome of being a late-comer, relying heavily on borrowed or purchased technology and foreign direct investment. Thai entrepreneurs can easily buy technology off the shelf or go into joint partnership with foreign partners who possess technology. R&D and technological advance have not taken root in Thailand.

Political economists further point out the impact of present-day export-oriented

<sup>32</sup> Vorawich Charoenlert, 'Setthakit Thai nei Rabob Setthakit Lok' [Thai Economy in the Global Economic System] in, Pasuk and Sungsiddh (eds). (1991); Preecha Plampongsanti, Kanjana Kaewthep, Kanoksa Kaeawthep, Anan Ganjenaphan, *Witthi withaya suksa sangkhom thai withi mai haeng kan phai thana*, Bangkok: Adison press production, 1992, second printing 1994; Suthy Prasartset, 'The Rise of NGOs as Critical Social Movement', in *Thai NGOs: The Continuing Struggle for Democracy* (Bangkok: The NGO Support Project, 1985).

industrialisation on the employment of labour. As foreign investors originate from developed countries, their technology is capital-intensive. Consequently, the employment they generate tends to be limited. The industrialisation process does not lead to a dramatic shift in agricultural labour into the industrial sector. The process of proletarianisation is different from that which occurred in the classic capitalist transformation in the UK or even in the more recent case of South Korea. In Korea industrialisation after WWII led quickly to a transformation of the economic structure. By 1989 the share of agricultural labour in Korea was reduced to 19.5 percent of the total, while the share of manufacturing labour rose to 27.6 percent.<sup>33</sup> In Thailand the share of permanent manufacturing employment was only around 12 percent in 1993,<sup>34</sup> while the share of labour force calling themselves agricultural labour was still as high as 57 percent.<sup>35</sup>

Political economists point out that Thailand's industrialisation took place in a context of global change in information, transportation and production technology. Multinational companies (MNCs) now divide up their production processes into many stages, and distribute these stages across subsidiaries and subcontractors across the world. The production stages which take place in developing countries like Thailand are merely a part of the whole production chain. Under this system, Thailand receives

<sup>33</sup> Anis Chowdhury and Iyanatul Islam, *The Newly Industrialising Economies of East Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p.15.

<sup>34</sup> Of the total manufacturing employment, probably around 10 percent still operate as migrant labour moving back and forth between factory works and agricultural work.

<sup>35</sup> The source of these figures is National Statistical Office, *Report of the Labour Force Survey, Round 2, August 1993*. Not all of these labour work in agriculture full time or all year round. This is because agricultural work is seasonal. Farming families with small plot of land could not afford to maintain their livelihood on the farm work alone. Usually around one million people migrate around in the off-farm season for work inside the rural sector. Another million travel temporary to work in city and towns, doing non-farm. Another 4-500,000 Thai workers, mostly from rural origin, work abroad in Japan, Malaysia, Taiwan, South Korea, New York and elsewhere as migrant workers. The migrant stream of young men and women to leave village to work in towns and city during the rapid pace of industrialisation in the last 10 years has increased. But there are also indications of reverse flows back to villages among some migrants who had worked in cities and towns (Apichat 1994). And the duration of staying away in the town is getting longer. We still await a more detail migration survey to assess the pattern of recent changes.

increased income from manufactured exports. But the whole system is controlled from somewhere else, particularly in the area of technology and production system.

MNCs set up uniform systems of labour control and production process under a system dubbed 'fordism'. Low-skilled cheap labour is employed on the assembly line. Workers are exploited doubly, both by being pressed to work in time with the quick pace of the assembly line, and by the low wages and long working hours as compared to developed countries. Assembly-line workers experience a process of deskilling, not accumulation of skill. Workers also face health hazards due to pollution from dangerous chemical inputs in industries such as electronic parts production and chemical industries. Casualisation of workers, work insecurity and low wages are prevalent as means to reduce labour cost.<sup>36</sup>

According to this analysis, the current problems - such as the current account deficit, income disparity, environmental damage, and vulnerability to external money flows - are not side-effects of growth which can be overcome by policy tinkering. Rather these consequences are intrinsic to the pattern of growth adopted and will persist as long as this pattern is maintained. Political economists view the socio-economic impact of the economic boom as a direct result of the particular growth pattern advocated by the World Bank, namely economic growth based on borrowed technology and foreign direct investment, without due regard to the quality of life of the people involved.<sup>37</sup> Political economists object to this pattern and advocate alternatives.

#### **The impact of the recent boom and the potential for change**

In analysing the impact of the boom on society and politics, political economists are interested in the effects on social and political structure, the future trends of social change, and the prospects for progressive social movements to push for change.

The rise of the industrial economy, metropolitan and provincial businessmen has meant a decline in economic importance of agriculture and the rural populace. Political

<sup>36</sup> Vorawidh Charoenlert, 'Setthakit Thai nai Rabob Setthakit Lok; Sungsidh Piriyarangsar, *Kan Phatthana Utsahakam Phue Kan Song Ok Kap Raeng Ngan Samphan Nai Prathet Thai* [Export-Oriented Industrialisation and Labour Relations in Thailand], in Pasuk and Sungsidh (eds.) (1992).

<sup>37</sup> Preecha et al, 1992.

economists are among the first to point out that the rural sector is still powerful in Thai political development towards parliamentary democracy. The rural populace comprises nearly two thirds of the population and accounts for more than two-thirds of all the votes. Any political party or coalition of parties wishing to hold the majority in the parliament must be able to capture the rural vote. This should put the rural populace in the forefront of politics.

But the matter is complicated by three major developments. First is the tendency of metropolitan business to ally itself with the conservative bureaucracy and military to limit popular representation (Nidhi, 1993). Second is the emergence of local influential businessmen, some of whom are known as *jao pho*, who use their patronage in the locality to dominate local and national politics. They mobilise their business network for canvassing. They spread money and influence to buy votes. Third is the fact that political parties in contemporary Thailand are not real representatives of peoples of all walks of life. They are made up of business people with common interests, who join together to protect the interest of their immediate group members.<sup>38</sup>

While there is a relatively high degree of consensus among the political economists about the nature of current changes, there is less agreement over the implications for political action. Two wings exists within the group. Both reject political economy's traditional goal of centralised socialism.

For one wing, the goal is social democracy with full popular participation and a more equitable distribution of the fruits of growth. This must be achieved by efforts of all disadvantaged groups to overcome the current forces of domination and demand their rightful share of economic resources. This wing supports organisations such as NGOs, labour groups, womens movements and grassroots groups, and believes that the strategies for each of these movements must take its own appropriate course.

NGOs raise the society's consciousness of problems faced by people in all walks of life. The NGOs strengthen civil society, act as a counter to the power of the state, and make for more balanced power relations between state, business and people.

<sup>38</sup> Sungsidh Piriyanisan and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *Jit Samnuk lea Udomkan: Khabuankan Prachathipatai Thai Ruamsamai* [Consciousness and Ideology: Democratic Movement in Contemporary Thailand] (Bangkok: The Political Economy Centre, Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, 1996).

The strength and self reliance of the labour movement are crucial for the civil society of the future.<sup>39</sup> Teeranat and Vorawidh argue that the trade union movement must be developed to counter the negative trend of the market economy. But they also discuss the limitation of the labour movement. This has been due to the nature of Thai industrialisation and the control imposed by the government. Thailand's industrialisation in the 1980s and 90s did not produce a large increase in permanent wage employment as experienced in the west. Instead it has led to a proliferation of informal or casual labour and seasonal labour. They describe this phenomenon as non-wage labour. This tendency has been a direct result of the market liberalisation and emphasis on export-led growth. Together with the intensified global competition, businessmen and government cut costs by allowing casualisation of labour and control on trade union activities. The tripartite system of labour relations imposed by the government and other controls led to factionalism inside the trade union movement. They also explain the low rate of unionisation. Like Sungsidh, both Teeranat and Vorawidh think that the weakness of trade unions as a social force could be overcome if they make alliance with other social groups in society.<sup>40</sup>

Thailand's export-oriented and capital-intensive industrialisation created a high demand for skilled labour. Between the 1960s and late 1980s, the numbers in white-collar jobs grew from around half a million to around four million and a half.<sup>41</sup> Over three

<sup>39</sup> See the works by Sungsidh Prityanangsan from 1991 to 1996 listed in the bibliography.

<sup>40</sup> Teeranat Kanjanakaom and Vorawidh Charoenkit (1990), 'Industrialisation and Democracy in Thailand', presented at the Forum of Democratic Leadership - Asia and the Pacific "Democratisation & Co-operation in Asia", Seoul, 3-4 May.

<sup>41</sup> Despite this large pool of white-collar workers, Thailand faced an acute shortage of skilled and technical manpower at the height of its boom years in the late 1980s and 1990s. Lee, using a political economy approach offered the reasons for this phenomenon. He compared the roles of government in industrialisation between Thailand, Germany and Japan. The last two countries adopted some kind of 'developmentalist state' a role during the onset of industrialisation and took initiatives in fostering industrialisation by actively designing educational policy to expand the pools of technical manpower. Thai government on the other hand reform the bureaucracy and the educational system in the late 19th century in order to protect the old system of *sakdina* rule of the old order. The educational system was not designed to serve the industrialisation. See Lee (1994). See also Narong Petprasert, 'White-collar Workers in Thailand', Ph.D Thesis, Latrobe University, 1992, for an analysis of the growth of the white-collar workers and their roles in the labour movement.

decades Thailand acquired a new white-collar working class. This emergent group is often dubbed the 'middle class'. The Centre's work on the Thai middle class<sup>42</sup> (Sungsiddh and Pasuk, ed. 1994) shows that the democratisation trend has become an important issue in Thailand because of the growth of the white-collar workers. While some writers (Nidhi, Vorawidh, Preecha) are pessimistic about the middle class's commitment to freedom and democracy, others (Anek, Pasuk, Somkiat, Sungsiddh, Ukrist) see potential in the middle class as a force for greater democratisation both in economy and politics and as a counter to political parties which are intent on protecting narrow interests.

A second wing among the political economists has advocated a rather different strategy.<sup>43</sup> Members of this wing attack the economist approach to development, on the grounds that it neglects human as humans. They seek alternative ways of thinking along the line of Buddhist economics and green economics. They strongly support decentralisation, and the dismantling of many of the central structures of political and economic control. They wish to see a rapid transfer of public resources away from defence to social uses such as including health, social services, social securities, rural development and promotion of the standard of living of poor people and the destitute in urban areas. How this will be achieved is not clear. A major study by this wing ends with this phrase: 'There is a need for political strategy in order to change the structure of power. This is inevitable. This is the most important condition which will ensure allocation of resources along the line of democratic principles.'

#### **The NGO view**

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) arose in Thailand in the late 1960s as a reaction against the top-down, urban-oriented approach to economic development. The origins of the movement were associated with Dr Puey Ungpakom. The key idea

<sup>42</sup> Sungsiddh Piriyanongsan and Pasuk Phongpaichit (eds.), *Chon Chan Klang Bon Krasae Prachthippatai Thai* [The Middle Class and Thai Democracy] (Bangkok: The Political Economy Centre, Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, 1993).

<sup>43</sup> Preecha Piampongsanti, Chayan Wattanaphuti, Anand Ganjanapan, Kanjana Kaewthep, Kanoksak Kaewthep (eds.), *Withi withaya suksa sangkhom thai* [The Methodology for Studying Thai Society], Vol.1 (Bangkok: CUSRI, 1986).

was 'rural reconstruction is human reconstruction'.<sup>44</sup> This basic idea was later refined with contributions from theoreticians (many from the political economist perspective) and social workers in the field. After the crisis of 1973-76, many political activists chose to work through the NGOs to avoid confrontational politics. In the mid-1980s, NGOS became active in a wide range of development projects, and built a loose network of cooperation.

While there is no single 'NGO line', there is a distinctive analysis of the Thai economy and its prospects which emerges from some of the core NGO institutions such as the NGO support project.

Jaturong Boonyarattanasoontom, the Director of the NGO Support Project argues that Thai economic development policies since 1961 were capitalist, linking Thailand with the global capitalist system. They followed the World Bank, IMF strategy of outward-oriented industrialisation on the basis of liberal economic philosophy. The core strategies were promotion of free trade, foreign direct investment, privatisation and deregulation, human resource development, macro-economic management and reduction of population growth.<sup>45</sup>

Thus far, the analysis is identical with that of Preecha, Kanoksak and Suthy of the political economy group. But Jaturong extends the analysis by examining three ways in which the Thai government has exacerbated the uneven nature of development. First it has expanded international trade by speeding up the process to establish ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and linking AFTA with European Economic Area (EEA) and North America Free Trade Area (NAFTA) including creation of trade networks with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Indochina. Second, it has welcomed MNCS whose demands have distorted the pattern of government investment in infrastructure, human resources, R&D, and so on. Third, government has neglected the declining economic sectors, especially rice and tapioca agriculture. The result is that people are pushed to create their own local development strategy. Jaturong talks about the 'capitalist sector'

<sup>44</sup> Suthy Prasartset, 'The Rise of NGOs as a Critical Social Movement', in *Thai NGOs: The Continuing Struggle for Democracy* (Bangkok: The NGO Support Project, 1995), p.99.

<sup>45</sup> Jaturong in *Thai NGOs: The Continuing Struggle for Democracy*.

and the 'people's sector'. The people's sector refer to the rural people who have been neglected in the development process.

The core of local development strategy consists of: emphasis on people's right; the aim of a 'good life' not economic growth; solutions to be found in the villages, meaning that villages have the capacity to solve their own problems, based on local culture and wisdom; not opposing globalisation, but countering globalisation's impact on the environment; requesting for co-existence and not exploitation.

Six development strategies derived from the local development school:

- (1) self-reliance;
- (2) production for quality living;
- (3) community culture-based development;
- (4) the importance to popular wisdom;
- (5) group formation to establish community organisation;
- (6) return of rights over community resources back to the people;<sup>46</sup>

Kanjana and Kanoksak Kaewthep elaborated the meaning of self-reliant development, based on a study of economic activities in rural areas through self-help organisation in two villages in the north and Isan between May-December 1985.<sup>47</sup>

In order to be self-reliant, villagers should be able to create a third economic system, *rabop setthakit baep samachikaphap* (membership organisation) to counter the other two systems, namely *rabop setthakit phokha naithun* (capitalist system) and *rabop kharatchakan* (bureaucratic system). In other words the people must have their own independent groupings, separate from institutions which come from outside the village. For instance, to avoid domination by financial institution from outside the village, villagers need to establish *klum oom sap* (saving co-operatives) to replace BAAC (*tho ko so*). This strategy will enable rural communities to survive in the midst of capitalist development and increased penetration from outside, especially from government and *naithun*.

<sup>46</sup> Jaturong in *Thai NGOs*, pp.147-154.

<sup>47</sup> Kanjana and Kanoksak Kaewthep, *Kan phung ton eng sakkayaphap naikan phatthana khong chonnabot* (Bangkok: Sepha khatholik haeng prathet thai phue kan phatthana, 1987).

Villagers must be encouraged to become more self-reliant by developing their confidence in their own potential; creating organisations such as *thanakhan khwai*, buffalo-raising groups; encouraging participation; developing successful self-help programmes; and bargaining effectively with outsiders on issues such as prices.

The NGOs's vision and strategy for the rural people as outlined above is known as the 'community culture school of thought' or *watthanatham chumchon* approach. This approach began with the works of social workers, notably Suphot Thienwihan, Apichat Thongyu, Bamrung Bunpanya, and later was given theoretical backing by thinkers like Chatthip Nartsupha and Kanjana Kaewthep.

Chatthip is one of the originators of the political economy school. His own works and his students' theses on various aspects of Thai economic history provided the academic underpinning of the Political Economy School at Chulalongkorn University. He is still active in the Political Economy Centre's work. But his writings in the 1990s put him in the same school as the NGOs.<sup>48</sup>

The path of *watthanatham chumchon* stresses change must begin at the village level and then spread to the whole society. This strategy does not invite opposition from the authorities, as did the earlier left-wing strategies which sought major social change.<sup>49</sup>

The *watthanatham chumchon* group is in itself a political movement at grassroots level even though it does not offer a definite political agenda for the whole society like the usually Leftist movement. There is a suggestion that *watthanatham chumchon* and the present capitalist trends can co-exist. But the alternative society has to be selective in picking and choosing from the West. For some in this group the advocacy has a ring of cultural nationalism. As put by Chatthip,

As Thailand is entering the age of globalisation, Western culture will increasingly come into Thailand. The good part of Western culture, such as modern technology and the concept of liberty, should be welcome and should be instilled as an integral part of Thai culture. But at the same time

<sup>48</sup> Chatthip Nartsupha, 'The "Community Culture" School of Thought', in Manas and Turton (1991); Chatthip and Phonphilai Lertwicha, *Watthanatham kap sakayaphap chumchon* [Potentialities of the Thai village community], Bangkok, 1994.

<sup>49</sup> Naphaphorn, *Phatthanakan khwamkl*, p. 72.

the Thai people should be selective in accepting foreign cultures. We should receive foreign culture on our own terms. In order to achieve this goal we have to recover and strengthen our own indigenous culture.<sup>50</sup>

As represented by Bamrung Bunpanya, the value of the villages should be adopted as value of the whole society. Chatthip stand's is that *chon chan klang* should ally with villagers to bring about a better society. He does not offer action in terms of definite political strategies.

## CONCLUSION

For a long time there was no reason why the Thai economy should attract international academic attention. It could not stand as a case study for either spectacular success or spectacular failure. It offered no example of innovations in institutions or techniques. It was simply not a text book case.

In the early 1990s, the international approach to development economics went through a revolution. The classical development theory which evolved in the 1950s and 1960s was quietly dropped. It was replaced by a fascination with understanding Asia, the one region of the world which had demonstrated a spectacular record of growth in the past two decades. This new sub-discipline quickly resolved into a battle between the opponents and supporters of government interventionism. By mid-decade, these two positions were identified with UNCTAD and the World Bank. The World Bank first based its case for non-interventionist, market-friendly development policies on analysis of the first-tier NICs, especially Korea and Taiwan. After the Bank's analysis was severely undermined by better empirical work on these two economies, the Bank mounted a rearguard action based on the second-tier NICs. According to the Bank, the spurt of growth by Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, beginning in the late 1980s, had been fuelled by foreign investment and market liberalisation, with little evidence of industrial policy and other market interventions.

By the mid-1990s, Thailand had been firmly drafted into the international debate. In 1995, the WB announced that Thailand had been the world's fastest-growing economy

<sup>50</sup> Chatthip Nartsupha, 'A Search for an Indigenous Thai Culture', Special Panel Discussion, the 14th Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 20-24 May, 1996.

over the previous decade. While there are still very few international economists who specialise on Thailand, the Thai economy was now an intrinsic part of international economic debate. Yet Thai economists have taken little active part in this debate, and indeed pay it little attention.

This is not to say that Thai economists have been inactive. Indeed, there has been a spurt of economic writing in parallel with the spurt of economic growth. But the international and local debates have each focused on different concerns. The international debate has largely been about the role of government in the promotion of economic growth. The Thai debate has paid little attention to the question of the scope of government intervention, and has been only tangentially concerned with growth. Most of the Thai participants agree that as a latecomer, located in the dynamic Asian region, Thailand is able to import its growth. Rather the Thai debate has focused more on stability at one of the spectrum, and on equity and social justice at the other.

These two focal concerns reflect the intellectual background of the Thai economist community. At one end, there is a strong tradition of technocratic economics. This tradition has its spiritual home in the Bank of Thailand. It was expanded by US educational aid in the 1960s and 1970s, and has been nurtured since then by the World Bank. Its core proposition is that the Thai economy prospers through trade, and that the major role of practising economists is to maintain a stable economic environment in which trade can expand.

At the other end, there is a tradition which dates back to the intellectual ferment of the 1970s, and the attempts of that time to understand the unique characteristics and internal trends of Thailand's society and economy. From its origin, this tradition has a strong concern for equity and social justice. Over the past two decades, the tradition has become very fragmented. But the fragments still share a core proposition that the goal of economics must be a better life for the majority of the people.

In the analysis presented here, the BoT and TDRI approaches belong to the 'stability' end of the spectrum. The political economy and NGO groups are anchored at the 'equity' end. The institutional group occupy the middle ground. Many of its members 'have neo-classical training combined with 1970s experience and the special intellectual traditions of Thammasat. This spectrum has generated a wide range of views on the

origins and consequences of Thailand's elevation to the ranks of the Asian geese, dragons and tigers.

The management (BoT) and liberal neo-classical (TDRI) approaches readily embrace the integration of the Thai economy into the global fold because they believe that this is the best for Thailand's economic growth. They see the major risks in this economic strategy come from the low savings rate and worsening income distribution. But they believe that these problems can be overcome through human resource development policies and taxation measures. In addition, the TDRI advocates promotion of high value-added agriculture to reduce the urban-rural income gap. These approaches oppose direct government interventions, such as industrial policy.

The TDRI shows additional concerns over the problems of environment and the issues of governance. Economic tools should also be used to tackle the environment problems (polluters pay principles). The question of governance requires pressure from the public, but the TDRI would like the organised public to be neutral politically.

The other three approaches - institutional, political economy and Thai NGOs - have reservations about the extent to which the Thai economy should be integrated into the world economy. While not rejecting the reality of the present globalisation trends, many are concerned about Thailand's over-dependence on external factors. The degree of this concern varies, with the NGOs showing the most reservation.

On the whole all three take a stand similar to the UNCTAD group's opposition to the WB line in the current international debate over the explanations about the success of Asian NICs. They favour 'strategic integration with the world economy by integrating up only to the degree and in those spheres where it was desirable... in order to promote long-term economic growth' and benefits to the majority of the people.

All three of these approaches emphasise concern over the problems of poverty, income distribution and the environment. Economists in the institutional school have been active in studies on poverty and income distribution. They do not reject reform in taxation and use of property taxes as means to deal with these problems. They support industrialisation, especially rural industrialisation, and extension of service activities as means to provide employment and eradicate poverty. They also advocate direct government intervention through policies aimed at particular target groups to improve

the state of poverty and income distribution.

Political economists attempt to identify and promote progressive social forces which will be instrumental in pushing for reforms to make Thailand a better society to live in. Among the political economists, one group advocates working within the existing system, and allying with the progressive forces of the middle class (white-collar workers) and wage labour. Another group rejects the existing power structure and argues that an alternative political structure is needed to achieve a better society. But it is not clear what is this alternative political structure.

The NGOs seek an alternative development path focusing on 'the people's sector' as against the 'capitalist sector'. The aim should be a 'good life' and not economic growth. The *watthanatham chumchon* advocates want to rebuild society from the grassroots, based on people's freedom to organise their resources and their production for their own ends, within their community culture, without having to succumb to exploitation and repression by governments and big businessmen. Of all the approaches, that of the NGOs, with its introduction of '*watthanatham chumchon*' as its working principle, is the most indigenously based. In this sense they are most original of all. Their attempts to affect the thinking of people's at the grassroots may make this approach the most radical politically.

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