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Environmental Disputes in Thailand in the First Half of the 1990s:

Movements in Urban and Rural Areas

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INTRODUCTION

Since the latter half of the 1980s, protest movements have proliferated in Thailand over a number of issues, such as dam construction, rights to land, planting of eucalyptuses, and prices of agricultural products. Environmental problems are one of the issues that take center stage of these movements. In the 1990s in particular, it is no surprise to see one or two demonstrations over environmental disputes making newspaper headlines daily across the country. According to Prapat Pintopteng, lecturer at Kroek university, the number of protest demonstrations across the country reached 739 in 1993 and 754 in 1994, and the frequency is apparently on the rise. Nearly 40% of these movements were triggered by such environment-related issues as resource management, garbage disposal, or large-scale public works projects.[1] In this chapter, I will survey the general characteristics of these environmental disputes and try to analyze the background of their frequent rise in the 1990s.

Long after the short democratization period of the first half of the 1970s, the re-emergence of rural populations who have been drawn once again to the front stage of politics has prompted some to argue that rapid political change is going on in Thailand in the 1990s. K. Hewison, who regards environmental movements as new social forces comparable to organized labor movements, positioned them as one of the powers of political change in the 1990s, together with other polarized social groups.[2] Charles F. Keyes associated this process with a class struggle against the domination of a bureaucratic/military elite entailing an alliance between poor rural people and the urban middle class.[3] In this paper, I will focus on environmental movements from the perspective of social movement theory, and will point out some of their new characteristics. First, this paper argues that environmental movements in this decade should be distinguished from older types of labor movements and environmental movements which emerged since the 1970s, as their contentions do not lie in class struggles nor in radical political change. Rather, they put much more emphasis on the solution of the individual disputes. And yet, this paper indicates that their forms of protest may be based upon the resources and political culture of the respective social classes, reflecting the "class aware" (but not class conscious) political tendencies of the urban and rural partici-

pants.[4] In order to qualify these points, the paper begins with a general survey of types of environmental disputes in the first half of 1990s, and this is followed by a study of the modes of action of urban and rural environmental movements, while looking into the class-based characteristics of the political awareness as shown in the results of the awareness survey.

1. BACKGROUND OF FREQUENT ENVIRONMENTAL DISPUTES

There are in fact a wide variety of environmental movements in Thailand, ranging from ecology movements to recycling campaigns, and it is not an easy task to gain a comprehensive understanding of all these movements and their backgrounds.[5] However, it is at least fair to say that the political upheavals since 1992 and the rapid change in physical environmental conditions were factors behind the significant increase in environmental disputes since the first half of the 1990s.

Following the May Massacre in 1992, the use of force by the military retreated from the front stage of Thai politics, leading to a political environment in which disputes of all kinds surfaced more easily than before. The democratically elected governments installed since 1992 have had no official excuse to suppress protest movements that do not violate any law. The former government of Prime Minister Banharn that came to power during 1995 to 1996 quite often used scenes of the ministers receiving individual protest groups as public relations material. For example, in April 1996, when the Forum of the Poor, along with more than ten thousand farmers, held a one-month sit-in protest in front of the government house, Banharn stated publicly that he would never abandon the poor. He even provided the protesters with drinking water, toilets and bus rides home, as a means to impress upon people his image as a merciful local benefactor.[6]

It is also apparent that profound changes in the living environment and numbers of public investment projects since the regional development policy of 1987 were one of the major causes behind these disputes. Rapid economic expansion in the second half of the 1980s accelerated the spiraling of land prices and wages and aggravated traffic congestion in the capital city of Bangkok to such a degree that a number of corporate production and materials procurement activities, as well as large-scale public works projects began to relocate outside the metropolitan area. Such redeployment of economic activities brought greater job opportunities and higher income to areas receiving investment, but at the same time created circumstances that threatened to undermine local residents' rights to utilize and manage land and natural resources. In particular, protests involving land rights tend to become fierce over compensation issues for the loss of livelihood or restoration of vested interests. Recent environmental movements which take the form of direct protest can be seen as a means local people have chosen to counter the present situation where existing dispute settlement mechanisms do not work effectively to solve their problems.

Mass media reports of the past few years on pollution and repeated occurrences of natural disasters have been another factor influencing the rise of environmental movements. In Bangkok, where air pollution is deteriorating steadily, over one million people are reported to be suffering from respiratory trouble due to dust and automobile exhaust fumes. One election campaign slogan ominously declared that "Krung Thep ('the city of angels') in the year 2000 will be hell."[7] As for natural disasters, the November 1988 floods in southern Thailand, which left over 700 people dead or missing, were followed by water shortages in

1992 which hit the central part of the country. Also in 1995, historic floods affected 66 pre-fectures causing great losses in property and lives. In pin-pointing the causes behind of this string of major natural disasters, the Thai news media has typically focused on the effects of human activities, pointing out that logging in past years have changed the capacity of forests to hold rain water. Perhaps partly as a result of these reports, public awareness of the precar-ious state of the environment has risen dramatically in Thailand in the 1990s, and this appar-ently has laid the psychological groundwork for the social acceptance of environmental disputes.[8]

The frequency of environmental disputes has caused the government to gradually change its attitude toward local people's protest movements. In recent years there have been some cases of protesters actually achieving a certain measure of success. In the area of public works alone, the government conceded faults in investment plans or procedures and com-plied with local residents' demands in several projects. In 1988, the construction of Nam Choan Dam was suspended and since 1992, demands have been met regarding a hazardous waste treatment in Kanchanaburi (1993-95), damage compensation after the construction of Pakmun Dam (1995), and withdrawal of a plan to build a garbage-burning electric power generation plant in Hangdong (1995). These precedents, through coverage of television and other media, carried a message to people involved in other disputes that things are changing in their favor and this may have given rise to an even greater number of disputes over envi-ronmental issues.[9]

With regard to environmental organizations, there has been steady increase in informa-tion exchanges and mutual support among NGOs and grassroots movements across the country in the 1990s, resulting in the formation of a broad network to mobilize organized support for environmental disputes. Prior to these developments, there were loose contacts among activists from the Student Revolution generation and rural development organiza-tions since the 1970s. These provided the foundation on which a number of residents' groups since the 1980s began to build their networks.[10]

2. TYPES OF ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS

Social movements are usually defined as "a social action in pursuit of change based on anger or discontent." Claus Offe, who noted a new political motivations in certain types of social movements, advocated using the yardstick of four points in analyzing these movements: 1) actors, 2) the nature of issues, 3) the modes of action, and 4) value orientation of the move-ment.[11] In analyzing the dispute-type environmental movements in Thailand, I have focused on the urban new middle class and farmers as key players of protest movements and tried to classify the correlation between major issues and particular modes of action using Offe's point of analysis (Table 1).[12]

The early environmental movements in Thailand started around April 1973, amid a surge of enthusiasm for democracy following shocking revelations that police and military people were poaching in Thung Yai Naresuwan, an area under the application of the Wild Life Conservation Law. This incident prompted immediate criticism of the police and mili-tary officials who had misused publicly owned guns and helicopters for illegal activities, then grew into a big political scandal after Field Marshal Thanom and Praphat shielded the offi-cials involved from public reproach. The media emphasized the idea of "the people versus the bureaucratic/military power elite," and soon the anger of citizen and student leaders

Table 1 Main Environmental Movements in the First Half of 1990s

Issue	Leaders and followers	Time	Place	Contents of demands (Issue)
1. Protest or Mob				
Anti-eucalyptus plantation and settlement issue	Farmers, monks and NGOs	1985-	Northeast provinces	No eucalyptus planting, right to use or settle in the land
	NE Small Farmers Association	1992-		Compensation caused by plantation projects
Water contamination around Nampon river	Village heads, farmers, NGOs, and university academics	1992	Khonkaen	Pollution abatement measures by factories concerned, compensation
Hangdong waste treatment plan construction	Residents, NGOs, and researchers	1995	Chiangmai	Suspension of construction plan
Protest of the forum of the poor	Forum of the poor, farmers, students, and NE Small Farmers Association	April 1996	From all around the country	Various issues to be solved (forest, dam, pollution, etc.)
2. Civil Movement				
Treatment for industrial waste in industrial estate	Residents, NGOs, medical doctors, and Pollution Control Department	1987	Lampun	Proper treatment for hazardous waste from the industrial estate near by residential area
Treatment for toxic chemical waste	Committee of residents, NGOs, Lawyers' Association, students, etc.	1991	Kanchanaburi	Proper treatment for toxic wastes from Klontoey accidents
Review for Thanayon elevated railroad construction	Magic eyes, Lawyers Association for Envionment, doctors, university lectures, and architects	1993	Bangkok	Changing routs, structures, or change into subway
3. Mixed: Both Protest and Civil Movement				
Klontoey chemical plant fire	Duan Pratheep Foundation, residents, lawyers association	1991-	Bangkok	Medical treatment, compensation
Pakmun Dam construction compensation	Committee of residents, NGOs, college, lawyers, students, and mass communiation	1989- 1993-1995	Ubonrachathani	Suspension of construction and compensation
Kaensuaten Dam construction	Residents, NGOs, and researchers	1995	Phrae	Suspension of construction plan
GENCO toxic heavy industry waste management plant construction	Residents, university academics, lawyers, and mass communication	1995-	Rayong	Suspension of construction plan

Note: Those reported only nationwide, excluding labor accident and occupational disease.

became leveled against the military dictatorship, which worked as a breeding ground for cor-
ruption and abuses of power. In the end, this movement became highly politicized, calling
for the end of this monopoly of power.[13] Environmental movements at this time were indi-
visible from political movements calling for a change in the overall ruling system. Philip
Hirsch, who studied the development of environmental movements in the 1980s following
the Thung Yai Naresuwan incident, described the situation as one where the class struggle
strategy of the 1970s was gradually transformed into one which used populist and even tra-
ditionalist language. Philip Hirsch further described the process through which two major
movements — farmer-led protests and the campaign against construction of Nam Choan
Dam, which also mobilized various groups of urban residents — were organized in the
1980s.[14] Environmental disputes in the first half of the 1990s, as classified in Table 1, have
involved more diversified issues, but the actors in the movements and modes of action basi-
cally follow the two patterns depicted by Hirsch.

     One of these patterns is "mob" protests which resort to the use of direct force, and this
is typical of farmer-led movements. In addition, the issues involved in "mob" movements are
often associated with the protection of rights to livelihood, just as movements for forest pre-
serves are closely connected with the problems of ownership and land utilization. With the
exception of the leaders, most participants in the movements are people directly affected by
the problems at issue. Their forms of protest are characterized by the use of group power,
such as marching down roads by mobilizing a great number of people, sit-ins in front of the
Government House, or road blockades.

     When they have complaints, farmers usually follow the formal channels; they first go to
village heads (phuyai ban) or kamnan for help. Next come written inquiries to county
offices and prefectural governments, followed by protest actions in front of prefectural gov-
ernment buildings, petitions to local politicians and the like. At any stages in this process, if
the farmers get enraged by the insincere responses of local bureaucrats or manipulation of
information, they may send letters of complaints to prefectural governors or ministers of the
central government demanding the dismissal or investigation of untrustworthy local bureau-
crats. If these letters of complaints or protests at the local level produce no results, farmers
then decide to take such actions as organizing mass marches to the Government House and
buildings of the central government in Bangkok. The protesters seek prompt relief measures
by the central government and demand the opportunity to negotiate directly with politicians
with ministerial rank who have definite decision-making authority. The ministers responsible
for negotiations try to offer solutions, like setting up a committee to look into the problems,
and in exchange for such arrangements, they urge the protesters to dissolve. In some cases,
these demonstrations can get out of hand as it is hard for movement leaders to keep all par-
ticipants under control, and this entails the risk of arrests or bloody clashes if some of partic-
ipants commit unlawful acts. Still, mass marches and eye-catching tactics such as the
burning of straw effigies on the street can bring some tense moments into the capital and
attract public attention to the protesters' demands. Furthermore, if the mass media suggests
the possibility of riots or bloodshed, these protests may even expect to wring unexpected
concessions out of the government as major disturbances in the capital are the last thing it
wants to see.[15]

     Another pattern of environmental movement in Thailand is that of "citizens' move-
ments" undertaken mainly by urban middle-class organizations, such as NGOs, legal associa-
tions, or urban residents groups. This type of movement, which is usually spearheaded by a
small group of members, adopts a strategy to entice a strong public interest in their cause
through unremitting efforts of sending inquiries to and exchanging many letters with author-

ities concerned, providing information on their activities to the mass media and holding seminars.[16] The leaders of the movements may themselves be direct parties to the issues raised, but in many cases, they join the protest groups as supporters. Backed by their access to expertise and people in influential positions, they publicize what they stand for through publications or via the mass media. The ultimate aim of these movements is to have technocrats and politicians, who monopolize technology, information and decision-making authority, acknowledge defects in public planning or concede negligence on their part in sowing problems. What they seek is not only the immediate solution to specific issues, but also systemic reforms with far-reaching repercussions, such as information disclosure, participation in decision-making, environmental assessment systems and greater efficiency in public work programs. The strength of "citizens' movements" led by professionals and middle-class people, lies in their social and economic positions and knowledge of the participants themselves. They can negotiate on an equal footing with bureaucrats and corporate managers and have abundant chances of having their movements covered by mass media that are also based in cities. On the other side of the coin, however, once the mass media loses interest in their issue, their movements can easily be isolated and their support base and negotiating power evaporate quickly.

The third pattern is described as a "mixed type" in Table 1. In this type, the two different patterns of movements coexist in a pursuit of the same single issue. How the two types come to coexist varies. In some cases, urban "citizens' movements" come to the support of "mob" movements and help them obtain necessary information or act as go-betweens in negotiations. Conversely, people in rural areas, after their cooperative urban "citizens' movements" fail to produce the expected results, may appeal to "mobs" in an attempt to regain the attention of the mass media. In "mixed type" movements, however, participants have particular roles depending on their respective social backgrounds; farmers cannot take over the role of professionals with expertise, while members of "citizens' movements" try as much as possible to avoid the appearance of leading "mob" campaigns. In this sense, there still exists a fixed line dividing urban and rural actors even in "mixed type" movements.

In comparing "mobs" and "citizens' movements," commonalties can be found in the nature of issues they take up, i.e. discontentment towards unfairness in the way the negative effects of development plans are distributed, and claims for the right to use common resources and the right to lead healthier life. The point at issue seems to lie in the ability of the state to settle conflicts of interest and their claims no longer seek change in overall systems nor a change in the ruling class. They are more pragmatic, seeking solutions to specific issues that immediately affect daily lives. In reality, the relations between farmers and urban middle class participants tend to be rather cooperative despite their different social backgrounds. They even intentionally avoid acting on behalf of a class, since taking such a strategy would not gain them moral support from the wider public and is still risky given the political tolerance level in Thailand.[17] These facts suggest that there exists a sort of self-imposed limitations on political connotations in contemporary environmental movements.

In terms of modes of action, however, the two types of contemporary environmental movements show more differences than similarities. One difference is that "mobs" gain the most of their bargaining power by mobilizing thousands of people to protests, while "citizens' movements" rely upon the power of just a few professionals. As a preferable form of negotiations, "mobs" give priority to close negotiations with people in power and their recognition of the problem, while "citizens' movements" prefer methods with greater transparency, such as seminars and public hearings. The former can be very regionalized, depending on the issue at stake, whereas in the latter, a small number of members constantly

monitor problems regardless of the region where the issue arises. Many organizations in the latter category have, in fact, few regional connections. Why then do we see these differences between the urban and rural social classes in expressing discontent over environmental problems? There seems to exist a different logic of movements between the urban middle class and farmers. Nomiya advocates the approach of grasping the "basic causes" of social movements, which reflect collective norms of action, and proposes to focus on structures of authority and norms of collective action.[18] What this paper tries to focus on here is neither specific processes of individual environmental disputes nor the factors which motivate individuals to participate. It rather seeks to study the collective norms and types of political culture that are reflected in the modes of protest in cities as well as in rural communities. The following section is a comparative study of the class-based backgrounds, political awareness and favored ways of solving problems, formed on the basis of the results of an environmental awareness survey, and examines a possible relationship between these factors and patterns of environmental disputes.

3. SOCIAL CLASS AND POLITICAL AWARENESS IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS

3.1 Subjects for Comparison

In choosing social groups for comparison from samples of the 1994 environmental awareness survey, this paper has limited its scope of selection to the Greater Bangkok region and rural districts in the Northeast and North, since these are areas with frequent environmental disputes. In Bangkok, which represents urban areas, the new middle class or higher stratum was defined as people with university or higher education whose occupational positions are relatively homogeneous. In Northeastern and Northern rural areas, this paper covers only those who are engaged primarily in agriculture.[19] Since there was a difference between the sampling methods for Bangkok and the two rural areas, and evaluation on an equal basis did not seem appropriate, this paper does not employ the multi-variate analysis method that entails the integration of samples and cross-area sampling.

3.2 Profiles of Respective Social Classes

Before examining the attitudes and values of each selected social classes, the class-based background and general consciousness on life will be described in order to briefly understand their ways of living.

In Thailand, because of the wide income gap between urban and rural areas, the difference in average income and lifestyles between farmers and urban residents with university education is great. The average monthly income of farmers in the Northeast and North, according to data collected in the survey, is 1,696 baht and 1,243 baht, respectively, both less than one-fifth of the average monthly income of 10,447.2 baht for university graduates in Bangkok.[20] In Bangkok, the percentage of people with elementary school education or lower was 40% and university or higher 18%, while the ratio of elementary school or lower was quite high at 92% for the Northeast and 87% for the North. With regard to ownership of electric appliances, the survey found that electric fans, television sets and electric rice cookers are fast becoming commonplace in about half of farmers' households. But there still remains a gap in the spread of telephones, washing machines and some other items (Figure

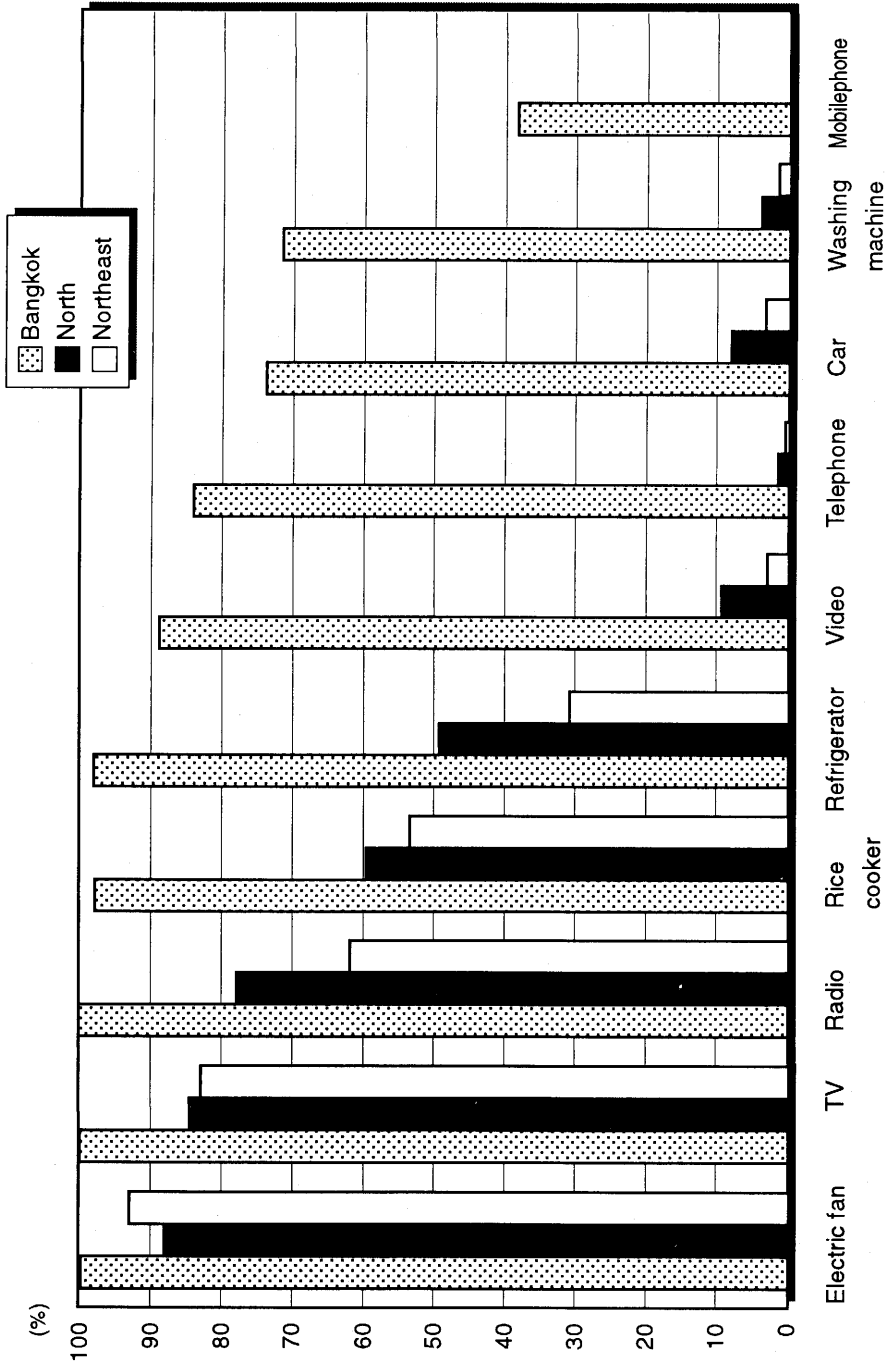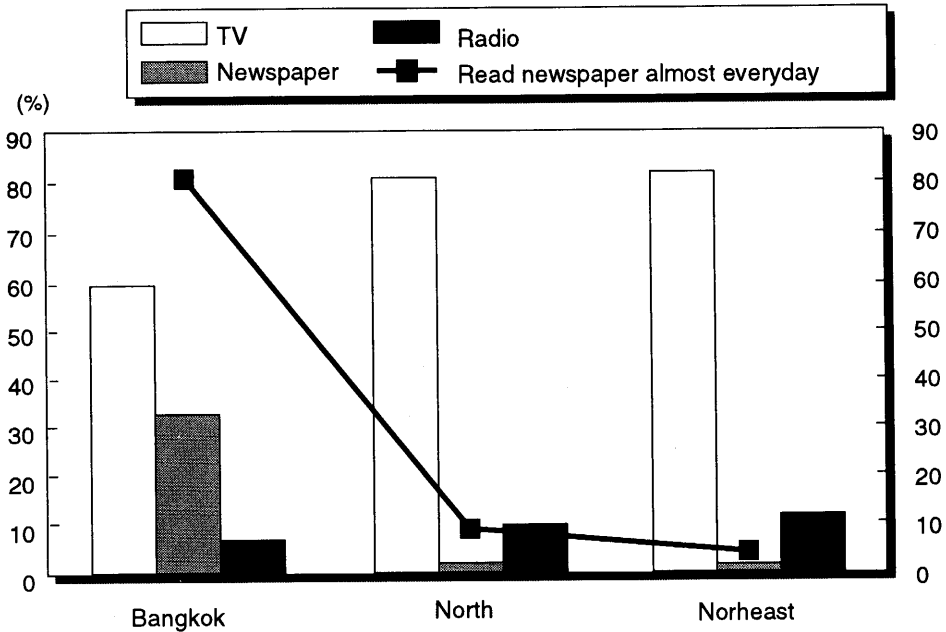**Figure 1** Ownership of Electrical Appliances (QB-8)

Figure 2 Major Information Sources and Access to Newspapers (QB-17, 18)

1). TVs are a dominant medium through which people in both urban and rural areas obtain information on a regular basis. But there is a conspicuous difference in the frequency of reading newspapers, which among the media are perhaps most critical of politics. Of urban university graduates, 80% said they read newspapers every day or almost every day, but the percentage fell short of 10% among farmers (Figure 2).

In terms of subjective ratings of the level of living standards, as many as 94.6% of university graduates said they were in the "middle" bracket (64.8% thought they were in the "upper middle," and 33.5% "lower middle"), while 75.3% of farmers in the North put themselves in the "middle" and 43.8% of farmers in the Northeast regarded themselves as "poor." In stark contrast with the living standard rating, Bangkok residents with university education were the least satisfied with the current state of society with a dissatisfaction ratio of 53%, whereas only 13% of farmers in Northeastern rural areas expressed dissatisfaction, showing great reserve. On awareness of inequality, however, farmers in the Northeast and North were more sensitive than Bangkok residents. The ratio of people who saw the fact that "good family background is an advantage for better living" as a serious social problem was 68% for the Northeast and 58% for the North, much higher than 45.2% for Bangkok.

With regard to environmental problems, the tone of response varied by region, but most respondents saw them as a serious issue. Of university graduates in Bangkok, 98% felt that "their life and health are being affected by environmental deterioration these days," while the ratio was also high at 91% for farmers in Northeastern and 81.3% for Northern farmers. When asked "Which do you think is more important, 'economic development' or 'environmental protection?'" nearly 60% chose "environmental protection" in each of the three areas.

This schematic picture confirms the existence of differences in social background and consciousness between the urban middle class and farmers.

3.3 Attitude toward Public Authorities and Political Consciousness

This portion examines the political orientations of university graduates in Bangkok and farmers by looking at their attitudes toward public authorities, perceptions of the central government system, and how much influence they can exert on politics. Figures 3-a and 3-b show the extent of trust placed in public sources of information. While university graduates do not show much trust in almost any public authority, educational institutions are given an outstanding degree of trustworthiness (Figure 3-a). In contrast, a high proportion of farmers in the Northeast express that information provided by public authorities is generally reliable, with even the lowest-ranking politicians considered reliable by over 60% (Figure 3-b). A comparison of responses on the reliability of "politicians" and "government" — the two most frequent counterparts in negotiations in environmental disputes — shows a gap of over 50% for "politicians" and over 30% for "government" between university graduates and Northeastern farmers.

Table 2 shows responses to questions on the central political system, elections and positions in politics. Given a long history of military coups d'etat, 75% of university graduates and over 97% of farmers said they favored an elected government when asked whether "the government should be chosen by elections only." However, there was a considerable discrepancy between urban and rural residents in consistency of opinion. When asked if "it is good for the military to hold power," 90% of university graduates in Bangkok disagreed, while 40% of farmers who had previously supported elected government also supported coups d'etat. To draw an interpretation of this contradictory phenomenon, Table 3 studies the relation between support for military coups d'etat and sense of hopelessness over politics among farmers in the Northeast. A sense of helplessness, that "our lives will not improve regardless of political change" can be seen among supporters of military coups d'etat at a statistically significant level. Moreover, among farmers with this frustration, who account for as many as 60% of the total, there appears to be a statistically significant tendency to place much importance on the personal ability of politicians; meaning a belief that, "if a political leader is capable, we can always count on him" (Table 4). These findings show that an acceptance of authoritarianism, along with a sense of hopelessness regarding politics, is still deeply ingrained in the often-noted conservative minds of farmers in the Northeast and North.[21] In contrast, university graduates in Bangkok feel less helpless in the face of politics.

Table 2 Opinion toward Politics (Q2-16)

(%)

Questions Indicating only "yes"	Bangkok (N=186)	Northeast (N=178)	North (N=162)
Q1. The government should be chose by election only.	75	96	99
Q2. It is good for the military to hold power.	7	41	45
Q3. If a political leader is capable, we can always count on him.	31	77	63
Q4. Our lives will not improve regardless of political change.	27	66	59

Note: N indicates number of samples.

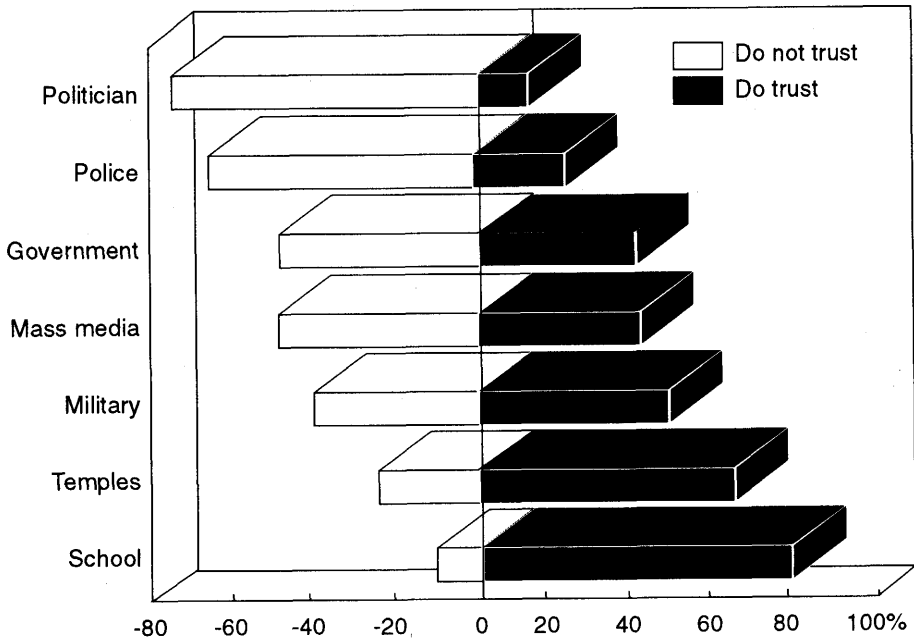**Figure 3-a** Trust in Public Information Sources (Bangkok) (Q2-11)

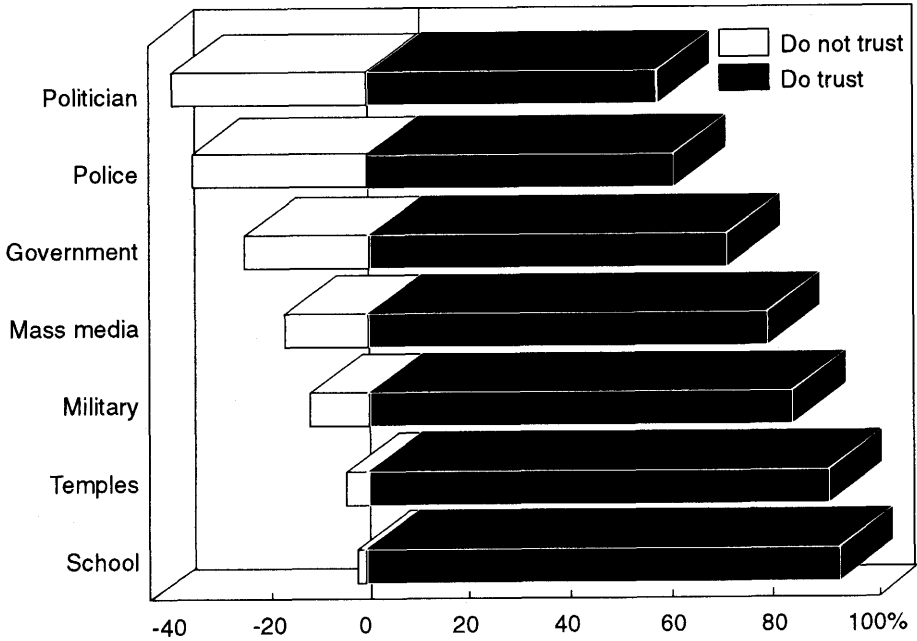**Figure 3-b** Trust in Public Information Sources (Northeast) (Q2-11)

Table 3 Opinion toward Coup de Main (Q2-16)

(%)

Questions		Q4. Our lives will not improve regardless of political change.	
	Q2 by Q4	Yes	No
Q2. It is good for the military to hold power.			
	Think so	81	19
	Don't think so	56	44

$p< .005$ $\chi^2=11.89$ (df1)
Cramer's V 0.266

Table 4 Political Effectiveness and Faith in Political Leaders

(%)

Questions		Q3. If a political leader is capable we can always count on him.	
	Q4 by Q3	Yes	No
Q4. Our lives will not improve regardless of political change.			
	Think so	85	15
	Don't think so	67	38

$p< .01$ $\chi^2=7.32$ (df1)
Cramer's V 0.208

Only 30% agreed with the statement that "our lives will not improve regardless of political change." In addition, 65% replied that it would not be desirable to trust politicians uncondi-tionally, whatever their capabilities. These responses suggest that in place of the conven-tional passive attitude, a sense of political effectiveness is beginning to take root among the new middle class in Bangkok, while at the same time a critical attitude of not placing easy trust in the government or politicians is beginning to grow among them.

3.4 Solutions to Environmental Problems and Choice of Responsible Organization

What then, on the basis of the different types of political consciousness described above, are the views of university graduates and farmers about the solutions to increasingly serious environmental problems? At present, expectations for solutions through legal proceedings are low, with 80% of university graduates in Bangkok and farmers in the Northeast replying that environmental laws are not applied fairly to people responsible for environmental dam-age. This subsection will analyze their views at two different levels. The first is what general measures they think are instrumental in improving environmental problems, and the second question is who they can count on when they personally suffer environmental damage.

In Figure 4-a, effective ways to improve environmental problems, as selected by each class, are grouped into "government regulations" and "residents' movements/each individu-al's prudence." Similarly, Figure 4-b indicates which of the two they think they should turn to when they personally encounter environmental problems — "village head/government" or "people's organizations." The results from Bangkok and from the rural areas differ vastly. University graduates tended to turn more to "individuals" or "people's organizations" than to

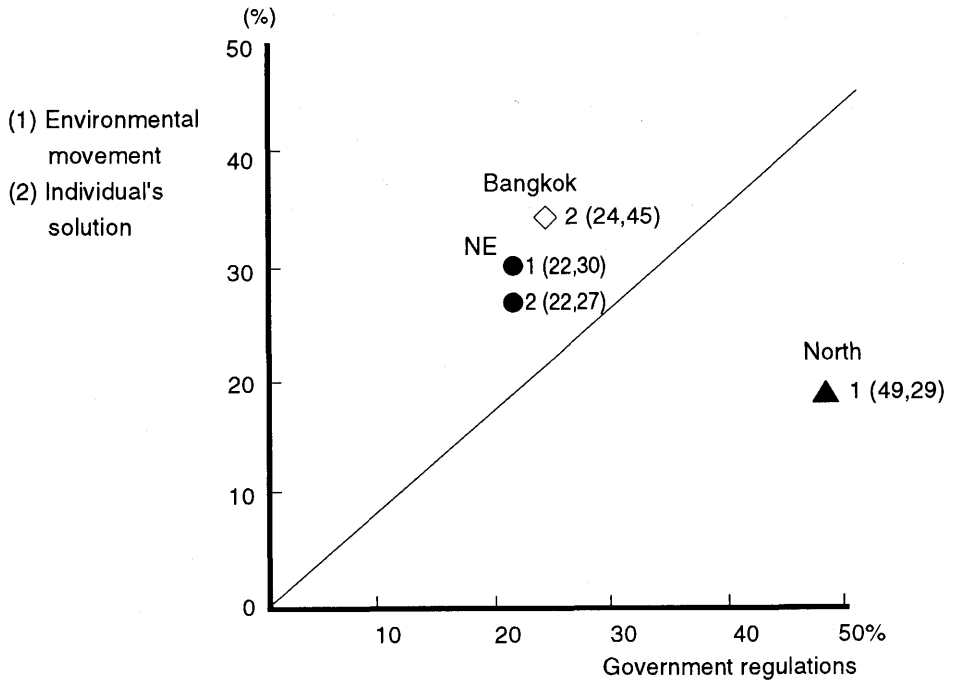**Figure 4-a** Effective Measures to Solve Environmental Problems (Q3-4)

(%)

(1) Environmental
    movement
(2) Individual's
    solution

Bangkok
◇ 2 (24,45)
NE
● 1 (22,30)
● 2 (22,27)

North
▲ 1 (49,29)

Government regulations

Figure 4-b Whom to Count on When Facing Environmental Problems (Q3-5)

(%)

Pepople's
organization

Bangkok
◇ 2 (20,40)

North
▲ 2 ▲ 1
(26,17)

NE
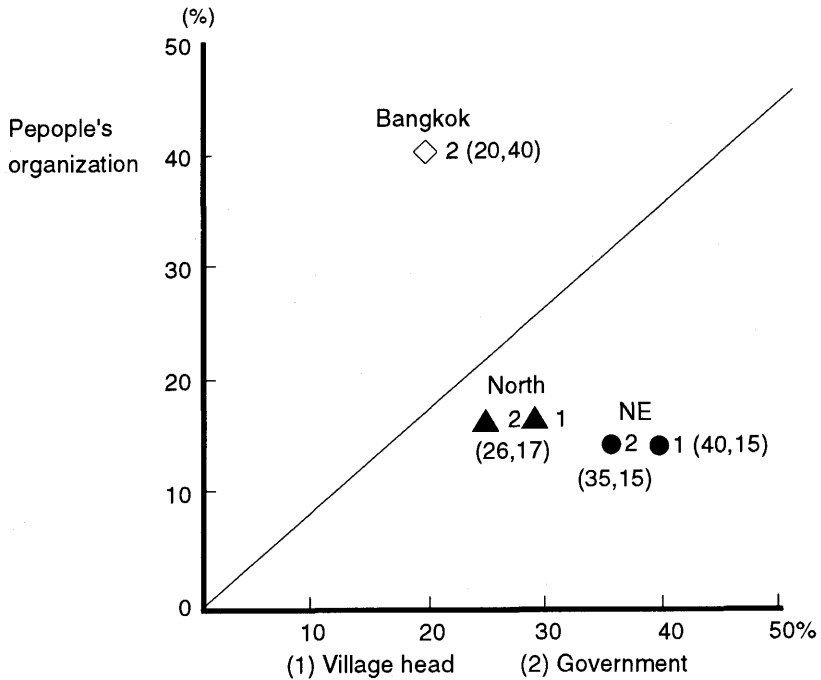● 2 ● 1 (40,15)
(35,15)

(1) Village head   (2) Government

Table 5-a Trust in Government and Solution of Environmental Problems (Q3-5)

(%)

Bangkok University Graduates	Government (34)	Mass media (28)	People's organization (70)	Others (36)	Total (168)
Do trust	19	18	39	24	100 (78)
Do not trust	16	21	44	19	100 (90)

Note: The figures in parentheses indicate the number of samples.

Table 5-b Trust in Government and Solution of Environmental Problems (Q3-5)

(%)

Northeastern Farmers	Government (60)	Mass media (67)	People's organization (24)	Others (18)	Total (169)
Do trust	39	39	13	9	100 (135)
Do not trust	21	44	17	18	100 (34)

Note: The figures in parentheses indicate the number of samples.

"government" and believed them generally to be effective for the specific problems they personally faced (Figures 4-a, 4-b). As for farmers in the North and Northeast, their responses varied over generally effective measures but were evenly divided between "village head" and "government" when asked whom they could count on for solving individual problems. (Figure 4-b).

The next subject is the intensity of preferences for respective solutions among university graduates and farmers. When respondents are divided into those who think information provided by the government is "believable" and those who regard it "unbelievable," 40% of university graduates in Bangkok who trust the government will still turn to "people's organizations" in dealing with environmental problems they personally experience (Table 5-a). Conversely, among farmers in the Northeast who think government information is "unbelievable," the ratio of those who turn to "village head" or "government," the route of official appeals, is higher than that of people who count on "people's organizations" (Table 5-b). A similar tendency can be observed in the relationship between generally effective solutions and specific, personal environmental problems. In the Northeast, farmers who gave weight to "residents' movements" or "individuals" as a general principle tended to seek the help of "village head" or "government" in coping with problems they personally faced (Table 6). These results show that Northeastern farmers ultimately regard the official route as the most effective way of settling actual dispute, an indication that the power of public authority is deeply rooted in their minds. In contrast, Bangkok university graduates do not place strong expectations on the government to solve their problems in the first place and have a clear tendency to rely on people's organizations or individual efforts.

Table 6 Effective Measures and Whom We Count on in Solution of Problems

(%)

Northeastern Farmers	Government	Mass media	People's organization	Others	Total
	(62)	(70)	(26)	(19)	(177)
Environmental movement	43	33	15	9	100 (39)
Individual's solution	35	42	19	4	100 (36)
Government	39	33	8	20	100 (54)
Companies to observe the law	19	53	17	11	100 (48)

Note: The figures in parentheses indicate the number of samples.

4. TYPES OF ENVIRONMENTAL DISPUTES AND THE URBAN-RURAL POLITICAL CULTURE

The consciousness survey in the preceding section sheds light on strikingly different views on the roles and positions of public authorities or the government between the new middle class in Bangkok and farmers in the Northeast and the North. Is there, then, any correspondence between the kinds of solutions urban and rural residents hope for and the strategies for action to express discontent in "citizens' movements" and "mobs"? Needless to say, it would be premature to directly link the survey results with the environmental movements, since the survey respondents do not necessarily become directly involved in environmental movements. Still, the differences observed in the political consciousness of urban and rural residents and the solutions they hope for may at least partially regulate the actions taken by the principal players of environmental movements. In this sense, the contrasting attitudes of the two groups toward the government or public authorities can be seen as fragments of clues for understanding the nature of "mobs" and "citizens' movements."

As previously stated, "mobs" quite often go straight to prefectural governors or cabinet ministers for negotiations, and these actions can be seen as based on the acceptance of the centralized power system as well as strong expectations from farmers for relief measures from the government. They tend to ignore lower administrative organizations and seek privileged access to people at the highest authority, often citing attempts by local bureaucrats to cover up problems or the limited administrative powers of local officials. This also corresponds to the survey results showing how farmers place expectations on politician's personal abilities. In negotiations, "mobs" tend to place themselves under hierarchical relations of paternalism, partly because of their own authoritarianism and feelings of helplessness. Thus, we often witness the temporary re-creation of traditional bonds between farmers and politicians, in which a cabinet minister offer donations or his good offices to help solve their problems, while the "mobs" for their part present the minister with a wreath in token of their gratitude.[22] These rituals suggest the intentions of farmers to put pressure upon those in

power to perform roles as protectors and help them out of difficulties, through appeal to a revival of paternalistic obligation. This may be part of a public relations strategy carefully mapped out by "mobs," who bring "threatening" group pressure into the cities, to avoid unnecessarily politicizing their actions. But this method of negotiation also has a weakness, since there is no way to force politicians in power to make good on their words if and when they unilaterally break their pledges or abandon the role of protector. In fact, a breach of promise by the government after the conclusion of negotiations has prompted disgruntled farmers to turn to their last resort many times, like arson, threats to harm or kill themselves in protest. This can show how vulnerable a relationship founded on authoritarianism and paternalism can be.[23] One point of interest under these circumstances is that one Northeastern farmers group, who frequently made protests in Bangkok, discarded the pattern of large-scale "mob" movements and launched a better-living project, while continuing negotiations at the local level with prefectural and county offices.[24] Another movement worth mentioning is the fact that rural respondents of the consciousness survey in the Northeast, where active people's organizations are located, are gradually becoming aware of the need to give weight to actors other than the government (Figure 4-b).

"Citizens' movements" in urban areas, in contrast, use a more open way of applying pressure than negotiations, on the strength of their easy access to technical knowledge and social recognition as middle class. This nature of their movements, which makes them independent of the government sector, has something in common with the survey results which showed that the new middle class in Bangkok were aware of their political effectiveness and would not easily place trust in public authorities. This may also be a factor explaining their support for citizens' organizations. "Citizens' movements" who are confident in their expertise and possible power of the people's movement, are adding a new, non-traditional element in environmental movements, in contrast with "mobs" who extract their bargaining power from the traditional relationships. However, the common ground between actual citizens' movements and the new middle class, as a potential pool of support, is perhaps still fragile. A large part of it exists only in a hypothetical world created by the mass media, and it is not sufficient to mobilize the new middle class to participate in actual movements. For example, those who get involved in issues directly affecting Bangkok residents, such as the Thanayon railway project or air pollution, are still limited to a very small number of activists, lawyers, university lecturers, and doctors. Other than public seminars, there are not so many occasions for a large number of people to get involved. It seems that the nature of "citizens' movements" in Bangkok is influenced to a large extent by the urban way of life devoid of small-community organizations, and by the individualistic lifestyle of the new middle class.[25]

As a result of rapid increases in environmental disputes at the local level, close cooperation between "mobs" and "citizens' movements" are becoming more frequent in recent years. These "mixed-type" movements, as a form of mutual support between urban professionals and local people confronting problems, are supposed to be the central form of movements in the issues where both urban and rural groups have common interests and concerns. In that sense, it will become increasingly important to make efforts to find points of agreement between the logic of cities and of rural residents.

This paper had attempted to make a brief survey on environmental disputes in the first half of 1990s, and has pointed out that the forms of protests by urban-rural participants probably reflect, to a certain degree, the percepts and political culture of the respective social classes. In Thai society, where the deeply rooted gap between cities and rural areas still exists, both movements have a logic of their own in political orientation or methods to deal

with environmental problems. However, the rapid pace of development and industrialization in the 1990s has, through environmental problems, promoted interaction between two different political cultures. Moreover, as a result of frequent disputes all over the country that cannot be dealt with individually, the government, which once listened to a variety of protests, is beginning to recognize the urgency of instituting a system of dispute settlements and transferring relevant administrative powers to local governments. Since the 1992 revision of the Enhancement and Conservation of National Environment Quality Act, the opportunity to hold public hearings in formulating public works projects has increased steadily, and the opinions of NGOs are now given more weight in environmental-related legal changes. Furthermore, the first election of the Tambon Council was held in April 1996 and the government decided in June 1996 to set up a special committee to deal with social problems stemming mainly from environment-related issues. A process has begun which involves searching for proper ways to balance the interests of the central and the local, and of the government, industry and local residents. It is clear that the proliferation of environmental disputes in the 1990s is working as a major driving force for the creation of a new system for consensus-building in Thai society.

Notes

1. A survey report by Prapat Pintopteng, lecturer at Kroek University appears in Sayam Rat Sapdaawicaan, pii41, chabap26, May 27, 1994, p. 20 and Warasan Rompruk, pii14, lem2, May 1994-1995, pp. 48-73.

2. Hewison, K. "Of Regimes, State and Pluralities: Thai Politics Enters the 1990s," in Hewison et al. (eds.), *Southeast Asia in the 1990's*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1993.

3. Charles F. Keyes, "Hegemony and Resistance in Northeast Thailand," in Volker Grabowsky (ed.), *Regions and National Integration in Thailand 1892-1992*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1995.

4. Differences between Urban and Rural politics in 1990's have already been the focus of several articles, such as Jim LoGerfo, "Attitudes toward Democracy among Bangkok and Rural Northern Thais," *Asian Survey* 36/9, September, 1996 and Masato Kawamori, *"Tai no gendai seiji ni okeru noson no ronri to toshi no ronri"* (Logic of 'the urban' and 'the rural' in contemporary Thai politics), *AJIKEN World Trend*, Vol.9, February 1996 [in Japanese]. Anek Laothamathas also tries to search for the possible solutions to overcome those different interests in urban and rural politics in *Song Nakhara Prachathipatai* (Two Proprietors of Democracy, Bangkok, Matichon Press, 1995) [in Thai].

5. There now are a variety of political ideologies and forms involved in environmental movements. Among the movements not covered in this paper is the "alternative development" movement which grew out of the ecology movement of rural development NGOs. Its core concept includes the restoration and preservation of rural culture, self-sufficiency and sustainable development, in contrast to the "(industrial) development" philosophy. For more details of this type of movement, see Atsushi Kitahara, *The Thai Rural Community Reconsidered*, Bangkok, The Political Economy Center, Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, 1996. To cite just a few example in urban areas, the Sarnsan (Magic Eyes) Association of Bangkok has been engaged in the cleanup and recycling movement since 1984, while in the area of policies, the Thailand Environment Institute, a private-sector think tank, has undertaken various research projects and published policy recommendations.

6. The former Chuwan Government had a tendency not to listen to these direct appeals and tried to promote existing tools for dispute resolution instead. However, the change of attitude of the Banharn Government in no way means that political pressure against environmental disputes no longer exists. During 1995-1996, three leaders of environmental movements were shot to death, including a village head in Rayong (assassinated on January 18, 1996), while the government has not yet withdrawn its accusation against leaders of the demonstration against the construction of Pakmun Dam. Moreover, several news programs that covered the scenes of environmental disputes were canceled under political pressure.

7. Problems in the deterioration of air pollution in Bangkok and diseases caused by it, based on Matichon, April 20, 1996, p. 6, and other sources. The phrase "Bangkok is hell" was used quite often by Akorn Huntrakul, a former member of parliament who bolted from the Phalantham party and ran in the 1996 Bangkok gubernatorial election. Prime Minister Banharn and some other politicians sometimes used similar phrases (Matichon Sudsapda, June 4, 1996, p. 26).

8. Newspaper articles on floods based on Matichon Sudsapda, Dec. 11, 1988, p. 11-15, etc. On environmental awareness in general, refer to the analysis of Prof. Okamoto in this book, and on the government's campaigns to raise the nation's environmental awareness, refer to another paper by TEI and by this writer.

9. A typical example of one dispute touching off another is the case of Sirinthorn Dam. Residents near the dam filed compensation demands 26 years after its construction, after they heard about compensation paid to people near Pakmun Dam, eight kilometers away. In rural areas, informal exchanges of information are under way. In Hangdong, local residents organized a campaign against a garbage disposal power plant after learning about the precedent in adjacent Maemoh in Lampang. In Rayong, residents objected to the construction of an industrial waste disposal facility after obtaining information about the cancellation of a similar project designed by the same company in the neighboring prefecture of Chon Buri (based on interviews at a meeting of the Forum of the Poor on April 5, 1996).

10. Among members of environmental movements in the 1990s, we can find several names of activists since Students Revolution in 1970s such as Mr. Warin and Mr. Somchai of Lawyer's Association, Bamrung Kayotha and Ms. Wanida of the Forum of the Poor. According to the Thailand Environment Institute, which surveyed 96 environment-related NGOs across the country, 20 organizations were established in the 1970s or before, 30 in the 1980s, and 42 in the 1990s (four unknown). The Environmental Stage of Thailand, a forum of over 180 environmental organizations from all over the country, was set up in 1991, the environmental committee of the Lawyers Association in 1992, and the Thailand Environment Institute in 1992.

11. Offe, Claus, "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics," *Social Research*, Vol. 52, No. 4, Winter, 1985, pp. 825-832. In this paper, I mainly referred to Offe's analysis in the analysis of environmental movements. However, Offe's "New Social Movements" concept was constructed presupposing the welfare states and institutionalized labor movements in Europe. Thus, I did not employ the word "New Social Movements" for the Thai cases, whose backgrounds are rather different from those in Europe. As for social backgrounds of Offe's discussion, refer to Koichi Hasegawa, *"Shigen doinron to 'Atarashii shakaiundoron'"* (the Resource Mobilization theory and the theory of "New Social Movements") in Shakai undo kenkyukai (ed.), *Shakai undoron no togo wo mezashite* (Toward an integrated theory of social movements), Tokyo, Seibundo, 1990 [in Japanese].

12. Some of environmental disputes categorized in this paper have been described in detail in published books. Please refer to the following: On the general state of environmental movements, Green World Foundation, *Sathanakaan Singwedlom Thai 2537, 2538* (State of the environment in Thailand 1994, 1995), Bangkok, Green World Foundation, 1995 [in Thai]. On movements to

oppose the planting of eucalyptuses, Toshio Tasaka, *Yukari bijinesu — Tai shinnrin hakai to nihon* (Eucalyptus business — Japan and deforestation in Thailand), Tokyo, Shinnihon Shuppan-sha, 1992 [in Japanese], Apichai Puntasen et al. "Political Economy of Eucalyptus: Business, Bureaucracy and the Thai Government," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 22, Nov. 2, 1992, and others. On chemical contamination in Khlong Toey and industrial waste disposal in Kanchanaburi, Surichai Wankaeo et al, eds., *Sanphit kap sangkhom niks: jak khlongtoey thung kanjanaburi* (NICs society and pollution: from Khlongtoey to Kanchanaburi), Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University Press, 1993 [in Thai]. On Pakmun Dam, see Charles Keyes, *op. cit*, etc.

13. *Dailynews*, May 27, 1973 and Chomrom Anurak Thammachat lae Saphayakorn Thammachat (eds.), *Banthuk lap caak thung yai* (Secret memory from the Thung yai), Bangkok, unknown, 1973 [in Thai].

14. Philip Hirsch and Larry Lohmann, "Contemporary Politics of Environment in Thailand," *Asian Survey*, vol. XXIX, No. 4, April, 1989.

15. "Mobs" came from the English word "mob" and moved into the vocabulary of the Thai language in newspapers and magazines around 1980 to describe a form of riot or group protest. According to Prapat Pintopteng, lecturer at Kroek University, "mobs" were the target of govern-ment suppression in the 1970s, and the word came into widespread use after it appeared in newspapers around 1982. In normal usage, "mobs" are not necessarily farmers. There are "mobs" organized to support politicians as well. More details about the routes and methods of "mobs" in Samphan Techaathik, *"Kantham mob lae kan praap mob prahachon,"* (How to make a mob and how to suppress), *Nation Sudsapdah pii thi 4*, vol. 196, March 8-14, 1996 [in Thai]. On the effectiveness and risks of "mobs," based on Kasem Sirisamphan, *"Mob samacha khon jon"* (Mob: the Forum of the Poor) *Phucadkan raiwan*, May 1, 1996, and interviews with Mr. Thongjaroen Srihatham, one of leaders of the campaign against Pakmun Dam (June 15, 1996) and with Mr. Buaphan Chabuanoi, the protest leader against the Nampong River pollution (Jan. 28, 1996).

16. Based on documents distributed at a public hearing on November 30, 1995, on the Tanayon pro-ject, an interview (January 8, 1996) with Mr. Warin Thiamjarat, lawyer on the environmental committee of the Lawyers Association, and an interview (March 24, 1996) with Ms. Pinan Sotrosaseranii, leader of the movement against industrial waste disposal in Kanchanaburu. The general definition of citizens' movements is based on the classifications of Koichi Hasegawa, *'Kankyo mondai to shakai undo'* (Environmental problems and social movement) in Nobuko Ijima (ed.), *Kankyo Shakaigaku*, (Sociology of environment), Tokyo, Yuhikaku Books, 1993, p. 104 [in Japanese]. Differences between citizens' movements and residents' movements based on Akira Sato, *"Gaisetsu: Jumin undo"* (An introduction: Residential movements), *Gendai no esprit*, No. 158, 1980 [in Japanese], etc.

17. For instance, in the environmental dispute around the Nampong River, which typically reflects the conflict between industry and farmers, protesters never take up this issue with the idea of "the capitalist versus farmers," suggesting that there exists little room for class struggle in this case. Ms. Wanida, one of "mob" advisers, explained that the change in strategy was inevitable after the collapse of farmers' movements in the 1970s following the assassination of their lead-ers. According to her experience, it is too dangerous to advocate radical political change or class struggle in social movements in Thailand, since such movements tend to be censured for rioting or for being communist. Besides, farmers themselves do not like too much politicization of the problem (interview on June 16, 1996, with Ms. Wanida).

18. Daishiro Nomiya, *"Shakai undo no kozo shisutemu apurochi: Shigen undo karano dakkyaku"* (Structural-system approach to social movements), *Shakaigaku Hyoron*, Vol. 46, Nov. 4, 1996 [in Japanese].

19. The new middle class has been defined as people with university education, because academic background remains particularly important for success in Thailand and also because statistics show that 90% of university graduates have "new middle class" occupations in management, professional positions, service and white-collar jobs, instead of gray-collar jobs or laborer.

20. Since the highest income bracket was set at 50,000 baht or above in the survey, the income of university graduates in Bangkok probably is considerably underestimated. The average income level in rural areas is no more than a rough estimate since it lacks credibility as an indicator or is not representative of living standards.

21. Prof. Atsushi Kitahara has examined the attitudes of farmers by linking them to Thai individualism and has discussed the possibility that the defensive attitude of farmers, their fear of people with power as well as avoidance of contacts with outside society, have unintentionally led to maintaining conservative hierarchical relationships. See Atsushi Kitahara, *op. cit.*

22. The Forum of the Poor has purposely incorporated these ceremonies in action plans of their movements, because farmers do not like confrontational situations, and they also expect to put moral pressure on the politicians through these amicable ceremonies. (interview on June 15, 1996, with Mr. Thirawat Namduwang, and Ms. Thasanii, lecturer at Burapha University) Ms. Wanida says, "Paternalism is the only resources farmers can turn to." (interview on June 16, 1996, with Ms. Wanida).

23. There are countless incidents of this nature. At the end of a fierce struggle with the Forestry Bureau over permanent residency in protected forests, a farmer in Kanchanaburi tied a cloth around his neck, climbed up a tree, and threatened to hang himself (*Nation*, May 13, 1995). In an April 1996 case involving land rights in Suphanburi, villagers warned that if the government expropriate their hereditary lands, they would dig graves and bury themselves.

24. Some people from within "mob" movements also question their effectiveness. The Federation of Small-scale Northeastern Farmers (Secretary-general, Mr. Nakhorn Sriwipat) questioned the effectiveness of large-scale "mob" and parted with the Forum of the Poor (a group with Bamrung Kayotha). It criticized how the repeated mobilization for protest movements had left farmers exhausted and without many gains because the government failed to make good on its promises. This group left the "mob" movement and launched a better-living project with a membership of over 35,000 members financed by a government budget, while continuing protests at the local level in collaboration with local teachers (interview on Aug. 16, 1996 with Mr. Nakhorn).

25. Bangkok Forum, an NGO targeted at the middle class in Bangkok has noted difficulties involved in setting up an organization which represents the new middle class, an equivalent to the Forum of the Poor for farmers (interview on February 19, 1996, with Ms. Kitipon Jaibun, a staff member of Bangkok Forum). Nithi Aeosriwong also points out that the urban middle class with individualistic values has yet to build up a new social relationship in place of the old relationship in the thesis entitled "Wathanatham khong khon chan klang thai" (The cultural dimensions of the Thai middle class) in Sangsidh Piriyarangsan et al. (eds.), *Chonchan klang bon krasae prachathipatai* (The middle class and democracy in Thailand), Bangkok, Political Economy Center, Chulalongkorn University, 1993 [in Thai].