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Spaces and Performance of NGOs in Thailand:
Their Transformation in the Development Process

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to review how the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector has changed during the process of economic and political development in Thailand. If we broadly define NGOs as organizations that are not for profit and that have not been established by the government, overseas Chinese associations and Christian organizations can be counted as the first NGOs in Thailand. However, the NGO sector in Thailand began to flourish after rapid economic development brought new economic and social problems. This is why these non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations in Thailand are called "development NGOs" (*ongkon phatthana ekachon*).

The development of the NGO sector in any society will reflect its economic and political structure. The author has compared 15 Asian countries and proposed a model to explain the salient features of the NGO sector in each country by combining their economic and political space (Shigetomi, 2002a). Some scholars have criticized this model because it neglects the organizational capability of NGOs and the existence of NGOs that seek political goals rather than economical ones (Decharut, 2002; Winder, 2002). While admitting some weaknesses in the model (Shigetomi, 2002b, 2002c), the author feels that it is useful to make international comparisons of the NGO sector and to develop an overview of the development of the NGO sector in a specific country. In this chapter, the author first summarizes his model. He then applies the model to explain the development of the NGO sector in Thailand.

SPACE MODEL OF NGO SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

Each individual tries to secure the economic resources necessary for his or her survival from the state, the market, and the community. In Figure 3-1, the area of the larger triangle represents all such resources. A small triangle at each corner shows the portion of demand satisfied by each traditional sector – the state, the market, and the community. The state sector provides resources according to the purposes of governance. The market sector allocates resources through transactions guided by price between actors who seek to maximize their profits. The community is a system in which people secure resources through their social and coopera- tive ties. Figure 3-1 shows a situation typical of developing countries where there is still a large unsatisfied demand since the volume of resources provided by the three sectors is too small. The existence of vacant space is the raison d'être of NGOs.

Figure 3-1: Economic Space of NGO

State

Economic
space of
NGO

Market

Community
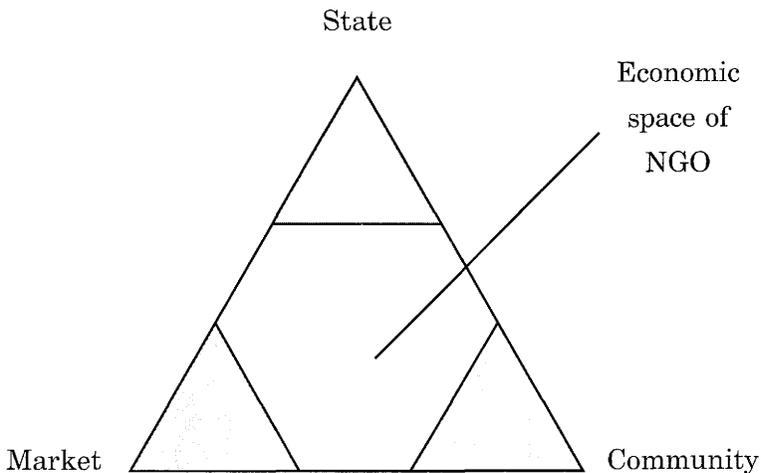
Source: prepared by the author

Many NGOs seek to fill this vacant space. They provide goods and services to underprivileged people. Korten (1990) called NGOs of this kind first-generation NGOs. The larger economic space means that there is

a large demand for NGOs. Other conditions being equal, we can expect vigorous NGO activity.

However, the economic space is not the only factor defining the size of NGOs and the extent of their activities. Since control of the distribution of resources is sometimes the source of political power, the actors of the existing three sectors do not leave NGOs free to carry out their activities. The government in particular asserts powerful control over NGOs. We call the arena in which NGOs can act without such restraints a political space.

To understand the salient features of NGO activities in a given country, we need to combine the economic and political spaces. For example, the situations of Bangladesh and Singapore are a good example of a contrast. The former has a much greater economic space than the latter. Unlike the government of Singapore, the Bangladeshi government does not have tight control over NGOs. Thus, the NGO sector is flourishing in Bangladesh to a greater extent than in Singapore. China and Vietnam have a large economic space for NGOs but their activities are considerably restricted by the authoritarian governments of those countries. On the other hand, the economic space in Japan is small but its government does not suppress NGO activities. When one of the spaces is small, NGO activities are weaker than when both the economic and political space are large.

However, in most developing countries, there is still a large economic space left vacant in spite of NGOs best efforts to providing resources. In this case, NGOs start to change the three traditional sectors; the NGOs' advocacy activities start.

Many NGOs start off by approaching the community. NGOs recognize that if they simply provide resources, local people will become more dependent on outside assistance. As a result, the development will never be sustainable. Therefore, NGOs persuade local people to organize themselves to tackle their own problems. Korten (1990) calls NGOs that take this approach second-generation NGOs.

However, the community cannot fill all the vacant space by itself. Third-generation NGOs go beyond the community. They approach for-profit enterprises, the actors in the market sector. For example, NGOs have urged private firms to be responsible in their provision of products and services and not to pollute the environment. They often organize critical or even

antagonistic campaigns against improper business activities.   Sometimes NGOs try other approaches; for example, they might enter into the business field and demonstrate fair business practices.

Third-generation NGOs also try to change the practice of governments, since governments have a large amount of resources and have responsibility to promote people's wellbeing.   These types of advocacy activities differ according to the size of the political space.   If the political space is very small, NGOs are not allowed to advocate.   If the political space is widening and there is still plenty of economic space remaining, NGOs call upon the government to provide more resources for people's welfare.   Putting pressure on governments to provide more resources has become an important part of NGOs' activities in many developing countries.   NGOs may call for better decision-making and better implementation of public policy if the poor distribution of resources by a government stems from the political and bureaucratic system.   When formal political channels are not necessarily effective in meeting people's demands, people have particular expectations of NGOs playing some political role in calling for a "better politics."

When economic development makes the space small, NGOs emphasize "smaller government" rather than "larger government." NGOs call for the government to transfer some of its resources and some of its authority to implement policies.   They identify the civil society as the ideal political system rather than the large state.   In Japan, for example, social movements put more emphasis on widening opportunities for civic associations to do something rather than calling on the government to do something. Even when the market economy is well-developed, however, NGOs in some countries, such as South Korea and Singapore, are keen to see "democratization" if formal political systems are not perceived as representing popular voices.

So the features of economic and political space explain the contrast between the NGO sectors in different developing countries.   This model is useful for illustrating the change in the NGO sector in Thailand.

COLLABORATIVE RESOURCE PROVIDER IN UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Until the 1950s, the primary commodities dominated the Thai economy in terms of production and exports. Four major commodities – rice, rubber, teak and tin – accounted for 80 percent of total exports, even in 1959. As for agriculture, about 90 percent of the value of exports came from rice and rubber. Exported rice was mostly from the central region, while rubber was predominantly from the southern region. The farmers in the other regions produced rice and other products mostly for their own consumption. In terms of marketable goods, the farmers' economic diversification was limited. Until the 1950s, the government identified farm debt and lack of land in some areas as major rural problems. As a result, the promotion of credit cooperatives and the land settlement program were the main social programs for rural residents in those days. On the other hand, Bangkok was a major city holding 8 percent of the national population. With a small manufacturing sector, more than a half the labor force was engaged in commerce and service industries even in 1960 (CSO, 1962). The government identified the most serious social problems as being in urban areas rather than rural areas, where the mutual assistance system was still working (Nikom, 1960). As a result, the emphasis in government policies was on tackling urban social problems.

The Thai government established its first social welfare branch, the Department of Public Welfare (DOPW) in 1940 (DOPW, 1990). Until the mid 1970s, the DOPW's programs addressed orphans, indigent households, prostitutes, disaster victims, and other people who were subject to extreme difficulties (Sakda, 1975). However, most of those receiving these services lived in urban areas and their numbers were limited. The government expected private charitable organizations to complement its services.

Organizational philanthropy in Thailand began at the beginning of the 20th century at the latest. It was conducted by Christian groups and overseas Chinese associations of the same original locality or the same language (Amara & Nitaya, 1994). Until World War I, these organizations mainly provided medical services and services for women and orphans. Thai people also formed philanthropic organizations such as Sapha Unalom Daeng (later the Thai Red Cross) in 1893 (Sapha kachat thai, 1999). More re-

cently, the wives of leading politicians and bureaucrats formed the National Women's Council (Amara & Nitaya, 1994). Even after World War II, these philanthropic groups continued to provide social welfare services (Table 3-1). Their beneficiaries were orphans, young people, the visually impaired, and victims of disaster (Sakda, 1975). Many organizations had executive members from the royal family and other upper-class members.

Table 3-1 : Number of NGOs by established year and field of activity

	No.of organi- zation	Human rights	Com- munity develop- ment	Infor- mation seminar, research	Co- ordination, support, funding for NGOs	Advo- cacy	Social welfare
Before 1969	69	0	8	0	4	10	47
1970-73	25	1	4	0	0	4	16
1974-76	42	2	12	0	2	9	17
1977-79	29	0	4	1	3	4	17
1980-84	112	2	43	6	11	18	31
1985-90	83	4	29	5	8	10	27
Unknown	15	0	4	0	0	3	7
Total	**375**	**9**	**104**	**12**	**28**	**58**	**162**

Source: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University Social Research Institute, Khon Kaen University Research and Development Institute, *Thamniap nam ongkan phatthana ekachon thai*. (Directory of public interest non-governmental organizations), Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 1990.
Notes: It is possible that the activity field at the established year is different from that of surveyed year shown in this table.

So, these private philanthropic groups were serving the same groups of people as the government chose to target. At the same time, these philanthropists were from the same social groups as those that supplied high-ranking officials to the government. There was no concern that these two sectors were conflicting or even competing with each other, since the

resources provided by both sectors were insufficient to meet the demands of society. At this stage, NGOs just tried to put some resources into a vacant space that could not be filled by the government, the market, or the community. The relationship between the government and NGOs was collaborative. In 1952, the government added a new unit to the DOPW to support private charitable groups. This unit has provided subsidies and other benefits and awards. In 1969, the philanthropic organizations secured 10 percent of their revenue from the government (DOPW, 1970). NGOs of this type still exist at present and retain a collaborative relationship with the government.

FROM CRITICAL RESOURCES PROVIDERS TO COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS

The economic structure of Thailand started to change rapidly from the end of the 1950s. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Thai economy continued to grow at an annual rate of 7 to 8 percent. The structure of agricultural production showed a dramatic change (Shigetomi, 2004). New upland crops, such as kenaf, maize, cassava, and sugarcane, were introduced and disseminated quickly and widely in the eastern, upper central, and northeastern regions. Small farmers planted these crops for sale on the market. With these crops, the market economy expanded in rural societies, which had previously been highly self-sufficient. Even the small farmer in a remote village was now involved in competition through the market economy. At the same time, rapid industrialization started in Bangkok and its vicinity. First the textile industry and then the machinery and electric industries emerged, supported by domestic and foreign capital. Rapid migration of labor from rural to urban areas began. About 8 percent of the urban population in 1970 had lived in rural areas just five years before (NSO, 1976). In 1990, the number of migrants from rural to urban areas was more than double that in 1970 (NSO, 1993). Farmers were able to increase the income from their farms during the 1970s because of newly introduced commodities and the price hike in the world market. They could add to this income from non-agricultural sources. However, the increase in urban residents' incomes surpassed that of rural residents. The result was a widening gap in incomes. Relative poverty became a serious problem

in Thailand.

The government started its organizational attempts to promote rural development in the late 1950s. However, even in the mid 1970s, its agents for promoting rural development covered only 60 percent of rural districts (CDD, 1979). Moreover, until that time, governmental projects had concentrated on building an infrastructure. For example, they had included the construction of roads and water pipes. This infrastructure, if built effectively, facilitated access to the market and brought new economic problems related to market-oriented agriculture.

This was the situation in which a new generation of NGOs (so-called development NGOs) emerged. Unlike first-generation NGOs, many of the new NGOs chose rural villages and urban slums as their fields of activity, as they considered the problems of development to be concentrated in those areas. According to a directory made by an NGO-supporting organization, 60 percent and of NGOs in 1986 had rural community development and 20 percent had urban community development as their field of activity (TVS, 1986).

TRRM (Foundation for Thailand Rural Reconstruction Movement under Royal Patronage of H. M. King) was one of the first development NGOs in Thailand. It was founded in 1967 by progressive technocrats and intellectuals such as Puey Ungpakorn (then President of the Thai Central Bank) (Rueng, 1995). Its field workers in this early period were mostly former bureaucrats. Puey also participated in the founding of Komol Keemthong Foundation in 1971. This foundation had more of an urban focus and engaged young people in working to promote health and children's welfare and to tackle other problems in society.

The student uprising in October 1973 had a strong impact on Thai NGOs. Under the civilian government produced by this revolution, NGOs enjoyed a relatively large political space. This certainly helped increase their number. In the three years from 1974 alone, 42 new NGOs came into being; most of them focusing on welfare (Table 3-1).

However, these NGOs were quite different from the older philanthropic groups in terms of their relationship with the government. They were seeking alternative modes of development and were critical of the government's way of development. Even TRRM, which considered possible links

with governmental agencies when choosing its project sites, did not collaborate with the government beyond visits and mutual loans of equipment. In reality, the government and the NGOs were operating their own projects without coordination or collaboration.

In urban areas, as well, new NGOs came into being with the support of Komol Keemthong Foundation to run public health programs, which supplied traditional medicines, and welfare activities such as catering services for schoolchildren of poor families. These activities were carried out independently of the official welfare administration.

Even though these NGOs were critical of the government's policy, they tried to fill the vacant economic space. They did not have to confront the government because there was such a wide space remaining.

In October 1976, the military and rightwing political forces set out to turn back the tide of democracy. The government cracked down on any popular movement that seemed to be critical of it. The political space of NGOs shrank suddenly; their activities in rural areas became nearly impossible.

The political change did not affect the economic space. Rather, in the early 1980s, the farming economy slumped because of depressed commodity prices. The proportion of people living under the poverty line increased in the first half of the 1980s. It was natural that NGO activities exploded as soon as the political space was reopened by the government's 1979 declaration of the easing of restraints on organizations whose ideology differed from its own. Between 1980 and 1984, 112 NGOs were founded (Table 3-1).

It is important to note that there were significant differences between rural development NGOs before and after the suspension of activity. In the 1970s, their activities focused on providing technology and knowledge to individual farmers. Through their experiences with rural people, NGOs recognized the capability of rural people to mobilize resources and organize themselves using their indigenous social system. They described such wisdom as "community culture" and developed this understanding into a strategy for rural development (Withun, 1986). Rather than providing resources for the rural population, NGOs were now trying to develop local people's capability to organize themselves and solve their own problems.

This was the start of NGOs' advocacy activities in the community.

At the present time, the belief in "community culture" remains a strong ideology guiding many NGOs. This ideology includes criticism of the market economy and governmental "top-down" development policies. In the mid 1980s, Maniemai and Tips (1984) found the relationship between government agencies and NGOs to be one of mutual suspicion and tension.

CHANGES OF POLITICAL SPACE AND STATE-NGO RELATIONS

However hard NGOs endeavored to provide resources and to enhance the capability of communities, the vacant space remained wide. The geographic coverage of NGOs' projects was very limited. Even though their projects included some examples of development strategies, limitations on the financial and human resources available hindered their spread. The resources that communities could mobilize were also limited. Savings groups, one of the praised community-based activities in Thailand, could provide loans for small production and livelihood expenses in only a few successful cases. Many factors contributing to rural poverty could not be removed by the sole efforts of NGOs and communities.

During the 1970s, the government learned that rural poverty could undermine its political stability. At the end of the 1980s, it declared that the elimination of rural poverty was a primary policy goal. With strong support from Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanond, the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) restructured the policy framework for rural development and took leadership of the new framework. NESDB once had Puey, the founder of TRRM, as an executive committee member and many of its staff had ideas that were close to those of NGO activists. When NESDB started to make serious attempts to tackle rural poverty, its rural development unit sought contact with development NGOs and urged NGOs to form a coalition. In 1980, NESDB organized a seminar and invited NGOs to give their opinions (Maniemai & Tips, 1984).

At the time when NESDB contacted the NGOs, NGOs' rural development workers had their own network (see Chapter 6 of this volume). This network, which was launched in 1978, facilitated the exchange of experiences and ideas by means of workshops and seminars. The NGOs held

their first national conference in 1981. The following year, the second conference had as its main theme "government and NGO cooperation in rural development" (ibid., pp. 52-53). The NGOs reacted positively to the approach from the government sector.

As part of this process of convergence, NGO-CORD (NGO Coordinating Committee on Rural Development, later NGO-COD) was founded toward the end of 1985 as a broad coalition of NGOs. At last, the government and NGOs had established systems to facilitate mutual links to promote rural development. In the second half of the 1980s, the Office of Primary Health Care of the Ministry of Public Health followed suit by initiating regular consultation with NGOs at a local level. In both cases, however, the cooperation between government and NGOs remained shallow. Normally it was limited to holding joint seminars and exchanging ideas. Even so, the relationship created at this time later served as the basis for political participation by NGOs.

ADVOCACY DIRECTED TOWARD THE STATE AND THE MARKET

Economic development brought new economic problems that differed from those experienced by NGOs involved in rural development. People could not obtain enough resources, not because resources were insufficient but because others were depriving them. In this situation, people had to confront the actors who were depriving them of resources. Since poor people did not have enough power and knowledge, there was a demand for NGOs to help them in their struggle. This type of NGO identified the problem as a violation of human rights rather than a lack of economic resources. The first NGO in this category was Union for Civil Liberty (UCL), which was established in 1973, soon after the October student uprising (Chapter 11 of this volume). The founding members of UCL were mostly intellectuals. Its core activities were to assist the labor movement and rural people in their struggle against state projects. For example, UCL provided legal and practical support for workers who were facing unjust treatment by their employers. UCL often supported local people who had disputes with state agencies over land and other issues. In this way, UCL focused on the distribution of resources and their management by actors in

the market and the state. In other words, it struggled for "better politics" that secured human rights.

Table 3-2 : Number of NGO established per year by field of activity

Established Year	Education	Agriculture	Disabled people	Slum	Children	Environment	Co-ordination/Support	Community development	Women	Labour	Religion and development	Public health/consumer protection	Human rights/Democratization	Media reform	Aids	Total
1979-1985	0.1	0.9	1.1	0.0	2.1	2.0	1.9	3.0	0.9	0.4	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.6	15.6
1986-1991	0.3	1.0	0.7	0.8	1.3	3.8	0.8	1.2	2.0	0.0	1.2	0.5	0.5	0.3	1.7	16.2
1992-1997	0.5	0.8	0.7	0.5	1.8	5.8	1.7	2.3	1.5	1.2	0.2	0.8	0.8	0.5	3.2	22.3
1998-2002	0.4	1.2	0.8	0.6	1.6	3.0	2.0	2.0	0.8	0.4	0.4	1.0	1.6	0.2	1.4	17.4

Source: Anusorn Chaiyapan (ed.), *Thamniap ongkon phatthana ekachon 2546.* (2003 directory of non-governemtnal organizations) Bangkok: Khana kammakan phoei phrae lae songsoem ngan.
Notes: The figures are calculated from the data collected for the year 2003's directory.   The field of activity in the established year might not be same as that in the year when the directory was promulgated.

After the mid 1980s, more and more NGOs started trying to influence the decisions and activities of actors in the market and the state.   Rapid economic development over more than two decades had caused environmental problems in many parts of Thailand.   For example, a dispute arose between rice farmers and salt miners along the Siao River in the northeast region from the early 1980s.   There was a big scale demonstration against the governmental project to construct the Nam Choen Dam in 1988.   In each case, NGOs joined local people's protests against private and governmental projects.   They saw that people faced problems because of inadequate management of natural resources rather than a lack of resources.

Naturally, they targeted the actors in the market and the state who were responsible for the management of resources.
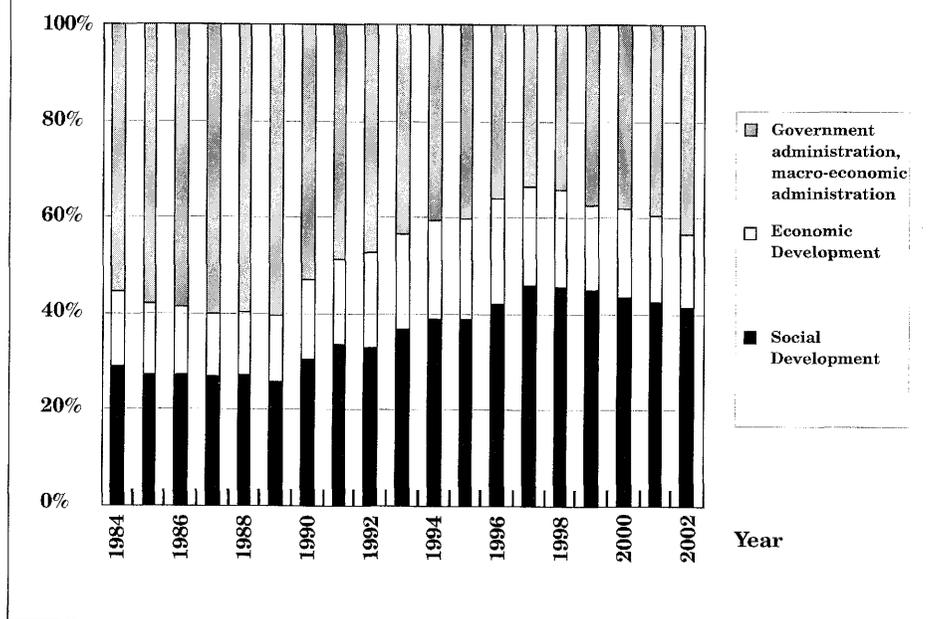
This kind of conflict over resources happened very often after the mid 1980s. Because of this situation and partly because of a shift in the focus of foreign donors, the number of environmental NGOs increased in that period (Table 3-2). Many active environmental NGOs, such as Wildlife Fund Thailand, Project for Ecological Recovery, and the Yadfon Association, were established after the mid 1980s (Phirrman & Korn, 1992).

In the 1990s, especially after the decline in the political power of the military after 1992, local people organized themselves and covered wider issues in their list of demands. People's organizations put pressure on the government not only over environmental problems occurring in specific areas but also over economic issues such as farming debt and land reform. Some NGOs, such as Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD), assisted these movements.

By assisting these movements, NGOs also gained political influence over the government. Most of the NGOs were small organizations with few activists. Their actions were accepted because of their members' professional skills and knowledge. When NGOs were allied with the mass of poor people, they became the spokespeople of the poor. When the people staged protests, for example by occupying a public place, their physical power gave NGOs the political power to bargain with the government.

To sum up, the emergence of advocacy activities aimed at influencing the state and market sectors was a reflection of the changes in the economic space for NGOs. Earlier, NGOs had framed the main issue as the scarcity of the state's allocation of resources to communities. By asserting this, NGOs were playing a complementary role, whether intentionally or not, by making up for the scarcity of resources provided by other sectors. However, environmental problems arose because the distribution and management of resources by private and state agents were inappropriate. In this changed situation, NGOs no longer criticized the lack of government policies, but rather the negative consequences of the policies of government and private enterprise. They were now expanding their activities to influence the government's policies through staging demonstrations.

Figure 3-2 : Change in Share of Budget Category

Legend:
- Government administration, macro-economic administration
- Economic Development
- Social Development

Year

Source: Bureau of Budge, *Budget in Brief*, various issues.

Notes: Each category coincides with the following classification in program budgeting. "Social Development" is a sum of Education, Public Health, and Social Services. "Economic Development" is a sum of Agriculture, Industry and Mining, Transportation and Communication, Commerce and Tourism, Science, Technology, Energy and Environment.

The rest is a sum of Maintenance of National Security, Maintenance of Internal Peace and Order, General Governement Administration and General Service, Debt service, and Stimulaion of economic growth.

PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE

Since the 1980s, the Thai government has paid more attention to the distribution of resources. Especially since the start of fully fledged party politics in 1988, the government has been conscious of its popularity among the voters. The budget for social policy increased considerably in the 1990s (Figure 3-2). The share of total government expenditure spent on public health increased from 4.4 percent in 1989 to 5.4 percent in 1990 and 7.6

percent in 1997. The increase in the social services budget was even greater: it was 3.6 percent of total government expenditure in 1984, 4.4 percent in 1989, 6.9 percent in 1990, and 16 percent in 1997 (BOB, various years). Although these two categories' share of government expenditure stagnated after 1997, the share of education increased from 20 percent in 1996 to 26 percent in 2000. The transfer of resources from the state to people who had been left behind in the nation's development steadily increased. However, the disparity in the incomes of different sectors of the population continued to widen until the mid 1990s. In the field of social development, NGOs perceived the problem as the way the government distributed resources rather than the lack of resources itself.

On the other hand, the political environment for NGOs changed considerably after the events of May 1992. The political reforms that resulted in the 1997 constitution emphasized the need to limit the power of politicians in policy-making. Non-state actors, such as intellectuals and NGOs, were interested in reforming the system to check the power of politicians. Firstly, the politicians were excluded from the process of drafting the constitution. Independent agencies were established as a check on politicians' behavior and government policies. The upper house became a body to monitor the lower house and the government. Politicians who had their own constituencies were discouraged from becoming cabinet members. The constitution itself had detail provisions that limited the power of politicians and bureaucrats in the making and implementation of policy. Some NGOs, such as UCL and Women and Constitution Network, tried hard to influence the drafting of the constitution. After the political reforms, NGOs were not eager to participate in representative politics except through their activists becoming members of the upper house. Rather, they focused on direct participation in policy implementation. The new constitution legitimized participation by NGOs in some fields of policy implementation.

NGOs started to participate in rural development even before the political reforms. As mentioned earlier, government agencies and NGOs had been in some contact since the early 1980s. In 1989, the government organized a subcommittee to draft the rural development plans for the Seventh National Economic and Social Development Plan. Four individu-

als from NGOs were invited to participate in this subcommittee, one of them as the official representative of NGO-CORD. In the process of drafting the Eighth Plan (1997-2001), Prawes Wasi, a respected academic in the NGO sector, assumed the chairmanship of a subcommittee for rural, local, and environmental development planning.

In the fiscal year 1992, the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) began to subsidize NGOs. In 1996, representatives of the coalition of ministry-registered NGOs were given seats on the subsidy screening and allocation committee. In addition to awarding such general subsidies, the ministry began to subsidize NGOs working on the AIDS issue.

In the area of social welfare too, the government changed its organization to allow for NGO participation. On the 49-member committee set up to make social welfare policies, nine seats were given to representatives from social welfare NGOs and four to social welfare workers serving in an individual capacity.

In the field of the environment, the 1992 Enhancement and Conservation of National Environmental Quality Act promoted governmental cooperation with NGOs registered at the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MOSTE). NGOs were expected to assist the administration, play a role in conducting public relations activities, support community movements, undertake research, make policy proposals, and provide legal advice to residents. The government also set a quota for participation by NGOs in the state environment committee. Thus, NGO participation in policy-making was legislatively endorsed. In addition, a fund was established for subsidizing NGOs which registered at MOSTE.

The participation of non-state actors in governance was legitimatized theoretically by civil society discourse. At the end of the 1990s, the discourse of civil society flourished in Thai academic and NGO circles. Even though proponents of the theory did not share a uniform understanding of it, many placed importance on citizens' participation in political and administrative mechanisms. According to this theory, NGOs were defined as indispensable actors in the new system of governance.

"Civil society" is *pracha sangkhom* or *prachakhom* in Thai. Even some government agencies started to introduce *prachakhom* in their administrative process. One example was *prachakhom changwat*, a provincial civil

society forum promoted by NESDB. *Prachakhom changwat* was a mechanism through which local residents could monitor provincial administrations and make proposals. However, these fora remained informal; their status and membership requirements were not defined by law. In practice, the core members were college teachers, lawyers, medical doctors, and other intellectuals, as well as NGOs. They were created through the desire of local people to influence the local administration's decision-making process directly through channels outside of the elected provincial assemblies. Organizations called *prachakhom* were also designed by MOPH and the Ministry of Interior (MOI) in about 2000.

Actually, many *prachakhom* emerged at a local level through local people's effort. In Petchaburi Province, for example, some volunteers in the poll-watch activity of 1992 organized a small group called Petchaburi Lovers Group (Sirinpha, 1998). In the late 1990s, this group became a focal point for many informally formed organizations in the province. There was no hierarchical structure in this coalition; the members gathered and exchanged information about local problems. This loose organization exerted its political influence when the city administration in Petchaburi proposed the construction of a road along a river. The group feared that the river would be polluted and it drew local people's attention to its concerns. During the process of drafting the constitution, the group organized a public hearing of candidates for the assembly that was to draft the constitution. The group leaders claimed that they were ready to cooperate with the provincial authority but that they should be independent of the state's mechanism.

Reflecting the above social transformation, an NGO named Civicnet emerged to promote civil society. Since the late 1990s, this NGO has been providing training for bureaucrats and citizens to help them develop skills for governance in civil society. The trainees learn what civil society is and how they can strengthen it. This NGO has provided training programs for several state agencies, such as MOI, MOPH, and the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives.

CONCLUSION

We can discern four major trends in NGOs during the course of economic and political development in Thailand. Until the early 1980s, it was clear that many Thai people who had been left behind in development lacked resources such as capital, land, skills, and information. The early NGOs emphasized putting resources (including knowledge) into the hands of people who were not able to secure enough resources from the market, state, and community sectors. They worked hard to fill the vacant economic space illustrated in Figure 3-1. In Korten's categorization (1990), they were first-generation NGOs, although in terms of their relationship to the government, the old philanthropic groups and the development NGOs took different positions.

The later groups went further to advocate for local communities. They helped local people to organize themselves and enhance their welfare through their own efforts. In other words, they tried to empower communities to fill more of the vacant space with their own resources. These were the second-generation NGOs according to Korten's categorization.

However, the efforts of NGOs and communities could fill only a small portion of the vacant space. When the government sector seriously considered the problem of poverty in the early 1980s, a positive exchange started between the two sectors. NGOs identified the government's way of allocating resources as a problem, as well as the lack of resources itself. They suggested methods for the government to provide adequate resources.

The expansion of both public and private projects has brought conflict over the use of resources that are indispensable to local people. In this case, NGOs stood with local people and sometimes confronted the government and business enterprises. NGOs called on the government and the enterprises to change their way of using and allocating resources. They identified political and administrative problems in the state governance. NGOs became political advocates seeking better policies, making them third-generation NGOs according to Korten's categorization.

Another trend toward seeking better politics appeared with the civil society discourse. During the process of political reforms that aimed to confine the power of politicians and bureaucrats, direct participation by

non-state actors in governance received legitimacy. Efforts started in about 2000 although they were still limited in scope. Some NGOs participated in the government's making and implementation of policy.

These four trends – resource transfer, community advocacy, confrontational political advocacy, and governance participation – have emerged in different economic and political environments. However, all the trends have existed up to the present. As a result, in contemporary Thai society, we can see four groups of NGOs, each with its own identity and critical views of the others.

The current economic and political environment for these four trends in the Thai NGO sector can be summarized in the following three points. Firstly, Thailand is going to "graduate" from the position of developing country. Foreign donations to NGOs are decreasing considerably, while NGOs are not yet attracting enough domestic donations or fees. Secondly, the government is now increasing the amount of resources it distributes. This has two possible courses: the government may provide resources by itself, or it may use private agencies instead. With the former course, the economic space of NGOs will shrink, while the latter course will offer new opportunities for NGOs. Thirdly, the present government under Thaksin Shinawatra's leadership has a clear intention of controlling political dissidents. This means that the political space of NGOs is shrinking.

This environment has different implications for each group of NGOs. When the government increases its distribution of resources, NGOs have more space to act as its agent rather than as critical resource distributors. The group seeking participation in governance may find that it has a wide space as long as it is not critical of the government. The community itself is increasing its capability to secure and manage resources, which is partly a result of long-term efforts on the part of the community advocacy group of NGOs. This decreases the demand for this group. The confrontational political advocacy group has more opportunities for activity since the increase in governmentally endorsed projects can bring conflict with local people. However, this group is facing tighter control by the government and fewer opportunities to mobilize resources for its activities.

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