Changes in the Perception of "Thai Rural Society"

and a New Model for Resource Management

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

Changes in the perception and definition of Thai Rural Society led to the development of the "community culture" concept. This concept has been influential over the last 30 years and has been responsible for Thai people becoming unable to understand the changes actually occurring in Thai rural areas. In addition, the hegemony of the idea has resulted in members of Thai society misunderstanding the causes of collective action among rural people. This concept has shown its inefficiency in solving rural problems and developing rural areas. In addition, it has intensified political conflicts at the national level over the past few years.

Since the "Community Culture School" of thinking has had significant effects on Thai intellectual and political life, this essay will start by explaining the origins of the perceptions and definitions of "Thai Rural Society" that led to the emergence of the concept. It will then analyse changes actually occurring in rural areas, which will clearly show that the "community culture" concept is no longer adequate to explain the problems and changes being experienced by people in Thai rural areas over the last two decades. Finally, this essay will suggest a new model for resource management appropriate to changes currently taking place in rural areas. It is hoped that this will provide an alternative framework for solving rural people's problems and that in the long run it will contribute to reducing national political conflict.

Contents

Introduction

For more than a century, social and power relationships in Thai society have been defined by the state-constructed idea of "Thainess" (Saichol 2007). This is a coarse and obscure label which hides the truth in Thai society. For example, we are told that we must protect "Thainess" and keep it secure, for example, by saying, "We have received Western influence to the point that we have forgotten Thainess. This has led to wrong behaviours." Even under the political regime of democracy, we believe that "Thai-style" democracy is a suitable form of political system for Thailand and that copying Western-style democracy causes Thai society to deteriorate. By refusing to accept the virtues of non-Thai culture, we are quite reluctant to pay attention to the changes occurring in social relations among ourselves. As a result, we failed to realize that the traditional social relations among Thai people have already disappeared and that there must be changes in power relations within Thai society. Without this understanding, we cannot avoid social tensions and political conflicts, which eventually grow into the kind of violent confrontations we have been observing for a number of years.

In other words, the conflict comes from the failure of Thai humanities and social science, which has prevented various groups of people in Thai society from understanding the diverse and complex changes taking place in this society. The members of Thai society, thus, failed to create social relationships which would enable them to live together peacefully and to proceed hand-in-hand to a more desirable society for all groups of people.

Generally speaking, the failure of Thai humanities and social science has been caused by two primary restrictions. The first one is national development that has emphasised the importance of technological progress much more than the development of humanities and social science knowledge. Many Thai people have mistakenly thought that humanities and social science knowledge is not necessary for economic development, even though the ability to understand people from the other parts of society is crucial for economic development. This is especially true when people create and manage the modern and formal organisations which are indispensable components of economic development.

At the same time, past economic development put much emphasis on the development of the service sector, especially tourism. Large numbers of people rushed to be engaged in the service sector business to maximise short-term profit. These business operators think about very little except how much money they can extract from tourists' pockets. The expansion of the service sector, especially tourism, has damaged and destroyed the capacity of Thai people to think and to be aware of long-term relationships among people.

The management of resources in rural areas has fallen under the control of people in urban areas, particularly the political elite and the public service elite. These people are interested only in meeting the needs of urban people, especially those who are from the

capitalist and middle classes. In rural areas, competition for resources and changes in resource use have become more and more intense. This conflict has expanded beyond rural areas and currently affects all sectors of Thai society.

The second restriction, which has held the humanities and social science inert to social changes, is the weakness of education in this field. Especially, education in the past constructed an idealized image of "Thai Society" and applied it to evaluate rural changes. This is the direct result of power relations in Thai society. The construction and perception of the image of Thai society as an ideal has prevented the development of explanations which take into account the changes actually occurring in Thai society.

To sum up, the present political conflict, which has divided the people into two factions, is a direct result of a lack of humanities and social science knowledge that pays attention to social changes in a broad and deep manner. In particular, the lack of knowledge about the changes in Thai rural areas has contributed to the present conflict, which appears as a conflict between urban and rural people.[1] Lack of understanding is apparent when urban people denounce rural villagers as people who are ignorant about politics and are deceived by corrupt politicians.

Now a new understanding of "Thai rural society" is urgently needed. Especially, understanding about resource management in rural society is crucial since the conflict between urban and rural people appears acutely in this sector. This new knowledge must include a method of resource management which responds efficiently to the needs of people in rapidly changing rural Thailand.

This paper aims to show that the "community culture" concept has connotations of both ideas of rural development and politics of the elite class, and that this concept, which has strongly influenced rural development in the past few decades, has consequently caused Thai rural development to fail. Firstly, the origin of the 'community culture' concept will be explained and it will be shown how this concept has been dominant both among Thai intellectuals and in Thai society for more than two decades. The author will then argue how and why the idea has lost its power both as a means for "social practice" and as a tool for building knowledge about present Thai rural society. The author also will present an alternative perspective for understanding some incidents which are currently occurring in rural society, especially conflicts in resource management under the changing social relations and economic situation among the rural population.

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1   See analysis of Nidhi (2008), which is a compilation of four articles by Nidhi, Kasian Techapira (2008), Attachak Sattayanurak (2008), and Pasuk Phongpaichit (2009).

I. Development of the "Community Culture" Concept in the Context of Thai Political Society

Towards the end of the 1980s, a perception of knowledge about rural areas, which was later known as the "Community Culture School" emerged as a result of collaboration between academics, non-governmental agencies, and village leaders from many regions. The proponents of this concept desired to solve the problem of poverty among rural peoples and attempted to find a solution from within the village. They were quite eager to organize villagers and persuade them to be conscious about their problems and find solutions by themselves.

The practices of the Community Culture School led to the construction of the knowledge of power in many aspects (Attachak 2002: 199). Firstly, the Community Culture School has created a foundation which allows villagers to join together in the resource management of the community. As a result, there occurred numerous incidents in which villagers collectively demanded their rights in resource management by referring to the concept of "community rights." These movements were successful in having this concept enshrined in the 1997 Constitution. Being a part of the Constitution, this idea is now disregarded only with difficulty.

Secondly, this school of thought has thrown light on the importance of knowledge among ordinary rural people. Words like "villager philosopher" and "local wisdom" have been invented and disseminated. These new concepts have brought about changes in perceptions concerning villagers.

Thirdly, the social activities of the Community Culture School have led to the widespread emergence of villagers' networks that have been mobilised to demand "community rights." The creation of villagers' networks can be considered to be an initiative of villagers who wish to have a power base from which to facilitate political bargaining.

The knowledge and practises of the Community Culture School have spread widely. Decisions regarding resources in large projects, for example, dam construction, have often had to be reviewed because villagers' groups have not consented. Also, their methodological framework has led to the development of a knowledge base.

Even though the Community Culture School's concepts have led to widespread socio-economic practises and have instigated the creation of new sets of knowledge in Thai society, over the last ten years they have been increasingly criticised. Jeremy Kemp has raised skepticism concerning the notion of community, saying it is just as well constructed by anthropologists as Thai intellectuals:

> However, one of the more curious of these moves is the glorification of the traditional Thai village community, a community which never existed

(Kemp 1989: 15).[2]

In Atsushi Kitahara's famous book *The Thai Rural Community Reconsidered*, he emphasizes that:

The concept of the community that most theorists of this school advocate is not based on empirical fact but rather on normative value… The theory is problematic, …because the nature of norm itself is problematic (Kitahara 1996:96-97).

Andrew Walker has also pointed out the weaknesses of community culture studies. He questions this issue in his article "Simplification and the ambivalence of community":

My view is that there is, but it is an approach which focuses less on community in itself than on the fluid and contested processes of community formation. The 'community forest,' 'community rights,' etc., need to become a question rather than an answer. (Walker 2001: 15)

Jonathan Rigg concludes that:

The net result of these processes of agrarian transformation has been that the village, as a community, a unit of production, a site of identity, and a place with a common history, is evaporating.[3] (Rigg et al. 2008: 355).

Philip Hirsch suggests that:

more worthwhile project is to de-essentialize our notion of village that the village exist as discourse…we should be looking at what the village means. (Hirsch 2002: 265)

I myself, as a socio-economic historian, have also argued against both the production of nationalist local history and the Community Culture School. I have pointed out that:

the knowledge obtained was inadequate to ensure accurate understanding of changes taking place constantly in the community culture and hindered them from truly understanding historical changes. (Attachak 2003)

Even though each of these academic criticisms raises important issues that should be fully considered, the influence of the "community culture" concept has continued to expand. This is because in fact the perception of, or the construction of knowledge about, rural areas is a form of elite class "politics." "Community culture" is therefore not an ordinary concept, but has become a discourse that has been passed on and adjusted in order to maintain elite class power over rural areas.

At first, the non-government development organizations and academics that created the concept of "community culture" wanted the members of Thai society to become aware of and perceive the importance of the capacity of villagers. They wanted them to understand that villagers have "wisdom" (not as a group of people that are in the cycle of "stupidity-poverty-pain"

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[2] Kemp had also commented on this issue in a former article (Kemp 1988).
[3] Apart from this, Rigg (2001) is another interesting work on this issue.

as the state elites saw it) and are able to subsist together through "self-reliance" under a culture that emphasises reciprocal sharing and the giving of help within the community (the state has not helped villagers, and further has encroached on and changed the use of resources by villagers). Additionally, the people who created and used the "community culture" concept, especially non-government development organizations, also wanted to strengthen the power of villagers by reviving "community culture" (which had been destroyed in part by the state and by capital). They believed that if community culture was strong, villagers would be able to join together on various issues, including mobilising to demand rights from the state and oppose state policies or projects that would hurt them.

Nevertheless, when the concept of "community culture" ceased to be solely an academic or rural development concept and became a discourse that led to socio-political practices that opposed the state, it was consequently co-opted by the state elite, or by the elite class who realized the importance of the state, and became a part of state ideology. This was done in order to enable the state to continue to be the leader in rural development.

For the reasons referred to above, the "community culture" concept has been passed on and adjusted to enable the elite to maintain secure power over rural areas. The influence of the "community culture" concept has therefore spread widely. The perception of rural areas up to the present has consequently not been an issue of empirical truth, but rather has taken place under the influence of the "community culture" concept, which has been emphasised as being the "Heritage of Real Thainess" that should always be revived and protected.

The process that led to the creation of the "community culture" concept, and which caused "community culture" to become the "Heritage of Real Thainess," enabling the Thai elite to utilize it as an ideology for controlling Thai socio-political change, itself occurred within conditions of socio-political change. The most important of these conditions were the control of history by the Thai elite, the increased power of the monarchy after 1973, and the construction of a "community culture" network. These conditions are briefly analysed in the following sections.

Control of History by the Thai Elite

Attempts were made by the Thai elite to control social change during the period in which the absolute monarchy was emerging, namely, through the emergence of a new way of writing history, which emphasized the role of the King as one who had historically acted to make the "nation progress," and the creation of an absolute monarchy (Attachak 2000). Later, when social and economic changes caused a new group of people to arise in Thai society, this power began to be challenged through the writing of a new history that did not accept that it was only the King who made the "nation progress." Rather, ordinary people (public servants who came from among the ordinary people) also had an important role in making the "nation progress." This change in historical consciousness played a role in driving one group of

people to effect a change of rule in 1932 (Attachak 1995).

The 1932 revolution did not lead to political or ideological change that broke decisively with the system of absolute monarchy. Consequently the struggle over historical space was not acutely felt. The role of the King in history continued to be recorded in the same manner as before, it was just that ordinary people were also credited as having had a role in history as a group who also "love the nation." For example, the role of the villagers of Bangrajan who fought Burma out of love for the nation, or Tao Suranaree (Ya Mo) who was so much praised for having helped protect the nation's independence that a monument has been built to her even though there is no clear evidence of her role (ibid).

An important change in the perception of history has been brought about by the political changes that occurred between 1973 and 1976. These political changes have also promoted the construction of local historical knowledge. The political mobilization of students' and farmers' movements during the three years after 14 October 1973 created an awareness in Thai society that the unity and security of the nation could be in danger. These social movements, along with the growing influence of the Communist Party of Thailand in many regions, including the far North, led the state to try to find a way to suppress the spread of political ideologies which, for the state elites, were "un-Thai" and highly dangerous to national security. One method that the Thai state discovered to be quite effective was the construction of local history. This was done with the hope that everyone, from the local elite through to the populace, would see the history of localities as having been under the rule of, and had had the direction of change controlled by, the centre of power of the Thai state including having been dependent on the royal grace and wisdom of the King. Along with this, it was also hoped they would take pride in the notion that local leaders and residents had played an important part in protecting the independence of the Thai nation.

The result was that the study of "local history" became an inseparable part of national history. This kind of framework created the consciousness of being "local" as being one part of the "Thai Nation" which every Thai person must love and protect. This happened because there was yet to emerge the study perspective that assumes the "local" may be different or independent from Thai national history.

In the decade between 1977 and 1987 local history seminars were held 30 times at Teachers' Colleges and universities around the country. Thongchai Winichakul studied this matter and spoke of this impressive change as being "The changing landscape of the past" and "new histories in Thailand since 1973" (Thongchai 1995).

It can be said that the Thai state was very successful in constructing the consciousness of "local" history within the framework of national history. They were able to link people in the localities, causing them to consciously love and cherish their lands, which were connected to the central land as if they were one land, whilst also strongly loving the Thai nation as a whole. In this type of local history framework, there is no space in history given to the social life of villages. This is because under this framework people or localities have value or are

explained only when they have a relationship in some way to the progress of national history.

Even though the study of local history expanded, it was the result of the gathering of "historical knowledge" that was confined to academic circles and did not spread to people over a wider sphere. The study and building of local history vanished not very long after Thailand's leftist movement collapsed. Seminars on local history which were once vivacious subsequently became dull and, more importantly, Rajabhat Institutes (formerly Teachers' Colleges), which were once the mainstay of local history studies, began one by one to abolish history departments until at present there are no longer any history departments in these regional institutes of higher education.

Later, there once more occurred an important change in the perception of history – the study of history which tied local history to the nation was forcefully driven to totally collapse within, and disappear from, both academic circles and local society. This was as a result of the immense force generated by the emergence of the study of localities within the framework of "community culture." The organisation of local history seminars at various institutes of study increasingly changed to research within the framework of "community culture" to the point that it can be said "that the expanding of community culture gradually replaced or forced 'local history-nationalism' studies out of academic circles" (Attchak 2003).

The study of "community culture" is an important development in the creation of an historical image of "rural society" that sees rural areas as static. The study sees the "community culture" as a tool to preserve genuine traditional Thai culture. Furthermore, it is this "community culture" which will be an important force in struggling against change that comes from outside the community, not allowing it destroy good Thai communities.

Nevertheless, in one aspect, it might be considered that the study of "community culture" is a continuation of the study of local history in the framework of national history because although, as already explained, it drove out the study of local history in the framework of national history, local history in the framework of "community culture" continues to focus on the importance of localities as a part of the nation. However, it only emphasizes that "local communities" are important to sustaining local society and enabling it to exist with continuity in the past, present and future. The difference is that "community culture" does not emphasise the relationship of local communities to the King or national elite as the "local history" did.

Even though local history in the framework of "community culture" has much benefit from the point of view that it gives importance to people in rural areas and genuinely gives them an economic and cultural role in historical space, from another angle, an important problem that has continued to exist is that this study of local history in the framework of "community culture" has overlooked the most important characteristic of historical research. Namely, it has failed to consider in detail the difference between communities and the changes that have occurred over each period of time. Instead it has so highly emphasised "general" characteristics that knowledge about one community is easily applied to understand

every locality in Thai society. Every community can be explained in the framework of "community culture," which is often represented by Kiriwong village in the South and Mae Na Chon village in the North as successful cases.

The study of "community culture" is therefore a research field that stresses the never-changing virtue of Thai communities. As a result, the study of local communities quickly and widely expanded because it is no longer necessary to depend on historians. Therefore it is not surprising that Rajabhat Institutes throughout the country would build community development departments to replace history departments with the emphasis on having students study the process of social development by looking for a way to revive the "community culture" of villagers in various localities in order to give the village community strength in solving problems and developing their own community or locality. This is no different from the work methods of non-government development workers throughout the country.

What is important is that this sort of framework is able to more easily pull ordinary villagers into the construction of their own history. Since the "community culture" concept has become widespread, there have been both a revival and a new construction of "collective communal memory" in various forms through local museums, statues of local or ethnic heroes or the production of cultural goods such as woven cloth, silverware, and so on.

The emergence and spread of "community culture" study has therefore been able to link communities, localities and all people both near and far, to enable them to join in building the "Thai nation" more broadly than study of local history in the old style. This is so much so that it might be said that it is the first time that Thai national history has been expanded to successfully cover all sections of Thai society. Therefore it is not surprising that a significant number of intellectuals, or elite thinkers, have turned to accept and emphasise the importance of this idea of "community culture." This in turn has resulted in state authorities at every level joining together in turning to actively show an interest in, and support the production of, knowledge within the framework of "community culture." They have done this both through giving research funding and pushing staff within their agencies to produce a large number of documents concerning knowledge on this subject (as will be discussed later).

It can be said that the process of transforming "history" into "community culture," which occurred during the mid-1980s with elite intellectuals, as well as government departments, playing an important role, is inseparable from the changes in power relations in Thai society. The most important of these changes is the increased power of the King after 1973.

Increased Power of the King after 1973

An important political change that occurred after the events of 14 October 1973 was that the leaders of the military were suddenly removed as the "head" of the Thai political

system. The retreat of the military leaders was possible partly due to the King performing "calming the event" and appointing a man from the Privy Council as Prime Minister. Politicians and public servants all had to move closer to the monarchy. The power of the King and the Monarchy consequently increased greatly.[4]

To clearly understand the increased power of the King and its relationship with ideas about "community culture," it is necessary to understand the development of the role of the King. When King Bhumiphol (Rama 9) succeeded to the throne, political restrictions under the government, of which Field Marshal P. Phibunsongkhram was prime minister, and ambiguity about the status and role of the king in a democratic system of governance, resulted in the King and royal family having only a limited role in certain areas of custom and in helping farmers with various issues. As **Sumet Tantivejkul** stated, royal duties were performed under a political atmosphere and environment that did not facilitate the monarchy fully performing them (Sumet 1986, cited in Chanida 2004: 31).

Political change occurred in 1957, when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat became Prime Minister. He strongly supported the role of the monarchy (Thak 1983). This opened up a space for the King to work widely as soon as the change in government occurred.

> The prime minister ordered that pictures of the King and Queen be hung in residences to revolutionise minds, and ordered the Tourism Authority of Thailand to play the royal anthem. In many official places, the "Chicken Brand" (the symbol of P. Phibunsongkhram) system of public administration was replaced by the system of the new government. Thai people observed these changes with surprise, especially those related to the worshipping of the King, which formerly did not exist at all. Now following the orders of the new government, people joined together in praising his virtues.

> The radio and television stations belonging to Thai TV had never played the royal anthem when shows finished, but from the night of the 25th on they played the royal anthem at the end of their programs.

> The Santi Maitree Building had never hung royal portraits on its facade, but had hung tens of pictures of Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram and Madame Laiad Phibulsongkhram, which were mostly photos taken in foreign countries, and included photos of them wearing cowboy hats. But today (in the press conference) it happened that there were royal portraits of the King and Queen sitting at the front of the meeting podium for the first time. (*Tai Newspaper* 1957)

Nevertheless the principal royal duties of the King in the period before 1977 continued to be those royal duties which concerned agriculture and reviving old customs, for example

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[4] Please see discussion of this issue in ONCC (2003). As for the situation in which there was no group whose political power overwhelmed the other groups, see: Kishtin (2002).

the Royal Ploughing Ceremony, naming it "Farmer's Day," and the establishment of many "Royal Projects" (Chanida 2004: 93-190).

The role of the King from the era of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat until 1973 was the building of a symbol, or the establishing of the quality of being King of the kingdom, because apart from establishing many rural development projects he also went and visited the people in areas all around Thailand. These actions made him widely known to the people throughout the kingdom. A research study found that before 1963 many villagers did not know the King until the state worked to vividly construct the "space of Thailand," including: "physical space," i.e. transport routes connecting all regions of the country and permanent structures in the cities, for example, clock towers, fountains and so on; "social space," i.e. arranging for the emergence of new types of social relations, but still emphasizing hierarchical relations, for example sports centers, Red Cross fairs and annual festivals in various provinces and so on; and "imagined space," i.e. making people around the country imagine being Thai people together under the symbols of nation, religion and the King and making people throughout the country genuinely perceive the existence of the "area of Thailand" which has the King as its centre and all people who consider themselves to be Thai as an inseparable part of the nation (Pinyapan 2009).

Royal visits to various areas led to the creation of customs for receiving royal visits in order to resolve the problem that public servants were not accustomed to making arrangements for receiving royal visits. As Puang Suwanarat has stated:

> Due to the fact that in the last four to five years the King and Queen have travelled to perform royal duties and to visit the citizens in villages in the various outer provinces including private travels... From this time on there will be increasingly frequent visits to the outer provinces... Officials in the various provinces that have not yet received a royal visit are anxious.... (Puang 1971: 24)

Since the late 1960s the state has supported and facilitated royal visits to various areas, for example the 19-day royal tour of the North of Thailand in 1968, which took place between 27 February and 18 March and which covered 489 kilometres by train and 2257 kilometres by road (Office of His Majesty's Principal Private Secretary 1996: 236). The tour followed the following route, Phitsanulok, Sukhothai, Tak, Thoen District Lampang, Pa Sang District Lamphun, Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lampang, Phrae, Uttaradit (ibid: 225-236). Another example is the 22-day royal tour of the South in 1969, which took place between 6 and 22 March, during which 14 provinces were visited (ibid: 284-285). After the royal tour of the North, front page news articles announced that "the King will visit the South before the Rainy Season" and this time would use only the royal car to travel the whole way (*Chao Thai* 1958). This showed the envisioning of the King and Queen reaching the people more closely, as well as the development of transportation by wide, open and convenient roads.

It can be said that before the events of 14 October 1973 the King had already fully become a symbol of Thailand, as well as having an image of being a king who worked earnestly in the agricultural area for the benefit and happiness of the people, who were mostly farmers. When the balance of political power changed in 1973, the King became the centre of power and the "pillar" of many future governments.

The rise to power of General Prem Tinsulanonda led to a great expansion of the King's rural development projects. This was probably in part the result of efforts to reduce conflict between farmers and the state and other groups in society, such as capitalists and landowners, between 1974 and 1976. General Kriangsak Chomanand, who was the predecessor of Prem as the Prime Minister, had declared 1977 as the Year of Farmer even though there were no programs which substantially improved farmers' lives. General Prem Tinsulanonda set up the Coordinating Committee for Royal Development Projects with the Office of the Royal Development Project Board acting as secretariat for the coordinating committee (Chanida 2004).

It can be said that apart from the Coordinating Committee for Royal Development Projects that was set up to be "a reflection of government support for royal projects and the growth of development activities with.... the government beginning to allocate a section of the budget to give as a special fund" (ibid: 239), this change also reflected the process of making His Majesty come to seem to be a leading agricultural scholar. This subsequently led to the need to establish a "model" for agricultural work. This can be seen clearly in the founding of the "Royal Development Study Centre," and continued up to the period just after the 1997 economic crisis. At that time, the King suggested an economic model called the "sufficiency economy."

Since the King had increased royal powers and appeared to be a specialist in rural development, "community culture" was regarded in the same way as the King's achievements. This has imparted greater power to the "community culture" concept than other academic knowledge and the concept has therefore been able to withstand academic critique over a long period of time.

Construction of a "Community Culture" Network

Through a large number of development activities, the King has built networks which facilitate the smooth progress of his activities (Chanida 2004). Such networks involved at least three actors who are engaged in development works, namely, the state, non-government development organisations, and the "Community Culture School" intellectuals.

The State and Non-government Development Organizations Networks

Before 1987, The "Royally Initiated Projects" were greatly different from projects

implemented by non-government development organisations. The former focused on technical aspects to solve problems while the latter emphasized local peoples' participation. The state revamped its rural development policies in 1981 by setting up the National Committee on Rural Development (NCRD) with Prime Minister Prem as its chairman. This went along with the fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan, which put special emphasis on the development of poor rural areas (Somchai and Chintana 1987). Until 1987, the state-led rural development work showed considerable progress. Especially, the NCRD successfully brought four Ministries, namely, the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Interior, together to coordinate their rural development projects. This means that the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) increased its role in rural development policy since the NCRD was supervised by the NESDB (Coordinating Centre for National Rural Development 1983).

The centralization of rural development thinking was positioned within a framework in which it was related to the Royally Initiated Projects. Important examples of this are the relationships with Sumet Tantivejkul and Snoh Unakul.[5] Chanida has said of the role of Sumet that:

> Sumet is a person who has had an important role in spreading the ideology of the King as a developer in various ways, especially in producing academic non-fiction works extolling the King…had a role in being an intellectual that performs the duty of connecting diverse social groups...[6]

In the decade commencing in 1977, non-government development workers proposed development models that focused on villages and people's involvement. The National Economic and Social Development Board tried to create connections with non-government development workers. A non-government development worker spoke of this as follows:

> Notions about "people's involvement" have been spread leading to review of development both at the government level and in non-government organizations and especially by the National Economic and Social Development Board, which has assessed the results of development and acknowledged that Thailand is still experiencing problems in developing the country and sees the importance of the private sector. Consequently they have begun to give greater support to the role of the private sector...
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> In the period of the Sixth National Economic and Social Development

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[5] The role of Snoh Unakul, who at that time was Secretary General of the National Economic and Social Development Board, can be seen from the interview given by General Prem Tinsulanonda to Media Representatives (Prem 1987).

[6] Sumet's role in connecting groups can be seen in Chanida (2004: 274-275). At that time he held positions in the Office of the Royal Development Projects Board and National Economic and Social Development Board, and was Director of the Coordinating Centre for National Rural Development.

Plan the government set a policy that the state should coordinate and cooperate with the private sector in development especially in developing rural areas and the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board established a department to work to set methods for coordination and cooperation and to establish mechanisms for later cooperation between the state and non-government organizations.

Towards the end of 1985, 139 non-government organizations, both of the development and aid kind, therefore held a meeting and passed a resolution to establish the "NGO Coordinating Committee on Rural Development" at the national level, which has now changed its name to the "NGO Coordinating Committee," to act as the mechanism of the non-government organizations in coordinating with the state sector.[7]

It can be said that the fact that the state built up a network with non-governmental organizations enabled them to "co-opt" the difference that had once existed between them and to effectively assimilate it. Mobilization around the issue of "Community Forestry" by non-governmental development workers tended to use the royal remark of the King on the issue of people and the forest and the royal remark of the Queen that "the Karen are people who look after the forest" as tools in negotiating and creating legitimacy for villagers that live with the forest.

In the collecting of essays by non-government development workers, Sumet Tantivejkul wrote an introduction on the topic of "The King and Rural Development" and quoted a royal remark in the first section of the book as follows (Seri 1993):

The people, they have knowledge, they have already worked this way for many generations, they work together well, they are intelligent, they know well where they should farm, they know where should be protected. What has been lost has been lost because those who don't know, who haven't already worked this way for a long time, have gone through and made them forget that life can proceed through farming that is right

Asa Khampha has studied royal remarks of the King and has found that:

In the decade beginning in 1977 royal remarks and royal guidance tend to have included points concerned with development and royal development projects more clearly than in earlier periods. For instance, the royal speech on the occasion of the anniversary of the royal birthday in 1980 (4 December 1980) the King mentioned rice banks and cow and buffalo banks... royal speech... 4 December 1983 mentioned cow and buffalo banks and a research centre for developing dairy cattle breeds, etc. (Asa 2008).

Importantly His Majesty has emphasized the good characteristics of Thailand and

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[7] Retrieved from "NGO Movement" (www.thaingo.org/story/info_003.htm) (In Thai).

Thainess. For instance, intellectuals in the past have tried to build the idea of the description of "This Thailand is good" for nearly a century (Saichol 2007).

> The points that show that Thailand has a mind to mutually assist others are abundant... It is an important characteristic of Thai people that everybody has a mind to be charitable to others and to have compassion for others. The summary is in the word "unity." It is constantly said that Thai people have unity and are of one heart and mind, they help each other out. To make the nation secure this must be repeated and constantly remain because it is an important point...

> Even if in the reference books you will read that this practice won't succeed or the situation is very bad, hear that we are bad, we should then say other people come and say that this Thailand is bad, never mind them, but we can come and consider how we will resolve the things that are bad, the thing that they say can't be resolved, but which can be resolved with Thainess, because we are charitable and sympathise with others, and the power of mutual sympathy and the power of good intentions to do one's duty honestly, but not say or complain that we have sacrificed personal benefit for public benefit, because we haven't sacrificed personal benefit at all; working well is looking after ourselves and the public.

It can be said that following the 1997 economic crisis, the harmonizing of development methods of non-government organizations and the network of royal development projects was clearly visible. Emphasis on ideas which focused on making villagers enter as the main actors in working to develop the community, as well as praising the good characteristics of Thai communities and assuming them as the center of Thai traditional culture, made non-government development workers feel that they could go along with the royal projects without any conflict. This meant the power of the "community culture" network spread much wider than before and pulled non-government networks in under the umbrella of the state and royal projects. Moreover, this brought funds and a research network which strengthened the idea of "community culture."

Building the "Community Culture" Knowledge Network

The increasing influence of the King after the events of 14 October 1973 brought the relationships between the government and military closer, and at the same time pulled in all non-government organizations and their workers to participate in the "community culture" network. In other words, a "community culture" knowledge network was built up through this process.

Building the "community culture" knowledge network also involved institutions of

higher education. For example, Prawet Wasi, one of the most influential "community culture" advocates, holds positions in the University Councils of Mahidol University, Thammasat University, Chulalongkorn University, the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), Khon Kaen University, Prince of Songkla University, and many Rajabhat Universities. [8] Sumet Tantivejkul, another influential advocate, holds the position of President of Thammasat University Council and serves on the University Councils of many Rajabhat Universities. Examples also include many privy councillors who also have positions on the councils of many universities.[9] General Surayud Chulanond holds positions as the President of the University Council of King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang and as well as the University Council of Phetchaburi Rajabhat University. Thus it might be said that among members of the University Councils of each Thai university there must be someone who has a connection in some way or another with work to serve the King. This is shown in the table below.

List of names of people who hold positions in University Councils/State Institutes (Privy councilors are underlined.)

	Name of University	Chairperson, University Council	Member, University Council	Note
1	Thammasat	Sumet Tantiwachakul	Prawase Wasi	
2	Chulalongkorn	Charat Suwannakul	Kasem Wattanachai Prawase Wasi Paron Israsena	
3	Mahidol	Vicharn Panich	Prawase Wasri Paiboon Watanasiritham	
4	Chiang Mai	Kasem Wattanachai	Paron Israsena Vicharn Panich *Chaianan Samutvanich*	
5	Kasetsart	Ampol Senanarong	Khwankeo Vajarodaya	Bureau of the Royal Household
6	Khon Kaen	Pao Sarasin	Tej Bunnag	
7	Naresuan	Khunying *Kaisri Sriarun*		
8	Prince of Songkla	Kasem Suwannakul	Prawase Wasri	
9	Burapha	Kasem Suwannakul	Sumet Tantiwachakul	

[8] This information is retrieved from the Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia <www.th.wikipedia.org>, which also mentions other roles, for example, having positions on the National Economic and Social Development Board and The National Culture Commission.

[9] The privy councilors of 2005 are listed in the appendix.

10	Walailak	Kasem Suwannakul	Prawase Wasri Paiboon Watanasiritham Vicharn Panich	
11	Srinakharin Wirot	Kasem Suwannakul	Prawase Wasri ***Khunying Chada Wattanasiritham*** Sophon Supapong	President of Siam Commercial Bank
12	Mae Fah Luang	Pao Sarasin	M.R. Disnadda Diskul	Secretary General of Mae Fah Luang Foundation
13	Silpakorn	Kasem Wattanachai	Prawase Wasri Sophon Supapong	
14	Thaksin		Khampol Adulwit	Market Director of Royal Project
15	Rankhamhaeng		Inchan Buraphan	His Majesty's Deputy Principal Private Secretaries Secretariat of Privy Council
16	National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA)	***Jirayu Israngkul*** Na Ayutthaya		Director of Crown Property Bureau, Committee member of the Royal Household
17	Nakhon Phanom	***Sanong Wattanavrangku***		Office of Royal Court Security Police
18	Ubon Ratchathani	Kasem Wattanachai		
19	Sukhothai Thammathirat	Kasem Suwannakul	Sommai Surakul	Committee member of the Royal Project
20	RMUT Thanyaburi	Kasem Wattanachai		
21	RMUT Suvarnapume	Kasem Wattanachai		
22	King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang	Surayud Chulanond		
23	RMUT Phranakhon	Pichitr Kullavanijaya		
24	RMUT Krungthep	***Sakthip Krairerk***		Committee of Foundation Under the Royal Patronage
25	Suan Dusit Rajabhat University		Wacharakiti Watcharothai	Official of the Royal Household
26	Suan Sunanda Rajabhat		Wacharakiti Watcharothai	Official of the Royal Household
27	RMUT Srivijaya		Khampol Adulwit	Market Director of Royal Project
28	King Mongkut's Unversity of Technology Thonburi	Thongchai Hongladaromp	Paron Israsena Paiboon Watanasiritham	

These people without exception formerly held positions as high-ranking public servants. However, this does not mean that all high-ranking public servants are accepted into university circles. Those who serve His Majesty are able to enter positions in higher education. This thus means that the King, at one level, has been able to control the course of education. As well as with the board members of educational institutions, the positions in various special committees, which were set up to solve problems in the education system also contain people who are associated with this network. For example, Associate Professor Thongthong Chansangsu, who served His Majesty in many aspects, accepted a position on the Education Council.

What was important in the early-to-mid 1990s, when the community culture network was more closely coordinated and connected, was the wider construction of "community culture" knowledge. This began with creating a body of research work. In the early-to-mid 1990s there were efforts by the state and a number of intellectuals to create policies to transform Thailand into a knowledge society. After the events of Black May 1992, these efforts were supplemented by a desire to study and create clarity concerning Thai society. This led to the emergence of many independent institutes that granted research scholarships. Important examples include the Local Development Institute (LDI) (established in 1990), the Thailand Research Fund (established in 1992) and the Thai Health Promotion Fund (established in 2001).

Chanida writes that Prawet Wasi has an important role in connecting the state and private sectors. A clear example of this is the establishment of the Local Development Institute (LDI) through funds from the Canadian government (CIDA). Dr. Prawet Wasi was president of the institute when it was established (Chanida 2004).

> The LDAP board therefore pays homage to Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, the patron who brought about the establishment of the Local Development Foundation through cooperation between CIDA, the Office of the National Education Commission and the Local Development Foundation. We have consequently set up the Local Development Institute (LDI) to be the operational organ of the Local Development Foundation.[10]

Prawet has maintained continuous influence in the LDI up to the present. This is demonstrated clearly in the speech given by Prawet Wasi upon renewal of his position:

> LDI has already worked for 10 years under sponsorship from CIDA. The character of our work can be divided into two periods. The first period was the period of sharp criticism of state development policy. In that period Professor Saneh Chamrik did an outstanding job of opening the way for further work. The second period was going and conducting research in village

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[10] Retrieved from the LDI website (www.ldinet.org).

communities to seek knowledge and a way out of, or solution to, poverty and building strength from local communities at the roots...

Now we already have knowledge of what we must do to give local communities strength. Our work in the next period therefore must link with state authorities and lead them to begin working...

Formerly LDI depended principally on foreign funding sources. it is time that LDI must instead turn to work with national funding sources, and the biggest national funding sources are state authorities.[11]

Also, within the framework of "community culture," the Thailand Research Fund also established a community research group with the following primary goal:

Supporting primary research and practical research with emphasis on working with communities, organisations and authorities in the research process to build knowledge and understanding about communities, to communicate with society as a whole, and to alter the system structures, mechanisms and work methods of groups so they support the strengthening of communities. This is in order to provide support which will result in the strengthening of communities throughout the country.

Involvement of institutes that work to grant scholarships and control the direction of research led to the widespread construction and production of "knowledge about community culture" in a manner that had never appeared before in the written history of Thai society.

Since the late 1980s, the process of building knowledge under the community culture concept has caused new meaning to be given to things that were never before given value. Most important is the giving of value to local culture. Words such as "local wisdom" and "villager philosophers" have been frequently mentioned in the literature to put a positive value on the way of life of the villagers. This resulted in the emergence of the idea of "community rights," which was clearly stated in the idea of the "community forest."

The author's study of the "Boundaries of Historical Environmental Knowledge" found that the concepts of community culture brought about changes in knowledge concerning the environment in three ways. Firstly, the study of community "rights" becomes important in looking after and managing nature. Secondly, there occurs a change in the knowledge concerning the following four fields, namely, knowledge about biological diversity; village agriculture, also known as alternative agriculture; holistic ecology and environmental ethics. The third was knowledge in handling public policy, which showed clearly that ideas of "community rights" were included in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E 2540 (1997) (Attachak 2002).

A survey of books on, or in the category of, "community culture" will find that this

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[11] Ibid.

type of research is widely published and covers every dimension of village life from the study of small things such as rice boxes (bamboo containers for holding sticky rice) and herbal medicine, to the study of local history or regional communities. If research work in the "community culture" category is surveyed at any university library, a great number of books and papers will be found.

A research report, conducted by **Anuchart Poungsomlee** and his associate researchers, compiled information on the environment based on the expansion of the "community culture" concept. They found that in total there were 8612 items with information about the environment; of these items, 87.7% were on aspects related to the community culture concept and development (Anuchart 1997).

Surveys of knowledge about the environment in various media have found that many sources used the "community culture and environment" framework in presenting or displaying opinions to society. For example, Kittiphon Chaibun's research on "The truth about dams: A Study of Discourse Practice in Thai Society" found that there was much change in the resisting of state discourses (Kittiphon 2000).

The wide expansion of the "community culture" knowledge network in this manner has helped made it seem as if community strength really exists and is very strong. At the same time, non-government development workers have also built social practices by constructing many concrete models of community culture[12] and the successful results of development work can be clearly seen in many parts of the country.

From all that has been said, I wish to show that the "community culture" concept, which has had great force over the last 30 years, is a result of complex political changes rather than of the direct work of any individual.

The important political changes are the attempts by the Thai elite to control history, which, when combined with the increased power of the King in His Majesty having always had a role focusing on agriculture, has led to the building of a broad network. This network has a mechanism uniting the state, non-government development organisations and non-government development workers in building socio-political practices that are very important to Thai politics in this new era, namely, the construction of "community culture" to forge it into an important benchmark in Thai rural development that is able to establish a clear hegemony.

The process of constructing "community culture" to give it greater force is the process of transforming history into the "heritage of real-Thainess." That is, it is the taking of "Thainess," which has already been constructed over a long period of time, appending it to selected characteristics of Thai communities, and then presenting it as real Thai history. "Community culture," is therefore an overview of Thai heritage that is not historic, or of

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[12] See Attachak (2000). Kanjana Kaewthep, a leading intellectual in the area of development following the 'community culture' framework, mentioned the diversity of non-government development workers practices, but summarised that they shared the principle characteristic of rejecting capitalism (Kanjana 1995).

un-historical consciousness, because it is research that emphasizes the worth, or good characteristics, of Thai society in the past, unaccompanied by the dimension of time. Or, one might say, it is the timeless quality of Thainess.[13]

The construction of characteristics of "Thai rural areas" as the essence of "Thainess" from Anumanrachathon, to intellectuals in the period after 1957, to the present generation of intellectuals and non-government development workers can therefore be said to be a process of carrying on the construction of mainstream "Thainess" that has continued uninterrupted and is as yet an unfinished project of the Thai elite.

The framework of community culture is created, recreated and modified by the elite class discourse within the context of the socio-politics of Thai society in order to maintain their superiority over the rural population. Therefore, the perception of rural society is not an empirical fact, but is the domination by, or hegemony of, the elite class over Thai society. Rural Thailand has been characterized as being the essence of "Thainess," which can be found in the writings of Anumanrachathon, other intellectuals after 2500, and contemporaries and developmentalists in the NGO sector. That is, "Thainess" has ceaselessly been passed down from generation to generation and is as yet an unfinished project of the elite class.

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[13] The process of transforming history in this way has occurred in many countries. An example is South Africa, whose painful experience of passing through opposition with a state that enforced apartheid, led to efforts to construct a new 'history,' or collective memory, of Africa. Nelson Mandela, when elected as president, announced to the African people that they "must forget the past" (which was painful). He also created a policy for National Reconciliation which transformed the framework of history. From emphasising that Africa was born because white people came and built it and not mentioning the original inhabitants in history at all, history came to emphasise the past in the form of a Heritage Program. Although it was possible to bring the past of black people into this set of collective memories, it was not a history that explained the role of white people in African society. Consequently, in the present many people in South Africa are still trying to seek an historical framework for society, or for the nation, that gives a space to every group of people.

II. Explanation of New Phenomena Occurring Outside the "Community Culture" Concept

It has already been said that the "community culture" concept is not merely ordinary academic knowledge about rural areas. Rather, in the end, it became part of the construction of the hegemony of Thai society elite over the contents and form of history. This has caused the idea, as constructed by the elite, to maintain strong influence up to the present. Therefore it is crucial to show that in the last two decades, vast changes have occurred in Thai rural areas which make the "community culture" concept no longer sufficient for understanding these rural areas. In addition, it is also inappropriate to use this concept to construct collective memory and initiate the collective action of villagers. This is because it is a concept that is not in accord with the real lives of villagers in the present day. Rather, if efforts to use this concept continue to be made, they will only cause villager mobilisations to lack strength and to fail in resolving various problems. This is because each day the problems of villagers are deepening in diversity and complexity. Only by looking for a way to understand the changes in each specific rural area more broadly and deeply, will it be possible to effectively resolve problems. If it is not possible to correctly evaluate or understand those changes, then naturally it will be impossible to adjust power relationships to accord with social reality. This inability will lead to the growth of more severe class and ethnic conflicts.

Economic, political, and social changes that have occurred rapidly in Thai society in the recent past have caused significant changes to occur in local communities. In particular, they have created status differences between groups of people in communities. This has in turn caused changes in the positioning of people in social relationships in local communities and has also changed power relationships in the management of local resources.

Change has been caused by two kinds of forces from outside the community, namely, the change in relationships between the state and local communities, and, the expansion of commercial production.   Changes in relationships between the state and local communities have occurred both in the forms of state power expanding to enter into and change property systems in local communities, and through the adjustment of power relations by the decentralization of some powers to allow communities to take care of themselves. Both of these have affected how each group of villagers has adjusted to the changes.

The expansion of commercial production has caused both the loss and change in use of various resources in the local community. The affected resources include land, water, forest, art, culture, and so on. This is because people from outside the community, including capitalists, businessmen, the middle class and politicians, are able to come in and exercise their rights over community resources. As well as this, commercial expansion has caused deep changes in the relationships between "urban" and "rural" areas, with people in rural areas wanting more resources from the centre. The resources from the centre that people in rural areas want include capital, budget allocations, and various forms of welfare ranging from

healthcare and education to greater access to, and bargaining power over, the market as suppliers of agricultural produce, labour and various services. This is because they are no longer willing to silently accept the condition that they must be the disadvantaged side.

The important socio-political mobilisation of villagers that has occurred in rural areas over the last ten years, whether it is mobilisation in the manner of people convoys demanding and opposing various state projects, or of entering into the patronage system alongside large political parties, is the result of changes in the positioning of villagers in power relationships, both those within the local community and those between the state and the local community.

The socio-political mobilization of villagers in both forms is a "problem" that Thai society as a whole is anxious about because there is as yet no solution to it. The mobilisation of village convoys in opposing and resisting state projects, which has occurred everywhere, is a "problem" that has not yet been successfully resolved. As for entering into the patronage system alongside large political parties, this has caused "problems" of conflict between the "poor" in rural areas and the "middle class" in urban areas, as can be clearly seen in the present.

Trying to understand the changes in power relations with respect to resource management in local communities under the context of the expansion of the state and commercial production is therefore important because it helps Thai society understand and see the picture of actual change. This then leads to the ability to gain a deeper understanding of the various "problems" in rural areas.

Case Studies of Resource Management

The two phenomena that have been selected for discussion have been chosen to show the changes in power relations in resource management in local communities. This is change that will set the form of the new rural society.

Rattikarn Hinkaew's study, "Change in Local Politics: A Case Study of Pasak TAO. Amphoe Mueang, Changwat Lamphun from 1995 to the Present" (Rattikarn 2008) is a study of local political change. It uses the Pasak Tambon Administration Organisation (TAO) as a case study. The study focuses on explaining local political change that occurred as a result of changes in the structure of village society. This change was caused by rapid economic changes since the late 1980s and occurred in the context of state policy to decentralise administrative power to localities by spreading it to TAOs. The internal power structure and politics of TAOs changed simultaneously with national-level political change.

An important change in local politics in Pasak occurred in the power structure among local groups of people who had various stakes in the village administration and local resources. Local politics consequently included not only elections, but also efforts by people from diverse groups to gain admittance to the management of common resources. Those groups which were important included the following: the local politicians who had a power

base from being local holders of wealth, whether major or minor, for example, construction contractors; owners of small businesses; members of the old leadership group such as the subdistrict headman, the village headman and village headman's assistants; and the group of villagers who had forged an economic base from having worked as hired labourers and from commercial agriculture. Each group of people tried to gain admittance and to have a place in the arena of negotiation in order to contest power in managing central resources using different methods.

This diversity of groups of people in Pasak arose as a result of the conditions of economic change in the decade of 1987-1997, the period in which industrial factories expanded in Lamphun Province. These changes caused class separation resulting in three groups of villagers with different statuses. Large scale contractors and small business owners, through relying on patronage relationships built on the base of the kindred system, were elected as TAO president and TAO board members. As a result, they became the "new leaders," who held the most power in managing resources at the subdistrict and village levels, and had increased opportunity to access common resources. Meanwhile, the old leadership group, that is the village headman and his assistants, still had power in the management of some resources. In addition, villagers had an increased role in making decisions about resources. This was particularly the case during the period in which the government of Pol. Lt. Col. Thaksin Shinawatra advanced populist policies which caused many newly formed groups to emerge in the village. The most important of these are the million baht and Small Medium Large (SML) fund groups. Each of these groups is chaired by the village headman and has a committee elected by the villagers. Even so, joint resolutions of the group must pass inspection by committee members who hold these positions due to being members of the TAO board. It is also worth noting that villagers attempted to use the "community meeting method" as a tool in negotiating with the TAO. Even so, most power remained in the hands of the TAO president, who used the method of forming groups outside the TAO to conduct negotiations prior to officially bringing policy or projects into TAO meetings.

Songsak Panya's study "The Occupation of Privately-Owned Land by Villagers in Lamphun and Chiang Mai Provinces in the 1990s" (Songsak 2008) aims to explain the phenomena whereby villagers illegally occupy land owned by people who have received documents of right from the state. The study considers not only the occurrence of the occupation of privately-owned land by villagers, but rather focuses on studying the process of the adjustment of power relationships in resource management that would give villagers legitimacy in using privately-owned land to make a living. Rai Dong and Mae Ao villages, in Pa Sang District, Lamphun Province are used as case studies.

The villagers in the lower strata of the case study villages occupied the land of an absentee landlord. The villagers divided the land into two parts; one part to be individually occupied and utilized for commercial agriculture. They allocated this to those who participated in the collective occupation. The rest of the occupied land was left as a common

property. This part of the land was not large in relation to the privately occupied part. Both areas were entirely without state endorsement of rights and some parts are being contested in court cases. However, the villagers are still at present using all the land in their daily lives.

The phenomenon by which villagers occupied privately-owned land occurred in the context of socio-economic change in rural areas. Villagers entered into commercial production since they desired to escape from the conditions of poverty. They entered into two systems of production - commercial agriculture and non-agricultural production. The villagers' inability to depend fully on income from outside the agricultural sector necessitated the maintenance of agricultural sector production.

Although this process of villagers entering into commercial production was necessary, previously existent conditions and limitations on obtaining land and accumulating capital caused the adaptation of each group of villagers to differ and to be varyingly successful. This resulted in clearer class separation. Throughout the period of the adaptation process it could be seen that having land was a very important factor in the ability of households to adapt.

All the changes pushed villagers, especially those from poor households and households of average status to become conscious of inequality and the unfairness of land resource possession. This unfairness caused them to be unable to use land as capital in order to adapt themselves, unlike the group of rich and middle level farmers who succeeded in shifting out of the conditions of household impoverishment, which had accumulated since before the 1960s, through changing to commercial production and trade. Therefore, villagers from poor households and households of average status decided to occupy private land that was neglected and unoccupied in order to undertake commercial production. This occurred in the context of their inability to apply previously used methods, such as reclaiming land, renting land or working as hired labourers outside the agricultural sector.

To occupy private land illegally, the villagers need to claim legitimacy for their actions. The villagers claimed natural and community rights as the basis of the legitimacy which allowed them to enter into and use the private land. "Natural rights" here means the rights of the cultivator to have the occupational right of the land. The rights referred to by the villagers were different at the following two levels. At the first level, within the village, villagers would cite principally natural rights. At the second level, when outside the village to negotiate with the state and seek support from the public, the villagers cited "community rights" in resource management.

In citing these rights, apart from using the process of political mobilization, villagers also chose to bring in collective historical memory to resist and negotiate with the state and to force the state to investigate how capitalists obtained the documents of ownership and to affirm the principle that, "The community rights of villagers have their foundation in natural rights which are a time-honoured tradition of villagers."

The process of citing natural rights and community rights also integrated "old customs" and "new customs." That is, the allocation of a part of the land was used to create a

new front in the village area for the community and the creation of a land management system which used "community title deeds." The use of "community title deeds" was under the management and control of the group of villagers who had seized the land. Each household received a "community title deed" to certify their ownership of the land that they had entered and were using, but they had to accept rules regarding the management of the land that were established by the group of villagers as a whole. With these efforts to construct legitimacy and political positioning at the community and local levels, this group of villagers successfully seized private land and put the land under cultivation.

Both of the above case studies show the changes in power relationships in rural Thai society. In addition, it has been demonstrated that the phenomena that have occurred in rural areas have not emerged in vacuum, but are rather the result of the efforts of rural people who have to survive under new conditions.

Rattikarn's study, which focuses on changes in the group of villagers entering local politics at the TAO level, is a study of political adaptation of new local groups who are in the position of connecting "urban" and "rural" in new ways different from the past. This has the result of causing changes in the use and distribution of local resources in many ways.

At present these new local community leaders are still under the patronage system of large political parties. However, it is also true that they become more and more independent from political parties. The patronage-style local politics is weakening rapidly in the present political environment. These changes in the local political system are related to socioeconomic changes in which villagers are trying to find ways to access necessary resources. This shows clearly that the "community culture" concept can no longer be applicable to the understanding of the behaviors of the rural population. At the same time, the concept that sees villagers as being merely citizens who are foolish and willing to "sell rights-sell votes," especially in the last two or three elections, is also a concept that does not permit genuine understanding of villager change. Villagers who have adapted themselves to work as labourers outside the rural area naturally have different needs. They therefore choose to "play" in local politics, which is the most advantageous strategy for helping them to best adapt themselves.

Songsak's study, in which villagers seized land in the area of Lamphun and Chiang Mai Provinces beginning in the late 1990s, is a study that focuses on understanding the political mobilization which severely affected the state resource system. This situation was the result of both the expansion of state power that came in and changed the village style resource system and of "class" separation that was a result of the expansion of commercial production and relationships with non-government development groups.

The group of villagers who seized the land had once used it as public land for a long time. Later, a group of capitalists occupied it and obtained an ownership document. The small and middle-level farmers changed their way of thinking about classifications in the property system. They formerly accepted private property and state property regimes, but now they

construct and put more importance on the common property regime.

The socio-political practices of villagers have very interesting meanings. This is particularly true for the mobilization of villagers in reviving the collective memory to build the principle of "community rights" with a basis in "natural rights" or "cultivators' rights," which are old villager traditions. Citing natural rights and community rights, they intended to construct legitimacy for the seizure of land held by private individuals and endorsed by the state.

These two case studies by Songsak and Rattikarn clearly show that the changes occurring in rural Thailand are more complex than the "community culture" perspective which emphasises that village communities are cohesive and filled with harmony. Explaining economic and social contexts, as these two studies do, explains the behaviours of local people more convincingly than speculating whether villagers were so stupid as to sell their rights and votes to influential figures. The case studies show the diverse socio-political mobilisations of villagers ranging from attempting to take a role in resource management in their local community to demanding various rights from the state. Local politics has already gone beyond the boundaries of the "community" now that the public administration is under the care of the tambon administrative organization (TAO) and at present, the principal resources from the state are under the supervision of the TAO.

Apart from the changes spoken of above, the management of relationships inside the community has also changed significantly. Shin'ichi Shigetomi's study of "Cooperation and Community in Rural Thailand" has found that there have been changes in the economic grouping of villages. From previously, when this grouping was a dyadic patronage relationship (which is not the structure of "community culture" style relationships), it has changed to a construction of group-based cooperation. This is because the old style of relationships is unable to satisfy the wants of villagers, which have increased beyond the point that dyadic relationships can satisfy. Villagers have therefore formed groups such as cremation groups, savings groups and rice banks to meet their needs. Shigetomi has summarized that:

> Increasingly villagers are being bound together by the incentive of private gain, and for this reason they are being compelled to coordinate their mutual desires. The process of this coordination is also the process of acquiring new organizational abilities. Thus the villager organizing that has been analyzed in this study is not the revival of traditional village cooperativeness that proponents of community culture speak of. It is the work of villagers who are in the process of forming a new cooperative culture. (Shigetomi 1998)

The area which we once called "rural society" for easy understanding, has changed extensively and deeply, and as a result, has unavoidably affected every part of Thai society. If we do not try to understand change in rural areas, Thai society will lack the capacity to solve problems because it will not have clear understandings as a base for doing so. For the better

understanding of the present society of rural areas, I propose not to use the term "rural society."

III.   Presentation of a New Meaning for Thai Rural Society and a Method for Managing Resources

Here I propose that "rural areas" should be termed "the marginal society of new-age production with some agricultural production remaining."We already know well that people who live in rural areas no longer live only within the agricultural production sector. Most of their income comes from working outside the agricultural sector. But what must be further considered is that it is not only that people in rural areas travel to work and seek cash in outside areas. Rather, the main production system itself in rural areas is no longer agricultural production in the way it was previously.

Economic changes in Thai society have brought about structural changes in Thai society. There has been a reduction in the number of poor in the agricultural sector – once almost as high as 18 million people in 1987, it was approximately six million people in 1997. At the same time, people who were once poor and once participated only in the agricultural sector have turned to look for a living outside the agricultural sector and have much higher incomes than before. This is an important change in rural areas which has many broader effects. Once the villagers' income increased, the problems that they confronted and the requirements in their lives also changed.

Economic expansion in urban areas and much improved transportation have aided villagers to adapt more easily to work outside the agricultural sector. They have more affluent trade businesses in the villages. Women leave their village to work outside with the hope that they will bring back enough capital to start a small trading business in their own village. Those who are engaged in trading businesses and other commercial activities in the present rural areas can be called "middle class" in rural society.

The "middle class" in the rural areas is never homogenous. There have emerged many strata of local people in the rural area. There is no longer just one type of class as there was twenty years ago. Along with the emergence of a more diversified rural middle class, the expansion of state power in the Thaksin period constructed the idea of "people" instead of the idea of "community." These "people" united horizontally rather than vertically through patronage ties. The Thaksin government tried to expand its constituency in this "new generation of the rural middle class" by spending a considerable portion of the budget to create work in rural areas. This expansion and change in the role of the state during the period of Thaksin's government helped many farmers who had already ceased to be full-time farmers to become minor traders or to be "new middle class people in rural areas" at a rapid pace. These "new people" had a certain stake in the decision-making regarding the use of resources distributed by the state. They use these resources to participate in the upper level of the political arena.

This sort of vertical political linkage has diminished the importance of "community

culture." Collective action under the "community culture" concept should be formed in a small circle. However, rural people do not feel that they belong to a community, and need a wider circle to initiate collective action.

The production system in Thai rural areas has become a component of the new-age economic system. For example, the introduction of new crop strains about which villagers do not have knowledge has made them dependent on knowledge monopolized by private companies. Villagers are now merely laborers who are hired to produce agricultural commodities for the companies. The livelihood of villagers has become a marginal part of new-age production system. Being a hired laborer in the urban sector is another form of this marginalization. Therefore the changes that have occurred have produced characteristics in Thai rural society which are different from those of previous periods. The characteristics of Thai rural areas today are a reflection of rural people having fallen completely into the position of underdog in the new-age system of production.

If we understand present rural society as the marginal society of new-age production with some agricultural production remaining, we will be able to perceive the problems of people in that area with improved clarity. This will also enable us to find ways to build mutual understanding between the various parts of Thai society.

The marginal society of new-age production with some agricultural production remaining is a society that requires new forms of services from the state. Firstly, it needs a social security system. The people in this marginal part of new-age production have never received state welfare. The social security laws, or the laws that are used with general permanent labourers, do not cover labour in the informal and marginal sector of production. The marginal society of new-age production is therefore a place where capitalists are able to seek benefits without fear of state sanctions.

Secondly, the marginal society of new-age production requires a financial system supported by state agencies. Being deeply immersed in the market economy, people in this marginal society may have better opportunities to increase their incomes when they have access to money for investment. These people do not fear inflation so much as deflation. However, when inflation comes with economic recession, as is occurring at present, the businesses of these marginal people are harmed much more than those of the middle class since the former are affected by the decline in the purchasing power of consumers. Therefore, instead of distributing money directly to each household's account, the government should prepare financial measures that will inject money into the sector of the new-age production system to make it possible for villagers to secure capital and create local purchasing power.

Thirdly, the welfare services from the state should be equally distributed according to the different needs of social sectors. For example, welfare policies for labourers in the informal sector should be equal to those for labourers in the formal sector. However, at present, those in the informal sector shoulder all the risks which may occur in their daily lives

by themselves.

The change from rural society to the marginal society of new-age production with some agricultural production remaining is an important change for Thai society. Building a new perception and definition of this new society is essential to avoid misunderstanding about what is happening in this society. Otherwise it will be difficult for us to seek a way to live together peacefully in present Thai society.

The perceptions of "rural areas" were previously an important political framework which allowed villagers mobilize themselves to demand their rights. However, when rural society has experienced the great changes discussed in this paper, this old framework can no longer work effectively. The "community culture" framework, the most influential framework for understanding rural areas, has been co-opted into the rural development ideas of the elite, which enables the elite to continue to monopolise power in managing resources. As a result, the determination of the use of many resources has always fallen into the fists of elites, a minority of society. At the same time the "community culture" framework has caused Thai society to be insensitive towards the changes taking place. Without precise knowledge about the actual situation in society, it will undoubtedly be impossible to solve the problems. As a result, the use of violence has become the solution for various problems in Thai society today.

IV. Conclusion

From History to Heritage, From Heritage to History

"History" has been transformed into the "Heritage of Thainess" in order to build bonds of cultural unity. This transformation of "history" is related to the structure of the power relationships that exist in Thai society, in particular, to rural development in the recent past.

Understanding "Thai rural areas" more deeply than current academism does is necessary in order to find adequate ways for development. Perceiving rural areas as "rural society" is not consistent with the state of change. It is also necessary to reconstruct an historical perspective of society. If we assume Thai society to be always in the form of the "old heritage of Thainess," Thai society will have no way to avoid social conflict.

Under the context of the economic and social changes that have occurred, many people, for instance most people in present day rural areas, are becoming newly conscious that their lives are changing enormously. This not only makes them feel frustrated with politics that are not consistent with their lives, but they are also frustrated with the history that is presently accepted in mainstream Thai society. On the other hand, those who desire to construct an image of the past Thai society alongside national history are also frustrated. However, the framework of national history that the state has constructed and maintained is not able to open an "historical space" for other groups of people. There is an urgent need to have a new concept that will aid the construction of a new "national history" which will open a public space for more diverse groups of people to be involved.

Some scholars, who desire to build a "collective memory" of the entire Thai society, or "national history," have proposed a new framework for studying and constructing a new national history. An important work is Nidhi Eawsriwong's "National History: 'Revising' the Old Version and 'Building' a New Version." Nidhi has said that:

> The net of memory covers time but it provides a platform for truth in the present and expectations in the future. Therefore newly weaving the net of memory is painful in every society. Nevertheless it is necessary because there is no society able to face the changes that occur endlessly with memory that does not make people ready to face the present and really understand the present... (Nidhi 2007)

The new historical knowledge should be knowledge that will help to return the power of decision making to the people in society. This differs from the old type of historical knowledge, which built up the legitimacy of leaders who monopolise power to make decisions on behalf of society.

An important change in Thai "history" is currently occurring after 2007 although it is

still early to say in which direction it will go or at what point it will settle. What is certain is that the ongoing construction of history will become an important foundation for the future of Thai society.

Members of the Current Privy Council

[March B.E. 2548 (A.D. 2005)]

1. His Excellency General Prem Tinsulanonda — President of the Privy Council

2. His Excellency Dr. Chaovana Nasylvanta

3. His Excellency Mr. Tanin Kraivixien

4. His Excellency Rear Admiral Mom Luang Usni Pramoj

5. His Excellency Air Vice Marshal Kamthon Sindhvananda

6. His Excellency Air Chief Marshal Siddhi Savetsila

7. His Excellency General Pichitr Kullavanijaya

8. His Excellency Mr. Ampol Senanarong

9. His Excellency Mr. Chamras Kemacharu

10. His Excellency Mom Rajawongse Thepkamol Devakula

11. His Excellency Mr. Sakda Mokkamakkul

12. His Excellency Mr. Kasem Watanachai

13. His Excellency Mr. Palakorn Suwanrath

14. His Excellency Mr. Sawad Wattanayagorn

15. His Excellency Mr. Santi Thakral

16. His Excellency Admiral Chumpol Pachusanon

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