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**DISCOURSES ON THAI VILLAGE
COMMUNITY IN THE CONTEXT OF
SOUTHEAST ASIAN MODERNIZATION**

by

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Introduction

Since the late 1980s, two social science concepts: “community forest” and “community culture” have gained considerably attention and stimulated continuing debates among social scientists of Thailand. Based on different theoretical assumptions and political agenda, the two concepts have called our attention to the importance of the diverse, small social units, the collectivities, which make up the Thai modern nation-state while it embarks on the road of modernity. Communities have emerged in various forms with different identities and have been seen as a strategy through which sustainable development can be achieved, organic solidarity attained, and traditional Thai culture can be restored. The nation is imagined as unified, bounded entity binding all communities together. The state, on the other hand, seems to be questioned regarding its role in the emerging Thai civil society.

The two concepts have been hotly debated in different manners. The concept of community forest has been largely contested between social scientists and NGOs, on the one hand and foresters and the state-oriented activists, on the other. It has been largely contained within Thailand, and become a contemporary political ecological issue, generating, in part, a large community forest movement in the 1990s. The concept of community culture, however, has been debated on the theoretical level among Thai and international social scientists and historians. Nonetheless, the theoretical implication of the concept is undoubtedly profound.

In 1988, Jerry Kemp raised his skepticism on the notion of community as constructed by anthropologists as well as Thai intellectuals (Kemp 1988, 1989a). A few years later, Atsushi Kitahara critically reviewed the concept of “community culture” as presented by a group of Thai academics (Kitahara 1993, 1996). The core of his criticism was on the validity of the concept which was conceived of “not only as the repository of valuable Thai heritage, but also an ideology which repudiates the state” (Chatthip 2000). He raised his concerns about the difference between the empirical, objective community and the idealized community which tends to be blurred in the use of this concept. He also warned against the danger of positing a “naïve unilinear development from a lower stage of isolation from the nation state to a higher stage of integration within it” (Kitahara 1996:19). In his own words, “[the] most serious confusion occurs when an idealized grand vision of the total system is applied to an objective empirical part system (the local community)” (Ibid.:17).

As anthropologist who has followed the people movement in Thailand, I tend to agree with Kitahara’s criticism and his concern about the danger which comes from the confusion between empirical reality and the idealized community. However, I think we should not dwell more in this debate, because the concept is based on partially grounded utopian ideal. Instead, we should go beyond this debate and try to gain a better understanding of how the concept of community has been conceived of and used by different scholars in their attempts to understand community as it encounters modernity. I will trace the development of this concept in Western thinking and see how the concept has gained different meanings in different historical contexts. I will look at different empirical studies done on village/community by different groups of scholars and researchers in order to see how the concept has been used. I hope that such an attempt will help us to see the merit of the concept of community which can lead to a better understanding of different types of community in the making. I also hope that my discussion on the concept will have some implications for development policy.

The Concept of Community: Historical Background

One of the concepts which has been commonly used by anthropologists over a hundred years is the concept of community. Unlike scholars of other disciplines, anthropologists tend to focus on a small community in order to gain a detailed, holistic view of culture of a group of people and the stages in social transformation that occur. We tend to take it for granted that we can study a “community” as an objective social form in a bounded territory for we see people live in a seemingly

isolated, bounded entity, regardless whether it is located in rural or urban setting. This tendency comes from the theoretical framework that we have been trained, although recently we have tried to be more critical about it.

It may be important to briefly review the notion of community as understood and see how it has changed over one hundred years. The concept can be traced back to the age of the Enlightenment, during which there were no distinction between community and society. “In contrast to the state, community referred to the more immediate world of meaning, belonging and everyday life. While the state was an objective and distant entity far removed from people’s lives,...” (Delanty 2003:8). It was then conceived of as society, and did not mean merely tradition, but simply social relations, such as those that were in fact emerging around market-based society and bourgeois culture (Ibid.). Community or civil society was seen as opposition to the state. Since the seventeenth century, “the defining element in the discourse of community was a critique of the state....In this respect community expressed a dream impossible to realize: a vision of a pure or pristine social bond that did not need a state. It was in a sense a purely utopian concept of community (Ibid.:9) and a normative critique of modernity which came with the emergence of capitalism and the rise of centralized state. Delanty observed that such attitude was a foundation of the idea of community as a discourse of loss as well as a discourse of recovery or regained (Ibid.: 13-14, see also Kitahara 1996). The former was associated with romanticism, seeing the disappearing of good life, while the latter led to different kinds of communitarian movement as well as political doctrines, such as Western millenarianism, republicanism, communism, nationalism, fascism, etc.

The concept of community was seen differently by modern sociology and anthropology at the beginning of twentieth century. It was conceived in terms of a cultural community rather than a political ideal. Community was defined in opposition to society rather than state as in the classical concept. On the one hand, it was perceived of as based on the allegedly ‘thick’ values of tradition, a moral entity. On the other hand, society became increasingly an alien and objective entity and based on ‘thin’ values. “Community came to be seen as the residual category of social, namely that which left when society becomes more and more rationalized by the state and economic relations” (Delanty 2003: 28-29). The work by Ferdinand Tonnies’ *Community and Society*, first published in German in 1887, is an example of how the concept of community was conceived of as traditional cultural values. Tonnies associated the term *Gemeinschaft* (community) with tradition and the relationships, which is real and organic. *Gesellschaft* (society), on another hand, is associated with modernity and the relationship, which is imagery and mechanical structure. For Tonnies, community as associative life can occur both in rural and urban society, but it expresses itself in different forms. The influence of his concept of community can be seen in sociological and anthropological studies during the 1930s-1960s, particularly through the works by American anthropologists.

In contrast to Tonnies, Durkheim viewed on community as post-traditional. He wanted to find out what kind of moral order would be best to deal with the problems of the modern age. He disagreed with Tonnies’ view that only the state could reverse the destructive impact of the individualism that comes with modern society. But civic forms of solidarity based on citizenship could function to reverse the problem. For Durkheim, his notion of community was specific to modernity and which may be understood as a form of moral individualism, a form of solidarity specific to modernity. He believed that the basic norms of moral individualism are already to be found in organic forms of solidarity that are emerging with the division of labor in society. Solidarity in modern society is not mechanical, but organic in the sense that it is a means of achieving integration within the context of social differentiation and the formation of even larger frameworks. Community as a moral force which is civic in nature.

The Concept of Community in Anthropological Discourse

During the formative years of anthropology, the concept of community was not used by anthropologists. This is because, as observed by Kearny, “anthropologists of social evolutionary theory of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the armchair theorists who synthesized the data collected around the world into account of how “civilized” societies emerged from ‘primitive’ antecedents...The Others so constructed are generalized and impersonal; there are no living communities of people leading daily lives” (Kearny 1996:26). It was largely the British anthropologists who began to carry out empirical study of non-Western societies as an intellectual reaction to the evolutionists’ “conjectured history”. They developed the concept of social system consisting of parts, each of which functions to ensure an equilibrium of the system. For them, an extended period of fieldwork during which anthropologists could directly observe and interview the local people would yield valid information from the “native’s point of view” (Malinowski 1922, Radcliffe-Brown 1922, Evans-Pritchard 1940).

Simple, small-scale, non-Western, ‘primitive’ society became the object of inquiry allowing these anthropologists to investigate how a social system functioned. “The concept of system, whether it be a tribe, ethnic group, lineage, family group or village, ...provided a convenient way of arranging and ordering complex data.” (King and Wilder 2003:29). Their interest in synchronic analysis based on empirical data and the fact that they worked among illiterate people led them to de-emphasize history or diachronic analysis (see also Roseberry 1989). Their emphasis was study culture from the local context or from the native’s point of view. The American anthropologists of Boasian cultural particularism and diffusionism also began to work empirically at the community level (eg. Mead 1928). So did the Dutch ethnologists from the Leiden school of law studies and structuralism in Indonesia (Ibid.).

Functionalist anthropology was very much linked to the interest of Western colonialism and was developed in its context (Asad 1973, Pels and Salemink 1999). However, functionalism was not a direct product of colonialism (King and Wilder 2003). Many anthropologists worked as advisor to as well as collected field data for colonial administration. Information on the timeless social life of the native living in isolated small-scale societies might be helpful to the colonial administration. However, anthropologists were often times at odd with the colonial administrators who did not listen to their recommendation. Some of them even tried to protect the natives from being encroached upon by outsiders and reconstructed their traditional culture in an attempt to demonstrate its values as in the case of the colonial ethnographers in Vietnam (Saleminck 1999).

Both British and American anthropologists during the formative stage of anthropology depicted the way of life, customs and beliefs, ritual practices of the people living in their local communities or places of their habitation. The communities were portrayed in their ethnographic description as objective, contained in bounded entity ‘out there’ and ‘down there’ without much contact with modern world. The primitive Other was a residue, a survival of a distant past stage in the social evolution of the civilized self (Kearny 1996:29). They were living in their primordial, “uncivilized”, traditional society. In this sense, the concept of community perceived by the classical anthropologists was very much similar to the concept of community as tradition as perceived by Tonnies.

It was Robert Redfield who started community study (Redfield 1930, 1941, 1947, 1956). He was a functionalist who was much influenced by Tonnies’ idea of community, and also Robert Park, a sociologist at University of Chicago. His work *Tepoztlan: A Mexican Village* came out in 1930 was regarded as a model for community study. However, Oscar Lewis restudied Tepoztlan decades later and found conflict where Redfield found harmony (Lewis 1951). One of Redfield later works, *The Little Community*, came out in 1955 seemed to reveal his clear concept of community. It is “about some of the several ways in which the organized life of man can be viewed and understood...It is a

book about ‘method’” (Redfield 1989:1). He put forward a concept of “little community” which has five characteristics. First, distinctiveness which apparent to outsider and is expressed in the group consciousness of the people of the community. Second, the community is small which is itself a unit of observation or, if large, some part of it can be representative of the whole. Third, community is homogenous or “slow-changing”. Fourth, the community is all-providing self-sufficient. (Ibid.4).

The object of anthropological study for Redfield then was not the primitive, but the peasant who, again, was seen as the rural folk living in traditional, self-subsistent, bounded entity in opposition to the urban. This shift reflected the anthropological interest from studying the primitive, savage, and uncivilized, simpler societies to the more advanced one. In his “Folk-Urban” continuum, peasant community was located somewhere in between. It was not entirely isolated but linked to urban center and affected by the process of modernization. With the dualist opposition between traditional, small, face-to-face, agrarian community with minimum social differentiation and the modern, large, impersonal society, Redfield wanted to study how “the little community” figured in the process of modernization. The peasant community as he presented was “‘out there’ spatially and ‘back there’ in time. It [was] passive, waiting, as it were, to be discovered and awakened” (Kearny 1996:51). His traditional, peripheral “little community” was “linked to modern urban centers by outflows of traits and forces of modernity” (Ibid.). Redfield also emphasized that peasant society was “part societies” (Redfield 1955, 1989). This issue, Roseberry noted, was also raised by Kroeber in 1948 (Roseberry 1987). After the WWII, anthropologists began to realize that peasant communities were part of the larger world, and the category of peasantry were not seen homogenous. Roseberry contended that

Politically, peasant villages were part of larger, more inclusive administrative units. Representatives of those units—such as public registrars, teachers, tax collectors, extension agents, police and national guard units and like—might reside in or regularly visit the village. Culturally, Redfield’s “little tradition” of the village came into contact with the “great tradition” of the city or of the wider civilization of which it was a part. ...The peasant was part of a wider world, and the anthropologist studying the peasant had to understand something about the wider world as well (Roseberry 1987:109).

Among the proliferation of community studies during that period, a study of a Japanese village, *Suye Mura* done by John F. Embree is a good example (Embree 1946). In the introduction to Embree’s *A Japanese Village*, Radcliffe-Brown commented that unlike social anthropologists of the formative period who were interested in illiterate people, the social anthropologists of the later period was interested in a

knowledge of how individual men, women, and children live within a given social structure...Hence, the kind of research that is the most important is the close study for many months of a community which is sufficiently limited in size to permit all the details of its life to be examined (Radcliffe-Brown 1946: viii).

In his view, community study then was associated with “detailed investigation of forms of social structure” (Ibid.). In *A Japanese Village*, Embree recognized a distinction between *buraku* (natural community or hamlet) and *mura* (rural administrative unit or village; a cluster of several *buraku*) (Ibid. 16). He devoted more than half of his book to discuss village organization, family and household, forms of co-operation and social class and association. It was a synchronic view of a Japanese rural community with life histories of individual members. Embree also paid some attention to social change in his Japanese village.

Community study evolved as a promising method for anthropologists to social life of the peasantry in different societies. In his forward to *A Chinese Village* (Yang 1948), Ralph Linton pointed out that the previous scientific research “began with the more or less artificial isolation of

particular phenomenon and their investigation without relation to the contexts in which they normally occurred” (Linton 1948:v) and therefore could not understand the functional interrelations between phenomena. In his view, the community study was a “frank recognition of the necessity for investigating such situations as a whole” (Ibid.). He realized the merit of sociological survey which yielded quantitative data. However, he contended that it would be more interesting to discover “how culture (in his examples, washing machines or churches) are integrated into life of the community and how the people feel about them” (Ibid).

Unlike other anthropologists during the 1940s and the 1950s who focused on studying community, Firth, a student of Malinowski, was not interested in peasant community per se, but wanted to understand fishing economy as type of peasant economy (Firth 1946). He chose a Malay community comprising of several villages to study fishing economy which was part of the larger elaborated network. Fishing economy was not “necessarily a closed economy or a pre-capitalist economy in literal sense of these terms” (Ibid. 23). “An important feature of a fishing economy is that it usually requires communities to enter into some form of market exchange to obtain other food-stuffs, particularly rice and vegetables, which they do not produce themselves” (King and Wilder 2003:159). Firth described a fishing community

which, though part of a much larger world—the world of the market, colonial government administration, the traditional Malay court headed the Sultan, the Islamic faithful—nevertheless, maintained a significant degree of social cohesion and equality” (King and Wilder 2003:161).

It is important to mention here that during the early twentieth century, there was also an interest among American sociologists to study “community” in urban context. City or urbanization became more diverse and unstable due to capitalist development and industrialization, while a sense of place and attachment were possible only in small localities or neighborhoods. For the Chicago School sociologists, community was “pertaining to relatively small groups, such as neighborhoods, based on mutual interdependence and common form of life, ... common experiences, a common language, kinship ties, and above all spatially life world” (Delanty 2003:55). This view was similar to the notion of community of Redfield who was also influenced by the Chicago School via Robert Park (who was Redfield’s father-in-law). However, in the study of the urban communities, sociologists of the Chicago school stressed the role of gangs, loyalties, local leadership and community clubs rather than the cozy world of rural America (Whyte 1943, Gans 1962). This led to network analysis and concept of community that emphasized relationships and flow of activities (Delanty 2003:55).

So far I have reviewed the concept of community as perceived largely by anthropologists who were under the Structural-Functional perspective which was dominant during the 1940s -1960s. However, anthropologists who used other frameworks (i.e. Culture and Personality, Diffusionism, Acculturation, etc.) also carried out their fieldwork through studying community. The village community studies proliferated again after the WWII when several Southeast Asia countries underwent de-colonization and began to find their own path of development. With the withdrawal of colonial powers in the region, the US began to assert its role in the region and wanted to ensure the containment of Communist China, North Korea and North Vietnam, as well as to counter the growing strength of indigenous South-East Asia socialist and communist movement” (King and Wilder 2003”70). The US became very much involved in the political and economic affairs of Indochina, especially South Vietnam, as well as Thailand and Burma and Indonesia and “invested substantially in the development of various research centers on South-East Asia” (Ibid.). By the early 1950s, several American scholars from prominent universities were involved in team research projects focusing on a particular country, for examples, Cornell Southeast Asia program under the leadership of Lauriston Sharp carried out Bang Chan project in Central Thailand, Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Center for International Studies worked on Java and Bali, Yale University Southeast Asia Program

supported anthropological work on the outer island of Indonesia, while the University of Chicago's scholars focused on the Philippines (Ibid.70-71).

In Latin America, American anthropologists were also active studying peasant communities. Wolf classified peasant communities into two types: closed corporate and open corporate communities (Wolf 1955). Anthropologists who studied Latin American peasantry seemed to be interested in peasant social differentiation, leading them to look at plantation zones with population of rural proletarians. According to Roseberry, "[t]he Puerto Rico project coordinated by Julian Steward examined a range of rural types, from the peasants producing tobacco and coffee in the interior to the rural proletarians on corporate sugar plantation in the coast" (Roseberry 1989:123). Several ethnographies of Latin American peasantry focused on economic behavior and their relationship with outside world (Foster 1965, see Cancian 1965, see his review in Cancian 1989).

As peasant communities in various regions of the world moved toward modernity in the 1960s and the 1970s, community studies also have undergone dramatic changes in both approach and methodology. Anthropologists were not limited to Structural-Functional approach, but employed and experimented with different ones. Julian Steward's "levels of sociocultural integration" (1955) was one of the concepts used to overcome the limit of the functionalist approach of community study. As King and Wilder observed,

[it] was no longer very easy to focus on the small-scale, closed village community separate from the wider sets of changing relations of which it was a part. American students usually adopted neo-evolutionary schemes in their study of socio-economic change based on the assumption that the newly dependent, less developed societies were on the path of progress from traditional to modernity (King and Wilder 2003).

Geertz who was influenced by Julian Steward's human ecology model undertook a study of the processes of change and a particular social and cultural transformation in post-independence Indonesia. Geertz "used both detailed local level case studies and an anthropological perspective on nation-building to examine the variety of possible directions and forms of change and their underlying process" (King and Wilder 2003). Geertz's approach is quite interesting and innovative, as one can see in his well-known *Agricultural Involution* (1963) and other articles, such as, "Balinese Cock-fighting". His *Agricultural Involution* is an ecological and historical analysis of the emergence and development of dualism in Java or the "inner Indonesia" and its contrast with limited transformation of the "outer Islands". Geertz wanted to explain why Indonesia, in contrast to Japan, had not developed toward industrialization, modernization and sustained economic growth.

Unlike Boeke who argued that the local communities did not respond to capitalist-generated economic stimuli (Boeke 1953 cited in King and Wilder 2003: 65), Geertz attempted to identify some obstacles to growth in terms of a particular kind of colonial experience acting upon a particular kind of village economy and ecology. He discussed the ways in which Javanese culture shaped and was shaped by the social and political forces and process of the colonial experience. The colonial government, he argued, integrated Javanese peasant agriculture into a capital-intensive, commercial system which produced cash crops for the Dutch. Such an integration situated the Javanese farmers to the subsistence sector while excluding them from the commercial sector, and using some of their land and labor for profit. The Javanese farmers then reproduced their labor power in the traditional subsistence sector, leading to agricultural intensification, increasing communal rather than individual right to land. Thus, a high level of peasant socio-economic homogeneity and 'shared poverty' prevailed and became unfavorable circumstances for achieving modernization and the transition to capitalism. The Javanese became "involved", internally over-elaborated, intricate and complex and locked into a 'permanent transition' (King and Wilder 2003:80).

In examining variation of Balinese villages, Geertz argued that its structure was not a constant; it varied in time and space (1959). In his article which appears in *Villages in Indonesia* edited by Koentjaraningrat (1967), Geertz also noted that “[t]he view of a peasant village as a functionally diffuse, all-purpose social form does not, whatever its value may or may not be elsewhere, apply at all to Bali” (Geertz 1967:242). He also asserted that “the Balinese village is not a circumscribed community, but an extended field (Ibid.243). This edited volume aims to depict various Indonesian villages and basic descriptions of economic activities and organization, social structure, etc. However, it is only Geertz’s chapter on “Tihingan: A Balinese Village” that the concept of village was discussed. In other chapters, “there is a little questioning of the appropriateness of the concept of the ‘village’ as a unit of analysis” (King and Wilder 2003:115).

In the last chapter of his edited volume, Koentjaraningrat observed that Indonesian villages, *desa*, were differentiated in terms of how villagers used their ecology or type of social relations. The social system of the village community included several interrelated circles of relationship, each of which varied in range. The interrelation of these various circles seemed to conform to two kinds of patterns: the concentric pattern and the diverging pattern. In the concentric pattern, circles of relationship are mutually inclusive and concentrically interrelated, comprising of the inner circle which included kinsmen and neighbors and the next circle which includes more extended relations, associations and friends “This circle is often recognized by the members of a community as a distinct territorial part of the whole, with its own identity and with a specific term or even name” (Koentjaraningrat 1967:389). In the diverging pattern, various small or large circles of relations are not mutually inclusive but yet are interrelated at various points. Members of one circle are not necessarily member of others.

Second, Koentjaraningrat asserted that village life in Indonesia was also not at all idle and indolent, as had often been assumed by several authors (Ibid. 393). He contended that the system of reciprocal or mutual aid called *gotong rojong* and labor service *kerdja bakti* according to indigenous *adat* regulations seemed to exist in most villages. In his view, Redfield’s concept of “little community” could be applied to most Indonesian village communities (Ibid. 403). He also emphasized that the interplay between local and national loyalties in village community was of basic importance.

It seems that community studies in Indonesia have developed quite far in comparison with those in other Southeast Asian or even Asian countries. This is due, in part, to the rich colonial records and, in part, to the self-reflection which led to innovative approach and criticism among anthropologists and other social scientists. In the Philippines, at least two studies by American anthropologists should be mentioned: Charles O. Frake (1950) and Harold Conklin (1954). Frake’s contribution mainly came from his cognitive anthropological approach which aimed at understanding contextualized meanings of culture, while Conklin’s widely cited works on shifting cultivation and land use among the Ifugao became a model in cultural ecological study.

Debates on Community Study and New Perspectives

Closed Corporate Peasant Community

Most anthropologists, American and European, during this period continued to focus on what “were assumed to be relatively closed, small-scale societies or cultures, the modes of integration of village, or community-based social system, and the structural principles that order ideas, values...” (Ibid.72). But they were more sophisticated in conceptualizing peasant community. Community was not simply viewed as isolated, bounded society.

Wolf in his 1955 article described two types of peasant community: closed corporate and open peasant communities". Based on his observation in Mesoamerica and historical records of colonial Java he read (eg. Furnival), he found similarity between what he called closed corporate communities in Mesoamerica and Java. He stated that "in both areas, they are closed corporate organizations, maintaining a perpetuity of rights and membership; and they are closed corporations, because they limit these privileges to insiders, and discourage close participation of members in the social relations of the larger society" (Wolf 1957:2). He also pointed out that the community is "territorial, not kinship-based. Rules of community endogamy further limit the immigration of new personnel" (Ibid.:3), and that "closed corporate peasant communities in both areas are socially and culturally isolated from the larger society in which they exist" (Ibid.5). Wolf argued that closed corporate communities in Mesoamerica did not exist before the colonial period. It was a "creature of the Spanish conquest" (Ibid:7) and a response to "forces which lie within the larger society to which the community belongs rather than within the boundaries of the community itself" (Ibid.). Peasant communities were not seen as isolated social system as depicted by the functionalist anthropologists, but as part of the larger system. The open community arose in response to the rising demand for cash crops which accompanied the development of capitalism in Europe (Ibid.).

Wolf's concept of closed corporate community drew much attention among anthropologists studying peasant society. One criticism raised was the closed-open community dichotomy might be too rigid to reflect the dynamics and complexity of peasant society (Skinner 1971). Based on his data on Chinese peasantry, Skinner argued that the Chinese case informed "the recurrent cyclical trend whereby peasant communities changed from relatively open to relatively closed and back again" (Skinner 1971:271). He contended that in the local territorial communities of which the peasant is a member were in no sense limited to peasants. His own study on market system in China allowed him to see peasant communities articulated with marketing system at the higher levels.

The Chinese peasant, then, was a member of two communities: his village and the marketing system to which his village belonged....It was artisans, merchants, and other full-time economic specialists, not peasants who sustained the heartbeat of periodic marketing that kept the community alive (Ibid. 272).

Skinner noted that "the opportunity structure prevailing during the dynasty's heyday led to high rates of upward mobility, which entailed high rates of geographical mobility out of and back into rural communities" (Ibid.27). Besides, he saw "the market and fairs brought merchants and traders from dispersed places to a common center fosters cultural exchange among local system" (Ibid.). While Skinner agreed with Wolf on the idea of economically closed corporate peasant communities, he contended that there were two more types of closure that peasant communities chose to adopt sequentially: normative and coercive closures. So, in Skinner's view, the peasant communities could not be understood by the rigid dichotomy of closed-open, but one would need to use a more dynamic conceptual model which linked peasant community to marketing system and the state. In response to criticism generated by his own idea, Wolf in his 1986 article argued that the closed corporate peasant community was "postulated neither as a universal type of peasantry,...nor as one of the two types of peasant communities" (Wolf 1986:326). He admitted that the flaws of his model developed in 1950s came from the limit of historical evidence anthropologists had access to during that time.

Based on intensive reading of colonial record and his own fieldwork in South Asia, Breman raised the issue of village as a colonial construction in his articles published in 1982, 1988 and 1997. In most colonial situations, he argued, the colonial regime took an administrative control over territory and population. He stated that

[t]he Javanese *desa* as a community is a European creation, not, however, as

device discovered at some early stage, but as a subsequent construction...The colonial practice was to attempt...find a modality for a system of exploitation that could be based as far as possible on the existing social order. Once the framework of this had been mapped out, the institution of local heads as middlemen between the colonial rulers and the peasantry made the village the most important administrative unit. Consequently, the choice of *desa* as a cornerstone of the colonial administration led in official reporting to the assumption of a 'traditional' Javanese community which remained current until decolonization and in deed for some times afterwards (Breman 1996: 3-4).

It was the Dutch who patterned after the British model establishing a plan known as "the Culture System" which stipulated that each village set one-fifth of its cultivated land aside for the production of export crops to be delivered to the government instead of land tax. The new Culture system was successful in promoting export crop production and for increasing the colonial government revenue. What followed was that solidarity of traditional village community was strengthened. The system was implemented through native administrative channels running from the Regents to the village headmen. Under this system, the village was utilized as a unit of communal production and labor mobilization (Hayami and Kikuchi 1981: 148-149).

In his "The Village in Focus" in which he compared the similarity between South Asia and Java, Breman explicitly pointed to the dominant discourse in the colonial literature which depicted Asiatic village as a "mini republic, an age-old corporation with its own institutional framework and considerable degree of self-sufficiency" (Breman 1996:16). He observed that the representation of Asiatic villages by the colonial administrators became firmly anchored in colonial literature which gained force of conviction through endless repetition and polishing. In his analysis, the European rulers tried to legitimize their presence in Asia by designating the village community as the basis of colonial policy and "wanted to restore a native institution that had fallen victim to the oppression of despotic rulers of their own race" (Ibid.:17). The image of Asiatic villages was often constructed superficially without empirical research.

Breman also argued that after decolonization, the villages in South Asia and Indonesia became "nationalized". "[T]he myth of simply-stratified, self regulating and inward-oriented peasant community continued to play an important role" (Ibid.21). That is, the nationhood could survive in the village formation against the exploitation of the colonial powers. In Vietnam, the village became "a symbol of national resistance" or "symbolic in the patriotic struggle in India" (Ibid.21-22). Nationalist historiography tended to paint the idealized image of pre-colonial villages and the disappearing of village tradition due to colonial onslaught. In Indonesia and India after Independence, rural improvement and reconstruction were undertaken with an emphasis on agrarian reform. "In Gandhi's programme of social reconstruction the village played a central role, eulogized by him as a collectivity based on fundamental quality, whose members were prepared and even prone to cooperate in a manner that was free of self-interest (Ibid. 31).

In this well-referenced and analytical essay, Breman described various stages of village studies: "colonized, nationalized, developmentalized, anthropologized and globalized. In all stages, villages were constructed. The post-colonial regimes tended to seek inspiration in traditional forms of social organization in order to give shape to their national identity from the past to the future, and made use of the traditional values and institutions, such as *adat*, *gotong royong*, in the institutional design of social development programme (Ibid.:34). The post-colonial villages also became research locale for, and revisited by, many anthropologists and sociologists with diverse conceptual frameworks representing social reality. "The village has never been isolated but today is even less so than before" (Ibid.64).

The French colonial practice in Vietnam was not similar to the British in India and the Dutch in Java. Kleinen noted that the colonial Vietnam was split into three parts, each with its own principle

of rule resulted in “ambiguous colonization” (Kleinen 1997:354-355). The French colonizers ‘introduced a French penal code to replace the pre-colonial Gia Long code ...and with it came a transformation of the indigenous laws and rules embodied in so-called *coutimiers*, village charters, which had to be modified and adapted to the new situation (Ibid.:355). French and Vietnamese scholars were involved in the study of Vietnamese village system. The writing of these scholars “have given rise to the well-worn cliché of ‘the Vietnamese village’ as a somewhat ‘closed’ society, ‘hidden behind thick bamboo hedges’ (Ibid.:384). Kleinen also pointed out that the relationship between state and village in Vietnam as expressed by the famous proverb ‘the laws of the emperor bow to the customs of the village’ has led to uncritical assessments of village autonomy by both Vietnamese and foreign scholars (Ibid.:385).

Kleinen pointed out to the post WWII village study by Gerald C. Hickey (Hickey 1964) as the first and best example of modern ethnographic fieldwork in Vietnam. In his view, Hickey’s approach “reflected the anthropological discourse at that time initiated by Redfield, about the village as a little community within a model of transition from folk to urban” (Kleinen 1999:4). Based on his village study in Red-River delta, Kleinen arrived at a few conclusions. He argued that “the classic image of a closed corporate community of the traditional Vietnamese village needs serious revision. It is largely a construction fashionable in the post Second World War social sciences, but not based on historical realities” (Ibid.:190). His own village study has shown that the delta village society of Northern Vietnam “has been more open and flexible than is suggested in the French and Vietnamese literature until now” (Ibid.).

Reconceptualizing the Peasantry

The review of the concept of community will not be complete without a look into how anthropologist and other social scientists have viewed the peasantry during the past four decades or more. In order to locate the debates on the peasantry in broader intellectual context, I will largely draw upon the work by Kearny (1996) which seems to be useful to understand issues related to village community study.

Kearny took us through the long path of peasant studies which began after the WWII. Anthropologists more than the other social scientists were intrigued by the category of the peasant who dwelled in rural society which began to transform itself in response to modernization and industrialization. It was Wolf who turned anthropologists’ attention from the primitive to the peasant, the former were the object of formative anthropological inquiry. The peasant then became a social category, situated in between folk and urban continuum, but seen not different from the primitive. Their position was still deeply dualist in that their communities are depicted as bounded and virtually without contact with modern world. “Classical anthropology is thus progressive in that it does advance the movement within formative anthropology to humanize ethnographic Others and to bring them closer to the West” (Ibid.:). Anthropology became interested in development as the West assumed responsibility for ‘helping’ the ‘lesser developed nations catch up with modernity and concerned over communist threat.

It is within the great drama of containment of communism that ‘the peasant’ was elaborated as part of a general anthropological discourse peculiar to the aftermath of the Cold War. The containment of communism became in large part the containment of masses of rural peoples (Ibid.:35).

In what Kearny called the Right-Wing modernist anthropology, the concern was over the inertia of “traditional culture” and “their ignorance of benefits to be gained from modern society, culture and technology” (Ibid.:52). The peasant were defined as “part-societies and part-culture (Krober 1948), a marginal type and constructed as “traditional”, the opposite of “modern”. However, as Redfield suggested, three major changes would occur in peasant society: 1) less organization of

customary way of life, 2) more individualization of behavior; and 3) more secularization (Redfield 1941 cited in Kearney 1996:52).

The Left-Wing modernist, on the other hand, saw the peasant from a similar view of unilinear evolutionism. The peasant's pre-capitalist society would be destroyed by the forces of capitalism as it happened in England and Europe. For Marxists, "peasants are a doubly ambiguous category, first with respect to their actual class status and its historical destiny...and second with respect to the subjective political dispositions derived from their objective social identity" (Ibid.:55). The peasants were seen as conservative politically as compared to the industrial proletariat. "Indeed, from this perspective, development requires the dissolution of peasant society" (Ibid.). Both Right-Wing and Left-Wing modernists' strategies to modernize rural areas, however, seemed to fail for the peasantlike types still persist and proliferate. In addition, Kearny observed that the modernists fell into the trap of essentialism. The peasant was conceived of having fixed identities which did not fit the dynamic social reality.

Kearny discussed two forms of romanticism as reactions to the modernists' representation of the peasant Others: right-wing and left-wing romanticism. Right-wing romanticism tended to view rural society as backward-looking reactions against contemporary society or modernity. Such romanticism often found its similarity in nationalist sentiments, seeking to build a nation out of autochthonous natural and cultural resources. Kearny referred to Robert Redfield and the populist Chayanov as the prime examples of the right-wing romanticism. Redfield valued country over city and essentialized his 'Little Community' which was eroded by the forces of urbanism (Ibid.:78). In a different context, Chayanov took the household as a basic unit, and saw "social differentiation as the result not of enduring class relation but instead of phase in the life cycles of households" (Ibid.:77). He was not a proponent of capitalist development, but his modified methodological individualism of neo-classical economics which ignored Marxist class analysis. He strongly believed in the essential positive features of production organized by families within the context of peasant communes and his idea was against Lenin and especially Stalin and the forced collectivization. He had a little or no concern for peasants as social and cultural beings (Ibid.). Within this category, Kearny found James Scott's works romantic in that they were on the side of the victims. Scott paid much attention to the art or micro-technologies of resistance, but in Kearny's view he seemed to deny the possibility of structural change. It should be emphasized here that Scott is much different from Redfield in that he did not subscribe to dualism. He did not essentialize the peasant.

Kearny classified Dependency theory which was born in Latin American context in the early 1960s as representatives of the left-wing romanticism. Like the modernization theory which is based on the assumption of traditional-modern dualism (or Redfield's folk-urban continuum), Dependency theory sees the dualism between the periphery and the core. It is a rejection and an inversion of modernization theory in that the Dependency theorists "turned attention from the diffusion of the cultural traits of modernity from 'modern' to 'traditional' to the extraction of economic value from the 'satellites' to the 'metropolis' with in the context of colonialism and neocolonialism" (Ibid.:80). Unlike the modernization theorists which assumed no relationship between the periphery and the metropolis, Dependency theorists saw the process of simultaneous underdevelopment or de-development in the former and the accumulation of wealth and growth in the latter. According to Kearny, dependency theorists can be classified as romantic for they "proposed that Third World peasants and proletarians were capable of being primary historical agents" (Ibid.:81). In any case, it should be pointed out that its unit of analysis is at the national level, not class in a particular social formation like the Marxists. In this sense, Dependency theory helps us to view local history in the larger context of a world system, but it does not pay much attention to the complexities and differentiation in rural society. It is a "major step in dismantling of the dualist assumption of modernization theory" (Ibid.).

The question of how Capitalism penetrates rural communities and is able to produce and accumulate surplus was the concern of anthropologists who studied peasant societies. Articulation theory which was born out of Marxism was further developed to explain the pre-capitalist social formation and the “interrelationship between capitalism and other modes of production” (Ibid.:82). As Kearny put it, “[c]entral to this process is the progressive incorporation of non capitalist labor into capitalist relations of production and exchange and the subsequent extraction of surplus value from those who expend such labor” (Ibid.). Capitalism then does not completely destroy the other pre-capitalist modes of production, but contain and incorporate them in order to accumulate more surplus. Articulation theory pays attention to internally differentiated social formation and complex process of articulation between capitalist and other modes of production.

Interestingly, Kearny situated Wolf within the Articulation theory and saw his work as “the bridge to images of the countryside that go beyond ideas of the ‘traditional’ peasant based on the dualist assumptions” (Ibid.87). His much debated concept of ‘closed corporate community’ is “closed only with respect to the penetration of outsiders and outside social forms; with respect to the extraction of value it is exceedingly open” (Ibid.). For Wolf, “this closed corporate community is but one type that contrasts with a variety of open peasant communities, open in the sense that they have more complex economic and social relation with other milieus and also in the sense that they are open to cultural forces and identities that are closed out of the indigenous corporate community” (Ibid:88). He saw differentiated peasants not only work in their domestic sphere, but also labor in much wider economic universe which are all sites of production needed to be analyzed.

Kearny also discussed how other scholars tried to reconceptualize the peasants through other frameworks beyond Articulation theory, for example, de Janvry (1981). He also pointed to the emergence of concern with sustainable development, which he thought, due to the failure of both right and left version of developmentalism (Ibid.:105). He saw residues of developmentalism in the emerging discourse, but developmentalism that has come up against the ecological limits of modernization. Kearny asserted that “[m]uch sustainability thinking and policy is markedly romantic in a sense that takes it beyond peasant romanticism to rediscovery and reevaluation of the primitive, now reconfigured as the ‘indigene’. ...The continuity of their existence in these landscapes over hundreds and thousands of years, often without causing environmental degradation, suggests that they have ‘traditional’ knowledge and practices that have allowed them to manage ecosystem without destroying their biodiversity...” (Ibid.”106).

Kearny proposed a model which depicts the theoretical landscape of the works done on the peasantry:

	Left-Wing	Right-Wing
Modern	Proletarianism	Modernization Theories
	Marx	Green Revolutions
	Lenin	Basic Needs
		Neoliberalism
	Articulation Theories	Sustainable Development
		Resistance Theory
		Moral Economy
Romantic	Dependency Theory	Redfield
	Mao	Chayanov
	Peasantism	Populism

Figure I : Intellectual-Political Disposition toward Rural Communities

(Modified from Kearny 1996:106)

The Early Period of Community Studies and the Debates on the Concept of Community in Thailand

I have discussed above the intellectual development of the concept of community, the anthropological discourses of peasant community as well as the conceptualization of the peasantry. This has been done in order to provide a background against which we can assess and understand the concept of community as has been used and developed in the village community studies in Thailand.

The decade of 1950s was the formative years of anthropology and the rise of village community studies in Thailand. Before that, way of life of rural population was mostly found in accounts and reports by officials, missionaries and journalists. By this time, village communities as

the lowest administrative unit had already been established under territorial control policy initiated during the Chakri Reformation. Although a number of them in the frontier and hill areas were not classified and were less accessible. But this does not mean that Thai village communities were isolated and had no contact with market system. The interest in rural areas became the concern of the Khan Rasadorn expressed in the Economic Program written by Dr. Pridi Panomyong. In 1933, Carl Zimmerman carried out the first socio-economic survey of Thai society, basically describing economic conditions of different rural areas in the country. In the predominant view of that period, the majority of Thai population was still very much living in the countryside and the forest which were the “outer” space out of the “civilized” *Muang* (town or polity) (see also Turton 2000, Thongchai 2000).

Academic study of Thai village community did not start until the 1950s. It was the interest of American academics after the World War II that led to the Cornell-Thailand Project which aimed at studying Thai society in the late 1940s and the 1950s. Although the members of the Cornell team was consisted a political scientist, a historian, agricultural economist, several of them were anthropologists who were interested in Thai peasant society, i.e., Lauriston Sharp, Lucian Hanks, and Robert Textor who carried out their study in Bang Chan, a farming village near Bangkok (Sharp et al 1953). The Bang Chan study was carried with functionalist perspective depicting the village community as a harmonious, isolated unit. It was very much associated with the ‘Loosely Structured Social System model proposed by Embree (1950). Thai peasants became a social category living in small rural communities and were scrutinized by American anthropologists (Kaufman 1960, Kingshill 1965, Keyes 1966, Piker 1968, Phillips 1971). The Chinese, on the other hand, lived in Bangkok and major market towns engaged in different kinds of non-farm activities (Skinner 1957). The title of Skinner’s seminal study, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, well reflects the spatial arrangement of Thai peasant and Chinese before the 1960s.

Among the early ethnographies on Thai village community, Kingshill’s *The Red Tomb* has been pointed out as example of the Redfieldian folk community in Thai community studies. It should be mentioned that Kingshill was not a member of the Cornell-Bang Chan team. He took the ‘Pattern of Culture’ approach to describe the Northern Thai village as an isolated, bounded entity without any conflicts. The village cultural patterns were normative rules which governed the villagers’ behavior. Keyes, on the other hand, contextualized his Lao-speaking village in the larger nation-state in order to explain the relationship between the Northeast peasants and Thai nation-state and the sense of regionalism felt among them. Like Geertz, Keyes took a local level approach and looked at the regional history from anthropological perspective. His work, then, is different from the Bang Chan study. Similarly, Tambiah who also worked a village level in examining, from Structural Functional view, Buddhism and spirit cults in the Northeast of Thailand (Tambiah 1968).

During the 1960s, the Thai peasants became the major concern of the government as well as the US, which asserted its active role in Southeast Asia, due to the existing underdeveloped socio-economic conditions and the perceived threat of communist insurgency. Many rural development programs sponsored by US agencies were carried out in the Northeast, including the highway connecting rural communities in the Northeast to urban center in Bangkok. Several Thai and foreign anthropologists and sociologists were also involved in rural community studies preparing for the rural development programs supported by USOM (Yatsuchiro et al 1966-67). In the North, with the help of William Geddes, Tribal Research Center was established to collect information and facilitate research activities on the highland. The Thai peasants who lived in communities were situated in a particular space and time in anthropological imagination. They were, as Kearny (1996) puts it, “out there” in the rural area and “down there” or traditional, backward and uncivilized at the end of the Redfieldian “Folk-Urban” continuum, waiting to be awakened to change. The formative period of community studies in Thailand reflected the ongoing anthropological discourse on peasant community during the 1950s-1960s.

Not only the American scholars, but a few Japanese scholars also began to study Thai society during the 1960s. At least two of them, Tsuneo Ayabe and Koichi Mizuno were interested in social structure of peasant community (Hayami 2001:67-68). The founding of Kyoto University's Center for Southeast Asian Studies in 1963 was, in part, instrumental for a team of Japanese scholars to carry out investigation in rice-growing communities in different regions in Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries in the decade of 1970s. During the late 1960s, a number of Thai social scientists returned from overseas training, mostly under the modernization theory, began to have influence in designing rural development program,

The first debate on peasant community in Thailand began during these formative years. It was Embree who, after studying a *Suye Mura*, compared Japanese and Thai social structure. He argued that Thai peasant society exhibited what he called "Loosely-Structured Society as opposed to the Japanese "Tightly-Structured Society". (Embree 1950, see Potter 1977). His dualism, which is different from the dualist concept of folk-urban, essentialized the Thai peasant community. A series of debates on this issue based on fieldwork experience of several social scientists came out in a volume edited by Evers (1968). But the more systematic, well formulated attack came from Potter who studied a village in Northern Thailand where Kingshill (1965) actually studied a decade before. Potter argued that Thai peasant community was not loosely structured. He attempted to found evidence regarding kinship, marriage, rules of residence, labour exchange and other forms of social relations in his village much more structured (Potter 1976). The debate, however, was still within the Structural-Functional framework. Potter was concerned with social structure and village institutions and he wanted to dismantle the Loosely-Structured Society model. But it seems that the social reality, as he himself acknowledged, is in the eyes of the anthropologist.

It should be noted that by the early 1970s, Thai social scientists began to read Marxism and other conflict theories. A Thai Marxist, Jit Phumisak, had already described Thai society as semi-feudal society using historical data. His influence was felt much among Thai scholars, eg. Chai-anan Smudhavanich, Chatthip Nartsupha and Suthy Prasartsert (see Chatthip 2000). His critique on Thai feudal society led many scholars and students to question Thailand's neo-classical, growth-oriented development model which had been adopted since the early 1960s. While Thai economy seemed to enjoy some economic growth, rural poverty was much prevailing and the gap between the urban and rural seemed to be large. The modernization theory based on the dualistic assumption of rural-urban was critically criticized. However, during that period there was no village study done from the Marxist approach.

Under the leadership of a prominent Thai economist, Dr. Puey Ungpakorn who wanted to find a rural reconstruction scheme to solve the problem of poverty, several urban middle-class academics and students went to the countryside to study rural communities and learn village way of life. Some of them became the pioneer of the NGO movement and started to develop their own theory of community-based development. The student-led political change which ended the decade-long military dictatorship opened up more space for discussions and debates about social inequalities, poverty, corruption, exploitation in the countryside as well as the Western model of development. However, such space was closed after the October 6, 1976. Many university students joined the Communist Party of Thailand in search for a way out for Thai society. Several went to further their studies abroad where they read Dependency theory, Marxism, Neo-Marxism, etc.

During the mid 1970s, Johnston 's "Rural Society and the Rice Economy in Thailand, 1880-1930" was arguably the first historical study of rural society which gave a vivid picture of the hard peasant life in Central Thailand. On the other hand, the Kyoto-based Japanese researchers produced a respectable volume on *Thailand: Rice-Growing Society* (1978) based on their extensive fieldwork. However, the Japanese view of Thai rural society was divided into several aspects including economy, social organization, soil, land use, agriculture, etc. With the exception of a concise historical introduction by Ishii, a respected historian, the Japanese researchers refrained from using historical

perspective in looking at Thai communities. They were interested in describing Thai villages empirically as being gradually oriented toward market economy. However, it should be noted that none of them was trained as anthropologist.

Anthropologists and other social scientists in this period distanced themselves from the Structural-Functional approach and became more sophisticated in looking at Thai village life. Turton took a historical political economic approach to study a peasant community in Northern Thailand. Based on Marxist class analysis, Turton described the transformation of pre-capitalist Northern Thai society as it became incorporated by capitalist economy. He recognized internal differentiation within his peasant community and saw them articulate with the local powers, officials as well as the state. He paid attention to the “microphysics of power” at the village level as well as ideological practice of the Northern peasants of different ethnic origins who settled in the river valley. Like Potter, he discussed the practice of ancestor spirit cult and the matrifocal descent group unnoticed by Kingshill.

Akin Rabibhadhana, one of the first Western trained Thai anthropologists, began to work on Thai community. His widely cited MA thesis was on Thai social organization based on historical data. With the interest in social organization, Akin he continued to study community in a Bangkok slum area. His work on village community reflected the tension between the state-led development program and the local villagers’ idea of development. He portrayed the way a conflict-prone village community was “developed” by the state agents and how the community led by Buddhist a monk tried to define their own path of development (Akin 1982). With his experience in rural development and a strong interest in the future of the Thai villagers, he initiated village studies in the Northeast of Thailand during the 1980s while he was director of the Khon Kaen University Research and Development Institute.

It was this period that we began to see conflict approach with different theoretical perspectives being used in Thai studies. First, in 1978 Chatthip and Suthy developed a well formulated thesis of political economy of Thailand in which they described how underdevelopment of Thai society occurred due to the *Sakdina*, a Thai feudal system. Thai economy was linked to the world market economy after the Bowring Treaty, but due to the interest of the ruling classes, the peasant class was exploited. It was the Chinese bourgeoisie, the middle class, who reaped the benefits and gained control over the economy. Chatthip and Suthy’s work was based on historical data depicting Thai social formation in a classic Marxist tradition. Chatthip then was not interested in community but he was more concerned with the hegemony of the *Sakdina* class. However, later he became interested in the peasant rebellions in modern Thai history. Chatthip and Suthy’s thesis became very influential among Thai scholars and students in the subsequent decades. Chatthip in particular supervised several graduate students to study peasant economy in different regions of Thailand, some of which became the basis for his later interests in Asiatic mode of production and community culture (see Chatthip 2002)

Second, anthropologists who are more familiar with the ethnographic method rather than historical one, began to raised their concern against the validity of the ethnographic study of a single village community. Although Sharp came up with a social history of Bang Chan, his social history was without class structure in the Marxist sense. For the anthropologists of Thai society, Thai village community was not isolated, but largely integrated into the larger, exploitative, semi-feudal system and capitalist market economy. Subsistence, self-sufficient, egalitarian village community was too romantic a view (see Bowie 1992). Class conflict and differentiation were seen as the dominant features of the community, while culture was seen as a residue and remnants of Thai feudalism. Peasants were not seen as passive, acquiescent, homogenous class, waiting to be developed. With a critical view against the dominant Redfieldian and Structural–Functional approach to Thai society, Anan (1984), Chayan (1984), Bowie (1988), Hirsch (1990), including the others, brought a new perspective on the study of Thai community.

At the peak of Marxist Anthropology, Anan (1984) used the concept of articulation of modes of production to describe a peasant community in transition to commercialization and the subsequent rural differentiation. His work gave a new trend in studying village community and became a model for many graduate students. Although village community was territorially bounded, Anan presented his village in connection with capitalist market economy, while the differentiated peasants diversified their strategies in dealing with scarcity of land and labor. Class conflicts occurred but among the landless class, there was class awareness and solidarity. With an interest in village-state relation, Chayan (1984) looked at ideological and cultural reproduction in a Northern Thai community located in the periphery of the Chiang Mai valley, formerly a forest concession area. Despite the spatial distance from the market center, his village was heavily involved in cash crop production and highly integrated into the hegemony of Thai state (Chayan 1984). The Northern peasants community was open in the sense of membership and land ownership, but closed in terms of membership of the administrative and political community, which was redefined by the state during the post October 6 period. Hirsch investigated a frontier area in Upper Central Thailand where villagers resettled (Hirsch 1990). He took an interest in the manner in which the state agents set up various groups in order to ensure control over rural population and implement state development programs.

Hirsch's discussion on participatory development in his work reflected the thinking of NGO movement in the late 1980s. The decade of 1980 allowed several NGO leaders to work in rural villages in search for alternatives to the dominant development paradigm. They focused on the community-based issues largely defined by villagers, such as rice-bank, credit and saving, agricultural improvement, education, traditional medicine, etc. Participatory development approach was the general method used but each NGO identified different target groups according to the problems they wanted to help the villagers address. The aim to examine the difference perception of state and village toward development. Two schools of thought were known during this period: the "Political Economy" which emphasized on class analysis working partly with the former members of the Farmer Federation Association and the "Community Culture" which defined the problem across the social classes. Both took their position in the village and worked outward to solve the larger political economic problems.

The "Community Culture" school, on the other hand, paid much interest to traditional community structures (eg., irrigation committee, temple committee and networks, elder council, exchange labor group) and cultural values and practices which served to bind the peasant community socially and spiritually. Nipote Thienviharn, a Catholic priest, who is one of the founders of the "Community Culture" school applied the method of conscientization of the theory of liberation to Thai village community context. While he recognized the overarching political and economic structure, he believed in the potentials of the villagers in resolving their problem from within first. Seri Pongpit, a former Catholic priest, worked on community culture in a similar vein. His work *Back to the Root* made the school widely known internationally. Culture became essentialized and community culturalized.

Debates between the two schools occurred occasionally, and both schools worked closely with Thai academics who returned their thinking to their approaches. Toward the early 1990s, the "Community Culture" school gained more acceptance by Thai intellectuals, such as Dr. Prawes Wasi, Dr. Ekawit Na Thalang, and the former political economist/historian, Chatthip Narthsupa (see Kitahar 1996, Chatthip 2000). The wider accepted "Community Culture" school also corresponded with the emerging idea of civil society which Dr. Prawes was also promoting. It was Chatthip who took a serious interest in theorizing community culture which he believed to be key elements of the Asiatic Mode of Production, which had not been destroyed by capitalism. Chatthip saw community culture "not only as the repository of valuable Thai heritage, but also an ideology which repudiates the state" (Chatthip 2000).

The beginning of the 1990s saw two significant changes in the discourse among Thai anthropologists and historians and foreign scholars. First, toward the end of the 1980s, Thai social scientists became more interested in environment and natural resources which were degrading due to the rapid economic growth. They were informed by the empirical problems and cases of conflict between the state and villagers in different areas. Forest management under the auspices of the Royal Forestry Department and the hegemony of Western forest management science was challenged by local villagers who depended on forest resources but were increasingly excluded. Theoretically, they were also informed by the emerging field of political ecology and common property relations. Instead of looking at means of production and class relations, they turned to look at well-defined communities from a property relations framework.

Through a research project on community forest management in Northern Thailand, anthropologists like Anan and Yos in particular reconceptualized “community” based on resources/property relations. The community was seen as having ideologies binding the village members, ritual practices reproducing social relations and ideology, property, situated local/indigenous knowledge on resource use, customary law and management practices, and community organizations (see Yos 2002). The lowland and hill peasants, redefined as villagers or forest users, were seen as possessing their cultural and social capital allowing them to manage their own resources—a view which was against the idea presented by Garret Hardin in his “The Tragedy of the Commons” (Hardin 1968). In a way, the concept of community as used by these social scientists might be similar to that of the Thai intellectuals and NGO leaders of the “Community Culture” school (see Kitahara 1996, Chatthip 2000). However, the former did not essentialize culture or local knowledge as something static and undifferentiated, nor they projected a stateless society as a normative order where villagers took over the management of their own natural resources. They argued for a separation between state forest and community forest, the latter can be realized through a recognition of common property regime.

The second important change came from the debate on the concept of village community, which started in 1988 by Kemp and subsequently by Kitahara in 1993 and 1996, began to challenge Thai anthropologists in rethinking about village studies. However, the real shift occurred in the late 1990s when some Thai scholars exposed to postmodernist theories and concepts.

After Benedict Anderson published his book “Imagined Communities” (Anderson 1983), a series of debates on the concept of village community occurred in the early 1990s resonated with Anderson’s idea. In Thailand, the interest was on how the Thai nation-state created its geo-body of the Thai state in response to the Colonial threat (Thongchai 1994), as well as the construction of local (administrative) villages in the process of nation-state formation (Kemp 1988, 1991, Chayan 1993, Adas 1988, Vanderveest and Peluso 1995). Similarly, Wolf’s concept of “closed corporate community” was revisited by Breman (1988, 1997a) who used historical data during the Colonial period arguing against the static and self-sufficient image of peasant community. They presented the view the villages in Java and South Asia were “constructed” by the Colonial power (Breman 1988, 1997a, 1997b). The concept of an objective, ‘out there’ bounded village community has been shattered. It was only “a mirage”, as Kemp argued, which seduced the social scientists and practitioners to see the village as objective reality (Kemp 1988).

Other social scientists of Asia have kept the debates on community alive until this date (Kitahara 1996, Chatterjee 1997, Breman 1997b, Samsul 1997, Klien 1999, Chatthip 2000, Jodhka 2001, Anan 2001, Attachak 2003). It is not my intention here to summarize all the ongoing debates on the concept of community. However, I find Kitahara’s criticism of the concept village community study in Thailand worth mentioning here, for he raised two very crucial issues in conceptualizing a village community (Kitahara 1996). In his view, the concept of community can be treated at two levels. At one level, the concept of community is a conceptual tool for empirical investigation or objective reality (Kitahara 1996:16). At another level, the concept of community also carries with it a

certain “ideal value for the community, and that ideal is tightly connected with his own interaction with the contemporary society that he faces” (Ibid.). This idealized community or normative order is in effect different from “an empirical, objective small community as a partial subsystem of civil society under the nation state” (Ibid.). In other words, the idealized community is what the researcher wish to achieve. This normative order is often confused with objective reality.

However, Kitahara raised his criticism from the main stream, positivistic social science stance. During the decade of 1990, there have been new perspectives from the postmodernists which enabled us to rethink about space, place, community and locality. Community does not have to be geographically fixed or bounded. It is seen as network of relationship or belonging which transcends boundaries. More importantly, community as can be reflexive in the sense that it can react to, articulate with or resist against external forces. Community is conceived of as place or terrain of contestation. It can be in rural or urban setting as well as in the border and marginal zone or in the cyber space. Postmodern Thai scholars who have worked on village community used such a perspective to understand its dynamics and reflexivity and came up with a new interpretation of community which seems to better reflect the empirical reality (Komartra 1997, Chayan and Sasitorn 1998, Akin 1999, Suriya and Pattana 2001, Suriya et al 2001, Thawat 2003, Attachak 2003).

Contemporary Community Studies in Thailand

Village community still has been the object of inquiry by both social scientists and development practitioners in Thailand (Seri and Hewison 1990, Yukti 1985, Anan 2003). Community is still the unity of analysis for social scientists and several historians have increasingly become interested in studying local community history, reflecting the sustained interest in the merit of the concept of community in social science. More importantly, several “communities” in different parts of Thailand demonstrated their power and resilience in coping with the impacts of the state modernization and development project.

There are five approaches in community studies in Thailand at present. They emerged out of the does not permit me to go into details, so I will briefly outline the important element of each approach.

1) *The Community Culture school*. This approach was originally proposed by NGOs working in rural communities in Thailand. The idea of community culture came from their engagement in solving the problems of poverty, exploitation by capitalist system, and other social problems associated with village community in transition. They were inspired by traditional values of the villagers and believed that such values could be preserved and strengthened so that the village communities could survive. The idea was subscribed by a former Marxist, Professor Chatthip, who saw Thai village community from the theory of Asiatic Mode of Production and proposed a theory of Anarchism in his a discussion paper, “The Theory of The School of Political Economy in Historical Studies of the Thai Village Communities” (Chatthip 2000). In this brief exposition, he claimed that the idea of community culture is “the main line of thinking of non-governmental organizations in Thailand” (Chatthip 2000:6).

Kitahara who made a critical review of the so-called “Community Culture” school demonstrated convincingly that there are two concepts of community used among scholars interested in community studies: one which is an objective reality and another is normative or idealized concept of community. He observed that scholars often shuttled between the two different concepts, thus confusing

Second, he also presented empirical evidence to show that the traditional, timeless village community as described by some scholars of the Community Culture school does not exist in reality. Village community is a product of history and created by the state project in its attempts to control

territorially and integrate rural population into the modern socio-economic system since the Chakri reformation period. His position is in line with Jeremy Kemp (1988 and 1991) who earlier mounted a critique of the Community Culture school as proposed by Thai NGOs leaders.

Third, equally important, Professor Kitahara disagreed with the Community Culture school which sees village community as self-sufficient, self-contained system with anarchist characteristics and a solution to civil society. He was quite skeptical about the anti-state, populist ideology as suggested by the proponents of the Community Culture school. He drew upon experience of Japanese experience in dealing with this issue during the 1970s. the real meaning. He believed that history does not have a unilinear development, but it “is likely to take a more zig-zag course” (Ibid.:19).

2) The Local History Approach. Superficially, this approach seems to be similar to the “Community Culture” School because of its strong interest in the history of community. However, at a closer look, one will find the concept of community of this approach is different sharply from the “Community Culture” school. Scholars classified under this approach are interested in the writing of local history of the local people, and by the local people. Against the dominant trend in “nationalist local history”, they have attempted to find a methodology to write history for communities or the “collective memories” shared by community members. Attachak, a social historian, argued against both the production of nationalist local history and the Community Culture school. Interestingly, he pointed out that the expanding of the Community Culture gradually replaced or forced “local history-nationalism” studies out of academic circles (Attachak 2003:5). While the Community Culture school promoted the understanding of local villagers and they have been devised to mainly to counter the state and the capitalists, this approach seems to be limited for it does not give due attention to the complex, diverse and dynamic change each community underwent. In addition, some scholars in this school “opted to study |community culture” through “local wisdom” and local intellectuals’ miscellaneous daily-life practices. Therefore, “the knowledge obtained was inadequate to ensure accurate understanding of changes taking place constantly in the community culture “hindered them from truly understanding historical changes” (Attachak 2003:6).

Attachak is interested in “local history” as collective memories of local people. His “local history” is history which is remembered seen and “written” by the local people. Through the process of writing their own local history, local people can gain historical consciousness--consciousness of their past situated in their place or their local identity. History, for Attachak, is then a contesting space. He would agree with Chatthip on the importance of the history of community, but methodologically he gives more emphasis on the role of local people in reviving their history in contestation against nationalist local history. Ideologically, Attachak differs Chattip in that he does not have a teleological view of the stateless civil society.

3) The Resource-based Community Study. A number of Thai Anthropologists have become interested in the issue of resource management, property right and post-modern concepts of knowledge and power, a la Foucault, since the early 1990s. Some of them used concept and approach in Marxist anthropology, but have recently diverted their interest to the contestation over natural resources by the state and villagers. Scholars in this approach differ from the Community Culture school in that they do not see village community as static and undifferentiated. In their view, the static, self-contained, self-reliance model of peasant village did not exist in the past nor in contemporary Thai society. Culture is not a traditional and should not be essentialized, but a terrain or space of contestation. Community cultural practices are constructed and reconstructed in the process of community’s articulation with the state, so as the community.

4) *Community and Identity Approach*. Several diverse concepts have been used by anthropologists and sociologists to investigate communities in relation to the state and market economy. The main shift in the approach is from the influence of the concept of place/space from Postmodernism. For example, the concept of enclosed space was used to described how a village

community in the Central Plain, Ta Kwien, faced the enclosure by industrialization. A village community was remembered and villagers re-invented their history in order to maintain their ethnic identity. A community can be a site of resistance, as in the case of Ban Mae Mun Man Yeun in Northeast Thailand, where people protested against the state's large dam. Discursive practice also is a focus of study in order to understand how villagers contest for space which is embedded in local meaning. The common theme found among these studies is that they conceived of community as a dynamic and reflexive. What I mean is that they do not see village community as something being constructed and acted upon by outside forces, the villagers as collective do create and re-create their own community, which may or may not overlap with geographical boundaries as demarcated by the state. In a sense, a community is seen as internally diverse, conflict-prone, but has its own identity. Community then becomes a contested space between state and villagers.

5) *Community as Communicative Network of People*. Unlike the other approaches mentioned above, this type of community is not a bounded entity, located in a geographical locale. It is a network of people who share the same interest or have encountered the same problem, either AIDS, ethnicity, gender or religious. Community is seen as having a sense of local identity and a sense of belonging. Community members are related to each other through communicative action and modern technology.

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