



Shin'ichi Shigetomi. *Cooperation and Community in Rural Thailand: An Organizational Analysis of Participatory Rural Development*, I.D.E. Occasional Papers Series No. 35. Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, 1998, 148p.

This is a study of the emergence of village organizations in north and northeastern Thailand. The author argues that contrary to the wide-held view, Thailand has structures and that they have been used to develop the cooperative organizations which supplement and sometimes compete with the market. The major cooperative organizations discussed are a rice bank, a cooperative shop, and a rice mill (see, for example, Chapter 6 for the formation of such organizations in a village in the Northeast).

The book is fairly well organized and crisply written, but there are a few confusing, possibly contradictory parts.

1) The author (as well as many recent scholars of Thailand) argues that the thesis that Thailand is a loosely-structured society is wrong, by pointing out the existence of cooperative groups (p. 4). Although those who argued that Thailand was a loosely-structured society may have been a little carried away in arguing their case, they did not mean that Thailand did not have structures. They meant (this was definitely the case of John Embree, who initially proposed the thesis) that compared with such countries as Japan, Thailand was loosely-structured (or to put it another way, individuals were less constrained by group rules). The author is well aware of the fact that Thailand lacked cooperative economic organizations in the past (p. 122).

2) In the formation of cooperative economic organizations in rural Thailand, the author emphasizes the initiative of villagers. He is right in arguing that without villagers' participation, such organizations would not be viable and that they can-

not be attributed solely to the initiative of external organizations (governmental and non-governmental). But the author also acknowledges their contribution (p. 124). One wonders which has been pivotal, villagers' new awareness or external assistance. The author would be more convincing in making his case if he could show that there are a number of substantive cooperative organizations which have developed for economic purposes without external assistance.

Having finished reading the book, one may wonder what is the author's point for rural development. He seems to be too obsessed with cooperative economic organizations, without explaining why they are important. Consider a rice mill. Why cannot it be a market organization? A typical argument is that the rice growers gain by getting their rice processed more cheaply at their mill than at a commercial outfit. But this is often not the case. And if it is, it is often because their rice mill receives government subsidies (a form of income transfer). Why should the villagers get involved in cooperative organizations and spend a lot of time there, instead of improving the method of production on their own or doing something else which contributes to higher productivity?

Economists are generally interested in cooperative organizations not as an alternative to the market but as something which strengthens it. For example, if the interest rate charged by an outside merchant is too high, instead of creating a saving association (which the author discusses as cooperative organization), it might be better if some villagers prove themselves to be trustworthy to the merchant and act intermediaries between him (or her) and the villagers who need money. In this case, cooperative arrangements do not have to be village-wide. As the author point out, the Thai community was a social unit and economic relations were dyadic in the past (Chapter 2). Nothing is wrong with that. Why does economic cooperation have to be village-wide? What matters is the emergence of coopera-

tive arrangements which reduce the costs of transactions.

One final point is the relative importance of the cooperative village organizations the author discusses in rural development in Thailand. He is well aware that they have to compete with market organizations and thus cannot freely develop. Since the Thai government is not very interventionist and there is virtually no discrimination against Chinese, compared with other Southeast Asian countries, market organizations are fairly strong in villages in Thailand. The author discusses certain areas where village-wide cooperative organizations can develop (such as cooperative purchase and 'pool-distribution type organizations'; see Chapter 6), but how important are they in rural development? There is no question that they are marginally important, but it seems that they are overshadowed by market organizations.

The book may be a little weak in relating its findings to the body of analytical knowledge on rural development, but it shows what type of cooperative economic organizations are evolving in a Thai village and why. It contains a great deal of factual information on rural organizations and presents its analysis in readable fashion.

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Carl A. Trocki, ed. *Gangsters, Democracy, and the State in Southeast Asia*. Southeast Asian Program Publications, Cornell University, 1998. 94p.

There are five chapters in the book, including the editor's introductory chapter. There is one chapter on Burma, another on Thailand, and two on the Philippines. On reading through the book, however, one wonders how these four chapters are related. Only two of them seem directly related to the title.

The gangster, a word which appears in the title, is ordinarily understood as a member of organized crime. He uses thugs and weapons (or threatens to

use them) to get what he wants from others. The title might convey the impression that such persons run the democracy of Southeast Asia today. But that is not what is meant. A local boss is considered also as a gangster since he uses the means of violence under state control (e.g., police) in order to get what he wants, and it is argued that such persons run the democracy of Southeast Asia. This is claimed for Thailand by James Ockey in "Crime, Society, and Politics in Thailand" and for the Philippines by John Sidel in "Murder, Inc., Cavite: Capitalist Development and Political Gangsterism in a Philippine Province." They do not, however, claim that the whole country is run by gangsters. They admit that in Bangkok or Manila, where a sizable middle class has emerged as a result of past economic development, the influence of gangsters is small. But they maintain that gangsters wield large power in provinces and that this puts an indelible mark on the democracy because power lies there rather than in the metropolis (e.g., in Thailand, 90 percent of the seats in the Parliament are allocated to local provinces, p. 52).

Is gangsterism a passing phenomenon? James Ockey says that the middle class is becoming frustrated, but that the influence of *chaopho* [local strongmen] will decline because of the expanding middle class and the increasing scrutiny of their activities by media reporters. John Sidel ends his chapter on a less optimistic note. He maintains essentially that, although bosses keep changing, bossism will remain. He shows that this is the pattern established in the postwar history of Cavite. The editor tends to side with Sidel rather than with Ockey (p. 15).

If gangsterism is an entrenched phenomenon in local politics in Thailand or the Philippines, one cannot be optimistic about the future of democracy in these countries. At present, Indonesia is also moving in the direction of democracy and many people predict a rosy future for the country because of it, but what has happened in the Philippines and

Thailand may happen in Indonesia too.

The two other chapters do not seem to be directly related to the main theme of the book. The chapter on Burma by Mary P. Callahan entitled "The Sinking Schooner: Murder and the State in Independent Burma, 1948-1958" is a historical piece and does not seem to throw any light on the problems the country will face when it moves to democracy. The power base of local strongmen seems to have been destroyed by the military in the past three decades. The article on Mindanao by Patricio N. Abinales entitled "'Muslim' Political Brokers and the Philippine Nation-State" focuses on the role of a *datu* in Cotabato as the mediator between his community and Manila. He may be able to use violence to get what he wants in his area, but this aspect is hardly touched upon in the chapter. When he lost the ability to be a mediator because of an increased inflow of Filipino migrants, his Muslim community split, and it came to be dominated by the MNLF. The author's theme is very different from John Sidel's or James Ockey's.

The editor does a fairly good job in giving the reader an overview in the introductory chapter, but

here and there, he gives the impression that capitalism is also responsible for the anomaly of Southeast Asian democracy. 'Transnational corporate interests' and 'rampant capitalism' are his villains. He then ends his chapter by pointing out correctly that political cultures have given rise to gangsterism in Southeast Asian democracy (p. 15). If that is so, capitalism is not to blame. After all, in industrial countries today, gangsterism was of minor importance or hardly noticeable in the process of their capitalist development. Capitalism can cohabit with many forms of government.

In the past, the economists had painted a rosy picture of Southeast Asia, but now that it is facing a serious economic crisis, they may be having second thoughts. What they have to be aware of is that the economy is not an island. If the political situation is what the authors of this book say it is, the economy cannot keep growing under such a political system, for public money is misused and the cost of transactions is high. To create a dynamic economy (echt capitalism) is partly a political problem.

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