

The place of a "peasant way of development" in the search for sustainable rural development in SEA

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Introduction

Previous sections have shown the extreme complexity of the question of the place of the peasantry in the societies of Southeast Asian now and in the future. It can also be said that there are two very different perspectives to address this future. On one side, one has the point of view of the inevitability of the long term disappearance of the peasantry as a social class; the other is the point of view of the resilience of the peasantry. The first point of view is obviously in the continuity of the paradigm of modernization, although apparently it has new accents. It has been shown that both the theory of the incorporation of the peasantry in globalized markets under the aegis of their dominant players, and the "deagrarianisation" thesis, even in its "soft" version, are elaborated in the perspective of the inevitable disappearance of the peasantry. But one has also seen that many facts reveal new peasant practices that attest to the resilience of small farmers, and their adaptability to the constraints of the globalized world. These facts are consistent with the arguments of the current of thought which, since more than a quarter of a century, has attempted to reconstruct a vision of the peasantry as an actor, and not only as object or victim of development.

In a first point below, one will briefly recall this theoretical approach developed without specific reference to the context of South East Asia. In the following section one will emphasize the implications that can be drawn from that theory, to assess the place of a "peasant mode of sustainable development" in general, and in South East Asia in particular. This relates on the one hand to the interaction between the role of family and village communities, on the other hand to the articulation between social and territorial dimensions in a process of sustainable development, and finally on the question of the relationship between local governance and the State.

1 Recent views on the role of the peasantry in development

In a contribution referred to above, A Akram-Lodhi does not hesitate to say that the WDR 2008 is only the most recent attempt to reformulate the theory of modernization as a dominant paradigm of development, reasserting its founding principles, developed already more than half a century ago.¹

The programmed elimination of small farmers, under the guise of modernization policies to reduce rural poverty, has resulted along half a century in different stages of deepening pauperization of small farmers. Each new stage opens the way to a new strategy of "fighting poverty". Agricultural modernization, elimination of the small farmers, and the fight against poverty are therefore today, as yesterday, coextensive dimensions of the strategies of the dominant players of the accumulation of capital at the national and global levels. For half a century the reading of development proposed by modernization, this always been to present poverty as a "lack", a deficiency, which can be measured in a monetary way. The result of this discourse is to reduce to a simplistic imagery of poverty all the popular layers, peasantry and petty urban producers alike, those who the historian F.Braudel analyses, called: "the actors at the bottom"².

Despite their claim to originality, the discourses on poverty of the years 1990 and 2000 are the continuation of the same approach. More that never the "poor's" are seen as to be freed from their "culture of dependency"; including their dependency upon State support, and be transformed into entrepreneurs and consumers, through the promotion of "a new economic mentality", which will allow them to improve their standard of living³.

This approach argues to be in line with A.Sen vision according to which poverty is a situation of lack of freedom, and the poor's lack capacity to define and fulfill their own interests. Therefore, one has to help them develop such a capacity. Insofar as that vision of liberty, is centered on the individual acquisition capacities, it has become a sort of

¹ AKRAM-LODHI A., (Re) imagining Agrarian Relations? The World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development, Development and Change 39 (6): p.1145-1161

² VERSCHAEVE F.X, Libres leçons de Braudel, Syros, Paris, 1994; Braudel F., La dynamique du capitalisme, Arthaud, Paris, 1985

³ SALMEN I., Reducing Poverty: an Institutional Perspective, in Poverty and Social Policy Series 23, 1, World Bank, Washington, 1992

ethical basis of the neo-liberal vision of poverty: poor people have to be liberated from poverty in order to be able to enter modernization⁴.

Besides the discourse on poverty, the recent evolution of the concepts of participation, "empowerment", civil society, have also been presented as a contribution to free people from oppression and poverty, and improve the capacities of rural poor's to enter modernization. These dominant languages of development have multiplied all these many positive views of the future for peasants and village dwellers. But they can not hide anymore the harsh realities of the ongoing process of "real rural modernization" denying to the peasantry the possibility to be something else than an object of "modernization policies". But despite its prevalence as the reference for consensus in the discourses and policies formulated by the dominant actors of the global accumulation process, the modernization paradigm has lost the hegemony and even the legitimacy it had enjoyed for half a century since WWII. Since the years 1980-1990, many analysts of rural development have rediscovered the vitality and creativity of the peasant societies, their infinite ability to survive and adapt to all sorts of environmental and institutional constraints, to maintain the conditions of reproduction of the whole family and village, or even in many cases to improve their often precarious living conditions. Gradually one has rediscovered the management rationality of peasant holdings, their openness to the market, their ability to innovate and to intensify the production by original modes of management of local eco-systems.⁵

This new look is the opposite of the still dominant belief that only policies of radical modernization of agriculture would be the solution to all the problems of the so-called "backwardness" of the rural world, and that an accelerated promotion of "the farmer modernization model" has to be the only path of agrarian development. For that new approach, diversification in the heart of the strategic behavior of the peasantry⁶.

This diversification is of course not the one advocated by the WDR 2008. For this last , diversification means producing more to fit in the value-added chain controlled by the multinational foodstuffs companies or major distribution chains. Diversification is therefore synonymous with dependence on the dominant actors of global accumulation. Instead the peasant diversification strategy aims to ensure security in the maintenance of autonomy. It is based on flexibility in a long-term perspective which aims to ensure both welfare and the secure reproduction of the peasant family. The emphasis on flexibility

⁴ SEN A. Development as freedom. New York: Random House, 1999. NUSSBAUM M. Women and human development: the capabilities approach, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.

⁵ RICHARDS P., Indigenous Agricultural Revolution: Ecology and Food Production in West Africa, Hutchinson, London, 1985. Brokensha, d., Warren M., & Werner o., eds., Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Development, University Press of America, Washington, 1980; BROOKFIELD h. & c. PADOCH, "Appreciating Agrodiversity: A Look at the Dynamism and Diversity of Indigenous Farming Practices", Environment, 36,5,1994, pp. 6-11, 37-43

⁶ BERRY S., Rural Class Formation in West Africa, in Bates and Lofchie W.F., eds., Agricultural Development in Africa. Issues of Public Policy, Praeger, New York, 1980

means that the peasant idea of development is not exclusively focused on the preservation of a minimum income nor alternatively on the sole pursuit of maximum profit⁷.

It is a holistic approach to development where peasants seek both to minimize their risk and expand their activity opportunities. At the economic level this leads to a preference for the polyculture instead of specialization in a single culture, an orientation to a diversified structure of working time, including seasonal migrations; the marketing of ancient cultures, the implementation of a sector of artisanal activities, etc⁸.

Peasant culture includes both resistance to the subordination and relative egalitarianism. These two elements are crucial to maintain the community and the system of collective security that it may provide.⁹

It is in that perspective that one can understand the sustainability of peasant practices concerning as well relations to the land, the security of tenures, environmental considerations, than socio-cultural relations and village institutions around which the peasant life is built. Stronger integration in the market is also accompanied by a stronger demand for security in face of the new risks. The insertion in the market is governed in the invention of new networks of sociability with multiple dimensions, combining both solidarity, clientelism, competition and new associative forms. Peasant development practices are therefore not retrograde or static, but they accept and even seek change, when it is in harmony with the search of an improvement to meet human needs and aspirations" ¹⁰

Peasant knowledge must therefore be taken in consideration in the sustainable development concerns, and one cannot ignore the potential of the contribution of a "peasant way of development"¹¹.

The peasant logic can integrate technical progress; but this technical progress will be another type than the one imposed through the farmer model of modernization¹².

This new insight on the peasantry, patiently built through thousands of field researches in the last quarter of the XX century, has finally begun to have a sort of official recognition, in a publication strangely co-edited by the same multilateral organizations which, during that same quarter of a century, led to the implementation of policies totally contradicting

⁷ DUFUMIER M., Les organismes génétiquement modifiés (OGM) peuvent-ils nourrir le Tiers-Monde? Actes du Festival International de Géographie, Saint Dié, 2004

⁸ BERRY S., No condition is Permanent: the Social Dynamics of Agrarian Change in Sub-Saharan Africa, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1993

⁹ ANDERSON L.E., The Political Ecology of the Modern Peasant, Calculation and Community, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1994

¹⁰ AKPOKAVIE C., The Intervention of International Organizations in Food Policies in Sub-Saharan Africa: a Case Study of Ghana, CIACO, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1996

¹¹ SANDERSON S., Poverty and conservation: the new century's 'peasant question?'. World Development 33, p.323–32, 2005

¹² SHEPHERD C., From In Vitro to In Situ: On the Precarious Extension of Agricultural Science in the Indigenous "Third World", *Social Studies of Science*, 2006, 36, 3, p.399–426.

the results of this research. The IAASTD report was published in 2009 under the aegis of FAO, UNEP and The World Bank. Directed by a team of four hundred researchers from different disciplines, it has called into question, in many chapters, the dominant orthodoxy in agricultural and rural development, including the vision proposed by the WDR 2008!¹³

The IAASTD report recognizes the importance of "traditional and local knowledge, based on the practices and knowledge of "local communities" to implement sustainable agricultural practices, protection of biodiversity, and find a way out of poverty. Instead of simply locating agriculture in a globalised value chain, it gives a central place to the role that agriculture can play to contribute to the improvement of living conditions of local populations. The report clearly states that the implementation of poverty alleviation and sustainable agriculture targets, requires the recognition of the multifunctional role of agriculture and the plurality of actors in it; in sharp contrast with conventional agricultural modernization policies. The report states clearly that a multifunctional approach means that agriculture can produce marketable products, but also non-tradable products, such as the conservation of the natural environment, the production of landscapes with a use value for the local identity, and many components of cultural heritage. The problems of agricultural sustainability require therefore a multidisciplinary approach. The recognition of local peasant knowledge is seen as an important element to improve production and productivity. The recognition of local specific contexts have to play a central role, with regard to the improvement of soils, water resources management, the fight against pre - and post harvest ravages, diversification of production in the respect of the biodiversity, etc. Local markets must be consolidated to reduce the costs of transaction for small producers and ensure them a greater share of the value created. Despised since the very moment of its publication by the lobbies of the agribusiness, this report has almost no possibility to see its recommendations implemented. But that publication itself demonstrates simply that international organizations concerned with rural development, are now forced to recognize that another view of rural development, scientifically based, is possible, even if all their practical choices continue to deny the conclusions of the report.

In addition to that new theoretical discourse on the place of the peasantry in development, a very important fact since the end of the 1990s has been the emergence of a new international peasant movement, aspiring to become a global player. This movement, la Via Campesina, want to be the representative of small and landless peasants, medium farmers, rural women, and youth, farm workers and of indigenous peoples¹⁴.

The movement, which in 2010, represented more than 60 organizations from Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America, present itself as autonomous, pluralist, multicultural, and politically independent. These organizations meet regularly in international conferences. The main objective of Via Campesina is to develop solidarity and unity

¹³ McINTYRE B. D. , et al., IAASTD, International Assessment of Agricultural knowledge, Science and Technology for Development: Global report ., IAASTD, Island Press, Washington ,2009

¹⁴ DESMANAIS A., « Via Campesina: consolidation d'un mouvement paysan international », in Via Campesina, , Une alternative paysanne à la mondialisation néo-libérale, CETIM, Genève , 2002, p.71-136

among its components to promote justice, the preservation of natural resources and their access to small producers, ecologically sustainable agricultural production and food sovereignty. Food sovereignty has been defined in the "Declaration of Nyeleni", in February 2007, as the right of peoples to organize in first instance agricultural according to the needs of local communities, through the mobilization of local resources. It involves protection of plant and animal species, and the protection of the domestic market against imports of agricultural foreign surplus at dumping prices. Food sovereignty must have priority over trade policy. Local communities must have the means to support family agriculture, which has to be the basis of the agricultural system. They must have the power to control the various components of the food chain, from production to marketing, so that peasant agriculture is not dispossessed of the benefits of his work, as it is the case in the vertical control of the food chain by large agri-business firms. Sustainable agricultural production must not be defined exclusively in ecological and economic criteria, but must ensure the maintenance of long-term local traditions and cultures, social cohesion and a lifestyle with quality. The principles of the movement have been consolidated and proclaimed in the "Charter of the Peasants Rights ", at a Conference held in Jakarta in 2008 ¹⁵.

The statement begins with a critical assessment of the situation of the peasantry in the world, highlighting what it calls violations of the peasants rights of in many countries. Land grabbing is the first grievance. Peasants land is expropriated to be assigned to projects of industrial plantations, manufacturing industries, real-estate speculation or tourism facilities. Huge projects of agrifuels, implemented by companies, often foreign, occupy a central place in the new waves of land grabbing .The expropriation of tens of millions of hectares of land belonging to peasant communities, pose to them a deadly threat. States are complicit in these expropriations, and often take the initiative, with the pretext to allow investments promoting export growth. Peasant resistance to these expropriations are confronted with new forms of violence on the part of the enterprises concerned, with the murder of peasant leaders by private militias. The States, instead of protecting the peasantry, participate in repression and criminalize various forms of resistance, in arresting, jailing and condemning to heavy sentences militant farmers. However, keeping access to land is an absolute priority for peasant communities, because the loss of land means the loss of identity and autonomy.

After this preamble, the Declaration proceeds forcefully with a long and impressive list of the peasant rights , which does clearly present an alternative view of the peasantry as an actor of development. The holders of these rights are all those who cultivate land with family labor, or through small scale organizations. The peasant families are rooted in local communities, and they take care of the conservation of local eco-systems and the quality of landscapes. As a result farmers must have the right to own land, individually or collectively, to ensure their livelihood, and have a priority to public lands access. Local communities must have the right to manage all natural resources, including irrigation systems, water, and forests. They cannot be crowded out of their ancestral lands for purely economic reasons.

¹⁵ Declaration the Peasants Rights ,proclaimed at the Via Campesina Jakarta conference , organized in June 2008.

The Declaration insists on the rights of farming communities to maintain and develop their collective knowledge acquired through their historical management of nature and local environment. This concerns the varieties of plants and seeds, the methods of culture, farming, fishing, forest management , the right to exchange seeds and knowledge between farmers, even free of charge,. It is also the right to refuse the methods of industrial agriculture, implemented solely by the productivity and the profit motive, without worrying about the long-term impact on biodiversity, health and the quality of social life. The right of local communities to protect and preserve the resources of biodiversity is proclaimed with force. They should refuse the recognition of patents that threaten the control of communities upon local genetic resources. Local communities cannot be forced to recognize the certification mechanisms established by multinationals, or external intellectual property rights upon products and knowledge developed by local practices. Finally the Declaration calls on States to protect the peasants rights, support them, including the improvement of conditions of production and marketing to the benefit of peasant communities. The declaration has also appealed to States to respect the peasant culture, recognize the originality of its moral and spiritual values , of its knowledge and its institutions, to protect its cultural and organizational heritage, and take concrete steps to prevent its destruction.

There are therefore new approaches to the realities of rural development, both at the theoretical level than practice. They have great relevance for countries which at the beginning of the 21st century, yet have a strong and large peasantry constituting even the majority of the population. It is the multidimensional character of peasant practices which allows to highlight the link between them and what may be called the production of the "rural territory". These practices are indeed linked with all the features of village life: management of natural resources (agriculture, livestock, fisheries, forest, pasture), production, marketing, crafts, the improvement of the supply of water and habitat, savings and credit, services (shops and village pharmacies, grain storage facilities, village health houses , mills). But they are also linked with the production of the social link through a combination of ties of interdependence, and strategies of collective security (associations, groups, tontines, pre-cooperatives, mutual funds, etc.) In peasant practices, the mobilization of savings is often made through associative modes that combine economic initiative with the consolidation of social links. They often materialize the reinvention of new links of solidarity in a context of great uncertainty. These links of solidarity are between partners who identify themselves as equal partners of a same association based on criteria of trust and proximity (neighborhood, belonging to the same area, ethnic or religious groups)¹⁶.

To recognize the experience, the needs, expectations and potential of old and new social structures (village assemblies, women's associations, youth groups) is important to substitute a quasi-contractual relationship to an authoritarian relationship that was and is still the basis of all modernization strategies proposed or imposed from the outside. To take account of the peasantry as development player , requires to take into consideration

¹⁶ PEEMANS J.Ph. , Gouvernance locale, secteur informel et pratiques populaires de développement, in Kioni Kiabantu,ed., La république démocratique du Congo face aux défis du 21ème siècle, Academia Bruylant, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1999

the many networks, which are inserted, in one way or another, in a historical continuity linking urban and rural living spaces. The rural and urban popular vision of space, never corresponded to the modernization imaginary, separating the "traditional countryside" from the "modern city".. Migrant peasants-workers shuttle between the site of the family rural production, the urban informal sector or large agro-industrial farms. Producers activity is thus linked to different geographical sites,: they are both in the urban and rural world, in the "developed" and the "underdeveloped" spaces , and their identity is made up of a set of references that refer to these different locations¹⁷.

For generations, the peasants and urban popular worlds were connected by invisible myriad of networks of exchange. Today these networks are globalized , through human, economic and monetary flows linking often remote villages to various national and foreign. urban centers. That means that peasants as well as popular economy actors are accustomed since centuries, to live in heterogeneous spaces , where the popular practice of construction and reconstruction of mini-territories are implemented through diverse types of struggle and resistance. The relations city-countryside are much more complex and contradictory than the normative readings of modernization and globalization would suggest. However this new complexity does not remove the role of the rural "territory" as a component of the peasant identity. The rural territory of peasants-migrant remains the place which can integrate the various components of well-being supported or enriched by revenues from the migration. It is a fortiori true for those whose life in the village is the base of their activity, and who play often the role of "keepers of the collective heritage" for those who "move".

2. The question of the interaction between family farms and village communities

One has seen that there is sufficient evidence to consider the future of the peasantry of South - East Asia, not as "a species being endangered", but as a collective actor inseparable from the issue of sustainable development. The peasantry can no longer be reduced to a simplistic classification or a homogeneous social category. The peasant world is a very differentiated world , composite and hybrid, whose rural and urban dimensions are closely interconnected.

However the rural anchoring of the peasantry remains the central dimension of its place as social actor for the future. A strategy of sustainable development, should give particular attention to the potential offered by a "peasant way of sustainable development". This means going out of the individualistic approach that has been at the heart of the farm modernization strategies for more than half a century, and which is still present in the so-called "poverty reduction" strategies, and in those aimed at integrating small farmers in "value chains" dominated by the major operators of the agro-food sector.

¹⁷ KEARNEY M., *Reconceptualizing the Peasantry, Anthropology in Global Perspective*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1996,ch.5

The economic and social base of the overwhelming majority of small farmers is the family farm, but at the same time it is inseparable from the general situation in the villages, which are historical collective actors. Recent studies at the level of villages in a large number of countries show that there are many village institutions that are still well alive. Peasant communities have reinvented or created in the last quarter century thousands of associations directed towards the improvement of the well-being of the community. These peasant associative and community initiatives play an important role to ensure collective security through changes affecting the village life. Their common vision of local development is the search for integration between the technical, economic, social and environmental activities. Very often this is linked with attempts to renew the achievements of collective knowledge, inherited from the past, in the control of local eco-systems to improve local living conditions. Recent studies have shown that taking account of soil quality empirical knowledge of a peasant community, can ensure better results than a pure scientific and undifferentiated approach of the same local soils¹⁸.

A very interesting case of maintenance and renewal of collective farm practices concerns the exchanges of improved seeds. These practices are very old, in Southeast Asia, as in other regions of the world... Within the villages, peasants were used to share between themselves the seeds that they had improved during long years of "trying and learning" on their farms. These exchanges are off-market and based on links of reciprocity. They allow both to consolidate the latter, and collectively improve the knowledge and the level of quality and productivity of the plant species concerned. A recent evolution is that these peasant practices of selection, are now based on new varieties of seeds provided by agro-industry, or public agronomic stations. They are also done by crossing old varieties with new varieties from trade and agro-industry adapted for use with new inputs of industrial origin (case of maize in East Java). Peasants often recognize the benefits of these varieties for their resistance or performance, but regret often the special qualities of some old varieties, including flavor. In Viet Nam these informal collective practices have allowed to maintain the qualities of particular kinds of rice flavor especially appreciated by consumers (Tai Nguyen rice variety of the Mekong delta) In the Philippines, the PSB (Philippines Seeds Board) has recognized several seed varieties developed by the peasant practices from strains from IRRI.

In Viet Nam and the Philippines, more formal innovation associations (like Pedigrea), have developed to systematically improve the seed qualities through the creation of hybrids of old and new seeds. These practices illustrate the collective creativity of the farmers through the renovation of former reciprocity practices, adapting them to new constraints and new potential from external resources. Of course the consolidation of these practices, which can be at the heart of a "peasant mode of sustainable development" are faced with the opposition of the firms wanting to maintain their monopoly on the supply of industrial seeds, and seeking to extend the respect of their patents to the prohibition of these practices. These peasant collective practices cannot therefore survive

¹⁸ SALEQUE M. A. and UDDIN M. K. and al., Use of Farmers' Empirical Knowledge to Delineate Soil Fertility-Management Zones and Improved Nutrient-Management for Lowland Rice, Communications in Soil Science and Plant Analysis, 39,p. 25-45, 2008

without protection and institutional support appropriate to each context, and without the recognition of their intellectual property rights¹⁹

It must however be noted that often the peasant collective initiatives are facing external stakeholders that do not recognize their potential for sustainable development adapted to the local context. External interventions are often in contradiction with local initiatives seeking complementarities and integration between themselves.. These peasant initiatives are weakened by external interventions relying on the contrary upon the privatization of resources, the specialization of the production value chain, marketing and credit systems, and forms of management in the hands of local and foreign experts. Most of the time, these external interventions cause extreme forms of social differentiation and polarization that weaken the existing village communities and their local bargaining power. In the name of the fight against poverty, in fact they pave the way for new forms of "modernized impoverishment". Taking account of a "peasant way of sustainable development" requires therefore to abandon the various types of authoritarian modernization projects imposed externally (often disguised under a participatory rhetoric), and recognize seriously the potential of community structures and associative local initiatives (peasant associations, village meetings, women's association, youth association, etc)

3. The question of the link between territorial and social dimensions in a process of sustainable development

The point of departure for a reflection on sustainable development is to escape the confusion between modernization, growth and development. It must propose a more demanding and more open vision of development, than the success of growth. Taking in consideration the territorial dimension can help to expand the vision of development. With a territorial approach to development one can say that: "development is the process of mobilization and use of resources of a territory, through which, the people of this territory sets, within an institutional framework appropriate to the latter, his relationship with nature and his way of life, constantly improving its social system and its well-being, and building his own identity that has a material base in the construction of the territory"²⁰

¹⁹ SALAZAR R. LOUWAARS N. et VISSER B., Protecting Farmers' New Varieties: New Approaches to Rights on Collective Innovations in Plant Genetic Resources, World Development Vol. 35, No. 9, p. 1515–1528, 2007

²⁰ PEEMANS J.Ph., Le développement des peuples face à la modernisation du monde, Louvain-la-Neuve, Paris, Academia-Bruylant, L'Harmattan, 2002, p.457

A sustainable mode of development is based on the recognition of the diversity of urban and rural territories and their patrimonies inherited from their long history. This recognition of diversity contrasts with the tendency to homogenization of spaces related exclusively to the standards of globalized growth. A sustainable mode of development is part of an ongoing process of construction of the conditions of a high quality of life for the entire population, including the needs of security of the latter, in their material and spiritual components. An integrated sustainable development strategy has to include the question of a balanced relations between the countryside and the cities and the quality of life in the urban, peri-urban and rural territories, including the many issues of the food chain, mobility, health and habitat²¹

This development approach, besides its normative aspect, highlights the conflicting nature of initiatives and demands around a territory.: either the territory is seen as a deposit of human and material resources to mobilize in an optimal way to foster growth and accumulation, either the territory is seen as a place to live, in which resources must aim primarily to build the framework for "a good life", security and the dignity of all. Therefore this approach can help to analyze in a relevant way real development processes and issues of conflict between actors and players who compete for the control of a territory. However, it should be noted that this concept of territorial development is far from the one which prevails among the ruling elites in South East Asia. For half a century, one of the main concerns of State powers in the region, has been to ensure the extension of the "national territory", through the strengthening of control of the central regions on marginal areas, be it in the name of the fight against subversion, of economic modernization or even recently, of the protection of environment²².

In recent decades, the "community development" rhetoric was often used, as a proxy for "territorial development", particularly in the Philippines, to strengthen the control of the State on local communities.²³

In addition, it is clear that the South East Asian ruling elites are currently totally addicted to a vision of development based solely upon outward oriented growth and urban "poles of growth" supposed to be the engine and center of capital accumulation. The countryside is seen only as an instrument of this policy. Their main concern is to ensure an adequate mobilization of their human and material resources to ensure the viability of the urban poles of growth. One can have very serious doubt that such a strategy can ensure the long-term conditions of a sustainable development for the vast majority of the population in the cities and the countryside. Soon or latter, the ruling elites of the region will be obliged to change their mind, and give a more serious attention to a balanced

²¹ PEEMANS J.PH., Acteurs, histoire, territoires et la recherche d'une économie politique d'un développement durable, *Monde en Développement*, n° 150, Juin 2010, p.23-42

²² VANDERGEEST P., & PELUSO N. L.. Territorialization and state power in Thailand. *Theory and Society*, 1995, 24, 385-426

²³ GAULD, R., Maintaining centralized control in community-based forestry: policy construction in the Philippines. *Development and Change*, 2000, 31,p. 229-254; McDERMOTT M. H., Invoking community: indigenous people and ancestral domain in Palawan, the Philippines, in A. Agrawal, & C. Gibson (Eds.), *Communities and the environment: Ethnicity, gender, and the state in community-based conservation*, Rutgers University Press., New Brunswick:,2001,p.32-62

view of territorial development , with an other type of relation between the cities and the countryside. In that perspective, the territorial dimension in the rural areas will have to take account of the role of the peasantry as a real actor of development., and the potentialities of a "peasant way of development" .It is the peasantry , organized at the local level , that gives a meaning to the territorial dimension as a component of sustainable development. Such an approach is in line with the 2008 “Declaration of Peasants Rights”, not inadvertently promulgated precisely in Jakarta, with a very active involvement of SEA peasants organizations;

In this context, a social sector of "associative economy (SSAE) can play a key role in the territorial construction of sustainable development. A SSAE based on the mobilization of local resources for local needs through the consolidation of associations created by local populations, can promote a maximum internalization of the revenues created by various activities in a region A SSAE can provide the appropriate institutional framework to ensure a broad diversification of agricultural production, the processing of agricultural products, marketing and procurement , the promotion of crafts and small rural industries, micro-credit associations, and mutual health services. It may also coordinate initiatives to improve the infrastructures and the conservation of the local ecosystem. All these activities can complement and reinforce each other, to create a "threshold effect" to visibly improve local living conditions²⁴

A SSAE is of course the antidote of a system rooted on the crude exploitation of the peasantry (as often it was the case with the State cooperatives), or its disguised exploitation (as is the case now with the subcontracting systems, or outsourcing to rural workshops). An area of associative economy has nothing to do with the conservative vision of "imagined communities" which is abundant in some literature on participatory development. Such an approach of these communities as an immutable tradition of natural solidarity, has paradoxically reproduced often the clichés of modernization, featuring local communities with a fixed identity based on values radically opposed to change. This vision is patently at odds with the reality in most peasant societies of today..In the case of Southeast Asia, the latter are integrated to the vagaries of the contemporary world, and adapt to it, often in a way that has nothing to do with the supposed virtues of the " natural community"²⁵.

A sector of associative economy can help to strengthen the capacity of coordination, organization and innovation, of actors who have already informal practices of association. This can allow them to deal with the market constraints, in a better bargaining position, to face the powerful actors which in fact control the markets. The institutional framework of a SSAE can prevent it from being transformed into a mere

²⁴ PEEMANS J-P, Etat, marché et enjeux d'un développement rural durable, Conférence francophone sur le renforcement de l'exploitation agricole familiale en Asie du Sud-Est, Vientiane, 16-18 juillet 2001, Fonds International de Coopération Universitaire, AUF ed., 2001, p.55-84

²⁵ AGRAWAL A., & GIBSON C.. Enchantment and disenchantment: the role of community in natural resource conservation, *World Development*, 1999, 27(4),p. 629–650;LI, T. M. . Agrarian differentiation and the limits of natural resource management in upland Southeast Asia, *IDS Bulletin*,2001, 32(4), 88–94.

instrument of accumulation for the benefit of the enrichment of a minority, with at the same time the increase of new forms of poverty²⁶.

The fundamental difference between a SSAE and producers associations promoted by the WDR 2008, is that, for the latter producers associations are merely a tool to promote the competitiveness for the global market, while a real SSAE is an organization that seeks to achieve a better quality of life within a community related to a territory. In that sense a SSAE is a powerful instrument to combine what has been at the heart of the peasant culture for centuries, the search for a human-oriented development and for a "good life", with a participation in a socially embedded and controlled market. Because of its very nature, a SSAE can provide a space, not submitted only to a strategy devoted to growth at any cost, but open to the construction of a sustainable development.

4. The role of the State and "local governance" in the political economy of a "peasant way of sustainable development"

The support of a "peasant mode of sustainable development" requires to attach much importance to the type of "local governance" capable of contributing to this support. There has been, since twenty years a remarkable exuberance of the literature on "participatory community development." It is a literature from diverse origins where the authors (academics, NGOs, international organizations) are engaged in a semantic outburst about the virtues of the so-called "participation at the base". Behind the multiplicity of the discourses, however, there is a large unity in an attempt to legitimize and do make accept external projects by local communities, which most of the time are fed up with "the top down" approach.²⁷

In this context the imported version of "local governance" seeks to define local institutions in a way which is as much functional as possible for overseeing a good "market transition." It is this type of governance that the WDR 2008 encourages to promote the integration of peasant agriculture in agro-food value chains. In counterpoint to that approach, the importance of voluntary and community initiatives of the peasant world itself have to receive attention. They are both in a continuity and a revival of what was a "historical" local governance, through which thousands of local communities have tried for centuries to define the rules of "living in common", to ensure their safety and their viability. The remembrance of historical governance can also be an important tool to give local communities self-confidence, and reinforce the historic link between local development and cultural identity. Otherwise, the loss of self-confidence opens the way for an accelerated destruction of culture and values able to support a sustainable way of local development. The following lucid reflection of K.Polanyi is worthwhile to be quoted in relation with that process: "..it is not economic exploitation, as it is often assumed, but the disintegration of the cultural environment of the victim which is the cause of degradation. The economic process can provide the vehicle of destruction and,

²⁶ LAVILLE J.-L. *Politique de l'association*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2010

²⁷ CRAIG D., PORTER D., *Development Beyond Neoliberalism ? Governance, Poverty Reduction and Political Economy*, London, Routledge, London, 2006

almost invariably, the economic inferiority will make the weak give up, but the immediate cause of its loss is not mainly economic, it is rooted in the deadly wound inflicted to the institutions in which his social life is incarnated “²⁸

An illustration of that point is given by a recent study of the Karen minority villages in the West of Thailand. It has shown that the consumption of non-timber forest products, known by the population for centuries, can deliver a nutrient equivalent to products sold on urban markets. But these original products are systematically downgraded in the dominant Thai culture, to the point that even the local populations begin to doubt their interest. They are thus forced, by a cultural pressure, to enter the consumption of so-called "superior" products, which contribute to their poverty.²⁹

One of the roles of strong local governance is to help communities to enhance their cultural and material heritage. A new local governance based on associative networks inside the local community can play an important role in supporting "a peasant mode of sustainable development". This local governance is a framework that can stimulate synergies between associations of farmers, provide a framework for cooperation between them and the village authorities. It often depends on the conservation and improvement of the productive potential of local ecosystems, creating synergies and complementarities between their various components. In view of the gap between the requirements of long-term sustainability and profitability in the short term, the management of interdependence between these components cannot be left to individual entrepreneurs through the privatization of resources.

There is a large number of field activities that require a collective organization in order to reinforce the potential synergies between them. They include: community agro-forestry projects; valorization of NWFP (non-timber forest products); reforestation operations; the fight against erosion and desertification; the production of biomass for energy; the treatment of plant and animal waste for the production of natural fertilizers; the integration between vegetal, animal and aquaculture products the construction of light irrigation systems; improved seeds production; the improvement of village storage facilities, etc.....

Many of these activities are in fact eco-infrastructure projects that can help improve the security of the conditions of production and the existence of small farmers, and increase sustainable agricultural production without being exclusively dependent on inputs provided by the market operators, fostering a system of uneven exchange, leading to impoverishment of the small farmers. The implementation of these projects can play a big role in sustainable rural development strategies. This involves to give consideration to the peasant heritage in integrated agriculture-livestock systems, well illustrated in Indonesia

²⁸ POLANYI K., *La grande transformation*, Gallimard, Paris, 1983, p. 88

²⁹ DELANG C.O., *The role of wild food plants in poverty alleviation and biodiversity conservation in tropical Countries*, Progress in Development Studies 2006, 6, p. 275-286

Viet Nam experiences, and which are now regarded as a way to consolidate a sustainable rural development³⁰.

Several studies have highlighted the interest of local agro-forestry practices, through diverse forms of forest management which do meet the criteria of sustainable development. These methods of management of the "domestic forest" combine a relationship between agricultural rotations and productive management of certain parts of the forests aiming at the regeneration of the existing forest. This has been the case for many historical agro-forestry systems in Indonesia. These systems were based on historical governance, since they have focused on collective rules of forest access, combined with individual rights of use. Together they ensured social cohesion and permanence between generations.³¹

These studies focus on the link between sustainable reproduction of the forest in the long term and sustainable socio-cultural reproduction of the communities concerned. These elaborate systems of agro-forestry are real "territories of life", and combine the management of the forest resource and the construction of cultural identity and social links between the members of the community³².

In a growing number of cases, this form of governance is threatened by the pressures made on local communities to reconvert to a privative management oriented toward export products controlled by agro-industry. In the case of agro-forestry systems combining the damar (a softwood), food crops (rice and vegetables) and perennial productions (coffee and pepper), in the South of Sumatra, there is a decrease in revenues from the damar, which is at the centre of the agro-system. This evolution encourages some of the producers concerned to cut down these trees when the price offered for their wood is high. However the cultural and symbolic elements attached to the system still ensures its resilience. New trees are planted by young farmers who have an urban employment, and areas based upon the integrated agro-system continues to expand. The legacy of local governance is able therefore to ensure the reproduction of this system, despite unfavorable conditions. But it seems obvious that its future will depend on a clear policy of support by the Indonesian State.³³

Another example illustrating the role of local governance is the implementation of local projects of bio-energy based on the use of fairly hardy plants (jatropha). It also involves strong institutions of local governance to ensure the effects of complementarities between

³⁰ ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK, Building Climate Resilience in the Agriculture Sector in Asia and the Pacific, Manila, 2009, p.179

³¹ MICHON G., H. de FORESTA H., KUSWORO A., and LEVANG P., The Damar agro-forests of Krui, Indonesia: justice for forest farmers. Pages 159-203 in C. Zerner, editor. People, plants and justice: the politics of nature conservation. Columbia University Press, 2000, p.159-203

³² MICHON G., De FORESTA H., LEVANG P. and F. VERDEAUX F., Domestic forests: a new paradigm for integrating local communities' forestry into tropical forest science, Ecology and Society 12(2): 1, 2007

³³ KUSTERS K. et al., Will Agroforests Vanish? The Case of Damar Agroforests in Indonesia, Human Ecology, 2008, 36, p.357-370

the components. These projects can provide not only domestic energy for lighting, cooking, but also for irrigation pumps, fertilizer production, etc³⁴

Biogas production can help also to improve considerably the well being of peasant communities, through animal and plant waste recycling (anaerobic digestion), for the production of energy and other use. It has a visible effect on the environment through the drastic reduction in the firewood consumption it entails.³⁵

These facilities operate optimally at the village level, within a dynamic local governance. This is what has shown the experience of China which has been a pioneer in the sector, and where in 2010, more than 27 million peasant families were related to this type of energy resource. Also in the Chinese experience, it is interesting to note the relationship between the role of the State and the local initiative, since government subsidies cover two thirds of the equipment cost ³⁶..

Strong institutions of local governance can also renew the relationship between local communities and the State, in what may be called a new "Pact" for sustainable development. Charters of local and regional "sustainable development" can be concrete instruments for the construction or reconstruction of local territories. A new legitimacy of the State may be based on its ability to allow the largest possible majority of associations and local communities, to extend the sphere of their social and economic rights. The SSAE mentioned above, can contribute in a particularly positive way to a new relationship between local governance and the State, in order to implement a sustainable development policy.

The role of the State should be to protect these activities by appropriate regulations ensuring their access to the resources needed for their development. Coordination of local associative systems could be made through a very light system of local planning by communes or municipalities, which could become the point of articulation between the State, the public sector and the associative sector. In this way, the three could be mutually reinforcing each other, in the search for a common strategy promoting the sustainable development of the national territory. That means the State authorities would recognize the legitimacy of the local historical governance. However, in most of the countries of the region, the colonial powers and more or less authoritarian powers in recent decades, have weakened or even largely obliterated the historic governance institutions. Moreover the temptation of some "democratized" States is to redefine local institutions in a way they will support only better central State control, despite a extensively use of the participation rhetoric

An example is the KDP (Kecamatan Development Project) in Indonesia, considered being the most important program of this kind in Southeast Asia . Established in 1998, this project is supposed to give the power to the villagers to define of what are their

³⁴ EWING, M. and MSANGI S. , Biofuels production in developing countries: Assessing tradeoffs in welfare and food security. *Environmental Science and Policy*, 2009, 12 (4). pp. 520–528

³⁵ van NES, W. J. , Asia hits the gas: Biogas from anaerobic digestion rolls out across Asia., *Renewable Energy World*, 2006, (January–February). pp. 102–111

³⁶ ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK, op.cit., 2009, p.190

priority development projects. Firstly implemented in 28,000 villages, it has been disseminated by decree in 2006, to 60,000 villages. Accepted projects can receive support from the State ranging from 60,000 to 110,000 dollars. However, in practice, it seems that , in many cases, the assemblies put in place are in fact an instrument of the central authority to better assert its control over local elites, through some form of popular participation. But the local collectivities seem to have a very weak capacity to propose projects reflecting popular demands. According to many recent studies, Indonesia is showing many examples of the ambiguity, or even the duplicity of the State policies in face of the peasant world: on the one hand one has a pervasive assault against the communities historical governance practices, on the other hand the implementation of so-called participatory institutions supposed to restore power to local communities, but in fact under the aegis of an often opaque alliance between State actors and large national or foreign firms, aiming at the control of local resources.³⁷

Another example is the great ambiguity of the CBNRM programs (Community Based Natural Resources Management) implemented in the mountainous regions of several countries. These programs claim to be based on the desire to involve local communities in the management of natural resources, because they are supposed being better able to preserve the local environment and biodiversity, and to ensure the maintenance of the local population security of existence. However, some observers have doubts about the conformity of this discourse with the realities it covers.. It represents local populations as natural communities focused only on the basic subsistence needs, while in fact these populations are often very interested and very able to mobilize the resources of their natural environment to increase their income. Through authoritarian conservationist views, the “traditional communities” designated as such are compelled to management practices, imposed by national bureaucracies and foreign donors, whose programs deny local communities any initiative not corresponding to the clichés of a supposed transition to modernity.³⁸

In the Philippines as in Indonesia, programs supported by NGOs specializing in the conservation of natural resources, have met and meet more and more stiff opposition from local communities , because the foreign sponsored projects are at odds with their ancestral local eco-systems management practices. T.M.Li has shown how the language of participation in fact often covers a will of States to extend their control over communities having maintained some de facto autonomy. Much worse, the environmental concern officially displayed, is manifested especially in areas that have already been completely devastated by wild logging during the years 1980-1990, conducted by large multinational firms. In many cases, the argument of environment protection is a pretext to justify new large projects of biofuels. Local communities are

³⁷ GIBSON C., & WOOLCOCK M., Empowerment, Deliberative Development, and Local-Level Politics in Indonesia: Participatory Projects as a Source of Countervailing Power, *Studies in Comparative International Development* , 2008, 43,p.151–180; GUGGENHEIM SE. Crises and contradictions: explaining a community development project in Indonesia. In: Bebbington A, Guggenheim SE, Olson E, Woolcock M, editors. *The search for empowerment: social capital as idea and practice at the World Bank*. Kumarian Press, Bloomfield , 2006. p.111-144

³⁸ LYNCH O. J., & TALBOTT K. , *Balancing acts: Community-based forest management and national law in Asia and the Pacific*, World Resources Institute, Washington, 1995

forced to accept collaboration with new multinational in this sector, all under the auspices of these so-called CBNRM programs³⁹.

However one cannot reduce the relations between States and local communities only to a heavily distorted power game in which the political authorities are trying to manipulate the local populations to better control or exploit them, in collaboration with the most powerful economic actors. An example of another possible link between State and local communities has been the project of village funds established in Thailand in 2001. The Thai Government has created in 2001 the "Village Fund" system, establishing a public micro-credit system, involving an amount of approximately 30,000 US \$ available to each of the 77,000 villages of the country. The funds made available to the villages in the whole of the country amounted to 1.5% of GDP. The organization of village funds was based on a system of local governance, deliberately supported by the State, since the creation of these funds was a component of the National Act of Village and Community Fund in 2001. The purpose of this Act was to support and stimulate the initiatives of local communities to improve the conditions of production, employment and life in general. This Fund has changed deeply the credit access conditions in rural areas.⁴⁰.

In that system, loans are allocated through a village committee composed of 10 to 15 delegates, elected by the villagers, in meetings where at least 75% of households must be represented. Loans are granted for 1 year and may vary from 500 to 1,500 dollars, at a rate of approximately 6% interest. There is a obvious link between the State and the villages, since in fact the village funds are technically operated by the local offices of the BAAC (Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives), both for the granting of loans and for repayment. However these offices, are supposed not to intervene in the decisions or the control of village funds. Loans are used for consumption or for production purposes. What is important to emphasize is that they are village committees who decide who can benefit from loans, according to local criteria. These credits are not awarded according to international or national technocracies criteria, defining potential beneficiaries through their own typology of poverty. It is at the level of the village that is decided "those who need money" for an emergency, or to undertake a project. Those who request and receive a loan are normal people, "peers not poor's". Through this procedure it is not because there is a lack of money that a villager must be stored in a degrading "poor" category with a lower despicable status, and submitted to a severe "market pedagogy".

Through this institution, the State was recognizing the peasantry as a collective actor, organized at the village level. It is a very different approach than the individual micro-credit programs, controlled by a bank micro-bureaucracy, as in the case of the Granmeen Bank. It is interesting to note that in the villages studied by Menkhoff et Rungruxsirivorn, in the provinces of Buri Ram, Nakhon Phanom and Ubon Ratchatani, 70% of borrowers

³⁹ MURRAY LI T., *Engaging Simplifications: Community-Based Resource Management, Market Processes and State Agendas in Upland Southeast Asia*, World Development, 2002, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 265–283

⁴⁰ MENKHOFF L. and RUNGRUXSIRIVORN O., *Do Village Funds Improve Access to Finance? Evidence from Thailand*, World Development, 2011, Vol. 39, No. 1, p. 110–122

are considered as peasants, 20% as wage workers, and 10% as independent That social structure shows incidentally that the "peasantry" remains the heart of the rural population, and that it wishes to participate actively in the market via the credit. ⁴¹.

The Thailand Village Fund illustrates a situation which is rather at odds with the "deagrarianisation" thesis. It helps to put the real issues of that theory in terms of a "political economy of development". The creation of these funds has been part of a political project, aimed to give a new political base to the regime of Prime Minister Thaksin who came to power in the 1990s. The objective of that billionaire tycoon had clearly some sort of populist overtone. It aimed to mobilize the votes of rural masses through a policy of improvement of infrastructure, health, education, provision of basic rural services. In a certain way, it was a sort of late implementation of a basic needs policy. But it was also in line with the more recent discourses about poverty, including the Millennium Development Goals. This policy received a positive welcome from a large part of the rural world. It has resulted in a inclusion of the peasantry as a stakeholder into the political scene monopolized until then by the intra-elites fractions struggles.. ⁴²

But urban elites reacted very negatively to this evolution, accusing the Thaksin government, not only of populism, but of squandering public funds for purposes contrary to the requirements of growth and competitiveness of the Thai economy. This has led to the coup of 2006, throwing Thaksin out of power , and to a permanent political crisis since that year. The urban elites have been mobilized in more and more radical and violent manners to demand the end of the reforms undertaken by Thaksin. According to Chairat Charoensin-o-larn, because of the latter, the Thai ruling classes have developed a genuine hatred of parliamentary democracy if it leads to strengthen the place of the popular classes in the society. They consider themselves the only ones to represent civil society, while not hesitating to take the streets (occupations of airports by the so called "yellow shirts").⁴³

But the urban elites violent reaction has entailed a parallel mobilization of popular masses, including rural dwellers especially from the so-called "backward areas" from the North East, to defend the reforms and demand the return of the exiled Prime Minister. This led to the occupation of central Bangkok by their movement of "red shirts". The end of this occupation by military force did not end permanently the protest movements that have continued to occur. Thailand has thus entered a state of permanent instability, which even had an impact on its relations with its neighbors .According to many observers, the border conflict with Cambodia has been fostered by elements directly related to the nature of the political crisis in Thailand. These events are not solely relevant as political anecdote. In fact they highlight the emergence of very violent conflicts between the ruling elites and a popular movement , now self confident and

⁴¹ MENKHOFF L. and RUNGRUXSIRIVORN O., op.cit., p.114

⁴² WALKER A., Thailand's Political Peasants: Power in the Modern Rural Economy. The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin , 2012.

⁴³ CHAROENSIN –O-LARN C., THAILAND in 2009, Unusual Politics Becomes Usual, Southeast Asian Affairs 2010, Institute of South East Asian Studies, 2010, p.304-334

organized, that demands its place and the recognition of its interests in the political system. But people's who have spearheaded that movement are in fact the new hybrid popular actors, mentioned here above, composed largely of peasant-workers, circulating between the cities and the countryside. They belong to both worlds, but require that the State do recognize their identity as rural people who maintain a fundamental commitment to land, natural resources and village life. The situation of Thailand probably foreshadows the future evolution of most of the countries of Southeast Asia. It allows to challenge seriously the predictions of the "deagrarianisation" theory. The central issue is not the disappearance of the traditional peasantry. It lies with the reconstruction of the power relations between actors in the political economy of development. The new hybrid peasantry has been transformed into a popular player which can no longer be reduced to the image of a backward peasantry, or a mass of poor's waiting for their incorporation into markets and growth. They are a new unexpected type of development actor, ready to confront old and new economic and social elites.

Conclusions

One has tried here above to show that an approach in terms of political economy of development allows to highlight the major issues of the future of rural development in South East Asia.

A first component of that political economy is the overwhelming influence of the most conventional development theories focused only upon the themes of economic modernization and now globalization. Both phenomena continues at a frantic pace since a quarter of a century. Their impact on South-East Asia rural areas has been and remains quite impressive. In fact these conventional approaches, old and new, are all focused on the visions of a linear progress, based on the universality and the inevitability of some supposed development laws. These laws have become normative principles, justifying policies intended to accelerate, at any social or environmental cost, the pace of modernization. One obvious case is the idea of the inevitability of the alignment of the Southeast Asian food model on the western norms of consumption and production. And that idea does entail of course policies giving priority to the expansion of large firms in the agro-food and retail sectors. The deagrarianisation theory is also a piece of these inevitability discourses. Even if it is presented with new semantics, it is difficult to see anything but a reformulation of the good old theories of dualism or of the agrarian transition, predicting the inevitable disappearance of the peasantry in the universal movement to progress for the ones, to capitalism for the others. Its only novelty is to say that the peasantry itself wants massively to leave agriculture in which there is no more future: peasants have therefore to be "liberated" from agriculture. Recently the "new economic geography" current has advanced the theory that the future belongs to mega-cities of tens of millions of people, connected through multimodal transport and telecommunications networks being the keys to global performance and competitiveness. For this thesis it is therefore important to encourage the concentration of investment in these urban growth poles and not waste or scatter resources in rural areas. This is nothing else than an ultimate version of the "urban bias" often denounced in the years 1970-

1980, which resurface now, in a more radical version where the rural areas are definitively obliterated as a development component.

A second component of the political economy of the rural world is that its realities are much more complex and at odds with many of these predictions about inevitability. It seems a bit too early to bury the Southeast Asian peasantry. The peasants of South East Asia continue to develop ever more diversified and intensive economic activities, agricultural land and village numbers are in expansion, despite the enormous pressures that are exerted from various origins. Moreover the peasant world is a world full of initiatives and innovations that cannot be reduced only to economic dimensions. In the same vein, migration cannot be reduced to the one way interpretation made by the "deagrarization" theory. Migration gives rise to the establishment of new social relationships between the villages and urban working-class neighborhoods, through multiple initiatives of migrants networks. Besides a peasantry that remains essentially focused on agricultural activity, there is the emergence of a "hybrid peasantry", half rural, half urban, contributing to redraw the contours of the village life, and to establish new relationships between cities and countryside. A strong attachment to the land remains common to these various categories of peasants.

A third component of a political economy of the rural world in Southeast Asia is that they are a variety of possible routes for its future. A complete deagrarianisation process or alternatively, a pure "peasant way of development" are not the only ways. Practices and initiatives of the various categories of the peasantry are however indicating that the peasantry, being hybrid or not, has to be recognized as an insuperable actor of a sustainable way of rural development. A major problem for thinking in terms of sustainable rural development is the ancient and persistent refusal of dominant political and economic elites, to take into consideration the diversity of possible routes. Their vision is obliterated by projects wanting to impose the sole path of accelerated modernization, now even restricted to the sole requirements of globalization. This ideological vision most often masks the interests of a minority of powerful actors for which the peasantry and its natural life supports are only instruments to accelerate the trend towards the hegemony of capital accumulation rules. However, a growing number of case studies show this type of reasoning leads to an intractable deadlock, in terms of both social and environmental imbalances and deepening agrarian and urban crises. A reflection on sustainable development cannot only be restricted to some sorts of incantatory discourses. It has to take into account the reality of the existing power relations between the conflicting actors of different paths of wild capital accumulation or sustainable human development.

A fourth point of interest in terms of a political economy of development of the rural world, is that at least it can help to highlight what is at stake in these power relations, well beyond petty political games.. The Thai case is perhaps emblematic of the upcoming changes in the whole of the region. On one side one has a block of very radical and aggressive elites in defense of their privileges and of a way of development centered only on the logic of growth and capital accumulation. For them, clearly the respect for "formal democracy" has no more interest if it does entail to share more equitably the

results of growth. On the other hand, one has the emergence of newly recomposed and vocal popular actors, including various categories of the peasantry. These players require to take their demands into consideration, including their future security in relation to land and access to natural resources. That is the only way to ensure not only their survival, but also the improvement of their living conditions. That would require an evolution toward a "substantive democracy." This point is certainly not at the order of the day for the ruling elites of the region, and certainly not of the Western countries, so eager to promote, at any social cost, a sort of "market democracy". But it will certainly be at the heart of the conflicts and struggles to come. The more or less violent repression, or the more or less peaceful emergence of a space for a "sustainable peasant way of development", will be key components of these conflicts and struggles.

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