Rethinking Localism in Sustainable Development Practice: The Case of Development Monks in Northeast Thailand

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Abstract

This research, based on fieldwork conducted Northeast Thailand with development monks and their lay collaborators, examines the contrasting practices and ideologies of Pra S in Loei province - who is working with villagers to oppose the construction of a nearby goldmine - and Pra Potiwirakun in Roi Et province - who, in a addition to turning his temple into a community center and ICT training facility, is a key player in the creation and maintenance of networks of development monks and outside actors. I discuss the ideological differences underpinning their sustainable development practices, which I refer to, respectively, as *neolocalism* and *networked localism*.

Keywords: Buddhism, Ideology, Development Monks, Development, Community Development, Sustainable Development,Alternative Development, Community, Locality,Non-locality,Extra-locality, Localism,Neolocalism,Networked Localism, Localization, Globalization, Glocalization, Place, Non-place, Networked Place, Supermodernity, Northeast Thailand, Indigenous Knowledge, Identity

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The phenomenon of 'development monks' [*prasong nak pattana* or *pra nak pattana*] arose in Thailand the late 1960's and early 1970's to contest specific government policies aimed at the centralization Thai development practices [2]. These monks saw aspects of this top-down, market-driven development(such as the valorization of material wealth) as ideologically opposed to Buddhist teachings and, thus, leading to environmental degradation and economic unsustainability [3],[4].They, thus, began advocacy for and practice of what they considered to be more Buddhist forms of development. These practices have often taken the forms of tree ordinations, rice and buffalo banks, the creation of local currency, and so on. The movement has since gained momentum, garnering the support of NGOs, lay activists and, in some cases, government entities. In my experience, I have found that people (monks and lay actors) have come to use the term 'development monk' to refer to monks who engage in a wide range of activities. These definitions also tend to vary widely and are often contradictory. I follow Lapthananon's definition as monks who "regularly engage in development activity with villagers or the community in a way that effects their living conditions or way of life"[11] (translation mine)

Development monks play a key role in shaping the sustainable/alternative development [12] discourse in northeast Thailand. I argue that understanding how glocalization is manifest on the ground (both as ideology and as lived practice) by these monks can offer key insight into the shape of local sustainable development in northeast Thailand. I use the term 'glocalization' here to mean, as Roberts phrases it, "the simultaneity and interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local" [13]. The glocalization practices of the development monks in this paper are twofold. First, they consist of making the local legible at the level of the extraloca - that is, they aid in the translation of local circumstances, practices and ideologies so as to be comprehensible to extralocal entities (globalizing the local). Secondly, these practices allow local entities access to extralocal knowledge and resources (localizing the global). I characterize these glocalizing practices as manifestations of 'localism,' as they are executed with the intention of protecting or reclaiming the relevance, power, and/or autonomy of the local within the context of globalization.

I will analyze these processes through the ideologies and practices of two development monks. The first is Pra S, who is involved in an anti-mining campaign in Leoi Province. The second, Pra Potwirakun from Roi Et Province, has turned his temple into a community center and ICT training facility. He is also a key player in the creation and maintenance of regional and national networks of development monks, NGOs, lay activists and government agencies. I argue that the differing ways in which glocalization is manifest in their practices stems from an ideological divide. The activism practiced by Pra S is rooted in the

framework of neolocalism, which seeks to undo the delocalization that has occured in the past 50 years and reestablish the more locally-centered models and practices of the past. He, thus, works to make the local legible at the extralocal level and vice versa only insofar as legibility gives local actors the power to stave off encroaching centralization. He is, thus, reluctant to collaborate or directly interact with exteralocal actors or entities, as he understands his role to be that of an 'advisor' to the villagers. Pra Potiwirakun, on the other hand practices what I call 'networked localism,' which attempts to reappropriate the symbols and technologies of modernization and globalization in order to reassert the role of locality within this new context. He works directly with outside institutions and actors, acting as a facilitator of extralocal legibility, 'translating' the villagers' needs in order to mobilize outside support. He also works training villagers and providing them with material access to the technological and economic resources that are the products of globalization.

1.2 Monks Profiled:

Pra S.

Pra S is the abbot at B *wat* [temple] in Loei Province. He was originally ordained in Nakhon Sawan Province in the northern region of Thailand. After that, he set out on a pilgrimage, looking for a peaceful environment in which to continue his practice. He stayed for a time in Phitsanulok and Tak Province, but eventually heard about a small rural village (P Village) in Loei Province whose *wat* was abandoned (B *wat*). He has now been the abbot at B *wat* for almost 13 years. Although he has engaged in more traditional alternative development practices (community rice banks, etc) in the past, for the past six years, he has focused on opposing construction of a gold mine near the village.

In 2004 Tungkum, Ltd. (TKL) finished construction of a gold mine in the L Mountains near P Village. According to a report by the Peace and Human Rights Center of Northeast Thailand (PHRC), within two years of the gold mine's construction the villagers in the area began to experience severe health problems. Subsequent blood tests found that of 279 villagers tested, 34 had dangerously high levels of cyanide in their bloodstreams. Subsequent tests were conducted, but the results have not been publicly released.

However, the government issued a statement warning villagers not to drink water from local sources or use it for food preparation. The same year, TKL announced its intention to construct a second mine in the same vicinity. In response 1,000 people from seven nearby villages formed the protest group, *Grum kon rak ban gud* (People Who Conserve their Hometown) [15]. Since its inception, the group has been working to oppose the construction of the new mine by organizing protests, staging sit-ins at government buildings to prevent the TDK corporation from completing the required environmental scoping process and barricading roads so as not to allow trucks to pass through. Their latest endeavor has been to draft a law that would prohibit heavy trucks from the using local roads, making it effectively impossible for gold removed from the mines to be transported out of the area.

Since this movement's inception, Pra S has acted as primary advisor to the villagers opposing the mine. According to group leaders, they meet with Pra S on a daily basis to discuss strategy and develop concrete plans of action. However, he prefers to remain anonymous, working in the background and allowing the villagers to be the face of the movement.

Pra Potiwirakun

Pra Potiwirakun was ordained in 1989 in his home village of Ban Po Noi in the northeast province of Roi Et at Wat Potigaram, where he continues to practice today. Seeing the poverty in his village and the outmigration of the youth that was taking place, he felt obligated to contribute to the development of the area. In 1995, he began a program helping villagers to find work within the community. He began by opening a training facility in the *wat* to teach typing, computer operation, sewing, and other marketable skills he saw them as lacking. In 1999 he began a program to train villagers in the basics of Information and Communication Technology [ICT] (using the internet, sending email, etc.). This program has continued to expand, and in 2007 he collaborated with the Thai Ministry of Information and Communication Technology to open an ICT center in his temple. Since then, he has worked with monks in other villages, helping them open similar computer training centers in other temples in the area. His temple community center has expanded to include a co-op convenience store, a community bank, a healthcare facility, and a classroom for teaching weekend classes to local school children (at which I participated as guest English teacher on several occasions). He has also established a system through which villagers can receive

supplemental income by making small dolls and key chains, which are sold internationally.

Pra Potiwirakun describes his role as a monk in development activism as being a facilitator. He says that monks have the ability to work at every level of society, and thus, are in an ideal position to create networks through which people, knowledge and resources can be mobilized. Accordingly, he is intimately involved in the creation and maintenance of networks among villagers, government officials, lay activists and volunteers, and other development monks. He is also active in recording his activities and promoting them via social media sites like Facebook and YouTube. All of this, he says, allows for strategic collaboration on projects and ideas. It also is way for activists or potential activists in other villages to see what his village is doing and possibly implement similar projects in ways that best suit their specific needs.

2. Aims

2.1 To study the role of Buddhist monks in sustainable development practices in northeast Thailand.

2.2 To study how so-called 'development monks' who locate their practice in differing forms of localist ideology contribute to the process of glocalization in the region.

3. Theory, concept of the research and related findings

3.1 Localism in Thai Development Discourse The establishment of Thailand's First National Economic and Social Development Plan in the early 1960s saw the centralization and unification of development practices throughout the country. Since then, there has been a groundswell of NGOs and other activists advocating for the re- localization of these practices. This movement reached its peak with the "Community Culture" [*wattanatam chumchom*] movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s [17][18], which, in addition to advocating for development rooted in local identity, was an attempt to ascertain and codify exactly what constituted 'identity' and 'locality' [19]. The ideology behind this push is generally referred to as "localism," as it sees as desirable development goals and methods tailored to the specific needs and identities of those who are the target of the practices [20][21]. However, Parnwell uses the term *neolocalism* to describe the particular form of localism practiced by development monks, NGOs and other alternative development activists

in Northeast Thailand, which he refers to as a "'back to the future' perspective"[22]. This is because, as he states, many of the referent elements upon which the movement is based have their roots in situations, practices, and moral codes that prevailed (sometimes more imagined than real) in the past, which both local and external activists are seeking to rekindle and remodel" [23].

I will use this term here, then, to refer to the type of localism that seeks specifically to undo the delocalization that has been taking place for the past 50 years and return to the state its proponents see as existing prior to it.

Many of the development monks and lay activists with whom I spoke expressed a decidedly neolocalist point of view. When I asked the former head of NGO-COD (NGO Coordinating Committee on Development - a prominent umbrella organization that links NGOs working in alternative development throughout the country) about his goals for development in Northeast Thailand, he said that it was necessary to return rural Thailand to its previous state – before the government-led development push was instated. He spoke of the time prior to this period as being one of self-sufficiency and one in which villagers' lives were guided by Buddhist values. He contrasted this with the rampant consumerism that was brought about by Western development models and that characterizes the cultural landscape in rural Thailand today [24]. Pra S. mirrors this sentiment though he refuses to speak in terms of the interaction of broad movements and ideologies. Instead he focuses on (his memory of) lived experience and his line of sight rarely traverses village borders.

In the Past, the villagers were poor. They didn't buy anything except for *nambpla* [a kind of fish sauce] and salt. They grew their own vegetables. Their houses were bamboo. The roads were dirt… living here was physically exhausting, but blissful" [26].

He compared this with life as the village developed, in which he said people were more materially wealthy, but unhappy. The cars, paved roads, and store-bought food came with deleterious economic and environmental consequences. The villagers were in debt, they were no longer self-sufficient, and the forests around them were being destroyed as, increasingly, investors came to buy up the land and exploit its resources.

Neolocalism is at its core a form of resistance and, as such, it is inherently negative. Its goals are defined by what it regards as problematic about the scaling up and centralization of rural

development. Practitioners, thus, work to essentially turn back the clock to an era remembered through the refutation of present circumstances. After the economic crisis in 1997, this view experienced resurgence. Taylor writes that globalization "in some sense became a much feared word, one that challenges the bases of local values and culture" [27].

Although the neolocalism that Parnwell describes is a prevalent ideology among development activists in Thailand today, it fails to tell the entire story. There is another strain of localism (what I call networked localism) that is becoming increasingly prominent - especially among the younger generation of development monks in the northeast provinces which does not strive for the restoration of a prior state of localization, but instead, sees the tools of globalized society as a conduit through which localist values can be realized in new ways. In order to understand these ideologies in detail and how they are manifest in practice, I will explain below the key concepts of 'locality,' 'non-locality,' 'extra-locality,' and 'community' and how they relate to the anthropological notions of *place*, *non-place*, and *networked place*.

3.2 Place, Locality, Community

Central to alternative development ideology as practiced by these development monks are the concepts of locality and community. Locality as an anthropological notion has been defined and interpreted in various ways. Contemporary definitions often follow Appadurai's description of it as being "primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or spatial" [28]. According to this view, locality is not necessarily tied to a particular physical space, but "constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity and the relativity of contexts" [29]. This definition is useful in describing the emergence of virtual communities and the loosening of spatial moorings that has accompanied advances in technologies that have allowed for of travel and communication over increasing distances. However, it does not accurately reflect the term as it is used and understood by either the development monks I encountered in the field or lay actors with whom they were involved. The word that I translate as "locality" [*tong tin*] is an abstraction that is centered upon and defined in relation to a *place*. *Place* is defined by Auge as a space that is "relational, historical and concerned with identity"[30]. Locality in this context implies small

scale, tradition and ancestral history and was often described to me in terms of beliefs and practices left over from an undefined past. Development monks often describe their work as 'community development' [*pattana chumchom*]. Similar to the way locality incorporates and abstracts from the notion of place, 'community' [*chumchon*] in this context tends to function as an abstraction of locality. The word *chumchon can* be used to express types of social relatedness that are not dependent on spatiality (in the case of online communities, etc.). However, when used in the context of community development it refers to the lived practices and relations of a group or groups within the context of locality. Both development monks described above speak of the "communities" that focus of their development practices as being located in specific places. This is especially true for Pra S, who typically refused to generalize about any kind universally applicable aspects of his work, saying that he only concerns himself with the problems of the villagers. The work of Pra Potiwirakun also stems from an attempt at development within his own village. However, the border of village is not the edge of his concern, and he advocates for the generalization and reapplication of his methods in different areas. This is reflected in his meticulous recording of activities and his use of social media to disseminate and promote them. However, he does not advocate for a one-size-fits-all universal application of his development strategies. He says that this kind of promotion allows others [with similar development goals] to look at what we have done … They do not take everything, only the aspects that work for them. They do not do what does not work for them" [31].

He participates in extralocal networks and campaigns with the intention to share, modify and translate effective development practices so that they may be transplanted from one local context to others. These ideas are often refined and disseminated extra-locally. However, their application is place-specific and embedded in locality.

3.3 Non-Place and non-locality

Auge contrasts his notion of *place* with that of the *non-place*. For Auge, the non-place is "a space that cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" [32]. It is, instead, associated with individualism, immediacy, and anonymity. Among the many examples he gives are supermarkets, hotel chains, and refugee camps. They are spaces that are devoid of all but

immediate context and in which all other cultural elements are superseded by the function for which the space was created. Auge argues that we are entering a state of 'supermodernity,' characterized by excesses in information, space, time and individualism, and in which our lives are increasingly spent in *non-places*.

Just as Auge posits the proliferation of the *non-place* in opposition to *place*, `non-locality` is a useful concept in describing similar trends in policy and practice that are antithetical to locality. The notion of locality held by Pra S and Pra Potiwirakun is embedded in *place*, while *non-locality* is a state of being and acting that is disembedded from relatedness, history, and identity. Here we see parallels between Auge's lamenting the rise of the non-place and development monks' criticism of top-down (read: non-local) development practices. They hold that often state or market-led forms of economic development fail to take into account the particular social, cultural, moral, and environmental consequences that result from these practices within a given community. The task, then, for the development monk becomes the relocalization of development – reembedding village life in *place*.

4. Methodology

This paper is based on fieldwork conducted in northeast Thailand in January ~ March and May 2013 ~ February 2014, consisting of extensive semi-structured interviews, informal unstructured interviews and participant observation with active and former development monks and their lay collaborators. All interviews referenced here were conducted in Thai and the translations are mine. I focus on two development monks, Pra S and Pra Potiwirakun, whose differing practices I consider representative of two larger trends in Thai alternative development activism: *neolocalism*, and what I am calling *networked localism*.

The interpretation and presentation of the ethnographic data were based on the method of 'thick description' popularized by Geertz in his 1973 work *The Interpretation of Cultures* [33], in that emphasis is placed on grasping conceptual and symbolic meanings that simultaneously inform and are informed by the subjects' descriptions and practices. Thus, primary significance is given to *how* my informants describe 1) the actions and motivations of both themselves and others, 2) the relationships among various actors and ideologies and 3) objects, events and phenomena related to their activism. In this way I have also been heavily

influenced by Kim Fortun's recursive (as opposed to reflexive) approach to ethnographic representation and interpretation of activist practices.

I do not, however, consider this work a postmodernist endeavor. Although I acknowledge the role of the anthropologist in the production of meaning and the recursive relationship among anthropologists and their subjects, that relationship is not explicitly addressed in this paper. Here, I am more concerned with illustrating my informants' conceptual and symbolic interpretations of social, political and historical processes that inform how they practice, ascribe meaning to and represent their activist endeavors.

5. Study/experiment results

5.1 Neolocalism in Buddhist Development Activism Auge's dichotomy between the traditional *place* and the encroaching *non-place* provides a lens through which to view the ideology of neolocalism among development monks and other alternative development practitioners in rural Thailand. It is a view that suggests that the only path out of the disembedded economy [35] and its accompanying social and environmental problems is to go back to the way it was before.

Globalization and neoliberalism are making their way into localities via the implementation of non-local development policies and strategies by non-local sources. Thus, the reaction becomes an attempt to 'claw back' [36] local control over development by appealing to a remembered way of life and working to stave off the modernist forces attempting to push their way into local communities. When Pra S. discusses the environmental problems in his village he makes a qualitative distinction between those that originate from within the village and those that come from non-local sources. here are many ways we can talk about pollution (*singwedlom bpen pit*). It comes from every place, every direction. *Pit* can come from a single speck of dust…Pesticides are also *pit*. The chemicals that come from fertilizer are *pit*. Biological fertilizers are also *pit*. These are the *pit* that come from the community, from the villagers. However, all of this *pit* is not able to harm humans. But some kinds of *pit* does not come from the community, but from somewhere else. They are brought into the village so that someone can make a profit … These harmful chemicals, which are actually international [from international sources] create *pit* that is hazardous…They may come from

a factory that does something wrong - for example if there is a leak or a seepage or a break, then they flow out. These come in and do harm to the community. These poisons come from the hands of people who come in search of a profit [37].

For Pra S., the environmental problems his village is facing are the result of forces coming in from the outside, national and international (non-local) organizations and institutions. They have a monetary stake in village (and nearby) resources, but are not embedded in local relations or identity and, thus, have no stake in the quality of village life. They are entities that are not embedded in *place*. The solution for the neolocalist, then, is to do away with the *non-place* and those structures that have arisen out of it and return village life to the way it was in the past.

This neolocalist ideology is reflected in his development practice. While he does attempt to render the local legible on the extralocal stage, he does so only insofar as that legibility assists in resisting the encroachment of non-local forces into village life. He does not work to form extralocal networks or collaborate with outside agencies or organizations, aside from the few activists who have come to the village in order to assist in the protest of the mine. Instead, he acts as advisor, counseling the villagers as to how to best mobilize their power in a way that is effective extralocally. This predominantly takes the form of advising the villagers on how best to make their demands known to state entities, who he describes as being outside and having little vested interest in the village (non-local).

We must communicate in a way that they will understand. Communication is the most important thing. If we do not communicate they will not understand. If we communicate incorrectly, nothing will go correctly. If we are able to convey [our situation] correctly everything will go correctly, because we are their [the state's] leaders" [38].

`Communication` here does not simply pertain to verbal or written communication, but also to action. According to villagers working closely with Pra S on the anti-gold mine campaign, he instructed them to construct brick walls to block the roads used by TKL vehicles, at which government buildings to protest and as to how to use the law to their advantage. These are all exercises in legibility. They are methods by which the plight of the villagers is rendered comprehensible at the extralocal level. However, his involvement with the extralocal ends here.

Extralocal systems are tools by which the villagers can resist exploitation and outside intrusion. In keeping with the ideology of neolocalism, he does not attempt to collaborate at this level or to mobilize its resources. When asked about this, he replied, "

I don't want to know [think] about others [those outside the village], it's enough to know about these villagers specifically… [others' business] is not my business" [39].

His choosing to be an advisor also stems from what he understands to be his proper role as a monk in the community. "

I [as a monk] cannot do this myself. I can only talk [to the villagers]. If the villagers have a problem, they come to me. I just advise [40].

Of the two development monks profiled here, Pra S more closely represents this neolocalist or 'back to the future' approach. However, both he and Pra Potiwirakun lament the relative decline of the role of the *wat* [temple] in village life, which has accompanied urbanization, economic centralization, and increased prioritization of material wealth in village society. As many scholars have pointed out, the *wat* has traditionally been a focal point for village activity and village identity [41][42][43][44]. As Pra S. phrases it, "The *wat* is the body. The village is the shadow. They cannot be separated. Anywhere they go, they must go together"[45]. However, this is a role that has declined with the growth of outmigration into urban areas and increased secularization of key social institutions [46]. Development monks whom I interviewed frequently cited this decline as being one of the root causes of the modern economic and social problems they are attempting to address. On one hand, they are lamenting the diminishing role of Buddhism in people's daily affairs. On the other hand, they are also referring to the resulting lack of a village center – of a public space that reaffirms local relations, identity, and values. In many cases, the impetus for monastic development activity, itself, can be described as an attempt to reassert the importance of the *wat* in village society. Many of the monks I interviewed referred to their primary reason for engagement as being what they perceive as their duty as volunteers at the *wat*. As Pra S stated,

I am the abbot of the temple – the person who looks after it, but I am not the owner of the temple … this temple does not belong to the laymen, this temple does not belong to anyone. It belongs to the public" [47].

Consequently, Pra S allows the villagers to use temple space for meetings and its audio equipment for protests against the gold mine. The mobilization of *wat* space and resources is, thus, a common theme in Buddhist development practices. Speaking about his making his *wat* a community center, Pra Potiwirakun said, "if we don't do things like this, the younger people are going to think religion is something for the older generation"[48]. Monastic engagement in development activism is one way in which the *wat* is able to remain relevant.

Pra Potiwirakun's temple community center is emblematic of this approach. It represents a drive toward relocalization and the attempt to reestablish the role of *place* in people's lives. However, it does not adopt the 'back to the future' stance of neolocalism. He describes the project in this way:

In the temple there are various learning centers, for example a community shop, a financial institution, an ICT center, a children's center. It becomes a center like a gas station. In a gas station we can use the bathrooms, we can shop at Seven Eleven, we can go to Amazon [a coffee shop chain] or go to a restaurant, and fill our tires. It is a central hub. [Do this and] people will stop by the temple without thinking about it" [49].

As spot made for those in transit with speed and personal convenience emphasized above all else, the Thai gas station/rest area is the quintessential *non-place*. Instead of simply opposing the rise of the one-stop shopping center, Pra Potiwirakun has adapted its model of centrality and convenience. In doing so, he has re-appropriated the symbols of supermodernity in an effort to reestablish the role of locality - of shared history and community identity - in the lives of the villagers. It is the reclamation of public space– not of a specific plot of land or institution, but of the *kind* of space in which people engage in public activity.

Thus, we see the contrast between this notion of non-locality and that of locality from within the context of Buddhist development. Locality is a state of being, acting and relating that is embedded in *place*. Non-locality in this context represents a state of depersonalization of development, in which development methods and economic policies are universalized and implemented from the top down with little regard for the specific cultural, historical, and material circumstances of a particular village. Development monks' opposition to non-local development practices mirrors Auge's lamenting of the advance of

supermodernity and the rise of the *non-place*. The spaces Auge would describe as *non-place* - airports, mini-malls, coffee shop chains - are manifestations of non-locality. For these monks, non-places represent a rise in consumerism, loss of community and religiosity, and dwindling populations in rural villages as members of the younger generation increasingly move to urban centers. Thus, be it Pra Potiwirakun's temple community center or Pra S's work to oppose a corporation's construction of a gold mine near his village, the practices of development monks often reflect an opposition to non-locality and attempt to relocalize development. They are an attempt to re-embed modern life in a sense of *place*. However, the development practices of Pra S. are rooted in the ideological framework of neolocalism and, thus, reflect a wholesale rejection of globalization. Pra Potiwirakun, meanwhile, has appropriated the symbols and functions of supermodernity and chosen to repurpose them in order to further the goals of localism. His ideology, thus, differs greatly from Parnwell's neolocalism. Instead he represents an emerging form of localism in Thailand, characterized by the embrace of the symbols and technological underpinnings of supermodernity and by the mobilization of extralocal collaborative networks in order to support the localist endeavor.

5.2 Networked Localism in Buddhist
Development Activism The movement away from neolocalism by development monks like Pra Potiwirakun is best understood through Varnelis and Friedberg's [50] criticism of Auge. Auge saw spaces replete with cultural, historical and communal context being steadily supplanted by those characterized by transience, convenience and alienation. While accepting Auge's premise having to do with the nature of the *place* and the *non-place,* Varnelis and Friedberg do not share his pessimism. They assert that Auge failed to see (or foresee) the critical role communication technologies play in re-connecting communities and re-embedding individuals in *place.* They hold, instead, that these sorts of technological advancements have led to the formation of networked communities, which span large distances and are not necessarily contingent on physical proximity. In *Place: The Networking of Public Space*, they trace the history of communications technologies and the failed predictions of loss community that have accompanied new developments in this arena. They focus on the pervasiveness of the internet -

especially with regard to its growing role in mobile technology - and its ability to dis-embed community from physical space. This disentanglement, they hold, allows one to bring the essential elements of *place* – relatedness, history, and identity – with them wherever they go. Patrons of a Starbucks are not necessarily taking part in the non-place that is a chain coffee shop, but interacting in a community unbounded from place via their laptops and mobile phones. For those who gather in these hot spots," they write "to engage with the network, being online in the presence of others is the new place to be, the bodily presence of the other cafégoers easing the disconnect with the local that the network creates"[51].

For Varnelis and Friedberg, Auge's eulogy for *place* was premature. In a way that is reminiscent of the Hegelian dialectic [52], the apparent deterioration of *place*'s role in people's lives was merely the beginning of its transformation into something that transcends proximity and spatial boundaries. They conclude, "Today, Augé's solitary non-places are an artifact of the past. We will never be alone again, except by choice" [53]. Throughout the course of the contemporary era, developments in communication and information technology have led to *non-place* being supplanted by *networked place*, thus offering a potential escape from the postmodernists' prognoses of increased isolation and cultural homogeneity.

The *networked place*, then, is not fully connected to locality per-se, as it is not necessarily tied to a point in physical space. In this respect it is much like non-locality. It exists more-or-less ubiquitously and independent of physical proximity. However, it is also a conduit through with people reassert and reinforce their communal identities and relationships. These networks are neither local nor non-local. They are *extralocal* in that, while they are not tied to a specific place, they do not necessarily serve to undermine – and can, in fact, work to promote - the role of locality in development activism.

It is helpful to view Pra Potiwirakun's mobilization and promotion of information technology through this lens. As with Varnelis and Friedberg's description of *networked places*, implicit in these endeavors is the belief that utilization of such technologies can mitigate the alienating effects of modernization in the context of community development. When I asked him about his reasons for promoting ICT education in the village, Pra Potiwirakun spoke of its potential to both enable those who have left the village maintain their connection to the community and to give the local community a presence on the extralocal stage. In the past, if a member of the village migrated to the city for work or education, it would necessitate that they sacrifice knowledge of and participation in events there to a large degree. In many cases, it would require them to spend the majority of their time in one of Auge's *non-places*. To insist that there be an attempt to reverse the trend of urban migration would be at the very least impractical. Bangkok and urban metropolises are rich with educational and financial opportunities that cannot typically be found in rural small-scale communities. For Pra Potiwirakun, however, this does not mean, as Auge suggests, the rapid and inevitable disappearance of '*place*'-ness. Nor does it mean, as the neolocalists insist, that in order to reassert the relevance of locality it is necessary to go back to 'the way things were.'

For example, he emphasizes the role that communication technology plays in maintaining ties within the community over long distances.

Sometimes the children here have parents who are in Bangkok or another country. This [internet communication, social networking, uploading pictures online, etc.] allows [the parents] to see their children and grandchildren" [54].

He asserts that maintaining connections between the local community and those who have moved away from it is a critical in preventing the loss of those community ties and that it does so in a way that was not possible in the past.

Like Varnelis and Friedberg, he sees networks facilitated by communications technologies as particularly adept in mitigating the loss of community that has been associated with globalization and a possible means by which globalization and localization can coincide.

[Localization and globalization] can happen in harmony. If one looks at it from a negative perspective, they are in conflict with each other; but if one looks at it from a positive perspective, they can be compatible. In the locality, [the villagers] have cell phones. You have a cell phone…[When you take pictures with it], you take them in the local community…then you upload them, you let people know what we are doing here, what life is like here, the kinds of activities we are doing…and they mix [with those elsewhere]. So if people don't accept the community, don't accept the old things *and* the new ones they can't know what they must do [55].

I, thus, refer to this ideological disposition as 'networked localism' in relation to Varnelis and

Friedberg's notion of *networked place*. The creation of extralocal networks and the recording and active promotion of his activities via social networks such as YouTube and Facebook allow groups in other places with similar problems and similar goals to see what his community has done and is doing about them. It creates a forum in which communities cease to act in isolation, but as a sort of community of communities, in which values and methods are shared but applied

selectively from within, thus ostensibly avoiding the pitfall of assuming methodological universality. In this way the networked localism practiced by Pra Potiwirakun, not only embodies, but expands upon the notion of *networked place*. Varnelis and Friedberg describe the communities accessed and created through extralocal networks as communities of *individuals* and are, thus, not rooted in physical proximity. These networks work to assert individual identity and strengthen the ties among the individuals who form the network regardless of their physical location (or history of shared physical location). Varnelis and Friedberg can then confidently assert that *networked places* are formed and sustained independent from locality as I describe it here. The networked localism represented by Pra Potiwirakun, however, aims at developing *networked places* in which communities (not individuals) form the network and in which ties can be strengthened and resources mobilized *within* each community. For him *networked places* exist, not as a replacement for Auge's *places*, but as a conduit through which development can be localized and through which locality (firmly embedded in *place*) can be reaffirmed and remain relevant.

6. Summary and explanation of results

The alternative development discourse in Thailand and throughout the world is hinged upon the interaction of such notions as globalization, localism, identity, and community. The ideology of localism attempts to reassert identity and heterogeneity into increasingly globalized economic, social and legal systems. In anthropological terms, it seeks to re-embed these systems in *place* and to re-establish the role of *place* in peoples' lives. The localist discourse in Thailand has largely focused on the phenomenon of neolocalism, which seeks to 'undo' the encroachment of *non-place* and 'claw back' local power by returning to what they perceive as having been the dominant state in the past. Networked

localism, on the other hand, works to repurpose the tools associated with global networks and *non-place* and use them to revitalize locality and assert its relevance on the global stage. This ideological distinction is crucial, as it shapes both localist development practices and the ways in which practitioners interact with national and global systems and actors. It is at the heart of how development goals and strategies are generated and of how these projects and policies are implemented.

The development monks profiled here are emblematic of these divergent forms of localism, as seen in the way the process of glocalization is manifest differently in their practices. Pra S practices a kind of activism based in the neolocalist tradition. He acts as advisor to the villagers, teaching them to formulate their demands and to assert their power within an extralocal context. Conversely, Pra Potiwirakun works to utilize extralocal networks and global communication technology to create *networked places*, consisting not of individuals, but of communities. He sees his role as being that of facilitator or 'translator,' working directly with extralocal entities and re-contextualizing the symbols and provisions that have traditionally characterized delocalization and the *non-place* of supermodernity.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Recommendations gained from the research

It is recommended that organizations engaged in sustainable development from a localist perspective study the methods being practiced by Pra Potiwirakun and other *networked localists* like him. The traditional neolocalist ideology as manifest in the practices of NGOs and other development activists is built on contesting globalization, rather than reshaping it to localist ends. Pra Potiwirakun's successful adaption and relocalization of extralocal symbols, networks and technologies could prove a viable alternative to this model.

7.2 Recommendations for further studies

This paper dealt solely with localist development strategies from an ideological and methodological standpoint. There are significant political implications to these strategies, as well. Neolocalists like Pra S. often find themselves in conflict with government entities attempting to enact rural development policies. Networked localism, however, is an essentially collaborative endeavor and can promote cooperation among state/local authorities and localist

development activists. The political dimensions of these efforts warrant further research.

8. Acknowledgements

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