

**Title: Women's Struggle and Politics over Land and Development
in a Slum Community in Chiang Mai**

NAKATA Yoshimi

1. Introduction

“Slum” was born in the process of urbanization and modernization. It has been recognized as an over-populated, dirty and deteriorated place where urban poor have occupied land illegally in a center of a city. Studies in the past showed observation that people in the slum is lazy and helpless. Oscar Lewis presented an influential and controversial concept, “culture of poverty” that means slum dwellers, usually poor and in lower class, form patterns of behavior and value and they tends to perpetuate, be shared among slum dwellers and transmitted to next generations (Clinard, 1970). It also helped to perpetuate the image of slum; people living in a slum are mostly poor and less educated, and it makes the environment of the area full of crime and miserable. Thus, “slum” has been regarded as an eyesore of a city by the mainstream of the society.

However, this oversees the fact that slum is a community where people have a life. In his dissertation, Akin describes in the study of slum community in Bangkok in the middle of 1970s, where the urban poor people make living, go to work as hawkers and peddlers and form a “community” with neighbors (Akin, 1975). The poorer residents in a slum community form a patron-client relation, which is a kind of supportive mechanism among the poor. His observation reveals that slum dwellers were not left in helplessness but had survival systems in order to manage their livelihood.

This paper attempts to focus on the land rights struggle and community development of a slum community in Chiang Mai as a case showing how residents, in particular, women play important roles in these activities. Involvement in the politics and social movement is a process that women empower themselves and find a space for themselves in a city. A strong initiative of a women's group also contributed the community development project such as road construction and credit group establishment.

The research was conducted during November 2000 to January 2001 in a slum community in Chiang Mai. I call name of the community as “train station community” in this paper. The train station community is located behind the Chiang Mai train station and a just one of the 38 more slum communities in Chiang Mai.

2. Location of Slum Women in Thai Society

Slum is a marginalized place in a city, which is, in fact, a center of industry, business and social services. City attracts much labor from rural area but many migrants find themselves in poverty in a city. It means that they have to manage cheap accommodation, which has to be close to their working place. The poor frequently cannot afford commuting time and cost. Thus, we see slums quite often behind big supermarket, business building, construction and industrial site. Slum is a sort of consequence of industrialization and modernization that have drastically increased labor force needs in city, at the same time, generated a large population in lower class.

Living conditions in a slum is comparatively bad in physical and social respects. They lack modern facilities such as water supply, drainage system, roads as well as social services and community development plan. Rainy season bring frequent floods, but residents are helpless and government just neglects them because the slum are not recognized officially and out of responsibility of the local government. It also means that they lack the access to public health care, public services and social welfare, that is, in a sense the benefit of the city and national development. Hence, one of the biggest problems of slum is neglect from society and government.

Economic condition is another suffering of slum dwellers. Most of them work as cheap unskilled labor, for example, construction worker, factory worker, waiter/waitress in a restaurant, driver, petty trader, street vender, housemaid, prostitution and so on. These are classified in informal sector work. These works are less valued due to the state economic policy which values only some industries producing marketable goods for export purpose. That is, informal sector has been seen as unproductive and just a temporary resort of unemployed people. However these kinds of work are not temporal but rather perpetuated because migrants who have only low education find it difficult to be a stable wage-worker in a city.

It is pointed out in several urban study that connotation of these concepts, slum and informal sector, is quite negative and problematic. Definition of slum regarding land tenure does not necessarily refer to illegal or squatter settlement. In Bangkok, a number of slums are on rented land with proper contract with land owners (NHA, 1980). Conflicts have frequently occurred between slum dwellers and land owners in many developing countries not only because they occupy the land illegally but also because there is no land price control and the pressure from the private sector. However they conventionally call the place with housing problem, including rented lands and squatter settlements, "slum", which easily leads outside people to blame dwellers for the cause of the problem. Relocation is frequently presented and planned by the government without the sufficient participation of dwellers as a good way to solve the slum problem. Revision of definition is necessary in order to understand the real situation, which is quite complex and dynamic.

Informal sector is also under the same sort of accusation. Development theory explains that informal sector appears only in the course of industrialization when labor force supply out of agricultural sector excess the demand in an industrial sector (Arizpe, 1977; Moser, 1978). In this idea, all works not classified in formal employment has been categorized in informal sector though boundary between formal and informal is not so clear. It is not recognized in the official statistics. These works are out of control of government, and of course, out of their support. However, it has gradually proved that informal sector is not temporal but become a significant part of economy in the city, which provides cheap services. Thus, informal sector work provide good income source for the urban poor. As Arizpe points out (1977), “such as marginal jobs fulfill specific functions within the economy.”

As slum is marginalized in a center of a city, people living there are, more or less, also marginalized. Mapping politics between men and women in and around a slum community needs careful insights on gender relations in specific context in addition that we have to be thoroughly aware the complexity in the classification and definition.

In this study, I take gender perspective as a main viewpoint. Gender concept emphasizes the relational aspect of sexes in addition that it indicates that “woman” is not just biologically defined but socially constructed. What we tend to think “natural” in sex such as human body has signs and meanings that differ over cultures and societies. As Errington discusses, it is not biological difference of human body but these signs and meanings attached to parts of human body such as genitals can somehow determine behavior of people as men or women and it is quite an obvious and decisive factor of human relations in a tradition of Western culture (Errington, 1990). It is an interpretation of a sign over body only in certain societies to believe that gender differences form hierarchical relation between sexes.

While gender difference is quite significant in some societies, gender is construed in different way in other societies. From the view of Western scholars, women in the Southeast Asia look to enjoy their high status because they are entitled to inherit family property in their traditional kinship system and they are so active in economic sphere. The complementarity of the sexes and harmonious relationship between men and women are frequently emphasized. However, it is actually not so simple as it appears. Errington further argues that we have to question the assumption that “power” and “status” are cross-cultural concepts (1990). Study on the Javanese society indicates an interesting insight on gender relation in the Southeast Asia. Brenner explains that women’s active role in market place and material control in household does not mean their higher status compared with men because pursuit of wealth and economic power indicates the lack of potency, one’s inner spiritual power, in the Javanese society (Brenner, 1995). This idea on power is different from that of the Western where people think that economic control and coercive force is a power. We can say that gender is a political stage where power is contested, however the meaning of power has to be stated clearly. Mohanty’s argument is corresponding the idea but from another dimension. She argues that it is discursive representation from ethnocentric view of Western

scholars to regard the “Third World Women” as vulnerable, oppressed and helpless (Mohanty, 1991). This is a dominant and one-way view from the developed countries to the developing countries, which does not necessarily incorporate the reality. Gender, though it is defined as a social construction, is closely associated with body which make us confused that its value is universal and cross-cultural. Culture is an important variable in conceptualizing gender in each society.

In Thailand, there are various points of arguments regarding women’s position in Thai society. Buddhism influence is often raised as a primary reason why women are in low status. On the other hand, there is a contradiction between women’s high profile in a society and low status in Buddhism institution. Women are not allowed to be a monk but a nun who is lower status than monk. It seems that women can have less important roles in Buddhism institution. But when we see different aspects of Buddhist rituals and ceremony, women are attendant who contribute much. In addition, anthropological studies on kinship system reveal that matrilineal system and practice of spiritual cult in northern Thailand gives women more important roles in households (Potter, 1977; McMorrin, 1984; Tanabe, 1991; Bencha, 1992). Rather than bringing discussion based on the traditional notion and practices of Thai society, discussion should focus on the influence of changing social contexts, modernization and development. As Karim states, “geographical or demographic displacement and the resulting cultural decontextualisation of women (and men) are contributory factors to marginalisation” (Karim, 1995).

Image of women has been changed a great deal in recent Thai society. Increasing number of young female migrants from rural area work in the urban areas. This is an outcome of the national economic policy and industrialization in urban areas which needs young women as cheap labor force. While these young women, without supervision of parents, can have freedom to seek for modernity demonstrated through media and advertisement, they also experience exploitation and insecurity in the livelihood in urban areas. Media and advertisement have strongly appealed young women the modern styles and fashion, which drive them into consumption. They manage to buy commodities and consume modernity, at the same time they perform “good daughters” through sending some money to their parents from their small income in order to financially support family in rural areas. This is necessary action for young female migrants because, as Mills’s study indicates, local people in rural area react it with resistance, when conventional gender practice is disturbed by modernity (Mills, 1995, 1997a). For their parents in rural hometown, daughter’s migration brings dilemmas (Mills, 1997b). Migration means that parents cannot control daughters’ sexuality but they need financial support from migrated daughter. Migrants have to select the balance and practice between image of modern women and “good daughter” when they are far from their hometown. Particularly in urban area, it seems that people cannot continue to practice traditional gender roles in a household which is based on land and kinship network in their village. Gender roles and practices, thus, change according to context and environment they are in and its relation with outside society.

Therefore, the attention should be paid on the women's adjustment, interpretation and presentation of gender in the context in an urban slum community. Individual woman is, of course, in social relations that are being constructed endlessly through their daily practice and interaction. As seen in the Mills's study on young female migrants, a woman separated from traditional kinship system in rural area is facing dilemma and has to create new meanings in their lives, including gender relations. In particular, woman in a slum community has to deal with specific problems such as poverty, isolation and dislocation for their survival, which are the main factors for them to be marginalized. Thorbek (1987, 1990) points out, in her ethnographic study on women in the Bangkok slum, that characteristics of women in slum community are open and visible in their struggles of gender relation, which is a process to contest the gender relation as well as construct a counter culture against mainstream culture. She describes that:

The gender struggle in Khlong Toey creates conditions for women that give them scope for a number of activities in, and sometimes outside, the slum. Women form friendships and networks in the slum, and are active in the creation of new gender relations and of slum culture in the wider sense. (Thorbek, 1987, p.152)

Struggles of women draw our attention on positive, autonomous and knowledgeable side of women as leaders and organizers in public.

In order to illustrate women's struggle in a slum community, this study compares the women's spaces, which are constructed by women themselves through their daily practices and activities. Space is an abstract term mainly used in geography, however space here means not a physical objectives but a cultural construction of human relation and meanings attached to a place with a certain boundary. Furthermore, space can indicate not only human relations and meanings attached to the place where woman has activities but also women's autonomy and power to define relation and meaning as well as boundary.

Boundary is controversial in defining gender relation. Feminist scholars have pointed out that dichotomous relation between concepts is problem; for example, men and women, public and private, formal and informal and productive and reproductive. These sets of two concepts are correspondingly placed in the opposite ends with different value; in other words, a rigid boundary divides concepts into two separate spheres as if they were completely different. This assumption, though it is a social construction, has effectively made people believe that it is a natural division with physical or non-physical attributes and characteristics. In reality, what seems to be clearly divided can be overlapped or reversed.

Concept of "bilateralism" gives an interesting implication to the flexibility and complementarity of gender relation in the Southeast Asia. The term derives from bilaterality of genders in kinship system in Southeast Asia. It means men and women can cross the gender boundary and explore the other side without much discussion (Karim, 1995). This is a kind of value when people form the relation between the ego

and others. Crossing the boundary is not taboo but can be a reason why women in the Southeast Asia enjoy high visibility. Thus, women may have many roles regardless it belongs to men's sphere. One of the most obvious cases is that working women in urban areas are not confined in a household. Rather in many cases, they are the main breadwinners in households because it is necessary for a household survival.

In the discussion of marginality, Shields argues that it is the work of discourse that has put certain places in a marginal position in society (1991). Unequal values attached to two concepts such as North-South and high-low put one concept into a marginalized place in opposition to the center. Although mechanism of marginalization is based on the actual social and economic situations and inefficient performance of the place compared with the center, it is also based on the symbolic meaning generated by these performances. Observing women's space allows us to see how women manage boundaries in specific context and how they struggle against marginalization.

3. Overview of the Train Station Community

3.1 Historical and Social Context

A few families began to live the place of Train Station community approximately thirty years ago. The first settlers were families of train station workers. The very first resident testify that a master of train station at that time allowed train station workers, mainly porters, to build a house for their family on the land where the officials regarded the place just as empty space or parking area of unused train. At that time, thorny bushes covered the land and people have to clear the land before building a house. There was no proper road but only a small lane to go outside. Gradually many more workers of train station settled down the community out of the shortage of cheap accommodation.

They developed informal land tenure system in the community in the course of its expansion. In the beginning period, the first settlers helped to clear the land for new comers when they begin to build houses. However recently, they began to claim the rights for the land which they cleared by themselves and take care of it. Other community members also respect its validity. Nowadays, there is no empty space left in the community.

The train station community has not been officially registered yet in the municipality in Chiang Mai city. It means that each house in the community does not have address. Not only letters are never sent to their houses, but also they cannot register themselves in a city when they moved from other districts in the rural areas. Nowadays, the municipality issued temporary house number, though they insist that they will officially issue the house number when the community solves the land problem with the train station, which put the notice every year in the entrance of the community, saying that residents should leave the land in seven days. In the same attitude, the municipality rejected the request from the community to install water supply and electricity.

3.2 Economic and Physical Information

The community had 97 households and its population was 306 peoples in 1999. Most of all residents are daily wage workers. Many of them work in the train station as porter, cleaner and garbage collector, who mainly live the south part of the community. Other than these jobs, there are varieties of works people engage in and outside of the community. There are some shops in the community, which become a place where people see neighbors and friends and get to know each other. According to survey conducted in 2000, average income of individual ranges 2,000 up to 4,000 baht. Duration of stay in the community is mostly 1-5 years, though some households reside on the land more than 30 years.

People in the community do not have water and electricity supply and drainage system. Most of them use well in a house area. Many of them have electricity connected from neighbors whose houses are equipped with electricity. However, the owner of electricity supply charges higher rate for its use. They are equipped with toilet, which municipality service comes to collect filthy water when a resident call. Water used to wash clothes and dishes is discharged outside.

There is a problem such as poverty, unemployment, drinking alcohol. However the most serious problem is a drug trafficking. Quite a number of people sell drug in the community, which put the dark shadow into the community. People who are not related to it feel insecure and even dangerous. Everyone distrusts each other. Drug traffickers doubt somebody may report police about drug trafficking. Residents including drug traffickers and others who never touch drug are afraid that police raids into the community. Drug is not only a problem in the community but also a social problem that has to be solved as a whole. It has to be noted that poverty and desperation may cause the heavy drug trafficking in the community.

4. Land Problem of the Community

In 1998, Thailand experienced a severe financial problem and economic crisis, which affected every sector of economy in the whole country. Many people in the big cities lost jobs and had to withdraw to their rural home. Government sectors also had to manage the financial damage and deficit. In this line, the Train Station Authority of Thailand decided to rent their property in particular their lands to the private sector. This decision, of course, put the poorer people in the society, slum dwellers on the land of train station into difficulties.

Slum dwellers were not silent on their problem. Slum dwellers on the land of train stations at the national level gathered their voices and organized a network among communities in order to negotiate with the ministry of transportation and communication with a support of non-governmental organizations (NGO). Networking organized around the common issues is relatively a common strategy frequently observed in social movements. The train station land movement, thus,

continued the negotiation with the government authority however it seems to be difficult and through a slow process to reach the agreement.

Three women, Kung, Plaa and Puu, in the train station community in Chiang Mai actively involved in the movement and showed their abilities to present their opinion in public and negotiate with government officers. They represent slum dwellers from the north region of Thailand, which enabled the movement to unite four regions in Thailand and have collective action. Their function is sufficient to connect the local community network to wider networks. Furthermore, it consequently enhanced the community development activities with the strong support from a local NGO. Community residents cooperatively constructed proper roads in order to prevent from being flooded during rainy season. They also began to manage a revolving credit scheme.

However, in fact their participation and involvement in the social movement is controversial in the community. There was an obvious conflict between two power groups, which actually revealed a complicated network and relation in the community. Seeing the background and politics over the land problem, the following section attempts to depict background of the conflict and power politics which shows diversified idea and view on the community development.

4.1 Manifestation of Conflicts and its Background

First of all, it began with an announcement of the ministry of transportation and communication stating the eviction of slums due to the deficit of the train station authority of Thailand. The ministry regarded people living on their land as “intruders” who are going to be moved to rent accommodation built by the national housing authority (NHA) and train station. However, the master of the Chiang Mai train station quickly reacted and decided that they would not evict the slum on the land of train station in Chiang Mai. They issued an annual contract on land rental. It was not so expensive so some people paid the suggested price.

However voices of disagreement on the contract were raised soon after that. The reasons are that: 1. the rent fee is still expensive, 2. it is not secure to have an annual contract, 3. there is an article in the contract to guarantee the right of the train station to tell residents to leave the place within seven days if they send an official notice. These voices came up from the Chiang Mai train station community as well as other communities which were willing to make contract the train station authority. However, they have to revise the conditions of contract. Suggestions from the slum four region network towards the government on these points are: 1. reduce the rent fee in accordance with the income level of the poor slum people, 2. extend a contract period to thirty years in terms of the use rights of the land, and 3. delete the article which may cause the sudden eviction of the residents. In addition, there is a suggestion regarding land that is close to railway. Train station authority does not allow people to live within a radius of forty meters from railway, though there are some communities located along and close to the railway in the south part of Thailand. The network had a meeting

directly with the ministry of transportation and communication which supervise the train station authority.

Regarding this strategy and negotiation of the slum four region network and a women's group in the community, quite a few number of people showed a strong disagreement. They were the laborers in the train station. They feel that the Chiang Mai train station is their generous boss who provides works and takes care of them if needed. Many of them have worked in the train station for a long time and build up a kind of patron-client relation, though these people are not the staff or employee of train station but porters, cleaners and garbage collectors who are allowed to work in the area of train station. They believe that the community should not oppose the decision of the train station. Furthermore, they seem to believe that the Chiang Mai train station never evicts them. They said that the train station does not have an obvious plan to evict the residents, clear the land and rent it out to the private sector. This relieved them from the worry of eviction at the same time they do not want to make their patron angry with the community because of the social movement. Ironically, the train station workers, living the south part of the community, are poorer in terms of income level. However they prefer to pay the original rent fee rather than to have a negotiation on rent price and other conditions with the ministry in order to avoid the problem with the train station. They hardly show their opinion and objection in the community meeting because, they are afraid, nobody care about their opinion.

On the contrary, women's group insists that they cannot trust the train station. They need higher security authorized by the law. Kung and Plaa, who are the distinguished activists in the national level movement, have experienced the eviction and insecurity since their childhood. Both of them had to move several places with her family members before they settled down the present place. They think that the security of residence and cheap accommodation is a right of urban poor. They objected that the master of train station called them "intruders." They began to call themselves as "people living on the land of the train station." It gives a new image and encouragement to residents as Thai citizens who are qualified to claim rights and support from the government. It shows that women's group gained knowledge on human rights out of activities with national level community network and NGOs.

There is another group competing in the community power politics; that is the headman and his supporters. They confronted each other in the community headman election in May 2000. Headman is an important official position under administrative structure of the municipality because the person in the headman position is responsible for the community development activities supported by the local government, which subsidizes the fund to the headman. As a result of the election, the present headman won with 94 votes compared with 84 votes for Kung who is a candidate from the women's group. Although Kung has many relatives and supportive neighbors, the present headman gained good support from the people living in the south part of the community. The main reasons people preferred the headman to Kung were not necessarily due to his skill but passive way to oppose Kung's group. However, during

his term, the headman organized several community activities, which are usually based on the Buddhist ritual such as merit making ceremony. Many residents from the elders to children helped each other for preparation and attended the ceremony, in which relatives of Kung and Kung herself rarely participated.

Through the community forming process, the train station community has built up the organizing structure as a “community”, which should have a headman and community committee. Particularly being a headman as an official position and authority gives legitimacy to be a community leader and make decision on the direction of development. Before the term of present headman, members of women’s group were active as members of community committee, however the present headman did not nominate them as committee members. So they lost the position in community administrative structure temporarily. There was another authority set up by the municipality; that is women’s development group, which aims to promote women’s roles in community development and to give direct support to women. When there are fifty women applying for the group as members in a community, they can organize the group as a formal institution. Women’s development group in the train station community was registered as formal group and the municipality organized the election of a group leader in January 2001. There were two candidates; Kung and the opposition. Kung gained much of votes and won because most of the members who can vote were Kung’s relatives. She finally gained the authority to work as a leader in the community.

They needed some sort of authority because they also had conflict over an affiliation to community network, what we call, people’s organization (PO). Chiang Mai city has two community networks. Communities first established a network covering whole communities in Chiang Mai city in support with a NGO and the municipality. Then a group of communities separated themselves from the network because the priority of activity objectives was different. When the train station community had a land problem, they learned that the community network was not willing to help them. It was mainly due to the class difference. So they established new community network that aims to support social structural problem of slum communities. Women’s group was active members of the new network. PO gives women a forum to represent dwellers of slum communities in Chiang Mai. On the other hand, the headman had connection with neighboring communities in the same district that were members of the old community network. He wanted the train station community to be a member of old network rather than working closely with other slum communities.

4.2 Power Politics in the Community

This is the brief background of the land problem and conflict in the train station community. While group deeply sympathize and involved in the land rights movement at national level, other group cannot accept and understand it. Community institutionalization process is a visible place of conflict and competition. In daily life, each group keeps distance to avoid obvious conflict. This hidden conflict implies the decisive differences in conception and strategy of community development between headman’s group and women’s group. It needs further elaboration in order to

understand why they began to have different ideas.

Headman's group, actually consisting of people who are anti-women's group, believes that they can rely on the patron-client relation or government who are supposed to help their clients. On the other hand, women's group challenges a policy and a social structure, which marginalize the poor and low class people. Hasson introduces that it is the two interpretative schemes that diversify the reaction of people in the same context and situation (Hasson, 1997). One is the structural interpretative scheme and the other the empirical interpretative scheme. Structural interpretative scheme suggests the way people understand their situations, problems and causes of the problems as a deep structure. It can connect other people's problem with ours in the same structure from a wider viewpoint. This leads people to demand the fundamental change in the system of social, cultural and politic relations. Thus the strong demand comes out as conflict and confrontation. Empirical interpretative scheme, in contrast, has an empirical character, which just leads people understand the surrounding and problem in front of them. They try to solve a problem in pragmatic manner. Difference and gap between these two groups in the train station community has the same character and these two interpretative schemes are applicable in the context of slum community in Chiang Mai.

Headman's group understood the land problem empirically. When the Chiang Mai train station offered the annual contract, it was just a good offer for them. They just saw and understood happening as it is. Making contract is the best way to solve the problem as long as they can think of. However women's group analyzed the future problem the contract may cause. They could see structural cause of the problem as they attend the meeting of regional network at Bangkok or other area in Thailand. Therefore they regard the negotiation with the ministry as necessity. Experiences women gained enhanced the knowledge and widened the viewpoint.

It has to be noted that even empirical interpretative scheme cannot lead many of slum dwellers to make action to improve the community. Some dedicate their time exclusively for their families, relatives and economic activities. They think that their house in the community is a place to sleep. For them, including men and women, "community" does not mean much. Others become a free rider of the community activities. They do not help the preparation and implementation of community activities, however they appear when they offer foods in community activities. These two kinds of people are passive and inactive member of the community. On the contrary, women's group actively contributes community activities from cleaning of the community to the construction. Strength of women's group is partly derived from the number of their supporters. They are old settlers in the community and have many relatives living in the community. The unity of kin group supports the high mobilization of people in conducting community development activities.

Why was women's group deeply involved in the social movement? First, women have different access to the resources. Men can easily access to political parties, government services and private sector services. Women use rather informal relations, such as

relatives, neighbors and co-workers. Of course this is just a principle. Some women can access to and negotiate with government officers and politicians. This division is also social construction supported by daily practices. NGO and community network are newly established institution in a society and ready to help marginalized people. They can offer a convenient methods and comfortable place for women to implement community development activities. Second, women state that they feel comfortable to work with friends in a NGO and a community network because their relation within the organization is comparatively egalitarian. Accidentally committee members of community network consist of mostly women plus only one man. Third, what NGO offers may be appropriate to women's need. NGO provided opportunities to learn about a society and problems in other societies. In an interview, women recall how it was influential for them and wonderful experiences. It gave women confidence and motivation to continue the social movement, even though many people in the community oppose their idea.

This case shows that the complex politics in the course of development of community. The unity as "community" is difficult to be achieved in particular in the period of dramatic population increase just in a few years. But at the same time, it gives a chance for slum dwellers to think about community development. For some women in the community, it is the opportunity to participate in the community issues, which are very public and formal.

5. Women's space and boundaries

Observing of these women's daily activities, political action, economic activities, relation and network with family, relatives, neighbors, friends in and outside of the community, they organize quite flexible and dynamic spaces. Example of one of active women, Plaa will show how she got involved in the land right movement.

Plaa had worked in a night bar before she got a car accident and become a housewife in 1998. Before the accident, she was not interested in the community issue because she did not stay home and community during daytime. She came back from work in the morning and had to leave the home in the afternoon for work. During receiving medical treatment after the accident, she stayed at home and begin to learn the human relation and problem of the community. She gave up working again, instead began to work for the community. What she did was to contact with a NGO worker who has visited the community before. Sooner she got involved in the NGO activities, she became distinguished as natural leader. She was good at speaking in front of people. She just extended her network and constructed human relation, which widened her space. Her geographical space has been widened to national level, where she attended a meeting, workshop and seminar.

In addition, her action and opinion bring a symbolic meaning to the community. Against government definition as "intruder", she appealed public and the government that "people in the slum also have rights to stay". It had the strong message that the

government should not evict residents who are poor and nowhere to go. This is a counter discourse they collectively made in the social movement. “Community” covers not only her community but also slum communities at national level. She presents herself as one of the poor slum dwellers, which represent the whole communities involved in the social movement

Her space for the politics was constructed only in a few years. It means that space change over time. As a person’s role changes, they construct new space with intensive activities. In case of Plaa, turning point was when she quitted her job and began to work for the community. Second, Plaa does what she wants to do and what she thinks is right to do, just beyond what is expected to her. Thus, women’s roles are sometimes beyond gender roles in Thai society where men are supposed to dominate political sphere. Third, she made and extended her space through networking as well as discursive practices. She mentions that some men do not like women who speak very well in public, even though it is a correct and relevant opinion.

Making space is a creation of a person. It allows a person to control one’s action as well as the meaning attached to the sphere of action. Woman tries to make space in order to define their life and the place where they can feel comfortable. In particular, an urban area where dynamism is its characteristics is a good place for women to widen their action and network. It depends on women’s initiative, though it is not an easy way due to the many problems and restriction in urban society. There has to have some conditions. For example, they need such as relatives’ financial and mental supports.

6. Conclusion

Urban slum communities seem to be a difficult problem to deal with for outsiders due to its dynamics and complexity. Residents frequently move in and out. Politics within and outside of the community often change the map of the power relation. However this dynamics allows women to act as political figure both in the community and wider society. Their active participation in the land rights conflict shows that urban setting and several conditions give women more freedom of choice and opportunity.

Women’s roles are multiple. They are expected to be a good wife and mother, an income earner at household level. In addition, they are expected to be contributor of community activities. Some women can enlarge or change their frame of activities through their fight and struggle against the outside authority or control. The challenge gives women more power to define themselves and their space.

References

- Akin, Rabibhadana. 1975. *Bangkok Slum: Aspects of Social Organization*. Ph.D Thesis. New York: Cornell University.
- Arizpe, Lourdes. 1977. “Women in the Informal Labor Sector: The Case of Mexico City”. *Signs*,

Vol.3, No. 1, p.25-37.

- Bencha, Yoddumnern-Attig. 1992. "Thai Family Structure and Organization: Changing Roles and Duties in Historical Perspective". In Bencha Yoddumnern-Attig, *et al* (eds.) *Changing roles and statuses of women in Thailand: a documentary assessment*. Salaya: Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University.
- Brenner, Suzanne A. 1995. "Why Women Rule the Roost: Rethinking Javanese Ideologies of Gender and Self-Control". In Aihwa Ong and Michael G. Peletz (eds.) *Bewitching Women, Pious Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Clinard, Marshall B. 1970. *Slums and Community Development: Experiments in Self-Help*. New York: The Free Press.
- Community Architects for Shelter and Environment (CASE). 1998. *The Invisible People: a Census of the Slum Dwellers of Chiang Mai*. Chiang Mai.
- Errington, Sherry. 1990. "Recasting Sex, Gender, and Power: A Theoretical and Regional Overview." In Jane Atkinson and Sherry Errington (eds.) *Power and Difference*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Hasson, Shlomo. 1997. "Local Cultures and Urban Protests". In Steve Pile and Michael Keith (eds.) *Geographies of Resistance*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Karim, Wazir Jahan. 1995. "Bilateralism and Gender in Southeast Asia." In Wazir Jahan Karim, ed. *'Male' and 'Female' in Development Southeast Asia*. Washington DC: Berg Publishers.
- Massey, Doreen. 1993. "Power-geometry and a progressive sense of place". In jon bird, barry curtis, tim putnam, george robertson and lisa tickner (eds.) *mapping the futures: local cultures, global change*. London and New York: Routledge.
- , 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- McMorran, M. V. 1984. "Northern Thai Ancestral Cults: Authority and Aggression". In *Mankind*, Special Issue 3 "Spirit Cult and the Position of Women in Northern Thailand". Vol.14, No.4. p.308-314.
- Mills, Mary Beth. 1995. "Attack of the Widow Ghosts: Gender, Death, and Modernity in Northeast Thailand." In Aihwa Ong and Michael G. Pelets (eds.) *Bewitching Women, Pious Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- , 1997a. "Contesting the margins of modernity: women, migration, and consumption in Thailand". *American Ethnologist*. Vol.24, No.1, p.37-61.
- , 1997b. "Working for Wages in Bangkok, Reworking Gender and Family in the Countryside". In Virada Somswasdi and Sally Theobald (eds.) *Women, Gender Relations and Development in Thai Society*. Chiang Mai: Women's Studies Center, Chiang Mai University.
- Mohanty, Chandra. 1991. "Power, Representation, and Feminist Critique." In Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Tones (eds.) *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Moser, Caroline O. N. 1993. *Gender planning and development: Theory, practice and training*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Shields, Rob., 1991. *Places on the Margin: alternative geography of modernity*. London: Routledge.

- Potter, Sulamith, Heins. 1977. *Family Life in a Northern Thai Village: A Study in the Structural Significance of Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Tanabe, Shigeharu. 1991. "Spirit, Power and the Discourse of Female Gender: The Phi Meng Cult of Northern Thailand." In Manas Chitakasem and Andrew Turton (eds.) *Thai Constructions of Knowledge*. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.
- The Slum Upgrading Office. 1980. *Slum Improvement Program: The Answer for Low-Income People in City Settlement*. Bangkok: National Housing Authority.
- Thorbek, Susanne. 1987. *Voices From the City: Women of Bangkok*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books.
- , 1990. *Gender and Slum Culture in Urban Asia*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books.