People's Reality, People's Process and Alternative Development in Urban Asia

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James Ferguson, an anthropologist, decomposes the concept of modernity in an attempt to point out the problems associated with interpreting it according to the view of development as inherently progressive.[1] Such a view, he argues, leads to the implicit assumption that development progresses uniformly and spontaneously according to a single imaginary time scale along whose various intermediate stages the different nations of the world may be found. However, Ferguson does not stop with the assertion so often repeated in the field of anthropology that social diversity and cultural differences give rise to modernity of various kinds. Rather, he points out that there is a global-scale political and economic hierarchy whose boundaries form great barriers keeping developmental processes from unfolding naturally over time. Moreover, as Ferguson perceptively argues, because development is viewed in terms of a temporally progressive process, the fact that there are such major barriers at the various steps in the hierarchy is glossed over and concealed. For example, it is commonly held that least developed countries in Africa are simply not as far along on the developmental time scale as others and that they need only strive patiently, or perhaps undertake a few more well-placed development projects, before they will come up to par with the developed countries. The reality, however, is that the least developed countries have not only been tracked into the bottom of the global hierarchy from the very beginning but are being kept there by immense barriers that seem only to grow higher as the world becomes increasingly globalized.

Temporalized views of modernity and development which are widespread in areas such as development theory and growth theory even within economics, my own field of study, thus perhaps indicating the extent to which academia itself has fallen victim to the trap pointed out by Ferguson. This trap seems to have similarly ensnared not only people of developed

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[1] See Ferguson, "Decomposing Modernity: History and Hierarchy after Development," in Proceedings of the SOPHIA-COE International Symposium 2003 "Prospects and Challenges for the World Polity: Global Norms in the Twenty-first Century" (Tokyo: Sophia University, 2003).

countries but many in the developing and least developed countries as well, so that only a few are willing to grapple with the ramifications of the aforementioned global hierarchy. Given such circumstances, Ferguson's ideas are very important, especially to those truly concerned with combating poverty. On the other hand, however, it is also true that Ferguson provides little advice or suggestions as to how to actively break down the walls of the hierarchy that he decries. The present article will thus see what may be learned from South and Southeast Asia in considering whether this hierarchy may be successfully dismantled, and if so, how.

The Urban Poor and the Informal Sector in Asia

While Ferguson's argument unfolds mainly in relation to Africa, the present article will focus on Asia and particularly on its urban poor. As will be discussed in further detail below, both the political and economic circumstances surrounding many of the urban poor in Asia as well as the way in which these poor are perceived and treated by government authorities, international organizations, and inhabitants of developed countries reveal this region to be facing the same issues that confront Ferguson's Africa.[2] In other words, people in both regions have been deceived into believing in their future progress even though they have actually been placed at the bottom of the political/economic hierarchy from the outset and continue to be kept there by barriers blocking their advancement.

Before starting, let me note that I will continue to use the term *development* despite Ferguson's objections to its assumption that time is inevitably progressive. Furthermore, though the verb *to develop* possesses both transitive (to develop something) and intransitive meanings (when something develops in and of itself), I employ it in the latter sense, in the belief that this usage will further clearify the barriers rigidifying the political/economic hierarchy identified by Ferguson.

Since my own expertise lies in economics, the discussion will seek to consider the urban poor in Asia first by focusing on the nature of their economic activities. Of the words used in

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[2] Though Ferguson cites East and Southeast Asia as examples of successful development, this assessment does not necessarily accurately reflect the current conditions of the urban poor in those regions. In addition, much of South Asia remains largely underdeveloped.

relation to the economic activities of the poor, the term *urban informal sector* is particularly well known. Though its exact definition remains a subject of much debate, we will not enter into the details here. Suffice it to say that the urban informal sector generally includes those types of labor so often seen in Asian cities, for example the open-air market stalls and food vendors crowding the streets, self-employed street businesses such as bicycle repair, cottage industries in effect engaging in domestic piecework including the production of sewn goods, small-scale transportation services such as rickshaws or pedicabs, junk dealers who make the rounds gathering discarded materials into bags or onto hand-drawn carts, and scavengers who inhabit garbage dumps in order to make a living foraging for recyclable materials.

How are the people of this urban informal sector, that is to say the urban poor, perceived by their governments or by inhabitants of developed countries including international organizations and NGOs? While many development projects supported by the national governments together with the developed countries and international organizations have been carried out in Asian nations since the 1960s, most of them have proved to be directed towards the formal sector. Thus the people in the informal sector have been left out of developmental processes and are forced to eke out a living in the face of deplorable conditions. Moreover, the development process itself has yielded a "new poor" who have formed new slum communities and further expanded the informal sector. In short, the common perception is that the informal sector is considered to lie in the shadow of the formal sector and the urban poor to be people excluded from developmental processes. When I first started my research I, too, shared this view. My perceptions gradually began to change, however, as I visited slums and observed the informal sector first hand in various Asian cities on a number of occasions. I found many peoples striving to earn a livelihood through varied enterprises, fighting to improve their living standards by forming community groups, and otherwise seeking to better their lives in any way that they could. Many of these efforts were, moreover, driven by great creativity, energy, and vitality, and as I became better acquainted with them I realized that the informal sector is far from being simply a gathering place for those excluded from progress void of all potentiality for future development. Rather, I began to believe that the informal sector perhaps contained the seeds of a kind of progress that would solidly preserve the

cultural foundations of its people while opening up promises of a new future. In other words, it might possess the possibility and potential to provide an alternate course of development distinct from that traced by the already developed countries.

Interestingly enough, economic literature concerning the informal sector reveal that even though its potential not only for autonomous development but for contributing to the economic development of the country as a whole has been acknowledged from a purely theoretical standpoint, the results of empirical research do not show the occurrence of growth. This lack of performance is one reason why the informal sector so often tends to be deemed unnecessary for the county and excluded from the development policy. However, it seems likely that the gap between theory and reality is actually the result of barriers preventing autonomous development from taking its course.

Thus the informal sector, far from being in a position where development is assured to unfold naturally over time, appears instead to be impeded by formidable barriers that restrict it to the bottom of the national, and ultimately global, political/economic hierarchy. It is here that we can observe a connection to the issues pointed out by Ferguson.

The following section will consider the nature of these barriers from a mostly economic standpoint.

Three Barriers Blocking Autonomous development

Difficulties in gaining access to land, credit, and the market are three of the barriers blocking the autonomous development of the urban informal sector and the poor. These barriers constitute not only three different kinds of access problems but three successive stages, since under normal conditions the unfolding of developmental processes would cause them to be lifted in the same order as listed above. Let me discuss each of these barriers in more detail.

Access to Land

The urban poor live mainly in slum or squatter areas. Not only do they reside in such areas but much of their productive activity tends to be centered there as well. These people constantly face the threat of forced eviction. The Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions

reports that 6.74 million people throughout the world were forcibly evicted between January 2001 and December 2002. Another 6.33 million were reported as threatened with eviction which was ultimately not carried out.[3] Eviction along with the fear thereof greatly impedes any first steps toward autonomous development. For example, consider cases where people live under especially adverse housing conditions, such as in areas near swamps or without adequate sewage. The threat of eviction will prevent residents from developing any motivation to improve these conditions at least to some extent on their own, since even if they do anything they will never know when they might be driven out. Evictions furthermore destroy not only homes but also the production equipment, that is to say capital, of any modest enterprise that may have started out there. Street vendors, peddlers, and informal transportation providers including pedicab drivers also often face forced removal from metropolitan areas or otherwise find their access to areas where they can ply their business severely restricted.[4]

Access to Credit

While it is true that various grassroots efforts initiated since the 1970s (to be discussed in a later section) have led those living in Asian slum communities to gradually improve their access to land by their own power, this in itself is not sufficient in order to ensure sustainable autonomous development. The poor have extremely limited access to banks and other formal lending institutions despite the fact that in order to start or expand their businesses they must first acquire some sort of capital. Their only option is to accept the illegally high interest rates charged by local moneylenders or by the middlemen who buy their finished goods and/orwho

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[3] In South and Southeast Asia the figures were 1.7 million for those evicted and 3.9 million for those threatened with eviction. See COHRE, *Global Survey on Forced Evictions No. 9: Violations of Human Rights* (Geneva: Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, 2003).

[4] To give one example, a "clean-up operation" proceeding in Jakarta since the middle of August 2001 under the slogan "Cities without Slums" has repeatedly led to the confiscation of pedicabs, the demolition of vending stalls and car wash operations, arrests of street children, street merchants and sidewalk performers, and the demolition of houses belonging to the poor, most of them carried out violently and at night. According to an investigation conducted by the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) from November 4-8, 2001, during a roughly three-month period 140,000 peopleof the informal sector lost their livelihood and 6,000 households or 20,000 people their homes. Such evictions continue intermittently to this day so that for instance the Urban Poor Consortium, a Jakarta-based NGO, reports 15,000 people as having been driven out of their homes during September and October, 2003.

arrange for the raw materials and equipment necessary for production.[5] This situation must be mitigated if sustainable autonomous development is to be achieved.

Access to Markets

Although increased credit access would enable the poor of the informal sector to more easily start up or expand their businesses and thus to generate their own employment, this improvement will not lead to an immediate rise in the income levels of the poor, largely because they will still face great hurdles in gaining market access. Even when the poor are able to engage in some sort of production, they usually find their entry into markets for selling finished goods as well as for buying raw materials severely restricted. Often they can only market their products through a limited number of well-established local middlemen who take advantage of their plight and give them only a paltry sum in return. In cases where the poor must also acquire their raw materials from the same middlemen, these dealers will of course demand prices that will siphon off any surplus income, leaving them barely enough to live on.

Improving market access is a far more difficult task than dealing with the aforementioned issue of credit, since middlemen, corporate enterprises, and others with vested interests in maintaining the status quo will seek to prevent any newcomers from entering the market and threatening their advantage. Overcoming barriers to market participation will be key in ensuring that the poor can continue on their way toward sustainable autonomous development.[6] Outside support such as from government, the private sector, international organizations, and both domestic and foreign NGOs will also be required on a much larger scale than when dealing with the other two types of barriers. Efforts to secure fairer entry to markets from the Poor's side can also be a way to redress the inequitable form of market liberalization that has resulted from the current neo-liberal globalization. The form of neo-liberal globalization proceeding today is actually an extremely unfair process that focuses

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[5] This form of financing is known as *interlinkage*. See Shimokawa, "Interlinked Transactions and the Improvement of Access to Credit and Market in the Informal Sector" (in Japanese), *Ajia keizai* 42:8 (2001), pp. 27–52 for further discussion.

[6] Shimokawa, "Competition Policy in the Informal Sector's Output Markets: Improvement of the Small Business' Access to Market" (in Japanese), *Ajia keizai* 40:2 (1999), pp. 2–18 makes use of economic models in order to show the importance of improving market access and argues that increased credit access unaccompanied by improvement in market access may exacerbate rather than alleviate poverty.

on achieving market liberalization in one direction only, namely that of opening up developing markets so as to give free entry to multinational conglomerates or to overseas corporations owned by already developed countries. This is contrary to the kind of liberalization that should be achieved—giving freedom of access from the Poor's side to financial and goods markets both in and out of their country.

People's Process: Creative Grassroots Efforts

Many creative community-based practices initiated by the poor themselves to overcome the kinds of barriers described above are already in progress throughout Asia, although these efforts remain largely unknown in the developed countries. It should be noted here that those with the preconceived notion that the informal sector and the poor are dropouts from the development process, or who see the world only through conventional views of development aid prevalent in the developed countries, are unlikely to notice what are actually quite numerous endeavors already taking place in Asian countries. Indeed, development projects and policies launched by agents with such preconceptions actually end up wrecking what good grassroots efforts have managed to accomplish.[7] Some of these grassroots efforts, have nevertheless met with notable success, and the discussion will now describe a few outstanding examples and Asian common trends presented in the order of the three barriers mentioned in the previous section.

Gaining Easier Access to Land

The late 1960s to the 1970s in Asia was a time of frequent forced evictions conducted against slum and squatter areas, to which the urban poor fought back by organizing communities. A particularly major influence upon these community organizing movements that spread rapidly throughout all of Asia from the 1970s onward were the tactics advocated by Saul Alinsky.[8]

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[7] Through an analysis of one development project conducted in Lesotho by the World Bank, Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), skillfully depicts how those who view a situation through a preconceived framework fail to see reality as it is. The same thing may be said to be happening in Asia as well.

[8] Saul Alinsky (1909-1972) was born in the slums of Chicago and around 1940 developed his community organizing tactics while actually working to organize the residents of African-American neighborhoods.

Described briefly, this strategy call for a trained community organizer to come and live within a slum or squatter area so as to help organize and strengthen the community by encouraging residents to consider about the issues that concern them, raise awareness, and find ways to solve their problems on their own.[9] When the times comes to negotiate with the authorities—a step that is inevitable if the community is to keep the authorities from forcibly evicting them—emphasis is placed on achieving practical goals through creative and direct action so as to engender a cycle of effective social change where success empowers the community and enables it to pursue even higher goals.

Alinsky's co-worker was invited to South Korea in 1968 and to the Philippines in 1970 in order to train community organizers. The newly trained organizers in turn became the instrumental force behind the 1971 founding of the Philippines-based Asian Committee for People's Organization (ACPO), an institution dedicated to establishing organizer training centers within Asian countries. Through its efforts, organizer headquarters and training courses were set up one after another in Hong Kong, Indonesia, Thailand, and India. Training sessions were also held in Nepal and Malaysia while leaders from countries such as Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Pakistan. and Bangladesh, which had been unable to establish their own facilities, received training at ACPO. The efforts of these new organizers soon gave birth to many well-known slum community organizations around Asia. One example, Zone One Tondo Organization (ZOTO) founded in 1970 within Manila's Tondo slums, counted approximately 300,000 people at its height around 1975. In Mumbai, India, the People's Responsible Organization of United Dharavi (PROUD) was formed in 1979 within Dharavi, said to be the largest slum in Asia (current population: approximately 800,000), followed by the 1986 establishment of the People's Organization Wadala for Equality and Rights (POWER) in Wadala (total population: approximately 400,000). Thanks to the power exerted by these people's organizations, still active today, there have been no instances of forced eviction in either slum since 1993. Alinsky's organizing stragegy thus had an extremely powerful influence upon the Asian urban poor, though other communities established independently of

[9] Once these groups grow sufficiently powerful the organizer usually withdraws in order to begin work in another slum community.

his ideas have come into being as well. In any case it seems that community organizing has found wide currency among Asians, who have generally tended to retain community-mindedness. These communities have in turn formed the basis for various other efforts described below.

Before going on to describe endeavors related to the next type of barrier, I will mention two more unique and influential practices aimed toward improving land access through ways other than simple fighting by organizing community, namely the Community Mortgage Program (CMP) first begun in the Philippines and land-sharing measures carried out in Thailand.

Explained briefly, CMP calls on the poor to form their own community organizations for becoming eligible to purchase either the land they currently occupy illegally or some other substitute property through twenty-five-year government loans obtained using this land as security.[10] The program originally started out when Francisco "Bimbo" Fernandez, an Alinskyan community organizer, began to look for something more that the poor could do rather than simply resisting the authorities to prevent forced evictions. His community began to put aside funds and, after thus showing society that the poor were capable of saving, used this money to acquire a loan toward buying a low-priced piece of property onto which they could settle. The project succeeded well beyond initial expectations, demonstrating that as long as the threat of eviction was removed the poor could make significant improvements to their own living conditions as well as be fully capable of meeting loan repayments.[11] Seeing in the success of the project a key to solving the squatter problem, the government initiated CMP in 1988, as a result of which over 10,000 households per year, or a total of 130,000 as of the beginning of 2002, have gained land title to their own land. Slightly revised versions of CMP are now also in place in Thailand and Cambodia.

Land sharing is an alternative to forced evictions first devised in the early 1980s in Bangkok, Thailand through the combined efforts of slum community organizations seeking to

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[10] Note that the most interesting feature of CMP is that currently illegally occupied land becomes the mortgage of loan for the community.

[11] Even more significant than the fact that the poor managed to prove their ability to others was that they were able to realize it for themselves.

resist the tide of urban redevelopment. In this revolutionary new measure the poor, again on the condition they form their own community organization, participate in government-mediated talks with landowners and developers in order to divide property into sections destined for redevelopment and others reserved for relocating displaced residents. The process allows residents to continue living in the same place without fear of being forced to move to some far-off area as had happened before,[12] and thus may be said to represent the fruits of a combined commitment on the part of all the actors involved toward guaranteeing secure housing for the poor. Nine projects have been carried out in Bangkok so far, with the practice spreading to outlying cities in Thailand as well as to countries such as Cambodia and Indonesia.

Both of the programs discussed above may be considered assertive, creative and community-based undertakings initiated by the poor themselves.

Improving Access to Credit[13]

Microcredit has in recent years attracted much attention as an effective means of alleviating poverty through better access to credit. In February 1997, over 2900 representatives of government agencies, NGOs, and private organizations based in 137 countries gathered for the Microcredit Summit held in Washington, D.C., which proclaimed the goal of providing microcredit to 100 million impoverished households throughout the world by the year 2005 to provide working capital to enable people to support themselves. One reason behind the worldwide interest in microcredit lies in the success of Grameen Bank, a small-scale financial institution established in Bangladesh in 1983 that has effectively adopted a system of lending money to poor farmers. In this system, the farmers form groups of five whose members are called upon to provide each other with mutual accountability and assistance.

While Grameen Bank is indeed a collaborative and creative practice which could not be imagined by traditional financial institutions, it is also true that even before its establishment

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[12] Not having to move far away is especially significant given employment concerns.
[13] See Shimokawa, "Interlinked Transactions and the Improvement of Access to Credit" in which I employ an economic model in order to analyze under what circumstances increased credit access leads to alleviation of poverty. The paper concludes that areas evidencing widespread occurrence of interlinkage will particularly benefit from improved access to credit.

other systems depending even more heavily on the self-initiative of the poor—namely, saving groups—had long already been functioning within many Asian urban slum communities, albeit to different degrees in different countries.[14] Though details tend to vary, saving groups generally call upon the poor to gather within the community to contribute their savings on a daily, weekly, or some other regular basis so that those who have participated over a certain period of time may, when the need arises, draw loans of up to a set amount out of this joint pool. Several such groups have eventually grown into formally organized credit unions.[15] The practice has spread rapidly among the poor, so that for example approximately 850 out of the 1200 slum communities in Bangkok possessed some kind of saving group as of 1996, a year before the aforementioned Microcredit Summit. Many NGOs, international organization networks, and government agencies have furthermore emerged to support saving groups, and since the latter half of the 1980s the system has grown to reach not only urban slums located throughout Asia but also in several African countries including South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, etc.

The main difference between microcredit and saving groups, I would note, is that the former is initiated by outsiders using funds also brought in from the outside while the latter is organized by the poor themselves largely out of their own resources. Compared to microcredit, saving groups and credit unions thus contribute more effectively to the empowerment of the poor while at the same time according better with autonomous development through people's process. Although institutions such as the World Bank or international NGOs seem to have focused on microcredit as their preferred method of alleviating poverty, saving groups probably possess greater significance as far as the autonomous development of the Asian urban poor is concerned, since they are fostered by the people's own efforts.

Improving Access to Market

When compared to the aforementioned issue of credit access, the need for greater market

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[14] To my knowledge, saving groups have existed in the slums of Bangkok at least as early as 1965.
[15] Efforts to establish credit unions, known as the *credit union movement*, was especially widely seen within Thailand, South Korea, and the Philippines, eventually leading to the successful passing of relevant legislation in these countries during the latter half of the 1970s.

access seems neither as widely recognized nor to have inspired as much effort toward reform. Improving market access is moreover much more difficult than enhancing access to credit, as already discussed, and the few measures that have been attempted cannot be said to have met with great success. On the other hand, the poor have steadily come to acknowledge the importance of surmounting this barrier, making it useful to present some of the groundbreaking endeavors currently underway.

Here I shall focus mainly on the work done by the Community Organization Development Institute (CODI), a Thai government agency. Though CODI places greater weight on engaging in the kinds of efforts toward better land and credit access already described in the previous sections rather than on striving for fairer market participation, attempts to combat the first two barriers have prompted a growing awareness of the need to deal with the third, leading to the implementation of several measures toward this goal. The following brief description of CODI's history and work will focus especially on its efforts toward increasing credit and market access for the poor.

CODI was formed in 2000 after its predecessor, the Urban Community Development Office (UCDO) founded in 1992, merged with the Rural Development Fund in accordance with the philosophy that urban and rural impoverished communities should work more closely together. The institution is characterized by a unique organizational structure in which the board of directors is made up of representatives of slum communities together with government officials, members of private sector, and academics and other experts.[16] Somsook Boonyabancha, director of UCDO and CODI since their establishment, adheres to the principle that real development is the development (growth, expansion and networking communities by the people's process. Thus she aims to use the fight against the three barriers as a springboard for further community growth.

In one unique project intended to increase credit availability for the poor, the UCDO began financing loans as revolving fund to the aforementioned saving groups found

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[16] The fact that slum community members have a place at the center of the decision-making process along with those from government and private sector should afford great advantages for the organization as it works to expand and accelerate moves among the poor toward autonomous development and should prove particularly beneficial for efforts to ensure better market access.

throughout Thai slum communities after realizing that the borrowing demands placed on these pools often tended to exceed the sum that could be gathered solely through the efforts of the members themselves, thus jeopardizing the group as well as the community as a whole. This measure not only enabled many of the urban poor in Thailand to more easily acquire their own land and houses but also provided the means for them to start many small businesses. At this point the UCDO encountered a new problem, namely that the income of the poor did not rise as high as initially expected despite the employment generated by the establishment and expansion of small businesses made possible through the acquisition of credit. The UCDO reasoned that the root of the problem was limited market access, in other words the beating down of the prices of their products (clothing, food, accessories, sundries, and the like) by middlemen and the concentration of the supply of raw materials necessary to producing those products in the hands of a few dealers. Its response was to institute a new Community Enterprise Division starting in 1996 responsible for proposing and implementing projects to give informal sector businesses more opportunities for participating in the market. More specifically, the division has held trade fairs introducing goods produced in the informal sector to distributors and consumers both inside and outside the country in an attempt to encourage the development of new markets and distribution channels lying outside the influence of established middlemen. Efforts are also underway to build mutual information-exchange networks among informal sector entrepreneurs as well as to explore ways for the poor to enter the distribution sector on a joint basis.

The seeds of similar efforts to improve market access may also be seen in several areas outside of Thailand. To give one example, the Equitable Marketing Association (EMA) based in Kolkata, India works together with cooperatives of mostly poor laborers[17] in West Bengal in order to support their participation in new domestic and foreign (mostly European) markets free from the intervention of already existing middlemen. The Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) is another NGO that assists the poor trying to improve their own living conditions in slum and

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[17] Though most of these are craft cooperatives, the fact that there is also a tea cooperative (albeit in the rural sector) is especially worthy of note. While foreign investment has had a firm grip over tea plantations and distribution ever since the British colonial period, making it virtually impossible for poor growers outside the plantations to participate in international markets, the cooperative has continued to take direct action toward rectifying this situation.

squatter districts mainly around Karachi, though the organization's influence has now grown to spread throughout all of Pakistan as well as beyond to other Asian countries. Through its work not only to improve the living conditions of the urban poor but also to make more credit available toward the starting and expansion of small businesses, the OPP, like others, has recently come to recognize the importance of dealing with obstacles to market access. As a result the organization has begun setting up networks of microentrepreneurs working within the urban informal sector and has plans to negotiate with the government in order to enable them to collectively enter international markets. The OPP has furthermore helped set up numerous cooperatives in suburban agricultural areas and through these networks begun supporting joint purchases as well as collective participation in domestic wholesale and international markets.

Characteristics of the People's Process

The successful grassroots efforts undertaken by the Asian urban poor in order to combat the three barriers described above may be said to share the following four characteristics:

1. They emphasize mutual cooperation and are often community-based.

2. They are creative.

3. They have spread through mutual learning processes in which, for example, the poor share their own experiences with one another.

4. They tend to focus more on the process than the goal.

Since the previous discussion has already sufficiently dealt with the first two characteristics, attention will be given here to the remaining two. Item 3, mutual learning among the poor through the sharing of experiences, is often also known by the term *horizontal* or *community exchange*. Most people affiliated with the developed countries, development aid agencies and organizations, or the government usually think about the poor only in terms of teaching them, getting them to do something or conducting some pre-packaged project for their benefit. Experience has, however, shown that such attitudes often do not generate the intended results, or even if they do, that the desired change stays only within that single area without spreading further. By contrast, horizontal exchange results

not when know-how or projects are brought in from the outside but when the poor share their own experiences with others, causing their self-initiated grassroots endeavors to spread spontaneously to other regions. This experience sharing process is spreading beyond national borders to contribute to the formation of a global network among the poor all over the world, so that influences may for example spread from Cambodia to Thailand, from Thailand to India, and from India on to countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe.[18] The existence of these networking movements is a part of the reality of Asian cities that must not be ignored.

The last item, that of emphasizing the process more than the goal, has been especially evident since the 1980s. This characteristic seems to mark the difference between current efforts toward autonomous development on the part of the Asian poor and Western-inspired development practices and social movements previously initiated in the region.[19] To explain more fully, where the old style had been to establish a goal and then to apply various tools toward its realization, these endeavors by the Asian poor toward creating and enhancing their own autonomous space, whether they involve forming saving groups, improving their own living conditions, or creating networks of community organizations through the mutual sharing of experience, do not start out with any specific aim in mind. The participants' enjoyment of the process is what drives the movement forward and in this process enables the overcoming of great barriers.

The abovementioned realities regarding the lives of the Asian urban poor become evident only after Western-style preconceptions regarding development have been abandoned, as already repeatedly noted. By way of providing a summary of the characteristics of the people's process taking place in Asia, the section will conclude by introducing again the ideas of CODI director Somsook Boonyabancha, who is a longtime advocate of the potential of the poor to realize their own autonomous development. Somsook believes that the essence of development lies not in economic or material progress but rather in the strengthening and

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[18] In 1996, such horizontal exchange processes brought together federations of community organizations formed by the urban poor (note: *not* NGOs) from six Asian countries (Cambodia, India, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand), four African countries (Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe) and one in Latin America (Brasil) to give birth to the international network Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI).

[19] Leftist movements as well as the Alinskyan community organizing movement previously discussed may also be considered Western-inspired, since both were introduced from the United States.

expansion of the community, community networks, and the people's process. Once this perspective is adopted, material concerns such as secure housing, escape from poverty, or better living standards stop seeming like the ultimate goals of development. Not only that, but the aforementioned three barriers and any other obstacles that may arise switch from being problems to be solved to becoming opportunities for the people's process to grow even more powerful and far-reaching. This sort of newfound outlook and mentality certainly does seem uniquely Asian.

Advancing the People's Process and Enchancing the Space of the Poor

As the previous discussion should have already made clear, the current state of the Asian urban poor already contains the seeds of an alternative form of development. Although the article has dealt chiefly with economic issues, a people's process is actually one in which the poor create and expand their own space not only within the economy but also within the fields of politics, society, and culture. If such a process can continue to cross borders and spread worldwide—if, in other words, it is possible for the poor to expand their space within world politics, the economy, and society—then there is a chance that these movements will eventually succeed in breaking down the great barriers maintaining the political/economic hierarchy that Ferguson identifies. To put it the other way around, in order to take down the barriers the poor must work to gain more of their own say and to advance their people's process even further. Those of us in developed countries should contribute toward dismantling the barriers rather than simply continue to dole out aid that is bound to a conventional development framework, thereby enabling the poor to pursue their own distinctive form of development more easily according to their own inclinations. If it is indeed true that the developed countries and the privileged classes have been complicit in building these barriers, both historically as well as now within today's increasingly globalizing society, then our responsibility to combat them becomes that much greater.