

## International Volunteer Cooperation Activities of GONGOVA: Grassroots Programme for the Underprivileged Villages in Thailand\*

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### Abstract

For more substantially sustainable growth of local communities in developing countries, the role of non-governmental organizations (NGO's) is of increasing importance particularly in international voluntary aid for grassroots projects and in the efforts of education for the younger generation to help them appreciate such voluntary aid. With this in mind,, the Gakushuin Overseas NGO Volunteer Activity Programme (GONGOVA) has, by conducting a series of grassroots projects since 1997 in remote mountain villages in Thailand, been serving as a volunteer-education programme and as a volunteer-practice programme as well. To help us think more clearly about the above-mentioned role of NGO's, this paper discusses (1) basic features of GONGOVA which emphasizes the creative compatibility between educational and practical programmes, (2) desirable attitudes expected from volunteers working for grassroots projects, (3) prerequisites expected from the local communities for fruitful outcomes from grassroots assistance by

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NGO's, and (4) functional complementarily existing in private-public cooperation partnerships for the successful conduct of grassroots projects.

## 1. Introduction

The role of the volunteer practical programmes which are made up of small-scale international cooperative grassroots projects, has recently become increasingly important for underprivileged local communities in developing countries to improve in a sustainable way their social, economic and environmental conditions with minimum negative impact upon the valuable local qualities<sup>1)</sup> in both the hardware and software spheres. The same applies to the volunteer educational programmes for the young people who possess a sound attitude towards global volunteerism, and who wish to enhance their ability to comprehend the profound implications of volunteer activities and to foster self-enlightenment and self-fulfillment through international volunteer activities.

With the points made above in mind, the Gakushuin Overseas NGO Volunteer Activity Programme (GONGOVA) was launched in 1997, and has since then been conducted every year up to the present. The primary function expected of GONGOVA is twofold. One is supposed to be performed through the volunteer-education programme, and the other through the volunteer-practice programme.<sup>2)</sup>

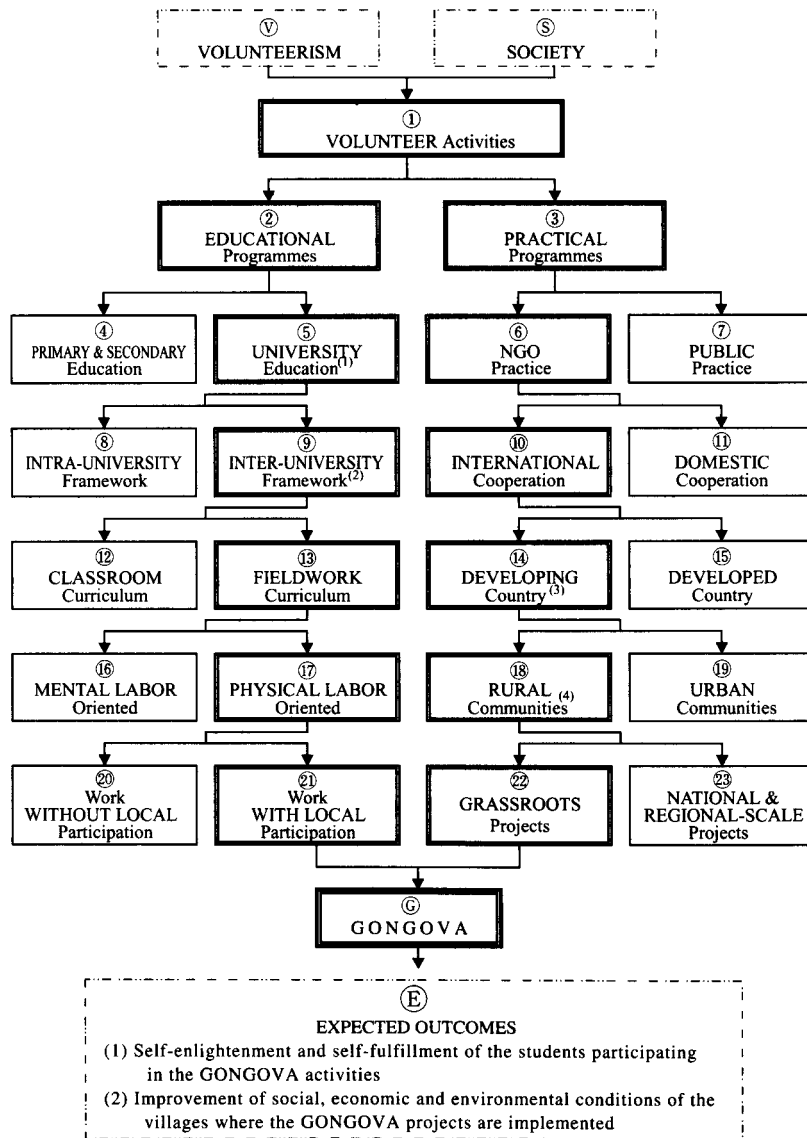
The major purpose of this paper is threefold. The first one is to take a general view of GONGOVA by paying attention to the basic attributive components of GONGOVA, including the creative compatibility between volunteer-education and volunteer-practice programmes which GONGOVA sets up. The second is to discuss the two themes that are vital for the innovative conduct of volunteer activities which have a twofold "educational and practical" function like GONGOVA. One theme is on the desirable attitudes of volunteers from the viewpoint of volunteer education, while the other is on the necessary prerequisites for the local communities receiving the grass-roots assistance from NGO's so that positive outcomes can be secured. The third purpose is to try to make the point of the need for our efforts to promote functional complementarity existing in private-public cooperation partnerships<sup>3)</sup> when the grassroots projects are implemented by NGO's.

To meet the above objectives, the present paper first describes in Section 2 the characteristics of GONGOVA with remarks on the framework for the educational-practical combination in volunteer activities in grassroots projects with a view of its effective influence upon the encouragement of university students to shed new light on international volunteerism. Then in Section 3, it talks about desirable volunteer attitudes and necessary local community factors for fruitful outcomes in grassroots projects by NGO's. Finally, in Section 4 based on the discussion in Sections 2 and 3, comments are made on further necessity of the improvement of the framework for the private-public cooperation partnerships particularly its improvement in the complementary function of the NGO programmes for grassroots projects with the local, regional or national government programmes as well as with the ODA programmes.

## 2. Gakushuin Overseas NGO Volunteer Activity Programme (GONGOVA)

GONGOVA is a university NGO programme set up to carry out international cooperative volunteer activities in remote villages of developing countries. Programmes have been conducted annually since 1997 principally in the hill-tribe villages of Thailand as can be seen in the notes of Figure 1. The

**Figure 1 Attributive Components of the GONGOVA**



[Notes]

- (1) The GONGOVA puts itself in a position to serve as an authorized extracurricular volunteer-education programme at Gakushuin University, Tokyo, Japan. At the same time, it can be considered as a university-NGO body for carrying out practical volunteer activities.
- (2) The GONGOVA has the permanent team of participants from Chiangmai University, Chiangmai, Thailand.
- (3) Thailand.
- (4) The GONGOVA has been involved in remote mountain villages inhabited by ethnic minority highlanders (or ethnic minority hill-tribe people) as Ban Namchang, Ban Phadang, Ban Lukkholum, Ban Phapuk, Ban Nonphajam-mai and Ban Maechang in Maehongson Province of Thailand.

attributive components of GONGOVA are outlined in Figure 1, while the somewhat detailed features of GONGOVA are explained in Appendix-1 for the general outline and in Appendix-2 for the recent activities carried out by GONGOVA in 2002 as well as in GONGOVA Programme Unit (1997,1998,1999 and 2000) for the reports of annual activities from 1997 through to 2000.

As Figure 1 shows, the volunteer activities (①) usually stem from the mentality-reality interaction between volunteerism (Ⓥ) and society (Ⓢ). In the case of GONGOVA, its volunteer activities carry both educational and practical roles (②and③) to help materialize the constructive synergistic effects between them. More concretely, GONGOVA performs two basic functions through its volunteer activities: educational and practical. Concerning the former function, GONGOVA has been organized as an authorized extracurricular activity programme mainly for the students of Gakushuin University in Tokyo (Ⓢ). GONGOVA aims to heighten the enlightenment and self-fulfillment (ⓔ) of university students from both Japan and Thailand (⑨) by providing them with opportunities to train themselves in global volunteerism through the relatively heavy work (⑬ and ⑰) in international cooperative grassroots projects. They work together with the ethnic minority highlanders of the remote mountain villages situated in Maehongson Province<sup>4)</sup> of the northwestern region of Thailand (Ⓣ). This education function helps the participating students to enrich their capacity as international volunteers to promote a sense of equality, to develop humane benevolence, and to cultivate perseverance in collaborative hard work. At the same time, this function also helps them to deepen their understanding of the value of dynamic sustainability<sup>5)</sup> in the social, economic and environmental milieus that are peculiar to each of the villages where GONGOVA does its work. This educational function is furthermore extended through GONGOVA's field-study trips as described in Appendix-2. As a result, the education function of GONGOVA serves not only as volunteer education but also as "development education," "environmental education," "social education" and "daily-life (or living) education."

As for the practical function of volunteer activities, GONGOVA has carried out the grassroots NGO projects (⑥ and ⑳) so far six times in the form of international cooperation activities in developing countries (⑩ and ⑭), always with the intention of benefiting the local people. The projects have been conducted in different mountain villages (⑱) in Maehongson Province; two Red Lahu villages, two Black Lahu villages, one Lisu village and one Pwo Karen village. For these six villages, such projects have involved (1) the construction of simple-frame water-supply pipeline systems, (2) the installation of flush toilet facilities, (3) the clearing and levelling of the steep and desolate mountain-surfaces to make fields for the cultivation of cash-crop fruit trees<sup>6)</sup>, (4) the planting of cash-crop fruit trees in those fields, and (4) the building and extending of school houses for primary and high school education (ⓔ).

It should also be kept in mind, though it is not explicitly described in Figure 1, that GONGOVA is a programme that involves not only hard work but also mental pleasures characterized by:

- (1) a plain and modest life with simple food and through staying in modest local houses, tents or school buildings,
- (2) a difficult life with no electricity and no ample water, and
- (3) an unusual routine quite different from the ordinary daily rhythm of life at home (e.g. the precious experience of "going to bed early and getting up early").

### 3. Volunteers' Attitudes and Local Prerequisites for Fruitful Grassroots Projects

In order to succeed in conducting the NGO grassroots assistance programmes like those of GONGOVA, which involve both educational and practical functions, the following volunteerism attitudes are highly recommended for the participants in the grassroots assistance projects from an educational standpoint.

- (1) Constructive manner not to feel envy of fellow volunteers who are enjoying more precious experiences from the participation activities in the grassroots projects,
- (2) Indifference towards not being thanked explicitly by those to whom the NGO assistance is provided,
- (3) Care not to generate volunteer-activity pollution,
- (4) Generous concern for inexperienced or unskilled fellow volunteers, and
- (5) Open-minded and generous consideration extended towards those who can not or will not participate in the volunteer activity projects.

Additionally, from the practical standpoint of realizing fruitful NGO grassroots programmes, the following fundamental six-L elements are considered necessary prerequisites expected from the assistance-recipient localities.

- (1) Local needs <sup>7)</sup> :

The NGO should not force the implementation of any volunteer grassroots programmes <sup>8)</sup> that the local people do not need. That is, the NGO should not do anything in their volunteer activities that would result in the "volunteer-activity pollution" that would be regarded as "external diseconomies" to the local people.

- (2) Local participation :

The NGO should put high priority on the basic-need programmes which are likely to attract active cooperation and participation from the local people in their implementation.

- (3) Local technological and management abilities :

It is desirable that the local people exercise their own skills, knowledge and abilities <sup>9)</sup> to do the necessary follow-up work of the NGO programmes already carried out.

- (4) Local intention for self-help efforts :

If the local people possess a self-help attitude and they are able to learn from the NGO programmes, then those programmes will be effective in generating the new value added in social, economic and cultural arenas of that locality.

- (5) Local sense of ownership :

If the local people can employ or operate the facilities which have been brought to them by the NGO programmes with their own sense of diligence, care, and mental-attachment, then those facilities can be made good use of and can last relatively long.

- (6) Local perceptiveness of community rights:

If the local people can perceive the importance and dignity of their community as well as their duty to it, then it is expected that the private-public partnership cooperation mentioned in the next section will lead more effectively towards the better outcomes of the NGO programmes.

Those students participating in GONGOVA are provided with opportunities to learn through fieldwork in a developing country, as indicated in the above, about the desirable volunteer' attitudes and necessary local prerequisites for reasonably satisfying realization of the NGO grassroots projects. It is therefore hoped that the student participants in GONGOVA may be strongly encouraged to comprehensively understand the interactive interface among NGO's as "relief and development agencies with their autonomy,"<sup>10)</sup> assistance-recipient localities, and individual volunteers<sup>11)</sup> , and to duly recognize the importance of the private-public cooperation partnerships to be discussed in Section 4.

#### 4. Conclusions: Towards the Improvement of Private-public Cooperation Partnerships

For the substantially sustainable growth of the underprivileged villages in developing countries, various types of assistance<sup>12)</sup> from the local, regional or national governments (*i.e.* public entities), NGO's and ODA's, are in general certainly necessary. Thus, the following points should be kept in mind for the sound development of such villages.

- (1) The NGO's, public entities and ODA's<sup>13)</sup> should try to understand properly the needs, attitudes and future perspectives of the villagers.
- (2) The villagers should be careful not to accept assistance from inappropriate NGO's, but choose the right ones in their best long-term interests.
- (3) NGO's should try to cooperate with each other for the better outcome of their work in the villages so that the optimum aggregated and synergistic effects can be effectively generated.
- (4) The NGO's and local, regional and national governments are expected to cooperate with one other in the interests of the villagers.
- (5) The NGO's and ODA's are expected to function together for the benefit of the villagers.

Concerning the aforementioned points (4) and (5), the public entities are usually involved. In this connection, the issue of the improvement of private-public cooperation partnerships is worth serious consideration.<sup>14)</sup> For point (4), the NGO's are expected to improve their own three roles. One is the improvement of their role as facilitator between the villagers and public entities. The second is the improvement of their role as actual co-implementors of the joint grassroots assistance projects with the public entities by sharing limited resources available to each of them in the interests of the villagers, while the third one is to serve as functional collaborators with public entities by carrying out the mutually complementary roles.

Regarding point (5), the NGO is expected to improve its role in helping the ODA's in appropriate grassroots projects and to accomplish follow-up work in these projects if necessary so that some shortcomings consequent upon the "built-in less-elastic framework"<sup>15)</sup> of ODA's can be effectively supplemented with the efforts by NGO's.

Private-public cooperation partnerships can still be significantly improved with constant and strenuous efforts by the parties concerned to increase the social welfare of villagers despite the possible existence of

problems from time to time between the NGO' s and public entities including ODA's. It is one of the strong desires of authors that some of the GONGOVA participants will in future be able to significantly contribute to the further improvement of the framework for the private-public cooperation partnerships towards resource sharing, functionally complementary and mutually respectful working partnerships between NGO's and public entities.

## NOTES

- 1) That is, the social values and resources of the local communities.
- 2) GONGOVA lays a slightly greater importance upon the volunteer-education programme than on the volunteer-practice programme.
- 3) Though the term of public-private, government-private, public-NGO or government-NGO cooperation partnerships is more often used, we employ in this paper the term private-public cooperation partnerships to underline the importance of the "private-side significance" in grassroots assistance projects.
- 4) See Appendices-3 and 4 for the locations of Maehongson Province and its three major communities of Maehongson, Panmapha, and Maesariang as well as those of Chiangmai Province and Chiangmai City where the TWT Institute mentioned in Appendices-1 and 2 is situated.
- 5) For realization of the fundamental concept of rural, regional and worldwide sustainability, see by way of example Auty and Brown (1997), Hoff (1998) and Lo, Tokuda and Cooray (2000) respectively. For the discussions on environmental sustainability in the developing economy, see for instance, Kirkpatrick and Lee (1997).
- 6) Among these cashcrop-fruit trees are coffee, mangoes and tea.
- 7) Or, local grassroots needs.
- 8) Or, volunteer grassroots assistance projects.
- 9) That is, the local social capital in a broader sense.
- 10) See OECD (1988, p.14) for NGO's regarded as "relief and development agencies." It is also to be noted that NGO's can be sometimes regarded as "social collective action agencies." On this point, see for example Bystydzienski and Sekhon (1997) and Khan (1999).
- 11) See Wuthnow (1995) for the analysis of why teenagers become involved in volunteer works. See also Stevens (1997) for the possible contribution to the increase in the welfare of the underprivileged people in urban areas of Japan.
- 12) We can view the types of possible assistance from different angles such as not only the assistance for the conventional socio-economic issues but also that for the issues of land-use governance, cultural heritage and watershed conservation. See, for instance, TA-HASD Project Group (1990) as an example of the data-panel for the actual land-use and land-ownership in a part of Thailand, Prasavvinitchai (1993) for realization of the concept of the cultural perspective held by countryside villages in Thailand, and Doolette and Magrath (1990) for the general view of the watershed management.
- 13) More precisely, the governments of ODA donor countries. In this sense, the ODA's are included in the category of public entities.

- 14) In the preface of Smillie and Helmich (1999), J. Bonvin (the then president of the OECD Development Center) states: "Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have made remarkable progress since the early 1990s in working together towards common development goals: OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries have significantly increased the involvement of NGOs in their development policy-making and programmes; and many NGOs have successfully continued their efforts to improve their effectiveness as partners. Particularly striking is the progress that has been made in creating mutually respectful working partnerships. This partnership approach is needed if the objectives of the Development Partnership Strategy, endorsed by the OECD Council at ministerial level in 1996 and since adopted internationally, are to be attained."
- 15) In other word, self-organizing less-flexible scheme.

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## Appendix-1 Outline of the GONGOVA

- (1) Name  
Gakushuin Overseas NGO Volunteer Activity Programme (GONGOVA)
- (2) Organization status  
University NGO Programme (which is conducted as extracurricular activities for the students of Gakushuin University but which also welcomes well-intentioned participants from outside Gakushuin University)
- (3) Conducting entity  
GONGOVA Programme Unit (which is conducted from Professor Kawashima's Office, Economics Department, Gakushuin University, Tokyo, Japan)
- (4) Major activities
  - ① International cooperative NGO volunteer activities at grassroots level carried out in under-privileged villages of developing countries
  - ② Volunteer-training activities for those who want to enlighten themselves in the domain of international volunteerism
- (5) Primary functions (in the form of programme)  
Education programme (*i.e.*, programme for the training of volunteer activities)  
Practice programme (*i.e.*, programme for the conduct of volunteer activities *per se*)
- (6) Main participants  
Students from Gakushuin University and other universities in Japan  
Students from Chiangmai University and other universities in Thailand
- (7) Places where the major activities are presently carried out  
Villages of ethnic minority highlanders (*i.e.*, hill-tribes) or general rural communities in the northwestern region (*e.g.*, Maehongson province) of Thailand
- (8) Duration for the participants to stay in Thailand (for each programme)  
Four weeks (approximately)
- (9) Objectives
  - ① For participating students
    - (a) Development of humane capacity for :
      - internationalism
      - volunteerism
      - absence of prejudice
      - creativity
      - benevolence
      - perseverance
    - (b) Promotion of the understanding of:
      - sustainability of the natural environment
      - socio-economic sustainable development (including the development of basic and non-formal education and improvement of the local administration systems)

② For local villages

Conduct of works in:

- clearing and levelling the desolate steep mountain surface to make fields for the cultivation of cash-crop fruit trees
- planting and growing cash-crop fruit trees
- constructing water-supply pipeline systems (for living and irrigation purposes) and flush toilet facilities
- improving conditions for basic and non-formal education
- alleviating poverty, infection diseases, child prostitution, drug addiction, and
- natural environmental degradation

③ For the World

- Peace and progress

(10) Projects already completed so far in Maehongson Province of Thailand

① GONGOVA 1997 (February 17 ~ March 8, 1997)

Ban Nam Chang, inhabited by the hill-tribe people Red Lahu, 150 villagers

② GONGOVA 1998 (February 17 ~ March 9, 1998)

Ban Pha Dang, Red Lahu, 150 villagers

③ GONGOVA 1999 (February 18 ~ March 16, 1999)

Ban Luk Kho Lum, Black Lahu, 350 villagers

④ GONGOVA 2000 (February 19 ~ March 16, 2000)

Ban Pha Puak, Black Lahu, 150 villagers

⑤ GONGOVA 2001 (February 19 ~ March 18, 2001)

Ban Non Pha Jam Mai, Lisu, 200 villagers

⑥ GONGOVA 2002 (February 19 ~ March 17, 2002)

Ban Maechang, Pwo Karen, 300 villagers

(11) Local NGO counterpart in Thailand

Maehongson Hilltribe Extension and Improvement Programme (NGO)

The MHEIP has been providing the GONGOVA with the basic and substantial assistance necessary for the implementation of the GONGOVA projects.

(12) Local academic counterpart in Thailand

Institute for Thai Woman of Tomorrow (TWT), which is a university NGO of Chiangmai University

The TWT has been providing GONGOVA participants with lectures and field-work opportunities on

- ① the basic characteristics of the hill-tribes in northern Thailand, and
- ② the factors which would drive the underprivileged high-school girl students into the prostitution sector where the commercial sexual exploitation of child labour takes place

(13) Budget

- ① approximately US 60,000 dollars per year (the sources of which are mainly from external donation)
- ② participating students pay their own travelling and accommodation expenditure themselves.

## Appendix-2 Sketch of the GONGOVA 2002

The group of students participating in the Sixth Gakushuin Overseas NGO Volunteer Activity Programme (GONGOVA 2002) on February 19 - March 17, 2002, enjoyed valuable experience at Ban Maechang which is a remote mountain village (with population of around 300 persons from 70 families) located in the Maesariang district of Maehongson province and inhabited by the hill-tribe people Pwo Karen. The GONGOVA 2002 students from Gakushuin University in Japan and Chiangmai University in Thailand worked together with the Pwo Karen people during their stay at Ban Maechang, to construct a school building for village children, to make up flush toilet facilities for local houses, and to clear and level the bushy desolate surface of the steep mountain to make fields for the cultivation of coffee seedlings and other cash-crop trees. After coming down to the cities from Ban Maechang village, the GONGOVA 2002 students made field-study trips to the following three places.

- (1) The Main Field-office of the Maehongson Hilltribe Extension and Improvement Programme (MHEIP) in the Suburbs of Maehongson City:

Mr. Prinya Kunnika, Chairperson of the MHEIP, delivered a lecture to the GONGOVA 2002 students on the topic of 'Roles and Issues of the International Cooperation by the NGO's for the Development of Hill-tribe Villages: Local Needs, Participation and Management-ability.' In his lecture, Mr. Prinya explained in detail the process of the difficult construction work in building the 28km-distance water-supply pipeline system which carries the water to the village of Ban Kud Samsip in the Pang Mapha district of Maehongson province from the springs deep in the mountains. This project was successfully completed at the beginning of this year by the MHEIP in cooperation with the village people through the support of the Grant Assistant for Grassroots Projects from the Official Development Assistance (ODA) of Japan.

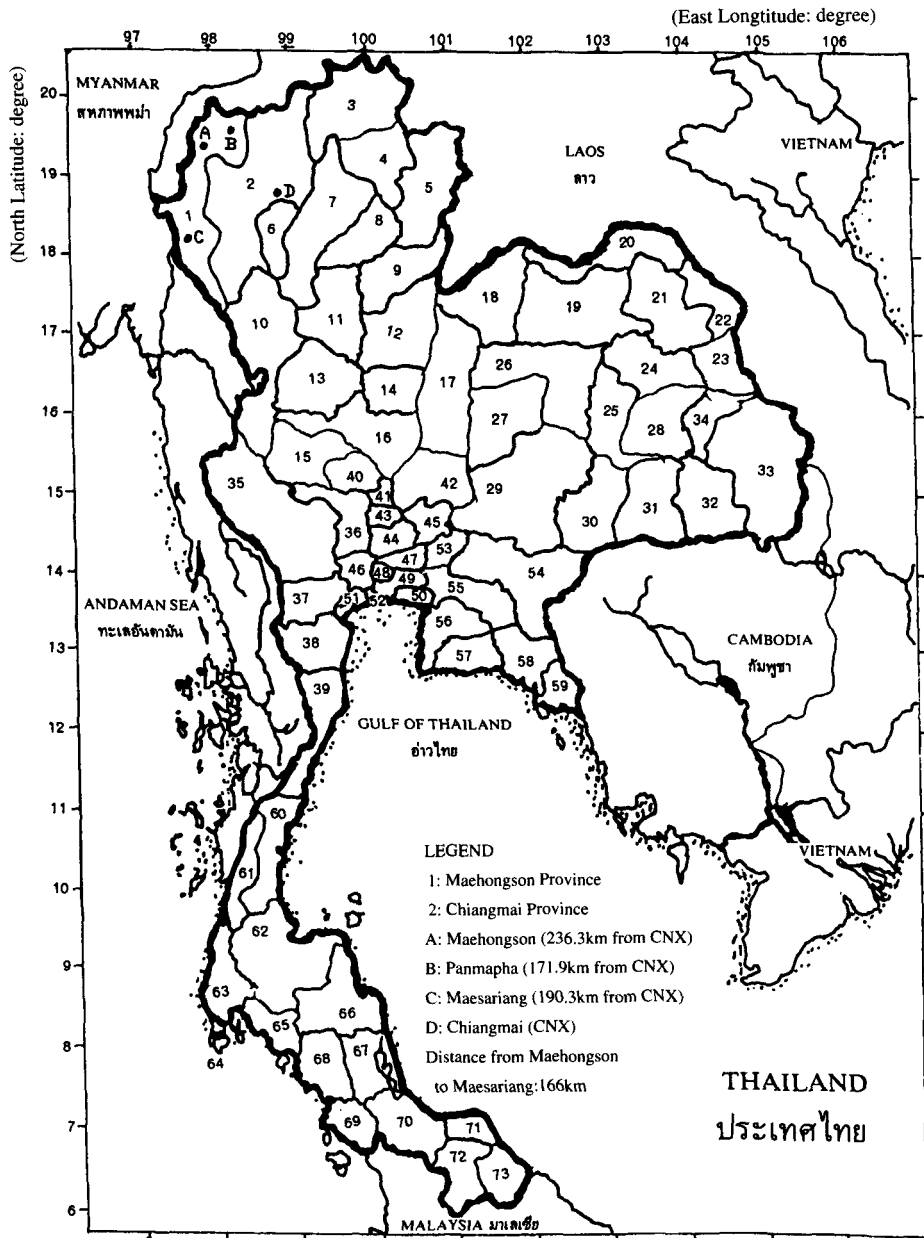
- (2) Ban Pong Sanuk Village of Chun District in Phayao Province:

Prof. Chakrapand Wongburanavart who is the director of the TWT (Thai Woman for Tomorrow) Institute which was established in 1987 and is affiliated with the Social Sciences Faculty of the Chiangmai University, conducted this field-study trip for showing The GONGOVA 2002 students two of the TWT's major volunteer activity projects which are directed at preventing high-school girl students from being forced to work in the child-prostitution sector. These two projects are the Scholarship Provision Project and Income Generation Project.

- (3) Huai Hong Khrai Royal Development Study Center in Chiangmai Province:

Dr. Orasuda Charoenrath and Dr. Chuntana Suwanthada arranged this field-study trip to the Development Study Center which was established in 1982 and is operated by the Royal Project Division, Office of His Majesty's Principal Private Secretary, to give the GONGOVA 2002 students an opportunity to learn how to deal effectively with forest, water and soil management issues and how to properly incorporate the philosophy of 'simplicity, sustainability and self-sufficiency' into policies for improving social, economic and natural environments in rural and mountain areas.

Appendix-3 Map of Thailand: Maehongson Province



[Note] See Appendix-4 for the provincial code.

[Source] Constructed on the basis of the Royal Forest Department (1990)

#### Appendix-4 Changwat (Pvinces) of Thailand: Eight-region System

[ I ]	19. Udon Thani	37. Ratchaburi	56. Chon Buri
1. Mae Hong Son	20. Nong Khai	38. Phetchaburi	57. Rayong
2. Chiang Mai	21. Sakon Nakhon	39. Prachuap Khiri Khan	58. Chanthaburi
3. Chiang Rai	22. Nakhon Phanom		59. Trat
4. Phayao	23. Mukdahan	[ VI ]	
5. Nan	24. Kalasin	40. Chai Nat	[ VIII ]
6. Lamphun	25. Maha Sarakham	41. Sing Buri	60. Chumphon
7. Lampang	26. Khon Kaen	42. Lop Buri	61. Ranong
8. Phrae	27. Chaiyaphum	43. Ang Thong	62. Surat Thani
	28. Roi Et	44. Ayutthaya	63. Phangnga
[ II ]		45. Saraburi	64. Phuket
9. Uttaradit	[ IV ]	46. Nakhon Pathom	65. Krabi
10. Tak	29. Nakhon Ratchasima	47. Pathum Thani	66. Nakhon Sri Thammarat
11. Sukhothai	30. Buri Ram	48. Nonthaburi	67. Phatthalung
12. Phitsanulok	31. Surin	49. Bangkok	68. Trang
13. KamphaengPhet	32. Srisaket	50. Samut Prakan	69. Satun
14. Phichit	33. Ubon	51. Samut Songkhram	70. Songkhla
15. Uthai Thani	34. Ratchathani	52. Samut Sakhon	71. Pattani
16. Nakhon Sawan	35. Yasothon		72. Yala
17. Phetchabun		[ VII ]	73. Narathiwat
	[ V ]	53. Nakhon Nayok	
[ III ]	35. Kanchanaburi	54. Prachin Buri	
18. Loei	36. Suphan Buri	55. Chachoengsao	

[Source] Rearranged on the basis of the Royal Forest Department (1990)