

# Post-Development Thought in Mexico: What Gustavo Esteva's Narratives and Writings Teach Us

Kitano Shu

*I have a question for you. When foreigners come to this village, they take pictures, ask us various questions, and bring only information about this place home with them. Though the photographs and information about us make a name or a reputation, there is no feedback for this place. Because of this lack of feedback, we may have serious trouble. Why did they even come here in the first place? (25-year-old Zoque woman, interview, September 12, 2002, Las Conchas Village, Oaxaca, Mexico)*

## 1. The Topic in Question<sup>1</sup>

Although parents frequently admonish their children to “put themselves in the shoes of others,” this is difficult even for adults to do. Just as an object changes when seen at different angles, it can be said that it is obvious that the experience of a similar situation changes with each individual. In the same way, a vast “epistemological rupture” exists (Esteva and Prakash 1998: 11) inside a part of a southern nation-state, and between the people of the south and of the north. It is quite difficult, yet very important, to attempt to understand the worldview of those who reside in the margins of southern countries.

Having been a businessman, a high-ranking government official, a university professor, and many other things, Gustavo Esteva is one of the intellectuals representing Latin America concerning NGO activities that have Mexico's Oaxaca state as a base, such as alternative social change and indigenous people's movements, for the past 25 years; he has also served as one of the leaders of the civic movement in Mexico. On the other hand, he has also created an ideal of post-development thought known inside and outside Mexico from his experiences with investigative research and publications. In Japan, he is known for a publication that introduced his ideals, *The Development Dictionary* (Sachs, ed. 1991), which was translated into Japanese in 1996.

The purpose of this paper is to consider what problems are occurring, in the worldview of post-development thought in Mexico, as determined primarily through dialogues (open-ended interviews) between Esteva and the author, and examination of the narratives of Esteva and the views of the world held by the southern people against development and about their *autonomy* during this particular age of globalization. The information used in this paper is based on Esteva's narrations and interviews, and additional investigation of references.<sup>2</sup> The provided information and topics in question are those

that a scholar or student in development studies should proliferate widely and this is what is primarily in mind for this paper. In this paper, this prominent thinker and activist, Esteva, speaks in his own words, of his background, examination of which is expected to provide insight that surpasses the simple translation of information but rather gives an interpretation by associating and examining post-development thought.

The following is the history of Esteva as a historical background to post-developmental thought, as well as an ideological background where the main concepts of this thought are described. Finally, a criticism, interpretation, implication, and look at the subjects involved are presented.

## **2. Historical Background**

The history of rural Mexico has involved rule and violence, and the history of resistance against it (Esteva 1983). The native inhabitants have always been forced to fight against “development” for the past 500 years. In the first 100 years of the colonization of Mexico, the indigenous peoples lost 90% of their population. Although these indigenous peoples cooperated in fighting for independence, the independent nation-state did not translate into a body that paid respect to their cultural heritage and rights. For many years, they have been discriminated against as second-class citizens, and more recently, the environment upon which the existence of self-supported, small-scale family-based agriculture depends has been markedly changed by the implementation of neo-liberalistic policy, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and others (Kitano 2003a). In Mexico, the land and culture of indigenous peoples were protected in this context, and post-development thought, which demands things such as existence, self-determination, and autonomy, has been created.

It is said that two-thirds or more of the population at the time of Mexican independence were indigenous peoples. Now, 180 years later, they only make up 10% of the population with the division of those who speak the 56 languages of the country other than Spanish (Kunimoto 2002: 9). In addition to this population decrease, there have also been huge changes in the indigenous culture. It is incorrect to think of the post-development thought introduced in this paper as a peculiar opinion from the position of a simple “indigenous people and ethnic minority.” Instead, if one thinks of it as “development” vs. “local identities,” this ideal can be seen as a universal philosophy in developing countries.

## **3. The Travels of Gustavo Esteva**

In order to understand Gustavo Esteva’s idea of post-development thought, it is necessary to know his background. I should like to think that his travels with Barkin, a friend and a development economist from Mexico, put his fatherly love into the metaphor of “Don Quixote” (Barkin 1990) when I focus on introducing his story.

### ***The encounter with “development”***

Esteva first encountered “development” when coming into contact with his maternal grandmother while his father was a Congress member in the Oaxaca state electorate during his childhood.

“My father’s side was a Spanish-style strict kind of family. My mother had the blood of the indigenous Indians and her mother was an indigenous Zapotec Indian. The thing I remember very well as a child was my grandmother standing in front of the house. She was never able to enter the house (because she held back whenever my father (her son-in-law) came home). This is because in those days it was thought that they (Indians) were a foolish and primitive people... This was the time when their society was forced to merge with modern Mexico. It was around the time of President Truman’s inaugural address... In that address, American power became ‘development,’ and I was told that it brought advanced scientific and rational ‘development’ to the parts of the world that ‘development’ was attained. It was a time when there was no question about what it meant and that ‘development’ was being permitted universally. The musicals of Hollywood and the United States, the U.S. lifestyle, these were ‘development’ for us, and were our dreams in the 1940s. It was presupposed that 2 billion people in the world were ‘underdeveloped.’ The future was ‘development’ and there was a trend to disregard the dignity of our culture in Mexico. There was a Sears store built nearby when I was 9–10 years old. Going there was a joy and a desire for me. It, however, depreciated my life. I wished to become part of ‘development.’” (Esteva, interview, September 2)

### ***Desiring development – the business elite***

In Esteva’s youth, he followed the path of a “development” elite, not questioning his course, save for the question of his father’s treatment of his grandmother. While studying business administration as a bank clerk and a university student, managing his own company, and joining the personnel department of a large American business, he quickly climbed the business ladder. His first disappointments with “development” occurred with these experiences, especially with his service in the personnel department.

“My father passed away when I was 16 years old, and I began work. I graduated from high school and went to work for a bank. Right before I graduated, my high school teacher told me that business administration is a wonderful subject to study, and so I began studying business administration at night college. I was then quickly promoted and became the youngest manager at only 19 years old. I moved from the bank to become a personnel manager in a large American company after that, and when I became 22 years old, I managed my own company. Of course, the income was very good. However, I gradually began to question my work. While I did personnel work, I was not able to bear the severity of how Mexican employees were treated. The company would deceive a community, squeeze as much as possible, and pursue profits alone. I became very uncomfortable with my post. Then I was fired. I

then lapsed into a serious moral crisis at that time. I quit the company that I was managing and the company transferred another employee into my place.” (Esteva, interview, September 2)

### *Activity as a left-wing guerrilla*

After that, he quickly switched poles and became a left-wing guerilla. Latin America contained many leftist movements during the 1950s. From the end of the 1950s to the 1960s was the period in which he learned new things from the street. From adopting an opposing consciousness of collectivism, he read the complete works of Marx and Engels and, through the recollection of the things that he had heard and experienced in business and on the street, saw connections with Marxism. The Cuban Revolution occurred almost simultaneously with this change in him. A guerilla group was organized when he turned 37, and he learned more about the leftist movement. However, he later resigned from the guerilla group because of a death of another member due to strife inside the group. Although he still sympathized with revolutionary ideas, he then decided to cast away violent methods and adopt peaceful ones to achieve his goals. This “different method” was through becoming a government bureaucrat.

### *Engaging in social policy as a government official*

Esteva then became a member of the Ministry of the Presidency, quickly being promoted into a position in charge of finances. In the Company of National Public Consumption (Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares), he made 15,000 village commercial centers by subsidy, and began a program that supplied goods to poor people in the 1970s, concerning himself with the planning of many policies to provide people’s daily sustenance. His work in this period was appraised as a success, and soon his influence in the organization became so strong that he was requested to join the government as a minister when a new government was voted in during 1976. However, he declined entry into the Cabinet. He explains why he did so:

“(At that time) I had a close relationship with the President and other cabinet members and I was in a position in which I knew what was going to occur in the government. Through working in the government, in 1976, I realized that the logic of government and that of people are different, and that they are never in agreement. After all, isn’t the government just interested in controlling people? In this way, I came to regard both businesses and governments as unworkable because of the people... I noticed that the governmental development programs destroy the culture and environment of people who are supposed to be true beneficiaries.” (Esteva, interview, September 2)

### *Progressing to pro-development NGOs*

After resigning from the governmental job, he aimed to create an NGO by the name of *Análisis, Desarrollo y Gestión* (ANADEGES), literally “analyzing, developing, and helping,” and worked with various people. Headquarters were assigned in Mexico City and its reach expanded to 22 national

states in 3–4 years.

“Since whatever ‘development’ the government does is bad, I thought that it would be better if we did it. So we gave it that name. I thought the first point was to analyze information, capacities, and problems; the second was to support necessary ‘development;’ the third was to become a buffer between people and organizations (the government, etc.).” (Esteva, interview, September 2)

The ANADEGES of that time aimed to avoid playing the role of an “intervening organization” (being an intermediary) between the government and the people, but to be a buffer between the government and peasants or the poor. Although various procedures are necessary for receiving governmental services, he believed that he was able to conduct things in the desired direction by offering support and other information about these procedures, for example, entry applications among others. In other words, this was the reason he was an adherent of “development from the top down.” ANADEGES corrected the policy of action later to *Autonomía, Descentralismo y Gestión* (the abbreviation remains the same), and changed its direction toward post-developmental orientation.

### ***People do not desire “development”***

Not only are residents disinterested in “development,” as the experience in the repeated grassroots activities of NGOs has shown, but that they are instead opposed to “development.” This was in the beginning of the 1980s. His first opportunity was when he was elected as the chairman of the Mexican Society of Planning in 1982, and conducted research on alternative development with various individuals, such as laborers, scholars, and activists, in a study group.

“The experience of several months subsequently changed my life a lot, and the idea of ‘development’ was finally discarded. One day, I noticed that we were not helping people, but that seeing (the present) reality was prevented, and so I decided to see things with my own eyes. I had been used to seeing things through a lens for years. I also noticed that our language and ideals were built to focus on ‘development.’ Language used by international organizations such as poverty, participation, BHN (basic human needs), and human development is developed on the basis of the idea of ‘development.’ That kind of language does not present a reality. So I decided to see reality with my own eyes at a grassroots level. In fact, I noticed those people knew well what was really important all along.” (Esteva, interview, September 2)

### ***People demand a dignified autonomy.***

What is it that people want? Esteva says that it is *autonomy*. This autonomy does not mean autonomy as simply a political meaning. What it means is the “freedom” of protecting one’s dignity through protecting culture, history, and environment. In order to designate this meaning, the term will be

written in italics in this paper.

Esteva says that he noticed that living a good life and desiring only what could be provided with one's own hands, and not by "development," what outside forces (not only developed countries, but central governments and municipal elite as well) press in the sense of values. "With any 'development,' people are told it requires, '(that something) must be done'" (Esteva, interview, August 30). That this idea conflicts with their *autonomy* is the conclusion they reached.

Against this background, an approach for people committed to constructing a new Commons was chosen, and Esteva moved to a village near his maternal hometown of Oaxaca, and now protects the *autonomy* of the community as a farmer, as well as a "de-professionalized intellectual" on the side, or in other words, a "grassroots activist."<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. Viewing the World of Post-development

In this section, the essence of the worldview of post-development thought will be examined using some keywords and concepts that are explained by Esteva.

##### *The background of the word "development"*

In view of how Esteva considers the meaning of this term, all "development" is the "escape from the undignified condition called underdevelopment" (Esteva 1991: 7); from this, there is an opening of distrust about this term.

Nothing other than the Truman Doctrine in 1949 created the concept of underdevelopment. BHN development also tells us that, at the bottom of all development, there is something that can be identified through contrast and measurement, regarded as "underdevelopment," and that this remains until participatory development, human development, sustainable development, and endogenous development drive it away. Esteva was himself an adherent of the Truman Doctrine, and freeing himself from that false enchantment was a frustrating process for him.

The actual conditions of sustainable development are a continuation of "development" itself, and if endogenous development is truly followed, it is believed that the concept of development itself would disappear (Esteva 1991). They who have the ability to "develop" themselves base their ideas on a specific set of values that demand that development should be carried out (because others are underdeveloped), applying a label that is an insult to the life and culture of the people who occupy two-thirds of the globe. Instead of alternative development, according to him, alternatives to development are required.

##### *What is poverty, other than something created?*

On the reverse side of "underdevelopment" lies the concept of poverty. A friend of Esteva, Lummis (1996: 72–73), classified the status of poverty into four groups: one, absolute material poverty (lack of

BHN access); two, poverty seen from a developed country's or outsider's sense of values; three, social poverty; and four, capitalism value or an osmosis of systems to create new poverty. The poverty that relates directly to post-development thought is observed especially in the second and fourth of these.

First, I would like to relate an experience relevant to the second type of poverty. When Esteva was accompanied by researchers of the United States and Germany and visited a village inhabited by the Chatino people, the foreigners said to a villager, "Even though your way of life seems wonderful, aren't you still poor?" In response, the villager said, "We are not poor. We are Chatino."<sup>5</sup> Esteva reasoned that when someone says someone else is "poor," they are without saying so comparing that person with others. For example, they considered that they have bought things and are therefore rich, such as by having a VHS machine, but that is not so. The villager continued:

"We can say that you are poor. The reason why is because you can have neither the air nor the water nor the abundant nature or time. That is why we do not call ourselves poor. We are Chatino, and you are Germans and Americans. When does the comparing end?" (Esteva, interview, September 2)

Esteva says that this episode is a challenge to the way of thinking that views everything in one light. According to eight standards below which Esteva himself lives in a village with indigenous people in the state of Oaxaca, as the Mexican government defines him, he is under the "poverty line." However, there is an exclusion of abundance in environmental surroundings, culture, or social mentality in the standard of the "poverty line."<sup>6</sup>

"It is a paradise. I acquired the privilege of living a very beautiful life here in Oaxaca. However, I am classified as in poverty by the government standard. Seven conditions are fulfilled among eight. For example, there is the standard of no access to drinking water. If you go to the back of my house there is a hill with water trickling out of the rocks. I reached an agreement with villagers, and an 800 m pipe was set in place, and this gave me drinking water. I do not use a flush toilet. If I got running water that might be an end, but then contamination would come with it. Expensive equipment and chemicals are also needed then. Having a flush toilet in a house is what allows the government the power of centralization and rule. Therefore, the filth is then turned into compost ecologically. I want others to know that curing poverty is destroying an alternative way of life." (Esteva, interview, September 2)

What we must be careful about is that the second classification of poverty, if it is applied by an outside person (the inhabitant of a developed country, or an elite Mexican inhabitant of the cities) with their specific sense of values, can lead to the identification of poverty, even though the local residents do not have a sense of poverty. Of course, access to BHN can still be greatly restricted, and absolute poverty can become life-threatening. Furthermore, in Oaxaca as well, along with the new poverty produced by "development," deforestation is progressing and there is a reality in which the life of the indigenous

people is under pressure to change. In the case of the fourth classification mentioned above, Lummis says, “This is a case not of meeting an existing need but of restructuring a society so as to establish a need where there had been none before, so that now the people who cannot buy this thing, including those had one before dreamed of owing it, are to that degree impoverished.” (Lummis 1996: 73). “Such things” are used in the field of presence in Coca-Cola, McDonalds, and Nike. I want to introduce an anecdote applicable to this.

This event happened to me as I was going to the Las Conchas village of an ethnic minority, the Zoque, who live in the tropical forest zones of the southern state of Oaxaca, with personnel from a local NGO by car in September 2002. Although we had left the paved roads and were driving along muddy roads, the brand of Coca-Cola had made its mark there already. A person from the NGO tells his story:

“One of the marks of Coca-Cola or Pepsi-Cola will surely come this deep into the jungle. This is the frontier of capitalism. With this, (consciousness of) poverty is created.” (local NGO staff, September 12)

Life is possible even if Coca-Cola, Fanta, Pepsi, and such things are non-existent, and just because these things do not exist in certain places does not make people poor. However, to buy requires cash. Once a place acquires the taste of cash, a self-sufficient economy cannot remain the same any longer. And since this is the rule of capitalistic economy, they cannot stop considering these things. This is the birth of the “development refugee” (Lummis 1996: 74) in the face of “development.”

### *Civil society for post-development*

Post-development thought with its concept of underdevelopment and “poverty” as the reverse side of “development” explains the necessity for social change and for the construction of a new civil society. Originally the people here had a democratic civil society with autonomy. The expansion of the civil society is one ultimate kind of connection with social change (Kitano 2002), and is based on a more radical view of the world, for example, stressing autonomy from a so-called “democratic” system of a modern nation-state, as Esteva notes that this is the essential right of the people (Esteva and Prakash 1998: 11–15).

Esteva defines civil society as “the sphere of autonomously organized society” (Esteva 1998: 159), and supposes that it is the possessor of a “movement of people at the grassroots level for the establishment of rehabilitation of a community and its autonomy as a reaction to globalization, and various other initiatives” (Esteva 2001: 126).

Three occurrences are deeply related to the rise of civil society in recent years in Mexico (Esteva, interview, September 5):

First was the movement toward making various autonomous systems and communities as a self-defensive reaction of farmers and citizens in the 1980s, which then changed into a route toward drastic



structural adjustment accompanied by the liberalization and privatization of bodies that the once protectionist government had changed completely during the past economic crisis.<sup>7</sup>

Second was the huge Mexican earthquake in 1985. This focused attention on activities such as the formation of citizens' volunteer organizations and relief and restoration organizations. This had also followed the Great Hanshin Earthquake, and allowed the word "civil society" to come into frequent use afterwards in Japan. The same happened in Mexico. The people trapped in the Mexico City Earthquake noticed the inefficient nature of the government and international organizations, and while they remained powerless, the efficiency and ability of volunteer support by civic organizations and the farming communities were recognized. Following this occurrence, the people of Mexico found a new definition for civil society.<sup>8</sup>

The third instance was the indigenous people's Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) armed uprising in the state of Chiapas in 1994. The demand for supreme power by the communities, and for territories of the indigenous people, as well as the political change to *autonomy* along with jurisdiction by the community, showed the people's feelings of rebellion against the marginal positions into which they had been placed, not only in the state of Chiapas, but nationally and globally as well. They cried out for the psychological establishment of civil society amongst the people.

Esteva says that, "It is neither ideology nor classism that people have examined for the past 15–20 years. Such language does not serve as a motive for systematizing people any longer... It is indicated that the problem that we should address is about why people gather and work together." (Esteva, interview, September 5)

### *A multi-centered society*

In relation to this *autonomy*, it is necessary to understand the two completely different concepts of decentralization and decentralism. The latter term was coined by Esteva. He explains the difference of the two words as follows.

"Decentralization is the term seen from the center; when the center is seen as the start. The root of the thought is decentralizing in a district on the basis of commands from the center. It is the rule of the circumference by the center. The handful of employees in the head office of McDonalds in Chicago made the manual, and this controls the worldwide functions of McDonalds. This is the theory of decentralization. The English word decentralization comes from the British Imperial territory of India. It is a term produced to describe a handful of British having the ability to command India, despite the great distance from their native country. However, there is no center in decentralism. Each village decides who will lead the group. The center has more than 1,000 people, instead of a handful. In a village, people are the centers of the world. We are just centers. Of course, existence of the central government is accepted, but it is not the center of rule." (Esteva, interview, September 2)

This way of thinking is not restricted to Mexico:

“A sense of values like this can also be found in Africa or India. There is no solitary India. This is also true in China. Although Mandarin may be the dominant language in China, there are many different cultures. One Mexico does not exist... If Africa was examined, even the concept of a country could not be found. Each people have their own lifestyle, culture, and language.” (Esteva, interview, September 2)

These many centers have thrown away the idea of the center-periphery relationship, and every person will become a part of the center if viewed from the position of the southern people. A social view of the world is required, and Esteva emphasizes that these opinions are not localism, but localization. It is a concept about the state of an area that is opened to the natives who refuse isolation, fundamentalism, and refusal of outsiders, but who respect the identity of an area with a mutual relationship (correlation).<sup>9</sup> As mentioned above, Esteva himself was governed by the “centralist” logic. The instruction of the people of different communities revealed to him the logic of a “multi-center society.”

Suppose that relationships of a thoroughly distributed type, having no center, as in a small-scale network of organizations such local NGOs or grassroots/people’s organizations, are desirable.<sup>10</sup> If a big organization exists, it will be revealed that an informal center will be made in that organization. However, it differs because it is disorderly. Esteva calls this relationship a “telephone system” and explains it as follows:

“With our viewpoint, the operation was perfectly distributed without any center and was considered to be much more effective and efficient than other organizations that usually have a center. A required thing is a good rule for connecting the others to oneself... An analogy of this is the telephone system. You can talk to someone by telephone here now. There is no single center, no single company, and no single technology. It is not in a disorderly state; however, it is required that the rules of the game are clear. In order for a telephone company to operate, the existence of a telephone system in the world is required. Also the organization of a country, as well as private enterprise, is required. And technology that is different in a different country is used. There is also competition. The one point that you must adhere to is the rules of the game for participating in the telephone system in the world. The present rule is that a differing telephone system cannot be created. Although we were concerned during our time in ANADEGES (after its renaming) with various organizations and their different ideas, the common rules of the game were that there were mutual respect for specific activities (mainly small-scale agriculture support) and mutual support. We decided to accept great diversity about both sides of orientation and ideology.” (Esteva, interview, September 6)

### ***Radical pluralism and communal democracy***

However, post-development adds criticism to some universal concepts that have now spread widely, for example, the idea of human rights. Originally, in many rural villages in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, the concepts of Western European “individual self” and “human rights” did not exist. Of course, that does not mean that torture and such acts are admissible.<sup>11</sup> Individual rights have a rationality for the first time in the frameworks of the rights of the community, which presupposes that there must be a relationship between the individual and society according to each culture and democratic state; it is claimed that it is not a priority given towards economical demands of an individual (company) is rational regardless of the context of the culture. Throughout the world, an idea that is “essentially narrow-minded” cannot be the only set of values, and there are claims that radical pluralism is important for each peculiar view of the world (cosmovision) in the diversities of communities, regions, and cultures (Esteva and Parakash 1997: 284–286).

Although democracy is important, representative system democracies are not the only choice, but rather the “minority group” of the earth. The “majority” of developing countries, including the indigenous peoples of Mexico, have practiced a direct democracy centering on the community, with a base of reliance between autonomous governments of communities and people, for many years (Esteva and Parakash 1998: 152–163). People of non-Western European origin have not had the concepts of Western European individualism. “People are not individuals, but singular man and woman” and “People are persons, knots in nets of concrete relations. They want to continue being persons (people cannot be otherwise), and to organize society in a way in which they can be treated as such, not as individuals or masses” (Esteva 1998: 156, 157). They are individuals in a community, and individuals in a social group, and as part of humanity an individual, but they are not the masses in a society. If people hope to reign over themselves, by themselves, this respects the government of each community rather than abandoning it, and if the structure of the state or city as an only choice, and leads to the opinion that it should crawl before the state of plural democracy that it can coexist with. Even if the existence of various types of democracy is not acknowledged, under the flag of development and modernity, there are specific sets of values and systems that are forced, some of which are very undemocratic.<sup>12</sup> Is that fair?

These opinions sound like an institution with problems to us that the things regarded as “poverty” in the former conventional sense of values has hidden possibility of affluence in another view of truth.

### ***Think locally, act locally***

Esteva claims that one should “think and act locally,” and not follow the famous slogan “think globally and act locally” (Esteva and Parakash 1997; Esteva and Parakash 1998). Only by thinking locally, one brings forth a counterargument like the criticism of carrying out the “narrow-minding” of people (parochialism), and then weakening and isolating them. As a result, evaluating local measures about the environment, human rights, and so on in the context of global thinking and international solidarity,

and even put on information communication networks (The internet, CNN, etc.), and sent overseas, the problem is that the reactionary actions or banning of those ideals would erase the base ideal of “local thinking” and “local thinking” itself would be denied by the enemies, the “globalists.” About those who are “acting locally,” any sort of people cannot know all about the earth around them (only God can accomplish), but local people know well about their place, culture, and lives, and only they can understand the place where they are the best (Esteva and Parakash 1997; Esteva and Parakash 1998).<sup>13</sup>

About the argument on the above-mentioned “narrow minding,” the counterargument is that “fragmentization” is originally acted on as a global principle by people who believe in the modern Western-like set of values as the only choice (global proposals). It is because it is a reality for those who are not related to the consumption habits (the real ‘global’ way of life), which occupy two-thirds of the earth and are the ancient majority, the people of the south, continue with no realization of “global proposals” into the future. If we look at the whole earth and the viewpoints of all people, the view of the world in lieu of globalization and fragmentization is one that is seen exclusively by only the people of the north, who have enjoyed globalization and the economic benefits that it has brought.

## **5. What is Asked of the People of the North and South?**

There are three key ideas that are relevant to the attitude that is needed for people in the world of post-development: these are hospitality, dialogue, and humility and austerity.<sup>14</sup> These are the bases for the view of Esteva about the relationship between developed and developing countries is considered collectively. Although the understanding of these factors has only taken hold at a local level, an alternative view of the world in which many different cultures live and join together is in sight.

### ***Hospitality***

If one term could be used to express that which is required for the time of post-development, it is hospitality. We must be hospitable to one another’s ideas. That is, to face others with an open posture, to accept that different ideas exist, and to respect the many other different cultures as well.

“It means that we accept differences and admit mutually that everybody has the same rights on this earth. This is what hospitality is. Old Western society cannot be said to be hospitable about this point. The United States in particular, with its idea of its better culture, drove others away, and made mutual understanding difficult.” (Esteva, interview, August 30)

Old “development,” which forces a set of values of an advanced country onto a target, is clearly contrary to this. You must mutually accept that there are different kinds of people. People in the post-development view do not deny the existence of a nation-state, or modern organizations or systems. They also want to accept the particular cultures and rights of people. For example, as indigenous

peoples who speak 16 different languages and maintain many different cultures live in the state of Oaxaca, hospitality is required among these people. Hospitality is a keyword for considering symbiosis with diversity in post-development thought.

### ***Dialogue***

A dialogue is required in order to realize symbiosis based on the psychology of hospitality. Esteva contrasts two different concepts and explains them:

“Dialogue and tolerance are essentially different concepts. A dialogue is accepting of differences. Of course, tolerance is better than intolerance. However, tolerance is accompanied by a certain sting... A dialogue is a discussion of one’s ideas and the other’s ideas. First of all the ‘logue’ of dialogue (logos) represents a conceptual system in Greek. [The concept of culture] is peculiar to each, as is the word *fudo* in Japanese.” (Esteva, interview, August 30)

In the case that two cultures or societies encounter each other, there are basically two choices that the insider of a community can make. In fact, which choice is taken starts with the outsider’s posture. Conquest and war are the gravest things that a person with tolerance asks a community for grief or sacrifice. To date, people in the south, or at least the indigenous Mexicans, have been forced to tolerate the thoughts of the dominant culture on the earth and the ruling nation-state government, which was made without their intention or agreement.

Another choice that Esteva considers to be the alternative of tolerance is dialogue. A dialogue is a concept that explores the state of construction both in a relaxed nature on the assumption of differences and diversity. Of course, there may be certain grief as a result, but a dialogue is a concept reflecting symbiosis of an external person and the community, and both essentially differ in the meaning which the processes have gone through a certain change in the culture of an area, economy, and environment as a result of contact with an outside person.

### ***Humility and austerity***

Although humility and austerity were originally considered virtues that people of developing countries have traditionally protected, they have been covered with labels, such as “primitiveness, ignorance, and childishness,” via the appearance of the concepts of “development” and “underdevelopment” (Esteva and Parakash 1998: 202).

Although it is said that the humility here, said simply, should have a dialogue in a modest attitude with a different culture, in light of the multi-center view of the world, all culture is a center or a small universe, and must intend to be open to other cultures rather than being based on cultural relativism. Although austerity has become an exceptional concept used in the context of living a simple life according to religious practices in the present-day modern set of values, originally it was the virtue of

an individual or group that traditional society shared (Esteva and Parakash 1998: 203). In addition, in the grassroots movement of post-development, you have to consider the meaning of the following simple statement: People do not like consuming without limits for their desires, and because this is actually impossible. Esteva explains as follows:

“It was predicted that Mexico could catch up in 25 years, if not, then at least in 50 years, during the 1950s by Leontief. During 1988 or 1989, the World Bank determined that Mauritania would take 3,223 years to catch up. This difference is great. To be rich in 1960, you had 20 times more than if you were poor, and in 1980 the difference increased to 42 times... The Club of Rome announced the concept of a “limit to growth” and gave a meaning to eternal growth in 1972. This was because the inconsistency in respect to ecology was becoming clear. When the 1980s came, it was shown clearly that all citizens of the world cannot live the life of Americans. This is not only for economic and social reasons, but because of environmental factors. It is natural to have a car in Japan or the United States. One or more TV sets are owned by one family. However, all the families in the world are unable to have one car at the same time... All the human beings on the earth are unable to go to university. It is also impossible that all human beings can stay at a Sheraton hotel and eat at McDonalds. I am not arguing about the right or wrong of the quality of life, but all members on the earth living a life on this level and with these means is already impossible... Is it necessary to argue about the quality of our lives once again? This foolish race should be given up.” (Esteva, interview, September 2)

### *Reconsidering aid and assistance*

It is understood in post-development thought that the assistance from advanced countries is business in many cases, and spoils the *autonomy* of the people. Assistance produces dependency for people. It is said that changing the lifestyle of the northern people, rather than assistance, and facing the common problem of the deficiencies of the earth, are what northern people must be counted on to do. Although the experience of the Mexican earthquake suggested the inefficient nature of the assistance of governments or foreign countries, Esteva again explained about the problem of assistance and autonomy using an anecdote on the earthquake:

“It is a very horrifying story. Afterward, there was a miserable procession of disaster victims; it was the assistance organizations that fought each other over dealing with disaster victims. “You are our visitors. If our religion and political principles are accepted, we will be in a condition to help you.” The disaster victims had their application forms filled in, taken in, and then forced on them. I went to the United States and Europe, talked with the media, and requested the cessation of assistance from the personnel of assistance organizations. I was satisfied with the reaction. However, my trip caused the opposite effect because then a large number of assistance organizations visited, after my homecoming to Mexico. Since their boss, who is present in the United States or Europe, should know how to use

aids, met me and then ordered “Go to meet him.” Finally, assistance was not stopped but it became a panel for collecting assistance.” (Esteva, interview, September 6)

Then, Esteva mentioned whether assistance would be received or denied after a week passed:

“Although all assistance could be refused, we decided to prepare a rule for this game. It was a revival of the *autonomy* we fundamentally needed. The outsiders had to respect the rules of the people who were in disaster victims’ organizations or who resided on the land. We decided “They will accept our conditions (i.e. those of disaster victims about the use of aid), which would create perfect autonomy, and we will make this into the rule of the game for which perfect cooperation will be generated without control or guidance.” We organized ourselves... We showed the assistance organizations the detailed rules... Consequently, it was only a small number that said that they still wanted to work with us, and among the original offers of 100 there were only three organizations left. They were Swiss Red Cross, German Red Cross, and the organization of the Catholic system of Switzerland.” (Esteva, interview, September 6)

Esteva expressed a skeptical view not only on cases of urgent disaster relief but on any assistance, such as food aid and technical assistance from developed countries and international donors. Zapatistas of the Chiapas state insist that they must not be dependent on help from the outside and have also declined proposals for cooperation from various people and organizations, such as for school construction and census enforcement. It is said that one of the reasons for this is an indigenous people’s traditional sense of values. According to this, receiving a present demands obedience to the giver when there is no ability to return a present of corresponding value, which is a technique used by Catholic clergymen to make people obey from 500 years ago. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI), which has held political power as the governing party for many years in Mexico, has controlled people with skillfully placed presents called subsidies.

Although it is very difficult to sever assistance from developed countries and become self-reliant, a few NGOs that Esteva superintends are adhering to this rule, save for a few special exceptions. In an aspect of inter-organizational communication, the strengthening of ties with the organizations of the north that lead global networks, such as the International Network for Cultural Alternatives to Development, is thought of in the south as important rather than as control by organizations of the north in exchange for financial support.

So, what are these people expecting from the north, if not financial assistance, in this worldview of post-development theory? It is the changing of the lifestyles of the northern people. Esteva explains this using the metaphor of the “garbage problem:”

“[What we expect from the people of the north are] many things. If this expectation is shown in the

countries of the north, then it may be turned into their profit. I will give you an important example. The people of the north have a great concern about the garbage problem: about all kinds of waste, such as nuclear waste, and all kinds of garbage. Since they cannot dump garbage into their country, they send garbage to our country and use it as a dumping ground.” (Esteva, interview, September 6)

What is the meaning of this? It may be what I mentioned in the beginning of this text, namely, a rupture of epistemology, or in other words, different views of a phenomenon. He continues:

“Many investment agreements have been made between Japan and the countries of Southeast Asia. I hear that ‘something’ is always included when they (the Japanese) make an investment, a factory or something. That country also receives garbage from Japan as well. The same is said of the United States because it carried its garbage to Mexico. European countries do this to Africa. We (people of the south) cannot stop this. It is because this business is sufficiently convenient to our government... When they can stop producing garbage rather than throwing it away, the true solution to the problem is solved and it will be good for the whole world, for us and for you. Since we have neither military strength nor economic strength, we cannot stop the garbage that comes from other countries. Therefore, I want to say this. I believe that it is a fact that you can erase your garbage. I think this would be the greatest thing for you.” (Esteva, interview, September 6)

How could we stop producing garbage? There is nothing left to do but improve our resource/waste ratio and the “mass production to mass consumption” lifestyle. It could become a wonderful method of support more than anything else. In addition, people of the south and north should have a common concern, that is, to monitor the actions of multinational corporations.

## **6. Discussion**

As mentioned above, the history of the man, Gustavo Esteva, as a background to post-development thought and the main concepts involved in it have been examined. In this final section, I will advance the theory, apply criticism, and give an interpretation of it, as well as deal with any other key issues left yet to be discussed. I will also give some idea of where post-development thought will go in the future.

### ***Criticism***

From the previous text, it is not hard to imagine criticism from the reader that the idea is from a simple narrow-minded theoretical nationalist, anarchist, or critic holding utopian ideas, which confine people in developing countries to a ghetto called poverty through self-righteous logic. However, Esteva simply explains the complex conditions that undeveloped countries and regions experience, where various economic developmental processes and political conditions exist. In this discussion, criticism based on



the dichotomies of north and south, as well as “advanced countries” and “developing countries,” has a certain amount of validity. We also need to elucidate with an approach of looking at actual conditions to determine whether this thought is simply a transient statement against globalization or capitalism or contains a truth on which an alternative social theory could be built; however, analysis of this issue is not the purpose of this paper, but rather a subject dealt with elsewhere.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Interpretation***

This view of people at the grassroots level is consistent with the idea of post-development thought documented above. This is the paradoxical reflection derived from the experiences of Esteva, who was once an elite of the business community and the government. Particular features that I noticed were the relationship with “thought” and the process of reaching an understanding and sharing in the reality of people, as well as the many complications of an individual as a thinker and an activist that can be seen in the personal history of Esteva. He thinks that it is not an exaggeration to say that he learned his ideas from people, but his words replace the reality that has occurred and become an explanation.

Esteva reconstructed his set of values, his view of the world, and his thoughts from his own experiences and frustrations from business, left-wing guerillas actions, bureaucracy, and NGOs, which were mentioned as experiences in an infantile state, so that he could choose a new sense of values or actions. At the same time, it is an explanation of him of a phenomenon, and an interpretation.

Of course, I do not generalize this idea immediately as something applicable to all current developing countries. I want to understand it rather as a declaration of intentions from Mexican civil society facing the advance of globalization.

### ***Implications***

I want to emphasize the following four points as findings obtained from this examination. Although post-development thought includes various elements, such as the environment, human rights, and culture, the first point is that *autonomy* from the bottom is an excellent political demand. We who are residents of the north need to understand other viewpoints for there to be a background for such thought and action to be produced.

The second point is that I want to note the theory of civil society from the position of the south. Although the term civil society is a concept born from Western tradition, there is a difference between the civil society in the West and that in the non-West; furthermore, the view of the co-existence of the many-leveled global society.

Third, the opinions of these people are a severe criticism and refusal of neo-liberalism, which is a dominant force in the modern world. This kind of thought and movement in developing countries needs to be watched to see whether it will become merely a temporary rebellion against globalization or a route towards an alternative truth for social change.

Finally, I want to point out the arrogance of the posture of the north and urge reflection about the

ways that north-south relations, divisions, and international cooperation are progressing, and underline the necessity of new approaches. It suggests not only official development assistance (ODA) and positioning of development NGOs of the north in a meaning that complements the ODA, but also the possibility of international networking activity of civil organization should be called an earth-citizen movement.

### ***Subject for future investigation***

Finally, if based on this thought, what will remain of the field of international development or development studies? Two points can be raised. First, these fields can involve investigation through research that clarifies the actual conditions of movements by social change toward alternative ideals. Next, they can clarify the universal common cause in non-Western societies and the south, and describe their localized nature through work involving the comparison, verification, and application of post-development thought and anti-development thought in other areas, such as Asia and Africa.

## **7. Concluding comment**

Generally, development studies (including development economics, sociology, and anthropology, education, as well as political sciences) is a field with a strong focus on empirical or real study and has the character of an applied science in which experimental research of a concrete example. In addition, however, theoretical and non-empirical research concerned with social movements based on ideological background, relating to the fields of humanities and social science can make an important contribution. In relation to post-development thought, a new area of research is necessary.

### **Notes**

1. This paper was originally published in Japanese as: Kitano, S., 2003, Mekishiko no posutokaihatsu shiso, *Journal of International Development Studies*, 12(2), pp. 141–157. This English translation is published with permission.
2. Interviews were held in the city of Oaxaca and were performed on January 16, August 30, and September 2, 5, and 6, 2002. The language used was English for about 60 to 90 minutes each time. Since the original version of this paper was published in Japanese, Esteva's narrations presented here are re-translated. As a writer of this paper, I am responsible for the translation and re-translation of his words.
3. Specifically, this is based on an idea called dialogue and symbiosis with different tribes and/or persons outside the group, and was organized by his NGO; there was participation in educational activities, networking of grass-root organizations, etc. He also had a role in the dialogue with the government as an advisor for the EZLN of Chiapas in 1997.
4. Esteva also participated in the establishment of the state's indigenous people's rights (Ley de Derechos de los Pueblos y Comunidades Indígenas del Estado de Oaxaca) as a student and adviser in Oaxaca state on November 12, 1995. The law legalized governance by customary law at community and municipality levels, as well as the political expectation of the prevention of the indigenous people from the influence of an armed uprising of the EZLN in the state of Chiapas that spread into the state of Oaxaca. 412 among 570 municipalities chose community self-government in the state (Esteva 2001).

5. Although the same episode at the time of Sachs visiting the Tepido area in Mexico City was described in a previous work (Sachs 1999), Esteva himself was there on that occasion with Sachs. It is said that Esteva repeatedly encountered this kind of exchange between foreign visitors and indigenous people.
6. 1) Access to running water; 2) Access to sewage; 3) Access to flush toilets; 4) Access to social security, public health insurance, etc.; 5) Access to a constant income; 6) Access to electricity; 7) Access to a modern dwelling; and 8) Access to savings or a pension. There are many citizens who oppose this classification, and it is now being corrected.
7. For example, establishment of producer associations centering on small-scale businesses, indigenous coffee producers, accompanied by abolition of price-fixing and the purchase policy of the state, etc.
8. Esteva explains as follows: "The word 'civil society' began to be used among people as language expressing having made a place for a people's organization and people systematizing themselves, having a sense of togetherness, distributing food to people, and caring for wounded people when the earthquake on the 10th was over. People had already developed a spontaneous systematization that is hard to believe. It was not made by someone. An organization of this sort is not seen usually because it is not formal and does not have a fixed 'neighborhood,' either. Although it is not formalized, it is an organization and really has solidarity. In Mexico, we came to use the term 'civil society,' with a new meaning for the first time (after the earthquake)." (Esteva, interview, September 6)
9. As a policy relevant to acceptance of diversity, by a state constitutional amendment on June 6, 1998: 1), there will be bilingual education in indigenous languages and a ban on discrimination against indigenous peoples; 2) language and culture are stipulated in the state constitution (indigenous language can be used for a trial and public office or related in a public document); 3) the government has to supply an interpreter and a translator -- a part of jurisdiction by the traditional community; and 4) a series of reforms that support autonomy, such as legalization of community land ownership (it was considered governmental land conventionally) was performed.
10. With this idea as a base, people are working at the grassroots level 1) to form dialogues and relations through indigenous people's groups, local NGOs, and international researchers, 2) to spread education of alternative technologies (introduction of a dry toilet and professional construction material etc.), and 3) to participate in the international networks and international research projects of NGOs. In particular, 1) is related to all the fields of social life, such as a village broadcasting station for environmental preservation, human rights, the U.S. migrant worker problem, environmentally conscious agriculture, and cultural traditions, and it does not remain in the frame of protection of indigenous rights any longer, but rather the network of the civic movement for alternative social change, which also involves city residents and the non-indigenous occupants, and is now taking place (Kitano 2003b; Kitano 2003c).
11. In Mexican indigenous communities, an offender is not put into prison, but responsibility is given to the community; there is also a structure of community supervision. A Western judicial system is not the only example (Sergio Beltrán, interview, September 13).
12. In this meaning, during January 1, 1994, in the state of Chiapas, the Mexican indigenous people who have appealed to every sort of nonviolent means to the undemocratic government then created an armed uprising of the EZLN as a last means of military power, which Esteva claims was a fight for freedom and true democracy (Esteva 1997).
13. This is related to *The Plan for Mexico by Civil Societies* (Un Proyecto para México: Desde la Sociedad Civil), which is touched on. This indicated the activity for alternative social change, which 400 or more specialists, intellectuals, and activists decided upon in October, 1998, for one year later. Reference is made about the legal system, gender and human rights, drugs, the financial system, expressional freedom, the accuracy of information and reports, conversion of public policies, reappraisal of an alternative lifestyle, etc. (Grupo Opciones Conviviales de México 1999). *The Plan for Oaxaca by Civil Society* (Un Proyecto para Oaxaca: Desde la Sociedad Civil) was decided as an agenda at the level of the state of Oaxaca in 2000.
14. As keywords to post-development, Esteva himself did not mention these three, but since they reflect his ideals,

these three characteristics were chosen by the author.

15. Refer to Kitano (2002; 2003a; 2003b; 2003c), as well as Kitano (2008), for details of some of the results of my research and the actual theory.

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**Kitano Shu** is a sociologist in the Department of Tourism and Transnational Studies at Dokkyo University, Japan. Professor Kitano's research and teaching interests include alternative (as well as post-) development strategies and critiques of development discourse. shukitano1@dokkyo.ac.jp