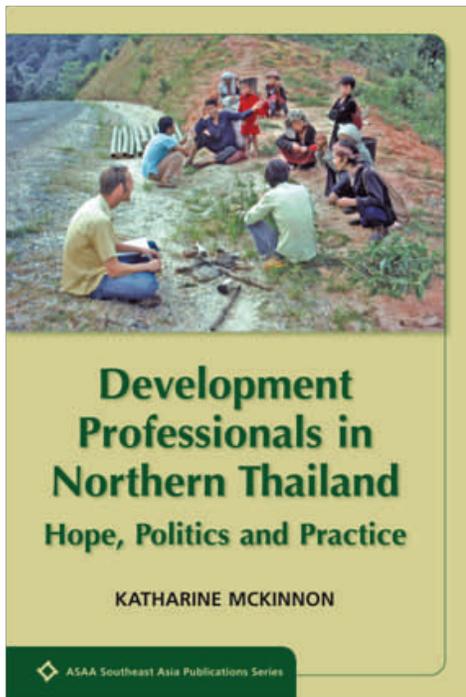


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# Development Professionals in Northern Thailand: Hope, Politics and Practice

**Katharine McKinnon**

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“Development” promises higher incomes, better livelihoods, social justice and emancipation, but decades of good intentions have left hill communities in Northern Thailand with high rates of drug addiction and poverty, and a loss of traditional knowledge and values. A former volunteer and development specialist who spent much of her childhood in the region, Katharine McKinnon set out to consider what has gone wrong by studying professionals involved in development work. How, she asks, did the highlands come to be seen as needing development? And why did the presence of well-intentioned developers still leave behind so much apparent misery and hardship?

Returning to the region to conduct ethnographic research, McKinnon found that a majority of development specialists she met were dedicated to ideals of altruism, emancipation and advocacy for local people, and resigned to the inevitable failures and shortcomings that emerge when development efforts are co-opted by geopolitics. Her book is an account of the everyday efforts and struggles of those who ‘do’ development—consultants, researchers, government officials, NGO workers and village partners. Taking a critical approach to post-development theory, she argues that politics and ideology are an intrinsic part of development work, and that an active engagement with the politics of development is essential for professionals hoping to make a difference.



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