

Public Participation in Environmental Management in Thailand

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1. Introduction

Thailand has faced many environmental problems, especially in terms of natural resources degradation and pollution, for a long time. It was not until 1972, after participating in the Stockholm Conference on the human environment, that the government recognized the need for environmental management by establishing the Office of the National Environmental Board. This was the first government organization responsible for dealing with the country's environmental problems. Before this, environmental laws and regulations, all the responsibility of the Royal Forestry Department, Ministry of Agriculture, were only for protection of the forest and wild animals. Despite environmental laws, environmental problems have increased due to the combined effects of industrialization and economics as well as population growth. As a response, an environmental movement has formed in Thailand.

Export-oriented government policy in the 1980s raised controversy about resource degradation as increased resource extraction and new agro-industry affected rural areas in unprecedented ways. Resource conflicts among many groups of people resulted from, for example, rock salt mining in the Northeast, export-oriented prawn farming in the South, and land speculation associated with tourism and industrial development throughout the country. New settlements in forests, extensive deforestation and commercial eucalyptus plantations led to many conflicts between people and government agencies. One of the most important environmental conflicts, which received much public attention, was the construction of the Pak Moon dam for which villagers were resettled in less fertile areas without adequate compensation. In the 1980s, the government project to build the Nam Choan Dam in Kanchanaburi province's Thung Yai Naresuan wildlife sanctuary

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was widely opposed. The long period of public participation in opposing the construction of this dam, which eventually ended with the victory of the project's opponents, became a significant force in Thailand's environmental movement (Hirsch, 1997). This event can be said to be the first record of public participation in environmental management in Thailand. Since then, many environmental movements have brought the force of public participation to bear on government development projects.

Thai governments have recognized the importance of participatory democracy as a mean to good governance since the democratic uprising in May 1992. Moreover, the concept of sustainable development accepted at the Rio Conference in 1992 was imported in the Enhancement and Conservation of National Environmental Quality Act 1992. This act also calls for public participation in environmental management. In addition, the new constitution enacted in 1997 is called the "participatory" and the "green" constitution because public participation was included in the drafting process and it is the first constitution to express fundamental environmental principles (Sribuaiam, 2000). The Official Information Act 1996 also emphasizes the public right's to know, and the Prime Minister's Office Regulation on Public Hearing 1996 is widely adapted as means to public participation. The Public Hearing Regulation 1996 is also used as instrument for public participation in many development projects that may affect the quality of the environment.

Since the drafting of Thailand's new constitution, people have more awareness of participatory democracy. This has led to a higher demand for public participation than before. Public hearing activity is believed to be an effective channel for public participation and is being widely employed by many state organizations.

Although public participation is becoming more active, some problems concerning the application of public participation in the Thai context still exist. For example:

- definitions, methods and processes in public participation are not clear. There is confusion between the meanings of public participation and public hearing:

- public hearing is normally used after a decision has been made and misuses of public hearings sometimes cause conflict between government and local people or between the groups of people themselves.;

- formal public participation is perceived to be a government tool for advancing government policies.

This paper intends to explain public participation in environmental management in Thailand by considering the concept of participation, historical events, legal framework and factors affecting public participation.

2. Concept of Public Participation

Before discussing further, the concept of public participation should be identified. A description of methods and

processes of public participation will help clarify this concept.

In this article, public participation is defined as the process by which the views and concerns of the public or stakeholders are identified and incorporated into government policy-making and decision-making. It is open, ongoing, two-way communication, both formal and informal, between proponents of a policy, i.e. government, and the public. It includes open information sharing with stakeholders.

Effective public participation requires three kinds of communication between proponents and the public:

1) input from public groups or individuals with the aim of explaining the nature of each public and expressing public knowledge and perception of issues to the proponents;

2) output of technical information about the issues from the proponents provided to the public; and

3) exchange of information, perceptions and values between the proponents and the public and among various public groups and individuals.

Public participation methods can be classified into legal and nonformal methods. Legal methods are those provided as basic rights through the constitution, for example, right to know (access to information), right to freedom of expression and right to association can all be exercised as citizens pursue their right to a healthy environment. Non-formal methods are nonlegal forms, for example, education (newsletters, workshops, seminars,

exhibitions, campaigns, etc.), direct pressure (demonstrations, petitions, complaints, etc.), lobbying (public hearings, consultation, roundtables, etc.), services (hotlines, information centers, cooperative networks, etc.) and complementary or semi-legal forms (hearing on environmental impact assessment or EIA, post-project monitoring, citizen committees).

3. Public Participation through Laws and Regulations

In the past, environmental management in Thailand was the responsibility of the government. Policies, strategies and enforcement activities were thus in the hands of government officials. The people only had to comply with all related laws and regulations.

At present Thai people enjoy more rights concerning environmental management, including resource management and pollution control, than they had in the past. For instance, the new Enhancement and Conservation of National Environmental Quality Act was amended in 1992, and since then other laws and regulations, most importantly the 1997 Constitution, concerned with public participation have been promulgated. Thailand's core laws and regulations concerning the rights of citizens in public participation about environmental management are worth examining in some detail.

3.1 The Enhancement and Conservation of National Environmental Quality Act 1992

Sections 6 and 7 state that for the purpose of public participation in matters concerning the enhancement and conservation of national environment quality, the people have rights to be informed and to obtain information from the government service. In addition, to encourage public participation in the promotion and conservation of environmental quality, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) shall be entitled to register with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment for environmental protection and conservation of natural resources.

According to this act, the people are not able to use their right as private individuals; their right must be used via non-governmental organizations. This method does not work well because the communication path to transfer information to the decision-makers may be distorted. In addition, peoples' rights are not defined clearly and do not conform with the new constitution (1997) in respect to right to know, right to access public information, right to monitor and audit the quality of environment and also right to ask for public hearing etc. Now many organizations are working together to amend this act.

3.2 The Official Information Act 1997

This act was promulgated with the principle of the recognition of the public's right to know and to have extensive access to official information. The people, therefore, have the right to access official

information concerning any development project which may affect them, their communities, and environment (except for information which would jeopardize national security, international relations, or national economic or financial security if it was disclosed) (The Official Information Act 1997).

This Act is quite new to public and not many people know how to access official information because, in the Thai bureaucratic system, all official information is not easily obtained by the public. This reflects many government officials' perception and is thus quite difficult to change.

3.3 Constitution

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2540 (1997) was enacted on October 11, 1997 as the principle of the democratic regime of government. The constitution was changed in response to broad demand for political reform and public participation in governance and in the inspection of the exercise of state power. Another factor behind change was the desire to improve political structures to achieve more efficiency and stability.

This constitution is different from previous constitutions because it includes the principle of environmental management. The government has changed from having exclusive responsibility in environmental management to encouraging and supporting environment management through 3 basic principles (Papussaro and Tabungarn):

1. conservation and utilization of natural resources and biodiversity consistent with the principle of sustainable development;

2. control and abatement of pollution that affects public health and quality of life;

3. public participation.

In Thailand, many groups of institutions have to coordinate with each other in order to conserve natural resources, the environment and biodiversity. Those groups of institutions are the national government, local government organizations, traditional communities, non-government organizations, education organizations, traditional communities, non-government organizations, education organizations and citizens.

The new constitution defines ways in which these groups are to participate.

1. Government

The government has to promote public participation in environmental management according to sections 76 and 79.

2. Local government organizations

Local government organizations also have roles in participating in environmental management according to the new constitution, section 290. They have the duty to consider and project or activity inside, and in some situations outside, the area of the locality that may affect the quantity of the environment, health or sanitary conditions of the inhabitants in the area.

3. Traditional Communities

Many development projects have impacts on traditional communities; therefore the new constitution (section 46) calls for the participation of such communities. Traditional communities shall have the right to conserve or restore their customs, local knowledge, arts or good culture of communities and of the nation and to participate in the management, maintenance, prevention and exploitation of natural resources in a balanced fashion and persistently as provided by law.

4. Non-Government Organizations

This new constitution sees the importance of right of association (section 45) and of the significant role independent non-government organizations can have in environment management (section 56).

A person shall enjoy the liberty to unite and form an association, league, co-operative, farmer group, private organization or any other group. They have the right to participate in the preservation and exploitation of natural resources and biological diversity and in the preservation of the quality of the environment.

Any project or activity which may seriously affect the quality of the environment shall not be permitted, unless its impacts on the quality of the environment have been studied and evaluated and opinions of an independent organization, consisting of representatives

from private environmental organizations and from higher education institutions providing studies in the environmental field, have been obtained prior to the operation of such project or activity.

Moreover, the studies and opinions of independent organizations concerning environmental management are to be recognized and employed as useful sources of information in government decision-making.

5. Citizens

The most important group is Thai citizens as a whole. Therefore the new constitution gives citizens the right to receive information, explanation and reason from state agencies before permission is granted for any project that may affect quality of the environment (according to sections 58 and 59).

In addition, the new constitution also guarantees the right to petition according to section 170 in that citizens can propose a bill for consideration in the National Assembly by submitting a petition bearing not less than fifty thousand voters' signatures.

3.4 Public Hearing Regulation 1996

A public hearing is a process where members of the public are given an opportunity to make suggestions, present information, pose questions to others, and given their opinions on implementation of a project so that a decision can be made on the basis of objective facts (Kanchanasuwon and Hurt, 2000).

Public Hearing Regulation 1996 was enacted under the Secretariat Office of

the Prime Minister in order to be the guideline for arranging public hearing activities. It includes principles and processes in public hearings for the formal discussion of national problems. The purpose of this activity is to collect useful information from stakeholders for government decision-making. Since 1992, many public hearing activities have been arranged; many of them relating to huge development projects with potential effects on the quality of people's lives and the environment.

According to this regulation, public hearing committees are appointed. Members are selected from the ranks of well-known academics, members of parliament, representatives from the Council of Lawyers and some technical experts. Their responsibilities are to monitor the process of listening to the public via public hearing activities, set up public hearing processes and prepare reports on public hearings for the Cabinet.

The principles and processes for conducting public hearings are quite complicated; for example, basic information of the project has to be prepared, public hearing committees have to be selected and the processes of public hearing have to be followed. There must be public relations processes concerning the activity. All basic information has to be announced, such as the appointment of committees, topics for public hearing, summary of proposals by all related organizations, time of activity and registration period, venues for registration, how to provide

information to the committees, and the characteristics of people that can register to join the activity (Public Hearing Regulation 1996).

Representatives from all stakeholder groups will be invited to express their ideas. Names and addresses of representatives and topics for discussion have to be submitted to the committees in advance. Experts from relevant state organizations will participate in the activity in order to answer question and inform the public about the project. The chairman of the committee will arrange the activity schedule.

When appropriate, the chairman can permit live broadcast of committee proceeding to the public (by radio or television). After the hearing, the committee meets to reach decisions on the issues discussed in the hearing.

The process has been criticized as a government tool for railroading projects and claiming that public participation is included in decision-making in case disputes occur.

Sometimes public hearing activities are arranged only after problems have already arisen. Whether this happens depends on to what extent the government organizations and the owners of the projects realize the importance of public participation.

Since Public Hearing Regulation 1996's enactment (even before the promulgation of the new constitution in 1997) there has been great demand to change the regulation into a new public

hearing act so that it can be widely used throughout the country. The draft of this act, which is quite similar to the Public Hearing Regulation, was approved by the Cabinet in March 2000 and is now being considered by the Council of State before being passed to the parliament.

Case Study: Hin Krud Coal-Fired Power Plant

From mentioned laws and regulations, it seems like Thailand paid attention to public participation for many years. However, there has been more failure than success in trying encourage public participation. Many pending development projects, such as Bo Nok power plant, and Kang Sue Ten dam are evidence of such failure. The case study (Hin Krud Project) and the summary of major factors affecting the success or failure of public participation in environmental management in Thailand will help reveal the extent to which participatory democracy is achieved through public participation activities.

Information about the project

The 200-hectare Hin Krud project is one of two coal - fired power plants (the other is Bo Nok project) planned by the government to be located in the coastal area of Prachuabkhirikhan Province, the upper south of Thailand. Bituminous coal will be used to fuel the 1,400 MW (3 x 700 MW) plant. There will be a port for transporting coal from ships to the power plant buildings. The port's jetty will

extend 3.5 km into the Gulf of Thailand (Union Power Development Co., Ltd., 1999)

Union Power Development Co., Ltd (UPDC), a company with major shareholders from Japan, Finland, Hong Kong and Thailand, proposed the Hin Krud project when private organizations were invited to invest in the Independent Power Producer (IPP) project in 1994 as an attempt to lower government investment. The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) selected and signed an agreement with the project in 1997.

The EIA for Hin Krud project presented by UPDC was approved by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment in 1998. In August 1998, some academics and villagers protested the construction of this project because they found that there is a nearby coral reef, not shown in the EIA report, which should be preserved. An additional EIA study on marine ecology was conducted by a different consultant and submitted to MOSTE in August 1999.

Responding to disputes between pro, con and neutral factions in the public and widespread concern about the potential impact of the power plant, the government demanded public hearing activity to reduce public tension. Some members of the public also demanded public hearings in a call for compliance with the new constitution's provisions on public participation, and as a way to express their opinions. The hearing was arranged for February 24 - 25, 2000.

A public hearing for Bo Nok had been held in late 1999. As with Hin Krud, government approval for Bo Nok was given before the hearing. At Bo Nok, the local people strongly objected to the power plant and there was violent argument and protest in the region. Since the hearing there have been no announcements of hearing results or further government decisions concerning the Bo Nok project, although the public hearing report has long been in the government's hands.

Some people in Hin Krud feared that there would be no government decision about the project as a result of the public hearings, just as in Bo Nok. Possibly with this in mind, several local people chose to engage in informal public participation activities arranged by local groups, the media, contractors and NGOs. These informal activities included community meetings, television broadcasts and seminars.

Public hearing activity

The government set up a public hearing committee (11 members) in February 1999 in order to comply with the Public Hearing Regulation 1996. The Chairman is Professor Dr. Sippanond Katudhat, a well-known academic and former minister of many ministries. The members include university professors, a senator, lawyers and academics (The Secretariat of Public Hearing Committees of Prachuabkhirikhan, 2000). Since there were 2 power plants projects (Bo Nok and Hin Krud) in the province about which this

committee has to organize public hearing activities, the public hearing about Hin Krud Power plant was held after the Bo Nok hearing. Although the 2 public hearing activities are over, the local conflict still exists and there is still no decision from the government (as of August 2000).

There were 9,252 people registered to participate in the Hin Krud public hearing on February 24 - 25, 2000. The large number of registrants caused a problem for the organizers because there was no suitable conference room for this activity. The largest air - conditioned conference room in Prachuabkhirikhan could accommodate only 200 people. Therefore, representatives from each group of stakeholders were selected to sit in the meeting room to express their ideas. The rest had to follow proceedings on radio or TV either outside the conference facility or at home. Proceedings were televised in the south for the full 2 days of activity, though only the first 4 hours of the first day's activity were televised in other parts of Thailand.

Before the day of public hearing, there was a great deal of activity by stakeholders. Some groups used mass media for expressing their ideas. The UDPC representative also expressed his opinion to the media that this project would certainly be continued. At the same time the representatives from local communities and non - government organizations rallied at the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Science,

Technology and Environment to submit information about adverse impacts of power plant on communities. Furthermore, an unidentified gunman shot one community leader who protested the project. Fortunately, the victim was not hurt.

One day before the hearing activity occurred, many hundred policemen with police dogs inspected the conference room and surrounding area for bombs.

On the days of the public hearing, many groups of people gathered around the public hearing area.

Approximately 700 policemen were assigned to surround the conference room and prevent outsiders (non-registered people) from entering the area.

Approximately 1,000 people dressed in green T-shirts symbolizing the environmental conservation group came to the public hearing area with hundreds of green flags and national flags (after interviewing some people, the author found that some of them were from Bo Nok). This group did not participate in this public hearing and was not allowed to enter the public hearing area. The group sent representatives to submit an open letter to the chairman of the public hearing committee. Bo Nok people submitted the letter asking for the government's decision on Bo Nok power plant. Hin Krud people submitted a letter expressing their opinion about the Hin Krud project. All of these people said that they could not accept this public hearing because they believed that public hearings should have been

conducted before the government signed the agreement with UPDC.

Moreover, hundred of fisherman sailed their boats to the public hearing location, which is close to the sea, to protest. More than 200 fishing boats, all decorated with green and national flags, lined up in front of the meeting location. Some representatives of this group used loudspeakers to voice their ideas about the impacts that might affect them and the environment as a result of this project. Hundreds of policemen lined up in front of this group and tried to prevent them and other local people dressed in green from entering the meeting area. The head of local housewives and leader of local municipality organization led this green group.

Among the people in the conference room were public hearing committee members, technical consultants and observers from related government organizations, local government officials, contractors and technical advisors (mainly university instructors who worked part-time as private consultants) members of the mass media, and citizens who either supported or objected to the project.

The conference room was divided into 2 parts. One part was for committee members and their technical consultants. This group (around 30 persons) occupied nearly half of the room. The rest of the space was for the team of contractors, their technical consultants and interested people.

The chairman let the people who supported and objected to the project

express their ideas and ask questions to the contractors and government agency representatives. Some technical consultants to the committee used technical words that the local people could not understand. One teacher from Hin Krud was selected by the objecting group to present information that was not stated in the EIA report, such as ecological system data. Many Hin Krud villagers who opposed the project and were entitled to participate in the hearing attended for only one day or did not attend at all because they did not trust the organizing agencies or the committee.

On the second day of the hearing, few people expressed opinions or asked questions and the chairman had to close the meeting 2 hours before the official closing time. No one wanted to talk further because there was a feeling that the committee could not be trusted anymore (Matichon (b), 2000). Some of the people felt that the chairman already had a proposal in mind and was simply using the hearing to convince people to accept his alternative.

Although the public hearing on February 24 - 25, 2000 was organized by the government to obtain information for submitting to the Cabinet, surprisingly, so far no member of the Cabinet has expressed any opinion about this project.

The public hearing committee concluded that a clear decision could not be made as to whether or not the power plant should be constructed at Hin Krud. The committee also made some recommendations for the contractors'

consideration such as the study of the coral reef, the construction of wind shield to prevent the dispersion of coal ash, the establishment of funds for Hin Krud human resource development and for the rehabilitation of the environment and the establishment of short and long term plans to reduce environmental impact (The Manager, 2000).

The contractors accepted the chairman's idea and proposed the donation of 30 million baht (25B = A \$ 1) per year to the village fund for occupational support such as training. Moreover, a tripartite group (villagers, contractors and government) was established to monitor the project and administer the village fund. However, some groups of people still objected to the project because they did not want the power plant in the area. These people felt that the money alone would not compensate for the damage caused by the plant. Now all groups are waiting for the government's decision on this project. The conflict in the villages still exists. Former allies have become foes.

Though public hearings should resolve dispute, in the case of Hin Krud it clearly did not. A key problem is that the government had approved the Hin Krud project before the public participation process was conducted. Government agencies such as EGAT and MOSTE should be responsible for their negligence in failing to honor the public's right to know.

5. Major Factors Affecting the Success of Failure of Public Participation in Thailand

The Hin Krud case study is a typical example of how, in the Thai experience, public participation in environmental management has failed to produce stakehold satisfaction and, indeed, has even increased conflict. Since Thailand is still in the process of learning about participatory democracy, the factors influencing the success of failure participation should be identified to help illuminate the real situation and push Thai society to move forward in democratic development. Study of historical events indicates that the major factors are legislative and institutional.

1. Legislative factor

While public participation has been practiced in community activities for many decades, national level public participation is a newer phenomenon. Laws and regulations to support the people's right to public participation have been in place for a relatively short time. These laws should encourage people to express their views through public participation channels. Though the new constitution and associated laws emphasize public participation, people and interest groups are still learning how to use the laws to their advantage.

2. Institutional factors

Institutional factors are government policy commitment, culture, public participation factor itself, and existence and accessibility of information.

2.1 Government policy commitment

Government policy commitment is important for public participation. If the government is concerned about the issue, relevant laws and regulations are enforced and public participation is encouraged, the level of public participation should be increased. The more the government responds positively to the demand for public participation, the higher the level of participation should be.

The figure below illustrates the relationship between demand for public participation and the government's response in Thailand as studied by the author. Actually, in the Thai situation, when there has been demand for formal

public participation, the government has normally responded negatively. This suggests that, despite laws and regulations that call for public participation, the voices of local people have not been of much concern to the government. Moreover, the formal public participation method is not clear in Thailand. Public hearings are therefore widely used but in both correct and incorrect ways. Arranging public hearings is also costly time-consuming. The government will respond positively to demand for public participation when a problem becomes a significant public issue. Some government organizations arrange public hearings even without great public demand in order to minimize future conflict.

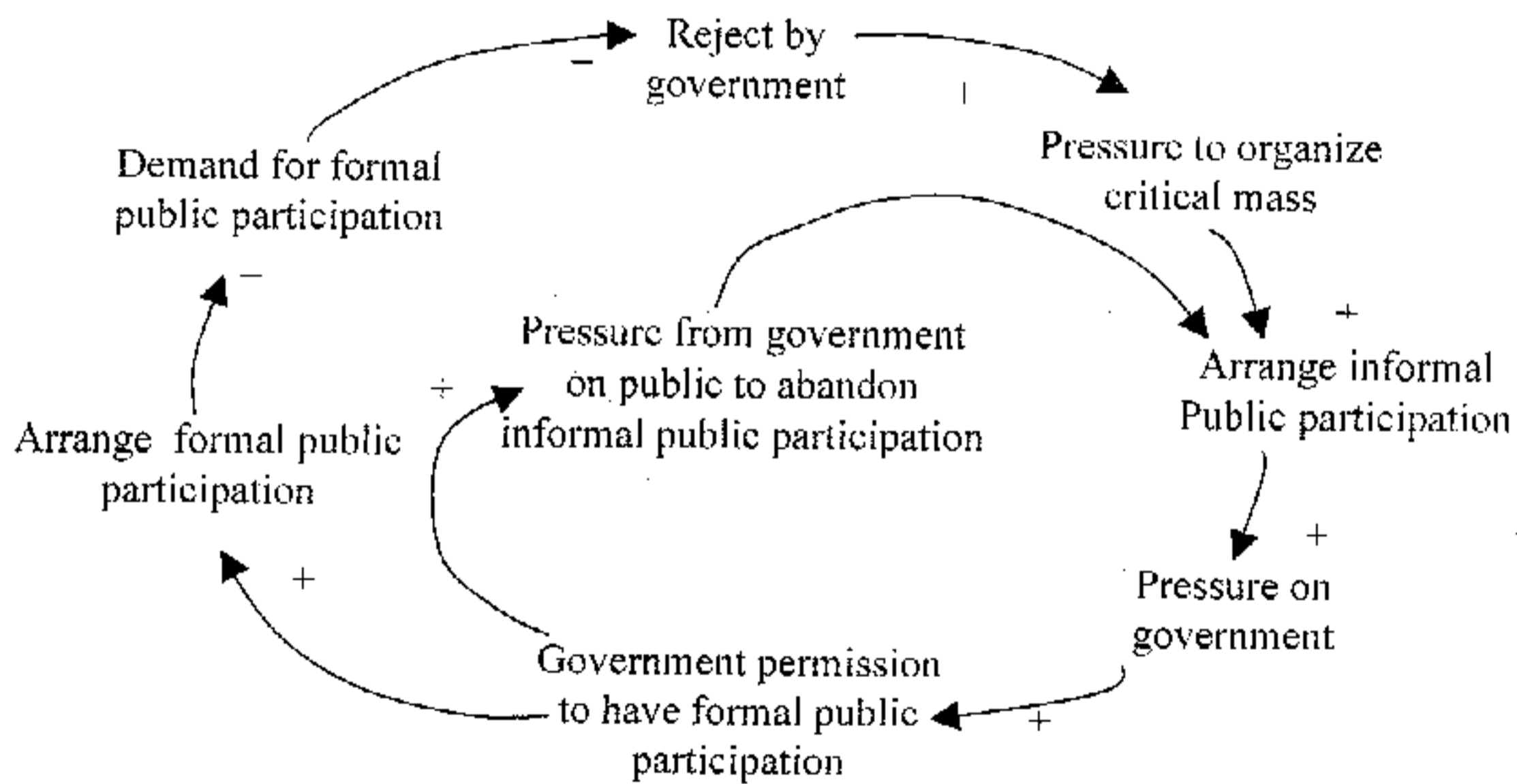


Figure 1 Diagram of Demand for Public Participation and the Government's Response in Thailand

When the government rejects formal public participation there is greater pressure on the people, which causes them to organize critical mass. When formal public participation cannot be arranged, the people arrange informal activity instead in order to pressure on the government. When there is pressure from critical mass, it is likely that the government will permit formal public participation, in then putting pressure on the public to abandon informal public participation. When formal public participation is arranged, the public demand for informal activities is lower. Many cases such as hazardous waste site selection, construction of hydroelectric dams, and coal-fired power plants exhibit this dynamic cycle. Government policy and government's degree of commitment to public participation thus help determine the character of public participation.

2.2 Culture

Aspects of Thai culture that affect the success or failure of public participation include problem awareness, compromise orientation and trust.

2.2.1 Problem awareness

People living in small, rural communities enjoy greater access to information than they have had in the past. Links to media are stronger with widespread television and radio services and even newspaper delivery. Personal communication is made easier through increasingly available telecommunication systems. Many villagers are able to receive

new knowledge and ideas from outside sources such as non-government organizations and also state technocrats. The more information people can access, the higher environmental management awareness they can have. Traditionally, Thais as a largely rural and agricultural people have had a close relationship with the environment. Buddhism has many tenets that are consistent with environmentalism. Even today, many villagers earn their living from nature in some way, and nature holds symbolic value in their communities. Therefore, as people develop more problem awareness, environmental awareness and political articulation, their level of participation should increase. In some cases, such as the Nam Chon Dam, the changing of Lumpini Recreation Area to be a garage for sky trains and the road in Tung Yai Wildlife Sanctuary, people who exhibited high levels of public awareness and engaged in determined protest, have successfully resisted development projects.

2.2.2 Compromise orientation and trust

Trust is necessary for cooperation. Trust depends on how well individuals respect other people's rights, the extent to which the sectors perceive one another in the community, similarity of perceptions between groups and accuracy of groups' perceptions of each other.

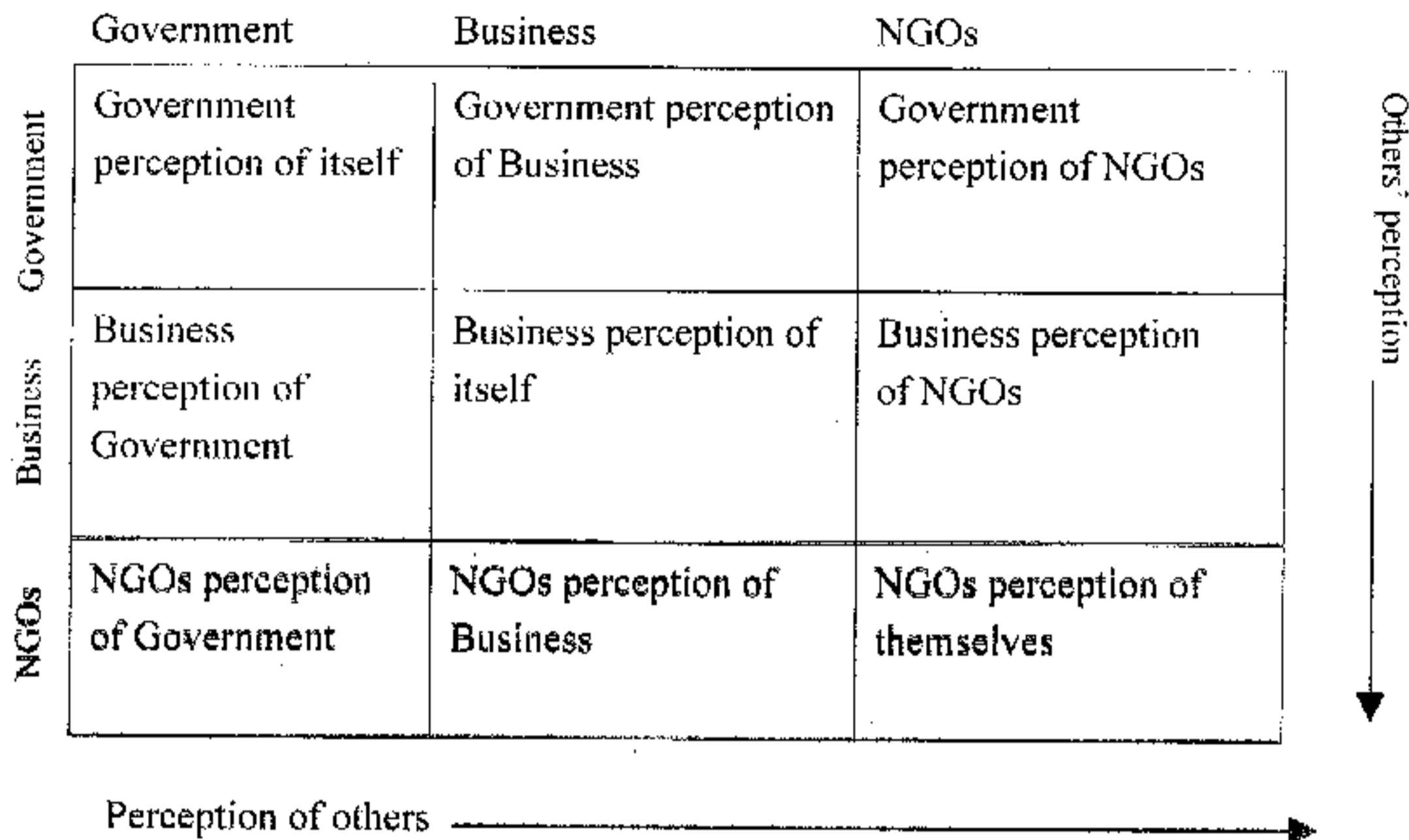


Figure 2 Groups of People and their Trust in Others

Figure 2 above illustrates how each group in a community perceives the others. The level of public participation will increase as the degree of trust increases. At the start of the process, if some people in government and some experts do not fully trust the citizens, there will never be strong public participation due to the skepticism about giving citizens a powerful role to play in the participation process. Moreover, citizens' views on trust change slightly throughout the process of participation because those views depend on to what extent the government and other groups trust the citizens. Citizens' trust in the government may improve if they are provided with satisfactory and accurate information. Some project owners (such as in the Hin Krud case) hire local

people as public relations officers to provide information about projects to other people in their communities. Personal familiarity with the project staff lessens suspicion about the information and trust about the project increases. Compromise may become easier to reach.

In addition, outside experts are generally employed to build higher trust among the citizens because citizens have tended to believe experts, although some experts do play political games with scientific information. However, since the Hin Krud case, the public has become more suspicious of experts' technical reports and compromise has become more difficult to reach. In the absence of trust, some people think that government organized public participation activities

organized do not allow the public to influence decision-making. The effect of lack of trust is illustrated in the examples of Hin Krud villagers did not actively participate on the second day of hearings and those who abstained from the public hearing altogether.

2.3 Public participation factors

The success or failure of public participation also depends on how well public participation activities are organized. Time, duration, venue, method, processes and public relations are examples of factors related to the organization of public participation activities. Many public hearing activities are organized on workdays, so many people are unable to participate. The facilities are sometimes inappropriate, for example, conference rooms that are too small to accommodate all registered stakeholders.

2.4 Access to information

Information about the proposed projects must be available for stakeholders to take part in decision-making. According to the constitution and the Official Information Act, the public has right to know or access official information, but in Thailand, some officials are not accustomed to this new system and do not disclose useful information. When the information is available, it has always been made available too late. In the past, EIA reports were not available to the public. At present, it is suspected that reports are not really easily accessible. The case of Hin Krud Coal-fired Power Plant is a prime example of poor public access to

information. The contract was signed and construction had begun before people learned any details about the project, and before any public hearing was held.

Project information, when available to the stakeholders, is often too technical to be easily understood. Stakeholders cannot properly evaluate the information. Technical consultants should be provided to help people understand the projects better.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The public participation concept is becoming more accepted as an essential part of policy, program and project development. In Thailand, public participation in plans and decisions about development projects that may affect communities, people and the environment is widespread and growing. Participation in natural resource development decisions is increasing in many parts of Thailand. Thailand's new constitution recognizes the importance of public participation in environmental management. However, public participation is sometimes misunderstood and misused and can cause disputes among groups of stakeholders. Public hearing is widely employed as the instrument of public participation although there are many kinds of appropriate instruments. The major factors that influence the effectiveness of public participation are legislative, institutional (such as government policy commitment), cultural (awareness and trust), existence

and availability of information and organizational factors (time, duration, venue, methods, processes and public relations).

6.2 Recommendations

The government, as a major stakeholder in environmental management, should encourage public participation throughout the country. Various public participation instruments should be studied for application in the Thai context. Since public hearing is not the only mechanism for public participation, and Thai society is dynamic, many mechanisms should be applied case by case as appropriate to enhance the effectiveness of public participation.

Grassroots community organizations should be strengthened so they can be involved in public participation at the most basic level. Self-reliance capabilities of the socially

disadvantaged rural and urban poor who tend to be left out of participation should be upgraded.

The participatory development capabilities of governments should be promoted from the central to the local levels in order to encourage government to give people a voice and maximize people's chances for participation. Moreover, foundations for public participation should be built, including administrative service to create and procure resources for participation such as officials' skills and financial factors. Laws and regulations should be enforced.

Appendix

Chronology of the Hin Krud Project

- December 1994 Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) announced the invitation to private sector to participate in producing electricity
- June 1995 closing date for submitting proposals
- June 1995 Union Power Development Co., Ltd. Submitted proposal
- May 7, 1996 start negotiating criteria for trading electricity
- August 1996 field survey for the evaluating of potential location and environmental impact assessment
- December 27, 1996 agreement on contract for trading electricity

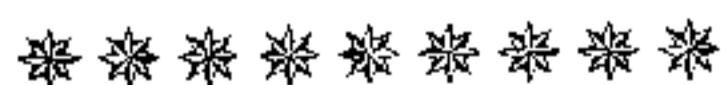
- January 31, 1997 decision - making on location for construction of the power plant
- March 26, 1997 EIA report submitted to Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MOSTE)
- June 30, 1997 contract signed with EGAT
- May 13, 1998 MOSTE accepted EIA report on port construction project
- May 29, 1998 MOSTE accepted EIA report on power plant construction
- August 1998 the people object the construction of the power plant
- May 1999 -MOSTE asked for additional EIA study on coral and marine ecology
- MOSTE withdrew license of environmental consulting company that conducted EIA for the contractor for 8 months
- February 17, 1999 the government set up public hearing committee in order to listen to stakeholders' opinions on the construction of the power plant by complying with the Public Hearing Regulation 1996
- August 17, 1999 additional EIA report on marine ecology submitted
- February 24-25, 2000 public hearing
- March 2000 final agreement was to be reached (not yet reached)
- October 2003 start production and selling electricity from power plant unit I (estimated)

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รายชื่อผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิ

ต้นฉบับบทความวิชาการที่ลงตีพิมพ์ในวารสารพัฒนบริหารศาสตร์ ปีที่ 40 ฉบับที่ 4 พ.ศ.2543 นี้ ได้รับการอ่านตรวจจากผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิภายในสถาบันบัณฑิตพัฒนบริหารศาสตร์ ดังมีรายชื่อต่อไปนี้

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. ศ.ดร.ประชุม สุวัตถิ | คณะสถิติประยุกต์ |
| 2. รศ.ดร.จรี วิจิตรวาทการ | อธิการบดี |
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บรรณาธิการขอขอบคุณผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิทุกท่านมา ณ โอกาสนี้ด้วย

