

THE ROLE OF INFORMAL ORGANIZATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT : THAI EXPERIENCE*

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INTRODUCTION

Whenever the people aggregate and associate with each other, both formal and informal organization are necessarily indispensable in directed human effort. The informal aspect of organization can be considered as the sum total of the actual behaviors, relationships, and attitudes that exists among the persons in the organization. The formal structure is the bones and the skeleton, in a sense, that serve as a framework. But the real action that occurs in an organization is never merely formal.

The formal aspect of an organization also includes a mandate, or a legitimate right to exist and to do certain things. But what actually happens—what is actually done—is never merely to carry out the formal mandate. In fact, the biggest basic problem of all management is to get the organization to behave in ways that are substantially consistent with the legitimate, intended purposes that led to the creation of the agency in the first place. The study of formal organization enables us to visualize the form and the formalities, including the right to command, while the study of the role of informal organization throws light on real practices, including the capacity to command, and the ways in which power is really used.

In this paper we use the concept of informal organization as a central part of our theoretical frame of reference. The empirical aspect of the paper consists of an illustrative case study. Thus we seek to combine theory and practice in this necessarily brief examination of community development in Thailand.

THE ROLE OF INFORMAL ORGANIZATION : WHY STUDY ?

The study of the role of informal organization in Thailand is acutely important for a number of reasons:

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First, the actual behavior that goes on in organizations is usually conditioned by past experience. To a great extent it is often controlled by patterns of informal authority derived from tradition, e. g., personal affiliations, submissiveness as an implicit and explicit quality of roles, and paternalistic behavior. Informal authority wields great influence in determining what kind of behavior is accepted and rewarded, and what kinds of behavior are not approved.

Second, setting up an organization—a formal agency to carry on a community development program—is no guarantee that the actual behavior of the people in the organization and the clients or customers of the organization will produce community development. The informal behaviors including informal authority may either prevent or enhance the achievement of mandated purposes.

Thus, to really look at something like community development in any particular place, it is necessary to examine carefully the qualities of the informal dimension of organization, and to consider how these affect community development efforts.

This is certainly true of Thailand. The formal structure of Thai bureaucratic organization strongly resembles those of many other nations where the informal side of organization closely supports and supplements the formal side. In other words, the Thai bureaucracy looks like one in which the actual behaviors are rather closely geared to the pursuit of official purposes. Yet the informal side of Thai government organization is deeply rooted in an ancient and integrated culture; much of the actual authority that controls behavior in the Thai bureaucracy comes rather directly from tradition—benevolent government and submissive attitudes of the Thai people—not just from formal written orders, or rules and regulations.^{1/}

^{1/}To obtain an insight of Thai society, these books are highly recommended: Ruth Benedict, *Thai Culture and Behavior*, Cornell University 1943, unpublished war-time study; Wendell Blanchard, *Thailand: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture*, New Haven: Human Relations Areas Files, Inc., 1957; Howard Keva Kaufman, *Banghuad: A Community study in Thailand*, Thesis, Indiana University, 1955; Kenneth Perry Landon, *Modern Trends in Siamese Culture: Religion*, Thesis, University of Chicago, 1938; Lawriston Sharp et. al., *Siamese Rice Village*, Bangkok: Cornell Research Center, 1953; John E. de Young, *Village Life in Modern Thailand*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955; Herbert P. Phillips, *Relations Between Personality and Social Structure in a Siamese Peasant Community*, Reprint from *Human Organization*, Summer 1963, pp. 105-108; D.E. Pfanner, "Religion and Economics in Village Thailand" *Journal of Asian Studies*, May 1962; pp. 331-361; and, Herbert P. Phillips, *Thai Peasant Personality: The Patterning of Inter-personal Behavior in the Village of Bang Chan*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965.

Here we can only briefly discuss our theoretical frame of reference, which centers on the concepts of informal organization generally, and of role in particular.

The concept of role may be defined as the social position which an individual possesses in a system of action, or a social system. An individual functions in roles, both formally and personally, on the job and away from it. Because role is the concept of the actually expected behavior of the individual in the organization, the role reflects the synthesis of the formal and informal sides of the organization. A man's role consists of his actual rights and obligations in the organization. He may, of course, have more than one role.

In the Thai bureaucracy one tends to find two things. First, the role of the official tends to be broad and encompassing, so that in one sense at least Thai officials are not always jumping from one role to another; they tend to play one big role, which has many sides. Second, the second vital feature of role in the Thai bureaucracy is simply that much of its content is determined by the "informal" aspect of organization. The norms and the authority that control behavior are not simply the products of formal side, rules and regulations, they are strongly and intimately linked with traditional values.

Hierarchical authority and paternalism, in the Thai bureaucracy, are key values, and the authority results from the superior social status, the informal position of the superior. So a pervasive feature of roles in the Thai bureaucracy is to give deference and expressions of respect to superiors; and to assume that subordinates will behave in the same way within very broad limits. A Thai bureaucratic organization can be viewed as a network of related roles of this sort. And such an organization is quite effective for many purposes; the Thai bureaucracy performs a host of essential functions and does them pretty well; but we are not concerned herewith performance characteristics of the Thai bureaucracy in general. Our essential concern is this: how do essential qualities of the Thai bureaucracy affect efforts in the field of community development?

This raises the question: What do we mean by "community development?" The definition suggested by the United Nations is worth noting, for it deserves comment. According to the UN, community development is "the process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities, to integrate these communities into the life of the nation, and to enable them to contribute fully to national progress"^{2/}

^{2/}United Nations. *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Twenty-fourth Session, Annexes*, agenda item 4, document E/2931, annex III, para. 1.

In the writer's opinion the UN statement is generally acceptable, but it is at best incomplete. It ends up talking about enabling people to "contribute fully to national progress." This is only a derivative of something more immediate, more important, and more pertinent. The practical aim of community development has to be the continued provision of adequate opportunities for self-satisfaction for individuals and groups who are rapidly being moved into a changed and broadened world of experience and needs. Community development, therefore, has to help people be able to master their fates in settings where tradition is no longer adequate. If it does this, then they will contribute to national progress.

A CASE STUDY : BAN CHIENG^{3/}

The Ban Chieng case study in this paper was chosen for two reasons: first, to obtain insight into the typical Thai village community in its appearance and reality, especially the role of informal organization at the traditional village level; and second, to highlight the role of community development in institutionalizing self-government. Eight years after community development practices were introduced into Ban Chieng, the community is now in the formal process of elevation to the Tambol Council status, the lowest level of self-government in the Thai local government system^{4/}

^{3/}A paper on Ban Chieng Case was initially prepared by the Department of Community Development, Ministry of Interior, to present to the Community Development Seminar, arranged by the South-East Asian Treaty Organization, July 19 to July 23, 2503 (1965), at Santitham Hall, Bangkok, Thailand. The case proposed in this paper is revised and rewritten by the writer.

^{4/}The following explanation may be helpful to non-Thai readers. Villages are generally designated by the prefix "Ban" and are led by an elected headman or *phuyaiban*. Several villages constitute a *tambol* (something like a township) under the leadership of an elected commune headman or *hamnan*. The *tambols* are grouped into districts or *amphurs* directed by a centrally appointed (Ministry of Interior) chief district officer or *nai amphur*. Finally, the amphurs are collected into a province or *changwad* in the charge of a governor or *poo-wa-rajkarn-changwad* who is appointed by the Minister of Interior.

For a more detailed discussion of the theory and practice of Thai local government, see especially: Arsa Maksawan, *the Role of the Provincial Governor in Thailand*, doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1961; Choop Karnjanaprakorn, *Municipal Government in Thailand as an Institution and Process of Self-Government*, doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1959; Frederick James Horrigan, *Local Government and Administration in Thailand : A Study of Institutions and Their Cultural Setting*, doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1959; Thai Government, *Thailand Official Year Book*, Bangkok: Government House Printing Office, 1964.

Socio-political Settings

Ban Chieng community consists of two villages: the fourth and the fifth villages of Ban Chieng Commune in the District of Nong Harn, Udornthanee Province. Over the years and decades these two villages have evolved into a single integrated community. The word "Ban Chieng" refers to these two village in social usage.

Ban Chieng community includes 1,781 males, 1,801 females, all of them Thai by nationality, and 93% of them earning their livings on their rice paddy farms. Among the villagers in this community, 99.68 % are Buddhists. There are 933 families with 620 households. The age-group distribution is as follows: 7.9 % over 60; 63.7 % between 16 and 50; and 28.4% under 16. The majority of the people, as can be seen, are in the labour force, and most of them have finished the fourth year of primary school.

The community folks are trustworthy, peace-loving, and industrious. Most of them have descended from two big families, Raj-Hoh-Dee, and Sri-Suna-Krua, which are under the leadership of Nai (Mr). Sitha Raj-Hoh-Dee and Nai Prohm Sri-Suna-Krua, respectively. The two influential families are on good terms. When a conflict arises in the community, these two leaders make themselves available as compromisers.

Besides their belief in Buddhism, their value system is underlined by a traditional heritage which includes deference to and respect of government official status and learned persons; they give great respect to Buddhist monks and honest men with sympathetic postures.

In this community, there are three Buddhist monasteries, the income and expenditure of which are managed by Nai Sitha. This helps to enhance Nai Sitha's community leader role a good deal; consequently, cooperation for community development activities, if arranged and asked by him, is always given without reluctance.

Local Leadership at the Inception of Institutionalization

Community development in a real sense was introduced into Ban Chieng in 2501 (1958) by a chief district officer of Nong Harn, who called a meeting of the village people and explained to them the principles and methods of community development. Then, with the recommendation of three local leaders: the head master of the village school, Nai Sitha and Nai Now—the village headmen, 15 committee members were elected by direct votes. They began

a village road-building project. The planning was done by the committee and then the proposal was presented to the villagers for their approval.

A CD worker was assigned to this community in 2503 (1960). He works directly with the village community rather than with the villagers individually. The work process at this stage is still the same as outlined above. What is to be done must first be agreed upon by the committee, and then each committee member will make it known to the villagers in his jurisdiction for informal approval and consent.

In planning a project, Nai Sitha, as committee chairman, takes the initiative and distributes an agenda to each of the committee members four or five days before the date of a meeting, so that committee members have time to talk personally with the villagers in order that their points of view will be learned. In this way it is generally assured that final plan will be responsive to the needs of the villagers as a whole.

Upon the recommendation of the CD worker, the term of service on the village committee was set at two years. Ban Chieng is divided into blocks (groups of households), and each block has one man as a representative to sit in the village committee. At the end of each two-year period, electoral campaigns are carried out with considerable fervor in an atmosphere of friendly competition. The one who is elected feels the self-esteem of being a representative of the village people. Needless to say, local politics at the grass roots level—the village and the block community—plays an important role in the process of institutionalizing self-government.

A survey of Ban Chieng shows that elected members with the most favorable qualifications fall into one or more of these three categories: first, a man with integrity; second, a man with high financial status; third, a man with talent in public speaking.

It is the writer's opinion that this survey also reflects the pattern of local leadership. It is not an oversimplification to say that Nai Sitha's leadership is personal and paternalistic, and that his leadership is strengthened by his relation with the Buddhist monks, with their charismatic influence in the community. It is also worth mentioning here that Nai Sitha's personal devotion to his community and village folks is reflected in certain financial aspects of the CD program's operation: he frequently pays for things from his pocket in advance to help get things done if grants-in-aid or the money provided for administering a program is not available at the time; he is later reimbursed for such expenditures. This also helps strengthen Nai Sitha's leadership.

The Changing of CD Workers' Attitude

There have been two CD workers assigned to work in Ban Chieng. The first one was a palad tambol,^{5/} who married a girl in Ban Chieng. In his case, he possessed both government official status and membership in the Ban Chieng community. Thus, his relationship with the village people was close. He gained their full confidence and respect, and this led to full-fledged cooperation for change at the very beginning of the programme.

The second CD worker, who is still on the job, is neither a member of Ban Chieng community by marriage nor by blood ties. He has been well trained under the new training programme for community development techniques, but his formal training is no full substitute for close informal relations with the village people.

It is interesting to observe the different types of behavior of these two CD workers. The first one was used to being a deputy chief district officer. Even though he worked through the committee, he unconsciously took the role of local leader by dominating its decision, rather than asking for cooperation through democratic procedures as a means of identifying local problems and needs. The second worker leaves responsibility for initiative to the committee, while he plays the role of adviser and coordinator of the committee.

Institution-building

At present, it appears that Ban Chieng community has developed a long way toward innovative, problem-solving self-government. The village committee is able to act on its own responsibility, take initiative, plan projects for the community's own welfare, and mobilize village group efforts to implement its projects. The only assistance needed from outside is for projects which require grants-in-aid. For such projects Nai Sitha, the chairman, invites the CD worker to join the meetings at which plans are made.

Generally speaking, all the meetings are called by the chairman at his own discretion; the only exception to this general rule is that the CD worker may ask the chairman to call a meeting whenever he has learned that special grants-in-aid are availa-

^{5/}A palad-tambol was a deputy chief district officer assigned to each commune under the former rural development programme. This position was given up quite a few years ago, because of the failure of the programme.

ble for the community. In such cases, the CD worker joins the meeting and helps plan the projects before submitting them to the district and province for final approval. At this stage, the CD worker and/or the chairman of the village committee will work out plans, formally and personally, to have the project approved.

In summary, the process of project planning begins in the formal meeting of the committee which considers what is to be done; then each committee member takes the plans to concerned village blocks for informal approval and consent, after which the issues come back for formal consideration by the committee.

When the project has been approved at the provincial level it is sent back to the committee, and it is the responsibility of the chairman and other committee members to put it into practice. The work process at this stage is largely dependent upon informal organization in several ways. First, the chairman arranges a gathering of the village people as a whole and explains to them what is to be done. It is important that the villagers be able to visualize the value of the project to the community welfare. Second, after the question-and-answer period of a meeting the chairman fixes the date to get together to commence work. It may be to build a new road, dig a well, etc. Whoever does not want to sacrifice his labour, may make cash payment instead. Occasionally, of course, a project is not carried forward according to plan. Whenever a project has not been completed in the past year and the committee does not want to continue it in the present year, the CD worker will call a meeting of the villagers to reconsider; but such cases are rather rare.

It must be granted that the Ban Chieng case offers no universal model for CD work. It is admittedly the case of an integrated community, which had leadership of its own before the CD worker began. The nature of that leadership was profoundly important in at least two ways. First, it consisted of individuals who were willing and able to respond to opportunities for development when these were made available through the community development programme. Second, the "leadership situation"—the environment in which this leadership functioned—was highly favorable to CD activities: There was an integrated, consensual community. Neither the values of the community nor the values and interests of the established village leadership were threatened in any important way by the new kinds of activity that resulted from community development work. And finally, in its flexible fashion, the community and its leadership could relate to CD workers in a variety of ways. In one case it responded to and accepted an authoritative-type official leader who gained personal access to the leadership structure. But it was just as capable of working with a "promoter-advisor" type of CD worker.

All of these things make Ban Chieng an almost ideal example. In the circumstances, there were no profound social obstacles to CD work. Given the skills and resources, plus officials who could relate themselves effectively to an established leadership structure, CD could move ahead.

Governmentally, the major effect was to "convert" an established, traditional local social system from a simple order-maintaining, occasional problem-solving structure into a more "programmatic" structure, with general responsibilities and welfare. This, of course, is no small conversion. But neither is it a sharp break with tradition. Instead, it is a building-upon-tradition, or the extension of a traditional structure into a new field of activity through outside influence and support. In many parts of the world such arrangements simply are not feasible; but where they are, as in the case of Ban Chieng, they tend to be effective—provided the official CD administration understands how to capitalize on the existing social resources.

The Strategy and Tactics in the Villiage CD Work

It is a usual thing for cooperative group efforts to be faced with the problem of antagonistic attitude on the part of at least one group member. It is unrealistic to hope that all men will always work wholeheartedly as a solid group. This is also true in the case of CD administration. For this reason, it is worth mentioning here a Ban Chieng case of how this sort of problem—antagonism and lack of cooperation—was overcome.

Antagonistic and uncooperative attitudes still prevail among some of the village people, at any rate, when any member of the village community does not show up in person on a designated day and has no excuseable reasons, his name is crossed off the list, and he is never called to participate again. After a short period of excommunication the dissenter seeks reunion with the group, and he becomes more industrious than before. Such strategy and tactics are not essentially undemocratic. A subtle mixture of social coercion and personal consent is involved. But the coercion has no power except if the individual acknowledges it. It is his own mental mechanism that drives him to work harder in sublimation of his feeling of guilt. It is he who makes his own destiny. As all government by its very nature must exercise control, the fact of coercion does not deny democracy. It is rather the manner of control that determines whether a system is democratic. If we can reason from the Ban Chieng case, then we can assume that self-government can be practiced in Thailand, despite certain characteristics of the Thai people. To govern themselves is the nature of mankind.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study of the role of informal organization in community development throws light on Thai administration, and especially on CD work and self-government. It may be said that the proposals are rather speculative and selective; however, it is hoped that they will help form a mental image of the problems of introducing CD and self-government into Thailand. The central thesis in this paper has been that in a society in which personal relationships, paternalism, and a belief in man before principle, are dominant and traditional, informal organization is a vital ingredient in the introduction of change.

The Role of the CD Worker

In the Ban Chiang case study, evidence was found that the role perception of CD workers could be shifted from an age-old traditional autocratic behavior to democratic attitudes toward the village people with no loss of effectiveness. CD workers could serve and help coordinate the CD activities rather than play the role of master.

At this stage, three essential village needs—clean water, health, and education must be met. The various officials responsible for these activities must get together, face-to-face, if there is to be effective development. The CD worker is the logical coordinator. In-service training programs for local leaders as well as officials concerned should be intensified, for this will help identify the problems and possible solutions. It will also facilitate the development of innovative ability within the communities.

Political Self-Government and Social Self-Government : The Quest for Local Leadership

In studying the problem of community development in Thailand it is very clear that leadership and support at the national level is of importance, but in the writer's opinion, local leadership is of prime importance. If Thailand wants to develop successful self-government through the experience of CD work as a new political school she has to encourage institution-building of local leadership.

In the last analysis in the second part of this paper, the writer expressed his assumption that self-government can be practiced in Thailand, and that to govern themselves is the nature of man. This assumption is derived from the writer's belief in the Thai people's

unlimited potential, to govern themselves for their own welfare. But the lack of technical know-how, the poverty, the isolation, the absence of outside support, bureaucratic control, and traditional master-servant belief seem to be great limitations to the village people. Consequently, villagers tend to accept their lot, to seek pleasure and contentment, and their attitudes toward self-government are apathetic, as they wait for the benevolence of the central government and its representatives.

No matter how the village people are, it is evident that they will be able to govern themselves if they are educated, have some support from outside, and if government officials can tolerate the trial-and-error of their practices in self-government.

Local leadership is now badly needed by the village people. In the writer's opinion, to provide local leadership is of the utmost importance to the institution-building of self-government in Thailand at present. This is due fact that Thai society is self-reliant or self-governed, that there is in fact the existence of "social government." it is just that it is limited to primary groups of the family institutions rather than extended to secondary associations.

Sociologically speaking, if one looks into Thai society, he will find one thing characteristically pertinent, and that there is no real social group cohesion into secondary associations, and, it is true to say, that even the secondary associations available at present arise mainly from selective primary groups based on kinship and close ties of friendship, rather than on common interests in general. The consequence of this is that there is no real social solidarity to compete with the public group—the government—and that autocratic behavior on the part of the government can always dominate the will of the people. The Thai government, therefore, feels benovolent. It does whatever it thinks best for the welfare of the Nation, and the will of the people is simultaneously overlooked. Consequently, it is not offhand to say that there is no real chain of popular control.

If the situation is to continue in this manner, the hope for self-government is only a narrow one. It must be changed. It is recommended that the movements for change should first attempt to encourage and establish local leadership as widely as possible, from the village level up to the district and provincial level. In this connection, CD techniques will be of great values. The writer is very hopeful that whenever local leadership is strong, social self-government will be realized and the realization of political self-government will be at hand.

Attitudes of Government Officials

It is also the writer's assumption that democracy, self-government, will not be possible in Thailand if government officials continue to assume that Thai people know nothing about how to govern themselves. Therefore, cooperation for change must involve more than private groups of people; the autocratic patterns of behavior on the part of government officials must also be changed. At any rate, this recommendation seems difficult to put into practice, because there are many levels of government officials in several administrative strata: the career service and the political overhead. There are broad-minded groups of officials at the political overhead level, and it is hoped that in-service training for the career service group will improve practices at that level. It takes time.

Informal Organization as a Dilemma

Informal organization as a "strategy" in community development, as previously described in this paper, can be thought of in terms of a "dilemma" on the one hand it offers promise as a "strategy"; and, on the other hand, as it prevails in Thai society informal organization includes the traditional authoritative behavior of government officials and the submissive attitudes of the people. For the latter reason, if one who resorts to the use of informal organization is not conscious of this fact, reliance upon informal organization as the means to community development could result in strengthening and encouraging autocratic behavior.

Consequently, the writer reiterates; informal organization must be used democratically, and aimed at the stimulation and popularization of self-government, especially at the initial stage; and in-service training programs arranged for government officials concerned with this idea should be geared to the ultimate aim of changing behavior than just offering the trainees theoretical knowledge of community development and self-government.
