7. Conclusion

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Conclusion

Since the early 1960s the penetration of the market economy into Thailand's villages has advanced more rapidly than at any other time in the country's history, and this study has looked at the new forms of organizing that Thai villagers have carried out in response to this penetration. Government efforts and those of NGOs have played important roles in establishing these new organizations and implanting them into village society. But what the author has wanted to stress in this study is that for many of these organizations the decision to set them up and then the work of managing them have come at the initiative of the villagers themselves. As such, these new forms of villager organizing cannot be explained as simply the results of external influences affecting a passive village society. Rather such villager organizing should be seen as a natural response to the penetration of the market economy into rural Thai society, and herein is the answer to the question posed earlier about why villagers form organizations.

In the past, the household as an individual economy possessed both land and labor as its means of production and subsisted as a self-sufficient entity. At such an economic level, the individual household economy remained largely self-reliant in its factors of production and in the disposal of its products. To assure its productivity, the individual household sometimes needed to overcome crises which often happened at the time of the cyclic change of family economic productivity (such as when a family's economically active members were reduced to only a few and they had to feed a large number of

dependants) and also for seasonal or accidental reasons. Thus at this level of economic subsistence, forming an ad hoc organization to mutually assist each other was sufficient to cope with those times of crises. However, the self-reliance of the individual household economy disintegrated under the impact of the market economy. The result has been the appearance of a vast number of households that have to rely on other people's land and labor and on a constant need for money to maintain their existence. They must now try to procure from the market the resources they lack. However, the market itself does not always allow villagers to procure resources efficiently; moreover the state often does not adopt policies that sufficiently make up for the deficiencies of the market. It is under these sorts of conditions that villagers will take it upon themselves to organize. But these conditions are not specific to "underdeveloped" economies. Even in the advanced economies, conditions persist that compel people to organize. Indeed we can find many types of organizations in the advanced countries. It is not surprising that in the United States and Britain "community economic development" was emphasized under the policies of the Reagan and Thatcher governments which put excessive importance on the market mechanism and extolled the reduced participation of the state (Fasenfest 1993). This means that economic opportunities for villager organizing do not easily disappear with the advancement of economic development.

However, the existence of conditions providing the chance to organize, and the actual act of organizing are two separate issues. As has been repeatedly stressed in this study, within an organization the members need to consciously coordinate their actions, for only after they have been successful in this can the organization achieve its objectives. Because of the importance of this coordination, one needs to examine what conditions make this coordination possible. For this reason the focus of this study has been on the social relationships and social structure of the Thai village.

In order to understand the phenomenon of organizing, one has to first understand its primary situation. As stated earlier, at a stage where the market economy had not yet penetrated very deeply, the household as an individual economy lost its self-reliance only in temporary times of crisis. For all of the households in a village, one family's crisis was not regarded as that family's problem alone; each household realized that it too could one day face the same sort of troubles. For this reason, in a society like the village where the social relationships among people continued over a long period, it was easy to organize mutual cooperation. This sort of cooperation could take a variety of forms, but in Thailand for the most part it took a form based on dyadic relationships and was for the exchange of resources. In this study this has

been called "dyadic cooperation," and it has been seen as the traditional and typical sort of organization in the Thai village. In this sort of organization the spiritual bond between the two parties and the social norms supporting this bond were the things that assured the exchange of resources. The exchange of resources when practiced alternately strengthened the personal ties between the two parties. In this way, despite the fact that the exchange of a resource itself was an action that each individual carried out for a specific purpose, this exchange can be regarded as a form of dyadically-woven social organization.

In the Thai village in the past (with the exception of irrigation groups in northern Thailand), it was rare to find an organization concerned with the villagers' production and the economic activity of their daily lives that was of a form other than dyadic cooperation. One reason for this, as will be discussed later, was because the Thai village community as an entity did not hold control over land. Another reason was that there was no tradition of collectively-bound small social organizations, and this limited the form that cooperation took among people to dyadic cooperation. By contrast, in Japan there used to be group-based organizations that provided mutual assistance in the areas of labor (*yui* or labor exchange groups) and finance (*ko* or mutual financing associations). The social bases of these organizations were the kin groups (*dōzoku-dan*) and neighborhood organizations (*kumi*) which were collectively-bound small social organizations (Takeuchi 1990). In Thai society with its bilateral kindred system, there were no such small social organizations, and it was easier to make use of dyadic cooperation.

However, this system of self-sufficient economic production has disintegrated as the market economy has penetrated deeper into the rural Thai economy. As a result, the sphere of close social relationships among people which are needed to sustain mutual assistance has been gradually diminishing, and the traditional strength of the dyadic cooperation system for securing resources has been greatly weakened. Villagers have responded to this situation by taking a new approach of organizing, i.e., the formation of group-based cooperative organizations.

The characteristics of this sort of organizing were treated fully in Chapter 2. Here only the major points will be reiterated. This new effort at group-based cooperative organization is based on people's collective agreement through which they pool their resources and invest them in the organization, and thereafter they undertake the cooperative exchange of these resources. The incentive for people to participate in such organizations is the pursuit of personal economic benefit. People's organizational activity can no longer be controlled through dyadic relationships; thus to reconcile the objectives of the organization with the personal desires of the individual participants in the

organization, there have to take place "institutionalization" and the "introduction of new organizational norms." The latter are organizational norms of collectivity which demand that organization members uphold the collectively accepted agreements in which the members have concurred irrespective of whatever variety of dyadic relationships may exist among the members.

The creation of group-based cooperative organizations is vitally important for the promotion of participatory development. One reason is the confining scope of dyadic cooperation, as noted earlier, which limits participants to two parties and which likewise limits the scale of resources that can be mobilized. But a more important point is that in organizations of dyadic cooperation, the roles of the people who make up the organization are based on relationships of trust, and for this reason their roles remain fluid and do not become specified or fixed. This means that organizations of dyadic cooperation do not become institutionalized and thus remain unstable entities. In other words, the organization has no existence as an entity beyond the personal relationships of its members (Simmel 1950, p.123), and no accumulation of experience in organized activity takes place within the organization. Therefore, a prerequisite condition for the expansion and continuation of an organization (which in effect means empowerment of the members through the organization) is the shift of people beyond dyadic human relationships to the stage where they can cooperate for the achievement of some specific objective.

Thus there is not simply a difference in organizational form between dyadic and group-based cooperation; there is also a qualitative difference in the significance of the organization and in its ability to evolve and expand. But the transition from the former to the latter in the Thai village has not been an easy process. Particularly in the case of group-based cooperative organizations like the savings group and rice bank, there have only been the new norms of group-based cooperation to rely on for the management of pooled private resources. But where these norms have not been sufficiently developed, the organizations that have been set up have frequently failed to produce the expected results even when the external environment is favorable for organizing. Thus, despite the fact that there are similarities between dyadic and group-based cooperation in the resources to be exchanged and the incentives for exchange to take place, there are so many differences in the capabilities and organizational norms between the two institutions that the shift from the former to the latter may be regarded as something of a metamorphosis. However, to move to the stage of participatory development, villagers have to go through that metamorphosis.

In the Thai village a number of characteristics are discernable in the transition from dyadic to group-based organizing. One is that it began with orga-

nizing that was comparatively easy for the villagers to manage. Sectors were selected where market competition was not so severe, and pool-distribution type organizations were set up which did not carry on the exchange of resources outside of the organization. There the members could expect to benefit if they made sure that the organization's pool of resources was steadily maintained; there was no need for their organization to compete on the outside market or for the members to have the managerial skills to successfully compete on such a market. Moreover, since it was an organization that pooled the members' private resources, the sense of protecting their mutual private property to some degree controlled the interactions of the members within the organization. The above points tell us that when an outside organization is going to act upon villagers to organize, it is not enough just to confirm that there is scope for increasing the economic benefits that villagers can obtain by organizing, it is also important to assess how far the villagers have come in developing their ability to organize themselves so that they can make good use of economic opportunities. It is not known to what extent the people directing villager organizing in Thailand were aware of these points; nevertheless, government and NGO support for villager organizing began with the appropriate approach of introducing pool-distribution type organizations that relied on private resources.

However, one should refrain from holding a static image of the ability of villagers to organize. Through the trials and errors of the organizing process people gain experience in organizing which develops their organizational skills and prepares them for the next stage of organizing. This study looked at Si Phon Thong Village as an example of how this dynamic process evolves. But this is only one case study. Many more such studies of other villages will have to be done and the results compiled before we can begin to draw generalizations and develop theories.

A second characteristic seen in the shift from dyadic to group-based organizations in the Thai village has been the important role played by groups (the government and NGOs) from outside the village. The idea of setting up and the skills for managing organizations like savings groups, rice banks, and village cooperative shops were brought in by people from outside of the village. Especially their technical support helped to reduce the uncertainty in managing newly formed organizations at the early stage of their development.

A third characteristic is that the "village community" as a social organization has often been employed, particularly in northern and northeastern Thailand, as the basis for forming group-based cooperative organizations. Since most of the newly formed organizations have been based on voluntary par-

ticipation, one would not expect to find any necessity for them to be bound to any specific locality. In fact, however, members have not only been limited to specific locality groups, the organizing and management of the organizations have most often been supported by some sort of locality group. Thus our study of "villager organizations for economic development" has made us aware of the existence of the "village community."

In order to get an understanding of the Thai village community, this study initially set forth the particular characteristics for three kinds of locality groups: the indigenous village, the Buddhist temple support group, and the administrative village. The people who lived together to form the indigenous village (which here is limited to the North and Northeast) were linked together collectively through the medium of the village guardian spirit and formed a "sense of unity" as an indigenous village. With the Buddhist temple support group, people accumulated experience in managing organizations through the practice of repeated mobilization and management of resources connected with the temple. With the administrative village, people were in possession of a self-governing institution as a locality group. Then by analyzing the way these three groups overlap, this study was able to set out the characteristics of the Thai village community and its regional differences. In the North and Northeast, the community could be specified as the locality group having the institutions for organizing a "sense of unity" and collective action, but this sort of community was not dominant in the central region. This caused differences in the way people coped when villager organizations for economic development were introduced.

Even with this sort of variation, a characteristic common to Thai village communities was that the community as an entity did not have control over land even though it was one of the important factors of production in the village. This is in complete contrast, for example, with Japanese and Germanic rural communities. In Japan the village community controlled forestry and water resources which were fundamental for supporting agricultural production, and the perception of privately owned farmland was that it belonged simultaneously to the individual farming families and to the village community (Niwa 1989). In the Germanic village, even farming families which held their own farmland had to use the land in accordance with the particular land use system of the locality, and farmers were expected to follow the cooperative rules of the village (Weber 1950, pp. 6–7). In historical research on Thailand, there are researchers who take Karl Marx's definition of community and apply it literally to the Thai village arguing that the Thai community was an entity that originally possessed land communally (Chatthip 1984). However, at least among the lowland Thai peoples, there is no historical evidence

that they cooperatively possessed land as a factor of production. Here the Weberian understanding of community can help clarify the issue. Weber maintained that in an environment of self-sufficiency, a group like the village that collectively possesses land does not exist; rather such a village comes into existence as the scarcity of resources increases (Weber 1978, pp. 362–63). When viewed from this perspective, it would seem that in Thailand where land was abundant compared to population, the community was not the entity which controlled the possession of land.

Because the Thai village community was never the entity which had control over land as a factor of production, it did not have direct contact with the people's economic production activities and their transactions of economic resources, and people's organized exchange of resources was carried out through dyadic cooperation. Thus the social structure of the traditional Thai village was characterized by the mutual separation of the social institution concerned with economic production (dyadic relationships) from the social institution concerned with the villagers' relationships in noneconomic exchanges (the community). Therefore, researchers who are concerned only with the people's economic activities perceive only the dyadic relationships in these activities. However, when we focus on the people's noneconomic activities, the community comes into view. This is demonstrated by S. J. Tambiah who dealt with villagers' spiritual beliefs and Michael Moerman who described villager action for defending their village; both "discovered" the community in Thailand.

It is incorrect to think that the Thai village community did not have much significance for the villagers' lives in general. The community existed originally as a conception based on spiritual belief.[1] As such the village protected the individual villagers from evil spirits, and through the "sense of unity" based on this conception, the village became the entity for organizing cooperative activity to mobilize resources connected with the temple.

Later when the socioeconomic environment beyond the village changed, the Thai village community altered its social significance. As already described, the community has been the entity giving rise to group-based cooperative organizations and likewise has been the entity that has taken possession and ownership of economic resources. The community, for example, has taken possession of unoccupied land in the vicinity of the village and brought it under communal management and use. The community has also become the recipient of externally provided resources, and is the entity that manages and operates these resources. In the past community resources were largely limited to the facilities and money connected with the village temple. But now the community has come to own and control resources connected with the villagers' secular economic activities.

This change has not simply meant a change in the function of the community. It has also changed the way that villagers are bound to the community. In the past the villagers had in common the village guardian spirit and were bound together as fellow villagers supporting the village temple. But with the penetration of the market economy and the accompanying modernization of village consciousness, the long-established "sense of unity" of the traditional village has inevitably been weakened. In its place villagers have come to be bound to the village by the economic opportunities and resources provided by the community. When the community takes over and establishes communal land, the villagers by virtue of belonging to the community are the first to use the resources produced by this land. Community members are also the only ones who can participate in the village funeral association, savings group, and rice bank. In most cases the community has become the recipient, manager, and operator of resources provided by the government. At the same time there are increasing instances where the villagers are having to decide on the secular rules which serve them as a community and control their mutual actions.

Thus the spiritual elements that used to bind villagers to cooperative organizations and to the community are now being replaced by the material elements of resources and economic opportunity. Increasingly villagers are being bound together by the incentive of private gain, and for this reason they are being compelled to coordinate their mutual desires. The process of this coordination is also the process of acquiring new organizational abilities. Thus the villager organizing that has been analyzed in this study is not the revival of traditional villager cooperativeness that proponents of community culture speak of. It is the work of villagers who are in the process of forming a new cooperative culture.

Note

1 The author is not asserting here that the community is formed only on spiritual beliefs. It can be formed out of the need for villagers to protect their group from other village groups in secular disputes, or it can be formed by the state in order to introduce various state systems (such as taxing villages where the village is held responsible for fulfilling the tax obligations of all the villagers). However, in Thailand a system of taxing villages never historically existed, and there is no historical evidence showing that there was a continuous need to form villages for group defense.