

Preface

This study looks at the cooperation that takes place among Thai villagers through an examination of their cooperative activities and the bases for these activities. Since the early 1960s the market economy has penetrated rapidly into rural Thailand. This has broken down the traditional form of dyadic cooperation in the exchange of resources, but at the same time it has brought about a new form of organized cooperation where villagers contribute small portions of their own resources to an organization's collective pool of resources. In the past, for example, village kin and family members mutually lent and borrowed money at low or no interest. But with the inroads of the market economy, the villagers' demand for funds grew, and this form of cooperation was no longer adequate. In response the villagers formed savings groups where they pooled their funds for a common purpose with other villagers, not all of whom were mutually acquainted, and members in need of funds could borrow from the pool at low interest. But it has not been easy to form such organizations. Villagers are poor people, and the resources they have to contribute are meager. Therefore people did not come forward to participate in such organizations until it was clear whether they could expect their resources to be used effectively and they could expect sufficient benefit in the future. Furthermore, the formation of these organizations required organizational norms new to the villagers. They could no longer rely on their customary dyadic social relationships. The premise now for successful organizing was that their actions would conform to the collectively accepted rules of the new organization.

The big problem initially for the villagers was the uncertainty of obtaining satisfactory results from the new form of organization. Their response was to mobilize existing organizations, notably kinship and locality groups, to overcome this problem. The existence of the “village community” was particularly important for the formation and development of the new organizations. This is clearly evident from an examination of the organization process and membership composition, especially among village communities in the Northeast and the North. The “village community” as a concept, however, is somewhat ambiguous. To carry out a more precise analysis in this study, I have established three locality groups that are observable in the Thai village: the indigenous village, the administrative village, and the temple support group. By studying how these groups exist and overlap in a village, the actual structure and function of the “village community” can be analyzed. Using this method, it has become clear that the “village community” in the Northeast and the North combines the villagers’ sense of unity, organizational experience, and their institutions of organization formation, thus effectively serving as an incubator of rural development organizations. In Thailand’s central region on the other hand, the “village community” did not emerge in most of the villages in this region, thus making it difficult to use it as the basis for villager organizing. By seeking out the mechanisms that form organizations for rural development, this study will clarify the Thai villagers’ principles of cooperation and the structure of their community. In so doing it can also contribute to the theoretical study of villager organizing which is vital to participatory development strategy.

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