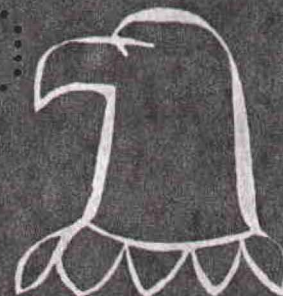


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DEVELOPING



CASE STUDY

DEVELOPING DEMOCRACY AT THE RICE-ROOTS' LEVEL
A CASE STUDY OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT
IN RURAL NORTHEAST THAILAND

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MB

REVIEWED BY George R. Marotta By DATE 8/24/91

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NINTH SESSION
SENIOR SEMINAR IN FOREIGN POLICY
Washington, D.C.

1966 - 1967
DEVELOPING

This is an educational exercise and does not necessarily represent the viewpoint of the Senior Seminar in Foreign Policy or of the Department of State.

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THE SENIOR SEMINAR IN FOREIGN POLICY
NINTH SESSION
1966-1967

DEVELOPING DEMOCRACY AT THE RICE-ROOTS' LEVEL

A CASE STUDY OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT
IN RURAL NORTHEAST THAILAND



George R. Marotta
Department of Defense

April, 1966

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FOREWORD

D E M O C R A C Y

In recent months, the Agency for International Development has been giving more attention and emphasis in the administration of U.S. development assistance programs to the goal of attaining a larger measure of popular participation in development programs in aid-recipient countries. This is in accord with Title IX of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1966 which states:

In carrying out programs authorized in this chapter, emphasis shall be placed on assuring maximum participation in the task of economic development on the part of the people of the developing countries, through the encouragement of democratic private and local governmental institutions.

Congressman Donald Fraser of Minnesota and other members of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs are the sponsors of this Title which is designed to secure a wider popular role in the self-help tasks of economic and social development. The new Title is a stronger directive to AID than past provisions urging development of local programs of self-help and mutual cooperation. The increased emphasis on this goal is based on past observation by the House Committee that there is a close relationship between broad popular participation in the process of development and the effectiveness of this process.

My interest in the general subject of political development or modernization in developing countries, and the recently-instituted "Developing Democracy Program" in Thailand, combined to provide what I considered a perfect subject for a three-week Senior Seminar case-study research project. This paper is the result of that effort. My research on this subject was made vivid by an eight-day jeep trip throughout much of northeast Thailand. Most of my conclusions are based on this admittedly-short field exposure and should not be attributed to officials of the Thai or U.S. governments.

However, I do wish to gratefully acknowledge the assistance provided by Mr. Frederick Simmons, Deputy Director of the AID's Office of Southeast Asia Affairs; Mr. Lawrence Pickering, State Country Director for Thailand; Mr. Albert Swing, USOM/Thailand's Public Administration Division Chief and members of his staff--Messrs. William Berg, William Sommers and Jerry Wood; and to the many other U.S. and Thai officials.

To a former colleague, Kenneth Landon, and two current Seminar colleagues, Charles Mann and Daniel Moore, I owe thanks for kindling a latent desire to learn more about Thailand.

D E M O C R A C Y

DEVELOPING DEMOCRACY AT THE RICE-ROOTS' LEVEL
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INTRODUCTION

Those who know Thailand will surely want to challenge the title of this article. They will state, and quite correctly too, that the villages in Thailand have for centuries been democratic. That is, the villagers have run their own affairs, with little or no contact with the central government, through an elected leader called a "puyaiban" (headman). Because of the increased insurgency in northeastern Thailand and in order to spur the development process generally, the Thai Government is strengthening institutions of local self-government.

One of the major problems of the Thai Government in dealing with the communist insurgents in the northeast arises mainly from the absence of close links with the remote villages. Fortunately, this lack of communication is not the result of a tradition of oppressive government, but as noted, a history of village self-sufficiency. To counter the insurgency, the government has in the past few years inaugurated more than a dozen programs to establish a more effective government presence in the northeast--especially those areas bordering Laos where most communist insurgents operate. After a recent three-week trip to Thailand, including a bumpy, dusty Jeep ride through much of the northeast area, it is my general conclusion that the Thai government is making good progress in closing the gap with the remote villages.

One of the many programs designed to strengthen the government's communication link with the villagers is the "Developing Democracy Program." Through this program, Thailand plans to reorganize, and hopefully to revitalize, the township--a level of government which has long existed.

The township council (comprising the township chief, one headmaster, one medical aide and two from each village--the headman and an elected member) is the focus of the developing democracy program. The government is wisely building on the tradition of the elected village headman, utilizing the township level which comprises a group of about a dozen villages. Although the developing democracy program has been in operation for just one year and only a very small fraction of the townships in Thailand have been reorganized, it is not too early to recognize that this program has great potential in the political modernization process. Furthermore, the Government of Thailand is proceeding in an orderly fashion to put the program into effect.

THE "DEVELOPING DEMOCRACY PROGRAM"

The "Developing Democracy Program" officially began when the Thai cabinet (headed by Prime Minister, Field Marshall Thanom) on March 8, 1966 approved a plan prepared by the Ministry of Interior. The project had been discussed at the cabinet level for at least a year prior to this. Also, during 1965, it had been tested in a pilot project involving six townships in the Ban Phue District of Udon Province in the north.

The objectives of the program as stated in the Cabinet-approved document are:

- "(1) to work with people all over the country so they will be interested in, and well understand the government's affairs;
- "(2) to train the people and government officials to be capable and to have the proper attitude to improve themselves to meet the requirements of the community in the democratic way; and
- "(3) to train both people and officials to know and believe their rights and duties under the Constitution."

Through this program, the government hopes to meet a charge sometimes made by the communists--that the people have no voice in their government. The national government also hopes to find out what

are the aspirations and desires of the villagers. Thai government officials want to encourage local institutions and leaders that have the will and ability to do something themselves about their problems. For its part, the central government is organizing itself and retraining its officials to establish a better relationship and dialogue with the townships and villages-- particularly in the northeast area.

By closing the gap which has long existed between it and the remote villages, the national government wants to demonstrate to the people of these areas that it is concerned with their welfare and, hopefully, to secure their participation in the development process.

The announcement of this program by the Minister of Interior, General Praphat, in March 1966 was received critically by the Thai press. The developing democracy program was interpreted by the press as a device by Praphat to stall the promulgation of a new constitution for four years--the stated time required to carry out the developing democracy township program. (In 1958, a military group abrogated the constitution and replaced it with an "interim" one. Present estimates are that a new constitution will be promulgated in 1967.)

Responsibility for the administration of the township program is centered in the Department of Local Administration of the Ministry of Interior. Mr. Chamnarn, a high-level, successful civil servant with a reputation for getting things done, is the head of this Department and reports directly to General Praphat. The Deputy Director General of this Department, Mr. Snit, is in charge of training for all personnel of the Interior Ministry outside the capital city of Bangkok. Responsible for the training aspects of the developing democracy program is Mr. Somsat.

In Thailand, the national government is the main institution which unites the nation. (The only other institution of national scope is the Buddhist hierarchy.) For purposes of government administration, the country is divided into 71 provinces, which are further subdivided into 509 districts. The chief executives of these units, the Governors and the District Officers, are career civil servants in a highly structured bureaucracy. The Governors are appointed by and report to the Minister of Interior, although both the provinces and districts have representatives of other ministries who receive technical direction from their respective central ministries in Bangkok.

The central government career system begins at the district level. Below that level are local officials who receive a small honorarium for services performed. Each village has an elected headman. A group of about a dozen villages comprises a township. All village headmen in a township elect one of their number to be the township chief. As there are about 5000 townships in Thailand, a district has an average of about ten townships and one hundred and twenty villages within its jurisdiction.

Historically, a township council (a group consisting of the township chief, the village headmen and a large number of teachers and other respected persons) was called into session by the District Officer at periodic intervals. At these meetings which he would chair, the district officer would instruct the local leaders regarding the desires of the central government in their area.

The essential elements of the Developing Democracy Program are:

- 1) a reorganization of the township councils,
- 2) training of township council participants, and
- 3) provision of funds to the reorganized township councils.

Closely related to the above, and in fact essential to the success of this program, is the training of district, provincial and central government officials in order to instill in them the kinds of attitudes and secure the type of behavior required to encourage the township council participants to assume a larger role in government.

Reorganization of the Township Councils

The first step in the developing democracy program is to change the composition of the township council. This is done by the district officer. First, he arranges for an election to be held in each of the villages of a township to select one person to serve on the township council for a five-year term. This "elected member," as he is called, will serve on the council in addition to the village headman who is elected for an indefinite period. Next, the district officer selects one headmaster or teacher and one medical aide, on a township-wide basis, to serve a five-year term

on the council. Lastly, these council members will select one of the village headmen to serve also as township chief. This chief or kamnan, serves also as chairman of the reorganized township council.

Assisting the district officer in the reorganization, training and operation of the revitalized townships is a newly assigned officer -- an Assistant District Officer for Rural Development.

Training the Township Council Participants

After the township council has been reorganized by the district office, a training team organized by the Department of Local Administration of Bangkok will visit the township to conduct a one-week training program for the township council members.

A training team consists of two professional trainers and a driver who also serves as an audio-visual assistant. The two trainers are civil servants of considerable experience having served as District Officers or Assistant District Officers. The trainers themselves receive a five-week course given at the Ministry of Interior by the Department of Local Administration.

Participating in the week-long training session in addition to the members of the township council, are the following:

- 1) the District Officer,
- 2) the Assistant District Officer for Rural Development and
- 3) the township community development worker.

These three participate as observers during the township council training sessions and later at regular meetings.

A community development worker is stationed in many of the townships in the northeast area as a result of the Interior Ministry's Community Development training program for local leaders. He helps the community organize itself to solve local problems. The township council will find his services especially useful to secure government assistance when problems are too large or complex to be tackled on the local level. Both he and the new Assistant District Officer serve as continuing advisors to the township council.

The subjects covered during the one-week training session include:

- a) rights and duties of citizens
- b) functions and duties of council members
- c) conduct of a township council meeting
- d) defining problems
- e) setting priorities
- f) establishing a plan
- g) carrying out a plan

Once each day during this week-long training session, the professional trainers step aside and let the township chief act as chairman of the council meeting. Immediately after that meeting, the trainers critique the session pointing out such defects as allowing the meeting to digress from the subject at hand, allowing one member to dominate the meeting, not securing the participation of all members and a too early expression of views on the part of the chairman. Sometimes, it is necessary to caution the district officer privately, not to interject his own views too soon in the session or too dogmatically as there will be a natural tendency for the local officials to defer to his judgment.

At least once during the week's training period, the township council will be taken on a field trip to visit a development project. They are shown what can be accomplished with teamwork between local officials and the district and provincial governments. During this visit, the steps required to identify, plan and execute such a project are reviewed to reinforce the techniques learned during the previous days.

The purpose of this training exercise and the program in general is to demonstrate to the villagers that the national government is serious in its intent to establish some institution at the local level which would permit them to elect their own leadership and to act on problems of their own choosing. The session also serves to provide council members with suggested techniques for utilizing their reorganized council. In most training sessions, the new council identifies the

problem areas it will attack first and these inevitably include improvements in roads, irrigation and potable water supplies.

Funds for the Reorganized Township Councils

In order to make this local government entity effective by giving it the incentive to develop, the township council is informed that the following funds will be at its disposal annually upon completion of its reorganization and training:

- a) 10,000 baht (\$500) is provided by the Department of Local Administration
- b) 5,000 baht (\$250) is provided from community development funds,
- c) 80% of the land tax collected in that township is returned to it by the provincial government level (In a visit to Ubon, the writer was told that the highly-rated governor of that province has decided to return all of this tax to the reorganized townships).
- d) If these funds are not sufficient to carry out locally-identified projects, a plan can be submitted to the District Officer for inclusion in the budget which is annually submitted to the provincial level.

The township councils review projects proposed by village development committees or by members of the township council. They are empowered to revise or combine village proposals into a single joint program of the township. Supplemental budgets may be prepared to meet necessary expenditures during a fiscal year when budgeted funds are not sufficient.

These are by no means the only monies spent by the government at the local level. Projects too large for one township are undertaken by the district or provincial levels. Many of these projects are accomplished under the "accelerated rural development" program--a diversified program designed to achieve results in the rural areas through decentralization of programs to the extent feasible to the provincial level. Some projects are those identified through the developing democracy township program or the community development local leadership training program, but which are too large to be undertaken by those local units.

It must be recognized that the townships are dependent upon the central government in the short run because it must be granted funds. In the longer run, these local bodies will have to develop sources of financing to grow to become effective representative government units. This factor is recognized and provided for. As a township unit develops to the stage that it can demonstrate capability of implementing local programs, which it is probably capable of doing in a limited number of cases, the township may apply to the Interior Ministry for "juristic" status which would allow it more autonomy in the sense that it can levy certain taxes (primarily on business and transportation) and disburse funds. This opportunity has existed since the councils were first permitted in legislation passed in 1956. However, up to 1967, only about 60 townships were so certified. The achievement of this level of independence would increase the leverage of township leaders in their dealings with the district officer.

Training of National Government Officials

The most difficult to achieve and probably the most important element required to support the Developing Democracy Program is changing the traditional behavioral patterns between the government official and the villagers. The district officer, as a salaried and educated person representing the national government, considers himself a very important person. He does not think of himself a "servant" of the people.

The villagers on their part have been content over the years to let the government govern--hopefully with as little involvement on their part as possible. In this regard, one observer has called attention to the fact that the Thai word for politics, "gan muang," means "things in and about the city" and it is seldom used to refer to life within their community. To them it is a term which belongs to a wider world, the world in which people have power!

Because of the insurgency, there has been an urgent necessity for the government to demonstrate to its citizens that it is sympathetic to their needs.

Much progress has been made over the past few years in Thailand to retrain the bureaucracy regarding its relationship with the people. The point at which this relationship is most important is at the district level where the bureaucracy comes into contact with the people. The township level is pivotal in this regard as it serves as a bridge between the district and the villages. (The latter are too numerous for the district office to have frequent direct contact.)

District, provincial and national officials are gradually being retrained to make government programs more receptive to local needs. As important as the types of programs undertaken is the way in which they are carried out in the rural areas. An intensive research study in one northeastern village revealed that the villagers' general attitude towards the government's efforts to effect rural improvements in the Northeast is evenly divided between favorable and unfavorable. One of the conclusions of this study was that there is an urgent need for a drastic change in the superior and paternalistic attitude characteristic of many government officials, of looking down on the village people and their way of life and treating them as immature children.²

The Department of Local Administration trains all the field personnel of the Interior Ministry. One of its successes in this regard, in my opinion, has been the training of new district officers. Three years ago, a District Officer Academy training complex was built thirty miles north of Bangkok. Here about forty assistant district officers are trained each year in a nine-month, full-time training course which they must take prior to their first assignment as district officers.

I was fortunate to be at the District Officer Academy on March 3, 1967 when two high officials of the Interior Ministry's Department of Local Administration met with the 1966-67 class to brief them on the "Developing Democracy Program." The new district officers were instructed to be very permissive in approving projects desired by the reorganized township councils--short of allowing them to divide up the money between themselves! The objective, of course, is to encourage and reward local initiative and to try to change centuries-old behavior of the villagers in deferring to higher authority.

The assignment and training of new personnel at the district level in connection with the accelerated rural development programs also bodes well for a changed relationship between the bureaucrats and the villagers. An assistant district officer for rural development has been assigned to every district containing a reorganized township under the developing democracy program. It will be his responsibility to maintain close contact with the township chiefs.

One of the aims in strengthening the township level of government was that it might acquire sufficient stature and power to be able to secure more effective performance of duties on the part of the district officer or other government officials. In this respect, the township council is exhorted to report to the provincial governor the misconduct of any government official. The council can also appeal district officer decisions to the governor. In my opinion, this "counterweight" goal will only be achieved in a limited number of cases over the near term.

The district officer must confirm the election of township chiefs and village headmen, which he does almost without exception although he has been known to influence who shall be the candidates in such elections. The district officer may remove local officials with the permission of the Governor who will then appoint a committee of three to investigate the charges.

In summary, the differences between the old township council and the developing democracy township council are:

- 1) In the new council, the township chief is the chairman. He may call meetings and conduct such business as he pleases. This is not to say that the district officer, who called and chaired meetings in the past would not be invited to attend and advise the council, or to send his representative.
- 2) Membership in the new council is much smaller. Meetings are more conducive to securing consensus on action programs as they are less formal. Meetings of the old council, as noted, were for the primary purpose of "getting the word" on what was expected of them from the district officer.

- 3) The elected member from each village provides a more up-to-date choice of a person to participate in township affairs. He is elected for a five-year term whereas the village headman is elected for life.
- 4) The new council has funds to undertake projects. These funds can be withdrawn by the government. However, some townships can look forward to becoming "juristic" thereby obtaining more autonomy.
- 5) The central government, and especially the district officer, has been trained to attempt to meet the expressed desires of the people.

Follow-Up on the Developing Democracy Program

The district officer is responsible for ensuring that the new township councils know their rights and duties. He must also ensure that the councils are provided the funds needed to plan and implement their projects. Because of all the new functions recently added to the already heavy workload of the district office, an additional Assistant District Officer (for Rural Development) has been assigned to the district officer's staff. His job is to follow up on the developing democracy program and other recently added rural development programs. Forty of these officers were trained and assigned during 1966 to all districts having reorganized townships. During 1967, forty additional officers will be trained for the additional districts having reorganized townships. These officers will be responsible for budgeting funds for the use of the new townships, disbursing such funds as required and working closely with the township councils.

While in the vicinity of the Province of Sakhon Nakorn in northeast Thailand, I visited two townships which had been reorganized in 1966. In one, the township chief and one of the village headmen took time out from the activity involved with a visit to their area of a provincial "mobile information team" to talk with me. Yes, they recalled the one-week training session. At that session, they told me they agreed to improve two kilometers of a local road. All of the funds provided under the developing democracy program had been expended on the project. The road is not yet completely repaired and they expected to receive supplemental funds to finish the job. They also have identified two other needs--refacing a crumbling well wall and securing a second-class rural health center (nurse and some medicines). This particular township has received much attention by the government. There had been a village leader training program in that area in March 1965. I also observed a new township police station and village security officers (home guard units).

In another township I visited, also in an area having a record of insurgency, the new township program was not doing so well. The township chief had resigned, ostensibly because of old age. I learned that he wished to avoid being a target for the insurgents. The acting township chief told me he was not present during the training program in 1966 for the new township council, so he summoned the "elected member" of the council from his village. This person recalled the training session and the fact that the new council agreed to try to work on three projects; 1) build a wall around their Buddhist temple area, 2) build a small bridge, and 3) construct an earth dike with spillway for irrigation use. He had to report, however, that nothing more was accomplished because the funds were never provided.

Mr. Stephen Young in his study of northeastern villages made these observations about the developing democracy program:

As I observed the initial operations of one such democratic tambol (township), I concluded that the significance of this new political structure was to put decisions in the hands of the local elite. Now the local elite could make decisions about the resolution of community problems as now they have the money to do something about them. . . . One village in Mahasarakam has waited two years on its request for a better well. But under the Developing Democracy Program such local problems can be locally met as government becomes more of a real, continuous presence in the world of the village.



One cannot discuss the township development program without acknowledging its strong relationship with the "community development" effort--both of which have the common goal of helping local leaders

solve problems through cooperative effort. The Government of Thailand has had a community development program for a number of years. In October 1964, it initiated an effort to systematically train village leaders in community development techniques. This program is sponsored by the Interior Ministry's Community Development Department, which is a sister unit to the Department of Local Administration. The Village Leader Training Program, as it officially called, is a logical forerunner to the Developing Democracy Program.

The purpose of the Village Leader Training Program is to train the leaders in the villages who are members of the Village Development Committee. Based on the "learning by doing" process, the training consists of a five-day long session of gaining practical experience in democratic principles through group discussions involving village-level matters. A village leader training group usually includes about thirty leaders from three to five villages. Most often the meeting place is a centrally-located wat (Buddhist temple area). Through these meetings the development of initiative is encouraged and practice is provided in decision-making on the local level.

The training encourages village leaders to freely discuss their problems and possible solutions. Through contact with various district-level technicians during the discussion periods, they increase their competence in technical subjects. They also observe agricultural, health and public works practices while on a one-day field trip. An important additional purpose served through the medium of this informal training session is that the village leaders have an opportunity to become better acquainted with national, provincial and district government officials. Conversely, the government officials can get first-hand information on the problems and aspirations of these local leaders and can actually visit some of the problem areas described.

The techniques practiced in both the Village Leader Training Program and the Developing Democracy Program for townships, as can be noted, are somewhat similar. As both these programs are targeted to the northeast part of Thailand, there will be a high degree of overlap in the areas covered which is not undesirable. Logically, the village-level training should be given first before the township council members are trained and this sequence is followed whenever practicable.

Through the village leader and developing democracy training programs, the government is reaching a significant number of leaders on the local level in a direct manner. The village leader program trained about 4000 leaders in 1965; about 9000 were trained in 1966 representing leaders from 1400 villages.

LOCATION OF THE TOWNSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The developing democracy program is being instituted in the so-called "sensitive" areas of Thailand where the insurgency is the greatest. This is primarily the north and northeast areas bordering Laos. This area covers the fourteen provinces which are designated by the Thai Government for "accelerated rural development." The provincial governor and Interior Ministry officials of the Department of Local Administration decide jointly which townships will be reorganized. They will also agree on the scheduling of the training sessions.

This and other programs involving the northeast area are especially important because the people of this area have historically felt themselves neglected by the national government. This is a somewhat poorer area agriculturally than the fertile central plains area and several other factors set the northeast apart from the rest of Thailand including geography as the northeast is a plateau area separated from the rest of the country by a chain of mountains.

The developing democracy program has been in operation just a little over one year. In the first year of operation, 1966, six training teams operated one-week training sessions for township council members in sixty-one townships in the northeast provinces. The plans for 1967 are to reorganize 197 townships utilizing thirteen training teams. All of these townships are located in eleven of the fourteen "accelerated rural development" provinces in the north and northeast areas. In total, there will be 646 townships reorganized by March 1969 in the currently-planned developing democracy program covering the accelerated rural development provinces. (In March 1967 an additional four provinces were designated in the accelerated rural development category. It is expected that this will add about 100 townships to the developing township program. The initial reaction of the Interior Ministry is that these additional townships can be absorbed into the program planned for completion by 1969.)

In several provinces located along the border of Laos, all of the townships in those provinces will be reorganized. These are the provinces of Nakhon Phanom, Nan, Sakon Nakhon and Nong Khai.

Officials of the Ministry of Interior are now working on plans to extend the developing township program throughout all regions of the country. Initial plans would decentralize this task to the nine regional offices of the ministry with the possibility of beginning this extension in late 1968.

IS THE TOWNSHIP THE RIGHT LEVEL?

The township level of government has been criticized as being the most awkward level of government and not worthy of revitalization. In terms of the objectives of the Thai Government, however I believe the township level was well chosen. This judgment is based on the following factors:

- 1) Through the Thai community development program and specifically the village leadership training program, local self-government on the village-level needed a follow-on program. There was a need for a level of self-government beyond the village to broaden the interests of the villagers. Furthermore, a township provides a means of undertaking projects of common interest which are too large for one village.
- 2) The township council provides village leaders with an opportunity to exchange views on how to approach and solve village problems.
- 3) In terms of area, the township is about the limit that can be encompassed at this time given local transportation means, i.e., walking. In fact, the township limits were originally set on the basis of how far a man could walk in one day!
- 4) It is much easier for the district officer and others on his staff to have contact, and more frequent contact, with the township chiefs rather than with each and every village chief. For example in the District of Yasothon, Province of Ubon, there are only 15 townships but almost 150 villages.
- 5) There is a desire to make the district officers more responsive to the wants of the local inhabitants. The township has the potential of becoming a more effective counterweight to the district officer than just one village.

NEED TO IMPROVE EDUCATION

In order to place the developing democracy program in Thailand in its proper perspective, some mention must be made of the educational system and its relationship to political modernization. From my brief study of the developing township program and the educational system, I could find little in the educational system which was supportive of the efforts of the government to secure more individual participation in local government.

First, the education level of the people is not high, especially in the rural areas where 85% of the people live. Four out of five students who complete the fourth grade in Thailand do not go further. In most rural areas, where schools exist only through the lower primary level, less than one in five go beyond the fourth grade. The figure may be even lower in the northeast area.

Second, for those who only go through the fourth grade, the curriculum is not very relevant to the farm work they will be doing thereafter because the offering consists mainly of academic-type subjects.

Lastly, the teaching methods do not contribute to an ability to think independently, to solve problems or to use initiative. Rote learning by the students with emphasis on learning for the sake of passing examinations does not serve to increase the creative abilities of the individual. The schools seem to place more stress on the duties and obligations of the individual rather than than on his potential for development.

In discussions with several Thai educators, one of them stated, "Teaching students to know and speak the truth is one of the major problems that we have." As I interpreted him, he was alluding to the fact that most students tell the teacher, and others in authority, what they think the listener wants to hear rather than what he really believes.

Another Thai educator whom I met, writing in a periodical which is distributed to all elementary school teachers in one area in the northeast, had this to say about the subject of democracy:

Some people speak of democracy without knowing what it is. Some people think that they understand the meaning of it. Fewer people admit that they don't know and the people who truly do know the meaning of democracy are not easily found. As teachers, it is our duty to cultivate the dream of democracy for the youth of our country and we should, therefore, understand democracy thoroughly beforehand.

The writer then goes on to quote a definition of democracy which he likes which was given by the president of a teachers' college: "Democracy is the relationship between individuals which has three basic foundation stones--respect, unity and intelligence."

Commenting on the first qualification, the writer then makes the following observation:

...respect, the Thai people possess this in excess. The majority of us easily accept the opinions of others. We do not like to express our own opinions of others. We do not like to express our own opinions at all and we prefer to be followers rather than leaders. This is perhaps true because we do not have confidence in ourselves. This characteristic can be called a failure to have respect for oneself. This is thought provoking for how can one who has no respect for himself have respect for others? It seems probable that in building democracy in our country we must consider this matter before any other.

Between these two Thai educators, I believe they have the basis for political development: training people to know the truth and to have the confidence and leadership ability to speak the truth.

The schools potentially can play the most important role in Thailand to ensure that modernizing factors in the society are channeled into an evolutionary, rather than a revolutionary, framework. No other agency is in a better position to prepare the coming generation for its full participation in the national economic, social and political development of Thailand. If the government seriously desires progress toward political modernization, it must devote more of its resources and attention to making changes in its educational system. In this regard, a statement made by Walter Vella in 1955 holds true today:

Ultimately, democratic progress in Thailand depends on the creation of the conditions for democracy from below rather than imposition of the democratic forms from above. And these conditions--popular education, literacy, and political awareness--are slowly and silently developing in Thailand.³

The following changes, would importantly contribute to Thailand's goal of preparing its citizens for self-government:

- a) Compulsory education should be raised to Grade 7 in those areas where it is still at the Grade 4 level. Four grades in Thailand barely makes a child literate. Although seven grades will not give a child an understanding of complex political theory--at least it is an interim goal which will contribute greatly. This means building more schools and training more teachers which will be very costly. (Furthermore, every child who is expected to end his education at Grade 7 should be taught some non-academic subjects in grades 6 and 7 to help prepare him for his vocation, i.e., farming in most cases. Ideally, two distinct tracks - academic and vocational - could be set up for grades 6 and 7.)

b) The old method of rote learning should be replaced in favor of instituting an analytic and problem-solving approach adapted to the challenges to be found in a modernizing society. The objective should be to train the individual to be a rational, truth-seeking being.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The developing democracy program is ably contributing towards the Thai government's objectives of closing the gap between it and the remote villages. At the same time it is facilitating self-government on the township level--admittedly within a very limited sphere. However, over an extended period, it will provide experience which will be useful in a broader political context. Moreover, the same qualities involved in political modernization will also foster economic advancement: individual initiative and a pragmatic approach.

2. Although the program is a small factor in the government's overall plan to meet communist insurgency, it is, in my estimation, one of the most important. It directly answers the communist charge that the villagers have no say in their government. It is a program the government can cite to illustrate that it is preparing the people for the elections which will be held after the constitution is promulgated.

3. In this and other programs, the government must be careful not to create the impression that it is overconcerned with the insurgency problem. Too much government presence in the rural villages might start the people worrying about the problem more than is warranted--especially in view of the previous almost complete absence on the part of the government from the local scene. It must be recognized, however, that this is a difficult trap to avoid and still get the necessary job done.

4. There is no quick substitute to the careful, orderly manner in which the government is proceeding with the township development program. Changes in century-old ways on the part of villagers and government officials cannot be made overnight. It would be preferable that the program extend beyond the target date of 1969 than to sacrifice the quality of the training.

5. Before the program is extended to other areas of Thailand, the government should ensure that there is adequate follow-up on the townships reorganized in the fourteen northeast border provinces. The officials most involved in the follow-up aspects are the Assistant District Officers for Rural Development. Frequent follow-up training sessions should be held with these officers by the Interior Ministry and provincial-level officials. They should ensure that these district officers are working closely with the township chiefs and councils.

6. The goal of the central government, in addition to securing as wide an area coverage as possible, should be to work on the quality development of those few townships that can be given more responsibility for home-rule through their designation as "juristic" townships. With the power to tax and disburse funds, the area for self-initiative and progress by the township leaders would be much expanded.

7. Educational reform must be carried out to support the long-run effort and talent required to build local institutions capable of meeting the social, economic and political needs of the people.

8. In developing plans for new programs, the government should ensure that the ministries adhere to its policy that the township councils appropriately participate in new activities being introduced at the local level by the various government bureaus.

9. The district and provincial levels should incorporate township-identified projects into their development budgets when such projects are beyond the local unit's capabilities.

10. The government's efforts to decentralize project planning and implementation should be encouraged as this will help the provincial-level administration to be flexible enough to meet locally-expressed needs.

11. If additional personnel resources are required to implement the township self-government program, or other local programs, a special effort should be made to enlist the energies of the younger men of the villages. Many of the more able young men in the population are now leaving the village to escape the stagnation of the traditional life. For those who remain, a conscious effort should be made to secure these youngsters' involvement in worthwhile projects -- especially during the lull period between harvest and planting time. This may help them to resist temptations which are now being offered them by the communists to escape from the stagnation by joining in their adventures.

12. Opportunities should be created on the local level to permit leadership training opportunities to begin at an earlier age. Scouting organizations, already in existence, should be expanded in area coverage and extended through older-age groups. Also, student council-type organizations in the schools might be considered to permit leadership training experiences.

13. To date, the United States has had minimal involvement in the Thai developing democracy program. Advisory service has been given at the ministerial level by several officials of the U.S. Operations Mission in Bangkok. This has included technical assistance on training matters, general coordination and program planning. The USOM has also provided the vehicles and equipment required by the training teams. I believe this amount of involvement has been correct and should continue at about the same level.

The leadership of the Thai Government for a number of very valid reasons has initiated the Developing Democracy Program at the township level. They realize that because the people, especially in the rural areas, are not clamoring for more participation, it will take much more time for the villagers to change their traditional attitudes. The handicap of having had a centralized, authoritarian system will act as an anchor in trying to foster local self-government. This is recognized by one key Thai official and is expressed in the following translation (somewhat garbled) from a 1964 Interior Ministry study of village and township headmen.

The development of local self government of countries in the East and the West are run on different lines. In Eastern countries the trend is guided by the central government. Because the pattern of administration is the type favoring centralization of authority from the very beginning, it does not favor the thoughts of creative developments in the localities. Whereas in Europe and America, the people have initiative in thoughts and the development in the locality arise from the initiative of the people. When these small local governments combine to form a nation, the establishment of democracy has a firm foundation.⁴

It must be admitted that Thailand has neither a history of federalism nor are there masses of politically-aware individuals throughout the country demanding a larger role. However, it is to the credit of the present Thai government that its leaders are, acting in their traditional way, handing down to their people an opportunity to use a form of local government they believe their country needs in a modernizing world. It is to be expected that the ideology which will eventually be built around these forms of government will be uniquely Thai--and probably effective and successful!

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FOOTNOTES

¹From an excellent tract entitled, "The Northeastern Village: A Non-Participatory Democracy" by Stephen B. Young, Bangkok, September 1966.

²These findings are from "A Study in Village Organization and Leadership in Thailand," by Toshio Yatsushiro, USOM Research Division, Bangkok, June 1966.

³Walter F. Vella, The Impact of the West on Government in Thailand, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1955. 398 pp.

⁴Kamnan and Puyaiban: (Township Chief and Village Headman) Their Origin, History and Importance to Village Development in Thailand, by Mr. Snit Vilaichitt, LLb, M.A., (Thammasat); Deputy Director General, Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior, Government of Thailand, July 1964. Translated through USOM/Thailand, January 1967.

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