

**The Village Fund Project and  
Changes in the Dynamics of Local Power in Rural Thailand**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines one of the flagship ‘populist’ programmes of the 2001-06 Thaksin Shinawatra government in Thailand. The Village Fund Project (VFP) channeled funds of one million baht to every village and urban community in Thailand, was intended as a form of micro-credit to stimulate local economic activity. Drawing upon extensive participant-observation research in two villages – one in Lopburi, another in Krabi – the thesis examines the impact of the programme on local dynamics of political power.

The thesis demonstrates that the VFP largely failed in its own terms: the project had rather disappointing results as a means of promoting local economic development. Most of the benefits from the projects were monopolized by a small group of elite villagers. Some of these villagers served as the *phuak*, vote canvassers or vote base for local, provincial and national politicians, who gained additional benefits from the scheme. The work of the village-level committees set up to administer the projects was usually problematic and lacking in transparency.

Nevertheless, in certain respects the VFP – especially when seen in conjunction with an earlier scheme, The Saving for Producing Project (SPP) – could be considered somewhat successful. One of the probably unintended consequences of the VFP was the extent to which it increased local scrutiny of village elites, forcing them to broaden their alliances and engage in forms of cooptation and consultation. Community leaders who performed well as members of VFP committees were then well-placed to stand for other kinds of electoral office, while those whose performance was widely questioned had more difficulty securing subsequent election. Leaders were therefore forced to become more responsive to the needs of villagers.

The thesis demonstrates that evaluating the success of initiatives made by the Thaksin government is fraught with difficulties, and illustrates the value of using ‘ethnographic’ style case studies to examine micro-level political change.

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**ABBREVIATIONS**

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CDA	Constitutional Drafting Assembly
CDC	Constitutional Drafting Committee
CPD	Campaign for Popular Democracy
CPRD	Committee of Political Reformation under Democracy
CNR	Council for National Security
CTP	Chart Thai Party
DDC	Democracy Development Committee
DP	Democrat Party
GSB	Government Saving Bank
OAG	Office of Auditor General
PAO	Provincial Administrative Organization
PAP	Poverty Alleviation Programme
PDP	Phalang Dharma Party
PRC	Political Reform Committee
NAP	New Aspiration Party
NCCC	National Counter Corruption Commission
NEDB	National Economic Development Board
NSCT	National Peace Keeping Council
SAO	Sub-district Administrative Organization
SCC	Sub-district Council Committee
SET	Student Federation of Thailand
SPP	Saving for Producing Programme
SSEF	Self Sufficient Economic Fund
TRT	Thai Rak Thai Party
VFP	Village Fund Project
VPP	Village Protection Programme

## ROMANIZATION

All Thai words are transcribed into English using the Leeds University Romanization system below. Where sources cited in this thesis have used alternative transliteration system, their preferences have been retained. This system employs a simplified version of the Library of Congress system, using only the twenty-six letters of the Roman alphabet, with no tone markers and no indications of vowel length. The aim is to transliterate Thai roughly as the language is pronounced, rather than as it is written.

### University of Leeds Romanization Tables for Thai

Vowels and Diphthongs				Consonants	Romanizationn	
Vernacular	Romanization	Vernacular	Romanization		Initial and Media	Final
อะ, อ	a	อ	ua	ก	k	k
อา	a	อัว, ว	ua	ข, ค, ฅ	kh	k
อำ	am	ไอ, ไอ, ไอย	ai	ง	ng	ng
อิ	i	อา ย	ai	จ	j	t
อี	i	เอ า	ao	ฉ, ช, ฌ, ฌ	ch	t
อุ	u	อา ร	ao	ญ	y	n
อู	u	อุ ย	ui	ด, ถ, ฑ	d	t
อุย	u	ไอ ย	oi	ต, ฏ	t	t
อุย	u	ออ ย	oi	ถ, ฐ, ฑ, ฒ, ณ	th	th
เออะ, เอี	e	เอ ย	oei	ฒ	-	-
เอ	e	เอ็ย	uai	น, ณ	n	n
แอะ, แอ	ae	อา ย	uai	บ	b	p
แอ	ae	อิ ว	iu	ป	p	p
โอะ, อ	o	เอ็ว	eo	ผ, พ, ภ	ph	p
โอ	o	เอ ว	eo	ฝ, ฟ	f	p
เอาะ	o	แอ ว	aeo	ม	m	m
ออ	o	เอ็ยว	leo	ย	y	-
เออะ	oe	ฤ	ru	ร	R	rn
เออ, เอี	oe	ฤ	ri	ล, ฬ	L	n
เอ็ย	ia	ฤ	roe	ว	W	-
เอ็ย	ia	ฤ ร	ru	ศ, ษ, ฐ, ฑ, ฒ, ณ	S	t
เอ็ย	ua	ฎ	lu	อ	-	-
เอ็ย	eua	ฎ ร	lu	ห, ฮ	h	-

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the study

Dynamics of local power, or the way in which power is perceived, gained, used, preserved, distributed, enhanced, and challenged at the local level, changes over time. Socio-economic and political changes all affect the dynamics of power. For example, when the economy turns bad and money is needed, those who have cash and can provide it to others, either in the form of loans or a gift, have power over the others' lives. By setting conditions for receiving such a loan or gift, they can also have influence over the others' behaviour. Politically, changes in government or national leader, which most of the time leads to changes in approach employed in local development policies (centralization or decentralization), also affect the dynamics of local power. Indeed, such changes inevitably rewrite political relations at the level they are introduced and thus obviously requires attentions to political participation or exclusion.

In the case of Thailand, the development of local politics mirrors the development of national politics. Over the past eight hundred years, Thailand has experienced many changes in its political regimes, from 'absolute monarchy' to 'autocratic', to 'paternalism' and then to 'semi-democracy'.<sup>1</sup> Since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy and the establishment of constitutional democracy in 1932, the Thai polity has alternated between military-led autocratic regimes and amateur democratic regimes. Local administration policies, implemented during the time of military-led government, had devolved some limited administrative and financial powers from the central authority, specifically the Ministry of the Interior, to local governments. The local governments established during this period were 'local governments by government officials', or local governments which were under the control of, and run by, government officials who answered to the central government through the Ministry of Interior. In effect, only government officials or bureaucrats had power in local administration. Power was maintained in the bureaucrats' circle, enhanced through the devolution of power from the central government, and was not challenged by other players.

Only in the mid-1970s, when the first non-military led government came into power, did Thailand first see the devolution of power, responsibility and sometimes resources to

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed description of the historical development of Thai politics during the period of the absolute monarchy, see Tej (1977), Vella (1978), and Batson (1984). For the period from the overthrow of the absolute monarchy up to post-World War Two, see Kobkua (1995) and Fineman (1997). For the definition of 'paternalism', see Thak (1979), and for the description of 'semi-democracy', see Chai-Anand (1989).

democratically elected councils at local or intermediate levels<sup>2</sup> - in its local development policy. The first such example was the 'Sub-district Development Fund' in 1975. This project distributed a development fund of 2,500 million baht among Sub-district Councils – local organizations comprised of the head of a sub-district, or *kamnan*, and the head of villages within that sub-district, or *phu yai ban* – nationwide in order to hire villagers, who were mostly farmers, to work on local infrastructure development projects during the slack season, the period in which rice farmers take a break from farming due to very dry weather. Praised by the people, the 'Sub-district Development Fund' was repeated in 1976 and 1977, and a similar project, called the 'Works and Income Generating Programme' was later implemented from 1980 to 1982.<sup>3</sup>

Even though the government abandoned the approach for almost a decade due to the lack of pressure from the masses, it has been in demand again since the uprising against the military-led government in May 1992. A series of reforms were subsequently implemented to reduce bureaucrats' power and to transfer power to democratically elected local working organizations. Firstly, after the general election in 1992, the coalition government, which comprised of a few military-opposition political parties, forced the Ministry of the Interior to issue a new regulation shortening the official terms of *kamnan* and *phu yai ban*, from up to the age of retirement, or 60 years old, to five years. Secondly, the same government set up Sub-district Administrative Organizations (SAO), as local governments at a sub-district level, composed of directly elected councillors. In the same year, Sanitation Districts nationwide, which had been established in 1952, were upgraded to Municipalities. Thirdly, the 1997 constitution, the sixteenth and most recent in Thai history, ensured that *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* – two important figures in Thai politics at the local level who had previously played an ill-defined role as quasi-government officials – were no longer members of any local governments, and were not allowed to run for these positions while holding such titles.

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<sup>2</sup> This approach is coined as 'democratic decentralization' by R. C. Crook and J. Manor in their work on 'Democratic decentralization and institutional performance: four Asian and African experiences compared' (1995). Unlike the term 'decentralization', with the notion of giving more autonomy to elected local committees, this approach has attracted many influential people and academics worldwide, and seems to have been praised by those on both the left and the right of the political spectrum. That is, the advocates of neo-liberalism saw it as a way of shifting power away from the centralized state whereas those of a pluralist persuasion saw it as a device for prying open closed systems. It was believed that decentralization combined with democratization might 'provide greater transparency, accountability, responsiveness, probity, frugality, efficiency, equity and opportunities for mass participation. For more discussion on 'democratic decentralization, see R. C. Crook and J. Manor, (1995) and (1998).

<sup>3</sup> In 1980-1981, a development fund of 3,500 million baht was distributed to every sub-district nationwide. In 1982, the fund was decreased to 1,975.5 million baht. For more information, see TDRI (1983).

A number of scholars have analyzed the effects of these local administration and development policies. For instance, Medhi argues that, in effect, the Sub-district Development Fund led to changes in the dynamics of local power, meaning that the *kamnan*, as head of a Sub-district Council, and *phu yai ban*, as members of the Council, were given more fiscal powers and this was to their benefit and that of those related to them. Also, interrelations between *kamnan*, *phu yai ban* and building contractors were created and their economic and power benefits were exchanged.<sup>4</sup> On the same programme, Somrudee contends that some contractors consequently became directly involved in local politics by running in elections for members of Sub-district Councils and became more involved in national elections, especially the one of 1979, as agents mobilizing support and assistance for the political party that had initiated the programmes.<sup>5</sup> On the effects of local administration and development policies over the past two decades, two tendencies are noted. On the one hand, it is argued that the dominance of the bureaucracy still persists in the local governments of rural areas. Taylor states that ‘despite the steady movement in Thailand toward a more popular, democratic form of government, in the countryside it is business as usual’.<sup>6</sup> In his study on the Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAO), Nelson notes that ‘the “bureaucratic polity” still seems to be very much alive in the countryside’.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, with an increase in the number of elected local officials, many studies find that nowadays, through using money in the elections, local businessmen and local mafia or *chao po* – which carries a meaning similar to godfather – have become important players in local politics and administration. For example, Arghiros contends that ‘the traditional dominance of state officials in local affairs has been tempered by the rise of provincial politicians’.<sup>8</sup>

Despite a substantial number of studies, actual research on the effects of such policies on the dynamics of local power has rarely been done. The few existing studies include the work of Arghiros (1993, 1995, and 2001) on the electoral politics of Sub-district Administration Organizations, of Nelson (1998) on the politics of Provincial Administration Organizations, and of Suchit, Pornsak, and Nelson (1998) on the politics of SAO and PAO. Moreover, no village-level research in this field has been done for at least the past ten years. An opportunity to develop an empirically based theory of the dynamics of power at the village level and the effects of the local development policy was presented when a local economic development policy called

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<sup>4</sup> On the economic and social impacts of the Sub-district Development Fund of 1975-1977, see Medhi Krongkaew (1979).

<sup>5</sup> Somrudee (1993), pp. 172-173

<sup>6</sup> Taylor, J. (1993), p.14

<sup>7</sup> Nelson (1998), p. 3

<sup>8</sup> Arghiros (2001), p.3



the 'Village Fund Project' (VFP) was implemented in 2001. The project was initiated and promoted during the general election campaign in 2000-2001 by the Thai Rak Thai party (TRT), then led by Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra, a former Police Lieutenant Colonel, who subsequently became Prime Minister until he was ousted by a military coup on 19 September 2006. The project established a one million baht fund for each and every village and community nationwide (75,547 villages and communities in total), which was to be lent out at cheap rates of interest to local villagers, in amounts of between 5,000 and 20,000 baht per villager. Undisputedly, the VFP, together with the other initiatives, namely an initiative to limit the medical and service charges on every patient and symptom at 30 baht per visit to the hospital, and an initiative to freeze agriculturalists' debt for two years, led to the landslide victory of TRT in the 2001 election. It was later implemented as promised in June 2001. At the village level, the project led to an establishment of VFP committee, which consists of 9 to 15 elected local villagers who have a two-year working term, whose responsibility was to manage the fund of one million baht.

### **Objective and main questions of the study**

This thesis is to investigate the impacts of the implementation of the VFP on changes in the dynamics of local power, or changes on the way in which power is perceived, gained, used, enhanced, and challenged at the village level, in rural Thailand. To this end, it compares and contrasts the dynamics of power within the village before and after the VFP was implemented in 2001, and analyzes the extent to which the VFP has created changes. Four main questions are addressed.

- 1) What were the dynamics of power within the village before the implementation of the VFP in 2001?
- 2) What were the dynamics of power within the village after the implementation of the VFP in 2001?
- 3) How, if at all, the dynamics of power after the implementation of the VFP differ from the dynamics of power before the implementation of the VFP?
- 4) How and to what extent does the VFP illustrate these changes in the dynamics of power within the village? (Are there other factors responsible for the changes?)

### **Theoretical framework**

In this study, the dynamics of local power refers to how power is perceived by the villagers, and the ways in which power is gained, used, distributed and preserved by village leaders, and challenged by other political actors. These aspects of power within a locality are very important to any political study, especially a study on the effects of a local development policy. Only when we understand these aspects of power within a locality, can we then recognize how the villagers, their leaders, and the leaders' opponents if there are any, interact with each other, and why, and appreciate the nature of their political situation and the power structure in the village. Furthermore, only when we are able to trace changes in the dynamics of local power, and the reasons for such changes, will we be able to determine whether the detected changes were indeed the result of local development policies and precisely how they were affected.

This thesis concerns changes in the dynamics of power at the village level. To discuss this we need to first define what 'power' is, and where does it come from. In addition, it is important to confer what 'village' and 'community' really are before any further discussions on politics at the village level. In doing this, this part provides classic discussions of power in political science and discussions which distinguish power from authority and influence. Also, it reviews the concepts of power relations in Thai localities used by other academics in the previous studies, and bestows the history of the establishment of Thai villages and communities.

#### *What is 'power'*

The classic definition of 'power' is that of Weber, which defines power as the ability to impose one's will even in the face of opposition from others.<sup>9</sup> In modern day, however, this definition was too broad and too simplistic to be used as a conceptual framework in any empirical study. This concept focuses only on the use of coercion and omits other essential dimensions of power. One useful conceptual map of what 'power' is, and what to look for when one researches on power, is offered by the 'three views of power', devised and developed by Lukes.<sup>10</sup>

According to Lukes, there are three distinct views of power, the so called 'three faces of power' consisting of a one-dimension view, which focuses mainly on decision-making, a two-dimension view, which centres around non-decision-making, and a three-dimension view, which concentrates on ideological power.<sup>11</sup> He claims that the first two views of power are not the best conceptual frameworks available for the study of power. The one-dimension view of power

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<sup>9</sup> See Parsons (1997)

<sup>10</sup> In 1974, Lukes' view of power, entitled 'Power: A Radical View' was first published. It was later clarified and expanded in 2005 by Lukes himself.

conceived power as intentional and active. This view is put forth by Dahl, who ascribes to political power the trait of decision making as the source and main indicator of power.<sup>12</sup> Researchers who employ this view would focus only on behaviour, decision making, observable conflicts, issues and interests.<sup>13</sup> Criticising this view of power as being too simplistic, Lukes then adds the second dimension to the concept of power; the preference-shaping dimension or the control over the agenda. This agenda-setting dimension of power was first added by Bachrach and Baratz, who view power as involving both the formal political arena and behind the scenes agenda-setting by elites groups, often with a hidden agenda that most of the public may not be aware of.<sup>14</sup> In following this view, researchers would not only investigate the decision-making behaviour and process, but also examine how demands for changes can be prevented, or kept covert from the decision-making arena. Later again, Lukes criticises his own view as too limited, too close to behaviourism, and inadequate because it still centres on observable conflicts. In the revised version of his study, Lukes see power as something that can also be exercised even before grievances are denied. Therefore, the actions which prevent grievance, such as the shaping of perceptions, cognitions, and preferences, thus become the focus on modern empirical research on power. In line with Lukes' third dimension of power, this thesis will not only investigate observable conflicts but also examine latent conflicts.

Lorenzi argues that the concept of 'latent conflict', offered by Lukes poses many problems to scholar of both sociology and political science. For Lorenzi, the line between social determination and the lack of awareness about the group's interests is very thin. The challenge in this approach is how to identify the latent conflict, and its process. According to this view, power can also be exercised unconsciously, and by collectivities. Another problem is that even those who are involved in such latent conflicts are not always aware of their own interests being in conflict.<sup>15</sup> Thus it is difficult for the researcher to identify them. In his work on the power of the working class in Thailand, Andrew Brown points out how an error in positioning 'working class' and in identifying their interests could lead to an incorrect analysis. In assuming that the working class in Thailand is cohesive, conscious of its strategic political location, and activist in

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<sup>11</sup> See Lukes, 2005

<sup>12</sup> Domhoff, among many others, criticised this view of Dahl, which focuses mainly on power exercised by politicians, as simplistic and argues that both political and economic power is monopolised by the 'elite classes' rather than just politicians. For more information see Domhoff, 2002

<sup>13</sup> The decision-making dimension was first put forth by Dahl, who described that power consists in defeating the opponents' preferences. See Dahl, 1961

<sup>14</sup> See Bachrach and Baratz, 1970

<sup>15</sup> Lorenzi, 2006, pp. 92-93

its pursuit of its class interests, researchers seek only ideal-typical forms of labour activism. As a result, very few researchers get to appreciate the significance of the working class in Thailand. By focusing merely on institutions, observable behavior and the changing form of struggle is misleading. Rather than representing growing strength within class, the proliferation of unions in the mid 1970s should be interpreted as representing a disorganization of organized labour.<sup>16</sup> Correctly understanding the nature of power involves an accurate grasp of the groups and interests involved in a given context.

### *Authority vs. influence*

Both authority and influence are closely associated with power. In fact, they are both the sources from which power is derived. The differences between power, derived from authority and power, derived from influence lie in their nature. The useful terms which can be used to differentiate between the two are 'power over' and 'power to'. The first, coined by Law, refers to the domination aspect of power or influence on other people, derived through state power, which is seen as the critical nexus of domination and subordination.<sup>17</sup> It is indeed a legal authority or the authority attached to the virtue of office holder, and often means power in decision making. This kind of power implies the use of coerciveness or an ability to punish, given by higher authorities. For example, the committee members do have power over the loan receivers regarding the use of loan given by the committee. Police officers have power over villagers' behaviours. If anyone does not obey their power or acts contrary to the power holders' preferences, they may be punished by the power holders, who might, for example, revoke membership of committees or apprehend criminal suspects. By contrast, 'power to', a term which is coined by Dowding, refers to an ability to perform and is also called 'outcome power'.<sup>18</sup> This ability to perform may exist without any official position. Good examples of 'power to' are charismatic authority and influences, which consist of ability to change one's behaviour, to exert one's view over another person, with or without the use of coerciveness. 'Power to' is not a given, it has to be gained and maintained. It is not attached to the virtue of official position, but to the virtue of one's own charisma.

Despite the difference in their nature, the significances of both authority and influence are not different. The degree of power of both depends largely on power holder and the context. Arghiros's study of the electoral behaviour of the villagers in central Thailand provides good

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<sup>16</sup> Brown, pp.163-171

<sup>17</sup> Law,1991, p.18

<sup>18</sup> Dowding, 1996, p.4

examples of the use of both ‘power over’ and ‘power to’ at a local level. It unravels how local authority, a sub-district headman or *kamnan*, and a religious leader use their authority and influence to support one candidate in a local election. Apparently, both leaders have ‘power over’ the agenda setting process and exercise it in the village meeting. While the sub-district headman’s ‘power to’ derived from his characteristics (including being brave, which is often associated with the use of coercion), the temple retains the ‘power to’ transform merit-making money, which the candidates donate to the temple, into votes.<sup>19</sup> Brown’s work also provides good examples of how authority and influence operate and interact at the national level. That is, while the state has exercised its authority or ‘power over’ the policy implementation by restricting the space available to organized labour, workers have used their ‘power to’ organize crowds or mobs to secure a space within which they could build their organizations, and in which they could legitimately air their grievances and attempt to influence the policies of employers and the state.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from the difference in their concept, the words ‘authority’ and ‘influence’ also have difference meaning in Thai language. It is necessary to first look into this for a better understanding of the concept of power in Thailand. Thamada notes the differences between the words ‘power’ or *amnat* and ‘influence’ or *itthiphon* in the language term, and maps out the relations between the two. He explains that generally in English both *amnat* and *itthiphon* are referred to as ‘power’, but in Thai *amnat* means authority, which can be derived from any official position or sanctioned by law, whereas *itthiphon* means the power which a man with or without authority exerts beyond his authority.<sup>21</sup> There are two kinds of *itthiphon*, distinguished by how it is derived; good and bad *itthiphon*. Good *itthiphon* is derived from the virtue of an individual. In English term, it is indeed the ‘charismatic authority’. Bad *itthiphon* or what most Thais call ‘dark *itthiphon*’ is derived by the ability to use coercion.

The relations between *amnat* and *itthiphon* are that those who have power, or *phu mee amnat*, often have influence over others while those who have influence, or *phu mee itthiphon*, may or may not have *amnat*. Thamada argues that those who have influence often use their influence to seek power for themselves or for others who have influence over them. That is they are either candidates in local elections or become vote canvassers for other political actors, over whom they might exert some influence. Those who can exert their influence over someone who already has power may be more influential than the power holders themselves. Thamada also

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<sup>19</sup> Arghiros, 2001, p. 208

<sup>20</sup> Brown, 1997, p. 169

<sup>21</sup> Thamada, 1991, p. 5

argues that those with power are not always ‘government officials are not always patrons and that businessmen are not always powerless’.<sup>22</sup> Rather businessmen’s ‘*itthiphon* is a sign of their political powerfulness. They are the privileged class and are often patrons of bureaucrats’.<sup>23</sup> Following this, power structures in Thai communities are best described by the politics of *itthiphon*, in that those who have *itthiphon* try to exert their *itthiphon* on those who have *amnat*. Those with *amnat*, or government officials, and those with *itthiphon*, say local businessmen, cooperate and exploit their power for their own interests.<sup>24</sup>

This mutual relationship between authority and influence is also exhibited in Arghiros’s work, which stresses the need of the powerful to gain influence and the need of the influential to gain power. It points out the political trends in rural Thailand, where provincial businessmen, or those who have influence, have increasingly participated more directly in local politics by running in local elections for position such as village head, and head of sub-district. It shows how the head of sub-district or *kamnan* strongly supports the businessman in the election of head of village or *phu yai ban* in order to create personal links between them and how local businessmen fight expensive campaigns for local office in order to gain the prestige associated with being *phu yai ban*.<sup>25</sup> According to Arghiros, such prestige ‘is often an end to itself.’<sup>26</sup> Rural economic elites felt obliged to acquire such prestige once they had secured wealth. Arghiros reveals that a major incentive, which drives local businessmen to fight expensive campaigns for local office of sub-district headman, is the fact that office give the holder access to bureaucrats and opportunities to establish mutually helpful relations with them.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from this, there are three prominent words associating with the words *amnat* and *itthiphon*, including *phu nam*, *phu nam thang thammachat* and *phu mee itthiphon*. Literally, the word ‘*phu nam*’ means leader. *Phu nam* refers to those who have *amnat*. *Phu nam* can expect the others to obey their orders for the fact that they have the virtue of office holder. The good examples of *phu nam* are the head of sub-district, the head of village, and members of local committee, who can lead the villagers. Most of the time, these *phu nam* also have *itthiphon*. In fact, it was their *itthiphon* which derived from their charismatic which led them to be elected or chosen as the office holders in the first place. *Phu nam thang thammachat* refers to charismatic

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 6

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 14

<sup>24</sup> Regarding this, Thamada argues that businessmen exert *itthiphon* mainly at the stage of policy implementation rather than policy making, and that they influence policy making only to a limited extent (Ibid, p. 14).

<sup>25</sup> Arghiros, 2001, pp. 223-224

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 224

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 223

authority or those have *itthiphon* but no *amnat*. Literally, *thammachat* means naturally. Because their *itthiphon* is derived from the virtue of their charismatic, *phu nam thammachat* are used exclusively for those who are accepted widely by most, if not all, of the villagers. Differently, *phu mee itthiphon* refers to those who have dark influence, or the ability to use coercion.

As this thesis unravels, in Thai villages those who has *itthiphon* often have *amnat* too. That is, they are either elected or chosen to become the office holders, such as. This means that most of *phu nam* in Thai localities do have strong charismatic. In fact, it is because of their charismatic that make them elected or chosen as the office holders in the first place. Having said this, the word *phu nam thammachat* is reserved to those who has charismatic but no *amnat* only. Generally, the charismatic *phu nam thammachat* hold are strong leadership and knowledge. Most of the time, *phu nam thammachat* are not selected or chosen as the office holders because they do not want to associate directly with *amnat* or because they do not yet have factors considered important for *phu nam* in that localities, such as being at the certain age, being member of a big clan network. In most cases, *phu nam thammachat* are young and knowledgeable. They are influential among the young villagers.

#### *The use of the concepts of power relation in Thai politics*

A number of theories explaining power relations in Thai politics are used in this field of study. Despite being argued and countered, some theories are still very popular. This includes the use of the concept of patron and client relationships, and the concept of kinship system or clan network. Summary of the discussions of the two concepts are as follow.

- *Patron-client relationships theory*

The concept of patron and client relationships is initiated and used by Hanks in 1970s to explain power relations in Thai society. It sees Thai society as an entourage, and explains the reciprocity among Thais as means of conduct between patrons and their clients or entourage. It suggests that a patron and his entourage are subordinate to a higher-level patron.<sup>28</sup> Having said this, Hanks also notes that Theravada Buddhist tradition and the value of reciprocation have tremendous effects on Thais' social and political behaviour and that Thai-style patron-client relationships thus differ from such relationships in other societies. According to Hanks, as Buddhists, Thais believe in the effects of karma and perceive that all living beings stand in a hierarchy, which depends on a composite quality called 'merit' (*bun*) or 'virtue' (*khwaamdii*), or

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<sup>28</sup> For details, see Hanks, 1975

a graded series of penalties (*baap*).<sup>29</sup> He argues that this belief makes people accept their subordinate status and phur standard of living as a result of bad *karma*, or *baap*, which they acquired in their past life, and not question the superior status of others, as it is a result of good *karma*, or *bun*, they have acquired. In line with this, one needs not have the same status all the time, though. As Hanks points out, this view of the impermanence of all living things is conducive to a desire for dependence on superiors. 'The coherence of Thai society rests largely on the value of becoming a client of someone who has greater resources than one alone possesses'.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, Thai style patron-client relationships are encouraged by the value that people need to reciprocate (*top thaen*) after receipt of a favour, service or gift (*bunkhun*), and the need to 'know' gratitude (*kattanyu*). It is to be expected that once a client is given *bunkhun* from his or her patron, such a client would feel *kattanyu* and be willing to *top thaen* this *bunkhun*. Politically and socially, patrons have influence over their clients immediately after giving them *bunkhun* and they can expect their clients to *top taen* them anytime they wish. One example of a patron-client relations is that between the abbot and the electoral candidate in Arghiros's work. Arghiros states that 'for the abbots, the relationship with politicians entwine them in complex webs of obligation. In order to retain their social honour, monks must abide by the social expectation of reciprocity imposed upon them by the act of accepting 'help' from a politician'<sup>31</sup> In wanting to encourage the candidates to donate or to continue donating to the temple, abbots feel the need to help them in order to create special bonds with candidates for mutual advantage.

- *Kinship system theory*

Kemp argues that by definition all relationships in Thai society, except those in a peer group, are in fact hierarchical. To denote them all as patron-client relations is both imprecise and pointless. Rather, Kemp notes that relationships in Thai society are best described by 'the kinship system', whereby every relation is that of kin, such as big brother to little brother, big sister to little sister, and father or mother to sons and daughters. Similar to the theory of patron-client relationships, this theory manages to grasp the essence of relationships in Thai society, where there are no equal relationships in the system even between two men in the same political position. By contrast, it points out that when cooperative action takes place in the community, it is an essentially short-term exchange negotiated between individuals and based on balanced

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<sup>29</sup> Hanks, 1979, pp. 95-96

<sup>30</sup> Hanks, 1979, p. 99

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 229



reciprocity.<sup>32</sup> Also, the kinship system theory places more emphasis on inter-personal, and not inter-group relations. Kemp argues that patron-client relationships fall into the ‘continuum of personalism’ with kinship system sat one end and the exercise of ‘explicit power and authority over the mass of the “freeman” population’ at the other end.<sup>33</sup> This theory reflects the fact that Thais normally refer to others as if they were related as kin, even though they may just have met for the first time. If the age difference is not so great, one is either bigger (*pee*) or younger (*nong*) brother or sister to the other. Or if the age difference is considerable, the senior is either uncle or aunt (*loong* or *nah*) to the other.

This was evident in both villages under study. Even in Ban Tao Fai, where most villagers had different origins and were not related to each other, they called each other *nah*. The senior ones – *pee*, uncles and aunts – are supposed to provide the junior ones – *nong*, nieces and nephews or *laarn*, with support and protection when asked for, while the junior ones are supposed to provide their seniors with help when asked for. During his premiership in the 1980s, Prem was called by his subordinates, and known widely by all Thais, as *Pa*, a Chinese term meaning dad or father, simply because he was then in the highest position in Thai politics and administration. In spite of all this, the idiom and ideology of patron-clients relationships are still used widely in the field. In trying to distinguish the Thai style patron-clients relationships from its general usage, Arghiros denotes that Thai political relationships ‘are generally instrumental, short-term, without any personal component and may be mediated only by a cash transaction’.<sup>34</sup>

Both concepts of power relations mentioned here are equally important to understand the dynamics of power in Thai localities. In the context of a Thai village, where most of the villagers were of the same social and economic status, not all influential persons could acquire power. Power means higher social status and thus to acquire it, one needs to have not only charisma, which is often already associated with influence, but also support from one’s relatives or fellow members of the same social group who would hope to share the privileges associated with power. Also, one needs to build his own political network by helping out those who need it in exchange for support and for otherwise one would be considered as a tight person.

Both patron-client and kinship system are evident in any given village in Thailand. As this thesis unravels, in one of the settings, where most of the villagers are immigrants from different origins the kinship system still played major role in the election of the first village

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<sup>32</sup> Kemp, 1991, p. 320

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, pp. 63-64

<sup>34</sup> Arghiros, 2001, p. 7

headman. Not only that the villagers who came from the same region, who shared speaking dialect, taste, and ways of thinking, considered themselves as kin to each other, and thus are divided into groups based on their origins. But also the representative of the biggest family of the biggest group was elected as the first village headman. Only about ten years later that the real influential figures who had strong charisma and had helped solving crime for the villagers emerged as the prominent leaders. As will be revealed in the later chapter, he was elected as the second village headman not only because he had strong leadership but also because the villagers felt gratitude to him. In the other setting of this research, where all villagers are related to each other as kin and are very much attached to their extended family or clan, influential figures are not always those who came from the biggest clan or family. Despite the fact that positions in the local committee was, most of the time, reserved only for those who came from the biggest extended families in the village, the charismatic persons who came from small clan network were also influential among young villagers. As will be revealed in the later chapter, because of his strong leadership and the fact that he had always helped out other villagers, he was adored by most of the villagers and was later elected as the first office holder who did not come from big extended family.

### *Thai villages and communities*

Two facts about the Thai village and community need to be clarified before any study on the village and community in Thailand. Firstly, the image of the peasant village community being the primordial base from which the wider, more complex society has emerged cannot be used in the Thai case. Indeed, the Thai village of today was artificially established as the smallest unit of territorial administration during the famous regional and territorial administrative reforms of King Chulalongkorn, initiated in 1893. Secondly, because the village is a state creation, it should not be treated as a community; its boundaries are of a physical rather than cultural nature. The romantic conceptualization of village communities as relatively isolated, fairly closed, corporate groupings of people within which most aspects of everyday life are constrained – which has long been a bedrock concept of studies for Thai and international scholars – is indeed a myth.

Under the *thesaphiban* system – a system of territorial administration established during the reforms of the 1890s – the boundary of a village was defined by the number of households, being between five and twenty houses.<sup>35</sup> Later, in 1914, a village was defined on the basis not of the number of inhabitants but on natural features of the locality.<sup>36</sup> The formation of a village was

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<sup>35</sup> Tej, 1977, p. 109-111.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 198.

most often the result of the outgrowth of an older village. As the number of people in a village increased, some villagers would migrate to settle on virgin land, taking with them their beliefs, norms, and culture. It is therefore possible to say that culture differentiation can be detected by region, where villagers' livelihoods and economic activities can be differentiated, rather than by village, and that in the newly settled villages situated on the borders of different regions, it is almost impossible to identify a particular village's culture. As was evident in one of the two villages under study here, a clash of regional cultures can be expected in such villages.

In Thailand, a community may exist regardless of village boundaries. Indeed, just a small number of people living together can constitute a community. Because a village's boundary was drawn by the state, it is likely that there was more than one community, or part of a community, in one village, or that, as in the case of the two villages under study here, one community was physically divided into many villages. As is evident in the two villages under study, some villagers are more attached to another village than to the one in which they live in. Some villagers who have recently migrated to settle down in a new village are not attached to their new village's related affairs to the same extent as they are attached to those of their old village. This happens quite commonly when villagers build new houses next to their parents' and the houses happen to be in a new village. It is also common when villagers' fields or farms are located outside the village in which they reside. Evidently, the villagers feel more attached to what happens in the village their fields are part of because that is what affects them more directly and because they can relate themselves more to such villages.

Indeed, village in Thailand is not a social or political, but merely an administrating unit. But even so, political development at this level is very much in the interest of the government, government officials, politicians, and academics for it was perceived as a development at a grass roots level. Evidently, local development policies have increasingly been implemented at a village level. Therefore, a study on the dynamics of power at this level contributes to a better understanding on Thai politics at all other levels.

### *Theoretical approaches*

When mentioned in this thesis, power means both 'power over' and 'power to'. When I investigate 'power' and the dynamics of it, I look into the power which is held not only through delegated authority, but also through social class, personal or group charisma, ascribed power, expertise, persuasion, knowledge, money, force, moral persuasion, and social influence of tradition. As this thesis unravels, at the smallest unit of administration like village, power which are exercised on everyday basis is not much of the authority, but the control over agendas.

Similar to Lukes argument on the second dimension of power, the powerful figures of both villages under study, were considered powerful not merely because they gave orders to the villagers, but more so because they could control the topics the villagers were discussing on. Through my observation, I identified the powerful figure from the person the villagers listened to and followed suggestions even though no order or instruction was given.

With or without authority or any official position, the powerful figures of both villages, did not only initiate the topics of their choice to be discussed in the meeting, but also managed to lead the direction of the discussions and interrupt or stop any opposing ideas or difficult to answer questions from the villagers. For example, in one village under study, where there was a regular monthly meeting among the villagers, the powerful figures, who controlled the microphone, only announced news they received from the district office and kept telling the villagers that they worked hard for the villagers. As this thesis argues, this was to create a status for themselves as the only mediators between the government officials and the villagers. Also, when the villagers started to ask questions they did not want to answer, they suddenly changed the topic or told the villagers to behave themselves and to be more cooperative and not causing problem. The control over agendas is not exclusively limited to the village meeting only. As was evident in the other village under study, where there was no regular meeting between the villagers and their leaders, the control over agendas were exhibited in any casual conversation of the villagers. Unlike the previous case, the most powerful figure did not have to say anything in order to change the subject of discussion, but acting uncomfortable.

These powerful figures had not always used coercion to gain control over agenda. In fact, time and place were important factors determining the level of coercion used. When outside the monthly meeting, the powerful figures of the first village were much softer to the villagers. Then and there, he managed to control the agenda for being charming and charismatic. It should not be assumed, however, that all powerful figures were charismatic. As was evident in both villages under study, some of the powerful figures did not have the strong personality or charisma, but very small voice, hearing problem and difficulties to finish the sentence. In order to understand the reason why someone became so powerful, one needs to look back to the time when the relationship between the powerful figures and the villagers developed. After spending a certain amount of time researching on the history of the villagers, I learned that some of them used to be very kind to the villagers but had later become fierce to the villagers while some of them used to be local thieves but later act as charismatic person. That is, the most powerful figure of one village used to be very charismatic, soft spoken with strong leadership. He used to initiate plan to set up a guarding system for the whole village when a group of fierce burglar and

rapists was in the area by having all male villagers taking turn to guard the village at night. He was later elected as the village headman and continued to provide the villagers with helps and good advices. Only when the villagers found out about his assistant's corruption in one of local committee that he became more protective of his and his team of assistants' reputation that he started to not let other people outside his close circle of relatives and friends to be part of any local committee and to keep all information about the work of the committee for himself and to not let anyone asking any question about his work. Differently, the most powerful figure in the other village used to be a local thief stealing cow, buffalo, and cash from the villagers. He used to be very fierce and loud speaker. Only after he was believe to have killed one of his opponents that his fearfulness was at its peak and he started to act as a nice guy. As this thesis argues, he did not have to act fearful anymore because everybody was already afraid of him.

By investigating changes in the dynamics of power, this thesis first analyzes the distinctive characteristics of the Village Fund Project. Also, it investigates changes on how the power is exercised, and the way in which it is gained, distributed and preserved by the powerful figures, and challenged by other political actors. That is, it does not only look back into the reason why such powerful figures had become powerful in the first place, but also examines the process in which they were elected as member of the Village Fund committee and inspects if there were any competitor and what strategies they used to win in that election. Additionally, it studies the committee structure and map out the relations all other committee members had with the powerful figures with an intention to identify the pattern of how power was distributed and enhanced. Apart from this, it analyzes the way the powerful figures worked or managed the project, how the committee were functioned, why some duties and responsibilities were assigned to some members of the committee and not the others, how these members performed their tasks. In addition, it investigates the level of, and the way in which the villagers' participated in the project and in the work of the committee. Also, it studies changes in the characteristics of the powerful figures in order to unravel changes in their strategies to gain more or gain back their popularity and supports from the villagers.

Given that one event was the result of many others that happened before, this thesis does not treat the Village Fund Project as the one and only local development policy having effects on the dynamics of power. Therefore it also looks into and analyzes changes in the dynamics of power which happened as the result of an implementation of other local development policies. Having said this, this thesis also examines socio-economic and political changes, which took place before and during the time the policy was implemented. In addition, it investigates the effects of the villagers' social and political norms, and social and production relations, on the

villagers' political characteristics and behaviours. Only by doing this, can we determine to what extent the changes in the dynamics of local power resulted from the Village Fund Project and not from other factors.

### **Methodology and the settings of the study**

In investigating changes in the dynamics of local power, which occurred after the implementation of the VFP in 2001, I employ a comparative methodology. This thesis investigates the dynamics of local power both before and after the VFP was implemented and then compares and contrasts these different periods in order to define the changes. In doing so, I examine changes in local power from not one but three different perspectives. I analyze transformations not only in the political and administrative facets of power, but also in terms of social and economic relations. It should be noted, however, that this is not to view the social and economic sphere as merely part of all observable phenomena, but as important factors having effects on the dynamics of power. To a great extent, differences in the social and economic spheres, in which the political structure of each locality functions, can account for differences in the political behaviour of villagers in different regions. Only when we understand the villagers' social interrelations, their roles, responsibilities, and place within the economic activities and their relations of production, are we then able to specify their status and roles in local politics. Thus we can better understand why some villagers were superior in status to others, why they initiated and used certain strategies rather than others to gain, use, preserve, and enhance their power and influence over others, and why their opponents chose to challenge their power and influence the way they did.

To this end, this thesis investigates changes in the villagers and their leaders' perception of power, changes in the qualifications and characteristics of the leaders, changes in the strategies they used to gain, preserve, and enhance their power, changes in the way they used their power both within and outside the project committees, changes in how the villagers participated in the projects and in the work of the committees, and changes in the way in which power was challenged by the leaders' opponents. In addition, it explores the villagers' history, their social and production interrelations and social and political norms, all of which are factors that have an effect, enabling or hindering, on the dynamics of local power. Indeed, the approach of study used in this thesis was not so much a structural one, but more of a behavioural or ethnographic one. The ethnographic approach has been used in Thai political studies before and has proved to be helpful in explaining why people behave in a certain way and not in others. For instance, Arghiros adopted a similar approach in researching the implementation of the Sub-

district Administrative Organization (SAO) and its effects on the level of democracy, development, and decentralization in two sub-districts in provincial Thailand. He examines not only electoral competition and the structure of the SAO, but also the other constraints that operate on institutions, such as a bureaucratic dominance, and their institutional cultures. Having said this, the period he spent on field research – from 1989-90, and from 1995-97 – was substantially longer than mine.<sup>37</sup>

### *The selection of research sites*

Due to time constraints, I could conduct research in only two villages. The first was the village of Ban Tao Fai, of Buaban sub-district, Tara district, Lopburi province, which is situated in the northern part of the Central Plain, about 300 kilometres from Bangkok. The second was the village of Ban Ton Mai, of Krabi Lek sub-district, Klang district, Krabi province, which is situated on the west coast in the south of Thailand, about 800 kilometres from Bangkok. Although the names of the sub-districts, districts and provinces are real, the names of both villages under study are not.

I used different criteria in selecting the settings of this thesis. The first was the rural condition of the villages. This criteria was used so that the thesis' findings would be more valuable as comparative cases for other less developed countries, where most villages are rural. The villagers of both villages under study worked in the agricultural sector. The villages' physical infrastructure was still rudimentary, in that a complete irrigation system had yet to be developed and street lamps had been erected only on main roads. Apart from this, the two villages were chosen carefully on the basis that they were good representatives of other villages in rural Thailand, and in other countries with a similar level of socio-economic development. I used many characteristics of the village as determining factors, including the age and the livelihood of the villagers, their economic activity, and their social and political relations. That is, I chose the two villages which are different from each other in most, if not all, characteristics.

Ban Tao Fai was chosen as a representative of 'newer' villages, since the village only originated in the late 1960s. Ban Ton Mai of Krabi province was chosen as a representative of 'older' villages, as its history dates back to the time of King Chulalongkorn's administrative reforms, when the village, or *mu baan*, was first established as the smallest unit of administration. Ban Tao Fai was also chosen as a representative of villages where the villagers' social and political interrelation can be best characterized as that of patron and client, or an

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<sup>37</sup> For more information on Arghiros's methodology, see Arghiros, 2001, pp.9-12, and pp. 275-276.

interrelation that is based on reciprocity between those who provide help in different forms and those who receive it. On a similar basis, Ban Ton Mai is chosen because it well represents other villages in Thailand where the villagers' social and political interrelations could be best characterized in terms of kinship.

Furthermore, the two villages were chosen for the fact that they are situated in different regions of Thailand, where the different climate and livelihoods yield different economic activities. Ban Tao Fai, which is situated in the northern part of the central plain and the western part of the northeast, is a good representative of most villages in the north, the northeast, and the central plain where the climate is hot and dry and most, if not all of the villagers are *tham rai*, or engaged in growing perennial crops. By contrast, Ban Ton Mai, which is situated in the south of the country, can represent all other villages in the south and some villages in the central plain where the climate is warm and most, if not all of the villagers are *tham suan*, or growing annual crops.

Apart from this, I choose the two villages because of the fact that I had close relatives who had become long term residents in each of them, who could introduce me and my research to the villagers, which helps ensure access to reliable and valid data. The fact that I already had close personal connections with some of the villagers was crucial for this study; otherwise, with a limited time frame of only four months in which to conduct field research in each village, I would not have had enough time to establish myself as a trustworthy researcher and outsider, and would not have been able to get to know and to carry out in-depth interviews and conversations with all the villagers in the two villages. Therefore, I chose Ban Tao Fai, where my grandmother had resided as a nun in a local temple for 23 years, and Ban Ton Mai, where my aunt, who was married to a local villager, had lived and worked as a teacher in a local school for 25 years.

Notably, studying not just one, but two, villages provided me with great a opportunity to not only conduct extensive qualitative research, but to also compare and contrast changes in the dynamics of power in two villages in order to distinguish changes which resulted from the VFP implementation from changes which resulted from their evolution over time.

### *Generalization of the findings*

It is reasonable to express concern over the matter of generalization of the findings of the two villages under study, given that there are 75,547 total villages and communities nationwide. As this thesis is the product of qualitative research, what matters is not the number of the village being studied, but the similarities the two villages under study share with the other villages in



Thailand and in other countries and the fact that each of the two villages can represent other villages in the same categories. By using the criteria discussed above, I am certain that the readers will find that the majority of villages in Thailand share similar features with those of the two villages under study.

Villages in Thailand vary widely in terms of their history, and length of origins. While the notion of the ‘Thai village’ is often casually invoked as if dating from time immemorial – and the history of some older villages does date back to the time prior to King Chulalongkorn’s administrative reforms – some younger villages were created less than a decade ago. In fact, as the population grows, new villages and communities are constantly emerging. The relative age of the village implies not only a different history of the village, but also a different degree and type of the villagers’ social and political interrelations. The age criteria I used to choose the settings allowed me to cover both old and new villages. It is hoped that readers will find it profitable to generalize the findings of each village to other villages with similar age, history, and similar villagers’ interrelations.

The different livelihood and economic activities of the villagers have significant effects on village interrelations. These livelihood factors considerably impact on how villagers arrange different social and political structure and strata within the village. The economic activity criteria I used cover a wide range of the villagers’ economic activities. They covers not only the economic activity of *tham rai* but also *tham suan*. Even though *tham naa*, or growing wet rice, is another important type of economic activity for Thai rural villagers;, I chose not to study this simply because the political aspects of such villages have already been explored in detail by other scholars. For example, Turton, in 1975, already investigated the social, economic, and political activities of villagers engaged in wet rice agriculture in the northern part of Thailand, with an intention to map the jural and political structure of the villagers. Ananya, in 1985, already discussed socio-economic and political life of contemporary wet rice agriculture farmers in the central plain of Thailand who had become labourers. More recently, Aghiros, in 1993, 1995, and 2001, extensively investigated the social and economic aspects of the villagers’ life and politics within one sub-district in central plain where the villagers are *tham naa*.

The extensive scholarship focusing on the villagers who are engaged in *tham naa* has somehow misled many readers into assuming that all Thai villagers in rural areas are *tham naa*. The socio-economic and political background of those who *tham suan* and *tham rai* are thus not yet explored and neglected. Because there are few, if any, studies on the economic and social background of Thai villagers engaged in *tham rai* and *tham suan*, I decided to give such villages the focused attention they deserve and dedicate two isolated but comparable chapters—chapters

2 and 3—to their analysis. As proved by the findings of this thesis, the different livelihood and economic activity of the villagers does have considerable effects on their social and political activities. For example, because *tham rai* requires the villagers of Ban Tao Fai to spend all day working in the field while *tham suan* requires the villagers of Ban Ton Mai to spend only a few hours a day working in the field, the villagers of Ban Ton Mai have more free time to socialize and discuss political matters, and thus seem to be more active politically.

In short, generalizing about Thai villages is fraught with problems, because of the wide range of historical and economic settings within which villagers operate in different parts of the country. It is impossible to say with confidence that the political structures and issues encountered in the villages studied here may be widely found across Thailand. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the choice of two very different villages, coupled with my constant critical awareness concerning the range of issues at stake, may have helped me to offer conclusions which have some wider salience beyond the two cases scrutinized in depth.

### *The fieldwork and data collection*

In this thesis information has been gathered by a quasi-participatory observation method, which means that I was living in the villages—observing and taking part in most, if not all, of the villager's activities—as a researcher, who was also an outsider. Investigation of what happened before I started my fieldwork, including the history of the villages and their inhabitants, was conducted mostly through in-depth and semi-casual conversations with a large number of villagers. Questions had been planned in advance and were asked in a casual way, rather than in a formal manner, while I was helping informants with their work, visiting them in their home, or attending social functions with them. Further information was elicited by studying existing reports of local working groups and committees. Information on what happened once I started my field research was gathered mostly through personal observation, interviews, and in-depth and semi-casual conversations with local leaders and large numbers of villagers, and by studying reports of the Village Fund Committee and other local working groups and committees.

By spending a substantial amount of time with the villagers and participating in their social functions, I was able to gain an understanding from the villagers' perspectives, rather than impose my own viewpoints, with regards to their political behaviours. This qualitative method has made it possible for this thesis to describe the interactions and relations between the villagers in unprecedented detail.

The fact that both my grandmother and my aunt were respected and trusted figures in the villages was crucial in making my methodology work. As will be discussed in detail in later

chapters, both religious leaders and teachers are prominent local figures of respect in Thai rural areas. Even though the degree of their influence varies due to many factors, the fact that both my grandmother and aunt have possessed their status for a long time and have never been involved in scandal make them trustworthy. That they personally introduced me and my research intentions to the villagers proved to be a considerable advantage. The fact that I was introduced as a relative of respected and trusted figures conveys the message that I, too, am a trustworthy person and not much of an outsider.

I spent four months in each of the two villages. I started my fieldwork in Ban Tao Fai in September 2003. I resided in a local temple, which was situated north of the village, with my grandmother. During the first week, I was introduced to a number of villagers, including the leaders, by my grandmother and her fellow nuns in the temple. The chairman of Buaban Sub-district Administration Organization, who was also a former *phu yai ban* of the village, later officially introduced me to most of the villagers at the monthly village meeting. As it turned out, staying in the temple was of considerable benefit to my research. As I was staying in the temple, it was common for me to wear a white robe and observe the eight silas, the Buddhist precepts for laymen. When most, if not all, of the villagers saw that they believed that I would not lie to them when I promised them that I would not relay any information they had given me to other villagers or any government officials. Also, because a large number of the elder villagers who regularly come to the temple to help the nuns cooking and cleaning the temple compound, or to pray in the temple hall, often saw me talking and helping the nuns and the monks, they believed that I was a 'good person' and told their relatives back in the village to cooperate with me.

While I was in the village, I visited villagers in their houses and in their fields. Most of the time, interviews and conversations were conducted while I was helping villagers with their work on their farms, with their errands in their household, or while I was accompanying them to the hospital, about 30 kilometres away from the village. Because *tham rai* requires a lot of labour, I was quite welcome to join the villagers by offering free labour while they worked on the farm. Also, I was either invited, or invited myself, to all domestic and ritual events, social functions, and the monthly village meetings. During my stay, I also interviewed an Assistant District Officer, or *palat amphoe*, at the District Office, for information on previous local elections. On that occasion, I met with a number of government officials, who had worked closely with the villagers of Ban Tao Fai and their leaders, and learned a lot from their perceptions of Ban Tao Fai, its leaders and the villagers. I left Ban Tao Fai on the 3 January 2004 to start field research in Ban Ton Mai.

In Ban Ton Mai, I resided with my aunt in her house. Due to the political violence around the village and the sub-district following the political killing of a former head of Krabi Lek SAO in 2000—allegedly by the present chairman of the SAO—my aunt and her husband, who was a local and also worked as a teacher at the local school, feared for my safety and accompanied me to every house in the village to introduce me personally to the villagers. The chairman of the SAO, who was also a resident of Ban Ton Mai, was very suspicious of my research and did not like the fact that I asked villagers so many questions, even though the questions were not related to him or the SAO. The tension was eased when one of my supervisors, Professor McCargo, decided to visit me in the village and talked to the SAO chairman about my work. Unlike in Ban Tao Fai, due to my lack of relevant skills, I was not allowed to help out the villagers on their farms. Most of the interviews and in-depth and casual conversations were thus conducted when the villagers got back from their farms late in the morning or in the afternoon, in their houses or nearby coffee shops, or when I attended the villagers' social functions, such as funerals, birthday parties and any other parties they decided to throw. I left Ban Ton Mai in May 2004. However, I went back to visit both villages a couple of times afterwards to follow up on the development of the VFP implementation from May 2004 to June 2004 and from January 2005-March 2005.

#### *The validity of the data*

Although I enjoyed good and friendly relationships with most of the villagers, I encountered a number of difficulties due to the fact that I was not a local. Not only did I need to spend a lot of time gathering and trying to digest and understand information, but also I needed to discard some false information from certain local leaders and villagers who lied with the intention of distracting my attention away from them or distorting the truth, and from some villagers who did not really remember events and facts that I asked about or did not understand them sufficiently.

In investigating what had already happened before I got to the villages, I depended solely on the information derived from the villagers. It turned out, however, that the information the villagers gave me was not complete or accurate because most of them had already forgot details and had not paid much attention to the matters in question. Also, because some of the matters I asked about were directly related to them or to their relatives, the villagers often experienced difficulty providing 'objective' accounts of what really taken place. Some villagers who are closely related to the persons in question had sometimes lied about what happened or distorted the facts. Therefore, I had to conduct in-depth interviews with almost everyone in the two villages, so that I would be able to cross-reference their accounts with each other.

Group and individual interviews usually yielded different results. In both villages, even though the villagers seemed to be more enthusiastic when there were interviewed in a group, they did not always speak more openly or provide me with more information. In fact, only a few of them in the group led the conversation and they would control the agenda while the rest nodded along or loudly cheered when the speaker was talking about a person they strongly liked or disliked. It is worth noting that, in group interviews, no one was willing to reveal their disagreements with such persons who spoke. As I found out, this was not because they were afraid of these persons, but because they did not want me to witness any arguments or think that they were not getting along. Even though they believed that the findings of my thesis would not be published in any newspaper, but would be kept in the university's library, they still wanted the readers to think of their village as a happy and harmonious village. This, however, does not mean that the group interview was not at all useful for my research. From group interviews, I got to know the characteristics of the villagers and their interrelations. Also, because I was more welcome in group interviews than in the villagers' homes when they were alone, it was rather easier to follow up with an individual interview later after I already had group interview. In comparison, the one-on-one interview yielded more details about the events and the persons in question. The villagers were not distracted by their friends and were able to concentrate on the details. When asked the same questions or if they fully agreed with what their friend told me, the villagers thus became comfortable enough to tell me in detail why they did not.

Additionally, the villagers of both villages were understandably reluctant to talk openly with a tape recorder present. Arguably this was mainly because prior to my field research there had been political incidents in both villages which the villagers did not want to comment on formally, including a corruption scandal in Ban Tao Fai, in which village leaders were implicated, and a political killing in Ban Ton Mai, where a former head of the administrative committee of Krabi Lek SAO was killed, allegedly by the present chairman of Krabi Lek SAO, who resided in Ban Ton Mai. Both incidents involved a number of interviews with tape recorder by police officers and local news agents but ended up with no official witnesses. Clearly, the villagers did not want to be quoted or referred to as sources. Therefore, I did not record my conversations with them on tape. Also, some villagers asked me not to note down some of what they told me. Most of the information, therefore, was either noted down on paper during the interviews or was noted down at a later time. My own opinions and notes were added later when I went back to the temple or to the house.

Being aware that as an outsider I might easily be misled by the villagers, I was very careful in choosing when and to whom the questions should be asked. During the first month in

each village, I mostly asked questions about the villages' history, the villagers' name, qualifications and relation to each other, details on their economic activity, and whether or not they were member of any local committees and working groups and their reasons for joining and not joining them. I sometimes asked what the villagers thought of the leaders and their activities, but mostly such inquiries met with silence or lies. The villagers' trust of me and my work grew over time and by the third month I was able to ask more personal questions and discard invalid information derived during the first month. I started to ask questions and managed to get answers about what the villagers really think of the leaders and their work by the third month I was in the village, when most, if not all, of the villagers had known and talked to me in person and were comfortable having me hanging around and within their houses. To ensure the validity of the data, I cross checked and triangulated all the information by asking the same questions about an event to persons representing at least three different perspectives, including the person in question, the villagers who like that person or support his/her action, and the villagers who dislike the person or disagree with his/her action. This, however, was not only for the benefit of finding out both sides of a story to ensure valid data, but also to determine which side that particular villagers took.

Observation turned out to be the most useful and reliable method. I gained most of my information by listening to the villagers' conversations and observing them. I managed to catch both non-verbal expressions and unprepared verbal expressions while observing them as they interacted with one another. I was able to cross check the information the villagers gave to me and to reconsider the source of some allegations. I could understand the interrelations of the villagers by observing them performing social functions. Only because of this, I learned that there was clear division between the villagers who came from different provinces in Ban Tao Fai, so much was this the case that only those who came from the same province socialized with each other. Similarly, I learned that everyone in Ban Ton Mai was related to each other as kin. Also, only through my observation in Ban Tao Fai's monthly meetings, I was able to conclude that most of the villagers were not comfortable with the way the leaders controlled the agenda but did not express their feeling for fear of being punished by them. By using these methods, towards the end of my fieldwork I was able to discard a substantial amount of information that was not directly involved with the main questions of the thesis or were not true.

#### *The researcher's status and role in the villages*

Realizing that the villagers' perception of me would determine the level of their willingness to cooperate with my work, I was very careful to ensure a neutral status and role in the local

politics of both villages. I made considerable effort not to be perceived as being closer to some important figures rather than others or as taking sides with anyone in the villages. This was to ensure that I would not be seen as a spy from or a supporter of any side of village adversaries, so that all villagers would cooperate with me equally.

Having my relatives introduce me personally to the villagers significantly facilitated the image of my neutrality. But despite my intentions, the chairman of the Buaban SAO took the liberty of officially introducing me to the villagers in the monthly village meeting. As I predicted, most of the villagers thought that I knew him in person for sometime before I started my fieldwork, and thus only spoke of him very highly. It took me sometime after that to distance myself from the chairman, his team mates, and relatives, and for the villagers to begin to tell me what they really thought about him, his team, and their style of working by the second month. This problem did not occur when I was in Ban Ton Mai as I was more careful not to let anyone but my aunt and uncle initially introduce me to the villagers.

In an attempt to limit the effect of my presence on the villagers' social and political interrelations and on the villages' politics, I tried hard to avoid answering the villagers' questions on what I thought about the matters and the persons. It is worth noting that this kind of question was directed to me more often as time passed and my relationship with the villagers grew closer. Towards the second half of my field research, the villagers not only felt more comfortable with my presence, but also started to ask for my advice and opinion on different things, such as what their children should do after finishing high school, or what I thought about the government. A number of villagers from both villages also asked me to investigate the work of their local committees. For example, the young male villagers of Ban Tao Fai asked me to investigate corruption within the Saving for Producing Committee and the Poverty Alleviation Programme. A few of them also tried to convince me to investigate and then disclose my findings to the authorities in Bangkok and to the press. Even though I enjoyed a good relationship with the villagers and found some activities suspicious, I chose not to reveal any information derived from my research to them, as I did not want to be a factor leading to any changes in the village's local politics. This, however, led to another problem when the same villagers thought I was taking sides with the leaders and stopped talking to me for some time. Fortunately, however, as time passed the same villagers were impressed with my determination to keep my sources confidential and told me more about what they thought, with the hope that their information would appear in my thesis. In the same way, my presence in Ban Tao Fai's monthly village meeting had effects on the leaders' behaviour. According to the villagers, the leaders were noticeably more polite towards them and were more willing to reveal more

information about the work of the local committee. These changes, however, were not permanent. In fact, when I went back to visit the village again after my fieldwork was officially completed, the leaders did not feel the need to 'perform' as much as they used to when I was conducting research.

At certain times I was also asked to become involved more directly in the local politics of the villages. I am known to be experienced as a master of ceremonies and a singer. During the election campaign for the Krabi Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO) in Ban Ton Mai, I was asked by all of the candidates to join them on stage, despite the fact that some of them were very suspicious of the true intention of my research activities. Initially I refused, as I did not want to be perceived as one of their supporters, but they announced to the villagers anyway that I would and introduced me as a knowledgeable person who knew a great deal about the work of the PAO and who should be elected. They also said that I should not say no if I was really neutral. In trying to limit my influence to the villagers, when I went on stage I only told the villagers what a PAO was, and urged them all to participate in the election. Also, I decided that I would join every one of the candidates on stage, purely to sing songs; this proved necessary to be seen as a neutral person with regard to politics.

### *Isolating the impacts of the VFP*

In both villages there were other local development programs underway by the time the VFP was implemented. These included programs initiated by the central authority to be implemented nationwide, such as the programme to create works and income among the female villagers, the Saving for Producing Programme (SPP) and the Poverty Alleviation Project (PAP), and those initiated locally, such as the Self Sufficient Economic Fund of Ban Tao Fai and the Water-Pipe Laying Project of Ban Ton Mai. It is thus crucial for this thesis to isolate the impacts on changes in the dynamics of power from those of other programs. This is not only to identify which changes on the dynamics of power indeed resulted from the VFP, but also to reveal whether or not there were other factors effecting the changes in the dynamics of power.

I therefore paid substantial attention on the implementation of all programmes. The programmes' objectives, rules and regulations, the qualifications of the working committee, their performance, and the villagers' participation to the programmes were investigated. Of all the programmes mentioned, the impact of the SPP on the dynamics of power was quite similar to the VFP mainly because, like the VFP, the SPP created a local ad hoc committee to run the program, and one of its objectives was to make cheap and small loans to villagers. In making this comparison, it was challenging to isolate the relative impact of the two programmes in both



villages. To do this I examined differences in the villagers' perception of the programmes, their participation in the programmes, the size of loan provided, the programme rules and regulations, the qualifications of the committee members and their performance, and the problems with implementation.

Even though the SPP was initiated by the central government to be implemented nationwide, it did not begin at the same time in each village. In the case of Ban Tao Fai, the SPP had been implemented for six years before the VFP. The villagers were somewhat familiar with the problems surrounding the implementation of the SPP, and suspected that it would happen again with the VFP. In the case of Ban Ton Mai, the SPP had been in operation for only four months before the VFP started. By analyzing all other relevant factors, I was able to conclude that in the case of Ban Tao Fai, the villagers' need for change had occurred before the VFP was implemented. In trying to maintain their status and power, the leaders thus felt the need to gain control of the VFP to avoid the emergence of the potential new leaders, and to perform well to secure their status. The implementation of the VFP thus became a threat to the existing leaders' already unstable power. In contrast, because the two programmes were implemented almost at the same time in their village, different leaders of Ban Ton Mai who were members of the two committees used each as a stage to show off their efficiency. They competed to secure their positions and status with the hope to emerge as the ultimate leaders of the village. The implementation of the VFP thus became an opportunity for potential leaders to perform, and for the villagers to observe their performances.

### **Structure of the study**

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter provides a review of the literature on the development of Thai politics, the regional and territorial administration and its effects on local politics and the dynamics of local power. Its main purpose is to examine the relations between the manner in which governments have come to power, and how their power have been derived, and the type of local governments and local development policies they have established and implemented, and to reveal how local politics have been transformed as a result of the establishment of different forms of local government. The second chapter investigates the two villages' social, economic backgrounds, including the villagers' history, origins, livelihood, economic activities, and their social and production interrelations, and shows how these factors had affected the dynamics of power within the villages. The third and fourth chapters unravel the dynamics of local power and some important changes in the politics of Ban Tao Fai and Ban Ton Mai respectively that occurred prior to the implementation of the VFP in 2001. They

investigate how power had been perceived by the leaders and the villagers, the qualifications and characteristics of the local leaders, how they had gained, used, distributed, preserved, and enhanced their power and influence, and how their power was challenged by others, through examining the implementation of existing local development projects established before the VFP. The fifth and sixth chapters then look into the dynamics of power after the VFP was implemented in 2001 in Ban Tao Fai and Ban Ton Mai respectively, investigate the differences, and analyze to what extent these changes occurred as a result of the implementation of the VFP, and to what extent they were due to other factors. The seventh chapter sums up all the arguments on impacts of the VFP on changes in the dynamics of power and concludes with some implications of the thesis' findings for the development of Thai local politics.

## **Chapter 1**

### **The Development of Thai Regional and Local Administration, and the Transformation of Local Politics**

This chapter aims to provide the reader with a detailed analysis of the development of regional and local administration in Thailand, and the transformation of local politics as a result of political change at a national level. It does so by reviewing debates to draw a relationship between changes in Thai politics at a national level, the development of regional and local administration, and the transformation of local politics in rural areas, from the thirteenth century to 2004. It argues that local administration in Thailand has been used as a government tool for gaining or regaining political power. That is, the manner in which governments have come to power and how their power has been derived has a significant relation to the type of local governments they have established. Less democratic governments would try to legitimize their grip on power by establishing local governments with less autonomy, and over which they could exert extensive control, while more democratic governments would establish local governments with a higher degree of autonomy.

To this end, this chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part examines the development of regional and local administration in Thailand from the thirteenth century up to 2004, as an instrument used by leaders to gain political power at a national level. It does so by exploring factors or situations that led to changes in the political regime, and investigates the leaders' motivations for implementing regional and local administrative policies. The pace of development is divided into eight periods, as follow:

- King Chulalongkorn and the centralization of the Thai state (1868-1932)
- Constitutional democracy and the localizing government (1932-1938)
- The military-led authoritarian regime and the bureaucratizing local government (1938-1958)
- The politics of 'despotic paternalism (1958-1963)
- The military rule and the quest for legitimacy (1963-1973)
- Parliamentary democracy and the development of local government (1973-1992)
- The demand for political reform and a series of decentralization policies (1992-2001)
- Popular politics and authoritarianism in disguise (2001-2004)

The second part analyzes the transformation of local Thai politics as a result of the development of the regional administration by looking at rural economic and political transformation, and at changes in the roles and characteristics of important figures in rural Thai communities.

### **Development of regional and local administration**

Since the first regime kingdom of Sukhothai in the thirteenth century,<sup>38</sup> Thailand has experienced many changes in its political system, from 'paternalism' to 'autocratic' and to 'democracy' regimes. Since constitutional democracy was established in 1932, Thailand has alternated between military-led authoritarianism and immature electoral politics. Indeed, since the first constitution was inaugurated in 1932, Thailand has had 16 different constitutions and 18 coups or coup attempts.<sup>39</sup> In line with this, the regional and local administration has been altered many times by different governments. Most, if not all, were implemented as attempts by the different governments to secure power and to establish a new power base for its elites and create new elites. That is, the governments created new local alliances by providing some groups with local administrative power. These local leaders would then, in one way or another, pay that government back by looking after its political and economic interests and even help in accumulating votes.

### *King Chulalongkorn and the centralization of the Thai state (1868-1932)*

In an attempt to regain power and wealth from the hands of the major nobles, who had become more competitive to the King over the control of labour due to the implementation of the Sakdina system,<sup>40</sup> to increase the crown's ability to extract labour, and to protect the country

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<sup>38</sup> Strictly speaking, Siam and Thailand were later inventions, despite their elements of continuity with the earlier Sukhothai and Ayuttaya kingdoms. During the Sukhothai period of 1257-1350, the polity of Siam, as Thailand was once called, was characterized by paternalism. That is, the Kings were believed to be 'fathers' to their subjects, who were counted as the King's children, ruling and protecting them with righteousness.

<sup>39</sup> On average, there was one coup every three years and four months.

<sup>40</sup> The 'Sakdina' system was introduced as a territorial administration at the beginning of the Ayudhaya period of 1350-1767. Under this regime, which could be best characterized as of 'master-to-servant', people were no longer considered as the children of Kings but as their subjects. In effect, provincial governors were made 'nobles' or members of the Ayudhayan bureaucracy and were granted control over manpower and wealth according to their importance, or rank, in the society. Their status was still that of the King's subordinates. Nevertheless, during this era, royal appointment was generally nominal; nobles' positions were generally hereditary. Despite changes in ruling dynasties, this pattern of regional administration was carried over into the Thonburi (1767-1782) and early Ratanakosin (1782-1867) periods without fundamental

from European imperialism,<sup>41</sup> King Chulalongkorn initiated massive administrative reforms in the early 1870s.<sup>42</sup> These reform, which included the creation of the modern Thai army in 1870,<sup>43</sup> in order to act as a deterrent to the British and French, who were steadily expanding their empires across mainland South East Asia, and the establishment of the Ministry of Interior in 1892, had for the first time created military and civilian bureaucrats who were royal officials answerable only to the King, not the nobles. In effect, previously diffused power was centralized in the hands of the King and his royal family, and the reforms ensured a successful expansion and intensification of government control.<sup>44</sup> Some have dubbed these reforms as a process of 'modernization' and 'nation building'.

For the regional administration, the '*thesapiban*' system, in which newly created civilian bureaucrats from the Ministry of Interior were sent to rule people in different regions, was established in 1892. The kingdom was divided into circles (*monthons*), headed by bureaucrats called '*samuh thesapiban*', or Lord Lieutenant, and each *monthon* was sub-divided into provinces and districts, administered by provincial governors and district officers respectively. All of these civil servants were subject to the rules and regulations of the Ministry of Interior. For the local administration, the Local Administration Law was established in 1897 after the successful trial of a new scheme, whereby local people were elected by other local people to administer their own locality, at Bang Pa-In district, Ayudhya Province.<sup>45</sup> Sub-districts and villages were created as smaller units of administration under the district and the province. For the first time in Thai history, local people nationwide were supposedly to elect or choose their own local leaders. That is to say, the village headman, or *phu yai ban*, was elected from among respected persons in the village, while the commune headman, or *kamnan*, was elected from all

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modifications. For details on social and economic transformation and changes in the power structure of the Siamese polity during the period before the reign of King Chulalongkorn, see Pasuk and Baker, 1995, pp. 211-215.

<sup>41</sup> Siam was affected by the imperial threat of Britain and France in various ways. For more information, see Tej (1977), especially pp. 49-61.

<sup>42</sup> For details on the reforms in the Ministry of Interior, see Tej (1977), and on the Ministry of Finance, see Brown (1975).

<sup>43</sup> A major development began in 1870, when the King introduced the salary system for the Royal Pages Body Guard division. In 1874, the various guard units were organized into the Royal Infantry following British patterns of military organization. In 1880, the troops were paid for their services, thus creating the nucleus of a standing army. In 1885, the Royal Army Military Academy was established to produce a Thai officer corps. In 1887, the Proclamation on Military Reform was issued, and an office was set up to oversee the planning of a modern national military system. In 1894, the Ministry of War was established, and in 1904, the National Defense Plan was founded. See Surachart, 1985, p. 27.

<sup>44</sup> Battye, 1974, pp. 544-550

<sup>45</sup> Government of Thailand, 2001, p. 2

the village headmen in that commune. Despite being elected to represent local interests and to cooperate with and assist district officers in local level administration, both positions were to report and be directly responsible to the District Officer, who was a government official. In effect, this meant that they were semi-government officials, not local representatives. As it turned out, the *thesaphiban* system, which in theory covered only the administration at the circle, province, and district levels, had penetrated further to the sub-district and village level.

During his reign, King Chulalongkorn also established Sanitation Districts as a form of local government. This was, however, only to serve the limited aims of the King – to have clean and tidy cities – rather than to decentralize any power to local people. It did not have sufficient autonomy to be called a local government. That is, he initially ordered the establishment of a Sanitation District as a type of local government in Bangkok, called the Bangkok Sanitary District, in 1897. But instead of being ‘local-self government’, whereby the council members were elected, it was in fact ‘Local Government by Government Officials’,<sup>46</sup> whereby all the administrators of the Sanitation District were appointed bureaucrats, whose status were ranked similarly to regional and local government officials. Later in 1905, after visiting Taachalom market in Samut Sakhon Province, and seeing that it was very dirty, the King also ordered the establishment of the Taachalom Sanitation District, using the same form of administration as that of the Bangkok Sanitation District. Satisfied with the resultant improvement in the cleanliness of the market, he ordered the promulgation of the Sanitation District Administration Law in 1908. The administrative structure of sanitation districts was the same as those of the Bangkok and Taachalom Sanitation Districts. At the end of his reign, there were 35 Sanitation Districts nationwide.

After King Chulalongkorn died, there were no major alterations or developments in regional and local administration during the last two decades of the absolute monarchy. Despite his two sons’ interests in democracy, no real changes were made during their reign. That is to say, during the reign of King Rama VI and King Rama VII, the Sanitation District system was neither changed into a more democratic system nor canceled. Also, in spite of King Rama VI’s interest in teaching Thai society about the idea of democracy, which led to the establishment of the first Municipal government – in which all the staff were elected - in Dusit Thani palace, and King Rama VII’s attempt to introduce a draft Municipal Administration Act in 1926, the draft was never promulgated due to the interruption caused by the 1932 revolution.

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<sup>46</sup> For discussion on the Interior Ministry’s control over the Sanitation Districts, see Tanet, 1997, pp. 136-147

*Constitutional democracy and localizing local government (1932-1938)*

The absolute monarchy had not gone unchallenged. Indeed, it was the bureaucrats created by the administrative reforms of King Chulalongkorn who turned themselves against King Chulalongkorn's two sons, King Rama VI and VII. That is, in 1912, during the reign of King Rama VI or King Vajiravudh (1910-1925), 23 young military officials, who were frustrated with the King's behaviour, staged the first coup against the King with the intention of replacing him with his younger brother, Prince Phitsanulok, who had been their teacher at the Military Academy in 1910, but failed.<sup>47</sup> Second, during the reign of King Rama VII, or King Prajadhipok, 102 military and civilian bureaucrats, who were supported by urban entrepreneurs, and called themselves the 'People's Party' or '*Khana ratsadon*', staged a successful coup to overthrow the absolute monarchy and established constitutional democracy.

Apart from the change in the regime, from absolute monarchy to constitutional democracy, the revolution of 1932 did not result in considerable change to the Thai polity. The absolute power that had been possessed by the King was not distributed to the people but was merely transferred to the hands of a small group of civilian bureaucrats and military officials. During the period of 1932- 1973, the various different governments could be characterized, at best, as nationalistic military regimes and, at worst, as authoritarian regimes. As many academics argue, this was due to the fact that the coup's leaders were not against absolutism as such but against the absolute monarchy, and therefore, they used democracy merely as an excuse to overthrow monarchical power. For example, Benedict Anderson states that the reason for both coups was the bureaucrats' frustration, which mainly stemmed from the fact that the military had no other role to play except for maintaining internal security. When King Rama VI created two more military organizations, a new unit under the Ministry of Palace to guard the royal residence and a national mass paramilitary corps called the 'Wild Tigers' or '*Sua pa*', in May 1911, the military's status and power were threatened. Military officers thus staged the first coup of 1912. The status of military and civilian bureaucrats was threatened once again during the reign of King Rama VII, when the King ordered a cut in their salaries ordered in order to help alleviate the economic crisis and a lack of state funds.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, Girling notes four main reasons for the coup of 1932.<sup>49</sup> Firstly, the King and princes' monopoly on power led to dissatisfaction to the growing urban society of bureaucrats and businessmen.<sup>50</sup> Second was the frustration of

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<sup>47</sup> For details on the coup of 1912, see Rian and Netra (1974).

<sup>48</sup> Anderson, 1978, pp.203-205

<sup>49</sup> Girling, 1981a, p. 104

<sup>50</sup> This argument is supported by Pasuk and Baker who point out that, during the period up to 1932, two main lines of thought in opposition to royal absolutism were developed within

young, able, and ambitious commoners, especially those educated in England and France, and who were inspired with ideas of democracy and progress. Third was the tolerant and indecisive character of King Rama VII,<sup>51</sup> and fourth was the King's program of economizing on expenditure in order to balance the state budget, both after the profligate reign of his predecessor, King Rama VI<sup>52</sup> and during the world depression starting in 1929, by reducing salaries and dismissing military and civilian officials.

It is worth noting here that, despite their mutual motivations for overthrowing the absolute monarchy, the coup group of 1932 was divided by their different concepts of revolution into two different groupings: the old order and young order. As Thawat argues, for the old order or the conservatives and whose main element was the military, 'democracy meant only one thing, which is modernization and prosperity'.<sup>53</sup> As Siffin adds, for this group, 'democracy means a share in the benefits. Revolution meant access to power, the elimination of a source of insecurity and inequity, and perhaps "national progress"'.<sup>54</sup> As Pasuk and Baker reveal that the young order, which was a coalition of civilian officials and various supportive groups in the new urban society led by Pridi Phanomyong, 'advocated a more open society and participant political system.... They supported constitutionalism, representative institutions, and economic progress through government support for private enterprise'.<sup>55</sup> Because it lacked dependable popular support, within a few months, the young civilian faction had a severe disadvantage in competing for influence with the military and the senior civilians.<sup>56</sup> But as will be revealed later, their power rose

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Bangkok's growing urban society of bureaucrats and businessmen, whose profits were derived from the expansion of rice frontier but were faced with strong competition from Western traders. For the bureaucrats, 'they found a fundamental dissonance between the values of merit, service, and achievement implicit in a "modern" administration, and the subordination of the bureaucracy to the will of an absolute monarch'. For urban businessmen, 'they blamed the royal regime for concluding the 'unequal treaties', which restricted the government's ability to assist local business against the colonial companies'. Pasuk and Baker, 1995, pp. 247-248

<sup>51</sup> This argument is supported by Wyatt's contention that King Prajadhipok was not prepared for his new responsibilities as king. When he returned to Thailand after studying at Eton and the Woolwich Military Academy in England, he was probably expecting a staff career in the army. 'He had little experience of government.... His youth and inexperience weighed against him. All he had in his favor was a lively intelligence, a certain diplomacy in his dealings with others, a modesty and industrious willingness to learn, and the somewhat tarnished but still potent magic of the crown'. Wyatt, 1982, p. 235

<sup>52</sup> During the reign of King VI, who was preoccupied with games and plays, there was steady growth in the monarch's expenditures. Royal expenditure was nearly 10 per cent of the annual budget. See Wyatt, 1982, p. 233

<sup>53</sup> Thawat, 1962, p. 108

<sup>54</sup> Siffin, 1966, p. 143

<sup>55</sup> Pasuk and Baker, 1995, p. 244

<sup>56</sup> Wyatt, 1982, p. 247



again after the World War II.

With the intention of maintaining the power of the bureaucracy to which they belonged, the conservative fraction of the coup group compromised with the King. The first Prime Minister, Phraya Mano, who was a royalist and whose wife was a lady-in-waiting to the Queen, placed himself on the King's side rather than the bureaucrats' side. Accordingly, the first constitution seemingly granted the King extensive powers. Dissatisfied with this, Phraya Pahon, one of the members of the old faction of the coup group, whose main element was military, staged a second coup in 1933 to oust Mano's royalist government, and became the second Prime Minister. The King announced his abdication in 1935.

The continuity of regime ideology during Phraya Mano's premiership was also reflected in the development of local administration. That is, Mano implemented the King's wish of setting up nationwide municipalities to act as local-self governments through the Municipality Administration Act of 1933.<sup>57</sup> In effect, all of the 35 Sanitation Districts, which had been established during the reign of King Rama V, were upgraded to municipalities, which enjoyed the status of a juristic person. By looking into the structure of all the various forms of local government established in Thailand from 1932 to 1997, Tanet argues that the municipality is the most democratic form of local government because, even though its administrative staff were appointed government officials, its legislative staff are directly elected by the people in the area, and are headed by a Chairman and a Vice-chairman, who are later elected by the legislatures.<sup>58</sup> Presumably, the Mano government's attempt to build 'local government by local people' was not for the sake of democratization but because the coup group did not possess a strong ideology and because Mano was a royalist. Once their positions were secured after the coup, they took the idea of King Rama VII and established municipalities in 1933. Although, the government intended to upgrade all the 4,800 communes or sub-districts nationwide to municipalities, the plan was later interrupted by the second coup in 1933. With no intention of changing the power structure within Thai politics, Phahon's government did touch upon any matters of regional and local administration.

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<sup>57</sup> According to the Act, there are three types of municipality; city, town, and commune, which are characterized by the size of the population. The commune (or sub-district) municipality has a population of not more than 50,000, a town municipality has a population between 10,001 to 50,000 and a density not less than 3,000 people/square kilometers, and a city municipality has the population from 50,001 upward. Chusak, 1975, p. 34

<sup>58</sup> The numbers of legislative staff depends on the type of municipality. The commune (or sub-district) municipality has 12 members, the town municipality has 18 members, and the city municipality has 24 members, all of which stay in office for 5 years. See Tanet, 1997, pp. 115-135

*Military-led authoritarian regimes and bureaucratizing local government (1938-1958)*

In 1938, Plak Phibunsongkhram, as known more widely as Phibun, succeeded Phahon as the third Thai Prime Minister, and the Commander-in-Chief. During this period, the military bureaucrats continued to hold tight control over Thai politics and administration. In order to strengthen the bureaucrats' power and secure their status and maintain the environment in which the military and civilian bureaucrats were Thai society's elite – the reason they staged the coup in the first place – Phibun amended the constitution to allow the term of appointment for half of the Assembly's members to be 20 years, instead of 10 years. Additionally, he appointed himself both the Minister of Defense and Interior, and in 1942, following Mussolini's model, he awarded himself the rank of Field Marshall and declared that he be referred to as 'the Leader'. Also, he exiled and disposed of the old guard of military commanders, and moved against the monarchy by prohibiting the display of pictures of ex-King Prajadhipok in people's homes. In effect, as Girling argues, Phibun's power became 'supreme'.<sup>59</sup> Phibun's attempt to strengthen his supreme power was also reflected in the development of regional administration during this period. That is to say, in trying to reduce the power of some members of the royal family who were '*samuh thesaphiban*', and thus had control over the circles or *monthon*, the government abolished the circle administration system by implementing the Provincial Council Administration Act of 1938. This established Provincial Councils as local governments by government officials, where all the staff were bureaucrats appointed from the Ministry of Interior.<sup>60</sup> In effect, the province became the largest and primary unit of regional administration.<sup>61</sup> Also, with the intention of centralizing power with himself and the bureaucrats, Phibun's government halted the attempt to upgrade the 4,800 sub-districts nationwide to municipalities, that had been initiated by Mano.

Even though Phibun and his military-led government had managed to ensure total control over all the internal factors that could possibly turn against him, Phibun's power was undermined by an external factor, specifically by bringing Thailand into alliance with Japan during World War II. Truly, this action placed Thailand on the brink of being on the losing side in the war. This gave rise to the young civilian faction of the 1932 coup group, led by Pridi, who during the war created a clandestine opposition movement to the Japanese under the name '*Seri Thai*' or 'Free Thai'. When the war was over, this movement, which included some Bangkok Chinese groups and some students who were studying in the West (essentially those in the US

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<sup>59</sup> Girling, 1981, p. 106

<sup>60</sup> The Provincial Council only acted as a consulting body to the provincial board, which was the regional administrative organization established during the reign of King Rama V. See Chusak, 1975, p. 22

<sup>61</sup> Government of Thailand, 1964, p. 74

and the UK), was propelled into power in order to negotiate a favorable peace with the Allies. Because of their differences in ideology, once the civilian faction of the coup group had come to power, they forced Phibun to resign in 1944, and chose Khuang Aphaiwong to be the fourth Thai Prime Minister. In 1946, the third constitution was inaugurated; this introduced party politics and a two-house parliament with fully elected members in both houses, and banned both civilian and military officials from being elected to either. It has since been described as one of Thailand's most democratic constitutions.<sup>62</sup> After the 1946 general election, Pridi's allies dominated both houses.<sup>63</sup> This period of democracy was known widely as the 'Constitutional Interlude'. But in spite of this, there were no developments in regional and local administration during this period. That is to say, being preoccupied with national politics, the civilian-led government did not implement any new regulations or laws regarding the regional and local administration.

Unfortunately, this political pattern was interrupted by the military coup staged by General Phin Choonhawan, with the support of the First Army, in 1947. To avoid foreign intervention, the military leaders asked Khuang Apaiwong to assume the position of Prime Minister once more.<sup>64</sup> An interim constitution, Thailand's fourth, was promulgated in 1947 and this established a half appointed and half elected two-house parliamentary system. With the aim of eradicating their opponents, military leaders accused Pridi of being involved in the assassination of King Rama VIII, and exiled him to China. Also Khuang was forced to resign, after a few months.<sup>65</sup> Phibun became Prime Minister again in April 1948. This period during the Cold War saw Phibun's regime being supported by economic assistance, trade concessions, a security commitment, and new arms from the USA. Inevitably, it was the beginning of a long and durable period of deep military rule.<sup>66</sup> In order to attract military aid from the US, he stated that his military government would pursue a pro-Western and anti-Communist policy, and this was welcomed by the US and Britain since those countries had adopted a strong anti-Communist

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<sup>62</sup> Chai-Anand argues that this constitution along with the one of 1974, are the most democratic constitution of Thailand. See Chai-Anand, 1993, p. 101

<sup>63</sup> During this period, Pridi also allied himself with the royal family, and with dynamic forces in the changing Thai economy and society, namely, urban businessman in both the commercial and industrial sectors. For detail on Pridi's rise during this period, see Pasuk and Baker, 1995, pp. 261-266

<sup>64</sup> 'They felt, for example, that Phibun's reputation was not suitable for a post-war premier.' (Surachart, 1985, p. 37)

<sup>65</sup> The incident was known as 'Khuang's Mugging'. For details, see Fineman, 1997, pp. 37-53

<sup>66</sup> In June 1951, there was a coup by the Thai Navy against Phibun called 'the Manhattan Coup'. The Navy was defeated, however. For details, see Thak, 1979, pp. 49-55

policy themselves.<sup>67</sup> Phibun's government was quickly recognized by the US on May 3 1948 and this subsequently led to international recognition.<sup>68</sup>

The absolutism of Phibun's power was also evident in the development of regional and local administration, in which bureaucrats re-centralized the state administration and enjoyed total control over almost all the types of local government. That is to say, instead of establishing more municipalities – the most democratic type of local government – by upgrading the 4,800 sanitation district nationwide, the military-led government reestablished the sanitation district system through the Sanitation District Act of 1952.<sup>69</sup> In recognition of the fact that the established 'local government by government officials' had not yet covered the whole territorial area,<sup>70</sup> the government also implemented the Provincial Authority Act in 1955 to establish Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAO), as the biggest form of local government covering every province. Each is headed by a provincial governor who is a bureaucrat appointed by the Ministry of Interior. He has the lawful right to withdraw the membership of any PAO councilors – who are elected from and by local people – and dissolve the council at any time.<sup>71</sup> Later, in 1956, the government also promulgated the Sub-district Administration Act to establish Sub-district Administrative Organizations (SAO) as a form of local government at the sub-district level. These were headed by *kamnan* and *phu yai ban*, who were quasi-government officials.

Phibun's second government was far from stable, however. He did not enjoy supreme control over the army as before. That is, during this time, younger officers such as Phin Choonhawan and Phao Sriyanon were the really powerful figures. Thak refers to the 1948-1957 as the 'triumvirate' period.<sup>72</sup> The fight for power between the three ended in September 1957, when Sarit Thanarat presented the army's ultimatum to Phibun demanding him to resign immediately.<sup>73</sup> As a result, Phibun panicked and fled the country; Phot Sarasin became Prime Minister in September 1957, and Thanom Kittikachorn succeeded him in January 1958.<sup>74</sup> No

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<sup>67</sup> Fineman, 1997, p. 66

<sup>68</sup> Darling, 1965, p. 66

<sup>69</sup> The government claimed that the reestablishment of sanitation districts was to prepare the area for later upgrading to municipality. The system that was implemented was the same as that used during the reign of King Rama V.

<sup>70</sup> The Sanitation District and Municipality systems only covered some of the larger cities in the country.

<sup>71</sup> For PAO structure, see Tanet, 1997, pp. 149-150

<sup>72</sup> For more information, see Thak, 1979, pp.79-102

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, pp. 117-120

<sup>74</sup> There were unstable situations under the premierships of both Phot and Thanom. For details, see Thak, 1979, pp. 126-140

new regional or local administration laws were implemented during this time.

*The Politics of 'Despotic Paternalism' (1958-1963)*

On the day Thanom resigned from the position of Prime Minister, 20 October 1958, Sarit staged a coup to retain power and become the next Prime Minister.<sup>75</sup> Thailand subsequently entered the regime of 'political authoritarianism' or 'military absolutism', which Thak dubs as the 'dark age' of political development.<sup>76</sup> During this period, the National Assembly was abolished, martial law was declared, and all political parties and gatherings were outlawed. Throughout the time this regime was in power, Sarit and his deputies, Praphat Charusathian and Thanom, enjoyed sole control over the administration, parliament, and other societal forces. As Pasuk and Baker argue, during the Sarit era, 'the state consisted of three clear strata; government, bureaucracy, and people. The government made policy, the bureaucracy implemented it, and people accepted it'.<sup>77</sup>

Despite establishing an authoritarian regime, Sarit's popularity was high throughout his premiership. The reason for this was the fact that he reestablished the monarchy as the symbolic head of the nation and as an agent for redistributing wealth from the prospering city to the less fortunate in the countryside.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, the military and Sarit's government became the 'army of the King' and the 'government of the King', whose power was derived from above not below.<sup>79</sup> With political support from the palace, financial support from the US, and his own charisma, Sarit was justified an efficient ruler, and was considered to have played the role of an idealized 'father-figure' or '*Phokun*'.<sup>80</sup> That is, from the start of his premiership, he responded directly and personally to popular needs. For example, he ordered the lowering of electricity rates, proposed to limit the working days of civil servants, and helped cut food prices by ordering new markets to be opened.<sup>81</sup> Unlike Phibun, who promoted state enterprises and implemented anti-Chinese policies, Sarit sought to promote industrial development through private investment and the use of economic planning. During Sarit's era, the government established many centrally planned institutions such as the Budget Bureau, the National Statistical Office and the National Economic Development Board (NEDB), to draw up five-year

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<sup>75</sup> For details on the 1958 coup, see Thak, 1979, pp. 140-152

<sup>76</sup> Thak, 1979, pp. 140-152

<sup>77</sup> Pasuk and Baker, 1995, p. 284

<sup>78</sup> 'Sarit realized that he could not get political legitimacy through the parliament system, because he had abandoned political parties as unsuitable for Thailand' (Royal Thai Government, 1964, 'Biography and Works of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. A Cremation Book', (The Cabinet: Bangkok), cited from Surachart, 1985, p. 79)

<sup>79</sup> Surachat, 1985, pp. 79-80

<sup>80</sup> See Thak, 1979

economic plans, and the Board of Investment as the central infrastructure for promoting urban economic growth.

Apart from this, the government did nothing regarding regional and local administration. Despite Tanet's argument that the stagnation of local government development was a result of the government's focus on economic development,<sup>82</sup> the stable political situation, in which the government was under no threat or pressure from the mass, seems to be a better explanation for the stagnation of the development of regional and local administration during this period. That is to say, no further regional and local administration development was implemented because the government found no reason to do so. In line with this is the 'bureaucratic polity' thesis of Riggs, who described the period of military rule in Thailand as 'immensely stable, impervious to appeals or pressures from outside world or below'.<sup>83</sup> Even though Riggs's thesis was helpful in explaining why there was no development in regional and local administration during this period, it was heavily criticized by Girling as an unsuitable theory for explaining Thai politics during that period.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> For Sarit's role as '*Phokun*', see Thak, 1979, pp. 186-208

<sup>82</sup> Tanet, 1997, pp. 92-98

<sup>83</sup> Riggs, 1965, p. 312. In the same article, Riggs states that 'the power was focused in the small group of elite, rather than being distributed to the mass, as a result of a 'transitional situation in which the apparatus of a modern bureaucracy has been created by virtue of a great transformation worked by the 'absolute monarchy', and that 'The failure of formal political institutions to achieve control over the bureaucracy has not meant the elimination of "politics" and the achievement of an "administrative state". Rather it has meant that the arena of politics, the focus of rivalry, and the struggles for power, wealth or other public values have moved within the bureaucracy itself'. Also, Riggs says that the distribution of powers within the bureaucracy result from the lack of a guiding force outside the bureaucracy capable of setting its own goals and keeping its bureaucratic agents under effective control. 'The countervailing matrix of public action, whereby the interests of the people might have been imposed upon the government in a framework of law and accountability, has not yet come into being.' (Riggs, 1965, pp. 196-197)

<sup>84</sup> Girling argues that Riggs's thesis of the 'bureaucratic polity' holds three weaknesses and such weaknesses were explanations for the unstable position of Thanom's government. Girling says that firstly, Riggs's thesis overstates the purely factional content of political rivalry and neglects the social changes that were already taking place during Sarit's era, and which were to break through the factional framework of the bureaucratic polity. Secondly, it was influenced by the 'consensus' model and therefore holds the view that only elite politics counted while in reality interaction between military and civilian and new social forces was emerging. Thirdly, it tends to combine the military and civilian components of the bureaucracy without distinguishing the differences between them. For details, see Girling, 1981, pp. 10-11

*Military rule and the quest for legitimacy (1963-1973)*

After Sarit died in 1963, Thanom became the Prime Minister once more. Despite its early attempt to recentralize the state administration in order to retain more power, Thanom's military-led government evidently turned to promoting a more open form of politics after only five years in power. This was not because Thanom himself favored more open politics but because the government was pressured internally by the expanding middle class, which had been exposed to democratic ideals in secondary and higher education, and externally by the US, which was uncomfortable about its alliance with an authoritarian regime.<sup>85</sup> As it turned out, the government promulgated a new constitution in 1968 (the eighth constitution of Thailand) establishing a two-house parliamentary system comprising of an elected lower house and an appointed Senate. After an election in February 1969, the government party won a majority in the lower house and Thanom continued as Prime Minister.

A change in the development of regional and local administration was also evident during this period. That is, even though Thanom had increased control over local governments in 1966 by replacing the SAO, which was established in 1956, with Sub-district Council Committees (SCC) – in which most of its members were officials within the regional administration and its status was not juristic<sup>86</sup> – he cancelled this system in 1972 through Decree No. 326, and once again established the Sub-district Councils. Also, in the same year, the government established local-self government by local people by issuing Decree No. 335 to upgrade the administrative structure of Bangkok, the capital of the country, to become the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. The decree merged Bangkok Municipality, Thonburi Municipality and other local governments in the area into one local government called Bangkok, in which the Bangkok Governor (administrative staff) and the members of Bangkok Council (legislative staff) were to be elected and stay in office for 4 years.

Being forced to rule the country in a way that went against his will, Thanom found it difficult to control power in this kind of parliamentary politics. In order to reestablish the

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<sup>85</sup> Wyatt, 1982, p. 297. Additionally, US support to the military started to decrease. US policy in Southeast Asia began to change because many Americans felt that the US government was unable to win the Vietnam War. The main theme of the 'Nixon Doctrine', announced in 1969, was the reduction of direct US military commitments around the world, especially in Vietnam. For detail, see Surachart, 1985, p. 159

<sup>86</sup> This Sub-district Council consists of 3 kinds of member: (1) officials of the regional administration (heads of sub-districts and villages, and health officials), (2) elected members from each village, and (3) appointed members, who are appointed by the district official. However, these councils were not juristic.

authoritarian regime, he staged a coup against himself and dissolved the parliament in 1971.<sup>87</sup> An interim constitution (the ninth constitution of Thailand) was promulgated in 1972, providing for a single constituent assembly composed entirely of appointed members, most of whom were military and civilian bureaucrats. Discontent mounted as a result. That is, university students, who had been led to expect political evolution, felt betrayed and began to act on a new political consciousness and anti-militancy. Supported by the new societal groups of Sarit's era – the new group of business leaders that emerged in Bangkok and the group of provincial notables who had emerged as a result of the development efforts associated with the Vietnam War; the small but increasingly influential middle class that was involved in the service, transportation, construction, and related industries; and the group of urban workers involved in those same industries – twenty university students and political activists under the name of 'The Call for a Constitutional Group' or '*Klum Riakrong Ratthathammanun*' distributed leaflets demanding the immediate promulgation of a new constitution, on 6 October 1973.<sup>88</sup> Thirteen of them were arrested and the government announced they had uncovered a communist plot to overthrow the administration.<sup>89</sup> This was immediately followed by a protest by students from the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT). Later, on 14 October 1973, a clash between students and riot police occurred.<sup>90</sup> The occasion, which attracted about five hundred thousand participants, from junior bureaucrats down to common vendors, is widely considered the first mass movement in Thai history.<sup>91</sup> The government's attempt to suppress the demonstrators failed because it lost the backing from the First Division Army, which had been vital in the seizure and maintenance of political power since 1947.<sup>92</sup> A newly appointed Army Commander-in-Chief Krit Siwara sided with the students and their allies. The King personally ordered Thanom and his deputy

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<sup>87</sup> The government was having difficulties getting its budgets through the lower house, and it was alarmed by what it perceived to be a collapse of national solidarity in the new atmosphere of competition among political parties, relaxed press controls, and rising political demonstration against the Thai alliance with the United States, and against the government's slow pace of economic development. For detail, see Wyatt, 1982, p. 298

<sup>88</sup> Ockey, 1992, pp. 9-10

<sup>89</sup> Thak, 1979, p. 348

<sup>90</sup> Notwithstanding this, it would be wrong to say that anti-government marches and protest first appeared in the 1973. In fact, during the 1950s, as a result of the Phibun government's establishment of a Hyde Park-style speaker's corner at Sanam Luang, in downtown Bangkok, a number of march were carried out to protest against the government's activities. Although violence broke out, the government managed to control the situation. For details, see Ockey, 1999.

<sup>91</sup> Thak, 1979, p. 348

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.



Prime Minister, Praphat, to flee the country and appointed Professor Sanya Thammasak, a rector of Thammasat University and former chief justice of the Supreme Court, as Prime Minister.

*Parliamentary democracy and the development of local government (1973-1992)*

The new constitution (the tenth constitution of Thailand) was promulgated in 1974, establishing a two-house parliamentary system with half elected and half appointed members. In effect, this opened up greater access for business interests, which had grown independent from their old military partners by turning for help from political parties, and they supported the growth of parliamentary democracy in order to exert their influence on decision-making and to participate in politics directly. After Sanya's premiership, three other civilian governments were established, including that of Seni Pramoj from February to March 1975, Kukrit Pramoj from March 1975 to January 1976, and Seni Pramoj from April to October 1976.

In line with the development of infrastructure – which boomed during the Sarit era – and the need to decentralize state administration, the government set up the Sub-district Development Program in 1975 as an immediate temporary (one year) economic and social development program to distribute a development fund of 2,500 million baht amongst all the Sub-district Councils, headed by *kamnan*, nationwide. Indeed, this was the first local development programme in Thailand to employ the democratic decentralization approach. That is, it gave more financial autonomy to local committees comprised of elected members, specifically village headmen, or *phu yai ban* and the sub-district headman or *kamnan*. The 490,000 baht fund given to each sub-district was in order to hire local people, most of whom were farmers, to do various public works in their localities – such as digging out canals, building roads and digging irrigation dykes and water reservoirs – during the slack season when they had no farm work to do. It was intended to raise farmers' income immediately and to generate employment within sub-districts. Due to its political popularity, the program was repeated in 1976 with a fund of 3,500 million baht; each sub-district received almost 700,000 baht on average. Since these two programs were completed, the Sub-district Council has never been given the same amount of development funds again.<sup>93</sup> Apart from this, no other programme regarding the regional and local administration was implemented during this period.

It can be argued that the government had no intention of developing or altering the structure and form of regional and local administration but used these initiatives to gain more popularity and votes for themselves. That is, up until the general election in 1975, each election was won by a government party, which, through control of the cabinet and thus the bureaucracy,

had a ready-made organization and adequate financial support.<sup>94</sup> It was only because of the student uprising of 1973, which affected the popularity of the bureaucrats and government party severely, and the widespread calls for democracy that non-military backed political parties were elected. With no support and connections at the local level, apart from providing their local supporters and canvassers with money, protection, and government concessions, the government rewarded them with more administrative power in local governments through the implementation of local development policies. As Somrudee states, the initiation of the Sub-district Development Fund was an important shift in vote gaining strategies. When the next election, which was set in 1979, drew near, Kukrit's political party could readily mobilize support and assistance from both local leaders, namely *kamnan* and *phu yai ban*, and businessmen, who benefited from the programme.<sup>95</sup> Having said this, the effectiveness of such a strategy could not be proved because the military once again staged a coup in 1976, three years before the election.

This period of parliamentary democracy was interrupted briefly by another military authoritarian regime when the military staged a coup in 1976. Events leading up to the coup included the return of Praphat from Taiwan on 15 August 1976 and Thanom from Singapore on 19 September later that year. In protest at their return, student activists gathered to distribute anti-Thanom posters. Two of them were murdered by the police on 25 September and their bodies were hung from a tree. Later, on 5 October, student activists held a mock hanging to dramatize the deaths of the two students. Things got worse when the right sought to provoke a confrontation by reporting, through the rightist newspaper *Dao Siam*, that the students were actually portraying the hanging of the Crown Prince.<sup>96</sup> Subsequently, three paramilitary organizations assaulted a group of students at Thammasat University, killing many and arresting others.<sup>97</sup> The same evening of this attack, the armed forces, under the leadership of Admiral Sangad Chaloryu, Minister of Defense, seized power in order to 'restore stability and law and order to the kingdom'. Prime Minister Seni and his cabinet were ousted. Martial law was once again proclaimed. The constitution, parliament, and all political parties were abolished. Press censorship was also established. On 9 October, the ruling military group announced the appointment of Thanin Kraivichien, a royalist civilian, as the new Prime Minister. The

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<sup>93</sup> Medhi, 1979, p. 2

<sup>94</sup> Ockey, 1994, p. 253

<sup>95</sup> Somrudee, 1993, pp. 172-173

<sup>96</sup> Morell and Chai-Anand, 1981, p. 274

<sup>97</sup> During the slaughter at Thammasat University, 1300 students were arrested. In total, including those arrested elsewhere, the number exceeded 3,000. (Morell and Chai-Anand, 1981, p. 275)

government announced its 12 years plan to implement democracy. And once again Thais were subject an authoritarian military regime.<sup>98</sup>

Thanin's regime did not last for long, however. Indeed, the regime gave rise to dissatisfaction within various groups in Thai society – including the military, which at the time was divided into factions<sup>99</sup> - alienated both the rightists and the new societal groups, and ended many methods of political participation that had opened up during the 1973-76 period.<sup>100</sup> Also, Thanin's strong stand against corruption created animosity within the bureaucracy and within the business community. Accordingly, the faction of young military officers, the so-called 'Young Turks', who were not unhappy with how their seniors had concentrated excessively on politics, staged a coup on 20 October 1977. In spite of overthrowing a system in which the military played too great a role in politics, they promoted a regime in which the military still had control. That is, three weeks after the coup, they promulgated the interim constitution of 1977 (Thailand's twelfth), establishing a four-year transition period, with the promise of democratic elections and a democratic constitution.<sup>101</sup>

Later in 1978, a new constitution (the thirteenth constitution of Thailand) was promulgated, creating a new political system with a two-house assembly, consisting of elected MPs and appointed Senators, and an appointed Prime Minister. As Ockey argues, this constitution was a compromise between the old elites, the military, and the new societal groups

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<sup>98</sup> The coup of October 1976 was a transition to authoritarian rule. It demonstrates that with because of their ability to stage a coup, the bureaucrats could come back. Additionally, it shows that the middle class in Thailand, like other elite group such as the monarchy or the military, considered their interests to be more important than others. Though opposed to the military-led authoritarian government of Thanom, they did not particularly care for too-open politics, in which their former subordinates, such as labourers and farmers, got some shares of their benefits. Rather, they preferred the kind of politics in which they had some control. The rise of politicians, whose sought to expand their own economic interests, thus created dissatisfaction among the middle class (Surachart, 2000, p. 25)

<sup>99</sup> During the period after the student uprising in 1973 and the coup in 1976, the military as an institution became factionalized. Emerged during the period after the student uprising of 1973, the so-called 'Young Turks' felt that their supervisors were too involved in politics and therefore ignored the development of the Army. Also, they saw the period after the events of 1973, when democracy blossomed, as characterized by confusion and the lack of social order. For details and discussions on the emergence of the Young Turks, see Chai-Anand (1982).

<sup>100</sup> See Ockey, 1992, pp. 19-22

<sup>101</sup> The period after the coup of 1977 also saw the emergence of another military faction, the Democratic Soldiers', whose primary aim was to promote democracy. For this faction, 'People's War' or the war between supporters of democracy and supporters of Communism resulted from the fact that the military lacked clear political strategies. They believed that the military should support democratic political regimes because it was only with the development of democracy that the communist force might be destroyed. (Chai-Anad, 1982, p. 168)

that had emerged during Sarit's era.<sup>102</sup> The constitution also strengthened political parties by requiring that, after the four-year transition period, all members of the elected House of Representatives had to become members of a registered political party, which had to consist of at least five thousand people.<sup>103</sup> It also established election districts. Consequently, the multi-party system emerged again and remained throughout this period.<sup>104</sup>

In trying to gain mass support ahead of the next general election, the government gave Pattaya, the famous tourist seaside city, self-government, with the creation of Pattaya Municipality in 1978. The system was based on the 'city managers' of the United States. The legislative section of Pattaya consists of 9 local people, who were elected by local people, and 8 appointed bureaucrats, who were selected by the Ministry of Interior, and is headed by a chairman, who was elected by the 17 members. The one and only administrative member of staff for Pattaya is selected by the legislature and called the '*Palat Pattaya*'. Additionally, the government implemented a programme, similar to the Sub-district Development Fund, called the 'Work and Income Generating Program' in 1980-1981, which distributed the development fund of 3,500 million baht among every sub-district nationwide. In 1982, the programme continued, but with a decreased fund of 1,975.5 million baht.<sup>105</sup> Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine whether this attempt to gain votes worked because the Young Turks, in the midst of hostile political parties and severe economic problems, demanded Kriangsak resign in order to stop political conflicts.<sup>106</sup> They nominated Prem Tinasulanond, the then Army Commander-in-chief and Minister of Defence, to become Prime Minister in March 1980.

Realizing he lacked his own political organization, Prem started his premiership by seeking support. Instead of relying on the people, who could only show their support in a general election, which might not even take place, Prem turned to three important institutions, namely, the Palace, the Army, and the House of Representatives, with the intention of preventing any single organization from acquiring a dominant political role and thus trying to remove him from

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<sup>102</sup> Ockey, 1992, pp. 34-63

<sup>103</sup> Regarding the large size requirement for political parties, Ockey argues that this effectively excluded political parties on the left, which were often small. For details on the strengthening of political parties, see Ockey, 1992, pp. 56-58

<sup>104</sup> These new rules for the Thai political game 'while not totally satisfactory to any group, were acceptable to all...with the military in the Senate, civilians in the political parties of the House, and a mix of both military men and civilians in the Cabinet'. In such circumstances, the military succeeded in acquiring the role of 'elder brother' and 'supervisor' to the civilian politicians, whereas the civilian politicians were able to strengthen their role in the political process and empower political parties. (Ockey, 1992, p. 62)

<sup>105</sup> See TDRI (1983)

<sup>106</sup> Chai-Anand, 1982, pp. 106-107

power. This tactic of political compromise, which Suchit called a ‘delicate balancing act’,<sup>107</sup> combined with his own popularity among the people<sup>108</sup> helped Prem to remain in power for nine years. That is, despite the Young Turks’ dissatisfaction and two coup attempts in 1981 and 1985 – which were taken as an attempt to regain control by the military – and the Thai baht devaluation crisis, Prem was PM from 1980 to 1988. In fact, due to his good and close relations with the Palace, the two coup attempts were aborted by the direct intervention of the Queen.<sup>109</sup>

Having said this, Prem’s delicate balancing acts resulted in the stagnation of regional and local development. Due to the support he received, Prem was in a very secure position. Similar to Sarit’s period, when Prem was in power, the political situation was very stable. In effect, he had no need to either tighten his grip on the state administration by implementing a centralizing policy or to increase his popularity by implementing local development programmes that benefited some groups of people. During his premiership, Prem did not alter or issue any new laws or regulations on regional and local administration.

In 1988, Prem decided that Thailand was ready to have an elected Prime Minister and he thus announced a general election. Chatichai Choonhavan, the leader of the Chat Thai Party, which held the most seats in the parliament, became the first Thai Prime Minister to be appointed as the result of a general election. While Chatichai’s victory marked the triumph of the tycoon-turned-politician, and the rise of economic elites who could use political parties to express their interests and demands, the election itself also marked the rise of money politics. That is, during the election, vote buying was evident, and the number of candidates with business backgrounds rose significantly; about two-thirds of all candidates were businessmen.<sup>110</sup>

Unlike Prem, Chatchai did not pursue the delicate balancing act. That is, instead of trying to compromise with different social groups, he established direct links only with individual members of the business community. Also, he kept decision-making on economic

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<sup>107</sup> Suchit, 1987, p. 34. For more details, see also Niyom, 1984, pp. 230-234, and Pasuk and Baker, 1995, p. 154

<sup>108</sup> Prem earned his reputation and popularity from various events. For discussion on reasons for this not unexpected appointment, see Niyom, 1984, pp. 207-209

<sup>109</sup> Surachart argues that the two failed coup attempts during Prem’s period was not a symptom of the decline of the military’s power but rather they showed the lack of solidarity among the military themselves. He contends that the changing political context was also an important factor for a successful coup. He explains that as the period after 1980 saw a sharp decline in the Communist threat, Thailand did not need security development but economic and participatory development, and thus coups were not required (Surachart, 2000, p.30). For more details on Prem’s support from the Palace, see Pasuk and Baker, 1995, p. 346

<sup>110</sup> Pasuk and Baker, 1995, p. 349

policy within his cabinet of elected politicians.<sup>111</sup> For the first time, the key Ministries of Defense, Interior, and Finance were wrested away from the military and civilian bureaucracy. During this period, the Thai political system cannot be called either democracy or authoritarian. It falls in between the two modes. The term ‘semi-democracy’, as coined by Chai-Anand, refers to a system that provides more power for the non-bureaucratic forces at the expense of the bureaucrats, and is the most accurate term for describing the regime during the 1988-1992 period. As Chai-Anand contends, ‘this system is a “political compromise”, made possible through distinctive constitutional arrangements, between the bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic forces, in which the bureaucrats were forced to pay the price by loosening its grip over political power’.<sup>112</sup> Being the first elected Prime Minister of Thailand legitimized Chatichai’s power to the extent that he did need not to alter regional and local administration, which might affect the vote base that was in favor of his political party. Thus, there was no further development in regional and local administration during this period.

Chatichai’s power met with some challenges, however. Because the appointed ministers had removed several senior bureaucrats from key posts<sup>113</sup> and the government also renewed privatization plans for some existing state enterprises and cut the military’s budget in order to enlarge the proportion of government funds available for other development activities,<sup>114</sup> dissatisfaction among the military, civilian bureaucrats and business interests, whose power was counterbalanced by that of political parties during the semi-democracy period, grew high. In effect, the balance of power among the various elite groups was broken, and, as a result, a consensus opposition to participatory politics and political parties emerged among the bureaucrats and urban middle class. As a result, on 23 February 1991, a group of military officers, called the National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC), led by General Suchinda Kraprayoon staged a coup, stating that the democratic system was being distorted by corrupt politicians, who sought to abuse their authority through a so-called “Parliamentary Dictatorship”. Anand Punyarachun, a former diplomat and successful businessman, was appointed as an interim Prime Minister.

*The demand for political reform and a series of decentralization policies (1992-2001)*

Despite their quiet support for the coup in 1991, the middle class grew increasingly suspicious of the NPKC, which had tightened the military’s grip on politics. The draft of the new constitution,

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<sup>111</sup> Chai-Anand, 1997, p. 52

<sup>112</sup> Chai-Anand, 1989, p. 319

<sup>113</sup> Pasuk and Baker, 1995, p. 349

which provided for an appointed Prime Minister, was the first target of the opposition. In opposition to this, the Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD) was formed by an alliance of progressive NGOs, which had emerged during the 1980s.<sup>115</sup> This movement pressed for democratic change and convened seminars, meetings, and rallies, with speakers were drawn from many political parties;<sup>116</sup> it opposed the military across the country. In an attempt to please the mass population, General Suchinda announced on 18 November 1991 that he would not accept the position of Prime Minister, and some of the constitution's more controversial provisions were withdrawn. Having said this, the coup group created its own ad hoc political party, called Samakkhi Dham Party, through a political pact with parties that had formed the core of the Chatichai government.<sup>117</sup> Later, on 7 December, the new constitution of 1991 was promulgated. It was the fifteenth constitution of Thailand and allowed for a non-elected Prime Minister. A general election was set for 22 March 1992. After the election, Samakkhi Tham Party became the single largest party in the parliament. Despite having ruled out the possibility of accepting the premiership, Suchinda was announced the new Prime Minister on 7 April.

Opposition to the authoritarian regime thus turned its attention on Suchinda, in particular. Protests started with a hunger strike by Chalard Vorachat, and a resignation of Chamlong Srimuang, the leader of the Phalang Dham Party (PDP), from his position as a Governor of Bangkok. Between 6 and 10 May, under Chamlong's leadership, 100,000 people gathered to protest against Suchinda.<sup>118</sup> Meanwhile, the middle class, academics and professionals, along with activist groups and local politicians,<sup>119</sup> also started demonstrations in 30 other provinces in all regions of the country. On 17 May, at least 200,000 people gathered around Sanam Luang, a big park near the Grand Palace, where violence broke out. Soldiers began firing rounds of ammunition: some into the air but others into the crowd. On 18 May, Chamlong was arrested. The next morning, he asked the remaining protestors to go home, saying that they were behaving wrongly. On 20 May, in an attempt to keep the peace, the King asked both Chamlong and Suchinda to meet with him in the palace and asked them to find a means to

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, p. 202

<sup>115</sup> LoGerfo argues that development and human right NGOs only began to emerge in the 1980s, and were able to do so because of the availability of international funding and the increasingly liberal political atmosphere that prevailed under the Prem Tinsulanonda (1980-1988) and Chatichai Choonhavan (1988-1991) premierships (LoGerfo, 2000, p. 255).

<sup>116</sup> These parties included the Phalang Tham Party, the New Aspiration Party, and the Democrat Party (McCargo, 1997a, p. 241).

<sup>117</sup> By buying highly-electable ex-MPs and offering them substantial fees to switch parties, the Party included many dubious figures from previous administrations.

<sup>118</sup> They went home to rest from 11 to 16 May, after Chamlong suggested so.

<sup>119</sup> For details, see LoGerfo (2000).

resolve their differences. He stated that all sides in the confrontation were losers. Four days later, Suchinda resigned. Once again, Anand was appointed interim Prime Minister and a general election was set for September 1992.

After the events of May, an anti-military mood was widespread. People could no longer accept bureaucrats, especially the military, having such a large role in politics anymore. With the need to change the administrative structure, ‘decentralization’ was placed on the political agenda. During the election campaign of 1992, five parties promised a ‘more decentralized’ form of local government, including the promise that the Provincial Governor – the head of administration at the province level and whose power reached down to the district, sub-district, and village levels – would be elected by local people and not appointed by the Ministry of Interior. After the election, all three anti-military parties, the so-called “angelic parties”, whose popularity was also based on promises of decentralization, established a coalition government under the leadership of Chuan Leekpai, leader of the Democrat Party (DP).<sup>120</sup> One of the first moves the government made was to tackle military privilege by removing some military nominees from various boards of the State Enterprises.<sup>121</sup>

Despite promising reforms in provincial administration, the government did not touch upon the issue, claiming that ‘the matter needs more time to consider’. Instead, it issued the Sub-district Administration Act of 1994, which upgraded any Sub-district Councils with the average revenue over the previous three years of higher than 150,000 baht to Sub-district Administrative Organizations (SAO). In effect, there were two types of local government at the sub-district level: the Sub-district Council, established by Decree No. 326 in 1972, and the SAO, upgraded from Sub-district Councils in 1994. With a large number of elected members in the SAO council, including two elected members from each village in the sub-district, *kamnan*, and *phu yai ban*, the SAO was a local government by local people. That is, it employed a democratic decentralization approach. In line with other administrative reforms, the government also, for the first time in Thai history, pushed the Ministry of Interior to appoint the first female District Officer in 1993 and the first female provincial governor in 1994.

Unsatisfied with these reforms, Chalard staged another hunger strike in May 1994, demanding that all administrative office-holders should be elected. Consequently, the president

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<sup>120</sup> The coalition government consisted of all three anti-military parties: the DP, the PDP, and the New Aspiration Party (NAP). However, so as to secure the majority vote in the parliament, these ‘angelic parties’ included the Social Action Party, one of the pro-military parties or so-called ‘devilish parties’ in the coalition (Kusuma, 1994, p. 147).

<sup>121</sup> McCargo, 2003, p. 12.



of the parliament established the Democracy Development Committee (DDC) on 9 June 1994.<sup>122</sup> Despite the DDC's recommendation to 'rewrite the constitution to curb the power of bad politicians',<sup>123</sup> the government did nothing, and the DDC eventually ceased to exist on 28 April 1995.<sup>124</sup> Later in May 1995, Chuan's government was dissolved because of the controversy over the highly corrupted land reform policy. The subsequent general election in 1995 witnessed a very high level of vote buying. The Chart Thai Party (CTP), the pro-military party and other parties that were accused of being highly corrupt, gained the most votes.<sup>125</sup> The CTP leader, Banharn Silpa-archa, a tycoon and an influential figure from Supanburi province, became Prime Minister.<sup>126</sup>

The shady backgrounds of several of its members, combined with a general lack of technical expertise, meant the Banharn government faced strong criticism from the middle class. The King also often appeared on TV to instruct the new ministers to work honestly. During Banharn's premiership, no further anti-military policy was implemented. However, pressured by the media, the government set up the Political Reform Committee (PRC), to pursue the reform agenda and to set up a constitution-writing mechanism. As a result, the Constitutional Drafting Assembly (CDA) was set up, consisting of 76 provincial representatives and 33 experts in law, political science, or government. It created the Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC), which was chaired by Anand, the former Prime Minister. No further developments in regional and local administration were made. Fearing a no-confidence debate, Banharn dissolved his government in 1996.

After the general election of 1996, which also witnessed high levels of vote buying, the New Aspiration Party (NAP), led by the former military general Chavalit Yongchaiyut, set up a coalition government. The sixteenth constitution of Thailand, known as 'the people's constitution', was promulgated on October 1997. It provided for reforms in the electoral system, and a series of checks and balances to stop abuses of the political process.

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<sup>122</sup> Murray, 1996, pp. 363-365, and Prawase, 2002, pp. 22-23

<sup>123</sup> For information on the establishment of the DDC and the political reform process, see Prawase (2002).

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23

<sup>125</sup> The Chart Thai Party managed to win six seats more than the Democrats party, thus earning the right to form the government (Murray, 1996, p. 369),

<sup>126</sup> Murray argues that the election of 1995 was 'a step backward for democracy'. He contends that the Chart Thai party was seen as a rural-based party of patronage and chequebook politics and that its victory in the election of 1995 implies a step backward for democracy. See Murray (1996) for details.

The main reforms of the electoral system involved replacing the appointed senate with an elected one, and the creation of 400 single member parliamentary constituencies.<sup>127</sup> In addition to this, many independent bodies, such as the Election Commission, were established to monitor and referee the political order, with powers to disqualify alleged cheats and re-run elections.<sup>128</sup> The reforms of checks and balances included provisions that enhanced the rights of citizens to challenge the power of politicians and the state, such as the right of 50,000 voters to petition the National Counter Corruption Commission (NCCC) to have a politician or high-ranking official accused of corruption investigated and even removed from office.<sup>129</sup> Notwithstanding this, a number of scholars have argued that these reforms were in fact steered by a small group of urban elites<sup>130</sup> and political parties, and that their politicians did have some influence over the drafting process.<sup>131</sup> Some even say that the reforms failed to solve the problem of money politics and even complicated matters more rather than improved them.<sup>132</sup>

With the aim of decreasing the Minister of Interior's role in local administration, the constitution of 1997 provided that *kamnan* and *phu yai ban*, the quasi-government officials, could no longer become members of local government and were not allowed to apply for such positions while still holding the position of *kamnan* or *phu yai ban*.<sup>133</sup> However, no new type of local government was established. Despite the new constitution, which provided opportunities to amend the laws related to local government and administration, Chavalit's government did not pursue any further developments in the matter. Faced with the 1997 economic crisis, Chavalit dissolved his government in November 1997. Chuan then became Prime Minister until 2001. His government implemented a series of policies and plans to reduce the military's influence in politics and to set up a platform for political reform. That is, Chuan appointed himself Minister of Defense and appointed Surayud Chulanont, a reform-minded military officer, as the new Army Commander. Some significant military budgets were also reduced.<sup>134</sup>

It is worth noting that the process of decentralization during this period was very slow. That is, between 1992 and 1997, three different governments had only managed to establish the

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<sup>127</sup> McCargo, 2002, p. 10

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, pp. 10-11

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, p. 11

<sup>130</sup> See McCargo (2002) and Connors (2002) for details.

<sup>131</sup> See Ockey (1997) for details.

<sup>132</sup> See McCargo (2003) for details.

<sup>133</sup> Although this provision was issued in 1997, *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* enjoyed reserved seats in the SAO and municipal governments until 2001 because the constitution allowed for four years of preparation.

<sup>134</sup> This included a reduction in the number of overseas military attaches and cuts in combat allowances (McCargo, 2003, p. 12).

Sub-district Administration Organization in 1994 and limit the *kamnan* and *phu yai ban*'s role in local government in 1997. All had failed to implement gubernatorial elections, which had been promised by all the government's coalition parties during the 1992 election campaign. Indeed, this resulted from the fact that all three governments were coalitions of different parties in which no single party had a majority in the house of representatives and each party had almost the same weight when decision-making was concerned. With different vote bases, these coalition parties in the government could not agree upon decentralization policy and constitutional reform because it might have affected their vote bases. That is to say, the Chuan's government lack of action on the issues of gubernatorial elections, Articles 198 and 199 of the constitution (which specified that local administrative councils at all levels had to be elected), and the DDC's recommendations, was the result of disagreements between the coalition parties and the lack of support within the government. That is, while the PDP, whose main support was the urban middle class, had pushed for gubernatorial elections, the DP and the NAP, whose main support came from rural people and quasi-government officials, had opted for decentralization at the grass roots.<sup>135</sup> The best, or the midway, reform was thus merely the shortening of the official terms of the quasi-government officials in 1992. Also, even though the DP and the PDP wanted the amendment of Articles 198 and 199 of the constitution, they met with vehement opposition from the NAP, led by General Chavalit, who sided himself with bureaucrats. He announced his party's withdrawal from the coalition in protest, saying that 'from the outside I may seem 100% a politician, but in my heart, I am still a soldier 70%',<sup>136</sup> and this nearly caused the collapse of Chuan government.<sup>137</sup> Apart from this, the DDC's recommendation to rewrite the constitution met with strong resistance from the Senate, the only organization that provided a legitimate channel for the military to exercise its influence in politics,<sup>138</sup> and from some coalition parties (mainly the NAP), and the opposition parties.

Another disagreement was also evident when, following the establishment of SAOs in 1994, Chavalit threw his weight behind the quasi-government officials and forced this aspect of the reform to be altered because it undermined power of *kamnan* and *phu yai ban*, most of whom are supporters for the NAP. According to the SAO Act of 1994, part of a PAO's revenue would automatically become the SAO's revenue.<sup>139</sup> Chavalit's strong support for quasi-government

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<sup>135</sup> Kusuma, 1995, pp. 194-195

<sup>136</sup> Cited from 'Master Strategies', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 2 November 1995, p. 24

<sup>137</sup> See Kusuma, 1995, p. 196.

<sup>138</sup> Kusuma, 1995, p. 194

<sup>139</sup> See Suchit, Pornsak, and Nelson, 1998, pp. 57-58 and Arghiros, 2002, pp. 228-230

officials throughout this period resulted in the fact that he and his party received overwhelming support from *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* in the general elections of 1996.<sup>140</sup>

Notwithstanding all this, the constitution rewriting process, which started in time of the Banharn government, was also the case of politicians trying to please the masses. That is, the Political Reform Committee (PRC) and the Constitutional Drafting Assembly (CDA), which created the Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC), were set up only because of strong pressure from the media.

*Popular politics and authoritarianism in disguise (2001-2006)*

In the 2001 general election, a two years old party called Thai Rak Thai (TRT), which was led by a communications tycoon and former police officer, Thaksin Shinawatra, won a landslide victory, with 248 seats out of a total of 500 (48 out of 100 party lists MPs, and 200 out of the 400 constituency MPs).<sup>141</sup> It can be argued that besides extensive vote buying and the fact that people had lost faith in the existing political parties, which they believed to be corrupt, TRT's victory was due to the three populist policies the party had proposed during the election campaign. These were, first, the Village Fund Project (VFP), which would give one million baht to each village and urban community for income-generating projects, second, the policy to suspend farmers' debt repayments for three years, and third, the policy to charge only 30 baht for every visit to a state hospital irrespective of the illness. Thaksin subsequently became Prime Minister and his party became the first political party in Thai history to hold a majority in parliament and thus dominate the House.

The government implemented all three policies it promised and thereby gained even more popularity among the majority of the population who worked in the agricultural sector and were poor, as the three projects instantly eased their financial difficulties. Of all the projects, it was the VFP that created a new administrative body at the village level. The project was first implemented at a national level in July 2001. At the village level, the project created 75,547 VFP committees, consisting of between 9 and 15 elected committee members, who would run the project and manage the fund of one million baht for a two-year working term. The committee

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<sup>140</sup> Arghiros, 2002, p. 229

<sup>141</sup> Having said this, it does not mean that there were no other factors that led to TRT's landslide victory. According to Sukhumbhand, there were at least four reasons for the victory of TRT in the general election of 2001: first, the general public's fatigue with the Democrat Party and its party leader; second, TRT's own marketing strategy; third, TRT's expanding cells tactic, which was similar to an old Communist Party tactic, that caused the success at the grassroots level; and fourth, the fact that TRT had more money than other political parties (Sukhumbhan, 2001, pp. 2-3)

was also given the status of a juristic person. The government claimed that by letting the local people manage the credit by themselves local needs would be met, as local people would know best what they needed. To try to encourage the committees to manage their micro credit efficiently, the government also set up a program to evaluate village fund committees nationwide after their two-year working term ended in 2003. The best performing committee in every sub-district would receive 100,000 baht more, to be used as capital to be lent out, as a reward, while the second and third best performing committee got the rights to ask for more loans from the Government Saving Bank (GSB), should they wish.

Thaksin proved to be a controversial and divisive leader. Despite being extremely popular among the rural poor, Thaksin was criticized heavily by scholars and Bangkok elites as being autocratic. This was due mainly to Thaksin's own personality – he was abrasive and overconfident – and his power centralization policies. Having been CEO of his Shinawatra business group for many years, Thaksin was very confident and did not pay attention to any recommendations and criticisms. Despite employing the democratic decentralization approach in the Village Fund Project, Thaksin implemented centralization policies that gave provincial governors and Thai ambassadors worldwide the role and status of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Although faced with strong opposition from Bangkok elites and scholars, this plan passed through the House easily and did not cause upset the majority of people, who did not understand its effects on state administration thoroughly.

Despite these two new developments in Thai politics and regional and local administration – first, the fact that TRT was the first single party to hold majority votes in the decision-making process, and, second, the fact that Thaksin's government implemented a centralizing regional administrative system (the CEO governors), only three years after a pro-decentralization constitution had been promulgated – the government met with no pressure from the masses. This was mainly due to the three populist policies. Debatably, these policies won TRT support from the rural poor before the election and then secured that support afterwards. As this thesis will show, the implementation of the VFP ensured that villagers who received loans perceived these loans to be financial benefits that Thaksin had given them and they thus continued to support Thaksin after the election.<sup>142</sup> Loans VFP, together with cheap services at state hospitals and the three-year moratorium on debt repayment, instantly resulted in a better life; for the first time, villagers enjoyed having cash in hand and relatively high spending power.

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<sup>142</sup> Nelson argues that the proposal of the Village Fund Project in the election campaign was an attempt to make voters relate the given budget to their personal gain, and thus encourage them to vote for TRT. (Nelson, 2001, p. 248)

Evidently, most, if not all, of the villagers in the two villages under study – even those in Ban Ton Mai who had long supported the opposition Democrat Party – felt that Thaksin was the one who could improve their quality of life. Therefore, the project only met with resistance from the elites and academic scholars in Bangkok. In November 2003, having just returned from a seminar on the project with the District Officer and having been asked for his opinion on the project, the chairman of the SAO, who was also a leader of Ban Tao Fai, told me that the project was called ‘TEO governors’, not ‘CEO governors’ but he did not know what TEO stood for. Indeed, this showed how ineffective the seminar was. After I told him that the CEO governor would be able to transfer any government officials in the province – including those who were not in the Ministry of Interior – if he thought it suitable, he said that would be bad but still did not believe that that was the case, and told me to read more books.

Thaksin came under pressure for the first time toward at the beginning of 2004, when the insurgency in the south broke out. Moreover, in January 2005, the news that Thaksin had sold his family stake’s stake in the Shin Corp telecom firm without paying any tax caused much anger among urban Thais. Having said this, in the run-up to the general election in February 2005, TRT announced a plan to upgrade the Village Fund Committees nationwide to Village Local Banks. More populist policies were also promised, such as a proposal to increase the pensions of government officials. Obviously, the TRT has moved beyond the old electoral strategy of gaining votes by favoring those who were connected to particular political parties to favoring the majority of people nationwide. This has undermined all other parties’ local connections significantly. With support from the rural poor, TRT won another landslide victory in the 2005 election.

Thaksin’s second term did not go as smoothly as his first, however. The insurgency in the south hit the front pages of the newspapers everyday. Many urban Thais and the military blamed Thaksin’s abolition of the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre – a special working unit which was established during Prem’s premiership to work on keeping the peace in the four most southern provinces of the country, where a majority of people were Muslim and differences in culture among the residences were evident – and the replacement of the military by the police force as the main causes of the problem. They argued that these moves had altered the power structure in the area and created ways for the insurgency to rise again. The pressure mounted when it was revealed that Thaksin had given control of Thai Com, Thailand’s first ever satellite and what was deemed an important national asset, to Singaporean investors. The opposition, led by the People’s Alliance for Democracy, consisting of a leadership group including Sonthi Limthongkul, owner of the *Phujatkan* Group and *Phujatkan* newspaper;

Chamlong Srimuang; Phiphob Thongchai, a senior NGO activist and educational reformer; Somsak Kosaisuk, a veteran public-sector labour leader; and Somkiat Phongpaiboon, a university lecturer and protest movement leader, started mass protests and called for Thaksin's resignation. Rallies and protests occurred in Bangkok almost every day. With opinion divided on Thaksin and allegations of his corruption, the nation appeared to be split into two sides: Thaksin's supporters and Thaksin's opponents. Amid mass opposition rallies against him, which undermined his position greatly, Thaksin announced a snap election in April 2006 so he might prove that he had the support of the people and was wanted by them. In protest, and in recognition that Thaksin might win the election easily due to support from the rural poor, the opposition parties boycotted the election by not appointing any candidate to contest it in the hope that with no opposition candidates, the election would be cancelled. It turned out, however, that there were candidates from many unknown, newly established, small parties who competed against Thai Rak Thai's candidates, thereby legitimizing the election. As expected, Thai Rak Thai won an easy victory again, with 56 percent of all votes. Finding various flaws in the organization of the election, the opposition filed a lawsuit against the commissioners of the Election Commission to the Administrative Court. All three of them were found guilty and were sent to jail. The Constitutional Court ruled the election invalid and set the next election for March 2007.

On 19 September 2006, a faction of the military under the name of the Committee of Political Reformation under Democracy (CPRD), led by General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, staged a bloodless coup to oust Thaksin while he was in New York, preparing an address to the UN General Assembly. After seizing power, the Committee declared that 'as it is clearly seen that the current government has caused the society to be fragmented, many people are skeptical of how the government is being run. Corruption has occurred. This is the worst in our history. This has caused many parties to come close to challenging the King's power. There have been attempts to solve this problem but they have been unsuccessful. This situation has made it necessary for the Committee - consisting of the heads of the military branches and the National Police, to take over the power from this point.' In October that year, the Committee appointed General Surayud Chulanont, a retired military man and a former Army Commander in Chuan's government, as interim prime minister. Martial law was announced throughout the country. The government set up a new Constitution Drafting Assembly and the new Prime Minister promised the next general election would be held within one and a half years. The military also promised to leave the political scene after the election.

Like the military coup, which ousted Chatchai in 1992, the coup of 2007 was quietly supported by the Bangkok elites and middle class. However, this coup was seen to have the King's approval because he had granted the coup leaders a chance to meet with him in the palace the night before the coup was staged. In spite of their doubts about the military's intentions, most people did not oppose the coup. For those who hated Thaksin, a coup was the only way of getting rid of him because his wealth and politically dominant TRT party made him unbeatable at the ballot box. Many Bangkok residents openly visited the soldiers in their tanks, gave them flowers, and had their pictures taken with them. The latest development as of March 2007, was that the new constitution drafting was still in process. It will face the first referendum ever in Thai history, planned for August 2007. Whether or not the military will leave the political scene as promised is yet to be seen.

### **Development of Thai local politics**

In this part, a number of studies of Thai regional and local administration policies and local politics are explored to show the transition of Thai local politics from the past to the period before the implementation of the VFP in 2001, with the aim of illustrating how the different regional and local administration policies and local development policies of various governments affected the dynamism of local Thai politics. To this end, it is divided into two sections. The first looks at some of the concepts of power and power relations in Thai localities that are often used by academics in the field. The second section then charts changes in the power, influence, roles and characteristics of important figures – including government officials who worked in a particular locality, semi-government officials, doctors, and elected members of local committees – in order to analyze changes in the structure of power in Thai localities.

### *Transformation of the rural economy and polity*

The politics of rural Thailand has been affected by not only regional and local administrative policies but also by economic change. There have been three major economic, social, and political transformations that have had great effects on the dynamics of power in Thai localities, since the Ayudhaya period up to the period before 2001. The first was the emergence of settled agriculture and the growth of the rice trade between the late Ayudhaya period and the beginning of the Rattanakosin period. These changes allowed the nobility to accrue substantial wealth and control over manpower, and in turn led to the administrative reforms of King Chulalongkorn that started in the 1870s. The second was the series of infrastructure development programmes employing the democratization decentralization approach that were initiated by the civilian



governments from the 1970s to the 1980s. These encouraged a much greater mobility of people and goods and led to changes in the political behaviour of rural people who had immigrated to urban area. The third was the political reform in the 1990s, which led to a considerable decrease in the roles and power of government and quasi-government officials in local politics.

The establishment of the *Sakdina* system in the Ayudhaya period, as already discussed in the previous chapter, not only transformed the local nobles' status from independent territorial rulers to the King's subordinates, but also provided them with opportunities to extract wealth and forced labour directly from their permitted land.<sup>143</sup> That is, according to the system, nobles were given pieces of land and manpower attached to them. While nobles were subjected to the King, the manpower was subjected to the nobles. Under this system, the government was able to mobilize common people, wherever they lived, only through their divisional and sub-divisional heads, namely the nobles. Despite changes in the socio-economic structure, which transformed the subsistence economy of Siam to one based on agricultural trading, this pattern was not changed. Evidently, this laid the foundations for the fierce competition between the Kings and nobles at the beginning of the Rattanakosin era. That is, between 1824 and 1830, when there was a rapid growth in the rice trade with China, King Rama III decided to withdraw from actively participating in trade, and consequently abolished virtually all the royal monopolies and farmed out the collection of taxes, in order to decrease the workload of the royal family. Instead of relying on Thai nobles, the kings entrusted the handling of much oversea trade to foreign merchants because 'the foreigners were less likely to put down strong political roots and became threats to the power of the king. If they overreached themselves, they could be exiled or otherwise dealt with'.<sup>144</sup> The growth in the rice trade also led to the emergence of settled agriculture and the increasing monetization of the Siamese economy. This in turn decreased the Kings' ability to extract labour and increased the nobles' ability to extract more manpower attached to their land as people were more willing to pay a commutation fee to the government to avoid having to do *corvée* labour for the King. It turned out that by time, the wealth and power of these nobles had out grown those of the King, both in terms of economic affairs and in central and rural administration.<sup>145</sup> As discussed earlier, this led to the regional administrative

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<sup>143</sup> The term '*sakdina*' has come to be used to refer to Thai 'feudalism'. However, any satisfactory conclusions are yet to be reached. The debate centres on the 'feudal economic activities' and the 'Asiatic economic activities'. For more information, see Pasuk and Baker, 1995, p. 211

<sup>144</sup> Pasuk and Baker, 1995, p. 96

<sup>145</sup> Among those foreign traders, the Bunnag family, originally Persian traders descended from Sheikh Ahmat, emerged supreme. According to Pasuk and Baker, in late Ayudhaya, they had become close associates and marital relatives of the Chakri family. Such dynastic links enabled

reforms initiated by King Chulalongkorn in the 1870s, which centralized power and the control over all administrative units in the hands of members of the royal family and the newly created bureaucrats in the Ministry of Interior. In effect, the regional administration reached down to the district level, while the local administration – that at the sub-district and village level – was composed of quasi-government officials, the *kamnan* and *phu yai ban*, who answered directly to the district officer. Since then, government and quasi-government officials, as the only officials with authority working in localities, have become the most powerful figures in their localities. Despite the transformation from absolute monarchy to constitutional democracy in 1932, this structure of power within localities remained the same because the new rulers, namely military officials and civilian bureaucrats, wanted to maintain the system whereby bureaucrats were the only powerful figures in all the units of state administration. As will be discussed later, it was only with the political reforms of the 1990s, that the power, role, and status of government and semi-government official in local administration was decreased for the first time.

With the introduction of open politics in the 1970s, Thai localities at the sub-district level saw a series of infrastructure development programmes employing a democratic decentralization approach initiated by different civilian government, whereby existing local leaders, the *kamnan* and *phu yai ban*, were given powers to manage the programme. These included the Sub-district Development Fund of 1975-1976, and the 'Work and Income Generating Program' of 1980-1981. As discussed earlier, the programmes were attempts by the civilian government, whose power was derived from votes in general elections, to win political support from and create connections with influential local people or 'men of influence', who could direct or influence local voters' behaviour in the rural area by acting as vote canvassers (*huakhanaen*), so that they might win the next general election. These connections with influential local people were a crucial factor in winning general elections as most of candidates in the general elections resided in urban areas or in Bangkok and thus did not have large kin networks and no, or limited, personal ties with local people. Robertson calls these politicians seeking an electoral district they can control through the distribution of money and business concessions 'rural network politicians'.<sup>146</sup> For Robertson, this mutually beneficial alliance between politicians and their local connections has endured because 'it provides political parties with an influential constituency and individual candidates with a ready-made public mobilization

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members of the family to secure appointments as the head of the Phra Khlang (a key institution of government which combined the roles of foreign ministry, port authority, export warehouse, and treasury) and in the royal warehouse. By the mid-nineteenth century, the family had accumulated wealth and power through these channels. Pasuk and Baker, 1995, p. 98

<sup>146</sup> Robertson, 1996, p. 924

system.<sup>147</sup> With limited support or connections at the local level, it is evident that apart from providing their local supporters and canvassers with money, protection, and government concessions, electorally successful political parties have also reward them with administrative power in local governments through the implementation of decentralization policies. That is to say, in effect, the infrastructure development programmes had, for the first time, provided an opportunity for local businessmen, whose business were involved in construction, to build closer ties with semi-government officials. In fact, some even competed in the elections for members of the sub-district council committee and thereby became local politicians.

Together with the diversification away from dependence on rice production to other cash crops – notably dry-land cash crops such as maize, sugar cane, cassava, and rubber – and the development of the manufacturing industry, which had started in the 1950s, infrastructure developments led to a greater application of capital and technology in rural areas.<sup>148</sup> In effect, rural farmers were transformed into labourers. Also, this altered the role of capital in production and the nature of capital-labour relations. To a great extent, corporate capital has gained more direct control over labourers.<sup>149</sup> Additionally, the continuing development of physical infrastructure had the effect of bringing rural people closer to the capital. That is, with a good hard-surfaced road network linking most district and provincial centers to Bangkok, the mobility of both people and goods increased. Rural people, especially the young ones, traveled to Bangkok and other big cities for higher education and for jobs. Some with little educational attainment became labourers in the manufacturing and industrial fields. Consequently, a new generation of rural people became less politically attached to their locality. In most cases, they might return home only on long holidays, such as the King's birthday and the Songkran period (the traditional Thai New Year). Accordingly, when it comes to a local election, they often have no idea who to vote for or do not really care who gets their vote, and thus, might decide to sell their votes.

Another big wave of change in the dynamics of power in Thai localities came in the 1990s. As discussed earlier, after the events of May 1992, the mass of the Thai population were in the mood for political reform. With the aim of opening up more access for local people to participate in local administration, in 1992, the government forced the Ministry of Interior to issue the new rules and regulations to shorten the working term of *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* from

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, pp. 927-928

<sup>148</sup> Better infrastructure brought technology and capital to rural areas, creating large corporate enterprises, such as the Charoen Pokhaphand group (Hirsch, 1994, p. 322), and manufacturing plants, such as brickyards in Ayudhaya. (Arghiros, 2001, pp. 43-50)

<sup>149</sup> Hirsch, 1994, p. 322

up to the age of 60 to just five years.<sup>150</sup> And in 1994, the government issued the Sub-district Council and Sub-district Administrative Organization Act to establish the Sub-district Administrative Organization (SAO) as a new type of local government at the sub-district level.<sup>151</sup> To further decrease the Ministry of Interior's power over local government, the constitution of 1997 provided that *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* could no longer become members of any local government and were not allowed to apply for such positions while still holding the position of *kamnan* or *phu yai ban*.<sup>152</sup> In effect, *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* have fewer responsibilities and a much lesser role. That is, as the SAO is now an agent of local development with a considerable amount of money to be managed and a very broad scope – including not just infrastructure but also social and education programmes - the quasi-government officials been transformed into mere registration officials, who produce paper work on the villages' deaths and births, and the official heads of local meetings. As it turned out, many *phu yai ban* resigned from their positions so as to contest for positions in the SAO. Having said this, most, if not all of them, tried to ensure that the next *phu yai ban*, and other members of the village committee, were their allies. As was evident in Ban Tao Fai, while campaigning for a position in the SAO, the former *phu yai ban*, also campaigned on behalf of a candidate for *phu yai ban* whom he had chosen and convinced to run for the position himself. Debatably, this was not only to ensure that they might cooperate well in the work of the SAO and the village committee but also to ensure political support from the village in the next SAO election. Inevitably, the new rules have also opened up more opportunities for new political actors to participate in local governments. Regarding this, Arghiros notes, in his study on the local politics of one sub-district in central Thailand, the emergence of local businessmen involved in construction, who had previously cooperated with the former *phu yai ban* and *kamnan*, on the local political scene. Nevertheless, the two villages under study saw young villagers with a relatively higher education than the former leaders elected to work in some local governments.

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<sup>150</sup> Government of Thailand, 2001, p. 57

<sup>151</sup> Tanet, 1997, pp. 97-98

<sup>152</sup> Although this provision was issued in 1997, *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* enjoyed reserved seats in the SAO and municipalities until 2001 because the constitution allowed for four years of preparation.

*Changes in the power, influence, and roles of important figures in Thai localities*

*Government Officials*

Since the administrative reforms of King Chulalongkorn, government officials from the Ministry of Interior have been appointed to govern citizens in the area outside Bangkok, with a provincial governor as head of the provincial administration unit and a district officer as head of the district office. But because the district officer was, by law, a direct supervisor of all heads of sub-districts, or *kamnan*, and all village headman, *phu yai ban*, the government official's power reached down to the local level. In any locality, government officials enjoy power over local villagers through the authority conferred by the government. Despite their power, not all officials have influence over the villagers. Also, it is not always the case that government officials have always exercised their power or exerted their influence over the villagers directly, either. As McVey indicates, government officials use their power and exert their influence through natural local leaders, who come from families locally acknowledged as sources of power and who offer protection, advice and sustenance to the villagers. Having said this, the officials have not always been more powerful than, or been the patron of, these natural leaders. On the contrary, as McVey argues, often the officials have become subordinates or clients to these natural local leaders for two reasons: first, the rotation system of the Ministry of Interior and second, the meager salary of officials. That is to say, because of the rotation system of the Ministry of Interior, officials cannot always build long-term connections with local people themselves. Also, with only a small official salary from the Ministry, officials cannot act as sources of power.<sup>153</sup> In effect, government officials sometime build an 'uneasy but symbiotic relationship'<sup>154</sup> with local merchants and wealthy people who can provide them with financial support and act as intermediates between them and local people to ensure local cooperation in local development projects.

The roles of these officials have changed over time. During the period of the absolute monarchy, their role was that of a servant of the King. That is, they worked for the King. After the transition to constitutional democracy and during the period of military-led authoritarian regimes, government officials sometimes acted as canvassers for government parties. As direct supervisors to *kamnan* and *phu yai ban*, they could indirectly influence local villagers' voting behaviour. Despite the introduction of open politics in the 1970s, government officials still supported the candidates of their choice during election campaigns. Since the 1990s, the lesser

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<sup>153</sup> McVey, 2000, pp. 4-6

<sup>154</sup> Meaning they are in tacit competition and also in cooperation with each other (Ibid, pp. 6-7).

influence of *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* has meant that government officials have had less indirect influence over villagers' voting behaviour. Having said this, provincial and local politicians still evidently seek political support from highly placed officials, as it is believed that they can exert their influence over their subordinates. Also, the staff of existing local governments are subjected to the rules and regulations of the Ministry of Interior, and thus have similar perceptions regarding local administration to that of the Ministry. Regarding this, Chusak, along with Suchit, Pornsak and Nelson, point out that the Ministry of Interior can also exert its power over local government's affairs through the staff of local governments, who are subjected to the personnel rules and regulations of the Ministry.<sup>155</sup> That is, councilors of the Municipalities, PAO, and SAO, who are elected from and by local people, do not have any control over these staff and their day-to-day administrative work. Additionally, in some cases, due to the culture of respecting the elder or the senior, newly elected local officials even ask for suggestions and solutions for local problems from the staff simply because they have been in office before.<sup>156</sup> In addition, although the law gives the elected members of local governments greater power in allocating budgets and the right to question regional government officials, in practice, they do not or unable to use these powers. Notwithstanding this, a number of researchers recognize that through elections local businessmen have increasingly come to occupy the available seats in local governments and exploited their newly found power to expand and protect their own economic interests. In short, nowadays, provincial politicians have increasing control over local politics.

#### *Kamnan and Phu yai ban*

Like government officials, *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* derive their power through the authority granted by the government. Unlike government officials, however, they have a much more direct influence over the villagers' behaviour due to the fact that they have lived among and have built up personal connections with villagers in the area. As already discussed, until recently, *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* had a considerable amount of power and influence over local villagers. This was because, until 1992, both *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* remained in their positions until the age of their retirement (60 years old) and because, until 1994, they had more responsibilities, most of which were related to village life. That is, apart from being the head of the village committee, *phu yai ban* were also members of the Sub-district Council until 1994. Also, before the promulgation of the 1997 constitution, *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* could also apply to be members

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<sup>155</sup> See Chusak, 1975, p.42 and Suchit, Pornsak, and Nelson, 1998, pp. 150-156

<sup>156</sup> Chusak, 1975, p. 42.

of local governments.<sup>157</sup> To an extent, all these new rules designed to decrease the power of these quasi-government officials have also decreased their responsibilities and the number of roles they play in the locality. As discussed earlier, after 1997, both *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* have become mere registration officers who coordinate paperwork with the district officer.

Having said this, most, if not all, of them have remained vote canvassers for local politicians. Similar to government officials, prior to the 1970s, *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* exerted a strong influence in ensuring that villagers voted for the government party<sup>158</sup> but, after 1973, turned to mobilize votes for civilian politicians, some of whom had a business background. Despite the fact that all *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* are local residents in their locality and thus have built up long-term personal relationships with villagers, their influence over local voting trends and other activities depended on their personality, governing style, and experience. Different *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* employ different degrees of influence. For example, *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* who bring 'development' to their communities may have greater influence over their villagers than those who do little good for the communities. In addition, *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* who employ aggressiveness in governing local villagers may exert more influence over local villagers than those who are not aggressive. In some cases, *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* who stay in power for long periods of time may have greater influence than more recently appointed *kamnan* and *phu yai ban*. Having said this, the Ministry of Interior's Rules and Regulations of 1992, which shortened the official terms of *kamnan* and *phu yai ban*, have had a significant negative impact on the influence of these quasi-government officials. As is evident in this thesis, an election for the position of *phu yai ban* most often means a new *phu yai ban*. That is, after the term of the previous *phu yai ban* ended, new political actors emerged to compete to be the next *phu yai ban*. With less time in power, these new *phu yai ban* have not enjoyed the considerable degrees of influence as former *phu yai ban* who had been in power for more than 10 years.

In spite of this, competition for both positions is still high. As Arghiros points out, although the positions yield less economic benefits, candidates are still motivated to obtain them because they want the prestige and status that officialdom confers.<sup>159</sup> It can also be argued that candidates, especially those who are from business backgrounds, may need to obtain these

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<sup>157</sup> By prohibiting *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* becoming involved in local government administration, the government expected that the positions would not be as attractive in the eyes of businessmen as before because the power of resource distribution was no longer attached to the position.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17

<sup>159</sup> Arghiros, 2000, p. 118

positions if they wish to establish closer ties with government officials and politicians in order to further their economic interests at another level.

### *Tough Guy, Hit Man or Nakleng*

Unlike government and quasi-government officials, tough guys or *nakleng* do not have power or authority but, nevertheless, still exert influence over local administrations and politics. Despite some similarities with quasi-government officials, in that they are local residents of the locality, their influence over villagers is derived not from long-term connections with the villagers, but from their physical strength, through displaying personal characteristics such as being daring, courageous, honest and manly, and their roles as local overlords or *jao khong thin*.<sup>160</sup> In their localities, *nakleng* assume the role of ‘protector’ and ‘threat’, in that they protect ‘their’ villagers from external physical threats, or *nakleng* from elsewhere, but might threaten local residents if their interests should collide. For example, *nakleng* may protect the villagers’ cattle from being stolen by thieves from outside the village but might also steal the cattle themselves if they wanted to. Having said this, *nakleng* are considered gentle and kind to their friends but tough with their foes.<sup>161</sup> It can be argued that while the virtue of manliness earns them respect from others, their ability to use violence makes them feared among local people. Despite being respected and feared by local people, *nakleng* have influence in their areas only as long as they can exert their physical power over others.

The role and influence of *nakleng* have also changed over time. In the past when the communications infrastructure was not yet developed and only a few officials were sent to rural areas, *nakleng* had relatively more influence than today, when a number of police officers work in any given locality. Until the 1990s, most, if not all, *nakleng* were personal assistants to *kamnan* or *phu yai ban*. As was evident in both villages under study, the current *kamnan* had been *nakleng* themselves. With the growth of the rural economy in the 1950s, some *nakleng* became seller of factors of production, and middlemen for credit programs. As assistants to *kamnan* and *phu yai ban*, some *nakleng* have also become members of local governments. Due to the increasing presence of police officers in most areas, *nakleng* had less opportunity to use violence and intimidation, and nowadays the word ‘*nakleng*’ does not hold the same value as before. That is, the modern day *nakleng* refers to the followers and canvassers of local politicians or influential local men. Having said this, the influence of *nakleng* still persists in some localities. That is, while the *nakleng* of Ban Tao Fai have played a decreasing role in local

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid, p. 218

<sup>161</sup> Sombat, 2000, p. 54



politics as assistants to *phu yai ban* and as candidates in local election, the *nakleng* of Ban Ton Mai have recently been involved in a political killing and are still very influential.

### *Local Merchants*

Local merchants do not have power but influence, which is derived from their ability to offer villagers financial support. Their influence, however, has decreased over time and varies depending on each merchant's personality and characteristics. That is, prior to the 1970s, when there were no commercial banks in rural areas, local merchants who had cash in their hands played the role of loan providers to the villagers. By lending money to local people, allowing villagers to buy their goods at a cheap price, or in some cases giving them for free so as to help villagers out, local merchants became patrons to local people. Also, as mentioned earlier, because some government officials may have sought financial support from local merchants, these merchants could also be considered as patrons to government officials, as in return they could exert their influence over the decision-making regarding government concessions and contracts.

Changes and reforms in local government structure during the 1970s, together with economic transformation in rural areas, opened up more room for local businessmen in local politics. That is, with the intention of getting more directly involved in the decision-making of the Sub-district Council, whose responsibilities include local infrastructure development, some local merchants and businessmen, mostly in the construction industry, sought support from local 'men of influence', such as quasi-government officials, who could, in one way or another, direct local villagers voting behaviour, or bought votes directly from the voters. Moreover, some local businessmen became owners of local manufacturing plants and thus gained special influence over their employees. That is, because most, if not all, of their employees' income come from wages paid by them, they can exert a considerable amount of influence over their employees' behaviour. As often illustrated, during election periods, employers can force their employees to vote for them or candidates of their choice; in some cases, they might even take their employees' ID cards and use them to vote themselves.<sup>162</sup> Having said this, not all local merchants and businessmen in every village exert influence over villagers' behaviour. That is, even though a local merchant in Ban Tao Fai became the second *phu yai ban* and the most influential man in the village, no local merchant in Ban Ton Mai had ever been so influential in that village.

*Godfather or Chao Pho*

Nowadays, the term '*chao pho*',<sup>163</sup> equivalent to 'mafia' and 'godfather' in English, is used widely to refer to major provincial businessmen of exclusively Chinese descent, who have a considerable influence in politics at both the national and the local level. The characteristics of a *chao pho* are defined and emphasized differently by scholars. While Sombat defines *chao pho* as businessmen originating from *nakleng*,<sup>164</sup> Ockey sees them as a combination of the *nakleng* and wealthy merchant, whom he calls '*sia*'.<sup>165</sup> Meanwhile, Pasuk and Baker emphasize their 'supernatural' ability to flout the law.<sup>166</sup> Ockey also notes that nowadays, the term *chao pho* is applied to, firstly, those who are involved in crime, secondly, those who build their fortune on corruption, and thirdly, those whose leadership style is decisive, charismatic, and generous.<sup>167</sup> Notwithstanding this, Sombat notes that a *chao pho*'s influence is derived from their generosity, and protection given to local people. For local people, to do what a *chao pho* asks them to 'is nothing compared to what the *chao pho* (godfather) has done for the community, and they are happy to comply'.<sup>168</sup> Distinctively, Pasuk and Baker argue that the *chao pho*'s influence is derived from their 'rough and ready' method in doing business and their reputation for using hired gunmen and sporadic violence.<sup>169</sup>

In spite of their differences, many scholars seem to agree that *chao pho* were on the rise in the 1970s, especially during the period of open politics, although prior to that, *chao pho* had already cultivated close links with government officials and urban entrepreneurs in order to advance their economic interests locally. Pasuk and Baker argue that, *chao pho*, 'occupied the space that was created between the concentration of economic and political power in Bangkok, on the one hand, and the concentrations of people and resources in the provincial periphery on the other'.<sup>170</sup> It is argued that during the late 1960s and 1970s under the military-led

<sup>162</sup> Arghiros, 2000, pp. 88-89

<sup>163</sup> Literally, *chao pho* means the spirit of those who died in an unnatural way. It is believe that unless people die peacefully, their spirit never leaves the place and will grow more powerful as time passes by. The violent the cause of death, the more supra-natural power they hold (Piker, 1979, p. 116).

<sup>164</sup> Although saying that *chao pho* and *nakleng* have similar characteristics, in that both of them are both respected and feared locally because of their ability to use violence, Sombat clarifies that, economically, a *chao pho*'s status is much higher than the rest of the community, including *nakleng* (Sombat, 2000, pp. 55-58).

<sup>165</sup> Ockey, 1993, p. 53

<sup>166</sup> Pasuk and Baker, 2000, p 37

<sup>167</sup> Ockey, 2000, p. 81

<sup>168</sup> Sombat, 2000, p. 59

<sup>169</sup> Pasuk and Baker, 2000, p. 37

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, p. 36

authoritarian regime, the *chao pho*'s business interests began to prosper due to the protection and cooperation from government officials. *Chao pho* engaged in various types of illicit business enterprises, such as smuggling, logging, gambling, drug trafficking, arms running, and prostitution, and legal businesses that provided 'fast and lucrative returns', such as public works contracting and transportation.<sup>171</sup> Concomitantly, *chao pho* acquired their connections with urban entrepreneurs through the commercial businesses they established during Sarit's era. By opening large accounts in local commercial banks, they became important customers and attracted the attention of bank executives and owners. Meanwhile, government officials and urban entrepreneurs tended to cooperate with and ask for support from *chao pho*, so as to influence local people's behaviour. By the 1970s, when urban entrepreneurs started to enter politics, they used their connections with *chao pho* to gain access to local people. Notwithstanding this, *chao pho* themselves also tried to become involved in politics at both a local and the national level. They supported political parties and candidates financially and in some cases supported their close relatives to become elected politicians. Their influence, in this sense, was felt in that candidates from the opposing parties to those that *chao pho* supported stood no chance of winning elections.

Having said this, the *chao pho*'s influence in local politics is limited only to the province that they are living in and some parts of nearby provinces. Also, it should not be assumed that there is at least one *chao pho* in each province. Evidently, there are no *chao pho* in Lopburi and Krabi provinces, where the two villages under study are situated. Therefore, there is no evidence of a *chao pho*'s influence in either village.

### *Monks or Phra*

The monks' influence over people's behaviour is derived from their status as religious leaders. Due to their possession of *Dharmaa*, or lessons in Buddhism, and their behaviour, shaped by monastic rules and regulations, monks or *phra* have become and will continue to be local councilors, advisors, spiritual leaders, and important leaders in secular affairs.<sup>172</sup> This is especially true for popular *phra*, who are considered to have supra-natural powers such as seeing the future and the past – these tend to be those who have been in the monkhood for a long time or are 'permanent *phra*'<sup>173</sup> – and can influence hundreds and sometimes thousands of people. It

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid, pp. 36-37

<sup>172</sup> Keyes, 1979, p. 207

<sup>173</sup> According to Keyes, the question that should be asked concerning monks' influence over local people in the village is not whether or not monks have such influence but whether or not that village has a 'permanent monk' (Keyes, 1979, p. 209).

is also widely evident that monks sometimes exert their influence in local politics or in local elections. As human beings, *phra* have preferences, which implies that in some cases *phra* can direct local people's behaviour for the benefit of those whom the *phra* see as proper. As evident in almost every election campaign, candidates go to make merit at temples in order to show their faith and religious piety. This is supposed to demonstrate their generosity and to encourage local people and *phra* to see them as 'good people' (*khon di*).<sup>174</sup> By donating, *Tham bun*, large amounts of money to the temple for merit-making activities, especially rituals, or for building a new temple building or *phra*'s residences, such candidates 'show and build transcendent virtue, which is synonymous with credibility'.<sup>175</sup> As Arghiros argues, 'religious leaders' attempts to influence villagers demonstrate varying degrees of subtlety, which reflect their interest at stake'.<sup>176</sup> In some cases, a *phra* signals which candidates he favors indirectly. Taking a more aggressive approach, a *phra* might threaten to disrobe if his villagers do not support the candidates of his choice.<sup>177</sup> In other cases, as Keyes puts it, *phra* can exhibit their disapproval of some candidates by passively reacting to their proposals or invitations, which is then seen by local people as 'devastating as open contradiction'.<sup>178</sup>

Having said this, not all *phra* in every local temple are influential, and not all influential *phra* try to exert their influence in politics. That is to say, *phra* who have been ordained for a longer time, and thus have had knowledge of the Buddha's lessons for longer, are more respectable than those who have been ordained for just a few weeks or months. In rare cases, however, young *phra* and new *phra* who have special characteristics, supra-natural powers, or preaching skills may be more influential than old *phra*. *Phra* with different roles in the villagers' lives also have different degrees of influence over the villagers' behaviour. As their roles change over time, their influence does too. As was evident in the two villages under study, the *phra* in one of local temples of Ban Tao Fai, who played the role of initiators, participants, and financial supporters for most of the local infrastructure development programmes, had a significant influence in the villagers' life, while the *phra* of one of local temples of Ban Ton Mai, who did not play much part in any village development programmes, had relatively much less influence in the villagers' lives. As will be discussed in the later chapter, with the establishment of the SAO, which meant that the responsibility and tremendous financial support for the village's

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<sup>174</sup> See for example, Arghiros (2000) for details on how election candidates use this strategy in promoting their personal qualifications.

<sup>175</sup> Grey, Christine E., 1991, 'Hegemonic images: Languages and silence in the royal Thai polity', *Man*, vol. 26, pp. 43-65, cited in Arghiros, 2000, p. 149.

<sup>176</sup> Arghiros, 2000, p. 152

<sup>177</sup> For more discussion, see Arghiros, 2000, especially pp. 149-153

infrastructure and other development programmes fell into the hands of elected SAO members, the *phra* of Ban Tao Fai evidently played a decreasing role in village life and enjoyed less and less influence over the villagers. Having said this, while they were still very influential, the *phra* of Ban Tao Fai had evidently not tried to exert their influence in local politics. Indeed, political activities were prohibited in the temple compound.

### *Teachers or Khru*

Teachers or *khru* are usually government officials of the Ministry of Education.<sup>179</sup> Unlike the officials from the Ministry of Interior, *khru* do not have power or authority in regional and local administration but in matters related to education only. Having said this, some teachers do have influence over the behaviour of quasi-government officials in the village and the villagers themselves. As Keyes argues, local villagers respect *khru* for their influence over the children of the community, their status as government officials, their high educational attainment, and their knowledge and sophistication about the larger world.<sup>180</sup> *Khru* can exert their influence over people's behaviour by giving advice and by asking for reciprocation from former students and their parents for their services or *bunxhun* as teachers.<sup>181</sup> In line with this, *khru* in rural areas, where most of the population has no or very little education, have more influence than *khru* in urban areas, where people have a higher level of education and thus might not need a *khru*'s advice. As evident in the two villages under study, as government officials and knowledgeable people, some *khru* are even asked by *kamnan* and *phu yai ban* for advice, invited to participate in the village development project, or to be their advisors. It is not true to say that every *khru* has the same degree of influences, however. In fact, different *khru* have different degrees of influence depending on their charisma, behaviour, and in some cases, on where they are from. Usually, head teachers or *khru yai* are respected more highly than normal *khru*. Also, some *khru* whose creditability is destroyed by bad behaviour might not be respected at all and in turn cannot influence local people's behaviour. In addition, as was evident in Ban Ton Mai, some *khru* who come from other provinces and who have little in common with local people may also be alienated as 'other people' and thus have no influence.

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<sup>178</sup> Keyes, 1979, p. 208

<sup>179</sup> Recently, new teachers have been hired on a contract basis in many areas, and do not have the status of government officials. However, in the two case study villages, all teachers were still government officials.

<sup>180</sup> Keyes, 1979, p. 209

<sup>181</sup> See Keyes (1979), and Fishel (1997)

During election campaigns, some *khru* might be canvassers or even candidates. Fishel argues that teachers are drawn into canvassing by the patronage networks within schools. That is they often support those who would bring, or have brought, benefits to their school. In some cases, their supervisors and patrons, such as fellow teacher in a higher rank and other bureaucrats, might also ask them to support their choice of candidates.<sup>182</sup> As candidates, Fishel points out that teachers are often motivated by the fact that ‘they have reached the climax of their bureaucratic careers’ already and ‘ready to step into a larger-than-life, glamorous role as gracious patron-politician’.<sup>183</sup> In campaigning in elections, teachers repeatedly emphasize their identities as teachers and calling upon the respect for their position and sense of indebtedness.<sup>184</sup> However, these patronage networks between teachers and their former students and their parents are not timeless. As Fishel notes, they are products of a particular historical and cultural context.<sup>185</sup> Nowadays, because of social and economic change, it can be argued that teachers’ influence is in decline. Relying on their *bunkhun* given to local people alone may not lead to the results that teachers want. With widespread vote-buying in the community, other factors, such as their willingness and financial ability to buy votes will always have an effect on teachers’ political influence to a certain extent.<sup>186</sup>

## Conclusion

In Thailand, regional and local administrations have always been important political instruments used by elites to gain and distribute power to themselves and their subordinates. Since the early 1890s, when King Chulalongkorn implemented the administration reforms to centralize scattered power into his hands by establishing the Ministry of Interior as the single powerful ministry for regional and local administration, creating military and civilian bureaucrats who, in theory, were answerable directly to him, and creating quasi-government officials, *kamnan* and *phu yai ban*, as the heads of local administrations who were answerable to the district officer, to the early 2000s, when the people’s pressure for decentralization had reached its peak, Thai local administration was transformed from a highly centralized administration, where regional administration reached down to a sub-district level and civilian bureaucrats of the Ministry of Interior, and quasi-government officials, had full control in local administration and politics, to a more decentralized state, where administration at sub-district level became local administration where

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<sup>182</sup> Fishel, 1997, pp. 454-457

<sup>183</sup> Fishel, 1997, p. 457

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, p. 458

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, p. 465

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, p. 459

all members came from local election, and civilian bureaucrats and quasi-government officials' role in local administration and politics was limited to the extent that they could not take part in any local committees. The local administration and politics of twenty-first century Thailand can be considered a much more open space, one in which local people can contest for power.

These changes have affected the dynamics of local politics to some degree. The roles and status of political figures in the locality have changed. Government and quasi-government officials have lower status, and hence less power and influence over villagers' lives. In order to hold on to their power and influence, some *phu yai ban* and *kamnan* have resigned from their positions and stood for elected office as SAO chairs or members. While the roles and influence of local monks or *phra* and local teacher or *khru* in local politics still vary and are dependent on their personalities and willingness to exert their influence over the villagers, it is evident that, through the use of their money, local merchants or businessmen have managed to become more involved in local governments, and thus have more roles, power, and influence over village life.

Prior to the Thaksin period, other governments had tried to increase their power and the power of their supporters by reorganizing local structures. Different governments had pushed for and established different new forms of local administration, directing power to their vote bases and provincial canvassers. As discussed, while the Democrats and Palang Dharmaa (whose vote base was largely among non-bureaucrats) pushed for gubernatorial elections after May 1992, the NAP (whose main vote base was government officials, headmen and *kamnan*) strongly opposed this move. Similarly, after the Democrat-led government of 1992-1995 established sub-district administrative organisations, the later NAP government of 1996-97 sought to revise the regulations to favour their own support groups. Unlike former premiers Chuan Leekpai and Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, Thaksin was much more interested in projects than in structures. To Thaksin, in order to reorganize local power for his own political advantage, there was no need to abolish existing local structures and build new ones (just as there was no need to revise the 1997 Constitution). Instead, he could establish new local 'development projects', like the VFP, which were managed by ad hoc committees rather than conventional structures. Whereas for the Democrats and the NAP, resources had followed power, in Thaksin's project-based style of management, power followed resources. In fact, the VFP was all about injecting money – the one million baht fund – and not about creating structures. As will be shown in Chapters 5 and 6, changes in the dynamics of power, which occurred after the implementation of the VFP, happened as a result of the one million baht fund itself, and the expectations and responses the money generated in recipient communities. Existing power-holders were forced to adapt themselves to this new, project-based form of influence, or else risk experiencing a decline in

their local standing. The VFP therefore produced a new generation of winners and losers among the elites of the villages studied.



## Chapter 2

### The Social and Economic Backgrounds of the Villagers and their Implications for the Dynamics of Power

The social and economic backgrounds of villagers in different regions of Thailand differ from each other to the extent that villagers from different regions speak different dialects, eat different kinds of food, and have different norms and culture. To a great extent, differences in the social and economic spheres, in which the political structure of each locality functions, can account for differences in the political behaviour of villagers in different regions. It is important to look into these backgrounds, not merely as part of all observable phenomena, but as other factors that have an impact on the dynamics of power. Only when we understand the villagers' social interrelations, their roles, responsibilities, and places within the economic activities, and their relations of production, are we then able to specify their status and place in local politics and better understand why some villagers were superior in status to others, why they initiated and used certain strategies, and not others, to gain, use, preserve, and enhance their power and influence others, and why their opponents chose to challenge their power and influence the way they exerted it.

This chapter explores the social and economic backgrounds of the two villages under study and analyzes their implications for the villagers' political life, meaning how they think, interact, and integrate politically. It is organized into two main parts. The first part investigates the social aspects of the villagers' lives, all of which are related to their political characteristics, to find out why some villagers were in a superior position – socially, economically, and/or politically – to others in the same village. It starts by exploring the profile and history of both villages and their villagers, which are the fundamental of the villagers' social interrelations, including the levels of cohesion, trust, cooperation, solidarity among the villagers, and their methods of conflict resolution, and analyzing the implications of these social interrelations for the villagers' political life. The second part then examines the villagers' livelihoods, and their main means of production, which is *tham rai*, or farming annual crops, in Ban Tao Fai and *tham suan*, or farming perennial crops, in Ban Ton Mai.<sup>187</sup> It maps the villagers' production relations by analyzing how factors of production were owned, used, and lent out among the villagers, and how the villagers sold their produce. It then analyzes how political influence was tied to the

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<sup>187</sup> Another phrase in Thai characterizing the type of crops or plants the agriculturalists grow that readers in Thai studies may be more familiar with is *tham nar*, which means working in the rice field. It is the main economic activities of the agriculturalists living in the Central Plain.

control of these factors. Ideally, this chapter should be read in close conjunction with the next two chapters, which examine the dynamics of power of the two villages before the implementation of the Village Fund Project (VFP) in 2001.

### **Villagers' social background and the villagers' political life**

#### *Villages' histories and profiles*

Like most of the villages in the northern part of the Central Plain, Ban Tao Fai is a relatively new village. It was founded in the 1960s when displaced people from nearby provinces – Nakhon Ratchasima or Khorat, Nakhon Sawan, Buriram, and Khon Kaen in the northeast, Phitsanulok in the north, and Chainat, Angtong, Singburi, south of Lopburi – migrated to the area in search of virgin land on which to settle down and start new lives, despite the fact that the land in this area was unfertile and rocky. By the time the field research for this study was conducted, it was one of nine villages in Buaban sub-district, Tara District, Lopburi province. It had a total area of 4,800 Rai. It consisted of 98 households and 450 people.<sup>188</sup> Despite being situated in the centre of the sub-district, Ban Tao Fai was far away from all government offices. The nearest post office, police station, and weekly fresh-food market – where most of the villagers buy goods and food supplies – were about 20 kilometres away, while the nearest hospital was about 30 kilometres away. Within the village itself, there was a local health office and local school (*Ban Khao Tham* school), which provided education from kindergarten to primary level for the children of Ban Tao Fai and nearby villages, and two local temples, *Wat Khao Tham*, with 50 and 92 live-in monks and nuns respectively, and *Wat Pa Mai*, where there were 10 live-in monks.

Unlike Ban Tao Fai, Ban Ton Mai is an old village. It has long been part of Krabi Lek sub-district, whose history is as important as the history of Krabi province itself.<sup>189</sup> By the time

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<sup>188</sup> Different documents give different numbers of households. Therefore I chose to count the number of households and the population by myself by interviewing all heads of households. Of all the people registered as residents of the village, only about 345 people actually reside in the village. Some of the rest live in town while others are living in nearby villages or other provinces. The number of households and the population stated here should be taken as a reference to the size of the village only.

<sup>189</sup> Prior to the regional administrative reforms in 1892, the locals found two ancient swords ('*krabi*' in Thai) in separate places and sent them as gifts to the *Chao Muang* at the time, who later named the province 'Krabi' and the place where the larger sword was found '*Krabi Yai*' (which means large sword) and the place where the smaller sword was found '*Krabi Lek*' (meaning small sword). Both Krabi Yai and Krabi Lek communities later became sub-districts of the present-day province.

the field research was conducted, Ban Ton Mai was one of thirteen villages in Krabi Lek sub-district, Klang district, Krabi province. Its total area was 2,726 Rai. There were 593 people and 133 households.<sup>190</sup> Ban Ton Mai is not only located in the centre of the sub-district, it is also the administrative centre of the sub-district, with a number of government offices, including the sub-district's post office and police station, the Krabi Lek SAO office, a weekly fresh-food market, and the biggest school in the sub-district (Ton Mai School) – which provided education from kindergarten to high school level to most children in the sub-district. Within the village, there was also a local temple, *Wat Ton Mai*, where four monks were residing. Even though the distance between the village and the nearest city centre was similar to that of Ban Tao Fai (about 30 kilometres away), it was comparatively easier for the villagers of Ban Ton Mai to travel to their nearest city centre to use public facilities and services primarily because they had better roads and more convenient means of transportation. While Ban Tao Fai's main road, which connected the village to other villages and to the city centre, was an old gravel road, Ban Ton Mai's main road was an asphalt road. Also, while most of the villagers of Ban Tao Fai had no private means of transportation, meaning they had to take a whole day off work to wait for a rare bus passing by in order to go to the nearest city centre, those of Ban Ton Mai had at least one motorcycle per household and visited the city centre about three times a week.

Debatably, the age of the village and the ease of access to public facilities affected villagers' dependency on their *phu yai ban* and other leaders, such as teachers (*khru*) and local merchants, and, to a certain extent, the status of these leaders. Because the villagers could acquire information and news from the government offices and deal with government officials by themselves, they were not dependent on their *phu yai ban* and other leaders on these matters. In contrast, because it was difficult for the villagers of Ban Tao Fai to travel to the local city centre, they depended on their *phu yai ban* or other leaders who had to travel to the city centre for some reason, to either take them to the city centre with them or to act as mediators, passing on information and news from government officials and the staff of government offices. Also, as part of a long established village and sub-district, most, if not all, of the villagers of Ban Ton Mai had more complex and close connections and/or relationships with government officials and staff of government offices than most of the villagers of Ban Tao Fai did. As was evident, a number of Ban Ton Mai villagers were friends with and, in some cases, related to government officials and government office staff. In contrast, only the *phu yai ban* and a few villagers of Ban Tao Fai had started to foster relationships with government officials and their staff in the late 1960s. The villagers of Ban Ton Mai thus had more means of acquiring information from the

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<sup>190</sup> Krabi Lek SAO Yearly Development Plan of 2003, p. 2.

officials and staff, and were more willing or confident in dealing with them directly. In effect, the *phu yai ban* and other leaders of Ban Tao Fai had more roles and greater importance as mediators between the villagers and officials than those of Ban Ton Mai.

### *Villagers' origins*

Most of the villagers of Ban Tao Fai were immigrants who had migrated from various nearby provinces since the 1960s. Before 1979, the land and people of the present village were part of Village Number 8 in Buaban sub-district. But as the number of residents grew, Village 8 was divided into two villages: Village 8 and Ban Tao Fai. Similar to other villages nearby, the majority of the villagers of Ban Tao Fai were immigrants from Khorat. There two reasons were for this. Firstly, Nakornrachseema province or Khorat is closer to Lopburi, and Buaban sub-district in particular, than the other provinces from where the rest of the villagers originated. Therefore, more Khorat people migrated into the area. Secondly, compared to villagers from other provinces, Khorat people were more familiar with farming unfertile land. As a result, while some immigrants, mostly from the Central Plain where lands were more fertile, moved out of the village, Khorat immigrants stayed. Regarding this, the present *phu yai ban* recalled that since the establishment of the village, the number of households originating from Angtong, Chainat, and Nakhon Sawan had decreased from 10, 6, and 10 to 3, 3, and 4 respectively, while most, if not all, of those from Khorat had stayed and even convinced some of their relatives to join them.<sup>191</sup> By the time the field research was conducted, there were 85 households originating from Khorat. Moreover, the migration had not yet stopped. After I left the village at the end of 2003, a number of families from the nearby district of Darn Khoontod, where there was a major expropriation of land in 2000 due to dam construction, had recently bought pieces of land in the village. Although most of them had not yet moved there, some had already registered themselves as official residents. In September 2005, one year after I left the village, an assistant to the *phu yai ban* told me that there were officially 479 people in 110 households registered as residents but only 350 people were actually residing in the village.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Interview with the present *phu yai ban* of Ban Tao Fai, on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2003 at his home.

<sup>192</sup> Interview with Khieu, an assistant to the *phu yai ban*, on 20 September 2005 at *Wat Khao Tham* school.

**Table 2.1: The number of villagers in Ban Tao Fai, and their origins (as of November 2003)**

<b>Origin of the villagers</b>	<b>Number of households*</b>	<b>Number of villagers**</b>
Khorat	85	368
Angtong	3	16
Chainat	3	13
Nakhon Sawan	4	21
Singburi	3	16
Buriram	2	7
Lopburi	3	9
<i>Total</i>	<i>98</i>	<i>450</i>

Source: Author's own interviews with the villagers.

\* In some households, there were residents of different origins. I refer to the origin of the majority of the residents in the same household.

\*\* This number includes the villagers' descendants who were born in the village.

Unlike those of Ban Tao Fai, most of the villagers of Ban Ton Mai were local, meaning that they, their parents, and grandparents, were born in the village. By the time of the field research, there were only ten villagers who originated from other sub-districts, districts, or provinces. Of all these newcomers, five came from the southern region of Thailand – specifically Nakhon Srithammarat, Phuket, and Phang Gna – and thus shared the same culture and spoken dialect as the local villagers. Accordingly, they had assimilated easily.<sup>193</sup> Because some of them are married to the locals, other villagers have embraced them as one of their own. The other five newcomers (from three different families) came from the Northeastern part of Thailand to become wage labourers. Three of them came from Surin in 1982 and became residents in their own household in 1990.<sup>194</sup> The other two came from Udon in 2000 and have since become residents in their employer's household. Even though these five northeastern wage labourers do not share the same culture and dialects as the local villagers, their inferior status means that they have tried to assimilate themselves to villager customs to a certain extent.

<sup>193</sup> There are many dialects of the Thai language. They can be roughly divided into the four dialects used in the four different parts of the country: the northern dialect, the northeastern dialect, the central dialect, and the southern dialect. Some words, speaking tones, and speaking speed are unique to a particular dialect. Moreover, even though people from the same region of the country but from different provinces speak the same dialect, they might also speak with certain differences in tone and speed.

<sup>194</sup> There are two ways to be registered as a resident: one is to be registered as a resident of your own newly established household. The other is to be registered as a resident of an existing household, which requires the approval of the house owner.

**Table 2.2: The numbers of villagers of Ban Ton Mai, and their origins (as of February 2004)**

<b>Origin of the villagers</b>	<b>Number of households**</b>	<b>Number of villagers</b>
Krabi*	132	584
Phuket	0	1
Nakhon Sithammarat	0	2
Phang Gna	0	2
Surin	1	3
Udon	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>593</b>

Source: Author's own interview with the villagers.

\* This refers to villagers who originated from Ban Ton Mai and from nearby villages in the same sub-district of Krabi Lek.

\*\* Some of the villagers who originated from elsewhere now live in their spouses' or employer' household. Therefore, they do not constitute a new household of their own.

### *Villagers' social interrelations*

#### *Cohesion/Unity*

Because the villagers of Ban Tao Fai have different origins, and come from different provinces, they are not socially and politically united. Even in 2003, most of the villagers were still very much attached to their roots, and were divided into provincial groups: Khorat, Angtong, Nakhon Sawan, Chainat, and Bureeram. There were three primary reasons for this. Firstly, when the first- and second-generation villagers migrated to the village, those who shared the same origins built their houses close to each other. Over the years, they have developed more complex connections and closer relationships as neighbours and wage labourers for each other. Secondly, because they speak different dialects, practice different cultures, and share different norms and values in life, the villagers of different origins have not really been able to assimilate to or understand others with different backgrounds to the same extent as with those who have the same origins. This is a result of the fact that the villagers, especially the first- and second-generation villagers, mingle only with those of the same origin. For instance, in local meetings, they sat next to only those people who shared their origins. Thirdly, the villagers' attachments to their different values have hindered assimilation. To a certain extent, villagers of one common origin consider their culture and way of life superior to that of others of different origins. For example, villagers from Central Plain provinces such as Angtong, Singburi, and Chainat, who spoke central Thai and thus considered themselves 'pure Thai' or *thai tae*, looked down on

villagers from the northeastern province of Khorat, referring to them as Laotians simply because they spoke the Isarn dialect, which is similar to the Lao language, and ate Lao food. In the same way, people from Khorat or the ‘Laotians’ saw those from the Central Plain, whom they called ‘the southerners’ or *khon lang*, as problem-makers and even criminals because many of them were actual criminals who had fled to the area to avoid criminal charges. In addition, both ‘pure Thais’ and ‘Laotians’ alienated themselves from the villagers who came from Bureerum province because they referred to them as Khmer (Cambodians) because they spoke the Khmer language with each other. Cohesion among those who have the same origins has ensured that in every local election, villagers have supported only those who share their origins. As such, candidates from the Khorat group, who made up the majority of the villagers, or those who were supported by the leaders of the Khorat group, always won. Moreover, even though differences between the villagers based on their origins and preferences were slowly fading away – through various channels, such as schooling and working together on the farm or on some village development projects – most of the leaders were still those who came from Khorat. As will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, this was due to the leaders’ success in preserving the power and influence within their close circle of relatives.

Unlike those of Ban Tao Fai, most of the villagers of Ban Ton Mai were related to each other. Not only were the younger generation villagers descendants of the older ones but also, through intermarriage between families of many generations, these villagers were, in one way or another, kin to each other. Although there were few non-local villagers living in the village, there were no obvious divisions between them. In fact, the locals of Ban Ton Mai referred to the newcomers, who came from the southern region, as ‘the same southern people’ (*khon tai muankan*), not ‘the others’ (*khon un*). There had never been conflict between the newcomers and the locals. Indeed, one of the newcomers had assimilated himself so well that his wife’s family, who were local, had convinced him to run in the election for Ban Ton Mai’s member of the Krabi Lek SAO (which had two representatives from each village) in May 2004. He received a moderate number of votes from the villagers of the same family. Certainly, he was not the one who received the least votes in that election.

Inevitably, the reason that the villagers of Ban Ton Mai had united so well was because of their shared kinship rather than the fact that they were from the same village. That is to say, the villagers tended to stick together with fellow villagers who were also their relatives and distanced themselves from fellow villagers who were not related to them. If they had to choose between relatives who resided outside the village and fellow villagers who were not their kin, they would certainly choose their relatives. Evidently, in any election at the sub-district, district

or provincial level, the winner did not come from the village, sub-district or district with the highest population. Instead, the winners came from the biggest extended family. In short, those who had more relatives had more chance of winning a local election. Most often, such candidates shared the same surname as the majority of the people in that constituency. The most recent local election, the election for the chairman of Krabi Lek SAO in 2004, saw a young male villager of Village 13, who was a janitor in Ton Mai school and came from the fourth largest extended family in the sub-district, win. In an interview I conducted one month prior to the election, he told me that he would win simply because, of all the candidates, he came from the largest extended family. In the same way, the present *phu yai ban* of Ban Ton Mai was elected to office because he was the one with the most relatives (*yat yoe*), even though he was widely known as an irresponsible drunkard. Additionally, all former *phu yai ban* and most of the elected members of the local committee had all come from large extended families.

### *Trust*

The word ‘trust’ is equivalent to the word ‘*chua jai*’ in Thai, which means believing in one’s heart. For Thais, trusting someone means either believing that that person would do only good things to them and for them, or believing in someone’s ability to do something to the best of their ability. To be able to trust someone, one needs to not only know the person, ‘*ru jak*’, but also to know the person’s heart, ‘*ru jai*’, which can only happen when one knows the person’s background – who their parents are, what their profession is, how that person was as a kid or teenager, and what that person has been doing and how – and knows the person personally, as a friend or neighbour, or through having worked together. Kinship was another factor that could create or destroy trust. For example, if one’s relative was known as a bad person, one would also be tainted with their badness. Thais would not trust that person because they believe that their relatives have an effect on their behaviour. In the same way, once Thais trust one member of a particular family, they tend to trust other members of that family who they do not know in person or have a relationship with. In a political context, most, if not all, Thais often conflate the real meaning of ‘*ru jai*’, which means knowing the heart of someone with ‘*ru jak*’, which means knowing of someone. That is, even though they often said that when it comes to an election, they would elect the person they *ru jai*, or trust, in reality and especially in a large-scale election such as a national one, they would vote for only the person they know of, through recommendations from canvassers who were their relatives or friends, simply because they could never really learn of or know ‘the heart’ of the candidates. By knowing the candidate or knowing a friend or canvasser of the candidate, they believe that they could later somehow ask for help or a favor



from the candidate when needed. Through understanding this, one can then comprehend why clan networks are such an important factor in winning elections in some parts of Thailand, such as the south where there has been less emigration in search of jobs than in other areas, but are not as important in other parts, such as the northeast and the central region. The good livelihood has been the most important factor in keeping southern people from moving to other areas in search of jobs, most of the people still live in the same area as their parents, grandparents, and other kin. Therefore, immediate family, relatives, and friends of relatives become their respective choice in local elections. In contrast, clan networks rarely exist in urban areas like Bangkok or in newly established villages where people knew each other very little. This was primarily because in such areas most people are immigrants from other areas who either came looking for jobs in the city or for new land to settle in a new village. Therefore, when it comes to an election, people in urban areas or newly established villages elect a person based on their profile or reputation.

In the case of Ban Tao Fai, the first- and second-generation villagers had only migrated into the area in the 1960s and thus they had no or very little knowledge of each other's background. Realizing that they could not know anyone's heart (*ru jai*), they opted for just knowing the person and that person's ability (*ru jak*). Of all the strangers in the village, these villagers felt familiar only with those who shared the same origin and a similar culture, and thus hired them, rather than others who had different origins, to work as wage labourers on their farm or even supported them in local elections. Having said this, it was evident that over time, and through various channels of socialization, the villagers of Ban Tao Fai had started to trust others who came from different origins more. Because the *tham rai* method of farming requires a lot of labour, it was evident that since the 1980s, villagers had started to ask other villagers from different origins to work in their fields. By the time the field research was conducted, job division in the fields was based on the labourers' skill rather than their origins, or their parents' origins, as it had been before. Through schooling, the later generation villagers had also learned about each other since they were children. Apart from this, intermarriage between younger generation villagers from different origins was also evident. By the time this research was conducted, there were six couples whose parents had different provinces of origin. Indeed, these marriages had also encouraged trust among members of the two families linked through marriage. As part of the same extended family, all family members have learned more about each other and started to trust each other more.

In the case of Ban Ton Mai, although most of the villagers were related to each other and thus knew each other's backgrounds and heart better than those of Ban Tao Fai, the degree

of trust among the villagers was not necessarily higher. Despite the fact that they would, at any given election, prefer to elect and support their relatives, in the hope that their relatives would then return the favour somehow, they did not trust their relatives as easily when it came to money and property matters. Indeed, theft, even among relatives, was common in Ban Ton Mai and other villages in Krabi Lek sub-district. As a matter of fact, the villagers were known among the villagers who lived in Muang District as 'thieves'. From my own investigations, this reputation was not at all exaggerated. Throughout my four months field research, there were cases of theft on a daily basis, some of which I also witnessed myself. In most cases, villagers stole fruit from the backyards or orchards of their neighbours while they were away. When their houses were situated on other villagers' rubber tree farms, they would sometimes steal rubber sap when the owner returned home for breakfast. Most of these thefts were neither matters of immorality nor of poverty, however. In truth, respectable figures such as teachers, police officers, and wealthy villagers also stole. In various interviews, they legitimized their actions by saying that they only stole from those who deserved to be stolen from or who did not deserve all the good fortune they were enjoying. Literally, they stole because they were unhappy with that person. However, many villagers clarified that they stole because they envied (*ittcha*) their targets or because they wanted to get even with a rival or opponent. Due to the lack of trust in these matters, the villagers would hire only their close relatives, some of whom lived in another village, to work on their farms, especially in the case of rubber plantations where rubber products could be stolen easily. Therefore, when the northeastern labourers migrated into the area less than ten years ago, they were warmly received and were easily hired. Also, when it came to money, the villagers did not normally lend money to just anyone. They would usually lend money or become guarantor to only their immediate family because, most of the time, they were afraid they would not get their money back. Since the villagers were somehow related to each other, those in debt would prefer not to pay back the debt in cash but by helping out with errands or farming instead. This does not mean that borrowing cash or money lending were not common in the village. But when it came to this matter, the villagers would turn only to their close relatives. As will be discussed in detail in a later chapter, the lack of trust among the villagers in money matters also prevented them from participating in some local development projects that provided cheap loans to the villagers, such as The Saving for Producing Project (SPP) and the VFP.

### *Cooperation*

In both villages, cooperation among villagers was always occasional. The villagers would cooperate in doing some things only when it was needed and once it was done, the cooperation would be dissolved. Cooperation among the villagers in both villages can be placed in two categories: cooperation in crop producing and cooperation in building communal infrastructure. Evidently, the number of villagers involved, and the degree of participation, in cooperative work in Ban Tao Fai was higher than in Ban Ton Mai primarily because the communal infrastructure in Ban Tao Fai was not yet developed and because growing annual crops required much more labour than growing perennial crops. Even though the need for the villagers of Ban Tao Fai to cooperate in building communal infrastructure declined sharply after 1998 – because most of the necessary work had been done and because the Buaban Sub-district Administrative Organization, whose main responsibility was to develop communal infrastructure in the sub-district, was established that year – cooperation in crop producing between the villagers from different origins increased to the extent that, by the time this research was conducted, hiring villagers of different origins was common. Having said this, cooperation in other activities was limited to among just close friends and neighbours. This mirrors the pattern of political cooperation within the village, whereby the leaders only assigned or supported their close friends or neighbours to work with them on any local projects.

By contrast, cooperation between the villagers of Ban Ton Mai, both in building communal infrastructure and in crop production, was limited to small groups of villagers who were closely related to each other. Unlike Ban Tao Fai, being a long established community meant that the government had long recognized the existence of Ban Ton Mai village, and had thus supported the construction of the village's local infrastructure through the work of various ministries and many rural development projects, including the Sub-district Development Project of 1975-1977 and the Work and Income Generating Project of 1984-1985. Most, if not all, of the projects were thus hosted and initiated by the government and quasi-government officials. The villagers were thus involved in the projects on a hiring basis rather than a voluntary one. Since money was involved, the recruitment of labour was thus limited to close relatives and friends of the heads of the project. For example, the head of the temple committee always reserved the temple's construction work for his son, his nephew, and himself. Likewise, the head of the village's water-pipe construction project only hired members of his extended family as labourers.

Hiring was also the basis for cooperation in crop production, in that, if it was not a case of children helping out parents, the villagers who were asked to work on a farm would have to be paid by the farm owner. Similar to the form of cooperation in building communal infrastructure, this cooperation was limited to a group of close relatives. This was because growing perennial crops yielded a very good income and did not require many labourers. As will be discussed in detail in the later part of this chapter, in most cases, the villagers only hired one labourer to work on their farm. As such, the villagers preferred to hire their close relatives, whom they trust, to work for them. It can be argued that this practice of benefiting only their close relatives supported the political norm, whereby the villagers preferred to elect and support their relatives in local elections. For many villagers, using their power to benefit relatives was not a matter of right or wrong but a matter of can or cannot. For them, benefits attached to their position were to be enjoyed. Many villagers, young and old, told me that if they were in the same positions, they would also help their relatives.

### *Solidarity*

Solidarity, or agreement resulting from shared interests among most of the villagers, was evident in both villages to a different degree and type. The first instance of informal solidarity, or agreement among the villagers which happened with no formality, among the villagers of Ban Tao Fai occurred during the course of 1977-1978 and came out of the common need to protect themselves from thieves. Because there were no police officers in the area and the villagers had been disturbed by and were afraid of a particular group of thieves, which had been in the area since 1976 and committed crimes, ranging from theft and robbery to rape and murder, on a daily basis, a number of male villagers of all origins took turns guarding the village at night. This arrangement was initiated by Ji, then the owner of one and only grocery shop in the village, in mid-1977. The nightly watches were carried on until mid-1978, when a leader of the thieves, Sarin, was killed. Other instances of informal solidarity, which involved a lot of villagers from various groups, occurred only when it involved merit-making activities, namely New Year's day. On the occasion of the New Year merit making, called *Tham bun klang ban*, held on the second of January every year on a local school lawn, almost all villagers brought food and desserts to offer to the monks, listened to the monks' prayers, and had lunch together. Other instances of the villagers' informal solidarity were social functions, including birthday parties and funerals. Unlike other examples of solidarity, the number of villagers attending these functions was normally small because the villagers were not socially united. On average, five to six villagers from two to three families attended their friend's birthday party, and about fifteen to

twenty villagers from eight to ten families went to funerals to pay respect to the dead and to show their grief. Most would leave early, only about ten would remain until the end.

An example of formal solidarity, or agreement among the villagers, which happen with some forms of formality, in Ban Tao Fai, which was rare in other villages in Thailand including Ban Ton Mai, was a village monthly meeting at the school canteen on the sixth of every month to discuss all village matters. The meeting was initiated by Ji, the second *phu yai ban*, who, by the time the field research was conducted, was a chairman of the Buaban SAO. According to Ji, similar meetings were held before but not on a regular basis. But since there were two new local micro credit programmes, namely the 'Poverty Alleviation Programme' and the 'Saving for Producing Programme', that meant the villagers were required to meet with him on a monthly basis to deposit their money and to pay back their debts to the committees, he initiated the meeting. As *phu yai ban*, Ji requested the presence of at least one member of each household at the meeting. In fact, the head of both committees, who worked closely with Ji, told the villagers that their presence at the meeting was a must if they wanted to be eligible for a loan. The villagers complied and the meeting has been organized continuously since. Notably, many government officials at the Tara District Office thought this meeting was 'the best way to encourage villagers' participation in local development'. For them, because of the meeting, Ban Tao Fai was 'an outstanding developing village' or '*mu ban pattana di den*'. As a matter of fact, the meeting has not provided a channel for the villagers to express their feelings or to ask questions and thus no real discussion has ever occurred at the meeting. Most of the time, the leaders talked about news from the district officer and SAO, and how hard they have been working on behalf of the villagers. They only reported on the work and the profits of all the local committee at the last meeting of each year. So despite their presence, the villagers did not really participate in the meetings. Indeed, most of them only listened to Ji and his team of leaders. They rarely expressed their opinion or asked any questions because when they did, the questions would be ignored and they would be discredited as a 'problem maker', as being 'uncooperative', or even 'misbehaving'. Indeed, the meeting was a stage where the leaders used to authenticate their status as mediators between the villagers and government officials, to discredit their opponents, and to enhance their power and influence.

Unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, there was no evidence of formal solidarity among the villagers of Ban Ton Mai. All instances of solidarity between the villagers were informal. With close ties between them, the number of the villagers involved in such instances was significantly higher than that in Ban Tao Fai. For example, there were about twenty to thirty villagers from seven to ten families attending birthday parties, and almost everyone in the village attended at

least one out of seven nights of any funeral. Indeed, for the villagers of Ban Ton Mai, as in other villages in the province and other provinces nearby, a funeral was a place to socialize and do something together rather than a place to show grief. While the funeral guests in Ban Tao Fai sat and listened to the monks' praying quietly in the house of the deceased, those of Ban Ton Mai played cards, ate, drank (soft drinks or alcohol), and even sang karaoke. The amount of food served at every funeral was enough to feed half the village.

Another example of solidarity among villagers was when a number of male villagers met each other at a particular coffee shop on a daily basis to discuss news and exchange information on the work of their local organizations, and both local and national politics. Despite the fact that anyone could visit that coffee shop and buy a coffee, not everyone was welcome to join in the discussion group. Like an exclusive club, if one wished to be accepted as part of the discussion group, one needed to be introduced properly by at least one of the existing regular visitors. With such exclusivity, it was uncommon for the regulars of one coffee house to visit another coffee shop. There were about 10-15 regulars visitors, from various villages, at one coffee shop. Evidently, most, if not all, of them were very active in local politics, were involved in or interested in national politics, and were influential. Support from the regulars of the coffee shops was crucial in local elections. Regulars of the same coffee shop always supported the same candidate in any election. Because of its influence, the coffee shop was dubbed *sapa kafee* or the coffee parliament. This solidarity was not limited to villagers of the same village, however. In fact, villagers from the same village were not regulars of the same coffee shop. Also, there were only five coffee shops in the sub-district and none in Ban Ton Mai. Therefore, the villagers visited ones in other villages. Evidently, solidarity among the regulars of any coffee shop went beyond the village border. This entails the division of ideology among the villagers and emphasizes my argument that in Thailand, the village is merely the smallest unit of local administration and is not always a community where all the residents share the same belief. Another example of solidarity among the villagers of Ban Ton Mai was a football club, consisting of 20 male villagers of Ban Ton Mai and 5 male villagers of other villages in the sub-district who had a passion for playing football and partying, called the 'Love Ton Mai Association' or *Chomrom Khon Rak Ton Mai*. The club was founded in 2000 by Yotin, a young male villager of Ban Ton Mai, who was also head of the club and was an organizer of a football tournament in the sub-district, called the '*Rak Ton Mai Cup*'. In organizing the football tournament, members of the club got to know and deal with various influential people, including local and provincial politicians. Apart from spending most of its profits from ticket fees and sponsorship on its annual party, the club also donated part of it to various development projects

of the local temple and school. Increasingly, the club and its members became influential, socially and politically. Indeed, in an election for membership of the Krabi Provincial Administrative organization (PAO) in 2004, different candidates visited Yotin and asked him to be their canvasser for the simple fact that he knew a lot of young male villagers.

### *Methods of conflict resolution*

The villagers of the two villages dealt with conflicts and problems differently. While those of Ban Tao Fai preferred to ask for help from local leaders who were quasi-government officials, such as the *phu yai ban* and his assistants, and members of local committees, those of Ban Ton Mai preferred to settle the conflicts by themselves. These differences – which have great implications for how one might emerge as leader, for the role, status, power, and influence of the existing leaders within the village, and for the villagers' lives – resulted from how the villagers had developed their relationships and how conflicts started in the first place.

In Ban Tao Fai, conflicts and arguments between villagers from different origins were widespread due to tensions created by differences in culture and ways of thinking and doing things. Due to their history of violence, the lack of a police officer in the area and the fact that no leaders, except for Luang Pho Khong who refused to get involved in any conflicts, displayed enough neutrality, prior to 1977, the villagers dealt with conflicts themselves. This often ended in violence and sometimes murder.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, they did not even report these conflicts to the *phu yai ban*, who had authority in such matters, simply because they did not want the case to be made official. As Sanit, the first *phu yai ban*, explained, because many of the villagers were running away from criminal charges in their home provinces and because they did not trust anyone in the village, they and their families did not want to involve themselves much with the *phu yai ban*, who had responsibility for solving conflicts and a duty to report to the district officer, or anyone else in the village. 'If a person went missing after a row with his neighbour, then we knew he had been killed. And that was the end of it.'<sup>196</sup> However, the incident of solidarity in 1977 when Ji successfully convinced male villagers to take turns guarding the village from the group of thieves led by Sarin, transformed the way the villagers dealt with conflict. From this incident, Ji slowly emerged as a strong figure for solving and dealing with the

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<sup>195</sup> The use of violence when dealing with conflict was not limited to the villagers of Ban Tao Fai, but was used by other villagers of Tara district of Lopburi province, who also had different origins. In fact, the villagers of this district were known among government officials in the Ministry of Interior, as 'uncivilized' and 'wild' (*khon teuan*), while the district was known as a 'wild frontier' (*daen khon teuan*).

<sup>196</sup> Interview with Sanit on 24 October 2003, at his home.

villagers' problems peacefully. After the incident, the villagers started to come to Ji to ask him to talk with their adversaries. Even though he was from Khorat, his approach in dealing with the villagers' disputes and conflicts was peaceful and considered fair to both sides, even when one of them was not from Khorat. If one stole anything from another, they had to return the stolen items within the time limit otherwise Ji would report it to the police officers and district officer in town. Satisfied with his way of dealing with conflicts, the villagers eventually came to depend on him when faced with disputes. When Sanit resigned from the position of *phu yai ban* in 1981, Ji was elected as the second *phu yai ban*, with tremendous approval from villagers of other origins. Even when this research was conducted, the villagers still ran to him when faced with the problems even though he was no longer a *phu yai ban* but a chairman of the Buaban SAO.

Most of the conflicts between the villagers of Ban Ton Mai involved theft, in that they either started with someone stealing something or ended up with someone stealing. As discussed earlier, sometimes the villagers stole because they envied their neighbours. Most of the time, this caused a rift between them and often ended with the use of violence. Some other times, the villagers stole in order to get even with a person they had previously had an argument with. In all cases, the villagers preferred to deal with it by themselves and not involve government or quasi-government officials. Unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, this was not because there were no actual leaders or police officers in the area who they could turn to. In fact, two police officers have been assigned to Krabi Lek sub-district since the 1980s and the police station was situated right in the centre of Ban Ton Mai. Rather, the villagers preferred to settle conflicts by themselves and tried to exclude officials because everyone in the village, including the two police officers and *phu yai ban*, was related to each other. That is, the villagers believed that justice might not be found if they involved other people in the conflict because that those people would surely take the side of their relatives, who might be their adversaries. According to a number of villagers, the police officers were simply normal people with guns. They too could get angry and might use their power to destroy whoever they did not like.<sup>197</sup> In addition, most of the time, the villagers found themselves involved in conflicts with their own relatives or neighbours and did not want to see them put in jail. In truth, they only wanted revenge or to teach that person a lesson. Also, in comparison, dealing with conflicts themselves cost less time and less money than dealing with officers and all the paperwork. As many explained, they did

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<sup>197</sup> Interview with many villagers on various occasions. The question asked was 'what was the role of police officers when the villagers had a conflict or fight?'



not want to spend the whole day filling in forms and then waiting another two or three days to be called in for questioning.<sup>198</sup>

In dealing with conflicts themselves, the villagers often used violence. After a theft or a small argument, villagers would start a war of words by calling the family of their adversary 'a clan of thieves' or 'a vicious clan'. Often, male members of the accused family would immediately respond by hitting their opponents with wooden sticks or throwing anything close to hand at them. Both sides would end up hurt but they would not report this to the *phu yai ban* or police officer and would simply stop talking to each other for a few weeks. Eventually they would start to talk to each other again and act as nothing had ever happened. In some cases, the violence used was indeed fatal but still the villagers did not involve officials. For example, in 2001, one male villager, Ton, shot his neighbour, Klag, who was also his business partner and close friend, while he was trying to steal Klag's cash from his house in the middle of the night. Klag survived but did not report this incident to the police officers. Two weeks later, after his wound had healed, Klag walked casually to Ton's house, which was situated opposite his, and shot him dead in front of his wife and a few other villagers. Ton's wife did not want the case to go to court. Therefore, she told the police officers that she had seen nothing. Other villagers who were present at the scene also said the same thing. With no suspects, the case was dropped. The two families still lived in the same houses as they lived in before, and the wife of the deceased was still on speaking terms with her husband's killer and all of his family members.

### **Villagers' economic background and villagers' political life**

#### *Villagers' livelihood and economic activities*

The main occupation of the villagers in both villages is agriculture. Although some officially hold other jobs such as teachers and merchants, they grow and sell cash crops as well. Even those who did not have their own land to farm, and stated that their profession was wage labourer, were hired to work on farms. Due to the differences in geography and weather conditions, however, the types of cash crops grown in the two villages were different as were the other livelihoods of the two sets of villagers. Because Ban Tao Fai is situated quite far away from the nearest river, irrigation depends heavily, if not solely, on rain. Furthermore, since it is situated in the north of the Central Plain, where the rainy season only lasts three months in a year, the villagers can grow only annual cash crops, or *tham rai*, which do not require much water. In contrast, the land around Ban Ton Mai, like many villages in the south of Thailand, is partly

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

mountainous and the rainy season is eight months long, meaning that there is plenty of water for irrigation, from both rain and artesian water wells. Thus the villagers can grow perennial plants, which require continuous watering, or *tham suan*. This implies that while the villagers of Ban Tao Fai can extract produce from their cash crops only once a year and have to uproot and replant them every year, the villagers of Ban Ton Mai can extract produce from their cash crops all year round for about 17-30 years and only have to plant new cash crops once every 20-30 years. In addition, while the villagers of Ban Tao Fai have to spend part of their income reinvesting in farming every year, the villagers of Ban Ton Mai can enjoy their income and have more possibilities for saving or investing in other things that might have a positive effect on their livelihood in the long run, such as education. Also, the longer rainy season in Ban Ton Mai means more forest products – such as bamboo shoots, wild mushrooms, and frogs – can be found around household compounds, which implies extra income or less expense on food for the villagers. Seemingly, as a result, the villagers of Ban Ton Mai were in a better economic situation than the villagers of Ban Tao Fai, simply because cash, which was more important as a means of living for the villagers of Ban Tao Fai than the villagers of Ban Ton Mai, was harder to find in Ban Tao Fai than in Ban Ton Mai. With less money but more expenses, every household in Ban Tao Fai was in a vicious cycle of debt, unlike in Ban Ton Mai. This, together with the fact – discussed in detail below – that the villagers of Ban Tao Fai, who *tham rai*, needed to work all day in the fields while the villagers of Ban Ton Mai, who *tham suan*, needed to spend only a few hours a day in their fields, also implies that the villagers of Ban Tao Fai did not have the opportunity to socialize among themselves and to discuss their everyday matters or politics to the same extent as the villagers of Ban Ton Mai.

In Ban Tao Fai, the cash crops include sugar cane, tapioca, corn, sunflowers (in order to sell their seeds), and beans. Because the three main cash crops – sugar cane, tapioca, and corn – have to be planted and harvested during the same period of time (see the agricultural activities calendar in Table 2.3), the villagers would alternate between growing one or two different cash crops at the same time, depending on the selling price of a particular crop the previous year. Of all cash crops, the villagers often chose to grow sugar cane simply because its selling price was higher than that of other crops (see Table 2.4). Many villagers also grow sunflowers, which are planted in August and harvested in November, and beans during the period between December and April. Apart from this, some grow garlic, chili, shallots, and spring onions, which are planted in October and harvested in January, mostly for their own consumption. The villagers grow nothing during the dry season, when there is no rain and not enough water supplies. Apart from growing crops, some villagers occasionally raise meat cows and oxen for sale. That is, they

buy young cows or oxen from the cattle market, which is held weekly in a nearby sub-district, at a price of about 7,000-10,000 baht each (depending on how much the cow/ox weighs), raise them by taking them to eat grass on fallow land for about five months, and then sell them back to the same market for about 6,000 to 10,000 baht profit. Because the price of cattle is so high, the villagers can only raise them occasionally, not every year. Apart from this, about five families also keep dairy cows in order to sell milk. Although the returns from investing in dairy cows can be high, not many villagers can invest in them because it requires a lot of money to buy the cow in the first place and then feeding them with hay is very expensive. With these economic activities, the villagers are not required to work in their own field everyday. That is, there are certain jobs, such as ploughing, sowing, fertilizing, harvesting, and uprooting the crops, which can only be done at certain times of the year. For example, the villagers plough the land after they have harvested the crop. They then sow the new crop seeds. Because all jobs requires a lot of labour, the villagers alternate from hiring others to work on their farm and being hired to work on other people's farms. In effect, almost all villagers find work nearly everyday. Normally, those who work in the field leave their house as early as 6am and come home between 5pm to 6pm, while those who raise cattle leave the house at around 7am and come home around 6pm. The average income per annum of the villagers, as stated in a report by the Department of Local Development, was 44,911 baht.<sup>199</sup> Most of it is invested in the next round of crop cultivation, while the remainder is spent on debt repayment and day-to-day living expense.

**Table 2.3: Calendar of crop-growing related activities of the villagers of Ban Tao Fai**

Month	Sugar cane	Sunflower	Tapioca	Corn	Garlic, Chili, Spring Onions, Shallots	Beans
Jan					<i>Harvest</i>	
Feb						↓
Mar						↓
April	<i>Plant</i>		<i>Plant</i>	<i>Plant</i>		<i>Harvest</i>
May	↓		↓	↓		
June	<i>Harvest</i>		<i>Harvest</i>	<i>Harvest</i>		
July						
Aug		<i>Plant</i>				
Sept		↓				
Oct					<i>Plant</i>	
Nov		<i>Harvest</i>			↓	
Dec					↓	<i>Plant</i>

Source: Author's own interviews with villagers.

<sup>199</sup> Manop, 2004, p. 3.

Unlike those of Ban Tao Fai, the villagers of Ban Ton Mai grow perennial crops, or *tham suan*. The main cash crops include rubber, oil palm, and tropical fruits. Having said this, the elders of Ban Ton Mai reckoned that, prior to the late 1960s, the villagers had, to some extent, a subsistence economy. That is, they grew rice and raised pigs, chickens and cattle for their own consumption within the household and occasionally sold the leftovers to neighbours or merchants in the market. The villagers only started to plant rubber trees, using the seed of wild rubber found in the forest, in the late 1960s and did not start to grow oil palm trees as cash crops until the late 1980s.<sup>200</sup> Unlike annual cash crops, perennial cash crops such as rubber trees, oil palm trees, and fruit trees, can be grown and produce products all year round. Having said this, the villagers had to wait for 7 and 3 years respectively in order to start harvesting their rubber trees and oil palm trees. Rubber trees produce good quality rubber for about 17 years (until they are 25 years old), while oil palm trees can produce good size oil palm seeds for about 27 years (until 30 years old). Apart from this, the villagers can extract rubber and oil palm seeds all year round, although there are slight difficulties in the rainy season when the rain mixes with the rubber and makes the oil palm seeds fall. Even though the returns of investment in oil palm trees were higher than those in rubber trees, more than half of the villagers still grew rubber trees primarily because oil palm cultivation required a greater amount of land and a more developed irrigation system, which most of the villagers did not have. While waiting for the rubber and oil palm trees to be mature enough to produce, the villagers also grow pineapples or beans in between the rows of rubber or oil palm trees. Once the trees produce sap or seeds, they stop growing other plants in their vicinity so that all the water and fertilizer will only nourish those trees.

Those who grow rubber trees have to leave home very early in the morning, around 3am, to tap the trees for sap (*nam yang*). This process can be done only before dawn because the rubber sap stops coming out when the sun comes up, this is when the villagers go back home for breakfast or to the coffee shop. The female of the family would return to the field to collect the sap at around 8 to 9am. While some villagers sold the sap, others processed the sap into rubber sheets (*yang pan*), a procedure that took until almost noon, and some just left the sap to solidify into rubber lumps.<sup>201</sup> Apart from the daily tasks, the villagers had to spray insecticide, cut down

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<sup>200</sup> By the time the field research was conducted, Krabi was the biggest producer of palm-oil products in Thailand, responsible for 38 percent of the country's total palm-oil produced each year.

<sup>201</sup> The main factors that determined what type of rubber products the villagers made and sell were, firstly, the price of rubber products and, secondly, the time of year. Prior to 2001, when the selling price of rubber products was very low, most of the villagers produced and sold rubber

grass, and clear up their fields on a weekly basis. In contrast, those who grew oil palm trees did not have to work every day and wake up early like those who grew rubber trees. But they did have to work longer in the field. That is, they had to cut down oil palm clusters for sale once every two weeks, and cut down oil palm leaf stalks, spray insecticide, add fertilizer and water, and collect any fallen oil palm seeds on a weekly basis. On a work day, they left the house at around 9am and returned at around 4pm. Apart from this, some 16 households also raised pigs and some 13 households raised meat cows, both for their own consumption and for sale. Twelve villagers had other professions apart from farming. Six of them, from three households, owned grocery stores while another two owned beauty salons, and another one ran a motorcycle garage. The average income per annum of the villagers, as stated in a report of the Department of Local Development, was 45,600 baht.<sup>202</sup>

**Table 2.4: Calendar of agricultural activities of the villagers of Ban Ton Mai**

Month	Extract rubber	Make rubber lumps	Make rubber sheets	Extract oil palm seeds	Harvest Durian	Harvest Papaya
Jan	↑	↑	↑	↑		↑
Feb						
Mar						
Apr						
May		↓			↑↓	
Jun					↓	
Jul						
Aug						
Sept						
Oct						
Nov						
Dec	↓		↓	↓		↓

Source: Author's own interview with the villagers

sheets, the rubber product regularly sold at the highest price compared to sap and rubber lumps. Having said this, during the dry season, most of the villagers sell rubber lumps because they are easier to produce and require less hours per day in the field. But during the rainy season, when it is not possible to produce rubber lumps because the sap mixes with rain water and because heavy rain might wash away all the sap from the containers, the villagers either sold sap or produced rubber sheets.

<sup>202</sup> Office of the Department of Local Development in Krabi Lek, 2003, p.4.

*Villagers' education*

In both villages, younger villagers tend to have a higher level of education than the generations before them. However, with less income and access to school, the level of education the average villagers of Ban Tao Fai received was relatively lower than that of the villagers of Ban Ton Mai. At the time this field research was conducted, there were 3 bachelor degree graduates, 15 diploma holders, and 6 diploma students in Ban Tao Fai, and 7 bachelor degree graduates, 5 bachelor degree students, 8 diploma holders, and 10 diploma students in Ban Ton Mai.

Not all of the highly educated villagers of Ban Tao Fai lived in the village and worked as farmers. Indeed, due to the hardship involved in *tham rai* farming, the villagers of Ban Tao Fai tended to migrate to the city centre to look for jobs other than farming. In total, there were 9 young villagers working outside the village,<sup>203</sup> all of whom had at least Mattayom 6 certificate, equivalent to grade 12 in the UK system. Interestingly, most of the highly educated persons who still lived in the village were the leaders and their relatives. With their good connections, these villagers could find jobs other than farming in or close to the village. For example, the village's two female BA graduates, who were the daughter of the Buaban SAO chairman and a daughter of the head teacher of the local school, worked as staff members of Buaban SAO. Because there were not many of them, these highly educated persons, in comparison to other villagers, enjoyed a higher status as knowledgeable people. As will be revealed in Chapters 3 and 5, when they ran in any local elections, these highly educated persons tended to be well received by the villagers.

Conversely, because *tham suan* yields a very good income, most of the younger villagers of Ban Ton Mai tended to stay in the village and continue to *tham suan*, despite having a high level of education. Only three young villagers, all of whom were female and were thus less likely to inherit their parent's land, pursued work other than farming, outside the village.<sup>204</sup> Because all the other highly educated villagers worked on their farms just like their parents, not all of them were seen as knowledgeable people. Only those who also had charisma were asked for their opinions and suggestions, and only those who gave good suggestions to others were perceived as knowledgeable. As will be revealed in Chapters 4 and 6, prior to the

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<sup>203</sup> Of these, two worked as clerks in Lopburi city centre (about 50 kilometres away), another two worked as wage labourers in the chicken processing factory in Lumnarai District centre (about 32 kilometres away), another three worked as shop assistants in the department store also in Lumnarai District centre, one worked as an accountant at the local Co-op grocery shop, another two worked in Bangkok, and the last two worked as staffs in the Buaban Sub-district office.

<sup>204</sup> Of these three, one worked as a public relations officer in a luxury hotel (about 35 kilometres away), another worked as a receptionist in another luxury hotel (about 50 kilometres away), and the last worked as an employee of the Department of Local Development, Klang District Office (about 10 kilometres away).

implementation of the VFP in 2001, knowledge and performance were not the most important factors for determining the number of votes they would receive in a local election. However, following the project's implementation, these factors became increasingly important qualifications that the villagers would look for in local elections.

*Household authority and the distribution of power*

Similar to other villages in rural Thailand, in both villages each household is a unit of production. In each household, the members' roles and responsibilities, both in crop production and in the house, is defined by their age. That is to say, the villagers can be divided roughly into five age groups: the eldest (75 and over), the elders (55-75), the mature people (25-55), the young (15-25), and the children (0-15).

In both villages, the eldest lived in their children's or grandchildren's houses. All of them had already given their land and house to their children and no longer worked in the fields. The women, however, did help out with household tasks such as cooking, looking after the children, growing vegetables and raising cattle in the compound of the house. Although their children, the elders, occasionally asked them for advice, the eldest did not have the last say in any decision-making regarding either work in the fields or household matters. Moreover, their children, who support and look after them, made decisions on behalf of them on household matters most of the time. Most of the elders of both villages lived in their own house. Most of them were still working actively in their own fields. The male elders enjoyed decision-making powers in matters related to work in the fields and household matters. Also, in any local monthly meeting they acted as a representative of their household. In both villages, most of the local leaders were the elders. Apart from this, some of the mature people of Ban Tao Fai still lived with their parents. Because of this, they did not have as much power in decision-making as the mature in Ban Ton Mai, most of whom, due to their good financial situations, lived by themselves. As will be revealed in the later chapter, some of the mature villagers of Ban Ton Mai played increasingly active roles in local politics, while those of Ban Tao Fai still listened to their parents. In spite of this, most of the young of Ban Tao Fai still lived with their parents and worked for their parents on their farm. In contrast those of Ban Ton Mai lived in their own houses and worked on their own farms, which they had inherited from their parents. In effect, most of the young of Ban Tao Fai were still influenced by their parents. Whether or not they would run in any election depended heavily on their parents and elder relatives. At the village monthly meeting, these young villagers represented their own households. In Ban Tao Fai, a few of the young, who had relatively higher education than other villagers, were beginning to play a

greater role in local politics. Having said this, due to the high level of dependency on their parents, their decisions – such as whether or not to run in any election, or what to do and how to do it – were heavily influenced by their parents. Conversely, in the case of Ban Ton Mai, even though the young had a relatively higher level of education than other villagers and were not so financially dependent on their parents as the young of Ban Tao Fai, they did not run in any elections. This was mainly due to the fact that they did not yet have much say on matters that involved the reputation of their extended family. As already mentioned, all the villagers of Ban Ton Mai were closely tied to their extended family. It was the leader of the family, the eldest, who decided which family members should run in which election, and who other members in the family should vote for. The finding of this thesis suggests that the eldest wanted the young, most of whom had just started their own family, to focus on their business and household matters rather than politics. Apart from this, most of the children of both villages were still studying, and thus were not required to work actively on their parent's farms. In Ban Tao Fai, those who had just graduated were looking for jobs outside the village and were not required to work. The children of Ban Ton Mai were required to help on their parent's farms. Unless they worked as wage labourers for people other than their parents, they were not paid, however. Nevertheless, their parents took care of their personal expenses and some still gave them allowances as when they were in school. Apart from this, they did not have a vote or an interest in local politics.

#### *Villagers' production relations and the distribution of power*

In both villages, the villagers' production relations can be grouped into seven different kinds, all of which revolved around the ownership and use of important factors of production. These production interrelations can explain the difference in status among the villagers and village the distribution of power.

#### *Land owners vs. tenants*

Like everywhere else in Thailand where high agricultural technology is not widely used, the amount of crops produced in both villages depended heavily on the amount of land available for cultivation. More land meant greater production. Because of troubled land reform policies, the villagers of both villages, like other agriculturalists in other parts of Thailand, did not really own the land they were farming on. At best, some had only documents, called *Nor Sor 3* and *Tor Por Kor 5*, permitting them to use the land for agricultural purposes. Those who did not have these documents rented land from fellow villagers on an annual or a two-year basis. Some, who could not afford to rent land, became wage labourers for their neighbours and friends. As mentioned



earlier, in both villages, the villagers' land holdings are not normally close to their homes and the villagers had to ride motorcycles or walk a long way to reach their land. Sometimes, one or two houses of other villagers might be situated on their farm. In the case of Ban Ton Mai, this could lead to theft and arguments between the landowner and the owner of the house that was situated on their land.

In Ban Tao Fai, almost half of the cultivated land did not belong to villagers who actually lived in the village. Some 500 rai belonged to the local temple and some 1,000 rai belonged to former residents who had left the village due to hardship. Of those who resided in the village, on average, poor villagers owned about 10-15 rai of land, while the rich owned about 60-80 rai. In addition, villagers of some 50 households did not own any land. To supplement the land they owned and meet their farming requirements, most of the villagers rented land to farm.<sup>205</sup> Of the 50 landless households, only 10 could afford to rent while the other 40 households were full time wage labourers working for their fellow villagers.

The villagers could rent land from three main sources: first, former residents who had moved back to their hometown or to a nearby village, second, the villagers who occasionally rented out parts, or all, of their land when they did not have enough money to invest in farming themselves, and, third, the local temple, Wat Khao Tham, which rented out 100 rai of their total land to the villagers of Ban Tao Fai.<sup>206</sup> Of all three sources, Wat Khao Tham provided the cheapest rental rate, at 200 baht per rai per year. The rental rate from the other two sources was indeed much higher: 700 baht per rai per year for sugar cane farming and 600 baht per rai per year for farming other crops. While the contract made with the temple was always on an annual basis, those made with other sources could be on a one, two or even three-year basis. When the field research was conducted, the temple rented out 100 rai of its land to 11 villagers, 10 former residents rented out 300 rai to 20 villagers, while 5 villagers rented out 100 rai to 5 other villagers. While the villagers and former villagers who lent out their lands managed the rent by themselves, the temple committee assigned the *phu yai ban* and his village committee, including two assistants to the *phu yai ban* and a few advisors, to manage the rent.

Being a landlord did not necessarily give landowners superior status over the villagers who rented land. Because there were many landowners from whom the villagers could rent land, and because most of the contracts were made on an annual basis, the landlords did not necessarily have influence over the tenants. Also, those landlords who did not live in the village

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<sup>205</sup> In order to break even on their investment, one household needed to farm at least 50 rai of land. More than that would mean more profit and less meant farming was not viable.

<sup>206</sup> The temple also rents out another 100 rai of land to villagers of the nearby Village 7.

or province anymore did not have much to do with local politics and, as a result, did not try to influence anyone politically. Similarly, the villagers who rented out their land occasionally to fellow villagers did not hold any superior status over their tenants mainly because they lent out their lands for their own benefit, to earn some additional income while they had decided not to farm that land. Indeed, the tenants believed that they were helping out the landlords rather than vice versa. However, because the rental rate of the temples' land was much lower, the demand was higher than for land from other sources. As manager of the temple's land, the *phu yai ban* and his village committee became the biggest landlord in the village, and even though they did not benefit financially from the land rental directly, they did have superior status over the villagers who wanted to rent the temple's land. Because there were no actual criteria on who would get the rights to rent the temple's land, the *phu yai ban* and his team enjoyed sole power in deciding the tenants and the tenancy period. Although there was no evidence of bribery and harassment, the villagers tried to be nice and felt obliged to the *phu yai ban* and his team. Indeed, this complimented their superior status in the village and increased their influence over the villagers' behaviours to a certain extent.

In Ban Ton Mai, there was no evidence of land renting, and therefore no landlord-tenant relationships. Primarily, this was because most of the villagers, as descendants of those who had lived in the area for a long time, had inherited lands from their parents. By the time the field research was conducted, only villagers of two households were landless: one was a family of immigrants from the Northeast and the other was a local family who had lost their land due to gambling debts. Having said this, neither rented land to farm simply because there was no land that might be rented for a sufficient period of time for the trees to reach the point when they could be harvested.<sup>207</sup> As such, the landless villagers became wage labourers for their neighbours, friends, and relatives.

### *Employers vs. wage labourers*

In both villages, cooperation in crop production was paid and money was used as the means of reciprocation.<sup>208</sup> In Ban Tao Fai, being wage labourers for neighbours and friends was common,

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<sup>207</sup> No villagers were willing to rent out their land for such a long period of time simply because, as discussed earlier, farming already yields a very good income.

<sup>208</sup> Students of Thai peasant society may be familiar with a form of cooperation between villagers in wet rice agriculture, as described by Turton in his study on Northern Thai peasant society in the 1970s, whereby a considerable amount of labour was required in the rice fields and help was exchanged between different households with no actual payment. Importantly, however, this kind of cooperation is limited to this type of agriculture only. Such cooperation

even for those who owned a large amount of land or were considered wealthy.<sup>209</sup> This was not only because there was a high demand for labour but also because there was a high supply. As discussed earlier, on average one household owned about 20 rai of land. With only 2-5 people in the household, farming by themselves was impossible. Also, since villagers did not work on their own farm everyday, they had a lot of free time and preferred to work and earn some money rather than do nothing. Conversely, in Ban Ton Mai, the villagers in one household were able to do most of the jobs on their farms by themselves. Even though those who grew oil palm trees might require 5-7 labourers to help out on a weekly basis, help from outside the household was needed only occasionally rather than regularly, as was the case in Ban Tao Fai.

In Ban Tao Fai, the relationship between employer and wage labourer did not have many implications for local politics. This was mainly because the relationship was reciprocal: a wage labourer might at some point become an employer hiring their former employer to work for them. Therefore, there was no obvious difference in their status. Having said this, some villagers who considered themselves superior to others, or the leaders and their close relatives, were selective when it came to employers. That is, they would only work for and get paid by their close relatives and friends in order to avoid being the wage labourer of those they considered socially inferior to them. Having said this, the relationships between employers and wage labourers in Ban Ton Mai were quite complex primarily because other types of relationship, such as being relatives or friends, were involved. Whether or not the employer had influence over the labourer's behaviour depended on many factors, including the regularity of employing the same labourer, the employers' treatment of the labourer, and other relationships they had. One full-time local wage labourer explained that the relationship was not so much about being employer and employee but, rather, whether or not they were on good terms. By good terms he meant that they never quarreled and the employer paid a fair and generous wage.<sup>210</sup> For those full-time and part-time local labourers who did not have a regular employer, no employer was considered superior because the labourer's work was seen as a contribution to their employer's income and was convenient for them. On the other hand, the northeastern labourers, who worked regularly for only some employers, admitted that they had a 'special bond' with their employers. Politically, the northeastern labourers, who were registered as villagers, were under the influence of their employers mainly because they felt gratitude for the work and income their employers provided them and because they did not yet know much about

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does not exist in *tham suan* and *tham rai*. For discussion on cooperation in wet rice agriculture or *tham na*, see Turton, 1975, p. 53-57.

<sup>209</sup> When the field research was conducted, the wage rate was fixed at 130 baht per day.

local politics. This was especially true for two northeastern villagers whose names were registered as residents of their employer, Pond. That is, they would feel obliged to follow their employers' suggestion on what to do and who to vote for. During the election for the *phu yai ban* in May 2004, the two labourers, who were registered as residents of their employers household admitted to me that they voted for their employer's friend.<sup>211</sup> Notably, due to the increase in the price of rubber products, by the time the field research was conducted, many villagers had stopped being occasional wage labourers for their neighbours and friends. It is likely, therefore, that the number of northeastern wage labourers, whose wages are less than those of other villagers, will grow in the near future. It can thus be predicted that relationships like that which Pond had with his northeastern wage labourers will increase.

*Crop seeds/seedlings, fertilizer and insecticide sellers vs. buyers*

Crop seeds/seedlings, fertilizer and insecticide were another indispensable factors of production in both villages. While the villagers of Ban Tao Fai had to buy crop seeds every year after they harvested their crop products, those of Ban Ton Mai had to buy rubber and oil palm seedlings on every 25 and 30 years. Apart from this, they had to buy fertilizer/insecticide almost on a monthly basis. In spite of this, the relationship between the sellers and buyers of crop seed/seedlings, fertilizer and insecticide of both villages had no or very little implication on local politics simply because the sellers did not live in the village. Having said this, the way in which the villagers of Ban Tao Fai buy crop seeds did have significant implications on the villagers' spending behaviour, which had direct effect on their spending pattern, a level of their dependency to the local sources of loan and to the Village Fund Project. That is, most of the time, the villagers did not buy but 'borrowed' crop seeds and fertilizer/insecticide from the sellers, or *tao kae*, and paid them back with their produce after harvesting. Accordingly, the villagers did not use any cash at all but let the *tao kae* deduct their debt from the price of their produce. With very little money left after these deductions, many found themselves trapped in a vicious cycle of having to 'borrow' crop seeds, fertilizer and insecticide from and being in debt to the same *tao kae*.

*Cash and loan providers vs. borrowers*

Money was a very important factor of production in both villages. Even though the villagers of Ban Tao Fai could 'borrow' crop seeds, fertilizer and insecticide from *tao kae* in town, they used cash to rent land, to hire labourers, to buy food for everyday consumption, and to rent scarce

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<sup>210</sup> Interview with Plian, on 15 February 2004 at his home.

<sup>211</sup> Interview with Pond, on 5 January 2004 at his home.

equipment such as ploughing tractors and weeding tractors. With no cash to hand, some villagers paid back their wage labourers by working on their farm in return. While most of the villagers of Ban Tao Fai only received cash once a year when they sold their produce, those of Ban Ton Mai received cash on a daily basis. Nevertheless, both sets of villagers did not have many savings and therefore when a large amount of money was needed, to pay back a debt or to pay school fees for their children, they occasionally 'borrowed' money.

There were various sources for cash loans in both villages. When a small amount of money, less than three thousand baht for example, was needed, the villagers would borrow from their relatives and friends, who most of the time lent their money with no interest for a short period of time (say, less than six months). Prior to the implementation of the Village Fund Project (VFP) in 2001, other legal sources of cheap but small loans in Ban Tao Fai included the Bank for Agriculturalists and Cooperatives in the city centre, The Poverty Alleviation Project (PAP), established in 1990 and which provided loans of 10,000 baht to 28 poor villagers whose average revenue was less than 5,000 baht per year, and The Saving for Producing Project (SPP), established in 1995 and which provided loans to just its members who continuously deposited money with the programme. In contrast, because the villagers of Ban Ton Mai were not considered poor enough, the village was not eligible for the PAP. Therefore, the villagers' only legal local sources of loans were the Bank of Agriculturalists and Cooperatives and the SPP.

Most of the villagers of Ban Tao Fai did not use these legal sources of loans, however. Unlike those of Ban Ton Mai, most of the villagers did not own land and therefore were not considered by the Bank for Agriculturalists and Cooperatives to be agriculturalists who were eligible to apply for loans. Consequently, very few of them could apply for loans from the bank using their land as a guarantee. Also, the PAP provided loans for only 28 villagers and the size of a loan from the SPP depended solely on the amount of savings its members had with the programme. This left a number of villagers still in need of loans. In effect, most of them depended heavily on other sources of loan, some of which were illegal. In contrast, because most of the villagers of Ban Ton Mai owned some land, and were thus considered as agriculturalists who were eligible to apply for loans from the Bank, many of them applied for loans from the bank when they needed cash. Also, because they had many relatives in the village, they could easily borrow small amounts of money from them. As will be discussed in detail in a later chapter, this, together with the fact that they did not trust others with money, meant many of them did not apply for loans from the SPP and the VFP because they did not want to be guarantor to anyone. Consequently, when more money was needed, they turned to illegal sources of loan, such as *toe share* and local money lenders.

Similar to those in many other villages nationwide, a number of villagers of both villages organized their own lending groups, called *toe share*, where all members, called *kha share*, knew and trusted each other, put together an equal amount of money as capital and then lent the whole amount to one member who offered to pay it back at the highest rate of interest. Technically, it was the head of a *toe share*, or the *tao share*, who invited their friends, who had a good enough financial reputation to be trusted, to become members. Evidently, each *toe share* in Ban Tao Fai consisted of villagers with the same origins, while those of Ban Ton Mai consisted of close friends. When the field research was conducted, there were three *toe share* groups in Ban Tao Fai, headed by Jai, Buan and Anong, and seven *toe share* groups in Ban Ton Mai, headed by Nee, Klam, Charassri, Anong, Suprani, Charoon, and Prasert. All *toe share* groups in both villages lent money to their members on a monthly basis.<sup>212</sup> Of these *tao share*, Jai and Buan were the wives of local leaders of Ban Tao Fai, and Klam and Suprani were leaders of Ban Ton Mai.

Apart from *toe share*, villagers of both villages also turned to moneylenders. Although the interest rates for loans provided by moneylenders were higher than that of other sources, many villagers relied on them. This was because the moneylenders did not have limitations on the amount of the loan and did not have fixed repayment periods. In both villages, some *tao share* were also local moneylenders. There were five moneylenders in Ban Tao Fai: Chalorm, Somjit, Ji, Adul, and Jai, and five local moneylenders in Ban Ton Mai: Banternng, Klam, Nuon, Suprani and Saree. While most, if not all, of the villagers of Ban Ton Mai depend on local moneylenders only, it was evident that the villagers of Ban Tao Fai sometimes asked for loans from *tao kae* who sold crop seeds, fertilizer and insecticide to them. Indeed, these non-local moneylenders were responsible for most of the loans the villagers had taken out, mainly because these *tao kae* were much more wealthy than local moneylenders and could thus provide larger loans. Similar to the case of *tao share*, some moneylenders in both villages were also active in local committees and organizations. Some of those of Ban Tao Fai were also local leaders, including Somjit, an assistant to the *phu yai ban*, Ji, the former *phu yai ban* and a chairman of Buaban SAO. Suprani, was an accountant of Ban Ton Mai's SPP committee and VFP committee. Both *tao share* and local money lenders had some influence over the villagers' behaviour because their decisions, such as whether to invite one to join a *toe share*, whether to

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<sup>212</sup> Once they have received the loan or *share*, the loan receiver pays back the loan to each *kha share* in installments over thirty months. Most of the time, the money is spent on personal and household products. Having said this, one villager of Ban Tao Fai admitted that it is also common for *kha share* to borrow money from their *toe share* to pay back debts from other sources.

lend one money or whether to prolong one's debt payment period, directly affected the villagers' lives. According to many villagers from both villages, their local moneylenders had never cheated them. In those cases where they had been unable to repay their debts in time, the moneylenders just prolonged the repayment period and the villagers just had to pay more interest. The reason why these *tao share* and moneylenders treated their debtors fairly was that they were living in the same village and thus also had other types of relationship with each other.

*Produce purchasers vs. sellers*

Similar to the relationship between the crop seed/seedling, fertilizer and insecticide sellers and buyers, the relationship between produce purchasers and sellers had none or very little implications for local politics in either village. When selling their produce, the villagers of Ban Tao Fai called the same *tao kae* who lent them crop seeds, fertilizer and insecticide to send a truck to pick up the produce from their farm. As discussed earlier, because these *tao kae* did not live in the village, they had no interest in village politics and evidently did not try to influence the villagers' political behaviour.

The villagers of Ban Ton Mai, meanwhile, sold their rubber products to several local middlemen: the Krabi Lek rubber farmers' Co-op which bought only rubber sap and would then process it into rubber sheets and sell them to buyers in nearby provinces; Klag, the owner of the grocery shop that sold fertilizer and insecticide, who bought only rubber sheet and then sold them to main purchasers in other provinces, and five other local middlemen who bought the rubber lumps and then sold them in nearby districts. These middlemen were not the ones who set the selling prices of rubber products, however. In fact, the selling price was determined by the demand in the markets in Surat Thani and Songkla provinces. Normally, the price that the middlemen bought the products from the villagers for was not much lower than the market price (only 3-4 baht per kilogram lower). The villagers were not especially dependent on these middlemen, firstly, because there were many such middleman and, secondly, because they could always sell their rubber products to the main purchasers, since they had their own vehicles and the main road meant access was good. Consequently, these middlemen did not have much influence on the villagers' behaviour. Likewise, because the villagers sold their oil palm products directly to various buyers in other districts, the buyers did not have influence over their behaviour.

*Hi-tech farming equipment owners vs. borrowers*

In Ban Tao Fai, very few households owned hi-tech farming equipment, specifically ploughing machines or *rot tai*, which were used for ploughing the soil, and small loading trucks or *rot e-tan*, which were used to transport the harvested produce from the farm. In fact, there were only four *rot tai* in the village. These were owned by Ji, a former *phu yai ban*, Somjit, an assistant *phu yai ban*, Khru Yai, the head teacher of the local school, and Nueng, the leader of Nakhon Sawan group. There were five *rot e-taan*, owned by Ji, Somjit, Khru Yai, Nueng, and Boonmaa, an immigrant from Khorat. When villagers needed to use these machines, they could borrow them from their owners. Generally, the owners or their relatives would control or drive the equipment themselves, while the borrowers paid for the petrol and the daily wage of the owner or driver. Unlike the employment of wage labourers, in which there were no differences in the status of the employer and employee, the owners of these hi-tech equipments had a superior status to the borrowers due to the fact that there were not many of them and the equipment they owned was vital to the villagers. Indeed, the villagers' decision on what day to do their ploughing and harvesting depended very much on the schedule of the *rot tai* and *rot e-taan* owners. As it turned out, the owners of these machines would see to their own needs and those of their close relatives first, while other villagers had to wait. The villagers often borrowed the equipment from the same owners. Debatably, by being regular borrowers, the villagers knew of the owners' schedules and could set theirs accordingly. Like the relationship between the cash and loan providers and borrowers, the providers of the hi-tech equipment enjoyed a superior status and influence over the borrowers' behaviour. That is, even though the borrowers paid them for use of their equipment, they felt gratitude towards the providers. Conversely, there was no such relationship between the owners of hi-tech farming equipment and borrowers in Ban Ton Mai simply because every household in the village owned all the equipment necessary for *tham suan*. Growing rubber, fruit and oil palm trees does not regularly require any hi-tech farming equipment like Ban Tao Fai. As already discussed, the villagers needed to do the ploughing only once every 27 to 30 years, and the oil palm tree growers needed to rent a truck to deliver their products to the purchasers only twice a month.

**Conclusion**

In both villages, the ways the villagers thought about politics and behaved politically were greatly conditioned by their social interrelations, which in turn resulted from their backgrounds, livelihoods and economic activities. Because most of the villagers of Ban Tao Fai came from different origins – implying they had different cultures, dialects, and ways of life – they only



trusted those who shared the same origins, and therefore they formed groups based on their common origins. The origin of the candidate thus became the most important factor in determining the winners in any local election, as most, if not all, of the villagers gave their political support to only those who shared their origins. In Ban Ton Mai, however, the most important factor for winning a local election was the size of the candidate's extended family. This was primarily because villagers were closely tied to their families and would give their trust, cooperation, and political support to only their close relatives.

Having said this, the extent to which local leaders exerted power over the villagers depended not only on these factors but also on the leaders' performance and the extent of the villagers' dependence on these leaders in numerous matters related to their lives. In Ban Tao Fai, instead of relying on themselves and using violence when dealing with conflict, villagers of different origins started to turn to Ji, who had emerged as a good and strong leader, for advice and conflict resolution. Performing this role ensured that he was later elected as *phu yai ban*. Additionally, the fact that the village was far away from government offices also strengthened the leaders' role as mediators between the villagers and government officials, thereby increasing the villagers' dependency on their leaders. By contrast, the power of Ban Ton Mai's leaders came mainly from the support of their relatives, and was not that reliant on their charisma or performance. Additionally, the villagers tended to deal with their conflicts by themselves and treated arguments as family matters, for most of time their adversaries were somehow related to them. This, together with the fact that the villagers could travel to the government offices easily and deal with government officials themselves, made them relatively less dependent on their local leaders.

Evidently, the villagers' livelihood and economic activities also had strong implications for their political behaviour. By comparison, the villagers of Ban Tao Fai seemed to be less interested and active in local politics than those of Ban Ton Mai since because they were involved in growing annual crops, they had to spend most of their time working on their farms at a distance from other villagers, and thus did not have opportunities to discuss village matters and local politics with one another. Indeed, the hardship involved in growing annual crops limited their interests to just the well being of their own household, rather than that of the village as a whole. By contrast, growing perennial crops meant the villagers of Ban Ton Mai had to work only a few hours a day, and thus had more opportunities for socializing with each other and discussing village matters and local politics. Indeed, these 'passive' and 'active' characteristics

of the two sets of villagers are not limited to just these two villages, but are known as typical characteristics of the villagers of the Central region and the South of Thailand, respectively.<sup>213</sup>

The villagers' roles and responsibilities within their households also reflected their social and political roles in their village. Since they held decision-making powers within their households, the elders and the mature were the only active political actors in Ban Tao Fai, whereas in Ban Ton Mai the elders, the mature, and the young were active political actors. As will be discussed in the later chapters, even though the young of Ban Tao Fai played an increasing role in local politics, they were under the strong influence of their older relatives. Additionally, the villagers' production relations between households also had implications for the status of different villagers in the same village. The fact that there was little difference in the status of employers and employees, buyers and sellers of fertilizers and insecticide, and buyers and sellers of farm produce implies that there was not much difference in status between villagers in the same village. Only those who had what others did not have, namely money and hi-tech farming equipment, and lent them out to other villagers had superior status to those who borrowed from them. This implies that in order to achieve superior status, the leaders had to differentiate themselves from others. For example, the leaders of Ban Tao Fai avoided being the employees of other villagers who were not closely related to them. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the leaders of Ban Tao Fai invested in their own and their children's education so that they would have better qualifications than other villagers. It can be argued that a high degree of similarity in the villagers' qualifications highlighted the importance of performing their tasks well as a strategy for gaining, and enhancing the leaders' power and influence. As will be revealed in Chapters 5 and 6, those who performed their tasks well received due recognition from the villagers as their local leaders.

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<sup>213</sup> Ruohomaki notes the stereotypes of the South commonly held by Thai bureaucrats and others as stubborn (*hua khaeng*) and quick to anger (*do*). (Ruohomaki, 1999, p. 101) While suggesting that "the existence of these qualities is debatable" he also notes that there are certain "real behavioral distinctions" between southerners and other Thais. (Ruohomaki, 1999, p. 99)

### Chapter 3

#### The Dynamics of Power in Ban Tao Fai Prior to the Implementation of the Village Fund Project

As discussed in the previous chapter, the fact that the villagers of Ban Tao Fai originated from different provinces in many parts of the country, coupled with the fact that they were *tham rai* agriculturists, created political divisions between the villagers based on their origins and obstructed political integration among them. Political discussions and activities were rare and limited to among those in the same group. However, not all such groups were competing for power or positions on local committees. Without strong political leaders, some of the groups did not even develop into political cliques or those that did would later dissolve. Evidently, until 2001, the Khorat clique, which was made up of and supported by most of the villagers who came from Khorat and some villagers who came from the central region provinces such as Angtong, Singburi, and Chainat, and whose numbers were much smaller than other groups, were the most powerful and influential clique. The first two *phu yai ban*, Sanit and Ji, both originated from Khorat, while the third one, Adul, was supported openly by the Khorat clique, despite originating from Angtong. Having said this, its power and influence had not always been stable. In elections for the position of *phu yai ban* in 1979 and 1981, the Khorat clique, led by Ji, was challenged by the Nakhon Sawan clique, which was made up of and supported by most of the villagers who came from Nakhon Sawan and was led by Nueng. Supported by the majority of the villagers, candidates from the Khorat clique won both elections. Knowing that they were, origins-wise, in the minority and could hardly win an election, Nueng faded out his political activities in the village, while his daughter, who was influential among the villagers who originated from Nakhon Sawan, decided to move to a nearby village, where there were many villagers from Nakhon Sawan, and later became the *phu yai ban* of that village. The Nakhon Sawan clique of Ban Tao Fai thus dissolved gradually. In spite of this, the power and influence of the Khorat clique were challenged once again in late 1998, when the corruption scandal involving the leaders was revealed by Sompit, then an assistant to the *phu yai ban* (Ji) and who was also a member of the Khorat clique. Despite Sompit's attempt to create another political clique to compete with the Khorat one, his clique was never firmly established due to a lack of support. Defeated by Ji and his teammates in the elections for *phu yai ban* and membership of Buaban SAO in 1999, and facing strong opposition from Ji and his teammates, Sompit was forced to give up his political activities in the village.

In exploring the dynamics of power in Ban Tao Fai prior to the implementation of the Village Fund Project (VFP) in 2001, this chapter is organized into three parts. The first part investigates the qualifications and characteristics of the local leaders, and the way in which they used their power and asserted their influence over the villagers. The second part looks into the strategies these leaders used to gain, preserve, and enhance their power and influence, and how the villagers responded to, or challenged their leaders' positions. The third part then examines how existing local committees and groups were composed before the implementation of the Village Fund Project in 2001, looking into how local committees, organizations, and groups were established, how their members were elected, and how the villagers participated in and responded to the work of these organizations.

### **Qualifications, characteristics, power, and influence of the local leaders**

#### *The late Luang Pho Khong*

It is not wrong to say that the history of Ban Tao Fai and the story of Luang Pho Khong are one and the same. Truly, Luang Pho Khong, and his special meditation approach, was one of the factors attracting immigrants, mostly from Khorat, to settle in Ban Tao Fai. Even though he passed away in 1993, it is crucial for this thesis to look into Luang Pho Khong's characteristics and influence over the villagers because he was an important factor in the local leaders gaining and maintaining their power and influence, and, despite his death, his influence was still evident in local politics.

Luang Pho Khong came from Khorat to practice meditation in a deserted cave in Khao Tham mountain in 1970. Due to his charisma, calmness, respectability, and special meditation approach, he became very well known among the people in the northeastern part of Thailand. However, Luang Pho Khong did not take up the position of abbot, assigning it to his follower Luang Pho Phieu, and became the head of the monks instead. According to the first *phu yai ban*, Sanit, more immigrants from Khorat moved into the area after Luang Pho Khong moved to the village. Throughout the time he lived in the area of Ban Tao Fai, Luang Pho Khong outshone other important local figures – *phu yai ban*, *kamnan*, and head teachers – by playing a significant role as not only an initiator but also an implementer of village development projects. Regarding this, he initiated and successfully convinced the villagers to co-operate in building the village's first main road, *Wat Khao Tham*'s main hall, and the public health centre, with funds donated by the temple's visitors. Under his leadership, the temple donated 25 rai of land on which to build the public health centre, provided rice and cooking ingredients to the local school for the

students' lunch programme, and granted five scholarships to students at the local school every year. All monks and nuns also participated in the construction of these buildings. To provide a better life for poorer villagers, Luang Pho Khong also initiated the scheme of letting the temple's 100 rai of land to the landless villagers to farm. Indeed, the bond between the village and the monk was so close that the village was better known as Ban Khao Tham, rather than its official name of Ban Tao Fai. While he was alive, other leaders were, at best, his assistants who merely followed his ideas and initiatives. It was only after he passed away that these supporters emerged as leaders of the village and became more influential.

After Luang Pho Khong died in 1993, the abbot did not assume the same role as leader of the villagers and initiator of village development projects. Instead, he kept the same routine, traveling to other provinces or countries, as invited, to demonstrate Luang Pho Khong's meditation approach. Even though the temple still provided food for the local school student's lunch programme, land for rent, and financial support for the village's development projects, when asked, none of the monks, who could potentially take up a leadership role, even participated in any of the projects. Accordingly, the villagers did not have the same affection towards them as before. During this period, the role of Ji and his group, who were members of both the village committee and the temple committee, as mediators between the village and the temple thus became very significant in the eyes of the villagers. Ji's group became the ones who initiated the village development projects and got financial support from the temple. As already discussed, their role as managers of the temple's land rental scheme was also crucial to the villagers' livelihood. Despite the fact that all the money and other support came from the temple, the villagers believed that Ji and his team were the ones who made it all possible. Indeed, the death of Luang Pho Khong opened the way for Ji and his team to become the most powerful and influential group in the village.

### *Ji*

By the time this field research was conducted, 56 year-old Ji was the most powerful and influential person in Ban Tao Fai. He was the leader of the Khorat clique, a former *phu yai ban*, and chairman of the Buaban SAO. Ji migrated to the area of Ban Tao Fai in 1960 with his parents, who ran away from a growing debt burden resulting from their underground lottery business. With the large sums of cash they brought with them, Ji's parents were much better off than others immigrants. Despite living in the village for a long time, Ji only registered himself as a villager of Ban Tao Fai in 1973. In 1976, he opened the first and only grocery store in the village. Due to travel difficulties and the long distance between the village and the nearest

market, every villager was his customer. Most of the time, he would let the villagers buy their groceries with credit and pay later. With a lot of ready cash, he also became a major moneylender, lending to the villagers of Ban Tao Fai and the nearby villages. As such, he became the most popular villager, to whom many villagers were in debt.

Ji was very charismatic, always calm and very convincing. As already discussed, in 1977, Ji displayed his strong leadership skills by setting up a guard system for the village in which male villagers took turns to guard the village at night from the group of thieves led by Sarin. Ji could have been elected as the first *phu yai ban* of Ban Tao Fai in 1979 if he had not been disqualified by the fact that he had been a registered villager of Ban Tao Fai for only seven years (since 1973), not the ten years required by law. Supported by Khorat people, Ji's nephew, Sanit, subsequently became the first elected *phu yai ban* of Ban Tao Fai. But, because of his weak leadership and drinking habit, Sanit was outshone by Ji throughout the time he was *phu yai ban*. Indeed, when faced with problems, the villagers went to Ji, not Sanit. In 1981, Sanit resigned from his position to pursue labouring work in Iraq. Ji was then elected as the second *phu yai ban*. In 1994, when the Buaban Sub-district Administrative Organization was established, Ji became a member automatically as he was *phu yai ban*. Due to his strong charisma, he was selected by other SAO members as head of the SAO's administrative council, or *Prathan SAO*. Adhering to the 1997 constitution, which prohibited quasi-government officials becoming part of any local committee, Ji resigned from his position, having governed the village for 20 years, and campaigned in the election for membership of the Buaban SAO in 2001. He won and was later elected by other SAO members to be the head of SAO administrative team once more. Later, in June 2001, the position of *prathan SAO* was upgraded to *nayok SAO*, or chairman of the SAO, who headed both the administrative and legislative council in the SAO. From then on, Ji's status changed from *Phu Yai Ji* to *Nayok Ji*.

### *Khru Yai*

Another influential village figure was the head teacher, or *Khru Yai*, of the local primary school, who, by the time this field research was conducted, was 55 years old. Instead of being called by his name, Sathian, he was simply called Khru Yai by the villagers. He was originally from Angtong. Unlike other villagers, he did not migrate to Lopburi in search of a better livelihood. Instead he was posted by the Ministry of Education as head teacher for Buaban sub-district local school in 1967 and was later transferred to Ban Tao Fai School, the local school of Ban Tao Fai and the nearby village, in 1972. By the time this research was conducted, the school provided lessons from kindergarten to *Prathom 6*. There were 63 students, five teachers, and one janitor at

the school. With insufficient teachers, one teacher had to take care of two classes at the same time. Despite better transportation, very few villagers sent their children to the larger schools in town simply because the tuition fees were much higher than those for Ban Tao Fai school.

Because there were no other types of government official posted in the area apart from teachers, Khru Yai, as the highest-ranking one, became the most powerful government official in the area. With the highest education, he quickly became an advisor to most of the villagers and was respected by most, if not all, of them. Also, because he had been at this school for 32 years, unlike other teachers at the same school, he had taught almost everyone in the village who was younger than 42 years old.<sup>214</sup> As these students respected, felt gratitude to, and believed in him simply because he was their teacher, their parents, or the eldest and elders, respected and felt gratitude to him because he was their children's teacher. Similar to Ji, Khru Yai had lots of charisma. His voice was loud and he was very witty. Unlike other teachers in the same school, Khru Yai was a registered villager of Ban Tao Fai. He also owned land and was a *tham rai* farmer. Compared to other teachers, he also had various complex relationships with the villagers, besides being teacher to the children of the village. With a dual income, he was better off financially than others. Like Ji, Khru Yai was also a big money lender in the village. His advantage was that he could apply for cheap loans from the teachers' cooperative, lend to the villagers at a higher rate of interest and make a profit from the difference.

Khru yai was a member of Ji's team. He was appointed as an advisor to the village committee when Ji first became *phu yai ban* in 1981, and was later elected by the villagers as an assistant to the secretary of The Poverty Alleviation Project (PAP) committee in 2000.

### *Adul*

Adul was the third *phu yai ban* and was elected in 2001. Even though he was from Angtong, he was in the Khorat clique, working closely with Ji as an appointed *phu yai ban*'s honorary advisor since Ji first became *phu yai ban* in 1981. Moreover, because they shared the same origins, Adul was a close friend of Khru Yai. Apart from being a *tham rai* farmer, he was the only one in the village who raised dairy cows, and made ice cream for sale in the city centre. He was comparatively wealthier than other villagers. Similar to Ji and Khru Yai, he was also a village moneylender.

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<sup>214</sup> By law, children aged 5 to 8 years old had to attend *prathom 1* to 4. In 1971, the school provided *prathom 1* level of education, therefore, its first students are now 38 years old. Also, in 1972, the school began to provide *prathom 2* to 4 levels of education, so those ex-students are now 38-42 years old.

Adul was not particularly charismatic, however. Rather, he was widely known as a generous person because he always organized a New Year's party for students of Wat Khao Tham school and fed them with his ice-cream. Because he had a big belly and was chubby, the villagers referred to him as a 'generous fat guy' or '*Khon uan jai di*'. Unlike Ji, Khru Yai and others in Ji's group, he did not live in the centre of the village. His house was situated in the far west of the village, far from other villagers' houses. His opponent in the election for the *phu yai ban* position pointed out the facts that he did not have much charisma and lived far away from most of the villagers as his disadvantages. Debatably, Ji proposed Adul, even though he was not from Khorat, because he was a financial supporter of the group. Despite being *phu yai ban*, Adul was not as influential as others in Ji's team. Apparently, he still followed Ji's ideas and suggestions, and always sat behind others members of the group at the monthly village meeting. Also, most of the villagers still went to Ji for help and his house remained the office of the village committee.

### *Sompit*

By the time this research was conducted, Sompit was not active in local politics any more, nor did he hold positions on any local committees. Having said this, his story is still useful for this thesis as it shows the rise and fall of a political actor in the village and the strategies the leaders used to gain and preserve their power and influence. Sompit was a known *nak leng* and womanizer with a hot temper, originating from Nakorn Sawan. Sompit was married to Ji's niece and was consequently close to Ji. By the time this research was conducted, Sompit was 42 years old. When Ji first became *phu yai ban* in 1981, he appointed Sompit as assistant *phu yai ban*. After working together for eighteen years, Sompit learned by the end of 1998 that Cha-on had mispent 100,000 baht from the villagers' saving accounts in The Saving for Producing Project to build his own water well. He told other villagers about it and threatened Ji that he would inform the District Officer. He also started to mobilize young male villagers of various origins to oppose Ji and his team. Ji later fired him as his assistant. Sompit subsequently gained some popularity among a number of young male villagers who were unhappy with the dominance of Ji and his group, and wanted to participate more in local politics.

In June 2001, Sompit competed with candidates from the Khorat clique, including Ji, Cha-on, and Chalorm (a nephew-in-law of Ji's associate, Somjit), in the election for two members of Buaban SAO. Notably, Chalorm, who was popular among young male villagers for his football-playing talent, was put forward as a candidate by the Khorat clique in order to gain the votes of the young male villagers, who were considered Sompit's vote base. Due to a lack of



strong support from the villagers, Sompit lost out in the election, receiving just 85 votes while Ji, Cha-on and Chalorm received 129, 102, and 39 votes, respectively. Later the same month, Sompit competed in the election for *phu yai ban* with another of Ji's teammate (Adul) in which he lost out in a very close vote. The vote counts were 98 for Sompit and 112 for Adul, with 16 false ballots. After the elections, Ji and his teammates canceled all Sompit's memberships, along with those of his wife and children, in local development programmes on grounds of misbehaviour. They also warned the villagers not to associate with him and his family, as they would also be condemned of misbehaviour. Sompit subsequently turned to concentrate on his business in town and no longer participated in local politics.

### **Gaining, distributing, preserving and enhancing power and influence**

#### *Establishing teamwork*

Once he became *phu yai ban*, Ji set up a village committee by appointing his relatives, neighbours, and close friends, as his assistants and advisors. This included Somjit, a very calm, organized, and well spoken Khorat immigrant who had been close to Ji since they first arrived in Ban Tao Fai and who was appointed as the first assistant to the *phu yai ban*, Sompit, who was appointed as the second assistant to the *phu yai ban*, and Khru Yai and Adul, who were appointed as advisor and honorary advisor to the *phu yai ban*, respectively. Notably, the different characteristics of Somjit and Sompit were well-suited to their different roles as assistants. As Ji explained when asked why he had appointed them, Somjit could help him solve many different complicated problems while Sompit could deal with young and stubborn villagers for him. Another member of the team was Cha-on, a Khorat immigrant who turned 57 years old while this research was conducted. Unlike others, Cha-on did not have a position on the village committee but always helped Ji and his team. He was Ji's close neighbour, his house lying opposite Ji's. Cha-on was first given power in 1995 when he was appointed a member of the Poverty Alleviation Committee, on which the rest of the team were also members. As Cha-on said himself, he believed Ji chose him because he lived close by and they were good friends. Later that year, Cha-on also became head of the Saving for Producing Committee. Apart from working together on the village committee, these figures also became close friends and some such as Ji and Khru Yai became partners in an earth-selling business, whereby they excavated earth from Khru Yai's land and transferred it on Ji's trucks to construction sites in Tara city centre.

*Gaining power and influence*

Despite their power in the village committee, the influence of Ji's team was outshone by that of Luang Pho Khong. As discussed earlier, while Luang Pho Khong was still alive, the team's status was, at best, that of assistants who followed his ideas and suggestions. Only after Luang Pho Khong died in 1993 was their role as mediators between the temple and the villagers enhanced. Because of the abbot's weak leadership, the team became the initiator and implementer of all village development projects, using the temple's money and resources. In the eyes of the villagers, they were the ones who made all projects possible and therefore became their sole leaders. Their influence increased accordingly. The team later gained more power when the government implemented The Poverty Alleviation Project (PAP) in 1995 and The Saving for Producing Project (SPP) in 1999. As members of the village committee, Ji and his teammates automatically became members of these newly established committees. Through their work on these two committees, the team's influence also increased as their decisions affected the villagers' life more. During this time, the team also acquired the role of being the only mediator between the villagers and the government officials in the city center District Office. It was evident that Ji and his associates sometimes used their power to benefit their relatives, or ignored some rules and regulations of the local development programmes they were managing. Being occupied with their farming, the villagers did not know or understand much about how the programmes worked and were thus not bothered much.

*Preserving power and influence*

Ji explained that his strategy for preserving his team's power and influence, and maintaining their superior status, was to improve his teammates' qualifications. He convinced all his teammates, except Khru Yai, to pursue higher-level education at the Non-Formal Education Centre in the city centre in order to gain more skills and greater knowledge than other villagers. At the time this research was conducted, Ji and Somjit were about to be awarded Bachelor degrees, Sompit and Adul had diploma degrees, and Cha-on had a Mattayom 6 certificate, which is equivalent to grade 12 in the UK system. Apart from this, they invested in their children's education in the hope that they would find better jobs than farming annual crops like their parents. It was because of their authority and higher level of education than normal villagers (whose average level of education was Mattayom 3) that they and their families became the village elite. As such, most, if not all, of the villagers did not question their ability and their work on any local committees. As will be shown later, the villagers or other members of local

committees always let Ji and his teammates prepare the rules and regulations of the committees, as they believed they knew best.

All this changed in late 1998, when Sompit informed the villagers that Ji and Cha-on had allegedly misspent 100,000 baht of the money they had deposited in the savings account of The Saving for Producing Project in order to build their own private well. Even though it was not clear if Sompit was angry with Ji and Cha-on because they had not shared the money with him or because he believed in fairness and honesty, the villagers started to question the team. In response, Ji and his team implemented new strategies, using psychological coercion to preserve their power. Immediately after Sompit revealed the alleged corruption, Ji dismissed him from his position as assistant to *phu yai ban* on the grounds of 'misbehaviour'. After the election for *phu yai ban* in 2000, in which Adul almost lost to Sompit, Ji then rescinded all Sompit and his family's memberships in every local committee on the same grounds. Also, they warned the villagers to 'behave properly' (*tham tua di di*) and to 'be cooperative' (*hai kwam ruam mu*) and not to 'associate with bad people' for otherwise they too would be considered as having 'misbehaved'. This prevented Sompit and members of his family from participating in any village related matters, and prevented other villagers from socializing with them. Not wanting to be labeled as having 'misbehaved' and to avoid having their memberships in local organizations revoked like Sompit and his family, the villagers started to keep away from them. Sompit subsequently concentrated on his job as an executive member of Lamnarai Property Cooperative. Moreover, the villagers stopped questioning the team and rarely discussed its activities. At the monthly village meetings, they rarely asked questions or showed their disagreement with what the team said, for when they did, the leaders would condemn them as 'uncooperative' in the development of the village or would warn them to behave properly.

In addition, Ji and his team ensured that they and their close relatives, who they could trust, formed the majority on every local committee by using the 'nominate and approve method', whereby two villagers had to approve the name of anybody nominated as a candidate by any villager in order for that person to be able to run in an election, rather than just the 'nominations method', whereby all those who were nominated would be allowed to run in all open elections for membership of local committees. In elections, Ji and his associates' relatives would nominate their close relatives in advance and another two relatives would then approve their names. The result was that other villagers did not put forward any names as they were afraid that no one would approve them or that the relatives of the team would veto them.

*Enhancing power and influence*

Evidently, the team also tried to enhance its power and influence beyond the village. In 1998, when the Buaban SAO was established, both the Nakhon Sawan and Khorat clique sent candidates to compete in the election for two SAO members. While the Nakhon Sawan clique sent Sanam, a tomboy daughter of Nueng, the Khorat clique sent Adul, Cha-on, and Duen. By sending Duen, who was Ji's niece and Sompit's wife, the team hoped she would get some of the women's votes. Adul and Cha-on subsequently won a majority of the votes and became Ban Tao Fai's SAO members, while Sanam moved to a nearby village, where there were more immigrants from Nakhon Sawan, and later became *phu yai ban* of that village. As the then *phu yai ban*, Ji also became an SAO member. He impressed other SAO members with his strong charisma and dedication to the work of the SAO and consequently was elected as the head of the SAO Administrative Council, or *Prathan Sapaa SAO*. As discussed earlier, believing that he had a future in the SAO, Ji resigned from the position of *phu yai ban* and ran as a candidate in the election for SAO members in 2001. Adul and Cha-on both backed off: Adul to compete in the election for the replacement *phu yai ban* and Cha-on to focus on his work in The Saving for Producing Project. Because Sompit and Chalorm also competed in the election, Ji was desperately in need of someone to be his partner. But because Somjit was also already assigned to help Adul and Cha-on in village matters, he turned to Chan, who was also from Khorat and whom he had heard was interested in running in an election. Ji then lied to him that he would support him and tell Adul to drop out if he sided with his team. Not knowing that Adul would run for *phu yai ban*, Chan accepted the proposal.

In the hope of winning both elections, thereby preserving their power and influence within the village and enhancing them beyond the village, the team engaged in vote-buying for the first time. In various in-depth interviews, a number of villagers told me that both teams bought votes at a very high price (300 baht for the SAO elections and 500 baht for the *phu yai ban* election). In the end, Ji and Chan became SAO members and Adul became *phu yai ban*. The same year, Ji was once again elected, by the other SAO members, as head of the SAO administrative council. The position was later upgraded to head of both the administrative and legislative councils and he became *Nayok SAO* and became known as Nayok Ji.

To increase his influence in the SAO, Ji, as Nayok SAO, tried to impress other SAO members by proposing to build a large new SAO office. Because the project required a large budget, Ji then promised other SAO members that he would let them use a share of Ban Tao Fai's development projects budgets for their village' development projects, while he would find a development budget for Ban Tao Fai from elsewhere. In addition, Ji's team supported Cha-on

in establishing connections with other leaders of other villages by setting up an association of the sub-district SPP committee. As will be discussed in detail in the later part, Cha-on's concentration on this association reduced his focus on the work of Ban Tao Fai's own SPP committee. Also, when the SAO was looking for a place to dump all the garbage from local villages, Ji came up with a plan for the SAO to rent the temple's land to use as a dumping ground. Moreover, with the aim of building good connections with politicians at a higher level, Ji's team also supported a candidate in the election for members of the Lopburi Provincial Administrative Organization in 2004. In an attempt to maintain their popularity within the village, Ji and his team then turned to Luang Pho Phieu for financial support. As a matter of fact, the team asked for financial support from the temple for every village development project, including laying the concrete road in the village and building the fence for Wat Khao Tham school. In response, in December 2003, the monk members of the temple committee banned all donations to Ban Tao Fai's construction projects on the grounds that the temple's money, which was donated by the temple's visitors, was to be spent on religious activities only and that the SAO was already responsible for the infrastructure development of all villages in the sub-district. Even so, they still managed to ask for Luang Pho Phieu's permission to set up a donation stand to solicit donations from the temple's visitors.<sup>215</sup>

### **Local development projects prior to the Village Fund Project**

This part investigates the dynamics of power through the implementation of different local development projects that were implemented before the VFP. It examines the selection process of the different local committees established as a result of the implementation of the projects, the work of the committee members, and the villagers' participation in the projects and the work of the committees. There were five different local development projects implemented in Ban Tao Fai before the implementation of the VFP in 2001. These were the Housewives' Group, the Agriculturalists' Group, the Self Sufficiency Economic Fund (SSEF), the Poverty Alleviation Project (PAP), and The Saving for Producing Project (SPP). Most of them were initiated and funded by the government through different Ministries. A few of these projects were initiated by the local leaders and funded by the local government, the Buaban SAO.

As will be discussed, through the 'nominating and approving' procedure for selecting committee members, the leaders, or members of Ji's team, managed to gain total control over the

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<sup>215</sup> On average, there were about 80-150 visitors on a normal day and about 500-900 visitors on religious days, depending on the importance of the occasion.

work of all the committees, and thus secured more power and influence. Evidently, they used these projects to benefit themselves and their relatives, financially and politically.

*The Poverty Alleviation Project (PAP)*

The Poverty Alleviation Project provided a poverty alleviation fund to some selected poor villages, which was to be lent out interest free to selected poor households in sums of 10,000 baht each for investment in agricultural schemes. The project was initiated and funded by the Department of Local Development, the Ministry of Interior, in 1995. Only villages deemed the poorest received the fund. The evaluation of villages was based on average net incomes – less than 5,000 baht qualified – on livelihood, and debt records. The amount of money each village received was thus different.

In the case of Ban Tao Fai, the Ministry gave a fund of 280,000 baht to be lent out to the 28 poorest households by the village committee, which at the time consisted of Ji, as *phu yai ban*, Somjit and Sompit, as assistants to the *phu yai ban*, and Khru Yai and Adul, as advisors to the *phu yai ban*. At the monthly village meeting, these leaders suggested that, in order to spread the fund equally among all the poor households in the village, loans would be given to the 28 poorest households but in later years, the returned money would be lent out to other poor households. No one opposed the selection of the poor households to receive loans because they believed they would receive a loan later. However, problems occurred when some of the first 28 households failed to pay back their loans at the end of the first year. Due to many factors, such as bad weather and unstable prices, the villagers did not get as high a return on their investments as they had expected. As a result, only a few other households were given loans the following year. The leaders thus used the monthly meeting as a stage to force the loan receivers to pay back their debt and increase their social responsibility to other villagers who were waiting for the loan.

In line with the political reforms at the national level, which decreased the role of quasi-government officials on local committees, in 2000, the Ministry of Interior ordered the establishment of a PAP committee, consisting of nine members, to replace the Village Committee in managing the project. However, as shown in Table 3.1, through the usual ‘nominating and approving’ method, the leaders still managed to appoint themselves to important positions. By the time this research was conducted, the project had been operating for nine years. Most poor households had received loans at least once. The administration of the project was no longer discussed at the monthly meetings. Hence, the villagers were not informed of the development of the project.

**Table 3.1: List of members of the first PAP committee of Ban Tao Fai (2001-2003)**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Relationship to the Leaders</b>
1. Adul (m)	Chairman	Leader
2. Somjit (m)	Vice-chairman	Leader
3. Khieu (f)	Secretary	Somjit's niece
4. Khru Yai (m)	Assistant to Secretary	Leader
5. Ji (m)	Member	Leader
6. Cha-on (m)	Member	Leader
7. Jiam (f)	Member	Assistant to <i>phu yai ban</i>
8. Chan (m)	Member	Member of SAO
9. Nongnuch (f)	Member	From Khorat

Source: Author's own interview with Adul.

#### *The Saving for Producing Project (SPP)*

The Saving for Producing Project (SPP) was initiated by the Department of Local Development, the Ministry of Interior, in 1998, as a means of increasing the villagers' savings and establishing a local village bank, which would provide small loans cheaply to the villagers. The principle of the programme was that anyone could be a programme shareholder but only one person in each household could apply for a loan at any one time. In order to be eligible to apply for a loan, the villagers had to become members of the programme and open a savings account, into which they had to deposit a fixed amount of money on a monthly basis. If they failed to deposit money into their account for three months in a row, their right to apply for a loan would be taken away. The size of the loan they could apply for was a maximum of 10,000 baht.

Although the Ministry's regulations for the committees stated that there were to be nine to fifteen committee members and four working committees to look after the project – managing, inspecting, loan managing, and supporting committees – Ji, as the then *phu yai ban*, suggested to the villagers at the monthly village meeting that they should elect nine members of the SPP committee to manage the programme. Supported by the majority of the villagers, Ji's team and other villagers from Khorat were elected as members.

**Table 3.2: List of members of the first SPP committee of Ban Tao Fai (1995-1997)**

Name	Position	Relationship to the leaders
1. Ji (m)	Chairman	Leader
2. Somjit (m)	Vice-chairman	Leader
3. Sompit (m)	Secretary	Leader
4. Adul (m)	Assistant to Secretary	Leader
5. Cha-on (m)	Accountant	Leader
6. Manas (m)	Member	From Khorat
7. Samran (m)	Member	From Khorat
8. Pan (m)	Member	From Khorat
9. Khru Yai (m)	Advisor	Leader

Source: Author's own interview with Cha-on.

Of all the local committees of Ban Tao Fai, the SPP committee was the most problematic. Following Sompit's 1998 allegations of abuse of these funds, villagers started to question the work of their leaders. After these allegations were made, 20 members, out of a total of 78, resigned from the programme. Between 1998 and 2003, even though some more villagers applied to be members, 54 more resigned.<sup>216</sup> By the time this research was conducted, there were 160 members, 600,000 baht of savings, 40 loan receivers and 500,000 baht worth of loans in total.<sup>217</sup>

With the intention of reviving his credibility, Ji did not join the third committee. Even though their credibility was damaged, others in Ji's team became members of the committee, through the 'nominating and approving' method, and Cha-on became chairman of the project. This may be because no villagers were affected by the fact that Cha-on had allegedly used their money because when he supposedly took the villagers' money, it was not yet the appointed time for members of the programme to start applying for loans. Immediately after the allegations, Cha-on returned the money, and therefore, although there were doubts, the members could still apply for loans and had not lost out in anyway. Judging from various in-depth interviews with the villagers, these allegations were not the only problem concerning the committee that bothered the villagers, however. Many villagers explained to me that they had resigned from the programme because they had not received regular dividends from the profits. Although there are many other leaders on the committee, Cha-on was the one villagers blamed for the committee's

<sup>216</sup> In the second year, three members resigned, followed by 11 in the third. In the fourth, fifth, and sixth years, 20, 3, and 17 members resigned respectively.

<sup>217</sup> Information taken from the information book of Tara District's SPP Group, which I borrowed from Cha-on.



inefficiency primarily because he was the accountant of the committee and because the well, allegedly built out of the embezzled money, was in the compound of his house. Also, Somjit, Khru Yai and Adul did not answer any questions from the villagers or me regarding the committee, but let Cha-on deal with them by himself.

After becoming increasingly unhappy about my research concerning the programme, Cha-on refused to give me any more information about it. I was left with no list of members of the second, third, and fourth committees and no copy of the regulations for the committee. When asked about what went wrong with the programme, Ji said to me that nothing was wrong but 'Cha-on lacked communication skills and could not explain himself properly'. At the monthly meeting of December 2003, after the leaders finished announcing news of the newly appointed district officer, three young men stood, raised their hands and asked about the dividends from the programme. Khru Yai, who was then holding the microphone, gave it to Cha-on. Cha-on then said, 'When it was time to make a deposit, you didn't do it. And now you want to know about the dividend. I will tell you later then'. The second man then asked, 'What about us two who made regular deposits? What happened to our dividends?' Cha-on insisted that, 'When I am ready I will tell you'. When the first man asked, 'What have you and the committee been doing?' Cha-on then asked him back 'What about you? Can you do this?' Ji then grabbed the microphone and ended the meeting.

### *The Housewives' Group*

The Housewives Group was a project initiated and funded by the Department of Technological Development, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, as a nationwide, village level women's organization. In practice, the ministry gave villagers a 20,000 baht fund as capital to invest in any business in which they had skills in order to generate more income. The project was implemented in Ban Tao Fai in May 2001.

As members of the village committee, the team was informed about the project in advance by the District Officer and had already made plans for it. At a monthly meeting, they suggested that the Housewives Group, called *Klum maeban*, was to be set up and it was to make curry puffs for sale at a weekly fresh market in a nearby village. They also suggested that the 'nominating and approving' method was to be used to select the chairman of the committee. Ji's wife then proposed Khieu, who was also Somjit's niece, while Cha-on and Adul's wives approved her. As the leader of the meeting, Ji also established a membership fee of 100 baht so as to increase the business' investment fund. However, not many women, apart from Ji's sister, were skilled in making curry puffs. Also, many of them were already busy with their work on

their farms and did not want to pay 100 baht. The group was not officially formed until October 2001 and there were only 26 members, most of whom were from Khorat, in total. The committee, comprising seven members, was then selected by all the members. As it turned out, the young and the mature people who originated from Khorat and had a good education became members.

**Table 3.3: List of members of the Housewives Group's committee of Ban Tao Fai  
(October 2001-present)**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Positions</b>	<b>Relationship to Leaders</b>
1. Khieu (f)	Chairman	Somjit's niece
2. Somsri (f)	Vice-chairman	From Khorat
3. Siriporn (f)	Secretary	From Khorat
4. Petch (f)	Accountant	Ji's sister in law
5. Boonsri (f)	Member	Fram Khorat
6. Prani (f)	Member	Sanit's wife
7. Somnuak (f)	Member	From Khorat

Source: Author's own interview with Khieu

Not all members were required to participate in the cooking, however. The rule was that only four or five skilled women would be cooking one day a week and they would get paid 120 baht per day for their time. Profits from sales would then be distributed equally to every member. In fact, only those who were related to the leaders – Khieu, Petch, Ji's wife, Cha-on's wife, and Somjit's wife – made the curry puffs. Lacking the required skills, other women were not allowed to take part and get paid for their time. With big hopes for the business, in 2002, Ji, as Nayok SAO, approved an interest-free loan of 30,000 baht from the Buaban SAO to the group to increase the group's capital. The group was to pay back 10,000 baht a year for three years to the SAO.

The business did not go well. As Ji's wife explained, many of the curry puffs were eaten by the cooks' children, and therefore they did not make a good profit. Within eight months, the regular cooks decided to quit, to which the committee agreed. Khieu then suggested that they should invest the remaining money in another business. With not much time to run a business themselves, the committee then decided to buy 10,000 baht worth of shares in and to lend out 20,000 baht interest free to another village's housewives group, which grew chilli peppers for sale. They also bought 5,000 baht worth of shares in the local cooperative and petrol station, which were also established in 2001. The chilli growing group's business also failed, however,

and the Ban Tao Fai housewives group lost their 10,000 bahts worth of shares. By the time this research was conducted, the chilli growing group had not yet paid back their 20,000 baht loan to Ban Tao Fai's housewives group, who in turn had yet to pay back their 30,000 baht to the SAO. As Khieu explained, this was not a big problem as Ji was the Nayok SAO. In spite of this, the group still received dividends from their shares in the local cooperative and petrol station, and all 26 members of the group received equal shares of that dividend.

Evidently, the leaders managed to get their hands on the implementation of the Housewives Group, even though it did not involve a considerable amount of funding nor a large number of the villagers, by setting up a business plan, nominating Khieu as the chairman of the group's committee, and using their powers in the SAO to lend out the 30,000 baht interest-free loan to the group. They did this primarily because they wanted their relatives, who were the group's members, to benefit from the group financially. As discussed, their relatives did not get only a share of the profits but also a wage for cooking the curry puffs, which required skills that only they possessed.

#### *The Self Sufficiency Economic Fund (SSEF)*

Following a lecture on the Self Sufficiency Economy (*setthakit pho phieng*), as propounded by the King, at the district office in April 2001, the Buaban SAO, led by Ji, lent out an interest-free loan of 100,000 baht, with no fixed repayment period, to every village in the sub-district as a fund to be invested in local economic development projects. As the most influential person in the village and the Nayok SAO, Ji announced the news and told the villagers, at the monthly meeting of May 2001, that he and the village committee had already decided that the loan would be set aside as a fund, called the 'Ban Tao Fai Self Sufficiency Economic Fund' (*Kongtun setthakit phung ton eng*), or SSEF, and would be invested in building the village's own petrol station and local co-op shop so that the villagers would not have to travel to the city centre to buy petrol and groceries. Also, he told the villagers that the proper repayment period should be five years, with 20,000 baht to be paid back to the SAO per year.<sup>218</sup> Even though the villagers did not oppose the plan, a few of them openly stated their worries by saying that the project was too big for them to handle and that they would lose out and end up in debt. Ji ignored them, however.

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<sup>218</sup> Other villages set up their repayment period for ten years, paying back 10,000 baht per year to the SAO.

Ji asked the villagers to select 15 members to form an administrative committee, seven members for an inspecting committee, and one advisor, to work for a two-year term. Selection was done by the usual 'nominating and approving' method. In effect, as shown in Table 3.4, Ji, Somjit, Cha-on, Khru Yai's daughter O, Ji's daughter Benjamas, Adul, and Cha-on's niece Pan became chairman, vice-chairman, vice-chairman, accountant, secretary, and members of the administrative committee, and held the majority votes. A number of villagers from Khorat filled the rest of the positions as members. Apart from this, Chalorm, who was Somjit's nephew-in-law and the same person who competed with Sompit in the election for SAO members in June 2001, Sakorn, who was Sanit's son in law, two female teachers from the local school, and three other villagers from Khorat became members of the inspecting committee, and Khru Yai became the advisor to both committees. Seemingly, because both the teachers who were chairman and vice-chairman of the inspecting committee were supervisees of Khru Yai, their behaviour in this matter was subject to his influence. As such, the leaders also held the majority on the inspecting committee.

Judging from various in-depth interviews with the villagers, most, if not all, seemed to be satisfied with the committee list. In fact, a number of them said that they did not want themselves or their relatives to be involved in the committee much as they did not understand maths and did not want to be responsible for such a large sum of money. Also, many of them were satisfied that two teachers were on the inspecting committee and explained that despite them being close relatives of the leaders, the qualifications of O and Benjamas, both of whom had bachelor degrees, suited their positions.<sup>219</sup> Evidently, the leaders' strategy of nominating their relatives who had a high profile, but would follow their ideas and suggestions, was working well.

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<sup>219</sup> With their high level of education and close connections with Ji, O and Benjamas were also hired as staff of the Buaban SAO.

**Table 3.4: List of members of the first SSEF committee of Ban Tao Fai**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Relationship to Leaders</b>
<i>Administrative Committee</i>		
1. Ji (m)	Chairman	Leader
2. Somjit (m)	Vice-Chairman	Leader
3. Cha-on (m)	Vice-Chairman	Leader
4. Benjamas (f)	Secretary	Ji's daughter
5. O (f)	Accountant	Khruyai's daughter
6. Adul (m)	Member	Leader
7. Pan (f)	Member	Cha-on's niece
8. Pood (f)	Member	From Khorat
9. Samarn W. (m)	Member	From Khorat
10. Gin (m)	Member	From Khorat
11. Kampon (m)	Member	From Khorat
12. Sawad (m)	Member	From Khorat
13. Kajorn (m)	Member	From Khorat
14. Nuang (m)	Member	From Khorat
15. Samarn S. (m)	Member	From Khorat
<i>Inspecting Committee</i>		
16. Teacher Muay (f)	Chairman	Khru Yai's supervisee
17. Teacher Pai (f)	Vice-Chairman	Khru Yai's supervisee
18. Chalorm (m)	Member	Somjit's nephew-in-law
19. Sakorn (m)	Member	Sanit's son-in-law
20. Siriporn (f)	Member	From Khorat
21. Sampoa (f)	Member	From Khorat
22. Samarn Sr. (m)	Member	From Khorat
23. Khru Yai	Advisor	Leader

Source: Author's own interview with Ji

The leaders and other members of the administrative committee met at Ji's house the next day to approve the rules and regulations Ji and his team had drafted in advanced. For the committee members, the rules prohibited anyone from being members of any committee for more than two terms in a row. On the membership of the co-op, the rules stated that one had to buy shares – at 100 baht per share – and pay a membership fee of 20 baht to join the co-op. No members were allowed to own more than 20 percent of the total shares. Also, the rules stated that members of both committees were to meet at every village monthly meeting, and that members of the Administrative Committee were to meet on every Sunday evening at the co-op. Regarding profits, the rules contended that 80 percent of the total profit was to be distributed

among all shareholders, another 10 percent was to be used for future investments, and the other 10 percent was to cover administration and management, including payment for the committee and a 150 baht per day payment for the shopkeeper. Having said this, there were no regulations stating the specific role of the inspecting committee. For example, for checking the account book, the regulations stated that only the chairman and the accountant were to be present. Additionally, there were no regulations on how the inspection should be conducted, or on what grounds. Up to the end of 2003, when I left the village, the inspecting committee had yet to inspect anything or even study the account book primarily because the regulations did not indicate any roles for them in the management of the fund.

The leaders enjoyed total control over the management of the fund, not only because they held the majority on both committees, and the inspecting committee did not have a role to play, but also because they performed well financially. Therefore the villagers had no reason to interfere in the committee's work. By the time this research was conducted, there were 185 shareholders with 1,825 shares in total. The fund was proving to be profitable. In 2003, its cash inflow was 300,000 baht. All shareholders received their dividends on time and were satisfied accordingly. Most, if not all, of the villagers, and some villagers from other villages, bought groceries and filled up with petrol at the co-op and the petrol station, respectively.

Indeed, the successful management of the fund earned the leaders considerable credibility, both within the village and beyond. It was a showcase of good management for representatives from other villages, in Lopburi and nearby provinces, to study. Because of this, even though some rules and regulations were overlooked and not treated seriously, other members and the villagers did not complain. A number of Administrative Committee members admitted that they had never participated in the committee's work following the approval of the rules and regulations because the regular members' meetings, which were supposed to be held weekly, had never taken place. Only the accountant came to the co-op every Sunday to get the weekly account book from the shopkeeper. Apart from this, the monthly village meeting, at which all members of both committees were to meet to discuss the fund's business, did not provide any opportunity for discussion. Evidently, while the leaders gathered in front of the canteen, other members of the committee sat among the villagers and did not say anything. During the four months of my field research, there was no discussion about or even an announcement of anything related to the fund. Being a locally initiated local organization also meant that the fund management was not subject to inspection by government officials. Having said this, most villagers seemed to be indifferent, saying that 'it was OK' and 'it does not matter', as 'they (the leaders) were doing a good job'.

Somjit explained that because all the members worked hard on their farms, they were too tired to meet regularly. As such, the fact that only a few members with specific responsibilities and decision-making powers would meet when it was necessary at the co-op without informing the other members, did not bother them. Despite obvious signs of misconduct, no members or villagers complained to anyone as long as they got their dividend at the end of the year. Also, even though the leaders used the fund to benefit their relatives and associates – for instance, hiring Ji’s close neighbour Ung as the shopkeeper for 33 months from the time the co-op and the petrol station were first established until December 2003, instead of changing the shopkeeper every month in order to create work and distribute extra income among the villagers as stated in the rules – no villagers complained. Also, even though the regulations stated that the administrative committee and the inspecting committee were to consist of seven and six members respectively, when the second committees were elected in 2003, the leaders announced, to no opposition, that the villagers were to elect ten and six members for the administrative and inspecting committee, respectively.

**Table 3.5: List of members of the Second SSEF committee of Ban Tao Fai (2003- 2005)**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Relation to the Leaders</b>
<i>Working Committee</i>		
1. Adul (m)	Chairman	Leader
2. Ji (m)	Vice-Chairman	Leader
3. Somjit (m)	Vice-Chairman	Leader
4. Khieu (f)	Accountant	Somjit’s niece
5. Wanpen (f)	Secretary	Somjit’s niece
6. Duang (f)	Member	Ji’s daughter
7. Lumpai (f)	Member	Ji’s daughter-in-law
8. Kajorn (f)	Member	From Khorat
9. Sermsuay (f)	Member	O’s close friend
10. Neang (f)	Member	O’s close friend
<i>Inspecting Committee</i>		
11. Sakorn (m)	Chairman	Sanit’s son-in-law
12. Khruyai (m)	Advisor	Leader
13. O (f)	Accountant	Khruyai’s daughter
14. Sommai (f)	Member	Somjit’s niece
15. Siriporn (f)	Member	Ji’s neighbour
16. Panompai (f)	Member	From Khorat
17. Salee (f)	Member	From Khorat

Source: Interview with Ji on 1 November 2003

*An attempt to establish an Agriculturalists' Group*

Similar to the local co-op and petrol station project, the agriculturalists group was not a government initiative but one of Ji's ideas. This scheme was done in an attempt by Ji to transfer the Housewives Group's debt to the SAO to another group of people, so that his and his associates' relatives who were involved in the Housewives Group would not have to take responsibility for the debt. Ji's scheme started in May 2003, when three female villagers tried to start a mushroom farming business to generate more income for their families. This group was initiated by Noi, a mature immigrant from Chonburi. Noi and her husband came to Ban Tao Fai in 2002. They rented a small piece of land from Khru Yai and built a small house to live in. Because they did not own any land, Noi became an agricultural wage labourer for other villagers, while her husband, who had asthma, helped out around the house. After seeing how the village temple's nuns successfully farmed mushrooms for their own consumption, Noi wanted to start her own mushroom farm. However, because she did not have much capital and could not apply for any loans from local organizations due to the fact that she was not yet an official resident of Ban Tao Fai, she convinced two young female neighbours, Phon and Wanpen, whose husbands were also not very healthy, to be her business partners. They started to learn about mushroom farming from the nuns in the temple.

When the leaders learnt of this partnership, they offered to transfer the leftover capital, about 11,600 baht, of the Housewives Group to them. Also, Khru Yai, whose wife was a member of the Housewives Group, used his position as head teacher to take 20,000 baht from the school's fence building budget and lent it to the three women, with an interest-free period of six months.<sup>220</sup> Seemingly, the leaders also helped out Noi because they wanted to make her feel gratitude to them. They were very impressed with Noi's leadership skills and the fact that, before she immigrated to Ban Tao Fai, she was an assistant to the *phu yai ban* of her old village. As Ji told me, he wanted Noi to join his team. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, Noi later became a member of the Village Fund Committee and was obviously taking Ji's side.

After only a few months, mushroom farming turned out to be too much of a burden for Phon and Wanpen, as they had to wake up very early at 4am and could not go to bed until 11pm. With no produce yet to be sold, they were afraid of debt and withdrew from the business. The loans from the SAO and the school thus became Noi's personal debt. Desperately needing to have the money back and to make the transfer of the loan official, Ji then tried to convince other

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<sup>220</sup> At the time that Khru Yai lent the 20,000 baht to Noi and her friends, the budget to build the school's fence had not yet reached the desired amount. Therefore, the construction was not able to start and all donated money was kept in Khru Yai's home.



villagers to organize an Agriculturalist Group to farm mushrooms, in the hope that the group could apply for financial support from the SAO, headed by Ji. He told the villagers that, ‘organized as a group, members may be able to ask for loans or even free development funds from the government through the Ministry of Agricultural or from local governments.’ The leaders even invited a mushroom specialist to give a short lecture to the villagers at the monthly meeting. Ji and Khru Yai even set an example by investing in mushroom farming with their own money. However, no other villager was interested in the scheme. They believed it meant more work and that it would fail like the Housewives’ Group’s curry puff project. Also, they did not have any surplus money to invest.

After a few months, Noi, Ji, and Khru Yai’s mushroom farming business proved to be profitable. Noi started to pay back her debts to the SAO and to Khru Yai. Consequently, a number of villagers started to apply to be members of the Agriculturalist Group. By the time I left the village in December 2003, there were 32 members in total. From various in-depth interviews with some of the members, I found that they did not want to do mushroom farming but wanted to receive some dividends from Noi’s profits. The group was not very organized, however. Once Noi started to pay back her debt, the leaders did not push for any activities, meetings, or even an election for the head of the group. Moreover, Ji did not push for any loan applications to the SAO. This was because their main purpose was to clear the original debts, and once this was done they did not want to create any more debt. By May 2004, the leaders no longer discussed the group at the monthly meeting.

### **Implications of the projects’ implementation for the dynamics of power**

This study of how all the existing local committees of the village had been implemented confirms that support from one’s origins group was the most important factor in getting elected. Indeed, for all local committees, most of the members were those originating from Khorat. Having said this, the fact that the most influential persons of the Khorat clique had become the executive members of all the committees highlights the importance of one’s characteristics and influence as other factors that determined the level of power one would assume. Indeed, the power of the leaders had indeed begotten more power. As members of the Village Committee, Ji and his team of *phu yai ban* assistants and advisors became members of the PAP automatically. Furthermore, despite their power and influence, the leaders still felt the need to plan votes in advance in order to make sure that their people would get elected. In the elections for members of the SPP in 1995, 1997, and 1999, they planned the names of the people they wanted to be nominated and the names of the people to approve these nominations in advance. Also, the

leaders felt the need to legitimize their plan to dominate the work of the Housewives Group to such an extent that, even though the government did not require that the committee be elected, they set up an election, planning the name to be nominated, Khieu, and her two approvers in advance. Even though at this time there was not yet any evidence of opposition, the leaders sought to legitimize their actions because, as it seemed, they wanted to highlight their status as leaders with merit. The villagers rarely nominated anyone in the election, anyway.

After the corruption scandal in 1998, the way the committees were set up changed. To preserve their power and influence, the leaders evidently used coercion to dominate the work of all local committees. Despite the monthly village meetings, which had been established since 1995, the villagers' participation in the work of local committees was limited to the extent that they were not allowed or encouraged to ask any questions or show any opposition to the leaders. The committee rules for the SPP and the SSEF, which stated that the membership of any persons who behaved improperly would be canceled, was used for the first time on Sompit. And when the villagers did ask questions or showed any opposition, they were warned to 'behave properly'. Information about the actual work of the committee was given only at the end of the year, while news on how hard the leaders were working for the committee and how much they had sacrificed for the benefits of the village were repeated many times. Despite the damage to the leaders' credibility, power still begot power. By exhibiting that their power as executive members enabled them to cancel any villager's membership in a local project, the leaders could preserve their power within that particular committee. Having said this, by emphasizing the importance of their experience and special skills in managing the work of all the committees, the leaders also made power commensurate with responsibility and hard work.

Apart from this, there was evidence that the leaders exploited their power to benefit themselves and their relatives. The most obvious example was when Cha-on misused some of the villagers' savings in the SPP to build his own water well. If Sompit had not found out about this and told the villagers, it was possible that Cha-on, or other leaders, could have done the same with the villagers' money that they were supposed to be looking after. Evidently, the use of coercion at the monthly village meeting was to protect Cha-on from having to answer any of the villagers' questions. Another example of the abuse of power was when Khieu decided that the Housewives Group was to make curry puffs for sale so that only her relatives and Ji's relatives might earn money from cooking, as no one else in the village knew how to cook them. Also, even after the incident in 1998, when it was proved that the Housewives' Group could not repay its debt to the Buaban SAO, Ji, as Nayok SAO, not only prolonged the repayment period but

also used his power to initiate another local project, the mushroom farming group, to take responsibility for the debt.

### Conclusion

Prior to the implementation of the VFP in 2001, the dynamics of power in Ban Tao Fai changed over time. The villagers were divided politically into groups based on shared origins and this meant that the candidate from the largest group always won in local elections. During the first 40 years, from the 1960s, when the villagers migrated into the area, until 1998, power, or authority conferred by the government, was gained mainly through the support of villagers in the same origins group. Having said this, one's personal characteristics and the role that one played indicated one's influence over the villagers. During the first 30 years of the villagers' settlement in the village, Luang Pho Khong, a monk who had no formal authority, was perceived by the villagers to be their ultimate leader primarily because of his charisma and the fact that his roles, activities, and legacy affected the villagers' lives more directly and positively than those of other leaders. Similarly, due to his strong charisma, Ji emerged as a good problem solver and mediator between the villagers, and was well received by other villagers who originated from provinces other than Khorat, especially those from the central plain. Consequently, he was later elected as the second *phu yai ban*, and thus gained power, or authority conferred by the government, to be the head of the village. Although part of the same team, not all of Ji's teammates, except for Khru Yai and Somjit who were also charismatic, were influential. As discussed, Cha-on and Adul were recruited to be in the team mainly because they were Ji's close neighbour and Khru Yai's close friend, respectively. Meanwhile, Sompit was recruited as Ji wanted to keep a close eye on him for he was a *nak laeng*, who might otherwise cause problems for the team.

While Luang Pho Khong was still alive, Ji and his teammates were perceived, despite their power, to be the monk's assistants and mediators between the temple, which provided resources for development, and the villagers. With support from the majority of the villagers, the strategy they used to preserve their power was merely to support and assist Luang Pho Khong's ideas and initiatives for many village development projects. In an attempt to improve their leadership credentials, Ji and Somjit continued to study, which effectively improved their qualifications. This, together with the fact that most of them had invested in buying their own hi-tech farming equipment to lend to the villagers and the fact that they avoided working as wage labourers for other villagers who were not close to them, gave them a higher status than other villagers. It was only in the mid-1990s – after Luang Pho Khong passed away in 1993, the Buaban SAO was established in 1994, and a number of local development programme, such as

the PAP and the SPP were implemented – that the leaders' status changed from being just Luang Pho Khong's assistants and mediators between the villagers and Luang Pho Khong to being the initiators and implementers of village development projects. Being members of the village committee, the *phu yai ban* and his assistants automatically became members of the SAO and PAP committee. With support from the Khorat people, they were also elected as members of the SPP. With power on the local committees whose works affected the villagers' lives, they gained more influence over the villagers. Despite changes in the perception of the leaders' power, during this period, the way in which power was gained and preserved remained the same. That is, support from villagers who belonged to the same origins group was still the most important factor in gaining power, while charisma and performance were crucial factors for preserve this power. Also, similar to how they acted towards the villagers of Ban Tao Fai, in order to gain power and influence in the newly established SAO or to enhance their power outside the village, Ji and his team made use of their charisma and played the role of strong leaders by not only initiating good and novel ideas but also by working harder than other SAO members so as to show off their efficiency.

Notably, the lack of competition from other political cliques, which resulted from the fact that the Nakhon Sawan clique had already been neutralized and dissolved, did not mean more stability for the leaders' power. Indeed, the fact that Chan, who originated from Khorat, wanted to compete in the election for members for the SAO implied a need for other political actors, who were not necessarily opponents of the leaders, to participate in local politics. To cope with this situation, the leaders evidently tried to involve more people who had potential, namely Chan and Noi, in their groups.

In 1998, Cha-on's alleged embezzlement of the villagers' money deposited in the SPP's saving account severely damaged the credibility of Ji and his teammates. Even though there was no clear evidence that Ji was involved in the fraud, the fact that the water well Cha-on had built using the embezzled money was very close to Ji's house created doubts in the villagers' minds. To preserve their power and influence, the leaders thus used new strategies, which this thesis has termed psychological coercion, whereby they kept telling the villagers how hard they were working for the village and how important their works were for the villagers. Moreover, in avoiding the villagers' intervention and question, they also branded those who asked questions at the monthly meeting as trouble-makers and warned them to behave properly. In order to stop the opposition, they cut Sompit and his family off from all the village's social and political activities by canceling all their memberships on local committees and branding them troublemakers. They then threatened to do the same to any person that associated with them. Meanwhile, in order to

reduce dissatisfaction among the young villagers, who were unhappy with their dominance of every committee, the leaders thus felt the need to legitimize the power they had acquired. As discussed, the leaders promoted new political actors to be members of some local committees and to compete with them in local elections. Despite setting up an election of members for any new local committee, the leaders had planned names of the person they wanted to nominate, the person who would nominate them, and the persons who would approve them in advance. While these new political actors may have had a higher level of education than other villagers or were popular among the young villagers, they were also the close relatives of the leaders and would thus follow their suggestions. Apparently, the use of psychological coercion worked to such an extent that in mid-2001, Cha-on was re-elected as chairman of the second SPP committee and the leaders won two other local elections, one for the third phu yai ban, and the other for members of Buaban SAO. Additionally, when new local development programmes, specifically the local Self Sufficiency Economic Fund and the Housewives Group, were established in April and May 2001, the leaders agreed on the nominators and the person who they wanted to nominate in advance so that most of the committee members would be themselves and their relatives. Apart from this, to preserve his power in the SAO, Ji, as Nayok SAO, had satisfied other SAO members by providing them with money for their villages' development projects at the expense of those for Ban Tao Fai.

Through examining how the new local development projects were implemented, this chapter has revealed how the leaders monopolized power. Even though new political actors were involved in the newly established committees, decision-making powers were limited to only a few members of the committees, all of whom were the leaders themselves. Despite the villagers' need to be more involved in the work of the committee, the villagers' participation was also limited; although they were present at the monthly village meetings, they were not allowed to ask questions or initiate any ideas. Clearly, the meetings, which were organized only when the PAP and the SPP were established, benefited only the village leaders. Not only did it make their work easier – rather than going to the villagers' homes, the leaders just dealt with them all at the meeting – it also provided the leaders with opportunities to exercise their power and to display their efficiency. Apart from this, this chapter has also shown that the leaders used their power to benefit their relatives and close friends, to the extent that other villagers were excluded from the work of the various committees. For example, by limiting the activities of the Housewives' Group to only cooking curry puffs, which most of the villagers could not do, the leaders' relatives who had the required skills were the only persons to benefit financially from the daily wages paid by the committee. Also, the attempt to establish the Agriculturalists' Group was

designed to help their relatives, who were the executive members of the Housewives' Group, to pay back their debt to the SAO.

Evidently, the implementation of new local development programmes led to certain changes in the perception of power. Prior to the corruption scandal in 1998, for the leaders, power on newly established local committees meant more status, more responsibility, and more influence. After 1998, however, regaining power on these committees meant they would regain their credibility and superior social status. Coercion was thus used as a way to gain power because, their credibility, which was based on their charisma and good performance, had been damaged. For the villagers, since these local committees were established, power has been increasingly perceived as denoting responsibility and dedication. Moreover, because the work of these local committees affected some of the villagers' lives more directly, the efficiency and accountability of the leaders was increasingly the crucial factor in determining their credibility and influence over the villagers. Seemingly, it was the implementation of such project, and not only the corruption scandal that caused the villagers' anticipation. Even if Cha-on had not been accused of corruption, villagers who were members of the PAP and the SPP would have started to question the accountability of the leaders because the shareholders of the SPP had not been given their dividends for sometime and some other poor villagers, who expected to receive PAP funds, were not chosen by the leaders. Having said this, because they believed and were encouraged to believe that working on these local committees required special skills and knowledge, they came to believe that only those with special skills should be entrusted with power. Accordingly, even though some of them had doubts about their leaders' accountability, they did not want the power for themselves and tended to let the leaders get on with their jobs with no interference.

The period leading up to the implementation of the VFP saw the leaders attempt to stabilize their power and influence. In using their power, the leaders evidently employed coercion and tried to dominate the work of all local committees. Additionally, with such higher anticipation from the villagers, the leaders thus felt the need to legitimize their dominance of power. Although new political actors participated in the work of the existing local committees, most, if not all, of them were the leaders' relatives. Accordingly, the power was still distributed among the leaders. Concomitantly, the villagers increasingly saw power as denoting responsibility, hard work, and accountability. Even though they did not consider themselves to be potential leaders, and thus let the leaders work with little interference, they examined the leaders' performance more closely. Over time the leaders' performance was gradually becoming a more important factor that determined their influence over the villagers.

**Chapter 4**  
**The Dynamics of Power in Ban Ton Mai**  
**Prior to the Implementation of the Village Fund Project**

Unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, there were no obvious divisions between the villagers of Ban Ton Mai. Also, there was no evidence of the existence of political cliques, comprising of a number of villagers who worked in a collective manner in competing with other groups. As discussed in Chapter 2, the villagers of Ban Ton Mai had a tendency to trust only their close relatives; therefore, in elections the winner was the one who had the greatest number of relatives or the largest clan. Also, in most open elections where names were nominated and approved by the villagers in order to get elected, only those who came from large extended families would be confident of sufficient support to nominate their relatives. In fact, politics in the south of Thailand as a whole has been dubbed 'clan politics', or *karn Klang rabob krueyad*, in which relatives or *krueyad* always come first. The villagers openly and aggressively supported their relatives by not only voting for them directly but also by convincing their friends to vote for them. However, there was a merit system within clan politics. As will be shown in a later part, in any local election, the elders of an extended family would normally prepare the name of the person they would put forward as potential candidates in the election. For the most part, that person would have sufficiently high qualifications and personal characteristics to represent the whole clan well.

In order to explore the dynamics of power in Ban Ton Mai prior to the implementation of the Village Fund Project in 2001, this chapter takes the same form as the previous chapter. It is divided into four parts. The first part investigates the qualifications and characteristics of the local leaders, and the way in which they used their power and asserted their influence over the villagers. The second part looks into the strategies these leaders used to gain, preserve, and enhance their power and influence, and how the villagers responded to, or challenged their leaders' positions. The third part then examines how existing local committees and group were implemented and composed before the implementation of the Village Fund Project in 2001, looking into how local committees, organizations, and groups were established, how their members were elected, and how the villagers participated in and responded to the work of these organizations.

### **Qualifications, characteristics, power, and influence of the local leaders**

By the time this research was conducted, there were seven large extended families whose members were involved in the local politics of Ban Ton Mai. The largest was Prasit's family; the others were those of Nom, Chokdi, Klam, Sopon, Manat, and Suprani's. It should not be assumed that the largest extended family had control over all the local committees in the village. Normally, any large extended family would have power over only one local committee. In fact, this was due to a political norm, practiced in Ban Ton Mai and other villages in the sub-district, that one should not have power over many political territories, and that once in power one could and should use that power to benefit your relatives. Even though the villagers might have witnessed or known of a particular person exploiting power for their personal benefit, they would not report such abuses to any authority or file complaints. This was because they were, in some manner, related to that person and thus did not want to anger them or they wished to ask for help from that person in the future. Most of the villagers said that the use of power to benefit relatives was not about right or wrong but about whether or not one could or could not do it. In various in-depth interviews, many told me that they would do the same if they were in the same position, and that they would expect their relatives to do so as well. This power sharing system among the different villagers' families, which stemmed from the fact that somehow everyone was related to everyone else, had only emerged by the end of the 1990s, when the former *phu yai ban* passed away and many local committees responsible for various local development programmes were established. Additionally, this attitude of not opposing or protesting the exploitation of power also meant there was aggressive competition for any position that had power to be exploited. In 2001, a competition between two members of Krabi Lek SAO, who were both from Ban Ton Mai, for the position of *Nayok* SAO ended with one of them, Prasit – then head of the administrative council of the SAO and who was supposed to be upgraded to *Nayok* SAO – being shot dead by a gunman hired by the brother of his fellow SAO member, Nom, who allegedly wanted to replace him.<sup>221</sup>

As the findings of this thesis suggests, the politics of Ban Ton Mai was in a transition period from the beginning of 2001 when Prasit resigned from the position of *phu yai ban* and was later shot dead. As will be discussed in detail in the later part, because no one in Prasit's family had tried to dominate any local committee since then, other political actors had emerged. Competition for the dominance in different local committee was high. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, the high level of competition for the dominance in the VFP committee, which led to

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<sup>221</sup> This position had been newly established by the Ministry of Interior to be the head of the SAO's executive team. It was to be chosen by and from among the existing SAO members.



the creation of many new strategies to gain and preserve power, resulted partly from this transition. Indeed, the implementation of the Village Fund Project was not the one and only factor leading to changes in the dynamics of power following its implementation.

### *Prasit*

Prasit was the late former *phu yai ban* of Ban Ton Mai. He was from the largest extended family in the village. Prasit took the position of *phu yai ban* from his father after he passed away. Prasit had been *phu yai ban* of Ban Ton Mai for almost 20 years before he was murdered in 2001. According to many villagers, Prasit had not been very active during the first 4-5 years. But after that he had started to read a lot and become very knowledgeable and helpful to the villagers. Most, if not all, of the villagers said that before he died, he was the most respected person in the village.<sup>222</sup> Like other *phu yai ban* in the sub-district, Prasit became a member of Krabi Lek SAO when it was first established in 1995. Because of his friendliness and wit, he was chosen by other SAO members as *Prathan* SAO or the head of the SAO administrative council. In 2001, he resigned from the position of *phu yai ban* to run in an election for two members of the SAO and won. Once again he was selected as *Prathan* SAO and this position was about to be upgraded in June that year to *Nayok* SAO, or the head of both administrative and legislative councils of the SAO. Prasit was shot dead in May 2001 by a gunman allegedly hired by Nom's brother, because he was blocking Nom's way to becoming the *Nayok* SAO. After he died, no one in his family competed in local elections again.

### *Chokdi*

By the time this research was conducted, Chokdi was 46 years old and *phu yai ban* of Ban Ton Mai. Unlike other political actors in the village, Chokdi had not been put forward by any of his extended family. In fact, he had not even lived in the village since becoming an official resident in 1987, but lived with his wife in a nearby village. According to Chokdi, he had never had any interest in politics. He only applied to compete for the position of *phu yai ban* three days before the closing date simply because he wanted to prove to the government officials in the District Office, who had insulted him while he was studying the election announcement by saying that he had no chance of becoming a *phu yai ban*, that he could do it. As he said himself, he regretted it because being *phu yai ban* meant too much work and too little time to spend with his friends.

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<sup>222</sup> Interview with various villagers on various occasions. The question asked was 'could you please tell me about the former *phu yai ban*? How was he as a person?'

Chokdi was not 'screened' by his extended family before competing in the election, and did not have a very suitable personality for a leadership role: he lacked charisma and was known as a drunkard. But the fact that he came from the second largest extended family in the village was not the only reason Chokdi won the election. Compared to his competitor, Mano, who came from the third largest extended family, Chokdi was a safer choice for most of the villagers because the villagers did not know Mano as a person. Indeed, Mano had just moved back to the village after spending 14 years as a monk in another province. When asked about their decisions in the election of 2001, many villagers recalled that they chose Chokdi because they felt that as they knew him and his family, they could talk to or reason with him better than with Mano, whom they barely knew.<sup>223</sup>

Despite his formal authority, Chokdi did not have any real influence over the villagers. When this research was conducted, he was the same drunkard and irresponsible person, even after three and a half years in the position. Many villagers complained that it was very difficult to find him and, if they could, he would not be sober enough to talk to them. It took me about two weeks to meet up with him because no one knew where he was. And when I did, he was drinking with his friends in another village. Most of the villagers, especially his relatives, were very disappointed. As will be discussed, he did not play any productive role on any local committee. The villagers and the government officials had given up on Chokdi and turned to a more reliable and influential person in the village. As I witnessed myself, when the officials needed to make an announcement or organize a meeting with the villagers, they would ask Supot, an influential figure among young villagers, to gather all the villagers and to assist them in the meeting. Many times, Chokdi was not present at the meeting. Also, when the villagers needed to report or ask anything, they would go directly to the District Office. Apart from being *phu yai ban*, he had not been invited to be an advisor on any local committee. However, he was not bothered by the fact that he was overlooked and bypassed. Instead, as he told me, he was pleased that they left him alone. According to Chokdi, the work and responsibility of being *phu yai ban* was too much. The 2,500 baht per month payment he received from the Ministry of Interior was not enough to buy him alcohol. He literally said that 'it was not worth it' and that 'if I had known this before, I would never have run for the position'. His four-year term ended in June 2004. Unsurprisingly, he did not run for the position again. The example of Chokdi illustrates the very real gap in Thai villages between formal authority on the one hand, and legitimate and effective power and influence on the other.

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<sup>223</sup> Interviews with various villagers, who were not related to Chokdi, on various occasions. The question asked was 'What was your reason for electing Chokdi rather than Mano?'

*Nom*

By the time this research was conducted, Nom was 56 years old and chairman of Krabi Lek SAO. He was known as the most influential and feared person in the village primarily because he had been involved in the political killing of Prasit, the former head of Krabi Lek SAO and a former *phu yai ban* of Ban Ton Mai. In spite of his authority and influence, Nom did not have much charisma. From the outside, he was a slow old man with hearing difficulties and a very small voice. He did not talk much but smiled a lot. Nom was not born in Ban Ton Mai but in a village nearby. He only took up residence in Ban Ton Mai in 1999 with the intention of running for membership of the SAO in 2001.<sup>224</sup> Prior to that, Nom had been very active in local politics both at the village and the sub-district level. He had been an assistant to the *phu yai ban* of his old village for 22 years, from 1977 to 1999, and an assistant to the *kamnan* of Krabi Lek for 10 years, from 1989 to 1999. Notably, the *phu yai ban* of Nom's old village, who was Nom's cousin, and the *kamnan* of Krabi Lek, who was Nom's uncle, were both known *naklaeng*. Indeed, Nom's uncle was supposedly the head of all *nakleng* in the sub-district.

Realizing that the Krabi Lek SAO was a powerful local government, Nom competed for the position as the member of his old village in 1999 but lost. According to him, this was simply because his competitor, another assistant to the *phu yai ban*, had more relatives living in that village than he did. Believing that he would have more advantages if he ran for the same position in Ban Ton Mai, where most of his relatives resided, he took up residency in Ban Ton Mai.<sup>225</sup> For him, this was the best way as he did not want to compete with his colleague again but wanted to work together with him and the others in the SAO instead. Nom was a familiar face for the villagers of Ban Ton Mai. He and his family found it easy to assimilate into the village. Because Nom's extended family was the second largest in the village, he won the election of 2001 and became the member of Krabi Lek SAO for Ban Ton Mai. Shortly after that, he was believed to be involved in the killing of Prasit, a fellow member of the SAO also from Ban Ton Mai. It was rumored that, prior to the killing, Nom had asked Prasit, then head of SAO's administrative council (*prathan* SAO) and who was to become chairman of the SAO or *nayok* SAO, to either resign from being a SAO member or openly announce that he did not want the position. Prasit refused and offered Nom the position of *prathan* SAO instead but Nom did not want it. Prasit was shot dead just two weeks before he was to be upgraded to *nayok* SAO in

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<sup>224</sup> To be eligible to run as a member of an SAO, one has to have been a resident of that village for no less than two years.

<sup>225</sup> The move was not difficult because the two villages are next to each other. Nom only had to build a house on a piece of land not far from where his old house was, which he had bought a long time ago, and then register as a villager.

front of about 70 villagers at Village 10 when the SAO made an announcement about the new position. The gunman was arrested and he accused Nom's brother, another known *nakleng*, of having hired him.<sup>226</sup>

After the incident, Nom not only became the *nayok* SAO but also became more feared. During his four-year term, there were five different *palat* SAO, the only government official working as administrative assistant to *nayok* SAO, who held the position and then resigned. According to many *palat* SAO of other sub-districts, whom I met and interviewed on various occasions, whenever the *Palat* SAO of Krabi Lek found something wrong in the management of the SAO, instead of reporting it to the Ministry of Interior or confronting Nom, they chose to resign because they were afraid that Nom and his relatives would harm them. Also, other SAO members did not try to oppose his plans or initiatives. Having said this, there was no evidence of Nom using violence against any in the SAO following the murder of Prasit. This was because he was watched closely by police and government officials, and also wanted to earn some credibility back. In spite of this, Nom's fearsomeness did not translate into more influence over the villagers or other SAO members. Indeed, the villagers perceived the political killing to be a crime of desperation. Unlike Klag, who killed his neighbour who had tried to rob his house and shot him in the eye, Nom was not seen as brave or strong figure who would not let anyone hurt him easily. Therefore, he had not gained any more respect from the villagers. The villagers just tried to avoid associating with him as closely as before. No one ever asked for a favor from him, and he evidently had not asked for a favor from anyone.

During his four-year working term, he benefited his relatives financially by hiring many of them as staff of the SAO and giving them the garbage-collecting concession, valued at about 100,000 baht per year. In return, his relatives gave him considerable moral support by talking highly of him to other villagers and blaming the killing on his brother, who was already in jail. This was also to earn back their family's credibility after the killing. After all, since the guilty man was already in jail, why not praise the one who then held the most powerful position in the sub-district? After his term ended in 2004, he ran for the same position again, but this time in a direct election for *nayok* SAO, whereby all villagers in the sub-district voted directly for the *nayok* SAO. Unfortunately, his uncle, who was *kamnan* of the sub-district, resigned from his position and competed with him in the election. Their vote base, namely members of their extended family, was split in two. Both lost to the former janitor of Ton Mai school, whose

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<sup>226</sup> Even though Nom's brother was imprisoned, when the case went to court the gunman declared he had never known Nom and his brother. Nom's brother was released in June 2004 after two years in prison.

extended family was the largest in the sub-district.<sup>227</sup> Indeed, the combined votes for Nom and his uncle were not greater than those for the winner. Indeed, the result of this election emphasized the importance of clan networks in local politics in Krabi Lek. The case of the janitor showed that even an uneducated and unrespectable figure could win an election if he had a sufficiently large clan network. Nom's fall from power illustrated that the murder he committed had not enhanced his standing in the village; the use of coercion did not necessarily translate directly into greater influence.

### *Choom*

Choom was Nom's cousin. He was the one who initiated the idea of Nom moving into Ban Ton Mai and running in the election for members of the SAO. Like some of his relatives, including the *phu yai ban* of Nom's old village, Nom himself, and the former *kamnan*, Choom was a former military instructor. He moved back to the village in the late 1980s after he quit his job. He subsequently became known as a *nakleng*. He was respected by other *nakleng* in the village and was feared by the villagers because he was a big man with military skills and a quick temper, and claimed to have an M16 gun in his possession. Apart from growing rubber and oil palm trees, he also owned a small grocery store, which had been going for thirteen years. Choom had many male followers, whose age ranged from thirty to late forties and who always gathered in front of his shop in the evening. As Nom's relative and as a *nakleng*, Choom was believed to also have been involved in the killing of Prasit.

Until 2001, Choom never participated directly in village or sub-district politics. But after Prasit was killed, he competed in the election for an SAO member to replace Prasit. According to Lex, an SAO member from a nearby village who had held her position for two terms in a row since 1997, Choom's presence in the SAO increased Nom's influence in the SAO primarily because most, if not all, of the villagers in Krabi Lek believed that it was Choom and Nom's brother, rather than Nom himself, who had hatched the plan to kill Prasit.<sup>228</sup> Because of his status as a *nak leng* and a tough man, he was put forward by some members of the second SPP committee to be a debt-repayment officer in 2003. Later the same year, his relatives also nominated him as a member of the second VFP Committee. When his four-year working term as member of Krabi Lek SAO ended in 2004, Choom ran for the position again and won. The

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<sup>227</sup> In an interview, the janitor told me that he knew he would win the election even before he applied to run. He told me that compared to other candidates he had the greatest number of relatives, the clan network, in the sub-district. And, even though he was a janitor, his relatives would support him.

<sup>228</sup> Interview with Lex, wife of Supot on 8 February 2004, at Supot's home.

continuing political influence of Choom illustrated the fact that some *nak laeng* could still play an important role in village life.

### *Supot*

By the time this research was conducted, Supot was 40 years old. He was married to Lex, a member of the SAO from another village. Apart from cultivating rubber trees, he and his wife also had an orchard, growing various tropical fruits, and owned the only *pa ton go* (a deep-fried snack popular with coffee as breakfast) shop in the village, which many villagers visited in the morning on a regular basis. Compared to others, his orchard was the largest and was getting bigger as he was still actively clearing new land for cultivation. He had an advantage over other villagers as his land was situated right next to the national reservation park. At a public meeting on 12 February 2004, organized by the Department of Local Development to survey the amount of cultivated land the villagers had,<sup>229</sup> Supot claimed that he had 150 rai of cultivated land, while other villagers' claimed that they had 30-50 rai. Because of his many businesses and greater amount of land, Supot was much better off financially than other villagers.

Being calm, well spoken and generous, Supot had many friends and was very influential among the young villagers, many of whom had often been invited to camp in his orchard and were given plenty of fruit to take back home as a souvenir. Indeed, he was known among the government officials as a natural leader or *poo nam Thammacart* of the village. Also, he always lent his friends cash, with no interest, when they needed money. According to his friend Pond, who owned a grocery shop and grew oil palm seedlings for sale, Supot would do anything to help his friends and those who needed help.<sup>230</sup> Despite having just an average level of education, Mattayom 3, Supot was perceived by most, if not all, of the villagers to be very knowledgeable (*mee kwam roo*). This was mainly because he was very articulate and always learnt about the rules and regulations of government offices and different local committees. Since Prasit was murdered, and Chokdi became *phu yai ban*, the government official had increasingly lost their faith in clan network and felt the need to promote *phu nam thammachat* like Supot as an alternative leader. Supot was asked by various government officials to help out gathering the villagers together and announcing news. In any meeting, where the government officials announced news, he would be asked by the official to sit next to him in front. Apart from this, he was appointed by the head teacher as chairman of the school committee and was appointed by

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<sup>229</sup> A meeting was held in every village nationwide as part of the Government's revived Poverty Alleviation Programme. Its main purpose was to update the information on the amount of cultivated land the villagers had.

Yotin, the chairman of the Love Ton Mai Association, to be an honorary advisor to the association.

Supot told me that he had been interested in politics since he was young.<sup>231</sup> Unlike other existing political leaders and influential people in the village, Supot did not have many relatives in the village. He was originally from another sub-district, and only took up residence in Ban Ton Mai in 1974 when he was 10 years old with his mother, who had remarried to a local man of Ban Ton Mai. According to Supot, he had never been close to his stepfather and half-brother and they did not consider him part of their extended family. With his high ambitions, Supot allied himself with the *kamnan*, every *phu yai ban* and every assistant in the sub-district, including Nom. Only when Nom was involved in the murder scandal did Supot distance himself from him and his family. Even though he was not from a large extended family, Supot was often asked by many local politicians to be their vote canvasser because he was influential among the young villagers.

Supot finally gained power in one of the local committees when he was proposed by his good friend to be a member of the first SPP committee in 2001. As will be discussed in detail in the later part, this against-the-political-norm nomination was made possible only through the interference of a government official who was present at the election. Because of his knowledge, he was later selected by other members to be secretary of the committee. Later the same year, he was nominated as a member of the first VFP committee and was then chosen by other members to be secretary of the committee. Supot worked hard on both committees and gained more credibility from the villagers. As will be discussed in detail later, he became a dominant figure in and indispensable member of the SPP committee because he played the role of not only secretary but also of accountant and spokesperson. Later in 2003, he was proposed as a member of the second SPP committee. In 2004, Supot ran in the election for the position of Ban Ton Mai's member of the SAO and won. Supot's case illustrated that a 'natural leader' who proved his abilities and dedication could move into a formal position of power, but only with the intervention of a local government official.

#### *Mano*

Despite being born in Ban Ton Mai, Mano, who was 28 years old by the time this research was conducted, had spent half his life (14 years) in Bangkok. Mano was the youngest son of Manas, the head of the third largest extended family in the village. He lived in a temple from the age of

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<sup>230</sup> Interview with Pond on 13 January 2004, at his home.

<sup>231</sup> Interview with Supot on 28 January 2004, at his home.

10. He was a novice until he was 21 years and ordained as a monk. While a monk, he studied Buddhism and had a certificate of *parien* 9, the highest level of monastic education and equivalent to a bachelor degree in the normal education system. He left the monkhood in 1999, became a teacher in Chantaburi province and got married to a local woman. Because his teaching income was very low he turned to selling clothes in the market and moved back to Ban Ton Mai in 2001. Apart from helping his father on his rubber farm, he sold clothes at almost every weekly market in the Muang district of Krabi. The business went very well and by the time this research was conducted, all his brothers also sold clothes.

As heads of the third largest extended family in the village, Mano's father, Manas, and his brother, Sin, had been approached by many local politicians to be their vote canvassers. When the former *phu yai ban* passed away, the family thought of entering local politics. Manas then selected Mano, who had the highest level of education in the family to be the family representative running in the 2001 election for *phu yai ban*. Despite having fewer relatives, Mano's high level of education won him many votes from other villagers who were not related to him. He lost out to Chokdi by only two votes because Chokdi came from a larger extended family and because most of the villagers felt they did not know him. Another opportunity for the family to enter local politics came when the SPP and the VFP were implemented in 2001. Later that year, Manas' relatives proposed Manas and Sin as members of the first SPP committee, and proposed Manas as member of the first VFP committee. As will be discussed in detail in the later part, their power and influence in the committee were outshone by Supot's brilliant performance. They then turned their focus on the VFP committee. That is, in 2003 their relatives proposed Mano and Manas to be members of the second VFP committee and pushed for a change in the loan receivers' repayment period, which pleased most, if not all, of the project members. When Mano ran in the election for *phu yai ban* again in 2004, he received a considerable number of votes from the villagers, both from his extended family and others, and won. The case of Mano demonstrated that some individuals could rise to leadership positions at least partly on the basis of their own abilities and performance.

### **Gaining, preserving, distributing, and enhancing power and influence**

#### *Establishing teamwork*

Recognizing the importance of clan networks, when establishing a team all leaders of Ban Ton Mai would appoint or propose someone from another extended family to work on their team. This was to increase the level of cooperation with other extended families. Evidently, the



appointed or nominated person would not only feel gratitude but would also feel obliged to cooperate with the person who had appointed or nominated them. According to Klam, who was the head of the sixth largest extended family in the village, all *phu yai ban* and *kamnan* in Krabi Lek always used this strategy so their appointed assistants and advisors would inform them of problems in the households of those they were related to or would help them in distributing news and announcements to their families.<sup>232</sup> In fact, when he first became *phu yai ban*, Chokdi appointed Klam and Sophon, whose extended families were the fourth and the fifth largest in the village, as his assistants. As will be shown later, Manas and Sin also proposed Suprani, who came from the seventh largest extended family in the village, as a member of the first SPP committee.

#### *Gaining and preserving power and influence*

Support from one's own extended family was an important factor in gaining power and influence. Indeed, one needed a lot of votes from relatives in order to get elected in the first place. Prior to 2001, when the villagers were given the right to vote in elections for members of two local government – the village committee and the Krabi Lek SAO– elders of an extended family would choose someone in the family who had sufficient qualifications to win to be their representative. Normally, the candidate from the largest extended family would win and the villagers could easily predict the result of any election. Things got more complicated in 2001, when the SPP was first implemented. Many new political actors emerged on the political scene due to the fact that the committee consisted of many members. Moreover, in using an open election method, whereby a number of names were proposed and approved in an actual election to be members of the newly established committee, elections became more complex. Evidently, the number of families involved in the committee increased. Instead of having representatives from just one or two big extended families working on the committee, the first SPP committee consisted of members of four extended families. Also, some families also proposed more than one representative to be members of the committee. For instance, there were two members from Manas' family working on the first SPP committee. With more members, the family had more power over decision making than others in that committee.

Evidently, the leaders also made use of their relatives to preserve their power and influence. Once they were in power, they would ensure their relatives benefited, either politically or financially, as a reward for their support or they would give their relatives some privileges

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<sup>232</sup> Interview with Klam on 22 February 2004, at his home. The question asked was 'Can you tell me how the Village Committee was set up?'

when they dealt with the committee. For example, Nom gave the garbage collecting concession to his relatives and hired some of them as staff of the SAO. Notably, for political actors, such as Supot, who did not come from large extended families, gaining power was not a matter of a family's support but of being accepted by other villagers. Supot explained that long before he was finally nominated as a member of the SPP committee in 2001, apart from allying himself with various leaders, including Nom and the *kamnan* of Krabi Lek, in the hope that they would appoint him to work on their team, he had also tried to demonstrate his leadership skills and knowledge to the villagers. To preserve his newly gained power, he presented himself as an irreplaceable member of the committee. As will be discussed, even though he was selected as secretary of the committee, he also worked as an accountant of the committee, and spent considerable time with the programme members, explaining what was going on with their accounts until they fully understood. Apart from this, Supot also gave some privileges to his friends when they dealt with the SPP committee by allowing them to deposit their money later than they should. When relatives are an important element of a leader's vote base, those in leadership positions were widely expected to offer preferential treatment to members of their clans. This pattern tended to reinforce the power of incumbents and typically led to the dominance of local committees by a single extended family.

#### *Enhancing power and influence*

To a certain extent, the political norm whereby one should not interfere with another's political activities hindered any particular leader from enhancing their power beyond their primary political territory. That is, unlike the leaders of Ban Tao Fai, they did not try to assert their power and influence over more than one local committee. The main reason for this was probably the fact that the leaders did not want to be considered selfish and greedy. As discussed earlier, it was not only acknowledged but also widely accepted that anyone in power was free to use their power to benefit themselves and their relatives. By having decision-making powers on more than one local committee, one would not only double one's opportunities to benefit oneself and one's relatives but would also hinder others' chances of enjoying the same privilege. If one were to do so, they would be selfish and greedy (*ngok*). When asked why he had not participated in other local committees apart from the SAO, Nom replied that he would rather 'let others take care of that (other local committees). The SAO was more than enough for me'.<sup>233</sup> However, he also clarified that using one position on a committee as a springboard to other positions on other

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<sup>233</sup> Interview with Nom on 8 February 2004, at his home. The question asked was 'Were you interested in working on other local committees?'

committees was a different matter. Therefore, the fact that he resigned from the position of assistant to the *phu yai ban* before applying to compete in the election for members of the SAO was not greedy, simply because he had already given up his old position. Evidently, this attitude of not expanding one's power or influence was responsible for the fact that there was no ultimate leader or someone in particular whom the villagers deemed their 'real leader' in the village. When asked to identify the most powerful figure in the village, most villagers said there were none and explained that there were different people responsible for different things. For instance, Chokdi was their *phu yai ban* and Nom was the leader of the SAO, while Supot was the leader of the Saving for Producing Committee.

### **Local development projects prior to the Village Fund Project**

At the time this research was conducted, there were only two ongoing local development projects, which had been established before the implementation of the VFP. These were the Housewives' Group of 1989, The Saving for Producing Project (SPP) of 2001, and the Water-Pipe Laying Project of 1997.

#### *The Housewives' Group*

Similar to that of Ban Tao Fai, the Housewives Group of Ban Ton Mai was a project initiated not by the villagers but by the government in 1989 through the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives.<sup>234</sup> When starting the project at the village level, the District Officer called for a meeting of all *phu yai ban* in the Muang district to hear the Ministry's policy.

Prasit, who was the *phu yai ban* at the time, asked his female relative, Vassana, who was very influential among female villagers, to organize a group of female villagers for him. He also told her to decide what the group should do in order to generate more income. According to Vassana, who was 49 years old when this research was conducted, Prasit came to the right person: she was close friends with almost all the housewives in the village because she was the only hairdresser in the village, until 2000 at least, and also because her husband had been one of only a few local moneylenders for almost ten years before he was paralyzed following a car

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<sup>234</sup> In Thailand, it is common for different villages to start the same local development programmes at different times. This applied to not only the Housewives Group and the SPP but also to the VFP. After the government announced the implementation of any programme, its implementation at the village level depended largely on each District Office, whether or not that District Office was ready and whether or not the particular village in that district was ready.

accident in 1997.<sup>235</sup> Vassana recalled that she set up the group by going to her friend's houses and asking them to participate. About 21 of her good friends, most of them her age, put their names down as members of the group. Unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, there was no membership fee and shares were to be paid for and bought. Apparently, there were also no rules or regulations. There was also no selection of members of the committee. Because Vassana was the one who gathered all of them together, she became the head of the group without any vote. Unlike in Ban Tao Fai, the leaders had no need to legitimize their dominance of the committee by holding an election.

Because Vassana was skillful in sewing and making clothes, she suggested that the group should set up a clothes making and alterations business. No one opposed the idea as most of them also had similar skills and Vassana promised to send those who did not for training in town. According to Vassana, the lack of opposition was also because she was the *phu yai ban*'s relative and the members understood implicitly that they had to follow her ideas in order to stay in the group.<sup>236</sup> After receiving a budget from the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, the group sent six women who needed training to a sewing school in town. Due to the good relations between the then *phu yai ban* and the District Officer, the group was also given a sewing machine by the Department of Local Development, Ministry of Interior, later that year. It was kept in Vassana's house for every member to use.

During the first few months, all members were responsible for looking for clients and clothes to be altered. There was no sharing of income and profit, however. Those who got a job, did it and kept the money for themselves. When more than one person wanted to use the sewing machine at the same time, members were given priority and the rule of first-come-first-served was applied. Having said this, because many members also used the machine to fix and make their own clothes, they did not generate much income. After a few months, the enthusiasm died out and the members rarely came to use the machine. Nevertheless, some other villagers who had not put their name down as a member of the group sometimes came to use the machine to fix their clothes. Since 1997, Vassana has had to look after her husband, whom became paralyzed in a car accident, all day long and thus could no longer receive guests in her home. She thus resigned as head of the group in 1998 and, after discussing the matter with a few of her close friends, appointed Dao as her successor simply because Dao's house was big enough to contain the sewing machine and to have members come to use it. Apparently, since 2000, very

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<sup>235</sup> Interview with Vassana on 28 March 2004, at her home. The question asked was 'How had the group been set up and how did it function?'

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

few members have come to use the machine. According to Dao, this was mainly because most villagers had prospered due to the increase in the price of rubber and oil palm products and had bought their own sewing machines.<sup>237</sup> At the time this research was conducted, the machine was still in Dao's place.

Even though Vassana did not go to every house in the village to gather the group's members, every female villager heard about the group. The reason some women did not join was simply because they felt they were already busy with their house and farm work. As already described in Chapter 2, rubber farming required them to get up early. By the time they finished their errands on their farms, most of these women wanted to rest or do their housework instead. Having said this, some of them sometimes came to use the machine. Therefore, besides those six female villagers who received training from the Ministry's budget, everyone benefited from the group. That is, those who knew how to use the machine did so, while those who did not hired others to use it. Once in operation, the committee did not have to make any effort to respond to the villagers' needs.

#### *The Saving for Producing Project (SPP)*

Similar to the SPP of Ban Tao Fai, and of other villages nationwide, the SPP of Ban Ton Mai was initiated by the Ministry of Interior to encourage villagers to save and to provide cheap loans to them. It was first implemented in Ban Ton Mai in March 2001.

After being informed by the District Officer about the programme, Chokdi set up a meeting with all the villagers at the school canteen on 17 March 2001 to elect the 10 members of the first committee. One government official from the Department of Local Development, Ministry of Interior, was also present as an election supervisor. Because Chokdi was not skilled in leadership, the official also played the role of the leader of the meeting and made a number of suggestions, including how the members of the committee should be selected and what the qualifications for 'suitable members' were. He suggested that of the 10 members, six of them should be assigned to specific positions and responsibilities, specifically the chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, accountant, public relations officer, and inspecting officer. Also, he suggested an open election, in which names were proposed and approved by the villagers to fill each position, and that because the committee's work involved a lot of complicated matters, 'suitable members' of the committee should have special skills and a good knowledge of the programme. Indeed, he went on to suggest that two assistants to the *phu yai ban*, Klam and Sapon, as quasi-government officials who had been educated about the programme by the

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<sup>237</sup> Interview with Dao on 30 March 2004, at her home.

government through the District Office, knew how to implement the programme and therefore should be the chairman and vice-chairman of the committee, at least for the first term.<sup>238</sup> Apart from this, he said that the secretary should have some knowledge of the programme in order to be able to assist the chairman and the vice-chairman, and the public relations officer should have good communication skills.<sup>239</sup> As it seemed, the officer's presence and suggestions had an effect on the way the villagers nominated people. For the first time, Supot, who was not from a large family, was proposed by his friend Nui to be secretary of the committee. When asked about his nomination, Nui explained that he believed that it would not be opposed by anyone as Supot's qualifications matched the official's requirements and because Supot had been helping out the official for sometime, everybody in the village knew that they were friends.<sup>240</sup> Indeed, no one opposed Nui's nomination and Supot became an official member of a local committee for the first time. Apart from this, Suta was put forward by her relatives as the public relations officer and, as planned in advance, Sin and Manas' names were proposed by their relatives as the accountant and inspecting officer. For the other positions, for which the officer had not stated any qualifications, villagers from large extended families were proposed by their relatives.

**Table 4.1: List of members of the first SPP committee of Ban Ton Mai  
(March 2001- March 2003)**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Other Status</b>
1. Klam (m)	Chairman	Assistant to <i>phu yai ban</i>
2. Sopon (m)	Vice-chairman	Assistant to <i>phu yai ban</i>
3. Supot (m)	Secretary	Known as a knowledgeable person
4. Suta (f)	Public Relation Officer	Known as a congenial villager
5. Sin (m)	Accountant	Nominated by Manas's wife
6. Manas (m)	Inspecting Officer	Nominated by Sin, his cousin
7. Samreang (m)	Member	Nominated by his relative
8. Yut (m)	Member	Nominated by his relative
9. Somjit (m)	Member	Nominated by his relative
10. Utai (m)	Member	Nominated by his relative

Source: Author's own interviews with Supot.

<sup>238</sup> Interviews with various villagers at the funeral at local temple on 21 January 2004. I urged them all while we were cooking to tell me about what happened in the election.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

Some elected members were unable to do their work, however. These people were Klam, chairman of the committee, who was very old and had hearing difficulties and Sin, the accountant, who found accounting too complicated. Supot then took up most of the committee's work because he was skilled in maths and accounting. In fact, because his house, which was situated right in the heart of the village, was used as the committee's office, he literally assumed almost all the responsibilities of the committee. Even though he enjoyed showing off his ability to the villagers, Supot said it was not fair that other members got paid as much as he did. After the two-year working term of the first committee ended in March 2003, the committee set up elections for the second committee members at the school canteen. In trying to share the committee's work among all the members, all of whom got paid equally, Supot suggested four new positions should be created: assistant-secretary, assistant-accountant, a loan officer and a debt repayment officer. Therefore, all members of the second committee had specific responsibilities. There was no government official present at the election as there had been at the previous one. Moreover, even though the villagers opted for an open election once more, this time they all agreed to just nominate names of the committee members and then let them decide among themselves who got what position. As will be discussed, this method was adapted from that used in the open election for the first Village Fund Committee in July 2001. As Manas explained, the villagers liked this method more as they felt less reluctant about proposing their relatives. Since they were not nominating people for a particular post, they did not have to think too much about the qualifications and skills of their nominee, and thus felt more confident in making nominations.

As shown in Table 4.2, of all 11 members, 4 of them were former members: Supot, Sapon, Manas, and Samreung. But while Supot, Sapon, and Manas held their previous positions, Samreung, who was formerly an ordinary member, was chosen to be chairman of the committee. As Supot explained, Samreung's appointment was somewhat unexpected but accepted by all former members. Indeed, because they were too busy trying to regain their old positions, the position of chairman had been left empty. Since he was the only former member left, Samreung was thus chosen as chairman.<sup>241</sup> There was also evidence that some votes were planned in advance. Of all the other nominated members, a few of them had been persuaded to join the committee by former members, even before the actual election. Regarding this, Manaa was told by his uncle, Sin, before the election date that he would be nominated to replace Sin in the second committee. Also Supot admitted that he had convinced Yothin, his close friend, and Choom to join the second committee and promised them positions as his assistant (assistant-

accountant) and the debt repayment officer, respectively. Supot thus proposed Yothin, while Yothin proposed Choom on the election date. Additionally, there was evidence of cooperation between two extended families, Manas' and Suprani's, in the voting process in order to try and decrease Supot's influence in the committee.

Supot's dominance of the programme did not please every former member. Manas, who came from a large extended family, and was the cousin of Sin, felt intimidated that Supot had taken over the responsibilities of his cousin Sin. Also, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, he did not like the fact that Supot also tried to dominate the work of the first Village Fund Committee. Consequently, Manas then proposed Suprani, a female villager who was the assistant-accountant of the first VFP committee, as accountant of the committee. Supot admitted he resented this, for he and Suprani had previously fallen out with each other while working together on the VFP committee. But because Suprani had so many relatives and seemed to have the skills for the job, he did not oppose it.<sup>242</sup> In spite of this, it turned out that Supot still played the role of accountant to the committee. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, this was mainly because Suprani, and Manas's two sons, already dominated the work of the second VFP committee. Apart from this, Bantao, and Samran, who were from large extended families, were also nominated as members by their own relatives. Despite the interventions by government officials, the size of one's extended family remained the most important factor in securing influence within the committee.

**Table 4.2: List of members of the second SPP committee of Ban Tao Mai  
(March 2003- March 2005)**

Name	Position	Other Status
1. Samreang (m)	Chairman	Former member, from a big family
2. Sapon (m)	Vice-chairman	Former member, and an assistant to <i>phu yai ban</i>
3. Supot (m)	Secretary	
4. Yothin (m)	Assistant-Secretary	Former member
5. Suprani (f)	Accountant	Chairman of Love Ton Mai Association,
6. Bantao (m)	Assistant-Accountant	Daughter in law of a former <i>kamnan</i>
7. Choom (m)	Debt Pressing Officer	Nominated by relative
8. Manas (m)	Inspecting Officer	A <i>nak leng</i> , and a member of SAO
9. Manaa (m)	Loan Officer	Former member
10. Samran (m)	Public Relation Officer	Manas's son Nominated by relative

Source: Author's own interview with Supot.

<sup>241</sup> Interviewed with Supot on 9 February 2004, at his home.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.



After they were elected, the members of the first committee met at Supot's house to draw up the committee's regulations. Unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, the regulations were not prepared in advanced by anyone. According to Manas, all members decided to strictly follow the model regulations drawn up by the Ministry of Interior. They established their own loan interest rate at 1 percent, and the expenses as a proportion of all profits received: 60 percent of the total profit was to be dividends to be shared among all members of the programme, and 25 percent of the total profit was an allowance to be paid to all members of the committee (7-10 percent was for the accountants, who supposedly had more work than other members and 15-20 percent was to be shared equally among the other members).

Throughout the first and second terms, both committees used Supot's house as their office. They agreed to meet on the fifteenth of every month, when a monthly transaction took place. However, despite attending the monthly meetings for the first few months, the other members, who had no actual role to play, except for Supot who had taken over all Sin's accounting responsibilities, eventually stopped coming. This left Supot with all the workload but he was more than happy to take up this responsibility. As Supot explained, he would invite other committee's members to his house only when a real discussion was needed, and this had only happened once when he proposed borrowing some money from the SAO in 2002. Because the programme had not attracted many deposits from its members and therefore did not have much cash to be lent out, Supot suggested asking for an interest-free loan to the amount of 75,000 baht from the Krabi Lek SAO, which would be re-lent to the members. Also, hoping to please some of his friends and thereby ensure their support in the next election, he eased the strictness of the committee's financial policy on depositing money. Even though the rules stated that all programme's members were eligible for loans unless they missed their monthly deposits three months in a row, Supot told many villagers that they could, if necessary, deposit their money every four months instead of every month. Sometimes he even deposited his own money on behalf of others when they forgot to do so. As Pond recalled, Supot had done this for him twice and he was very pleased and grateful.<sup>243</sup>

During the second term, Supot was still the most active member on the committee. Despite the fact that he was chosen by other members to be the secretary of the committee, he took full responsibility for the accounts just as in the first term. Evidently, this was not only because Suprani, the actual accountant of the committee, was unable to fulfill her responsibilities but also because she intentionally let Supot take care of her duties. As already discussed, Manas did not like the fact that Supot had tried to dominate both the SPP committee and the VFP

committee, and had thus proposed Suprani as the accountant of the second SPP committee in March 2003. As will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6, in September the same year, he once again proposed Suprani as the accountant of the second VFP committee. But because Suprani did not want to be seen as monopolizing the accountancy positions on both committees, she asked Supot to take care of the accounts for the SPP committee and let him receive her share of the payment, and turned to focus on the VFP committee. Trying to preserve his newly found power, Supot took the job even though this caused resentment between Suprani and Manas's families. Because the running of the committee involved some real administrative skills, it was soon apparent that those who were elected simply on the basis of their extended families were not able to perform the required tasks. The scale of benefits associated with the project demonstrated to villagers that they needed to pay more attention to the qualifications of committee members.

Apparently, the programme was not popular among the villagers. Although all 635 villagers were eligible to become programme members, only 84 of them had applied after three years (58 in 2001, 16 in 2002, and 6 in 2003). As the evidents suggested, it was the programme's main financial policies, set by the Ministry of Interior to be applied in every village nationwide that was the reason for the villagers' lack of interest in the programme. In various interviews, a number of villagers who were not members of the programme explained to me that the regulation requiring members to continuously deposit money into their saving accounts with the committee in order to be eligible for loans, and the regulation requiring two guarantors to guarantee their loan applications, made loan applications too complicated. Also, the fact that they could only apply for a small loan – 10,000 baht maximum – made the loan unattractive. For many non-members, a monthly deposit was too much of a burden, not because they did not have the money to deposit but because they would sometimes forgot to deposit it. Apart from this, the lack of trust, particularly in financial matters, among the villagers also made the programme unattractive. Many of them explained that they did not apply to become members because they did not want to become a guarantor of others. Because they were all related to each other somehow, it would be difficult to refuse other people; the only way to avoid this was to not get involved in the programme at all. As one villager put it, it was not fair for the guarantors to be responsible for the debtor's when they did not get to use the money, and if they did pay back the debtor' debt, there was no guarantee that the debtor would pay them back.<sup>244</sup> Evidently, many of

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<sup>243</sup> Interview with Pond on 8 and 13 January 2004, at his home.

<sup>244</sup> Interview with Sopa on 20 January 2004, at her home. The question asked was 'Why did you not participate in the SPP?'

the members were those who saw the importance of having a savings account. From 2001 to 2004, 25 members had not yet applied for a loan. As discussed in Chapter 2, there were other sources of easy loans available for the villagers, such as the local *toe share*, local moneylenders, and the Bank of Agriculture and Cooperatives. Even though their interest rates were higher than that of the SPP committee, the villagers found it easier to apply for loans from these sources because they did not impose similar rules. Unlike those of Ban Tao Fai, most of the villagers of Ban Ton Mai owned land or possessed deeds allowing them to use land for agricultural purposes, they were thus eligible to ask for larger cheap loans from the Bank of Agricultural and Cooperatives.

Apart from making their monthly deposits and paying back their loans on time, members were not required to have any more involvement in the programme's implementation. Since the programme was first established, there had been only two times when most of the programme's members were present in the same place at the same time, specifically the elections for the first and second committees. According to a number of committee members, this was primarily because the villagers were quite satisfied with their work, in that they had been provided with clear information about their accounts and the programme's account, including how much they had earned individually, how much profit the programme had made, and how much each of the committee's members had been paid. As a matter of fact, all the programme members whom I interviewed expressed their satisfaction with the clear information they had received from the committee and Supot, in particular. They interpreted all the information provided as evidence of the committee's transparency (*kwam prong sai*) and accountability (*truoj sop dai*). It can be argued that the members' more active participation could have been increased if the committee members had provided more channels for members to communicate with them. Evidently, the committee had not involved any programme members when making big decisions such as applying for the loan from the SAO in 2002. According to a number of programme members, the committee members had informed them about their decision but had not asked for their opinion. Some of them were told only after the committee had already applied for the loan. Despite his usual effectiveness in communicating with the villagers, Supot had not asked for the members' opinion either.

### *The Water Pipe Laying Project*

The purpose of the project was to lay water-pipes to provide water to households in all the villages in the sub-district. It was initiated and financed by Krabi Lek SAO in 1997. Unlike the case of other local working committees, there was no election for the head and members of the

working group. To implement the project, the SAO contracted different workers from different villages to work in their own village. In Ban Ton Mai, the SAO contracted Surin to be the head of the project, oversee the construction work and manage the system. According to Lex, who was then a member of the SAO for Village 9, Surin was chosen mainly for the fact that he was related to Klam and that he had good business connections with water-pipe merchants in the city centre and was relatively better skilled in pipe-laying than other villagers. This case again illustrated the tendency of SAO members to benefit their own members by appointing them to head the project.

As head of the project, Surin enjoyed full decision-making powers for hiring people to work on the project and for deciding where and when to lay the water pipe. As it turned out, he hired only a few of his male relatives to work on the project with him, and they were paid the same day. Despite having been ready for use in some households since 1997, the project was not yet completed. Many households, especially in the north of the village, still did not have access to piped water and relied solely on their own artesian wells. Rather than gaining credibility, those who were responsible for the project received a lot of complaints from the villagers. Surin was blamed for the uncompleted work, which caused much inconvenience to the villagers.

No other villagers, apart from Surin and his relatives, participated directly in the work of the group. Having said this, many had often complained to Surin and urged him to lay the water pipe faster. But as Surin was the sole power holder and because it was the SAO that had hired him, he did not feel that he needed to respond to the villagers' requests. He explained that, 'I was busy with other errands. I not only had to work on the farm but also had to look after my grocery store. I did the job (laying the water-pipe) as fast as I could'.<sup>245</sup>

### **Implications of the implementation of the projects for the dynamics of local power**

In investigating the implementation of all the existing local committees in the village, it can be concluded that support from one's relatives was the main factor in getting elected or appointed as the head or a member of the committee. Both Vasaana and Surin, who were head of the Housewives Group and Water-pipe Laying Project respectively, came from large extended families. With the exception of Supot, all members of the SPP committee also came from large extended families. Evidently, all committees were dominated by just a few members. Decision-making powers were limited to just a few members, who also carried out most of the tasks. Similar to the case of Ban Tao Fai, it was evident that the leaders of all committees exploited their power to benefit themselves and their relatives. For instance, Prasit appointed his relative,

Vassana, as the head of the Housewives Group; Sompong and Prasit, as members of Krabi Lek SAO, chose to give the contract for laying the water-pipe system in the village to Surin; and Supot compromised some rules to benefit his close friends, whom he expected to receive political support from. Nevertheless, unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, the leaders did not feel the need to legitimize their exploitation of power to benefit their relatives and friends. In the case of the Housewives Group, instead of setting up an election and planning the names of their relatives to be nominated and a person to approve those names in advance like the leaders of Ban Tao Fai did, Prasit, as one leader of Ban Ton Mai, just appointed his relative, Vassana, as the head of the group. Moreover, even though there were no monthly village meetings where members of all the existing local committees and villagers could meet together as there were in Ban Tao Fai, the villagers of Ban Ton Mai did not feel that their participation in the work of local committees was restricted or limited. This was because they had informal access to either the head or a member of the committee through their relatives and friend, who might be related to one of the committee members. Despite the lack of formal meetings, in the case of the SPP, Supot informed the villagers about the work of the committee more than any leader of Ban Tao Fai ever did. In comparison, because, as discussed in the previous chapter, Ban Tao Fai's formal meetings had not brought about more participation, it can be argued that the villagers of Ban Ton Mai felt less need to participate in the work of the committee than the villagers of Ban Tao Fai, who evidently had become increasingly anxious to learn more about the work of their committees. Despite the complaints of the villagers, it was still evident that the appointed members felt no need to respond to the needs of local people who had not in fact selected them in the first place.

### **Conclusion**

Similar to Ban Tao Fai, the villagers of Ban Ton Mai were all of the same social and economic status. Accordingly, power, or positions in any local committees, became an important factor for indicating higher social status and privilege. Being very much attached to their extended family or clan network, it was necessary for the villagers to lend their political support to their relatives to increase the good reputation of their family. In effect, this would also increase their own reputation as well as they were members of that family.

Because there were no obvious political divisions among the villagers, all political competition that occurred before the implementation of the VFP was occasional and between clan networks only. In any local election, therefore, the candidate who came from the largest extended family always won. Even though there was a merit system in clan network politics,

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<sup>245</sup> Interview with Surin on 11 March 2004, at his home.

where only those with good qualifications and characteristics would be selected by the family for nomination as candidates in local elections, it was evident that in some cases, especially in closed elections where anyone could apply to run in the election by themselves, this system did not work. In the election for phu yai ban in 2001, Chokdi applied to run without consulting his relatives. Despite his bad reputation, he still received tremendous support from his relatives and won the election. Seemingly, his relatives could not let him lose as it would have been bad for the family's reputation. Only in an open election, where names were nominated and approved by the villagers in public that the eldest of the extended family would select the family's representative in advanced.

Because the power was derived mainly, if not solely, from the support of one's relatives and not from the possession of charisma, a good record of performance, or special skills, the power holders did not feel an obligation to respond to the villagers' needs. Rather, power holders felt they had to return the favour by appointing some of their relatives as members of the committee or hiring some of them to work for the committee so that they would get financial benefits. Unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, where the leaders had to legitimize nominating their relatives as heads of the committees in order to dominate those committees, Prasit could simply appoint his relative, Vassana, as head of the Housewives' Group. Also, Vassana did not find it necessary to consult with anyone about the group's activities. In addition, appointing someone from another extended family was also used to build cooperation among big extended families and to increase support from those families. These factors, combined with the political norm whereby no other extended family which already dominated one committee should interfere in the work of another, led to the widely accepted perception that power meant merely the ability or license to exploit a committee's resources for one's own benefit. In all existing local committees, the committee's work was taken care of by a few members of that committee who all came from the same family. It can be argued that greater participation by other committee members and from the villagers in general was hindered by the fact that there were no organized meetings where all committee members and the villagers were required to be present. Additionally, the reason why the villagers had not evidently pushed for more opportunities to participate in the work of committees was because most, if not all, felt that their rights and benefits were already being looked after by their relatives or friends of relatives who worked as members of the committees.

Unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, power was not seen as being attached to responsibility and hard work or what could be derived from strong charisma or special skills. Only in cases where power had been retained for a long period of time and the power holder had learned to

perform his/her tasks well – such as with Prasit, the late former phu yai ban who had been in power for a long time and thus became a respectable figure in the eyes of the villagers – might the power holder gain more influence. Notably, the use of violence did not lead to influence either. Nom, who was believed to have been involved in the political killing of Prasit, was perceived as criminal by the villagers, rather than being considered more influential. In the Ban Ton Mai context, it was not only that power did not usually beget power, but also that influence did not usually beget power either. Because he had only a small number of relatives, Supot, an influential figure who was perceived as knowledgeable and respectable, had never been nominated in any local election, despite working with many different leaders, until the government official asserted his power over the villagers by suggesting, in the election for members of the SPP committee in 2001, the qualifications of ‘suitable members’.

Despite the killing of Prasit and Chokdi’s lack of charisma and poor performance, both of which were factors that led government officials to interfere in Ban Ton Mai’s local politics, support from one’s relatives was still the most important factor for getting elected. Evidently, the election for members of the SPP committee in 2001 still saw all the members, except for Supot, coming from large extended families. Desperately needing to preserve his newly gained power, Supot tried hard to show his skills and efficiency to the villagers. He consequently came to be seen as an irreplaceable member of the SPP committee and was nominated once again in 2003. To a certain extent, Supot’s outstanding performance had changed the villagers’ perception as to what leaders should be and do. As will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6, one’s qualifications had become an important indicator of suitability and would be used by the villagers in the local election.

**Chapter 5**  
**The Dynamics of Power in Ban Tao Fai**  
**after the Implementation of the Village Fund Project**

The leaders of Ban Tao Fai reacted quickly to the implementation of the Village Fund Project (VFP). In July 2001, just one month after the government launched the project, they announced the selection of the first VFP committee. Because their reputations had been damaged by the allegations of corruption related to The Saving for Producing Project (SPP) two years earlier, the implementation of the VFP, which entailed the establishment of a new local committee and new elections, was a threat to the leaders' shaken, if not unstable, power. Having said this, the leaders still managed to form a majority on the VFP, evidently, by using new strategies to get elected and to gain control of the work of the committee. In spite of this, the work of the VFP committees of Ban Tao Fai was, in the eyes of the government officials and of the villagers, very impressive. Indeed, when the first committee's performance was evaluated in mid-2003, it was categorized as a 'first class village fund' (*kong toon chan nueng*) and thus was qualified to enter a competition for the best Village Fund Committee in the district against six other first class VFP committees of other sub-districts. Later that year, it was ranked as the second best performing VFP committee in Tara District and was consequently rewarded 100,000 baht in cash to add to the available capital for lending to the villagers. It was also given the right to borrow one million baht at a low rate of interest from selected banks to add to its capital for lending. While the work of the SPP committee was still problematic, the seemingly efficient work of the VFP committees helped increase the leaders' credibility to a great extent. Having said this, the manner in which the villagers participated in the project and in the work of the committees was somewhat similar to that for the other local development projects and committees.

With the aim of exploring the dynamics of power in Ban Tao Fai since the VFP was implemented in 2001, this chapter looks into the implementation of the project – including the selection of committee members, the work of the committee's members, and the villagers' participation in the project and in the work of the committee – in order to identify changes in the characteristics and qualifications of the leaders, in the strategies they used to gain, preserve, and enhance their power and influence, and in the villagers' response to this leadership, which occurred after the VFP was implemented. This chapter also analyzes how these changes can be accounted for by the implementation of the VFP. In short, it compares and contrasts the dynamics of power in Ban Tao Fai after the VFP was implemented in 2001 with the dynamics of



power before the implementation of the project. To this end, it is organized into three parts. The first part investigates the selection of the members of the VFP committees, unveiling the strategies members used to get elected and identifying differences in such strategies between the period before and after the VFP was implemented. The second part looks into the work of the committee to find out how the elected committee used its power and influence to manage the fund, how the villagers participated in the work of the committee and in the project, and how they responded to the committee's work. The third part then analyzes to what extent all these changes resulted from the implementation of the VFP, and to what extent other factors were responsible for the changes.

### **Selection of the committee members**

The selection of members for the first VFP committee was organized in August 2001 at the monthly village meeting. Apart from the villagers, there was one government official from the Klang District's VFP Implementation Supporting Subcommittee present at the election as a supervisor. From various interviews and in-depth conversations with the leaders and the villagers, I found that, as was the case for other local committees, the leaders planned all the details of the election in advance and used their status to make decisions on behalf of the villagers. First, instead of letting the villagers decide the number of committee members – from between 9 and 15 members<sup>246</sup> – the leaders instructed them to elect nine members: a chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, accountant, loan officer, public relations officer, and three advisors. As it was evident, the leaders opted for the least possible number of committee members because they wanted to ensure only their people were on the committee and to limit the chance for other villagers to join in as, according to Ji, it would mean more work and inconvenience: 'Many people means many problems and inconvenience in managing the project. It would involve too many processes, such as convincing, explaining and voting among the committee members'.<sup>247</sup> Working on the assumption that the official and the villagers were familiar with the government's stance that the VFP committee should consist of 15 members, Ji convinced them that less members meant faster decisions and proposed a new way of increasing the villagers' participation by using the 'five go, four stay' method for selecting the committee members. As Ji suggested, instead of having all nine members working for the whole two-year term, only four of them would remain on the committee for two years, while the other five would leave after one

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<sup>246</sup> Rule No. 16, The National Committee's Rules and Regulations on the Village Fund Committee of 2001.

<sup>247</sup> Interview with Ji on 17 September 2003, at Khao Tham temple.

year and five new members would be elected to replace them. Moreover, instead of letting the villagers decide for themselves which method they wanted to use to elect the committee members,<sup>248</sup> Ji suggested that all nine members should be elected by the usual ‘nominating and approving’ method and all of them would draw lots after one year to determine who would leave and who would remain. Additionally, the leaders also stated that no member could stay on the committee for more than one two-year term. By doing this, the leaders claimed that there would be more opportunities for other villagers to participate in the committee, while the committee’s management would be fast and efficient. In various interviews, a number of villagers recalled that most, if not all, of the villagers were indifferent to this idea. Nevertheless, some of the younger ones who were unhappy with Ji and his team’s dominance of local committees admitted that they were excited by the chance to join the team. Also, the villagers stated that since the official did not oppose Ji’s suggestions or say anything, they believed the idea was acceptable to the government.<sup>249</sup> I was able to interview this government official in October 2003 and he explained that the reason he did not say anything was because, like other government officials who were present at the elections in other villages, he was instructed by his supervisor not to intervene in the election process and to let the villagers decide for themselves.<sup>250</sup>

Evidently, the ‘five go, four stay’ method did not ensure the greater participation of other villagers. Rather, it allowed the village leaders to take permanent control of the committee. As shown in Table 5.1, through the ‘nominating and approving’ method, the leaders and their associates were able to occupy seven seats, including four executive seats. That is, Adul, Chon, Khieu, O, and Jiam became chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, accountant, and regular member, respectively. And even though O and Sakorn were among those who were removed in the first annual draw, through a planned ‘nominating and approving’ election, they were re-elected again. As shown in Table 5.2, the leaders once again held seven seats and thus had control over the work of the second committee. Also, because of this method some of the leaders who had been removed in the annual draw were able to remain on the committee for more than the specified two-year working term. Since O and Sakorn had been removed in December 2002,

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<sup>248</sup> Rule No. 16, The National Committee’s Rules and Regulations on the Village Fund Committee of 2001.

<sup>249</sup> Interviews with various villagers on various occasions, mostly at their houses after they finished their work in the farm.

<sup>250</sup> Interview with Manop Sumontesharat, a government official from the Department of Local Development, Ministry of Interior, who was assigned to oversee the implementation of Ban Tao Fai’s Village Fund Committee, on 26 October 2003, when he visited the village to interview Somjit about the work of the local co-op and petrol station at the co-op shop.

they were considered new members when re-elected and thus their two-year working term restarted, ending in 2004. Seemingly, the results of the drawing process were also planned in advance. Indeed, the draw was not done in public and when I asked O, Somjit, and Somporn about the 2001 draw, their answers contradicted one another. While O said it was conducted in Somjit's house, Somjit said it was done at the school.<sup>251</sup> Also, while O explained that all members took part in the draw by picking a ticket saying either 'in' or 'out' from a bowl, Somjit claimed that Adul selected five folded pieces of paper bearing the members' names from a bowl. Meanwhile, Somporn stated that the chairman and vice-chairman of the committee were the ones who did the draw and then informed the other members about the result later.<sup>252</sup> When I mentioned to Ji how impressive it was that his people had always formed a majority on all the committees, Ji told me that: 'I could not take any risks. I needed to have my people on every committee. Particularly the VFP committee, on which I needed to have at least five people. It involved a lot of money'. He also claimed that 'this was for the sake of smooth management'.<sup>253</sup> It can be argued that should this method continue, the leaders would permanently have their people on the VFP committee.

**Table 5.1: List of members of the first VFP committee of Ban Tao Fai  
(6 August 2001- 5 December 2002)**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Relationship to Leaders</b>
1. Adul (m)	Chairman	Leader
2. Cha-on (m)	Vice-chairman	Leader
3. Siriporn (f)	Secretary	From Khorat
4. Khieu (f)	Accountant	Somjit's niece
5. Sakorn (m) (drawn out)	Member	Sanit's daughter
6. O (f) (drawn out)	Member	Khru Yai's daughter
7. Somporn (m) (drawn out)	Member	From Khorat
8. Patumtip (f) (drawn out)	Member	From Khorat
9. Jiam (m) (drawn out)	Member	Assistant to Phu yai ban

Source: Information taken from list of members of the first VFP committee of Ban Tao Fai, and author's own interviews with the villagers.

<sup>251</sup> Interviews with O and Somjit separately on 20 October 2003, at their homes.

<sup>252</sup> Interview with Somporn on 3 November 2003, at his home.

<sup>253</sup> Interview with Ji on 20 September 2003, at Ban Khao Tham school.

**Table 5.2: List of members of the second VFP committee of Ban Tao Fai  
(6 December 2002- 5 November 2003)**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Relationship to Leaders</b>
1. Adul (m)	Chairman	Leader
2. Cha-on (m)	Vice-chairman	Leader
3. Siriporn (f)	Secretary	From Khorat
4. Khieu (f)	Accountant	Somjit's niece
5. O (f) (re-elected)	Member	Khru Yai's daughter
6. Ji (m) (new member)	Member	Leader
7. Sakorn (m) (re-elected)	Member	Sanit's son in law
8. Chan (m) (new member)	Member	New SAO member
9. Pang (m) (new member)	Member	From Khorat

Source: Information taken from list of members of the second VFP committee of Ban Tao Fai, and author's own interviews with the villagers.

Nevertheless, in the election for members for the third VFP committee in November 2003, the same government official who was present at the first election felt the need to intervene in order to increase the number of committee members. According to him, he was informed by his supervisor that all VFP committees should consist of 15 members and that they were to have an emergency loan committee, consisting of three members to co-consider the provision of emergency loans, and an inspecting committee, consisting of one member to inspect the work of the committee, and that he had told Adul about this in August 2003.<sup>254</sup> Nevertheless, the leaders still managed to dominate the election process, nominating and approving themselves and their relatives to be the majority of the committee's members by carefully planning the nominators, nominees, and two approvers in advance. On the election night of 6 November 2004, which I attended as an observer, O, as the secretary of the second committee, announced the news to the villagers. The leaders urged them to first nominate 10 members for the working committee (five to replace those whose two-year working term was up, including Adul, Cha-on, Siriporn, and Khieu, and five more to make the total number of members 15) and to elect the members of the emergency loan committee and the inspecting committee afterwards. Notably, the leaders did not rush the process of electing the 10 new members of the third working committee as they had done previously with the first and second committees and other local committees. Indeed, they even let other villagers nominate a few names, some of which they approved. This encouraged the villagers to believe that the leaders sincerely wanted them to participate in the committee. However, when it came time to elect members of the emergency

loan committee and the inspecting committee, they had their relatives nominate and approve the names of their chosen people so quickly that the other villagers did not get a chance to nominate anyone. As it was evident, the reason why the leaders were relaxed about the selection of the 10 new members of the working committee was because they already had five people on that committee and only needed three more to form a majority. As shown in Table 5.3, the leaders managed to put at least seven members of their choosing, including themselves and those who were obviously related to them, on the administrative committee and all four members on the two new committees. Also, Adul and Khieu, who had to leave the working committee because their two-year terms were over, were nominated and approved as the debt repayment officers of the emergency loan committee. Khru Yai legitimized their nomination by saying that they had never been members of this newly created committee. In total, the leaders had 11 votes out of 14 on the third VFP committee. Wanpen and Noi, the two women who had tried to start a mushroom farming business and had received substantial moral and financial support from Ji and Khru Yai, were also elected as the public relations officer of the working committee and as a member of the emergency loan committee, respectively. Also, the one and only member of the inspecting committee, Arunchote, was Ji's son and was nominated and approved by the leaders. By looking at the names of the nominators, nominees and approvers, I also identified a new strategy the leaders used in order to get elected, specifically, taking turns to nominate and approve their own people. For instance, after Somsuoy gave her approval to Somjit, she was later approved by Chan. Similarly, after Duang gave her approval to Suchart, she was later nominated by Kajorn. Since Kajorn nominated Duang, he was then nominated by Jien. A number of the former members of the committee, including Siriporn and Pang, also gave their approval to the nominees put forward by the leaders.

After the election, the leaders, including Khru Yai, Ji, and Somjit, took the liberty as holders of the microphone to assign responsibilities to every member of the new committee. Satit, Samarn, and Sombat, who were new members, were trusted with following up loans and demanding repayment, while Wanpen and Duang were to take care of public relations. The village leaders and their relatives were appointed the chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, accountant, assistant-accountant, and loan provision committee members, the latter position giving them the power to decide who received loans. Interestingly, the villagers showed no signs of opposition to these appointments and to the results of the election. Seemingly, this was because in July 2003, a few months before the election, the first VFP committee of Ban Tao Fai was awarded the title of second best VFP committee in Tara district. Consequently, the leaders

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<sup>254</sup> Interview with Manop Sumontesharat, on 26 October 2003.

and their relatives who had taken responsibility for the work of the first committee received a lot of credibility for their supposedly efficient performance. I asked about thirty villagers, young and old, if they were happy with the results of the election for members of the third committee, and exactly half of them said they thought the results were suitable as most of the elected members were highly skilled and efficient. The other half, meanwhile, were indifferent to the result. As the evident suggested, the prime reason for this was that they considered themselves to be busy farmers who had no expertise in anything other than farming and therefore did not wish to take part in the committee or to judge anyone. When asked if they wanted themselves or their relatives to be members of the committee, eighteen of them smiled and explained that they preferred to let those who wanted to be members become members. The rest simply said no. While some said that they did not wish to assume any responsibilities because they did not have the required skills, all of them explained that they were already too busy with their own farm work.<sup>255</sup> While most of the villagers did not want to take part directly in the work of the committee, the supposed good performance of the leaders legitimized their dominance over the VFP committee.

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<sup>255</sup> Information derived from various in-depth interviews with 32 villagers while they were working in their homes.

**Table 5.3: List of members of the third VFP committee of Ban Tao Fai  
(6 November 2003-2005)**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Relationship to Leaders</b>
<b>Administrative Committee</b>		
<i>Remaining Members</i>		
1. Ji	Chairman	Leader
2. Sakorn	Loan Provision Approval	Sanit's son in law
3. Pang	Loan Provision Approval	From Khorat
4. Chan	Vice-chairman	Newly elected SAO member
5. O	Secretary	Khru yai's daughter
<i>New Members</i>		
6. Piraya	Public Relation Committee	From Khorat
7. Suchart	Assistant to Accountant	From Khorat
8. Somjit	Accountant	Leader
9. Duang	Public Relations	Ji's niece
10. Kajorn	Loan Provision Consideration	From Khorat
11. Wanpen	Public Relations	Mushroom farming group
12. Satit	Loan Follow-up	From Nakhon Sawan
13. Somsuoy	Member	From Khorat
14. Samarn	Member	Ji's neighbour
15. Sombat	Member	Somjit's neighbour
<b>Emergency Loan Committee</b>		
16. Noi	Chairman	Mushroom Farming Group
17. Adul	Loan Follow-up	Leader
18. Khieu	Loan Follow-up	Somjit's niece
<b>Inspecting Committee</b>		
19. Arunchote	Inspecting Officer	Ji's son

Source: List of members of the third VFP committee of Ban Tao Fai, and author's own interviews with villagers.

### **Works of the committee members**

Despite being ranked as the second best performing VFP committee in the district, all the work of the first, second and third VFP committees of Ban Tao Fai was dominated by the leaders, just as the work of previous committees had been. As will be discussed below, in trying to gain full control over the work of the committee while also increasing their credibility, the leaders played the new role of hard working members who took responsibility for most of the committee's work and assisted others in doing their own work. Interestingly, Ji, who was not even a member of the first committee, took a leading role in managing the work of the first, second, and third

committees. In investigating the work of the VFP committees in order to find out how all the work and responsibilities were divided among the committee members and how different members performed, this part looks into the setting up of the committee's rules and regulations, the committee meetings, and the financial performance of the committees.

*The setting up of the committee's rules and regulations*

Similar to the case of the SPP committee, the leaders prepared rules and regulations in advance, leaving the other members to merely approve them. After being elected, all the members of the first VFP committee met at Somjit's house to approve the already prepared rules and regulations for the committee. It was Ji, who was not even a member of the committee, and Adul who had prepared all the details in advance. Despite strictly following the rules and regulations model established by the National Committee for Village Fund Committees, only changing some details of its financial policy, the two men added a rule which stated that only those who were members of the SPP could apply for loans from the VFP.<sup>256</sup> Ji explained to me that he implemented this rule to encourage the villagers to save. Undeniably, this rule also enhanced the importance of membership of the SPP, the most troubled local development project and from which many villager had resigned their membership. Evidently, because of this rule, the villagers who had already resigned as members of that programme re-applied for membership. Even though this rule diminished the villagers' right to apply for loans from the VFP, other committee members and the villagers did not oppose it simply because they thought that all the regulations had been prepared by the government.

The leaders made only three copies of the final version of the committee's rules and regulations. One of them was sent to the government official at the district office and the other two were kept in Adul's and Cha-on's homes, the chairman and vice-chairman of the first committee. Seemingly, this was to avoid questions and difficulties that might have arose when committee members did not follow the rules and regulations strictly. Even though the project's members and other committee members were told that they could come and look at the rules and regulations in the leaders' homes at any time, no one had ever done so. Not knowing all the rules, other members just followed what the leaders told them to do. For example, even though the rules stipulated that all nine members were to be assigned different duties and responsibilities – the positions were chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, accountant, public relations officer, two loan provision officers, and debt repayment officer – in reality, during the first working year (December 2001- December 2002), only four members (Adul, Cha-on, Siriporn, and Khieu, all



of whom were Ji's teammates or their relatives) were assigned the specific positions of chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, and accountant, respectively. All the rest were simply members of the committee. Accordingly, while the leaders and their relatives had a clear idea what their responsibilities and powers were, the other five members, especially Somporn and Patumtip who were not related to the team, had no idea what they were supposed to do and thus simply followed the leaders' orders and suggestions. Adul and Cha-on took advantage of their respective positions as chairman and vice-chairman to act as loan approval officers, deciding which applications for loans to grant and how much. O and Khieu performed the roles of public relations officer and debt repayment officer respectively, while also assisting Siriporn, who was appointed secretary of the committee, with her work because she did not have much experience, according to O and Khieu. This made Siriporn, Somporn and Patumtip grateful for the leaders' contribution to the work of the committee and enhanced their faith in them. Instead of being seen as dictators who took control of all the committee's activities, the leaders were seen as hard working persons who sacrificed their time and energy for the public good. In effect, the team had total control over the work of the committee and gained much credibility for doing it.

Evidently, the leaders also managed to dominate the work of the second and third Village Fund Committees. As shown earlier, through the use of the 'five go, four stay' method, the leaders managed to dominate the work of the committees by nominating more of their people as members of the second and third committees, thereby successfully holding the majority vote in both committees. As shown in Table 5.2, while Somporn and Patumtip were removed in the annual draw, the leaders nominated Ji, Sakorn (Sanit's son in law), and Chan (the new SAO member) as members of the second Village Fund Committee (December 2002-November 2003). In total, the leaders had seven out of nine votes on the committee. Additionally, even though the three new members were not appointed to any specific positions, they were clearly told by the leaders what they were supposed to do. Regarding this, Ji became the real head of the committee, while Adul stepped down, and Sakorn and Chan worked on debt repayment. Through the 'nominating and approving' method, the leaders also managed to hold the majority vote and dominate all the important positions on the third Village Fund Committee (November 2003-2005). As shown in Table 5.3, Ji, Chan, Sakorn, Somjit, O, and Adul were the chairman, vice-chairman, loan approval officer, accountant, secretary, and emergency loan approval officer respectively. Even though there were other committee members, it can be predicted that by holding the majority vote on the committee and by projecting themselves as more highly skilled and more experienced than the others, the leaders would once again dominate the work of the

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<sup>256</sup> Rule No. 8 (9), Ban Tao Fai's VFP Committee's Rules and Regulations of 2001.

third committee. The dominance of the leaders was also evident in the fact that throughout the existence of the first, second, and third committees, the leaders had total control over approving loan applications. In truth, once the members had completed and submitted a loan application to the accountant, the chairman and vice chairman took the liberty of approving the loan by themselves with no other members present.

Despite the leaders' dominance over the work of the committees, other members, who were not related to them, never complained. This may be because firstly, they believed, and had been encouraged to believe, that they did not have the skills required to manage one million baht and were consequently relieved that they did not have to deal with all the regulations and figures. Indeed, Somporn, Siriporn, and Wanpen, who were members of the first and the third committees, explained to me that even though they were honoured to be nominated as committee members, they believed that they should let the leaders do the job as they had a higher level of education and already knew a lot of government officials in the city centre and could thus deal with them easily.<sup>257</sup> Secondly, because requests for loans never exceeded the supply, almost all loan applications, except for one that was rejected on ground that the applicant was not a member of the SPP, were approved and everyone was happy. Because no real decisions had to be made, other members did not think that they needed to be involved in the approval of loan applications. Thirdly, other members of the committee did not know that they also had decision-making powers. As already discussed, they did not study the regulations or receive a copy of them to study at home. The lack of knowledge of what they could and could not do, coupled with the fear of being considered by the leaders, who were supposed to know the rules better, as being 'uncooperative' like Sompit, ensured these members preferred to remain passive and be 'cooperative' by letting the leaders do the work. As Somporn put it, 'I was very honoured to be nominated as a member of the committee. I would not jeopardize this position by doing something stupid'. By stupid, she meant asking questions, which might let the leaders think that either she was stupid for not knowing the answer or she was being 'uncooperative'.<sup>258</sup>

Indeed, Somporn's explanation implies that for these other members, power was not as important as the social status they had acquired by just being members of the committee. The actual exercising of power was not as important as holding the position. After all, their jobs were being done, albeit by someone else, and in return they got not only higher social status but also received a payment at the end of the year. Positions on the committee were thus too good to risk

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<sup>257</sup> Separate interviews with Somporn, Siriporn, and Wanpen at their homes on 20 November 2003.

<sup>258</sup> Interview with Somporn, *Ibid.*

losing. As the evidents suggested, this passiveness even increased after the first committee received the award for its performance. That is, because other members believed that the leaders had done a good job, they felt even more comfortable with letting them dominate the work of the committee.

### *The committee meetings*

Despite the rules and regulations which affirmed that the committee must hold a meeting at least once a month,<sup>259</sup> for two years from December 2001 to December 2003 there were no meetings set up exclusively for all members of the committee. Instead, the leaders claimed that they used the monthly village meeting as a stage for all members of the Village Fund Committee, along with those on other committees, to meet and discuss their work. Nevertheless, other members and various villagers told me that most, if not all, of the decisions were made by the executive members and were never discussed at the monthly meetings. Apart from announcing the number and the names of loan receivers after their applications were approved in December each year and urging the loan receivers to pay back their debt on time, most of the villagers whom I interviewed said that the leaders never discussed anything else regarding the project, particularly how the profit had been spent.<sup>260</sup> Indeed, the monthly meeting was not an important institution or a stage for the discussion of fund related matters as the leaders claimed. Government officials were impressed by the existence of these meetings simply because no other village had such meetings and the village leaders did a good promotional job. Most of the time, the leaders used the meetings as a stage to exhibit their power over the villagers. Apart from announcing information from government organizations and telling the villagers how hard it was to manage the work of all the local committees, especially the SPP and the VFP which required knowledge of arithmetic, and how much time and energy they had sacrificed for the villagers, no real discussions were ever initiated or allowed unless there were some government officials or other visitors present.

As I witnessed at the four monthly meetings from September 2003 to December 2003, the members of the third Village Fund Committee did not meet together before the meeting started or sit together during the meeting. Also, the leaders never talked about or made any announcements regarding the project except for when there was the election for the third Village Fund Committee on 6 November 2003 and when they announced the news of the government's

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<sup>259</sup> Rule No. 31, Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Information derived from various interviews and in-depth conversations with various villagers on various occasions.

reward for the outstanding performance of the first Village Fund Committee on 16 December 2003. At the latter meeting, O told the villagers roughly how much dividend would be paid into the shareholders' accounts, while Ji announced that because of the excellent work of the committee's members, the committee was awarded for being a first class VFP committee, and the government had transferred 100,000 baht into the committee's account to be used as capital to be lent out to the villagers and had given the committee the right to apply for a one million baht loan from recommended banks to be used as further capital to be lent out. Despite asking the villagers to think, whether or not the committee should borrow 100,000 baht more in loans, Ji never held a vote, and later made a decision on behalf of the committee to borrow the money from the Government Saving Bank anyway. Evidently, asking for the villagers' opinion was done only for my benefit.

It can be argued that the existence of the monthly village meetings helped legitimizing the leaders' dominance of the work of all the local committees and highlighted their superior status over the villagers. With no official opposition to any of the leaders' plans, due to the fact that the villagers did not dare question them, all the leaders' actions on any local committee were thus considered to be approved. By monopolizing the microphone, the leaders could choose what questions were ignored, who should be discredited in public, and when to end the meeting. This showed the villagers that it was they and they alone who had power, which could affect the villagers' reputation, status, and the benefits they were entitled to receive.

#### *The committee's financial policies and performance*

Even though the committee's financial policies and performance are not the focus of this thesis, it is still important to examine them as they were the main criteria for government officials to evaluate the performance of the VFP committees nationwide. Moreover, the committee's financial policies and performance directly affected the officials and the villagers' perceptions of the committee members and the village leaders. As already discussed, because the first VFP committee was designated a first class committee and the second best in the district, government officials and the villagers had more faith in the committee members, most of whom were the leaders and their relatives. Also, it is necessary for this thesis to compare the written policies with the practiced policies.

Regarding the project's membership and loan applications, the rules stated that to be eligible for a loan, the villagers had to become a member and shareholder of the project,<sup>261</sup> and also to be a member of the SPP. The membership fee was set at 20 baht per person and the cost

of one share was set at 20 baht. The rules stated that one shareholder could not buy more than 20 shares. The revenue from membership fees was to be used for producing documents for all members, setting up workshops to further better understanding of the fund's implementation, and for following up the granted loans. The revenue from the selling of shares made up the one million baht fund to be lent out to members. While everyone in the village could become a project member and shareholder, the committee could give loans to only one member of each household at a time.<sup>262</sup> Additionally, 93 percent of the one million baht fund was to be lent out for agricultural purposes, while 5 percent was for trading purposes and 2 percent for emergencies.<sup>263</sup> While the maximum amount to be lent to one member was 20,000 baht, the maximum amount for an emergency loan was 3,000 baht.<sup>264</sup> The loan interest rate was set at 12 percent per year or 1 percent per month.<sup>265</sup>

Three criteria for considering loan applications were established:

- (1) The qualifications, credibility, and ability to repay debts of the loan applicant. The successful applicants had to hold assets worth not less than 25,000 baht, to have four guarantors, to have an income of not less than 25,000 baht per year, and to not be bankrupt.<sup>266</sup>
- (2) The applicant's objective in spending the loan.<sup>267</sup>
- (3) The level of the applicant's cooperation with the fund, meaning their attendance at fund meetings and whether or not they made problems.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Rule No. 9 (1), Ban Tao Fai's VFP Committee's Rules and Regulations of 2001.

<sup>262</sup> Rule No. 9 (2), Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Rule No. 32 (1), Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Rule No. 36 (1), Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Rule No. 40 (1), Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Rule No. 33 (1), Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Rule No. 33 (2), Ibid. For the purpose of following up the loans and demanding repayment, the rules established a community self-inspecting system. A group consisting of five loan applicants was to be set up and each member would become a guarantor of the others. If the applicant failed to pay back their debt in time, the four guarantors would have to take responsibility for repaying it otherwise they would not be allowed to ask for another loan the following year.

In addition, the rules contended that all the profits made were to be divided into six categories for committee expenditure.<sup>269</sup>

- 1) 50 percent was to be added to the one million baht fund to be lent to the villagers.
- 2) 20 percent was to be spent on public utilities (5 percent was for the student lunch program, 5 percent was for religious activities, 5 percent was for village development, and the final 5 percent was to support village sport activities).
- 3) 10 percent was for stationery.
- 4) 5 percent was to make up a community funeral fund.
- 5) 5 percent was an allowance for all members of the committee.
- 6) 10 percent was for dividends to be paid to all shareholders.

The first VFP committee of Ban Tao Fai received the one million baht fund from the government in November 2001. Together with 7,000 baht in revenue from the sale of 350 shares, the committee had total capital amounting to 1,007,000 baht to be lent out to members. Also, the committee received 1,900 baht in membership fees from 95 members who applied in August 2001. This was to be spent on producing documents for all members, setting up workshops for furthering understanding of the fund's implementation, and following up the given loans. On 14 December 2001, 55 loan applicants were asking for 910,000 baht worth of loans in total. One application was denied on the grounds that the requester was not a member of the SPP. The committee consequently lent out a total of 900,000 baht in loans to the 54 applicants. The community self-inspecting system worked well and by 6 December 2002, all the 900,000 baht of loans plus 106,740 baht in interest had been paid back to the committee. During the course of one year, the committee made a total profit of 111,962.56 baht, 5,222.56 baht from the bank's interest and 106,740 from loan interest. Fifty percent of the latter was added to the one million baht capital to be lent to the villagers. As a result, the total capital to be lent out in the second year came to 1,053,370 baht.

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<sup>268</sup> Rule No. 33 (3), *Ibid.*

<sup>269</sup> Rule No. 44, *Ibid.*

**Chart 5.1: Financial performance of the first VFP committee of Ban Tao Fai  
(December 2001-December 2002)**

	<i>Baht</i>
Assets (Village Fund plus revenue from selling of shares)	1,007,000
Money lent to the project's members (54 members)	900,000
Money left in the bank	97,000
Interest received from the bank (5.3% interest rate)	5,222.56
Loan interest received from loan receivers	106,740
<b>Total profit made</b>	<b>111,962.56</b>
<b>Distribution of the Project's Profit (111,962.56 baht)</b>	
	<i>Baht</i>
Addition to the capital (50%)	53,370
Dividend for all shareholders (10%)	11,196.25
Payment for committee members (5%)	5,598.12
Reserved as expenses for public utilities (20%)	22,392.51
Reserved as expenses for stationeries (10%)	11,196.25
Addition to community funeral fund (5%)	5,598.12

Source: Information taken from a balance sheet of the first VFP committee of Ban Tao Fai, and the committee's account book of December 2001-2002.

In the second round on 14 December 2002, there were 52 loan applicants asking for a total of 995,000 baht in loans.<sup>270</sup> All applications were approved. By November 2003, all loans and interests had been paid back and the committee had made a total profit of 117,400 baht (9,130 baht from interest on savings and 108,269 baht from the interest on loans). As before, 50 percent of all the profit, equaling 117,277 baht, was added to the capital to be lent to the villagers in the next year, and the other 50 percent was withdrawn from the bank account by the committee and reserved for expenses as regulated by the rules. In December 2003, there was a total 1,153,370 baht in capital to be lent out to the fund members. Apart from this, in July 2003, the 100,000 baht reward from the government was transferred into the committee's saving account, adding to the 122,277 baht left in the bank. The saving interest received from the bank was thus 9,130.68 baht (3,240.34 from the first half of the year, and 5,890 baht from the second half of the year).

<sup>270</sup> Fifty of them asked for 955,000 baht in loans to be used for agricultural purposes, and the other two asked for 40,000 baht for trading purposes.

**Chart 5.2: Financial performance of the second VFP committee of Ban Tao Fai  
(December 2002-December 2003)**

	<i>Baht</i>
Assets (Village Fund plus 50% of the previous year's profit)	1,117,277
Money lent to the project's members (52 members)	995,000
Money left in the bank	122,277
Reward given by the government	100,000
Interest received from the bank (5.3% interest rate)	9,130
Loan interest received from loan receivers	108,269
<b>Total profit made</b>	<b>117,400</b>
<b>Distribution of the Project's Profit (117,400 baht)</b>	
	<i>Baht</i>
Addition to the capital (50%)	58,700
Dividend for all shareholders (10%)	11,740
Payment for the committee's members (5%)	5,870
Reserved as expenses for public utilities (20%)	23,480
Reserved as expenses for stationery (10%)	11,740
Addition to community funeral fund (5%)	5,870

Source: Information taken from a balance sheet of the second VFP committee of Ban Tao Fai, and the committee's account book of December 2002-2003.

Toward the end of the second year, after the result of the government's evaluation showed that the first VFP committee of Ban Tao Fai was categorized as a first class committee in June 2003, more villagers applied to be project members. They bought 6,000 baht worth of shares, all of which was added to the capital to be lent out in the third year (December 2003-December 2004). The project had total capital of 1,163,896 baht. More members meant more loan applicants. On 14 December 2003, there were 62 loan applicants asking for a total of 1,160,000 baht worth in loans.<sup>271</sup>

Unlike the SPP, all shareholders in the VFP were given their dividend on time, which was by December of each year. According to many villagers who I interviewed, at the monthly meeting for December 2002, Khieu informed the villagers about the profits and how much dividend per one share the shareholders would get. However, she did not inform the villagers about how the rest of the profit would be spent. It was only at the monthly meeting for December 2003, which I also attended, that O felt the need to inform the villagers how the rest of the profit was to be divided into several categories of expenses, although as will be discussed



later she did not explain how it was spent in detail. Even though the majority of the villagers seemed satisfied with the information given, a few of them did tell me that they wanted more information. On many occasions, a number of young male villagers asked me to investigate the way in which the leaders, as members of the committees, had spent the fund's profits. Indeed, they suspected that the leaders might have 'borrowed' some of the money that was left in the bank, just as Cha-on had done with the savings of the SPP. However, when examining the committee's account book, I was assured that corruption could not take place as had happened with the SPP because the bank required the committee to state their purposes for withdrawing the money and to give details of how the money would be spent. The signature of the District Officer was also required to approve the withdrawal. Notwithstanding this, in studying all the receipts the accountant had collected and comparing them with the amount of money the leaders claimed they had spent, I found another way in which the village leaders, as executive members of the committees, might have misused some of the fund's profits that were supposed to be spent on communal development – specifically, the student lunch programme (5 percent), religious activities (5 percent), village infrastructure development (5 percent), and sport activities (5 percent),<sup>272</sup> - and to buy stationery for the committee (10 percent).<sup>273</sup>

As a matter of fact, over a two year period from December 2001 to December 2003, the executive members had spent these budgets without consulting the villagers and, as was also evident, they had not spent the profits for the December 2002 to December 2003 according to the rules, meaning they might have kept some for themselves.<sup>274</sup> To be precise, instead of spending 20 percent of all the profit made, a total of 23,480 baht, on communal development – the student lunch programme, religious activities, village infrastructure development, and sport activities – as stated in the rules, the committee spent all this money on buying a tent and chairs, items which should have been categorized as stationery and office supplies. For the money categorized as stationery expenses, they had spent 124 baht on photocopying, 1,240 baht on post, 400 baht on petrol, and 570 baht on more chairs. Accordingly, there was 9,406 baht left in the stationery budget. As mentioned earlier, O did not report this to the villagers. A week later, I asked O where the left over budget was kept as I did not see it being put back into the bank account or being added to the budget for the same category the following year (see Chart 5.2)

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<sup>271</sup> Sixty of them asked for 1,120,000 baht in loans to be used for agricultural purposes and 2 asked for 40,000 baht in loans for trading purposes.

<sup>272</sup> Rule No. 44 (2), Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Rule No. 44 (3), Ibid.

and if there was any money left over from the previous year (2002). She told me that it was kept at Adul's house and was to be spent on what the committee members thought suitable.<sup>275</sup> Indeed, there was no person or organization monitoring how this money was used. I asked a teacher, who was responsible for the student lunch programme, if the school had received any money for the programme from the VFP since December 2003, and was told that she had not received any money and believed it was because the budget had been spent on the tent and chairs. I asked again if she was bothered by the fact that the budget, which should have been used to buy food for students, was spent on something else and was told that there were other sources of money to support the student lunch programme, including donations from the temple and the temple's visitors, and, as such, she was not worried too much about not receiving any money from the committee.<sup>276</sup>

Even though there was no evidence of any misuse of the left over budget supposedly being kept at Adul's house, there was some reason for me to doubt the intentions of the leaders who were then executive members of the VFP committee. Considering that Cha-on and Ji had 'borrowed' 100,000 baht from the SPP account in order to build their own private well, only admitting to it and returning the money after they had been confronted by Sompit in 1998, it was possible that Adul, who had easy access to the money, could do the same by 'borrowing' it to buy something and then return the money later if he were confronted by someone.

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<sup>274</sup> I was able to accumulate all the related information and receipts for only the period from December 2002 to December 2003 as O refused to show me all the receipts of the previous years.

<sup>275</sup> Interview with O at the SAO office where she worked as a member of staff, on 28 December 2003.

<sup>276</sup> I went back to Ban Tao Fai to visit the villagers from 2 May to 20 May 2004. This information comes from an interview with one of the teachers, who was responsible for the student lunch programme, in the school kitchen while I helped her and a few mothers of the students cook.

**Chart 5.3: Details of the spending of the VFP's profit of 2002-2003**

	<i>Baht</i>
To add to the capital to be lent to the villagers (50%)	58,700
To add to public development fund (20%)	23,480
- all spent on tent and chairs	23,480
To add to stationery and office supplies budget (10%)	11,740
- spent on chairs, photocopying, sThamps, and petrol	2,334
- left over money	9,406
To add to funeral fund (5%)	5,870
Allowances for the committee members (5%)	5,870
Dividend to be distributed to members of the fund (10%)	11,740
<b>Total</b>	<b>117,400</b>

Source: Information taken from the committee's account book, various interviews with O, and all receipts for 2002.

When I returned to the village in May 2004, the same young male villagers who had urged me to inspect the use of the VFP's profits told me they believed Adul had used the left over money in the bank to buy himself a big freezer in February 2004 for his new business of making frozen orange juice for sale. Even though they were furious about the idea, they told me they did not know yet what to do next as there was no evidence and their parents would not let them confront the leaders for fear that they would be branded as 'miscreants' and punished like Sompit and his family had been.<sup>277</sup> Whether or not Adul and the other leaders had misused the fund's profits to benefit themselves, the committee members should have given the villagers more information and the opportunity to ask questions. Despite receiving recognition from the government and thereby regaining their credibility, the leaders had failed to win back the villagers' trust. To be exact, they had yet to perform their tasks with transparency and accountability.

Being ranked as the second best VFP committee in the district meant that the committee was given the right to borrow one million baht more at a low rate of interest from the Government Saving Bank to add to the one million baht fund granted by the government in 2001. Even though the third committee decided to use that right in April 2004, four months after I left the village to conduct my field research in Ban Ton Mai, I managed to study the committee's rules and regulations, established exclusively for the new one million baht fund,

when I visited the village again from 2 to 20 May 2004. This revealed that it was the leaders, and not the other villagers, who had benefited from this new fund. Unlike the first one million baht fund received from the government in 2001, this second million baht in capital was lent out in much higher amounts, ranging from 20,000 to 100,000 baht. Ji explained that this new regulation was to help villagers who needed bigger loans to make their investments. From my investigations, I found that until May 2004, no other villagers except for the leaders, specifically Somjit and Ji, had applied for a loan from this second million baht fund. Indeed, when the other villagers needed a loan, they only asked for a loan from the first one million baht fund. As it was evident, the leaders were the ones who benefited the most from this second one million baht fund.

### **Evaluation of the committee's performance**

As mentioned, in mid-2003, towards the end of the first two years of the project's implementation, all VFP committees nationwide were evaluated by the government. Three different organizations – the Department of Local Development (Ministry of Interior), the Bank of Agricultural and Cooperatives, and Rachabhat University – were assigned by the government to conduct the evaluation separately. The criteria used in the evaluation were those of effectiveness, accountability, and transparency of the fund's management. In evaluating the committees nationwide, these three organizations assigned government officials, banking staff, and research students to investigate how the fund had been managed. All investigators were trained in advance and had an evaluation form, designed by the organization to which they belonged, to be filled in, in which certain scores were set in advance to match with certain activities and practices. For example, in the evaluation of a committee's structure and responsibilities, the Department of Local Development would give three points to the committee if all members of that committee were assigned specific responsibilities, two points if some members of the committee, besides the chairman and vice-chairman, were assigned certain responsibilities, and one point if only the chairman and vice-chairman committee were assigned certain responsibilities. The total score would then be calculated and the committee would be categorized as a first, second, or third class committee.

Despite clear guidelines as to what the evaluator should look for and how many points would be given to different VFP committees, it was evident that in the case of Ban Tao Fai all the information the evaluators from the three organizations used in their evaluations was derived from interviews with only a few committee members, all of whom were the village leaders, and

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<sup>277</sup> In-depth conversations with Pong, Sang, and Kong on 15 May 2004 at Khao Tham temple.

from the committee rules and regulations. In fact, they had not questioned the villagers or tried to cross reference the information derived from the committee members with that of the villagers. I asked ten random villagers, who were members of the project and had applied for loans, two questions: firstly, whether or not they have been interviewed about the village fund by government officials, staff from the Bank of Agricultural and Cooperatives, or research students from Rachabhat University, or indeed by anyone at all; and secondly whether or not they knew of anyone in the village that had been interviewed about the village fund. All ten villagers answered 'no' to both questions. I then asked O and Somjit about how the evaluation had been conducted. O said that she had only met a government official from the Department of Local Development and that he came to ask her to fill in the evaluation form for him. Somjit said that a few evaluators had come to see Ji and Ji had assigned him to answer their questions about the fund's management. One of them asked for a copy of the fund regulations.

Debatably, the main reason why these evaluators had only interviewed a few executive members of the VFP committee was that it was the easiest way for them to conduct their research. Indeed, their organizations provided them with just one evaluation form. Accordingly, there was no room for more than one answer to any one question. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 2, most of the villagers spent most of the day working on their farms and did not get back home until 5pm or 6pm. These evaluators came to the village during office hours (from 8am to 5pm) and consequently missed the opportunity to meet the villagers. Also, because none of these evaluators were locals, it was easier for them to introduce themselves just once to the leaders of the village than to introduce themselves to many villagers who might not know anything about the evaluation programme and might not answer their questions. In the case of the government official from the Department of Local Development who was already familiar with the villagers, the fact that he knew the leaders well and already believed that they were efficient and good leaders compromised his evaluation. As he explained to me, 'the villagers did not know how things were done in detail. The leaders did. And it saved time by talking to the leaders'. He also admitted that, whenever he had to prepare any report or an evaluation on anything related to the village, he would simply ask the leaders to help him because 'they knew what was going on in the village'.<sup>278</sup> By examining the evaluation forms of the three organizations, I learned that although there were indeed few questions demanding knowledge of the technical details of fund management, most of the questions could and should have been answered by the members of the fund, the villagers, rather than the executive members of the committee. Indeed, the villagers' answers would have been a better reflection of what they really

knew about the fund's management and how the committee members had performed their tasks. By relying on the answers of the executive members of the fund committee and the regulations, without cross-referencing this information with the villagers, the results of the evaluation did not reflect the reality. Rather, it was, to a certain extent biased and distorted. As a matter of fact, the leaders considered the evaluation programme to reflect not just the committee's performance but their own personal performance. Indeed, Ji assigned Somjit, rather than Adul, to talk to the evaluators simply because, as Ji himself said, 'Somjit was a good communicator and he knew what the evaluator wanted'.<sup>279</sup> Since the fall of the Thaksin government, serious questions have been raised about the management, oversight and evaluation processes relating to the VFP. By June 2007, three years after the first evaluation programme was conducted, thousand of VFP across the country were saddled with overdue debts. Some of them had no money left in the bank account to run their activities. Auditor Pichet Trakulkram at the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) said the evaluation was aimed only at enabling the funds to continue to exist.<sup>280</sup>

### **Villagers' participation**

A large number of the villagers participated in the VFP. In August 2001, one month after the VFP was launched nationwide, 95 villagers, from 65 different households out of a total of 98, applied to be members and shareholders in the project. In total they bought 350 shares, worth 7,000 baht. Sixteen of the members were children, whose parents wanted them to receive dividends from the project's profits. As already mentioned, there were 54 loan applications asking for loans totaling 900,000 baht in 2001, and 52 loan applications asking for total loans of 955,000 baht in 2002. Having said this, the villagers became more interested in participating in the project after the government announced in June 2003 that the VFP committee of Ban Tao Fai was the second best performing committee in the district. Some existing members bought more shares and 10 other villagers from 5 different households became project members and shareholders. Altogether, there were 300 more shares worth 6,000 baht. By 14 December 2003, there were 62 loan applications asking for total loans of 1,180,000 baht. As already discussed, the demand for loans never exceeded the supply.

The main factors preventing more villagers from participating in the project by becoming members and shareholders or by asking for loans was the committee's financial policy, which stated that in order to be eligible for a loan, members of the VFP had to be

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<sup>278</sup> Interview with Manop Sumontesharat, on 26 October 2003, at the local co-op shop.

<sup>279</sup> Interview with Ji on 28 September 2003, at Khao Tham temple.

members of the SPP, and that they had to apply for the loan as a group of four, not individually. Moreover, some villagers did not want to accumulate more debt. By August 2001, there were only 160 villagers who were already members of the SPP. Some other villagers had resigned their membership due to Cha-on's scandal and problems concerning the dividends. Others had not become members in the first place because they did not want to save with the programme. A few villagers who were not members of the VFP said that they felt excluded and wished the leaders would alter the rule which stated that to be a project member they had to be a member of the SPP first. This discriminated against them simply because they did not want to deposit the money with that programme.<sup>281</sup> Also, it was very difficult to coordinate as a group of four, especially when it meant that, as members of the same group, they had to take full responsibility when anyone in the group did not pay back their debt to the committee. The main problem here was the fact that the old villagers, most of whom were the only person in the household who could apply for a loan, were not closely related to each other. As mentioned, after July 2003, even though the management of the committee had proved to be profitable, there were only 10 new members, most of who only joined just to get a dividend rather than to be eligible for a loan. Apart from this, a large number of villagers who were not members of the project explained to me that they were not interested in the project's loans as they already had *tao kae*, or merchants, who not only supplied the villagers with seedlings but also bought their produce, from whom they could borrow crop seeds, fertilizers and cash. Moreover, because most villagers had no plans for investing their loans in any new business, the loans would just complicate their farming business. That is, if they got loans from the project, they would only use that money to buy crop seeds and fertilizers from the same *tao kae* who would later buy their crops anyway, so it was more convenient to just borrow crop seeds, fertilizers or even money from them.<sup>282</sup>

Apart from applying for loans and getting a dividend from the committee, the members and shareholders of the project did not participate much in the work of the committee. In fact, they knew little about the project's rules and regulations. After the rules and regulations were compiled, they were kept at Khieu's place. No villager was given a copy to read or to study. As already mentioned, with no clear understanding of how to be eligible for a loan, one member went to the District Office to complain and accused the committee of being unfair after her application for a loan had been rejected on the grounds that she was not a member of the SPP.

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<sup>280</sup> Cited from [www.BangkokPost.com](http://www.BangkokPost.com), "Village Fund Saddled with Debts", Friday 22 June 2007.

<sup>281</sup> Information taken from various in-depth conversations with various villagers, who were not members of the VFP, at their own houses, which I visited after they finished their farm work.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

After this matter was resolved, the committee still failed to display the regulations anywhere for the villagers to see. It was as if the executive members of the committee, in other words the village leaders, had no intention of letting the villagers know about the regulations and wanted to avoid any problems that might arise when they failed to follow the regulations themselves. Inevitably, this also encouraged the villagers to be more reliant on the executive members and made them reluctant to oppose or propose anything relating to the fund.

Despite the fact that most of the villagers seemed to be indifferent to the results of the elections for the committees' members, a number of them said to me that they would like to know about the project's implementation, especially what they could or could not do. For example, a group of young male villagers told me that they wanted to know if the committee could invest some of the project's profit in buying communal vehicles (*etaan*) for transporting produce, which the villagers might borrow without paying any rent, but they did not want to ask as they did not know if the idea was against the regulations or not and did not want to be called a fool in front of everyone else. This proves that the leaders' strategy of discrediting anyone who opposed or questioned them worked effectively in preventing opposition and maintaining their preeminence. Mainly, this was because most, if not all, of the villagers were very dependent very on the loans and other benefits derived from being members of local projects. Even though most of the villagers did not need cash to buy crop seeds, fertilizers, and insecticide, they still needed cash to buy other goods and to pay back loans taken from other sources. Because the leaders dominated not only the VFP committee but also the SPP committee and the village's SSEF, which provided cheap loan and sold cheap groceries only to their members, respectively, they could use their power to affect the villagers in more ways than one. Also, because most, if not all, of the villagers did not actually use their loans for the activities that they said they would – for example they might use the money to pay back a debt instead of investing in farming – they were afraid that if they bothered the leaders too much, the leaders would cancel their loan or disapprove their next application on the grounds that they had lied to the committee. It can be argued that the benefits of being members of the local projects, all of which were managed by the leaders, were too great for the villagers to lose. By relenting on some of the rules for the villagers, the leaders gained more influence over them. In return, the villagers let the leaders do their jobs with no interference. As long as they received loans from the VFP committee and benefits from the SPP committee and the SSEF committee, they would not feel the need to bother the leaders by asking questions, even though they might want to know how the committees worked. Also, by not enforcing all the rules for the villagers, the leaders could prevent any challenges to their power.



Another factor which made the villagers tolerate and accept the leaders' use of coercion and dominance of the work of the committee was the fact that they did not have much free time to discuss among themselves and plan any political action against them. As discussed in Chapter 2, the villagers spent most of their time on the farm, and even though there were a number of them working the same plot of land, they were working separately and did not have many opportunities to talk to each other. Unlike the leaders, the villagers never planned the names of the people they wanted to nominate and the names of the approvers in advance. Also, due to the low level of social integration, a strong or influential figure who the villagers might turn to, or who could mobilize the villagers against the existing leaders, had yet to emerge. Despite the fact that a few villagers, who were not the leaders or their relatives, had been nominated as members of the committees, these members had not been appointed as executive members and thus did not play much part in the committees. Also, they had not learnt how to integrate themselves.

### **What had changed**

The period following the implementation of the VFP in 2001 saw some changes in the dynamics of power in Ban Tao Fai. Despite the fact that the leaders, namely Ji and his team mates, managed to gain control over the newly established VFP committee, thereby maintaining their status as the most powerful and influential figures in the village, and the fact that the villagers' participation in the work of local committees was still limited, it was evident that the way in which the leaders used their power and the strategies they used to gain, maintain, and enhance that power had changed. These changes occurred mainly because of the specific characteristics of the VFP. It was not only a local development project that employed a democratic decentralization approach, opening up more room for villagers to participate as committee members, but it was also a project which, through the provision of cheap loans, directly affected the lives of the villagers who received loans to a certain extent. In part, these changes were made by the leaders in response to their declining credibility resulting from Cha-on's corruption scandal over the SPP.

In 2001, Ji tried to limit other villagers' opportunities for participation in the newly established VFP committee by telling them that they were to elect only nine, rather than 15, members of the committee. To avoid opposition from young villagers, who were not happy with the fact that the leaders dominated all the local committees in the village, the leaders then nominated some new faces, who, despite being their close relatives, were young and had a high level of education, instead of nominating Cha-on and Ji, whose reputations had been damaged by the corruption scandal a few years earlier. They also let a few other villagers nominate their own

relatives. To preserve their control over the VFP committee, the leaders established the 'five go, four stay' system. Apart from this, in trying to dominate the work of the committee, the leaders and their relatives took all responsibilities upon themselves and worked hard in order to prove their efficiency to both the local government officials and to the villagers. As much as the VFP was a threat to the village leaders' ever declining power and influence, it was also an opportunity for them to win back their credibility and to uphold their status as the effective and efficient leaders of the village.

Another change that occurred after the VFP was implemented was to the nature of power and influence in the village. Because the project provided cheap loans, one of the villagers' many important factors of production, to a large number of villagers, those who managed to get elected as committee members gained not only authority, or power, in the newly established local committee but also status as loan managers, making them more influential to the villagers. In other words, power within the VFP committee also meant influence. Unlike the Saving for Producing Committee, which was a prototype for the VFP committee and in which the committee members' status as loan managers was not emphasized or highlighted by the fact that the success of the villagers' loan applications was not solely dependent upon the decisions of the committee's members but by whether or not they had a saving account with the committee, power within the VFP committee was considered more influential to the villagers. By combining this power with the diminished power and influence of the *phu yai ban* and his assistants, weakened by the establishment of the SAO in 1994 and by the 1997 constitution, Adul and his assistants were able to strengthen their status as influential figures in the village.

Despite providing another source of loans, the VFP did not greatly alter the relationship between the villagers and their other sources of loans. In fact, the other existing sources of loans, most of which were the leaders and their relatives, still remained a significant source within the village. This was mainly because the VFP's repayment period was short, within one year, and the villagers therefore had to borrow money from either local moneylenders or *toe share*, or both, to pay back their debt to the project in time. Another reason why other sources of loans still remained important was the fact that these local sources were more flexible when compared to the conditions for loans established by the VFP committee. Despite charging higher interest rates, these longer established sources of loans did not require a guarantor and had longer repayment periods. If the villagers did not pay back their debt in time, the moneylenders and *tao share* would let them pay later, although with more interest. Furthermore, the project did not affect the relationships between the villagers and *tao kae*, either. As already discussed, the

villagers still preferred to 'borrow' crop seeds and fertilizers from these businessmen and then pay them back with their harvested products rather than cash.

*Who benefited from the implementation of the VFP?*

Politically, village leaders managed to benefit the most from the project's implementation. As executive members of the VFP, and thus responsible for providing cheap loans to the villagers, they not only gained more power through the newly created local committee but also gained more influence, derived from their status as the committee's loan managers who had the power to approve or refuse loans to the villagers. Although the demand for loans never exceeded the supply, the fact that the leaders had once refused a loan application, on the grounds that the applicant was not a member of the SPP, demonstrated to the villagers that they had the power to refuse other loan requests. Also, by managing the fund so effectively that the first VFP committee was awarded the distinction of being a first class committee and the second best in the district, they regained their credibility. However, the leaders had yet to win back the villagers' trust. As already discussed, a few young villagers still doubted they had performed their tasks honestly, believing the leaders had misused the fund's profits to benefit themselves. Apart from this, the leaders managed to create a number of new allies by nominating and approving a few easygoing villagers to become members of the third VFP committee. In effect, this made these new committee members and their relatives feel gratitude towards the leaders for not only being so honoured but also for receiving a monetary allowance as committee members.

Theoretically, everyone in the village, both project members and non-members, benefited from the fund. While the project's members received cheap loans and a dividend (10 percent of all profits) at the end of the year, the non-members benefited indirectly from the 20 percent of the annual profits that were invested in the communal development fund, as stated in the committee's rules and regulations. Meanwhile, all committee members received a share of the committee allowance (5 percent of all profits made). Although, the leaders received a higher payment than other committee members, it was considered fair as they contributed more to the work of the committee. Practically, however, it was the leaders who enjoyed greater financial benefits from the project than other villagers. As discussed earlier, the project did not affect the moneylender status of some of the leaders and the second one million baht fund provided them with another source of large and cheap loans. Finally, there was the possibility that some of the leaders might have used some of the fund's profits for their personal benefit.

## **Conclusion**

After Cha-on and Ji's corruption scandal in 1998 and the two local elections for SAO members and for *phu yai ban* in 2001, the VFP was the leaders' biggest challenge yet. As a result of the scandal, their reputation and credibility was damaged to the extent that they almost lost the two subsequent local elections. Because the VFP created a new local committee, consisting of nine to fifteen locally elected persons, and thus provided an opportunity for new political actors to emerge as potential alternative leaders, and because it provided cheap, large loans (from 5,000 to 20,000 baht per applicant) to a large number of villagers, which could affect the villagers' life greatly, the implementation of this project had the potential to threaten the leaders unstable, if not diminishing, power and influence if they were unable to dominate the committee. In the eyes of the leaders, power, not only in the newly established local committee, but also in other local committees, was the only way to revive and secure their credibility, superior status, and influence. They felt that it was only once they had full control of all the local committees that their power would not be challenged as before. As Ji admitted, he could not take any risks by letting other villagers dominate the work of the VFP committee. Accordingly, new strategies to gain and preserve their power in this newly established committee were created.

Realizing that they did not have enough personnel to hold a majority vote on the committee if the committee consisted of fifteen members, Ji and his team mates created a new strategy to gain power and hold majority votes in the VFP committee by convincing the villagers to set up a committee with only nine members. Also, as a response to the villagers' anxiety about the leader's dominance, the 'five go, four stay' method and the annual draws were sold to the villagers as ways of increasing participation in the work of the committee. To show the villagers that they sincerely wanted more people on the committees too, the leaders nominated and approved the names of some selected villagers who they thought would comply with them in managing the fund and then later appointed them to some not-so-important positions, such as public relations and loan follow-up officers. These people included Noi, a potential alternative leader, and Wanpen, both with whom the leaders' had formed an alliance by making them feel gratitude for their financial and moral support when Noi was setting up a mushroom farming group as discussed in Chapter 3. Furthermore, they promoted their close relatives who had a higher level of education than other villagers as new political actors. Indeed, planning the names of the person to be nominated in advance, and those who would approve them, was no longer enough to legitimize their power. One's qualifications had become an important factor that the leaders had to consider when nominating anyone. Despite the fact that other villagers rarely nominated anyone and had never opposed any nominations, this focus on qualifications was still

necessary as it helped prevent any future opposition from the villagers, especially from the young. This was also a response to changes in the villagers' perception of power following the 1998 corruption scandal. For the villagers, power was no longer derived from just influence and charisma, but was also associated with skills, responsibility and accountability.

Apparently, the fact that the first VFP committee was categorized as a first class VFP committee and was awarded the second best performing committee in the sub-district increased the leaders' credibility and highlighted their superior status greatly. Also, the strategy of drawing lots annually to change the composition of the committee encouraged the villagers to think that the leaders genuinely wanted more participation from others. As a result, the villagers once again felt that the leaders were efficient and started to feel that they could trust them. Apart from this, the special characteristics of the VFP, as a project that provided large amounts of cheap loans to a large number of villagers, also led to yet another change in the villagers' perception of power. Because one of the responsibilities of the committee's members was to decide which loan applicants would receive a loan, the committee members' power also translated into influence. Unlike in the past, when the influence of the leaders – which resulted from their good charisma and good performance as assistants of Lung Po Kong and their role as the mediator between the village and the temple – begot their power, by the time the VFP was first implemented, it was power within the VFP committee that begot influence. In other words, by gaining power within the committee, committee members also gained influence over the villagers' lives simply because they had the authority to decide whether or not they would receive a cheap loan, which would benefit the livelihood of the villagers greatly. By the end of 2003, two years after the VFP was first implemented, the power and influence of the members of the VFP committees had become almost one and the same. That is, the villagers' perception of power had once again changed to the extent that, for them, power alone was not powerful, and influence alone was not influential. Only when one's influence was attached with power was that person then seen as influential. Conversely, only when one's power was attached with influence was that person seen as powerful. In comparison, the power Adul derived from the position of *phu yai ban* was not as powerful or influential as the power he derived from his position of chairman of the VFP committee because *the phu yai ban's* responsibilities did not affect the villagers' life as much as those of the chairman.

Despite the fact that the leaders gained more influence over the villagers by becoming members of the VFP committee, it can be argued that they managed to preserve such influence and power within the committee partially through the use of coercion and the exhibition of their superior status at the monthly village meetings. At the meetings, even though a number of young

villagers still had doubts about the leaders' behaviour, they still had no way of expressing their feelings or asking questions, not only because they were afraid of being branded as 'uncooperative' or 'misbehaving', but because their parents, most of whom were the loan applicants in each household and the household heads who still had strong influence over the rest of the household, did not want them to. In addition, the facts that the villagers were neither united socially nor politically and were busy with their own farming were other factors that made the leader's strategies for preserving their power and influence more effective. As discussed in Chapter 3, being busy with their own work, the villagers had no opportunity to meet and discuss politics and the work of the leaders, or to lobby votes. As far as the leaders were concerned, the VFP committee was not only a source of power but also influence. Moreover, the power and influence derived from the VFP were greater than those derived from other local committees. So long as they managed to hold the majority vote on every local committee, especially the VFP with the power to benefit a large number of the villagers, they could maintain their status as the most powerful and influential persons in the village. Indeed, after realizing this, Ji, who was then the *Nayok* SAO – the most powerful and influential position in the sub-district – felt the need to become the chairman of the third VFP committee in order to maintain his status as the most powerful and influential figure in the village. Those who were able to play central leadership roles in the VFP significantly enhanced their bargaining power with politicians at the PAO level, since their increased influence made them more sought-after as *hua khanaen*. In Ban Ton Mai, their influence was directly linked to that of MPs and national politicians for the same reasons. Accordingly, it can be seen that VFPs offered a means by which politicians sought to expand their network of *phuak*, their vote base (*than siang*), and generally to increase their capacity to mobilize votes.

## Chapter 6

### The Dynamics of Power in Ban Ton Mai After the Implementation of the Village Fund Project

Unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, by the time the Village Fund Project (VFP) was implemented in Ban Ton Mai, there was no ultimate leader within the village. Because the VFP committee and The Saving for Producing Project (SPP) committee were established at almost the same time, there was some competition for positions on the two committees between new political actors. As the evidents suggested, they were not only competing for power within the committees but also for dominance within the village. Chokdi's lack of influence and leadership enabled these actors, who tried to show off their efficiency and management skills to the villagers, to emerge as potential leaders of the village.

With the aim of exploring the dynamics of power in Ban Ton Mai following the implementation of the VFP in 2001 and in order to compare and contrast this with the situation before the project was implemented, this chapter takes the same form as the previous chapter and is organized into three parts. The first part investigates the selection of the members of the VFP committees and reveals the strategies members used to get elected, identifying differences in the situations before and after the VFP was implemented. The second part looks into the work of the committee to find out how its members used their power and influence in managing the fund, who had a dominant position within the committee, how the villagers participated in the work of the committee and in the project, and how they responded to the committee's work. The third part then analyzes to what extent all the changes are attributable to the VFP, and to what degree other factors were responsible for the changes.

#### **Selection of the committee members**

After the murder of Prasit, a former *phu yai ban* of Ban Ton Mai and the *prathan* SAO of Krabi Lek SAO, government officials felt the need to intervene in the political affairs of Ban Ton Mai in order to ease the political violence within the village. As was the case with the SPP committee, a government official from the Department of Local Development, Ministry of Interior, was ordered to supervise the elections for members of the first VFP committee of Ban Ton Mai.

One month after the government announced the launch of the project, the election for members of the first VFP committee was organized by the official at the local school canteen, on the 15 July 2001. One hundred and eighty villagers from 103 households participated in the

election.<sup>283</sup> The election was supervised solely by the official, with Chokdi only acting as a witness. The official gave some suggestions on the preferable qualifications and number of members for the committee, and on how the election should be conducted. As Jin recalled, he recommended that the villagers elect 'about 15 committee members, half of them male and the other half female, so that the National Office of the Village Fund Project would be pleased with the provision of equal opportunities for male and female villagers and so the committee would be registered and receive the one million baht fund sooner rather than later'. Furthermore, the official suggested an open election, whereby names were nominated and approved by the villagers in order to get elected, but also recommended the preferable qualifications of the committee members by saying that the villagers should elect someone who had special skills or knowledge that would help the implementation of the project, such as experience in working with government officials, skills in accountancy, knowledge about the project, or some recognized social status.<sup>284</sup> Lastly, he suggested that the villagers should first elect the committee members and then let them divide their responsibilities among themselves. In the end, 13 villagers (6 women and 7 men), whose qualifications matched the official's suggestions, were elected to the first VFP committee. Three of them were government or quasi-government officials, while six had experience of working with government officials and in working on other local committees. The rest were those with skills in accountancy or retail. As shown in Table 6.1, Bandit, who became the committee's chairman, was a former maths teacher at Ton Mai school, while Chokdi, Klam, and Sapon were the *phu yai ban* and his assistants, respectively. Suprani, Supot, Manaa, and Sin were already members of the SPP committee, while Sarapee, and Prapaa were volunteers on the Village Protection Programme.<sup>285</sup> Finally, Jin and Suparat were merchants, who had business skills, while Wanida was an assistant to a construction engineer in Krabi town.

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<sup>283</sup> This number exceeded the average number of villagers, between 60 and 80, who usually participated in other local committee meetings. Information derived from registration forms of the Village Fund Committee, submitted to the National Village Fund Committee. The government official who was present on the day was responsible for cross checking this number.

<sup>284</sup> This information was crosschecked with other villagers' accounts in various interviews.

<sup>285</sup> The programme was set up by the Ministry of Interior in the 1980s to encourage direct participation by local villagers, nationwide, in keeping peace and order during the period of the communist insurgency. The volunteers were trained by military officers and were to assist them when required. Apparently, in some villages, some government officials would ask for their help to relay information to other villagers on various occasions. In both Ban Tao Fai and Ban Ton Mai, these volunteers were trained but had not been paid or required to do much as there were no serious problems with communists in either village. Also, the government officials did not need their assistance as they approached the *phu yai ban* directly (in the case of Ban Tao Fai) or other existing natural leaders (in the case of Ban Ton Mai).



All the newly elected committee members met at Suprani's house the next day to assign positions. It was their levels of education and skills, not their profession, that were the main factors in determining the members' positions on the committee. Unlike the case of the SPP committee, semi-government officials, including Chokdi, Sapon, and Klam, were not appointed to any specific positions. This, according to Jin, was primarily because all members wanted to ensure that the National Office of the Village Fund Project would approve their qualifications and skills and thus approve the readiness of the committee. Accordingly, they assigned Bandit, who had the highest level of education in the form of a BA in Mathematics Education, and was a former mathematics teacher of Ban Ton Mai school and also a vegetable-seller in Krabi market,<sup>286</sup> as chairman of the committee. Wanida, and Jin, who both had diplomas in accounting, were made accountant and assistant secretary, respectively. Apart from this, the members appointed Manaa, Supot, and Suprani, who had all graduated from Mattayom 3, as vice-chairman, secretary to the committee, and assistant to the accountant, respectively.

The fact that all members of the committee had leading social and political status within the village had not happened before on any other existing local committee. Even though this was primarily the result of the official's suggestions, one should not assume that these people were nominated and approved purely because of their political and social status. As in the case of other open elections, being part of a large extended family was still an important factor in getting elected. In fact, most of the elected members, with the exception of Supot, came from extended families and were nominated by their relatives. Three of these extended families nominated more than one member. These members were Bandit and Suprani, both of whom were married to a former *kamnan*'s children, Klam and Sarapee, who were husband and wife, and Sin and Manaa, who were uncle and nephew. In truth, the officer's recommendations as to the qualifications of potential members gave large families, in which many family members already held recognized social and political status, the opportunity to have more than one member of their family on the committee. Having said this, the official's suggestion also allowed Sin and Suprani's relatives, and Supot's friend, to nominate them as the VFP committee members even though they were already on the SPP committee. As already discussed, being a member of more than one committee was considered greedy and selfish under normal circumstances. But thanks to the official, those who already held a position on other local committees became desirable as members of the VFP committee.

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<sup>286</sup> Interview with Bandit on 15 January 2004, at his home.

**Table 6.1: List of members of the first VFP committee of Ban Ton Mai  
(July 2001–September 2003)**

Name	Position	Other Status and Profession
1. Bandit (m)	Chairman	Former teacher, and son-in-law of a former <i>kamnan</i>
2. Manaa (m)	Vice-chairman	Manas's son
3. Supot (m)	Secretary	Member of the SPP committee
4. Wanida (f)	Accountant	Assistant to a construction engineer in town
5. Suprani (f)	Assistant to accountant	Member of the SPP committee
6. Jin (f)	Assistant to secretary	Local merchant
7. Chokdi (m)	Member	<i>Phu yai ban</i>
8. Klam (m)	Member	Assistant to <i>phu yai ban</i>
9. Sapon (m)	Member	Assistant to <i>phu yai ban</i>
10. Prapaa (f)	Member	Volunteer on the VPP <sup>287</sup>
11. Sarapee (f)	Member	Klam's wife, and volunteer on the VPP
12. Suparat (f)	Member	Volunteer on the VPP
13. Sin (m)	Member	Manaa's relative, member of the SPP committee

Source: Names and positions derived from the list of members of the first VFP committee of 2001–2003. Other information was acquired through many interviews with a number of villagers on various occasions.

After two years, an election for members of the second VFP committee, which was supposed to be held on 15 July, was held on 28 September 2003, in the Ton Mai school canteen. Unlike the previous one, this election was organized by the chairman and vice-chairman of the committee, not a government official. In total, 78 villagers participated in the election.<sup>288</sup> But, despite telling every other existing member about the election date and asking them to inform the villagers, Bandit and Manaa did not inform Supot. As far as Supot was concerned, this was a plan to prevent him from being nominated as a member of the second committee since only those who were present at the election were eligible for nominations.<sup>289</sup> Supot explained that Bandit and Manaa did not appreciate his participation as secretary of the first committee because he followed the rules and regulations too strictly and on many occasions opposed their ideas to change some of the rules and regulations.<sup>290</sup> Prior to the second election, he often reminded them that they needed to set up an election and asked for their opinion on a possible date, but they did

<sup>287</sup> The Village Protection Programme (VPP) was a programme established by the government during the communist insurgency in order to create local self-defense units. It recruited various young villagers as volunteers to protect the village from communist intrusion.

<sup>288</sup> This number is taken from the minutes of the meeting, where all villagers who were present signed their names.

<sup>289</sup> Rule No. 18, Ban Ton Mai's VFP Committee Rules and Regulations of 2001.

<sup>290</sup> Interview with Supot on 13 March 2004, at his home.

not say anything. When asked about Supot's absence, Bandit laughed and literally said that, 'Why (did we need to tell him)? He always knew everything about everything'.<sup>291</sup> Without admitting that they had deliberately not told Supot about the election, Manaa explained that Supot already had so many responsibilities on the SPP committee, to which a few month earlier (in March 2002) he had been nominated as a secretary once more.<sup>292</sup>

Even though it is not certain that Supot was deliberately not informed about the election date by Bandit and Manaa, it is certain that had Supot come from a large extended family or had support from his stepfather's family, he would have heard it from them. Moreover, a number of his stepfather's relatives were present at the meeting. According to them, they did not know that Supot was not informed about the election because they were not very close.<sup>293</sup> Also, the fact that Supot had already been nominated as a member of the second SPP committee a few months earlier caused resentment among other members of the VFP committee and villagers who were not related to him. As already discussed in Chapter 4, it was considered insuitable for one person to dominate more than one political territory. Only those who came from a very large extended family could manage this for the simple fact that their relatives would support them. Because Supot obviously controlled the work of the SPP committee, many thought that he should not dominate the work of the VFP committee. When asked about Supot's absence, a number of villagers responded as if they could not care less. For example, many said to me that 'it was OK, he should let someone else do it (work on the VFP)', or 'it did not matter, he already has the SPP committee' and questioned why did he want to work on both committees, since they thought one committee was enough.

Unlike the previous election, there was no government official present at the one for the second VFP committee. Therefore, Bandit, as the chairman of the first committee, supervised the election. After announcing to the villagers the financial performance of the first committee, Bandit stated that the villagers were to nominate 13 names, and reminded them to adhere to the officer's suggestion about the qualifications of the committee members and the proportion of male and female members. By urging the villagers to follow these suggestions, which had put him and some other members of the first committee on the committee in the first place, Bandit might have hoped that he and some others would be nominated again. Before the election process started, however, Wanida and Jin announced to the villagers that they were too busy

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<sup>291</sup> Interview with Bandit on 10 April 2004, at his home.

<sup>292</sup> Interview with Manaa on 10 March 2004, at his home.

<sup>293</sup> I interviewed Supot's mother, stepfather and stepbrother during many visits to their house.

with their own business and thus did not want to be nominated again.<sup>294</sup> As shown in Table 6.2, all former executive members, namely Manaa, Suprani, Sin, and Sapon, who had relatively higher levels of education than other villagers, were elected once more. Also, some relatives of these members were nominated and approved as members. These people were Mano, who was Manaa's younger brother and Sin's nephew; Sutata, Nantiya, and Pensri, who were related to Suprani and Bandit; Lamai, who was related to Sapon; and Sarapee, who was related to Klam. All were nominated by their relatives. As it seemed, this was another attempt by these former members to get a greater share of the fund's profits. As will be discussed later, this also showed how Bandit's and Mano's extended families cooperated in order to dominate the work of the committee.

**Table 6.2: List of members of the second VFP committee of Ban Ton Mai  
(September 2003–September 2005)**

Name	Position	Other Status and Profession (apart from farming)
1. Bandit (m)	Chairman	Former member
2. Manaa (m)	Vice-chairman	Former member, member of the second SPP's committee
3. Mano (m)	Secretary	Manaa's brother, merchant, Parien 9 graduate
4. Suprani (f)	Accountant	Former member
5. Sapon (m)	Member	Former member
6. Sin (m)	Member	Former member
7. Choom (m)	Member	<i>Nak leng</i> , member of the second SPP's committee
8. Samran (m)	Member	Pratom 4 certificate, Sapon's relative
9. Lamai (f)	Member	Pratom 6 certificate
10. Suppalak (f)	Member	Pratom 6 certificate
11. Pensri (f)	Member	} Came from a former <i>kamnan</i> 's extended family, related to Suprani and Bandit
12. Sutata (m)	Member	
13. Nantiya (f)	Member	

Source: Names and positions were taken from the list of members of the second VFP committee of 2003–2005. Other details were derived from interviews with a number of villagers.

As in the last election, all elected members assigned each other positions and responsibilities at Suprani's place the day after the election. However, this time Bandit stated that there were to be only four, not six, executive positions: chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, and accountant. No one opposed this idea. With the support of their relatives on the committee,

<sup>294</sup> Wanida said that she would be pursuing work in Krabi town and Jin announced she was heavily pregnant and wanted to focus on the baby when it was born. Interview with Jin on 18 January 2004 at her home.

Bandit, Manaa, Mano, and Suprani, were appointed to all four positions, respectively. Debatably, Bandit decreased the number of executive members on the committee in order to get a higher share of payment from the fund's profits. As with the SPP committee, members of the first and second VFP committees were not paid equally. As will be discussed in detail later, the executive members were paid more than ordinary members. Less executive positions meant each executive member would be paid more. It can be argued that the reason why no other members opposed this decrease was because they did not know how much higher the executive members got paid and they were happy just to get paid and not have to do much in return.

### **Works of the committee members**

The performance of Ban Ton Mai's VFP committee was not as impressive in the eyes of government officials as that of Ban Tao Fai. After the nationwide evaluation, the first Ban Ton Mai committee was categorized as a 2A, rather than 3A, committee. Accordingly, it was not awarded more funds and it did not enter the competition for the best committee in the district. However, this does not mean that the members of Ban Ton Mai's VFP committee had done less work than those of Ban Tao Fai's committee but, rather, that they had done it differently. In comparison, the rate of debt return for Ban Ton Mai's VFP was lower than that for Ban Tao Fai and the paperwork was not done as correctly. Despite their differences, one similarity between the two committees was that there were a few members on each that dominated their committee's work. However, unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, the chairman and vice-chairman were not the ones who dominated the work of the VFP committee in Ban Ton Mai.

As with other existing local committees, not all members of the VFP Committee participated in the committee's work. When asked about how decisions were made, all executive members of both the first and second committees replied that Bandit and Manaa had not participated much in the decision-making process because they had been too busy with their own businesses. Having said this, the three quasi-government officials who were members did not involve themselves in the work of the committee much either. This was not only because they were merely ordinary members with no specific responsibilities but also because they were not interested in involving themselves in the work of the committee much since they were already the *phu yai ban* or assistant *phu yai ban*. Other reasons for their lack of interest were the facts that Chokdi did not want much responsibility, Klam was very old and weak, and Sapon was already chairman of the SPP committee.

During the first term, most, if not all, of the committee's work fell into the hands of Suprani and Supot. In the case of Suprani, this was because all the work was done at her house.

Moreover, the committee accountant, Wanida, was already very busy with her own job, and Suprani, as the assistant-accountant, thus took on most, if not all, of Wanida's responsibilities. According to Suprani, most of the time, she would start working with out Wanida's presence and she would only approach Bandit when she required his signature.<sup>295</sup> As for Supot, he was very keen to involve himself in the work of the committee. Apparently, Suprani and Sin were not very happy about Supot's enthusiastic participation. Indeed, they felt intimidated and thought that he interfered in their jobs and responsibilities. For example, Suprani did not like it when Supot tried to give her and Wanida advice on how to prepare the committee's balance sheet and account book. According to Suprani, she understood the rules very well and maybe even better than Supot because she and Wanida were the ones who were trained by the official, not him.<sup>296</sup> Also, Sin, whose status as the accountant of the first SPP committee was undermined by Supot's intervention, did not really appreciate Supot's active role in the VFP committee. Sin also felt intimidated and was worried that Supot would take on Manaa's role, as a vice-chairman, like he had done with his position on the SPP committee. According to Sin, even though he felt grateful that Supot helped him with the SPP accounts, he could have taken care of them by himself.<sup>297</sup> These tensions grew over time, as Supot realized. Indeed, Supot believed that they disliked him so much that they had conspired not to tell him about the election date for the second committee's members.

Towards the end of the first term, cooperation between Suprani's and Sin's families increased. Convinced by his uncle's suggestions, Manaa took on more responsibility. He often came to Suprani's house to help her prepare the account book. Suprani felt that, unlike Supot, Manaa was not intimidating as he held the position of vice-chairman and was polite.<sup>298</sup> Supot also suspected that Manaa and Bandit cooperated in trying to exclude him from the second committee. Cooperation between the two families became greater during the second term. As shown in Table 6.2, of the four executive members, two came from Manaa's extended family and the other two from Bandit's. Since Bandit still did not participate much in the work of the committee, this enabled Manaa and Mano to quite freely dominate the decision-making process of the committee. Suprani, who was also in Bandit's extended family, was still an active executive member and worked closely with Manaa and Mano. Also, there were three more members of Bandit and Suprani's extended family working as ordinary committee members. evidently, this ensured there was a balance of power between the two families.

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<sup>295</sup> Interview with Suprani on 15 January 2004, at her home.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Interview with Sin on 25 February 2004, at the local temple.

Another example of their cooperation is the fact that in 2003 when Mano wanted to change some of the committee's rules and regulations to allow project members to apply for loans on more than one occasion a year, he discussed his ideas and worked out the details with his brother and Suprani before proposing it to the other members. Because it was supported by members of both families, the idea was well received by most, if not all, of the other committee members, even though some of them told me they did not fully understand it.<sup>299</sup> Because of these new rules, which meant that loan applications would be considered on a weekly rather than annual basis, Suprani, Manaa, and Mano met each other every week to settle the accounts and to approve loan applications.

In spite of all this work, throughout the first and second working terms other members were not asked to help. Neither did they express any desire to get involved in the work of the committee. A number of them explained to me that their responsibility 'was only to approve changes made by the committee', and that this was because 'their involvement would complicate the work of the executive members because of their lack of understanding and skills (in the work of the committee)'.<sup>300</sup> As with other local committees, all the key tasks were monopolized by a small number of core members; but the second committee illustrated that as projects grew larger, the sharing of both benefits and responsibility became imperative.

#### *The setting up of the VFP committee's rules and regulations*

After the election, all the committee members met at Suprani's house to set up the committee's rules and regulations. The reason for this was that Suprani's house was the former *kamnan's* house and had a very big lawn, which could be used as a reception area. It was also used as the committee's office, where all the transactions and training programmes with government officers took place during both the first and the second committees.

Unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, no members had prepared any written rules. Nevertheless, Supot was very enthusiastic and made many suggestions to other members, while Bandit, Manaa, Chokdi, Sopon, and Klam did not say much. One of many suggestions which was adopted as a regulation was that all project members had to open a saving account with the committee, into which they had to deposit a fixed amount of money in order to be eligible for a

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<sup>298</sup> Interview with Suprani on 15 January, at her home.

<sup>299</sup> Interviews with all members of the second VFP committee, separately at their places and on different occasions after the announcement of the new rules. The question asked was 'What do you think about the new rules?'

<sup>300</sup> Interviews with a number of the first and second VFP committee members during the four months field research.

loan.<sup>301</sup> This regulation was actually taken from the rules of the SPP committee, which had been implemented just three months earlier. When asked about this, Supot explained that he copied the rules from those for the SPP committee for two reasons. Firstly, he personally believed in the idea behind the SPP, which was to stimulate the villagers' to save. Secondly, he hoped that with these rules, the committee might get some kind of reward from the government after the project was evaluated.<sup>302</sup> Apart from these initiatives, Supot also suggested following the model rules and regulations set by the National VFP Committee. After all the members had approved the rules and regulations, Supot, as secretary to the committee, typed them up, sent one copy to an official in the Department of Local Development, Ministry of Interior, and left another copy in Suprani's house. The lack of preparation of specific rules illustrated the extent to which the committee had underestimated the importance and scale of the VFP project, assuming that a core group of family members could easily dominate the process.

#### *The committee meetings*

No regular committee meetings were held. Throughout the first working term, there were only two meetings where all the committee members were present. The first was when they assigned positions and responsibilities on the 16 July 2001 and the second was when they approved the committee's rules and regulations the following day. Since the second VFP committee was elected until May 2004, there were no additional committee meetings. With no scheduled meetings, Suprani was left to work alone quite freely in her house. According to Wanida, she came to Suprani's house only when she had the time and when she did Suprani had already taken care of the account book competently. Moreover, since there were no scheduled meetings, Supot's attempt to involve himself in the work of the committee by coming to Suprani's house was not required and was considered by Suprani as an interference in her work. Also, Suprani perceived Supot's attempt to become more involved as an attempt to dominate the work of the VFP committee. As discussed, this led to Suprani's strong resistance.

In their defense, Manaa explained that the executive members had wanted to set up regular meeting in which all the committee members would participate but because they had different jobs that restricted their availability, they could not all be present at the same time. For example, while Bandit and Suprani worked selling vegetables and rubber farming in the morning and thus had free time in the afternoon, Manaa and Mano started to work, selling clothes, in the

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<sup>301</sup> Rule No. 8 (9), Rules and Regulations of the VFP Committee of Ban Ton Mai of 2001.

<sup>302</sup> Interview with Supot on 3 March 2004.



afternoon.<sup>303</sup> The fact that Bandit, Suprani, Manaa, and Mano did not push any harder for regular meetings of all committee members to be set up also confirms the degree and nature of their cooperation. Considering most of the first and second committee members worked on their rubber and oil palm plantations in the morning and rested in the afternoon, had regular meetings been set up they would have to been held in the afternoon. Thus it seems that the two families did not want Manaa and Mano, the only two members who worked in the afternoon and finished late in the evening, to be excluded from meetings. Consequently they did little to encourage regular fixed meetings.

*The committee's financial policies and performance*

Similar to other VFP committees nationwide, the first Ban Ton Mai committee followed most of the model rules set up by the National Committee. As in the case of Ban Tao Fai, while they imitated most of the model's wording, the committee members changed the prices for membership fees and project shares, and the interest rates of loans. In order to be eligible to apply for a loan, villagers had to apply to become members of the project and pay a fee of 10 baht per person.<sup>304</sup> Members could also buy project shares at 100 baht per share and then receive a dividend at the end of the committee's working term.<sup>305</sup> Similar to those of other fund projects, the size of the loans ranged from 5,000 to 20,000 baht per member.<sup>306</sup> While anyone could apply to become a member and shareholder, only one person from each household could apply for a loan. Unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, however, when applying for loans, members could apply individually, rather than as a group. Loan applicants needed to have two other members as guarantors, who would take full responsibility if the loan receiver did not pay back their debt to the committee.<sup>307</sup> The loan interest rate was set at 6 percent per year<sup>308</sup> and the time for submitting loan applications was set for 1-4 August each year. All debts (capital plus interest) were to be paid to the committee one year after the loan was granted.

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<sup>303</sup> Interview with Manaa on 10 March 2004, at his home.

<sup>304</sup> Rule No. 6 (3), Ban Ton Mai's VFP Committee's Rules and Regulations of 2001.

<sup>305</sup> Rule No. 44 (6), *Ibid.*

<sup>306</sup> Rule No. 36, *Ibid.*

<sup>307</sup> Rule No. 40, *Ibid.*

<sup>308</sup> Rule No. 41, *Ibid.*

The committee also set up rules to indicate how the fund's profits would be spent each year, as follows:<sup>309</sup>

- 1) 55 percent was to be used as dividends to be shared among all shareholders,
- 2) 30 percent was to be used as payment for the committee members,
- 3) 10 percent was to be reserved for administrative costs,
- 4) 5 percent was to be kept as the committee's reserve account

Unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, there was no provision for any part of the fund's profits to be used on any public development projects. According to a government official, even though this was standard for most VFP committees nationwide, it was one of the reasons why the committee did not get extra points, like Ban Tai Fai's did, when it was evaluated in 2003.<sup>310</sup> Also, because the committee did not use any of the annual profits to supplement the original one million baht grant, Ban Ton Mai's village fund remained at just one million baht throughout the years (see Charts 6.1 and 6.2), while Ban Tao Fai's village fund increased every year.

No project member was allowed to withdraw money from their saving account with the committee, in which they made monthly deposits. If they did so, their status as a project member was terminated, as was their right to apply for loans. Also, the committee was not allowed to access the account. According to Supot, the account was purely to stimulate saving. Even though these rules were a burden for the project members, no one had ever complained. The evidents suggested that this was mainly because most of the project members were familiar with the similar regulations for the Saving for Producing committee, and most, if not all, of them believed that the rules were compulsory ones stipulated by the government.<sup>311</sup> On average, villagers deposited 50 to 100 baht per month in this account.<sup>312</sup>

Similar to the case of Ban Tao Fai, the demand for loans was less than the supply. Accordingly, no loan applications had ever been rejected. As mentioned, both Bandit and Manaa were rarely present when other executive members gathered to consider the loan applications on 14 August each year. As shown in Charts 6.1 and 6.2, in the first year (August 2001-September

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<sup>309</sup> Rule No. 44, *Ibid.*

<sup>310</sup> Interview with Weerayut Samunbutra, an official from the Department of Local Development, Ministry of Interior, who was assigned to oversee Ban Ton Mai's affairs, on 8 April 2004, at the office of Department of Local Development, Klang District Office. It turned out that before he was posted in Klang District, of Krabi, he was posted in Tara District, of Lopburi, where Ban Tao Fai was located, and knew all the leaders of Ban Tao Fai.

<sup>311</sup> I interviewed various villagers on many different occasions. I asked them how they felt about the fact that they had to deposit their money in order to be eligible for loans.

2002), and the second year (September 2002-September 2003), there were 61 and 79 loan applicants applying for 260,000 baht and 482,500 baht of loans in total, respectively.<sup>313</sup>

**Chart 6.1: The financial performance of the first VFP committee of Ban Ton Mai  
(August 2001–September 2002)**

	<i>Baht</i>
Assets	1,000,000
Money lend to the project's members (61 members)	260,000
Money left in the Bank	851,307
Interest received from the Bank	2,218
Interest received from loan receivers	44,339
<b>Total profit made</b>	<b>46,557</b>
<b>Distribution of the fund's profits (46,557 Baht)</b>	
	<i>Baht</i>
Dividend for all share holders (55%)	25,606.35
Payment for the committee's members (30%)	13,967.10
Reserved for administrative costs (10%)	4,655.70
Reserved for general usage (5%)	2,327.85

Source: Information taken from the Balance Sheet of the first VFP committee of Ban Ton Mai, and the committee's Account Book for August 2001–September 2002.

<sup>312</sup> Information derived from the committee's account book for 2001-2004.

<sup>313</sup> Information taken from List of Ban Ton Mai's Village Fund Project Members in 2002 and 2003.

**Chart 6.2: The financial performance of the second VFP committee of Ban Ton Mai  
(September 2002–September 2003)**

	<i>Baht</i>
Assets	
Money lend to the project's members (79 members)	1,000,000
Money left in the bank	482,500
	575,476
Interest received from the bank	3,586
Interest received from loan receivers	58,025
<b>Total profit made</b>	<b>61,611</b>
<b>Distribution of the fund's profits (61,611 Baht)</b>	
	<i>Baht</i>
Dividend for all share holders (55%)	33,886.05
Payment for the committee's members (30%)	18,483.30
Reserved for administrative costs (10%)	06,161.10
Reserved for general usage (5%)	03,080.55

Source: Information taken from the Balance Sheet of the second VFP committee of Ban Ton Mai, and the Account Book for September 2002–3003.

Unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, and most other VFP committees nationwide, there were some alterations to the committee's rules and regulations regarding financial policies when the second committee came to power. In an attempt to yield a higher rate of debt repayment, new rules stated that project members could pay back their debt (capital and interest) to the committee at anytime during the year.<sup>314</sup> Any late payment would be charged interest at the rate of 0.40 percent a day.<sup>315</sup> In order to increase profits, the new rules also stated that after their debt was paid, members were eligible to apply for a new loan immediately. Also, a new period for submitting loan applications was set for the first to the fourth day of every month.<sup>316</sup> In effect, members who were able to pay back their loan before the one-year debt repayment period expired could ask for another loan right away, instead of waiting for the next accounting year. When asked about the new rules, Mano, who initiated all of them, explained that the ideas had been derived from his experience in retail. As a merchant, he understood that it would be more useful for the villagers if loans were available at anytime of the year, rather than just once a year, as the need for a loan may come at any time. More demands for loans would mean that the one million baht fund would be fully utilized. Also, he recognized that if members were given a

<sup>314</sup> Rule No. 7, and 12, Ban Ton Mai's VFP Committee's Rules and Regulations of 2003.

<sup>315</sup> Rule No. 13, Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Rule No. 7, Ibid.

chance to pay back their debt whenever they had the necessary money, instead of waiting until the due date by when they might have already spent it on something else, the repayment rate would be higher. As such, both the committee and the members would be happy. As will be discussed in the later part, the project members were satisfied with these new rules. According to a number of them, they liked the fact that they could apply for loans at anytime of the year. With more cash available before the end of the year, because some loan receivers paid back their debt before it was due, the committee was able to grant loans to more members. In fact, from September 2003 to April 2004, 58 people received loans and Suprani expected 30–40 more loan applications before the end of the year.<sup>317</sup>

Similar to the case of Ban Tao Fai, the management of some of the fund's profits was not done transparently. Firstly, the committee members were not all paid equally from the 3 percent of the profits. Not all the members were happy about this. When asked, Jin said that no one, apart from Suprani, Bandit and Mano, knew how much all the members got paid, and that she was unhappy about this. Jin said that at the end of the first year, Suprani came to her house and gave her 1,000 baht as payment for her job as assistant secretary. But when she learnt that some other members had not even been paid, she went to question Suprani, who bribed her with 1,500 baht more and explained to her that the executive members were to be paid more than ordinary members as they contributed more to the work of the committee. Having said this, Jin did not ask if other members would get paid, nor how much, and she did not tell anyone apart from her husband, Pond, and Supot, as she was related to Suprani's family through her grandmother's cousin.<sup>318</sup> Apart from this, the executive members of the committee did not inform the project members how they had spent the rest of the profit. As Klam recalled, they did not explain in detail to the other committee members what exactly they had purchased.<sup>319</sup> Also, when the second committee wanted to buy a computer and a printer, instead of using the part of the fund's profits reserved for such purposes (the 5 percent that was reserved for general usage amounted to 5,408.4 baht and the 10 percent reserved for administrative costs amounted to 10,816.8 baht), he told the project shareholders that the committee would deduct 100 baht from each members' dividend, as a donation. In total, this equaled 13,400 baht.<sup>320</sup> As will be discussed in the later part, this, together with the fact that the committee did not pay dividends to the shareholders on a yearly basis but on a two-year one, led to dissatisfaction among the

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<sup>317</sup> Interview with Suprani on 15 February 2004, at her home.

<sup>318</sup> Interviews with Jin on 9 and 15 January 2004, at her home.

<sup>319</sup> Interview with Klam on 10 February 2004, at his home.

<sup>320</sup> Information derived from the announcement of the VFP committee members on 28 September 2003, and from the committee's account book for 2002-2003.

project's shareholders. Because they were not given a copy of the committee's rules and regulations, they did not know that they were supposed to receive a dividend by the end of 2003 not 2002. Despite constantly referring to the committee's rules, Suprani and Manaa, who started to participate more in the work of the committee from the beginning of the second working year, were unsuccessful in changing the members' impressions that some form of corruption was going on in the committee. As a matter of fact, the committee members from the two large extended families earned a bad reputation. Because Supot was prevented from getting too involved in the work of the committee from the beginning of the second year, he was not included in the corruption scandal. Having said this, there was no actual confrontation between any shareholders and the committee's members, those who were suspicious of the committee member merely talked about their suspicions among their close relatives and friends.

#### **Evaluation of the committee's performance**

Similar to the case of Ban Tao Fai, the people who evaluated the work of the first VFP committee of Ban Ton Mai acquired all of their information by interviewing just a few members of the committee. Even though one of the assessors was a local villager,<sup>321</sup> he did not take advantage of knowing all the villagers. Indeed, like the two other evaluators, he only interviewed Suprani and examined the balance sheets and the committee's rules and regulation.<sup>322</sup> Similar to the case of Ban Tao Fai, when asked if they would have told Samreung and the other evaluators what they did not like about the committee's work, most of the villagers, including those who believed that there were some corruption going on, said that they would not jeopardize the reputation of the whole village or the chance to receive a 100,000 baht prize. Instead they claimed they would have said only good things about the committee. It can thus be argued that even if Samreung and the other assessors had interviewed other villagers, the result of the evaluation would still have been the same. In spite of this, the evaluation result, which gave the Ban Ton Mai VFP committee a 2A ranking, was well received by most, if not all, of the

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<sup>321</sup> Samreung (24), who was an evaluator from Ratchabhat Institute, was born in Ban Ton Mai and lived there until he turned 21, when he went to further his BA studies at Ramkhamhaeng University in Bangkok. Because there was no Ratchabhat Institute in Krabi province, the office of the Department of Local Development, Muang District, Krabi Province, received applications from BA students from various universities and institutes to be evaluators of the VFP committees in Krabi. According to Samreung, he applied to be an evaluator of the project mainly because it was well paid and gave him the opportunity to visit his parents. Even though he had not expected to be evaluating the committee of his own village, he felt very fortunate and thought that this would make his job easier. Interview with Samreung at his parent's home on 14 March 2004.

<sup>322</sup> Interview with Samreung on 14 March 2004, at his home.

villagers, including those who were not the project members and those who were not fully satisfied with the work of the committee. Most of the villagers said that they were proud as there were only two other committees in the sub-district that were categorized as being better and given a 3A ranking. As discussed earlier, little importance can be placed on these 'positive' official evaluations of the VFP committee's performance, given the cursory nature of the process. In June 2007, the auditor of the OAG found that VFP committees in Krabi had plunged into more debt than in other provinces.<sup>323</sup>

### **Villagers' participation**

Comparatively, there was a greater degree of participation from the villagers in the VFP than in other local committees, including the SPP. At the beginning of 2004, the VFP had 134 members and shareholders, from 95 different households,<sup>324</sup> while the SPP and the Housewives Group had 21 and 84 project members respectively. Of the VFP shareholders, 39 villagers from 26 different households were not members who were eligible for loans as there was already one member in their family who was eligible. Apparently, the project did not attract only those villagers who needed a loan but also those who thought the dividends might be worth their investment. In total, villagers from just 32 households, out of a total of 127 households, did not participate in the project. The reason why the VFP attracted more villagers than other local committees was that it not only provided cheap loans but that it also provided large ones without any saving requirements. As discussed in Chapter 4, even though the SPP also provided cheap loans, it only provided them in small amounts of not more than 10,000 baht, and the size of the loan its members could ask for depended solely on the size of their deposits.

All of those who did not participate in the VFP had not participated in the SPP either. Evidently, the main reason villagers chose not to participate in the project was the same reason they had chosen not to participate in the SPP. When asked why they had not become VFP members, a number of non-member villagers explained that, as with the SPP, they did not want to be a guarantor for anyone. Some also added that they did not need a loan and that if they did, they already had other sources which did not require a guarantor.<sup>325</sup> Even though the new financial policies initiated by Mano were well received by the project members, they did not

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<sup>323</sup> *BangkokPost*, 22 June 2007.

<sup>324</sup> There were 95 villagers applying to be VFP members and shareholders, and 4 villagers applying to be just shareholders in 2001. In 2003, there were 35 more villagers applying to be project shareholders, respectively.

<sup>325</sup> Interviews with various non-member villagers on many occasions, mostly in their homes.

attract any more interest from non-member villagers.<sup>326</sup> Interestingly, these villagers did not want to be project shareholders either. Debatably, this was not because they did not want the financial benefits but because they had not been informed about them. In fact, those who were closely related to the executive members tended to be shareholders, even though they were not eligible for loans. Of the 39 villagers who were not eligible for loans but had become shareholders, 9 were close relatives of Suprani's husband (5 of whom actually resided in his and Suprani's house), 4 were Sophon's relatives (all of whom resided in his house), and 8 were Manas' close relatives (4 of whom resided in his house). The rest were either their friends or neighbours.<sup>327</sup>

As was the case in Ban Tao Fai, apart from applying for loans, paying back their debt when required, and receiving dividends, the VFP members of Ban Ton Mai did not take part in any other activities or the decision making of the committee. Despite the National VFP Committee's regulation which stated that all project members, along with the committee members, were to set up the committee rules and regulations, no project members were present when the executive members drew up the rules. Also, there had been no meetings set up exclusively for the project members to meet the committee members and discuss the project's affairs. Additionally, they never received a copy of the rules and regulations from either the first or the second committee. Once elected, the second committee established a new rule stating that to be eligible for a loan, members had to attend at least one of the committee's meetings a year.<sup>328</sup> According to my investigation, the principal intention behind this was not to involve the project members in the work of the committee but to show government officials that there would be some meetings, in the hope that if there was another evaluation, the committee would get more points. When asked about his new initiatives, Mano explained that after he studied the results of the project evaluation, he learnt that the first committee had not earned more points due to its lack of project member participation. He hoped that by adding this rule the committee would earn more points should there be another evaluation. In spite of this, by 30 April 2004, there had not yet been any meetings organized by the committee, although 58 members had already been given loans. Apart from this, even though Manaa and Mano distributed copies of

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<sup>326</sup> I interviewed many of the project members on numerous occasions, mostly in their own homes after they had finished their work. The questions asked were: 'Are you happy with all the rules set by the committee?'; 'Do you have a copy of the rules and regulations?'; 'Do you understand all the rules?'; 'Were you there when the committee set up the rules and regulations?' and 'Did any of the committee members ask for your opinion about the rules?'

<sup>327</sup> This information was derived from my own study of the list of members and shareholders of the VFP of 2001 and 2003.

<sup>328</sup> Rule No. 11, Ban Ton Mai's VFP Committee's Rules and Regulations of 2003.



the newly implemented rules and regulations to all the project's members, they had not distributed copies of the committee's rules and regulations for 2003.

Unlike the case of other local committees, the VFP members and shareholders felt a greater need to participate in the work of the VFP committee. This was because they felt that the work of the committee affected the benefits they might receive from the fund more than that of other local committees. Nevertheless, it was only after the project had been running for one year that the project members and shareholders started to feel the need to participate more in the work of the committee simply because they were not fully satisfied with the work of the committee, particularly the fact that they had not received dividends by the end of the year as they expected. Prior to this, because every loan application was approved, all members had been satisfied with the work of the committee. As already discussed, the dividends problem stemmed from the fact that the members and shareholders did not know about the committee's rules and was not because of any misconduct by the committee members. Indeed, the regulation clearly stated that the dividend was to be distributed at the end of the first working term, meaning the end of 2003 rather than of 2002. But since they were not given a copy of the committee's rules and regulations, the project's members and shareholders did not know this. Also, because the VFP committee of other villages nearby distributed dividends to their shareholders at the end of each year, the Ban Ton Mai VFP members and shareholders expected the same. Even though a few of them had confronted Suprani and were told about the rule, the fact that there had been no meetings at which the project members and shareholders could question the committee members in public meant that doubts remained. Also, although the dividend was paid by September 2003, on the same day of the election for the second VFP committee, most of the project's members and shareholders were still not satisfied with the rules and still had doubts about why the committee members had drawn up such rules. A few of them even suspected that the committee members had made use of the dividends when they were not paid to the shareholders. These doubts increased to the extent that the villagers started to question the use of all the fund's profits. The closeness among the villagers and the fact that they had a lot of time to discuss matters related to them after they finished their farm work meant these rumours of corruption spread fast. As it was evident, unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, the lack of participation by the project members did not benefit the power and influence of the first VFP committee members but damaged it.

As a response to the villagers' desire for more participation, once he was elected as member of the second VFP committee, Mano initiated the rule requiring all committee members, project members and shareholders to have a meeting at least once a year. Failure to attend a

meeting meant the project members would lose their right to apply for loans.<sup>329</sup> Having said this, by May 2004, no meeting had been set up yet, although 58 loan applications had already been approved. Even though the committee had not yet set up any meeting as promised and as stated in the rules, by the time I left the village, there were fewer complaints from the project members and shareholders about the lack of participation. This was mainly because the new financial policies had benefited most, if not all, of the project members, and because the members and shareholders' doubts about the misuse of the project's dividends had already been cleared. As a matter of fact, the performance of Mano, who initiated the new rules for the project's financial policy, satisfied the villagers to such an extent that he was elected as the new *phu yai ban* in June 2004.

### **What had changed**

Unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, in Ban Ton Mai the VFP and the SPP were implemented only one month apart. It is, therefore, difficult to distinguish which changes were the results of which project. When the VFP and SPP were first implemented, there was no overall leader in the village. The murder of the former *phu yai ban*, who was perceived as the most powerful leader in the village, had created a political vacuum. No member of his family, which was the largest extended family in the village, wanted to enter local politics. The newly elected *phu yai ban*, Chokdi, had also proved to be a weak leader and a poor replacement. The election for members of the SPP and the VFP committees in 2001 thus saw new political actors competing for dominance within the committees. After three years of these projects' implementation, new potential leaders had indeed emerged. One was Supot, a dominant member of the Saving for Producing committees from 2001 to 2004, and the other was Mano, who had become the outstanding member of the second VFP committee in 2003. In mid-2004, Supot was elected as a member of Krabi Lek SAO, while Mano was elected as the new *phu yai ban*. The evidents suggested that the political landscape of the village had changed accordingly.

When comparing the implementation of the VFP with that for other local committees, at least three differences can be detected in, firstly, the qualifications of the members of the VFP committee, secondly the strategies used to get elected, and thirdly the way in which the work of the VFP committee was controlled. Unlike other local committees, except the SPP committees, not all members came from large extended families. Indeed, Supot, who did not have many relatives in the village, was nominated and approved as secretary of the committee. Moreover, he was not nominated by his relatives but by his friends. As already argued, similar to the case of

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<sup>329</sup> Rule No. 3, Ban Ton Mai's VFP Committee's Rules and Regulations of 2003.

the SPP committee, this was primarily because a government official had intervened in the election by suggesting the qualifications for committee members. Even though his appointment gave Supot the opportunity to demonstrate his efficiency, the fact that he already dominated the work of the SPP committee, along with the fact that he did not have many relatives to support him politically, meant he faced strong resistance from the other committee members. This led to him missing the opportunity to be nominated as a member of the second VFP committee in 2003, when the official was not present at the election. The most important factor in getting elected in the open elections for membership of the VFP committee was still the same as that for getting elected to other local committees. That is, apart from Supot, only those who came from large extended families were nominated and approved as members. There was also evidence of a new strategy for preventing other villagers from being elected as members of the second committee. In order to prevent Supot from being nominated again, Bandit, Manaa, and Suprani, who set the date for the election, did not inform him when the election would take place despite his persistent questions. His failure to show up for the election meant Supot was not eligible to be nominated as a member of the second committee.

Unlike other existing local committees, both the first and the second VFP committees were dominated by members of two, rather than just one, of the large extended families in the village, namely those of Manaa and Suprani. This was mainly because, compared to other local committees, the political and financial benefits that membership of the VFP committees gave its members were greater. Therefore more people wanted to get involved. When compared to other local committees, members of the VFP committee received much higher payments at the end of the year. Furthermore, because the committees' work consisted of approving cheap loans for the villagers, the power and influence gained from being a committee member were comparatively higher. Since members of more than one family wanted a share of these benefits, a system for sharing them between the two large extended families was developed. This was only evident in the election for membership of the second VFP committee, not the first, as it was only by then that members of the committee had learnt about the financial benefits of being a member of the committee. Accordingly, there were three members of Manaa's family and five of Suprani's working as members of the second committee.

Even though more villagers participated in the VFP, there was no evidence indicating that they were any more involved in the work of the VFP committee than in that of other local committees. For all existing local committees, namely the Housewives Group, the SPP, and the VFP, there was no system whereby the villagers' opinions, questions, and concerns regarding the work of the committees could be aired and then responded to. In fact, there had never been an

official meeting where all members of any project could discuss the work of that particular committee. While this had not caused much frustration among members of the SPP or the Housewives Group, as most, if not all, of the SPP's members were given the information they needed by Supot on a monthly basis when they deposited their savings at Supot's place, and as all Housewives Group's members had all benefited from the work of Vassana, the lack of meetings caused rumours to circulate among a number of members of the VFP about the possibility of corruption by Suprani, Bandit, and Manaa, who were all executive members of the first VFP committee, and encouraged dissatisfaction among the villagers who had yet to receive services from the Water-Pipe Laying Project. This implies that it was only when the villagers believed that their interests were being affected negatively that they asked to be more involved in the work of local committees. Notably, however, because the benefits to be derived from the VFP were much greater than those from the Water-Pipe Laying Project, the villagers evidently demanded more participation in the VFP project, while in the case of the Water-Pipe Laying Project, they only asked Surin to look into the laying of the water-pipes to their houses rather than demanding to participate in the work of the construction group.

Apart from this, by comparing the work of the SPP and VFP committee members, it can be seen that the villagers' perception of power had changed once more. Being dissatisfied with the work of the first VFP committee, which was dominated by Suprani and Manaa, both of whom came from large extended families, the villagers started to perceive that power should come with not only experience and special skills but also with transparency and accountability. Many VFP members and shareholders were dissatisfied with the lack of information on the management of the fund and the fact that the committee had not consulted them before drawing up the regulations, which effectively limited their financial benefits. Even though support from one's extended family was still the most important factor in getting elected and despite the fact the villagers seemingly still accepted the exploitation of power and dominance of only a few families on one particular local committee – which meant that most of the second VFP committee members were former members whose performance was doubted by the villagers – it was evident that in trying to preserve and legitimize their power, members of the second VFP committee responded quickly to the villagers' need to participate in the work of the committee. Also, it was evident that the moral system within the clan network responded to this change. For example, Klam, an elder in one of the largest extended families who had not performed well, was screened out while Mano, an ambitious young man who had good qualifications and ideas, was put forward by his family.

In spite of this, the fact that some villagers did not participate in the project because they did not want to be a guarantor for anyone confirms that existing social norms still played an important role in shaping the political landscape of the village. Another example supporting this argument was the fact that before applying to run in the elections for the SAO and the position of *phu yai ban*, both Supot and Mano resigned their positions on the SPP and VFP committees, in which they were considered the dominant forces respectively, to try and avoid opposition from villagers who might think that they were being greedy in trying to monopolize these positions of power. Because of the high level of expectations by the villagers, the performance of the committee was now watched much more closely than had previously been the case. Good performance on such committees could be translated into increased 'credit' for those later standing for elected office.

*Who benefited from the project's implementation?*

Not all members of the VFP benefited, financially or politically, from the project's implementation. Evidently, executive members received substantial payments from the fund's profits, while the rest received much smaller payments. As discussed, in order to gain more financial benefits, in 2003, Bandit, as the chairman of the committee, reduced the number of executive members from six to four. Similarly, realizing the high financial benefits from dividends, Bandit and Manaa only urged their relatives to apply to become project shareholders. Therefore, those in Bandit's and Manaa's families received relatively higher financial benefits from the project than other project members, who only became members to apply for loans.

Apart from this, only those who controlled the work of the committee, namely Suprani, Manaa and Mano, were perceived as the power holders on the committee. Of the three, Mano benefited most politically. Due to the fact that he initiated the new financial rules that allowed the villagers to pay back their loans at any time and to apply for a new loan as soon as they had cleared all their debt, Mano was considered the most efficient committee member and a new potential leader by the villagers. When he ran in the election for *phu yai ban* again in mid-2004, Mano received tremendous support from the villagers and won the election. Because his job was selling clothes at weekly markets in the sub-district, Mano was not always in the village associating with the villagers. As the evidents suggested, if it were not for the VFP, Mano would not have been able to show the villagers that he was capable of holding positions of power.

Similar to the case of Ban Tao Fai, the relationships between the villagers and their local moneylenders and *toe share* were not affected by the implementation of the VFP. According to Suprani, who was one of many *tao share* in the village, the number of participants and the

amount of money involved in one *toe share* remained the same. It can be argued that this was mainly because most of the VFP project members did not use their loans to invest in farming activities but to buy consumer items, such as a new television or a new motorcycle, or to pay back their debts to moneylenders. Therefore, when they needed to buy some important factors of production, such as fertilizer, insecticide or seedlings, and had no money, they would still turn to other sources of loans within the village. Having said this, there was the possibility that in the near future, the new financial policies allowing the project's members to apply for another loan as soon as they had paid back their previous one, might increase the demand for VFP loans because they are not only cheaper than other sources of loans, but now they are also more readily available.

### **Conclusion**

Unlike the case of Ban Tao Fai, the implementation of the VFP came at a time when there was no overall leader within the village. Instead of being a threat to an existing leader, the VFP was thus seen as providing opportunities for new political actors to emerge as potential leaders. As never before, a few ambitious political actors were keen to use the VFP committee as a stage to show off their leadership abilities and skills to the villagers in order to convince them that they were capable of becoming the village leaders. These people included Supot, who had the ultimate goal of becoming an MP and had tried to ally himself with many political figures in the village and sub-district, and Mano, who ran in the 2001 election for *phu yai ban* but lost to Chokdi simply because he had only just returned to the village after spending more than fifteen years in another province. As it turned out, the chance to use the VFP as a stepping stone to a bigger position was not available to everyone who wanted it, however. Social and political norms, which did not easily allow any one villager to dominate more than one local committee unless they had the support of their extended family, meant Supot was cast aside after he tried to control the work of the VFP committee while already dominating the work of the SPP. Having said this, Mano, who came from a large extended family, was so well received when he tried to dominate the work of the VFP committee, so as to prove he was efficient, that he was later successful in being elected as *phu yai ban*. As it seemed, without the opportunity of being on the VFP committees, Mano might not have gained enough credibility to become *phu yai ban* so soon.

It is difficult to distinguish which changes in the dynamics of power were the result of which project, the SPP or the VFP, as the two projects were implemented at almost the same time. But it may be concluded that new local development projects which affect the livelihood of

the villagers directly do indeed provide greater opportunities for new political actors to participate in local politics. Even though the two projects did not attract the villagers' participation to the same extent as in Ban Tao Fai – because the villagers' social characteristics did not encourage trust among each other, especially when it comes to money – the implementation of both projects was debated by those involved in them, to a greater degree than ever before. The fact that the two projects were implemented in the same timeframe, which implies the same social and political context, allowed this thesis to compare and contrast the villagers' response to the implementation of two projects which, though similar, still had some distinctive differences. The most obvious difference between the villagers' response to the implementation of the VFP and their responses to other local development projects, including the SPP, was that they felt a greater need to participate in the work of the VFP committee. As never before, the villagers talked among themselves about how the VFP committee's rules and regulations were irresponsive to their needs and questioned the reasons for the rule which stated that dividends would be paid at the end of the committee's two-year working term, rather than at the end of each year. As the evidents suggested, this need to participate more in the work of the committee stemmed from the fact that the work of the VFP committee affected the villagers' lives to a greater extent than the work of other committees. Notably, however, it was only when the committee's work negatively affected their interests that the villagers started to question it. Indeed, when Supot decided to borrow more money from the SAO – to be used as capital for the SPP to lend out to project members – without discussing it with any project members in advance, no members complained about their lack of involvement. But when they did not receive their dividends from the VFP when they expected to, they started to question the work of the VFP committee.

Apart from this, similar to the case of Ban Tao Fai, the villagers' perception of power also changed after the VFP was implemented. For them, power, or positions in any local committee, came to be seen increasingly as being attached to responsibility and responsiveness to the villagers' needs. As it was evident, the villagers expected more from all their leaders, not just those on the VFP but on other local committees as well. Because their actions had been proved to have a greater effect on the villagers' lives, the leaders' qualifications were increasingly seen as important factors that villagers should consider when voting in local elections. As opposed to the government official's suggestion about the qualities of desirable leaders in the elections for members of the SPP and VFP in 2001, one's qualifications and the possession of special skill alone were no longer defensible as desirable or good leaders. Characteristics such as being responsive to the villagers' needs and displaying initiative, along with being

transparent and accountable, became increasingly important qualities for effective leaders. Influential figures who had these characteristics but had rarely held power thus became more accepted as potential leaders. Even though Supot had gained power in the SPP committee mainly because of the government official's intervention in the election, his responsive and overall good performance as secretary and accountant of the SPP committee made the villagers accept him as one of their leaders. Indeed, despite coming from a very small extended family, Supot was later elected as a member of Krabi Lek SAO precisely because the villagers were satisfied with his performance in the SPP.

Even though the support from one's extended family was still the most important factor in winning local elections, responsiveness to the villagers' needs was clearly becoming more important as a way of preserving acquired power and avoiding possible challenges. In response to changes in the villagers' perception of power, the second VFP committee members tried to be more responsive to the needs of the villagers by setting up new rules to promote the greater participation of the villagers by having a meeting where the VFP committee members and project members and shareholder could discuss the development of the project and the work of the committee. Also, they changed the committee's financial policies so they were more suitable to the villagers' loan requirements and ability to repay. Furthermore, the exploitation of power for the benefit of power holders and their relatives had become less acceptable, if not totally unacceptable. As a result, the domination of one local committee by only one family was not as tolerated as before. Toward the end of the first VFP's working term, Suprani was thus open to cooperation with Manaa. For her, this was not only a means of sharing the burden of the committee's work but a way of avoiding being branded as corrupt. With the involvement of other members from other families, Suprani hoped that the villagers would not think that she was exploiting her position for her personal gain. Evidently, the cooperation between the two families increased during the working term of the second VFP committee. This, coupled with the fact that the rules regarding the dividend had been clarified, meant there were fewer complaints from the villagers.

Despite the differences in the history, livelihood, social and production relations, and norms of the villagers of the two villages, the implementation of the VFP saw similar changes in the dynamics of power within the two villages. Not only did the villagers and the leaders' perceptions of power change but the way that power was used and the strategies used to gain, preserve, enhance, and challenge it also changed. Power had increasingly been perceived as involving responsibility, hard work, and an ability to affect the lives of villagers by furthering or hindering their interests. The villagers had increasingly considered the performance of power



holders as factor having effect on their own benefits. The work of the committee had increasingly been scrutinized. For the leaders of both villages, power was also perceived as not merely authority conferred by the government, which provided them with opportunities to exploit it for their own, or their relatives', benefit, but had increasingly become to be seen as meaning more influence, or the ability to change the villagers' behaviour.

These changes did not occur immediately after the VFP was implemented, however. Apparently, the dynamics of local power of the two villages, or the way in which power was perceived, used, preserved, enhanced, and challenged had gradually changed over the last decade. Since the establishment of the SAO nationwide in 1994, the implementation of the PAP and the SPP of Ban Tao Fai in 1995, and the SPP of Ban Ton Mai shortly before the implementation of the VFP in 2001, the villagers had increasingly been aware of the effect of the project and the work of the committee on their life. Having said this, it was the implementation of the VFP that had sharpened and catalyzed changes in the villagers' perception of power and power holders because the VFP had affected their life more tangibly and substantially. Unlike its precursors, the implementation of the VFP saw, for the first time, the villagers of both villages, particularly those who were involved in the project as members and shareholders, becoming particularly interested in how the committee worked, or how the fund's profit were spent.

## CONCLUSION

After the period of mass protest against the military rule in May 1992, which led to a series of political reforms and the new constitution of 1997 (in which decreasing bureaucratic power was an important element) Thailand was once again in a state of political transition. In January 2001, Thaksin and his Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT) won a landslide election victory, which led to the creation of the country's first ever civilian-led, one-party-dominant government. Thaksin was strongly backed by many of the poor, who made up a majority of the Thai population. Thaksin's popularity among the poor derived largely from the TRT's three main 'populist' policies: the 30 baht fee for all hospital treatment, the freezing of farmers' debts for three years, and the Village Fund Project (VFP), a micro-credit project which distributed one million baht funds to each single village and community nationwide, supposedly to stimulate economic growth at the grassroots level. Together, these populist programmes had a direct impact on the lives of many Thais, especially those in poorer communities and thus helped increased Thaksin's popularity significantly. Out of the three programmes, the VFP was criticized by a number of scholars in Thailand as a strategy to transform the nature of local power for Thaksin's own political advantage.

In investigating changes in the dynamics of power in rural Thailand after the implementation of the VFP, this thesis unravels the distinguished characteristics of the VFP as a project-based programme which involves a large amount of money distributed directly to the villagers, who are deemed the grassroots of politics. Many scholars argue that the VFP was used as a strategy to transform the nature of local power for Thaksin's own political advantage. Unlike the programmes initiated by previous prime ministers to distribute power directly to their political supporters or vote canvassers, such as the implementation of the Sub-district Development Fund by Kukrit Pramkoj, the establishment of the SAO by Chuan Leekpai, and the establishment of the PAO by Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, Thaksin's programmes were not essentially about changing structures. To Thaksin, there was no need to abolish existing local structures and build new ones to create new authorities. Instead, he could establish new local 'development projects', like the VFP, which were managed by ad hoc committees rather than conventional structures. Thaksin created a different formula to acquire and consolidate power. Whereas other premiers injected resources or the rewards they wanted to give to their supporters through new local power structures they had created using the 'resources follow power' formula, Thaksin created a new formula of public management where power followed resources.

In fact, the VFP was all about injecting money – the one million baht funds – and not about creating structures. The VFP was about dispensing and not about reorganizing formal structures. The programme did not distribute resources directly to the villagers, but channeled them through local elites. Politically, it yielded very positive impacts for Thaksin. As some scholars claimed, the VFP undermined the political supporters of other parties. It made most, if not all, local elites into political allies of Thaksin. Most loan recipients perceived the loan as a personal gift from Thaksin. Financially, the programme failed as a means of promoting local economic development at the village level, however. This thesis has shown that the results of the government evaluation of the VFP committees in two villages did not reflect the reality of how the project had really been implemented. Being given an award as a first class VFP committee or classified as 3A, 2A, or 1A VFP committee did not mean excellent management of the fund profits, nor that the loans had been used effectively and efficiently. In fact, it only meant that the committee members had done some good paper work or that they knew what the evaluators were looking for and answered the evaluators' questions impressively. From the investigation, there was no loan-follow up in both villages. The loan recipients could do anything with the loan despite what they had said in their loan applications. In Thailand as a whole, average household debt rose from 70,586 baht, or 5.7 times the average household monthly income in 2000, to 84,603 baht, or 6.1 times monthly income in 2002. In the poorest households, the rise was from 20,083 baht, or 11.5 times monthly income, to 24,188 baht, or 15.2 times monthly income in the same period.<sup>330</sup>

In spite of this, the VFP could be considered somewhat successful in restructuring local power. This thesis had illustrated a certain number of changes in dynamics of power at a village level. The local political changes that occurred after the implementation of the VFP, happened mainly as result of the one million baht fund itself and the expectations and responses the money generated in recipient communities. These changes were, however, unintentional. Compared with other economic development programmes, implemented in the villages during the time of the VFP implementation, such as the SFP and the PAP, which also distributed money directly to the villagers, the VFP distributed a much bigger amount of money (up to 20,000 baht per one villager per one year) and targeted bigger groups of villagers (since any household could apply for a loan). What changed in the dynamics of local power included the villagers' perceptions concerning power and the way in which it should be exercised, the leaders' perception over power and the strategies they used to gain, exercised, maintained, and challenged both 'power to' and 'power over'.

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<sup>330</sup> Kasian, 2006, p. 28

By being members of the VFP committee, the leaders had gained more control over additional aspects of the villagers' lives. They got to decide who received the loans, and how much they received. Having said this, the impact of the VFP was rather mixed. Over time, groups of well placed villagers in the two communities studied came to understand that membership of VFP committees entailed more than holding a token position. Committee membership was related to access to benefits and resources, and unless responsible and dedicated people served as committee members, the community would suffer adversely. As this thesis has shown, not only did the leaders' 'power to' increase, but the way this power was perceived also changed. In line with this, villagers came to realize that the ways in which the project was managed, and the ways in which the committee members performed their tasks, affected their lives tangibly. The dubious performance of the committee members was increasingly questioned and criticized, whereas the performance which affected the villagers in a positive way and responded more to their needs was rewarded with compliments and was more encouraged. The villagers had come to demand more from their committee members. It was no longer enough for leaders to be merely a representative of the biggest social and political clique, as in the case of Ban Tao Fai, or the leading clan network, as in the case of Ban Ton Mai. Nor were good qualifications and the possession of special skills alone any longer enough for people to be considered good committee members. Transparency, accountability, and responsiveness had increasingly become desirable qualities for committee members. Arguably, the extent to which the leaders were scrutinized had been increased.

Despite the differences in the two villages' social economic and political background, the direction of these changes is the same. For the leaders of both villages, power was also perceived not merely as authority conferred by the government, which provided them with opportunities to benefit themselves or their relatives, but was increasingly associated with new forms of responsibility: the ability to change villagers' behaviour and to shape the direction of the community. In trying to preserve their power and influence, the leaders felt the need to respond to such changes by performing their tasks well with a higher degree of transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to the villagers' needs. The strategies the leaders used to gain and maintain their power and control over agenda had also changed. The leaders felt the need to legitimize their dominance of power. In the case of Ban Tao Fai, this led to changes in how the leaders managed the fund and how they enjoyed control over the agenda. As this thesis has illustrated, Ji and his team who were members of the VFP committee felt the need to perform well financially to prove to the villagers that they were best and to let the villagers know more information about the performance of the committee than they had ever done with other

committee. Regarding the election for members of the VFP committee, the leaders also felt the need to create a new voting system, in which their relatives and friends would have advantage to win. Even though it seemed that new faces were allowed to participate in the work of the committee, the extent to which Ji and his team controlled the work of the committee had indeed increased. Having said this, the extent to which the coercion was used in order to control over the agenda had somehow increased. Even though the leaders were willing to talk more about the financial results of their work, they still did not allow the villagers to ask any questions about how the fund had been managed, and would express their feelings more openly. This exhibited the new balance of control over agenda between the leaders and the villagers. In the case of Ban Ton Mai, the villagers' needs for better performance of the VFP committee led to the emergence of new political players. Supot, who had been perceived as a knowledgeable person, was elected as member of the first VFP committee despite not having a big clan network. Apart from this, the non-performing members of the first VFP committee were not elected again at the election for the second committee. Additionally, during the campaign for the second VFP committee member election, Manaa and Mano announced to the public that they would set up a yearly meeting for the VFP members to meet with the VFP committee's members. Also, Mano announced that he would implement a new loan regulation to allow the villagers to apply for more than one loan a year, and to pay back their debt at any time they wished. All of these changes were to demonstrate to the villagers that they were more transparent and more efficient than the first VFP committee.

It is worth noting that all these changes had also been affected by the differences in the villagers' socio-economic background, namely the villagers' history, origins, social interrelation, livelihood, mode or production, and production interrelation, which all played important roles in shaping these changes. In Ban Tao Fai, where the existing leaders' power and influence were unstable and their credibility had been badly damaged, the leaders saw securing power within the VFP committee as the only way to revive their authority, influence, and superior status as the overall leaders in the village. Additionally, the fact that the villagers of Ban Tao Fai were not socially and political united facilitated the use of coercion and the exertion of influence by the leaders. Although some villagers, especially younger ones, were dubious about the work of the committee, and needed to be more involved, these concerns were not properly addressed. Young villagers were not encouraged or allowed to ask questions, since they (or their parents who had power over them) were afraid of being excluded from the committee. Thus they were not considered as threats to the leaders' increasingly stable power and influence. Consequently, even though the leaders had provided them with more information regarding the financial

performances of the committee, they had not felt the need to respond to the young villagers' need for more information regarding how the profits had been spent. In Ban Ton Mai, where the most powerful and influential figure had recently been murdered, leaving the village with leaders whose levels of performance and credibility were low and with no overall leader, the ambitious political players saw the project as a stage to show off their efficiency and skills in order to emerge as potential leaders. Due to the high level of competition, the strategies these candidates used in order to get elected were different from previous ones. Better qualifications and special skills were promoted as the prerequisites for suitable committee members. Even though the size of one's clan network was still very important factor in win elections in Ban Ton Mai, government officials had suggested that such qualities were necessary. Also, because clan networks were very important to the villagers in many respects, although the qualifications and the working styles had increasingly been considered as factors indicating the efficiency of the candidates for members of local committee, support from one's relatives or the size of one's extended family was still the most important factor indicating whether or not one would get elected.

Apart from all this, this thesis has explored how even though the use of power to benefit the power holders, their relatives, and friends was still evident in both villages, the way in which it was done had become less obvious. This was mainly because the leaders wanted to legitimize their power. In Ban Tao Fai, the new election system was initiated to legitimize the higher number of the leaders' relatives in the VFP committee. Also the fake 'raffle', initiated as a means to weedy some unlucky members off the VFP committee, was actually to ensure the continuity and stability of their control over the committee. Only those who were not closely related to them were picked in the lottery. The leaders' decision to lend a second one-million-baht fund in 2003 even though there was no demand for such loans from the villagers was another proof of the use of power to benefit themselves. Because there was no demand for such loan from the villagers, the leaders simply lent the second one-million-baht fund to themselves, in much bigger amounts than anyone could get from the first one-million-baht fund. For example, Somjit and Ji were given 100,000 baht loan each. In the case of Ban Ton Mai, even though some of the non-performing members of the committee were not nominated back as members of the second VFP committee, they nominated their younger relatives who had better levels of education to replace them. As this thesis has revealed, even though there were new players in the committee, all of them only came from the same families which had dominated the first committee. In other words, not only was the villagers' need to have better qualified

committee members met, but also the leaders' families would still get financial benefits derived through yearly payments paid to the new members who were indeed related to them.

The new requirements of ideal leaders were not limited only to the members of the VFP committee, but included those of other local committees as well. As was evident, because of their good performance on the SPP and VFP committees, Supot and Mano were later elected as, respectively, an SAO member and the *phu yai ban* in June 2004. It seems likely as long as the VFP project runs (or should any similar local development project which affect the villagers' life directly and substantially be implemented) the villagers' demands for greater efficiency, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness from their leaders will continue and, in turn, that the leaders would need to respond to these demands. In other words, only when candidates in local elections could exhibit such qualities to the villagers would they be able to gain, preserve, and enhance their power and influence.

Apart from this, this thesis has shown that all these changes in the dynamics of power did not occurred abruptly as a result of the VFP implementation alone, but rather gradually as a result of the implementation of the precursors of the VFP, including the PAP and SPP. In isolating the impacts of the VFP from other programmes, this thesis argues that the VFP has indeed catalyzed and sharpened such changes, or made them more obvious, mainly because the VFP affected the villagers' life more tangibly and substantially, and thus the villagers expected more from the committee members, which led to faster responses from the committee members.

Financially, the leaders also benefited from the programme. Not only did they receive a certain amount of yearly payment, but also they got an opportunity to benefit their friends and relatives with cheap loans from the programme. Also, as was unraveled by this thesis, a number of villagers were suspicious that they had exploited the profits of the programme for their own personal gain. There was no proper book keeping in the VFP committee of both villages. And the committee members had not tried to provide any information on how they had spent the profits. Socially, the leaders had also gained from the programme. By being members of the committee, their social status had been transformed. Because the VFP was to lend the villagers small and cheap loan, these members had been perceived as money lenders. Because the interest rate of the VFP loan was not as high as other loan available in the village, they, especially the prominent ones who enjoyed decision-making power, had become influential money lender. Because most of the leaders in both villages, as in other village nationwide, had been local money lenders long before the implementation of the VFP, the VFP thus emphasized their role as providers and helpers. As this thesis has revealed, some of the leaders, such as Khru Yai of Ban Tao Fai, had even applied for the VFP loan to re-lend to the villagers at a higher price.

All these changes in the dynamics of local power, whereby local people expecting more from the government and their local leaders and thus indirectly forced them to perform with higher efficiency, responsiveness, transparency, and promoted higher participation, happened as unintended results of high expectations from the villagers and from the one million baht fund itself. This 'rural constitution', a term used by Andrew Walker referring to 'a basis of judgment about legitimate, and illegitimate, political power in electoral contexts, embedded in the everyday politics of discussion, gossip and debate about the personal attributes of leaders, resource allocation, development projects and administrative competence',<sup>331</sup> had changed as a result of the VFP implementation. The implementation of the VFP was an expensive lesson, which taught people to think more and expect more from their local leaders and administration. In the long term, this led to the rising expectations on the part of people in rural Thailand in the government's project particularly the populist ones, rather than in the government's policy. For local political players, the implementation of any new, but similar, project would create more opportunities for them to gain even more power and influence over the villagers. Such power and influence were needed not only because it would stabilize or highlight their status as the ultimate, most powerful and most influential leaders in the village, but also because it would gain them opportunities to exploit their status as potential vote canvassers. With this status, they would become connected to provincial politicians and get to exploit another resource – vote buying funds – which would in effect further increase their influence over the villagers. The implementation of the VFP project in both villages had proved that at a village level, it was not only power that could beget power. Control over valuable resources could also beget power and influence.

In response to such changes in the villagers' expectations from the government, during the February 2005 elections, the Democrat Party had campaigned on its own populist policy; offering to outdo Thai Rak Thai by offering free hospital treatment for everyone. Since the Thai Rak Thai Party has been dissolved and Thaksin banned from holding political office for five years, it will be interesting to see whether the new government that follows the expected 2007 elections will be able to come up with its own brand-new populist 'local development' projects. Despite their persistent attempts to undermine Thaksin and his legacies, the military junta the Council for National Security (CNS), and the interim Surayud Chulanont government have apparently failed to find an effective replacement for the kind of popular legitimacy the VFP

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<sup>331</sup> Walker, 2007, pp. 1-2. This term is developed from the term 'cultural constitution', coined by renowned Thai historian and public intellectual, Nidhi Eoseewong, referring to the 'way of life,



created. On 14 October 2006, one month after the coup was staged, the Surayud government announced that they would not cancel the Village Fund Project.<sup>332</sup> It remains to be seen to what extent project-based, patronage-rich local development initiatives will successfully replace bureaucratic, structural methods of managing provincial Thailand. But initial evidence suggests that Thaksin's VFP unintentionally played a part in transforming the expectations Thailand's rural people placed in both the country's political leaders, and the leaders of their own local communities.

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ways of thinking, and values' that underpin the key institutions in Thailand's political life. For details on the 'cultural constitution', see Nidhi (2003).

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