

The Role of Village Headmen in Conflict Resolution: A Case Study of Thepha District, Songkhla Province

Kumpee Thongpoon

Faculty of Liberal Art and Education, Hatyai University, Thailand

kumpee@hu.ac.th

Abstract

The roles of village headmen are very important factor in solving conflict in the village. They stop problems and also change conflicts into positive ways through their authority. They could alleviate the conflict issues before sending them to the court. They perform their roles based on their potential, skills, and feature of disputes as well as conflict situations. Since unrest in southernmost has reached to Tephra district which once has long been calm area in Songkhla province. It is viewed as violent area due to the separatist movement. This violent evidence has emphasized how important the village headmen are.

Key words: Village headmen, Conflict resolution, Role, Songkhla province

1. Introduction

Thailand is a society that has social relationship with family and share with generosity. The societies are not too large. They have commitment to follow the traditions of their ancestors and their implementation. If the conflicts or controversies happen in the community, people will go to see someone who is respected or superior in solving problems. Later, it was appointed head of the village. This role was transferred to the village chief and village headmen for resolve conflicts in the community. Solving the conflict in the district and village, there has been much altered. It depends on the characteristics of the village to resolve the conflict with a major role in the village as the local government to resolve disputes without going to the court. It shows how the role of the village headmen depends on the nature of the conflict. It includes the severity situation of the problem and to manage conflicts.

In this study, author focused on the role of the village headmen in the conflict resolution: a case study of the Thepa district, Songkhla province.

Thepa is one of the four districts of Songkhla province which unrest has been happening. It relates to the three southern border provinces' situations. The government also has declared that Thepa is considered as violent area. The purposes of this study are (1) to study the conflict in Thepa district of Songkhla province, (2) to study the role of the village headmen in the resolution of conflicts in Theph district of Songkhla province, (3) to study how to resolve conflicts in Thepa district of Songkhla province.

The reason why Thepa district is the case study are (1) this area is a combination of multicultural areas between Buddhism and Malayu Muslim, and (2) this area is related to unrest situation in the three southernmost provinces.

2. Literature review

2.1 Concept of roles

Adiwatanasit (2532: 45) states that the role of the status, coupled with the social status of a conceptual framework for a common understanding of society. The role is considered from behavioral acting of a person and status of their existence. Khengkun (2537) studied the role of the village headmen in the era of globalization and found that there are several important factors resulting in the existence of village headmen. Firstly, village headmen are naturally born. They possess charisma leadership and are respected by people in the village. Secondly, the amendment of Local Government Act 2457 is also a key factor in changing of the role of the village headmen in order to meet the changing needs of modern society. Thirdly, the election of village headmen is to support the democratic system. It opens to the public in the district to directly elect officer. If people are not satisfied with the selected person, he/she can be changed. Fourthly, authority of the village Headmen can support central government. It also contributes to the governance of all forms. For example, local governments in Bangkok, there are headmen in each district. They can support the central government to be more effective. Moreover, Champamon (2539) studied the role of village headmen in the conservation of Environment and natural resources. He conducted the case study of Banpai district in Khonkhaen province. His results reported that most village headmen have a greater role in the implementation of the policy of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. It indicated that Ministry of the Interior and related agencies should have a clear policy and practice. They should be trained to expect village headmen in playing a role in forming policy.

2.2 Role theory

Sengpracha (2541: 136) discussed the role that the concept is the status of compliance behaviors. The role of social behavior and people with their homework as a teacher to teach students, the police have to escort people, the armies have to fence the country, children obey their parents and so on.

Suratnakawigul (2542: 65-66) has ideas about the role that it is as the abstract. They consist of three aspects. The ideal role is expectations of individuals in the society for guiding practices. The person who has the status of ideal role should conduct his/her life based on ideal role. However, he/she may not follow this role is also acceptable. The perceived role is a role that people consider themselves how he/she should be. It depends on attitude, values, individual personality and experience. The actual role is the role that people are acting. It depends on actual situation, resulting in different action in each context.

2.3 Village Headmen

Reconstruction of the central government purposed by department of Provincial Administration (2553: 39-79) mentions that King Rama V graciously announced a new series of 12 ministries which apply from Western countries. The distribution of power and responsibility are put to particular expertise. King has absolute power to command and control the lords. Reformation of provincial government which includes the cities along the border is called "Monthon". The objective of policy is to protect the country from colonial threats which called as "Thesapiban system". In collaboration of Thesapiban has shown the relationship among country, district, and village. Commissioner is responsible for implementing policies and orders of the central government. The reforms in the provincial government are established with Thesapiban. In do so, the King Rama V graciously start by making a small project. Then it is gradually expanded.

Since then, the village headman is firstly elected at Bang Pa-in, Ayutthaya province, on August 10, 2435. This is considered as the beginning of a democratic government in the country. The rules also appear more pronounced. Central government promulgates the local government Act 2457. The public administration has to follow new administration system. All provinces are divided into districts and villages respectively. Also, Ministry of Interior announced that ten of August of each year is the village Headmen day.

2.4 Conflict

There are several scholars have provided the meaning of conflict. Accordint to the Royal Institute of Thailand dictionary BE 2542 (2546: 78), conflict is simply defined as a disagreement. Other scholars have given more details of conflict which related to behaviors of individuals.

Santiwong and Santiwong (2535: 124) have given the meaning that conflict refers to behavior between groups. It derives from expected values and incentives which related to each other. Santiwong (2537: 284) also highlighted that the conflict as a hatred condition. People compete for a better position. Oppression is occurred between groups, resulting in the separation of subgroups. Consequently, it deems that there is no collaboration. It does not affect only the disagreement of thoughts, but it leads to the intervention and disturbance from the opposite sides destroy intention to work of one side.

Kesukpun (2538: 161) defines conflict as misunderstanding among individuals or groups. They may be not satisfied to continue their work due to the limited management position and unfairness. Meanwhile, Sengmani (2544: 128) has provided that disagreement can be happened from individual differences of attitudes between people, leading to the impeding of task related goals. Refer to Wongvnutara (2544: 158), conflict is defined as disagreement between two

people or more. It is caused by limited resources that people have to allocate. Moreover, conflict is the impact of differences of individual values and perception.

Sanyawiwat (2546: 38) defines conflict as an incompatibility, resulting in dispute, fighting, intimidating, forcing, and taking advantages in order to win in the situation.

Finally, Watanasup (2547: 10) notes that conflicts and disputes over the terms used interchangeably, but in some cases there is a sense that it is specific. The conflict is a matter of opinion or belief differently. However, the parties can work together. For example, spouses may have conflict; however, they are still happy with living together.

2.5 Conflict Resolution

Silapiyodom (2540: 44-45) suggests that conflict can be solved through three means, power and suspension, compromise, and integrative problem solving. Power and suspension consist of four ways. They are firstly forcing which refers to authorized actions. However, this means may lead to negative consequences. Secondly, smoothing is deemed to be appropriate way in solving conflict. Meanwhile thirdly, avoidance is unwilling to solve conflict. This also can be happened especially by the top management views. Possibly, their perspectives on such conflict are not seriously problematic to the group or organization. Fourthly, majority rule is also the appropriate way in solving conflict. This way will be more beneficial, if members of groups are in line with rules and justice.

According to compromise means, the management attempts to stop conflict using the third party. This means is relatively more useful comparing to using power and suspension. There is some advantages that individuals between two group have less hostile feeling.

Finally, the integration problem solving is considered as the most

successful approach. Conflict between groups will be transformed to joint solution. The two dispute parties will figure out the way to overcome conflict. They all together attempt to stop conflict through their consensus.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

Purposively selected sample of the population in the Thepa district, Songkhla province which plays a major role in the functioning of district and village chiefs are (1) All seven Kamnans of sub-districts in Thepa district, Songkhla province, (2) the village Headmen in the Thepa district, Songkhla province were selected, resulting in a total of 14 persons from each sub-district. They were purposed by Kamnan of each sub-districts, who had appropriate role of guardian in an interview with the conflicts resolution in the community. Therefore, the total samples used in this study were 21 persons (seven Kamnans and 14 headmen).

The following processes are (1) study of concepts, theories and research on the role of the village to resolve the conflict in the community, (2) use the information from the study to the synthesis and to meet the research objectives in this study, (3) the instrument development is adapted from Silapiyodom (2540), Chaiyarat (2551), and Trakunpichayachai (2552) as a guide for this study.

3.2 Data Collection

Research instrument used in this study is structured interview. It consisted of six parts. Part one was demographic profile of respondents. Part two was characteristics of headmen. Part three was roles of headmen. Part four was conflict that occurs in the village. Part five was approach of conflict resolution in the village. Part six was suggestion

Twenty one of village headmen were interviewed by author.

(1) The interview data were analyzed and classification purposes the

framework defined in this study, (2) The interview data were analyzed content (content analysis) and relevant documents, (3) make descriptive presentations and content analysis (descriptive analysis), which describes the purpose of the question indicated.

4. Results

In particular, the problem that was happened from family problems. There were many problems that got effect from family problem as drug problems, crime, contention, while also had political issue in the community. Now, political institutions also lose stability and confidence in the country. It becomes a big social problem that makes government to seriously solve it. Moreover, unrest in the region is also viewed as an important problem of the country.

The study found that causes of conflicts in communities in Thepa district, Songkhla province consist of (1) controversy, (2) lack of unity, (3) political issues, (4) drugs, (5) crime, (6) family problems, and (7) unrest problem in the areas.

For the role of headmen, it was found that the village headmen played three critical roles in solving conflict and governing people in their community. They could play ideal role through reasonableness, truth, justice, sincerity in solving problems, care and assistance people, and responsibility. Results also suggested that being committed to the serious practices, engaging in working and attempting of resolving conflicts could reflect their perceived role. Additionally, they could demonstrate their actual role through being fully work, being a good coordinator, being honest, as well as straightforward working.

In particular, the violent conflict which is related to the community, the village headmen utilize the participation of their people as the appropriate means in solving such conflict. In order to do so, village headmen strategically create and organize several activities such as sport

competition, saving cooperation, and production of community goods and product. Then, people will be involving in these activities leading to more participation among people in the community. Furthermore, for the unrest conflict, village headmen set a security group to assure safety in their areas. In addition, they also encourage young generation to learn their culture and context of their community through historical study. With the hope that, these activities can both prevent and solve conflict in community.

In summary, the means of conflict resolution within village were purposed in several ways. They primarily solved conflicts with the participation of people, and followed by compromise and authority power that included majority rules, smoothing, and avoidance respectively. Moreover, headmen also worked with local government in doing activities. However, it should be noted that people still relied more on headmen rather than local government.

5. Conclusions and Discussions

5.1 The village headmen are expected by people to solve conflict in the community and be a representative of village to propose the proposal to official unit for community development.

5.2 In circumstance, families inclined to collapse. Then, people in the community have to preserve and support the existence of families in order to prevent the impact of the families collapse.

5.3 The best player in solving conflicts is that people in community themselves. Further than that the official is the second choice to be invited into the picture.

5.4 The conflict resolution that is the most suitable can be used in community is the compromise and integration of problem solving.

5.5 The research interviewed only the village headmen because of the time to do research. For the next, researcher should interview the other

social of institutions such as teacher, the Imams, the monks or religious institutions, and the elders in the community.

5.6 Should be study in depth the problem and issues which affect directly to the community to get more details of each issue. Because of the study was to focus on the role of the village to resolve the conflict in the community. Not delve into the details of each the problem.

6. References

Adiwatanasit, C. (2532). *Sociology*. Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University press.

Chaiyarat, K. (2551). *Local leader in conflict resolution in community. case study Piboonrak district. Udonani province*. Thesis Master of Political science, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University.

Champamon, Y. (2539). *The role of village headmen in the conservation of Environment and natural resources: Case Study Banpai district Khonkhen province*. Thesis master of National Institute of Development Administration.

Department of Provincial Administration (2553). *Handbook for Village headmen*. Bangkok. Asaraksadindan Press.

Kesukpun, A. (2538). *Skill and Praticce Management (3rd)*. Bangkok, Sukkapapjai Press.

Khengkun, S. (2537). *The role of village headmen in globalization*. Bangkok, Department of provincial Administration.

Santiwong, T. (2537). *Organization Behavior*. Bangkok, Thaiwattanapanit Press.

Santiwong, T. & Santiwong, C. (2535). *Organization Behavior*. Bangkok, Thaiwattanapanit Press.

Sanyawiwat, S. (2546). *Sociology*. Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University Press.

Sengmani, W. (2544). *Organization managemant. 3rd*, Bangkok. Rabeng press.

Sengpracha, N. (2541). *Man and Society(4th)*. Bangkok, O.S. Printing House.

Silapiyodom, S. (2540). *Community leader and conflict resolution*. Thesis master of Art Political science, Ramkhamheang University.

Suratnakawi-Gul, P. (2542). *Man and Society(2nd.)* Bangkok, Kasetserit University Press.

The Royal Institute of Thailand. *Dictionary The Royal Institute of Thailand BE 2542 (2546)*. Bangkok. Akasonjareontat.

Trakunpichayachai, C. (2552). *The role of Village headmen in conflict resolution in Nakhonratchasima Provine*. Thesis master of art, Nakhonratchasima Rajabat University.

Watanasup, W. (2547). *Conflict: principle and problem solving tool (2nd)*. Nontaburi. King Prachatipok institue.

Wongvnutara, P. (2544). *Human Resources Psychology*. Bangkok, Pimded.

