

3. Structure and Function of Communities

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Structure and Functions of Communities

In this chapter we will clarify the functions of territorially based communities in the formation and management of development organizations. We will first examine the characteristics of three types of locality groups that are commonly found in most rural areas of Thailand: (1) indigenous villages, (2) Buddhist temple support groups, and (3) administrative villages. Each of these locality groups has different organizational functions. However, their geographical territories overlap to a greater or lesser extent, and there are also functional interrelationships. For this reason, a “community” should be understood as an entity in which functions and attributes of these three locality groups are comprehensively integrated.

The Indigenous Village as a Social Unit

Let us first look at the factors that lead to the recognition of a geographical conglomeration that is formed when people congregate to live in an area as a social grouping. A group of residences that forms naturally in this way is referred to in this study as an “indigenous village.” It is important to note that such a village does not necessarily correspond with a settlement that is recognized as a geographical unit. In fact, several small settlements that appear to be scattered are often seen by the residents themselves and outsiders as forming a single social grouping. Conversely, we sometimes find when we trace the historical background of what appears to be a single settlement that it is in

fact an integrated unit formed through the merger of multiple locality groups (i.e., indigenous villages). Northeastern Thailand is a region where the processes that led to the formation of indigenous villages are recognized and remembered by the residents themselves. The region is a plateau in the basin of a tributary of the Mekong River. Until the end of the 1950s there was a considerable expanse of unoccupied forest. For this reason, many of the settlements in this region are relatively new, and it is possible to procure information about village formation processes from the residents themselves.

For the people of northeastern Thailand, undeveloped forests were worlds ruled by good and evil spirits. When they logged and cleared part of the forest to build villages, people felt the need to protect their settlements from the evil spirits that inhabited the surrounding forest. They therefore asked the good spirits, which were regarded as the original rulers of the land, to ensure the safety of their entire settlements. Shrines (*san puta*) were built for these village guardian spirits (*puta*) on the outskirts of villages.¹ These shrines are wooden buildings about the height of a man. They are simple structures erected by just a few people. Therefore, worshipping the *puta* is the first collective act that occurs when villagers begin to regard themselves as a locality grouping.

In Thon Village, which was studied by the author, the *puta*-worshipping ceremony is carried out twice a year: once before the start of the monsoon, and again after the rice harvest. One of the villagers is a medium (*cham*), and it is he who decides the date and leads these ceremonies.² At the pre-monsoon ceremony, the *cham* asks the village guardian spirit about the village's luck for that year. He releases two turtles, named the "paddy field turtle (*tao na*)" and the "village turtle (*tao ban*)," in front of the shrine. From the way the turtles walk, the *cham* predicts the outlook for the safety of agricultural production and livelihoods in the village as a whole.

In May 1989 one of the villagers cut down a tree in the forest of the *puta*, a sacred area that forms part of the village's communal land. The village headman called a meeting of elders and leaders to discuss this incident. He then ordered the villager concerned to pay a fine and plant a tree. If the villagers believed that the *puta* extended its protection only to each individual member of the village and not to the village as a whole, surely they would have expected only the person responsible for this sacrilegious act to be punished by the *puta*. In fact, the villagers assumed that the safety of the entire village was threatened by one person's sacrilege against the guardian spirit. For that reason, the village as a whole punished the offender.

When a drought occurs, or if the village is beset by unhappy events, such as a spate of sickness or deaths, the people interpret these as a sign that evil

spirits have entered the village. In such cases the villagers hold a ceremony (*siang khong*) to drive out the evil spirits (Chop 1984). The ceremony uses a dummy made with a fish container (*khong*). Two sticks are attached as legs which are gripped by two villagers. The *cham* calls on a spirit to enter the dummy (*siang khong*), and then asks it why unhappy events are afflicting the village. The *siang khong* then begins to move independently of the two villagers holding its legs until it strikes one of two poles erected nearby. The *cham* interprets the dummy's answer from the way it strikes the pole. If it is found that the unfortunate events were caused by the presence of an evil spirit that infiltrated into the village, the *siang khong* rushes toward the boundary of the village, apparently dragging along the two villagers who are holding it, in order to expel the evil spirit. In Thon Village, *siang khong* ceremonies were carried out seven times in the eleven years between 1978 and 1988. Four of the ceremonies were prompted by outbreaks of disease, three by droughts, and one by an incident of theft in the village.³ Unhappy events that afflict the entire village, such as sickness or drought, are often attributed to an incursion by evil spirits following the withdrawal of protection by the guardian spirit due to acts of sacrilege against the *puta* by some of the villagers. In order to organize collective action to protect the village as a whole, as is the case with the *siang khong* ceremony, the villagers must accept their common responsibility as residents and define the range of people who should enjoy the collective protection. For this reason, the *cham* must never fail to inform the *puta* of the names of new residents and the people who no longer live in the village.

Before the village can be recognized as a unit under the protection of the guardian spirit, it is necessary to establish a clear demarcation between the world of evil spirits outside of the village and the world of human beings within the village. This demarcation is symbolically indicated by pillars, such as a village pillar (*lak ban*) or village boundary pillars (*lak khet ban*), and by ceremonies relating to these pillars. In many cases, the village pillar is a pointed wooden post about one meter high and is located at about the center of the village. The status of the pillar as a symbol of protection for the village is confirmed through the *thambun ban* (merit making for a village) ceremony, which is carried out near the pillar. In Thon Village, this ceremony is conducted over a three-day period. On the third day, the villagers bring offerings to the evil spirits (which are assumed to be outside of the village) and place these at the pillar where a monk first sprinkles them with holy water. The villagers then discard the offerings outside of the residential area of the village. The aim is to satisfy the evil spirits with the offerings so that they will remain outside of the village and not enter its precincts.

The village boundary pillars, often similar in shape to the village pillar, are commonly erected at entrances to the residential area of a village or around the perimeter. The pillars themselves clearly symbolize the geographical area to be protected. In Thon Village, metal plaques with magic words inscribed on them were nailed to the pillars by a monk. Some villages use stones buried at the side of the roads instead of using pillars (NE1). In certain circumstances, such as when a village has been afflicted by a spate of misfortune, a monk is invited to erect new pillars or to strengthen existing pillars by re-erecting them (NE33, NE37, NE40). According to Anuman Rajadhon, villagers used to erect gates (*khu ban*) at their entrances to protect their villages (Sathiarakoset 1959, p. 31). Apart from pillars, the people of Thon Village reportedly used to enclose the perimeter of the village in cogon grass (*ya kha*) tied into ropes when the village was in danger of invasion by evil spirits.

This belief in spirits is found not only in the Northeast but also in most of northern Thailand. The northern region encompasses a plateau in the upper reaches of the Chaophraya River and the surrounding mountains (officially designated as the Upper Northern Region). Many of the settlements in this region consist of villager residences clustered together on flatlands or in foothills. Each settlement worships its own village guardian spirit (*phi sua*) and has its own medium (*tang khao*). For example, the traditional settlement that later became Tha Kham Village was built around a temple, and originally there was a shrine to their *phi sua* in the settlement. However, over ten years ago some of the villagers began to establish a small settlement a short distance away from the original settlement. It was decided to build a new shrine in this settlement to honor the *phi sua*. As soon as a new place of human habitation formed, the people began to seek a new spiritual presence to provide direct protection. In contrast, Nong Bua Luang Village (N13) and Ton Kaeo Village (N14) have multiple shrines as reminders of the fact that they were once divided into small sections (*pok*) or settlements. In northern Thailand, many villages have village pillars (*chai ban*), and village boundary posts are not common. But in some villages the people place talisman markers (*talaeo*) or a cotton string around the village perimeter during *thambun ban* to prevent anything unclean from entering during the sacred ceremony (Turton 1975, pp. 359–60; Moerman 1966, p. 138).

Pillar cults look similar to *puta* cults but are not the same. One clear difference is the linkage between pillar cults and Buddhism. In some villages in the Northeast, statues of the Buddha are placed in holes made in the village pillars (NE33) (NE37), while in some other villages a shrine with a statue of the Buddha inside is erected in place of a village pillar (NE3). In these communities, the power of the Buddha is interpreted and used as a force that protects

the entire village. In rural Thailand, entire villages (rather than individuals) are regarded as recipients of protection by the Buddha. The following incident, which occurred in Thon Village on the eve of Songkran (the Thai new year) is an excellent example of this attitude. On the evening of that day, young people were in the temple precincts preparing for the Miss Songkran Contest under the direction of the abbot. Two youths who had a grudge against the abbot charged into the temple grounds on motorcycles and publicly criticized him. Several days later these youths visited the homes of the village headman and the abbot to apologize, but the matter did not end there. By criticizing the representative of Buddhism in the village and jeopardizing his authority, the youths had jeopardized the peace of the entire village, so the people of the village regarded their behavior not as a private problem, but as a common problem (*phanha suan ruam*). The two youths were therefore severely chastised in front of the villagers. Apart from this incident, the villagers have various other opportunities to confirm that their village is protected by the presence of the temple. For example, at the start of Buddhist Lent (*khao phansa*), some of the boys in the village leave their homes and start training as monks (for a specific period). When the number of boys participating in this activity is high, people feel that they can look forward to a good year. During the *khao phansa* festival, the village stages a procession (*hae nak*) of the young trainee monks and hosts drama and film evenings. The village also organizes the collection of donations for this purpose (Kingshill 1976, p. 136; Moerman 1966, p. 150).

One of the teachings of the Theravada Buddhism practiced in Thailand is that all people who earn merit will achieve salvation. The transcendental power of Buddhism is also seen as a force that protects the village as a whole from evil spirits, particularly in the areas where villagers regard their villages as a single integrated unit. As mentioned above, in villages in northeastern and northern Thailand, the existence of animistic beliefs is reflected in a very clear awareness of the area of the village that is to be protected. Interestingly, the tendency to regard the temple as a protective force for the village increases in proportion to the strength of the tendency to view the village as a single unit. People view their village as a community with a common destiny protected from outside evil spirits not only by animism but also through the medium of Buddhism.

The preceding discussion concerned villages in the Northeast and the North. In central Thailand, which consists mainly of the Chaophraya Delta and the gently sloping land surrounding it, villages differ widely from their counterparts in the Northeast and the North in their form and characteristics as social units. Settlements commonly develop along irrigation channels and rivers or

roads, or as scattered settlements where people build houses on part of their own farmland. In such places, villages do not have the appearance of clustered units. This situation is not conducive to the emergence of common symbols or behavior designed to protect the village. Therefore, in central Thailand in particular, it is extremely rare, even in settlements that are geographically unified, to find symbols or behavior indicating that residents regard their settlements as social units. Only a small number of villages in central Thailand have village shrines. As far as the author is aware, there are no village pillars or village boundary pillars. In the Upper Central (officially designated as the Lower Northern Region), settlements often form when a shortage of land along rivers causes people to occupy and develop hinterland areas. This is a pattern that the region shares with northeastern Thailand. Even in such places, however, it is rare to find villages with guardian spirits. This suggests that the presence or absence of guardian spirits may not be determined solely by the geographical characteristics of the village. Cultural differences between the Lao Thai of northern and northeastern Thailand and the Siamese Thai of central Thailand also appear to play a role.⁴

Yet even in central Thailand, it is not uncommon for villages to hold *thambun ban* or *thambun klang ban* (Chatthip and Pornpilai 1994, pp. 210–14). Monks are invited to these ceremonies to recite Buddhist scriptures to the gathered people. In the settlement of Huai Rong, the residents take food and earthen images of humans and animals to ceremonies in order to pray for the safety of people and livestock. However, behavior and symbols that delineate villages from the outside world do not appear in the ceremonies, and people from neighboring villages commonly participate. Also, it is understood that those who do not take part in ceremonies gain no merit, even if they are members of the village, and that nonresidents who take part can gain merit.

Finally, let us consider the situation in southern Thailand, which is the region of the country running down the Malay Peninsula. In the South there seem to be some regional variations in the form that villages take. As far as the author was able to observe, however, most villages are similar to those in central Thailand. Some settlements are made up of groups of houses, ranging in size from a few up to a dozen or so, scattered across farmland, while others are made up of houses standing in a row along roads.⁵ In the former case, the original unit of settlement is a group of related families. Such small settlements are called *ban*, and each settlement has its own name (S12) (S13). Traditionally, there existed no locality groups that bound these sparsely located small *ban* settlements together. However, there are other types of settlements in southern Thailand. These are villages that originally developed as cluster settlements which sometimes have community symbols and ceremo-

nies. For example, administrative villages in Khlong Pia Subdistrict in Songkhla Province (S4) are cluster settlements located along roads with each village separated from the other by a distance of 0.5 to 2 kilometers. Each village has a village pillar (*sao lak ban*) where annual ceremonies are held to pray for the safety of the entire village. Phrong Ngu Village (S5) and Sathon Village (S7), which are also in Songkhla Province, are cluster settlements and hold spirit-welcoming ceremonies (*rap thewada*) to pray for the safety of individual village households. In years when there are many misfortunes, Phrong Ngu Village holds a ceremony to purify the entire community. The perimeter of the village is enclosed with white thread, while monks recite Buddhist scriptures. Unfortunately, there has been little research about rural social structures in this region, and the author was able to conduct surveys of only a limited area. For this reason, many aspects of village society in the South remain unclear.⁶

Collective Activities in Indigenous Villages

There were a number of collective village activities in rural Thailand undertaken at the level of individual indigenous village. However, the scope of administrative and indigenous villages commonly overlaps in rural life. For the purposes of the following discussion, therefore, collective activities that appear to be essential to community life for people living in the same locations will be treated as activities in indigenous villages. Activities relating to temples and communal land will be examined later.

One type of collective activity relates to defense. In northeastern Thailand villages were rarely attacked by robbers (Ko 1990, p. 192), and the biggest law and order problem was cattle stealing. A study that examined this problem reported that when there was the theft of cattle, the village headman called the people together by sounding a wooden gong. They then went in search of the stolen cattle (Ko 1990, pp. 22–23). If the law and order situation deteriorated, night patrols were organized. A survey conducted in Udon Thani Province in 1964, for example, showed that thirty-six out of the thirty-nine villages in the region were operating night patrols (Blakeslee, Huff, and Kickert 1965, pp. 316–17). At such times, the village headman would roster the men of the village to stand guard at village entrances and exits and inside the village. However, it is not known how long such night patrols had been organized prior to the time of the survey. In this way, in the Northeast, villages have organized collective activities as a way of protecting themselves from external enemies. In Thon Village, night patrols were first organized at the village level in the 1970s. This followed an increase in thefts of money due to the increasing shift to a cash economy.⁷

Night patrols are also frequently organized by villages in central Thailand. However, it appears that such patrols are generally organized at the direction of district offices. It may be more appropriate, therefore, to regard these as activities of administrative villages rather than indigenous villages. David Bruce Johnston, who has researched the economic history of the central delta region, reported that villages in this region failed to take defensive action even when numerous incidents of banditry occurred in the late nineteenth century, with the result that the government was forced to send troops to defend villages or direct village headmen to lead defensive action (Johnston 1975, pp. 176, 185, 192-93).

In addition to defense from external enemies, villages also need to maintain internal peace and order. Normally order is maintained by the attitudes of village people who are reluctant to jeopardize relationships with their neighbors. However, when some people engage in behavior that threatens the safety of village life, villagers must work as a group to restrict such behavior. One method used to maintain internal order is to set rules that are accepted by all members of the locality group. In Thon Village, for example, the following traditional village rules are still recognized today: (1) large and middle-sized animals may not be slaughtered in the village; and (2) cogon grass may not be brought into the village before the stipulated date (determined by the *cham*). These rules have been observed in order to avoid angering the village guardian spirit (*puta*). This linkage of village rules with the village guardian spirit was also observed in neighboring villages around Thon Village. There are also rules that govern the direct actions of residents toward each other without reference to supernatural spirits. Such rules tend to have been established in recent times.⁸ In the 1970s, Thon Village began to impose 500-baht fines on people who stole bananas, bamboo shoots, and chickens, who relieved themselves in vegetable gardens, or who fired guns inside the village. These secular rules became necessary because of the increasing frequency of problems that had not previously occurred and which had been brought on by the depletion of the natural environment around the village, coupled with the increasing importance of the cash economy.

In recent years, villages have started to own communal resources, and the need to manage these resources has also led to the creation of rules. For example, when a village builds a communal fish farm, it establishes rules against fishing in the pond and penalties for those who break the rules (Seri 1989b, p. 72). There have also been cases in which villages have been forced to regulate participation in funerals because the level of voluntary cooperation was insufficient. Table 3-1 lists village rules noted by the author during his surveys.

Even where rules did not exist before, it is possible that restrictions and

TABLE 3-1
VILLAGE RULES IN VILLAGES COVERED BY THE AUTHOR'S SURVEYS

Name of Village (Province)	Rules	Survey Number
Thon (Khon Kaen)	Large and middle-sized animals may not be slaughtered in the village. Cogon grass may not be brought into the village before the stipulated date. Stealing, firing guns in the village, relieving oneself in other people's vegetable gardens incur a fine of 500 baht for each offense (since the mid-1970s).	Cf. Appendix A
Bung Kae (Khon Kaen)	Plowing with draft animals, killing four-legged animals, bringing firewood into the village, threshing grain, and carrying paddy to granaries are prohibited on Buddhist holy days. Firing guns in the village incurs a fine of 200 baht per shot.	NE2
Nong Kha (Khon Kaen)	Threshing grain, bringing firewood into the village, slaughtering animals are prohibited on Buddhist holy days. (There is a fine of 6 baht per offense, but this not enforced today.)	NE3
Khambon (Khon Kaen)	Catching fish in the communal pond is prohibited (since 1995).	NE4
Klang Hung (Khon Kaen)	The village prohibits stealing, firing guns in the village (1,000-baht fine per shot), slaughtering animals (500-baht fine per head), and cutting trees at night (apology to the village guardian spirit).	NE5
Nong Ben (Khon Kaen)	Bringing cogon grass into the village before the <i>puta</i> festival (12-baht fine per offense) and firing guns in the village (100-baht fine per shot) are prohibited.	NE6
Han (Khon Kaen)	Cutting trees in the community forest is prohibited (500–1,000–baht fine since 1989). Fishing in the swamp is prohibited (50-baht fine per line since 1989).	NE21
Muang Noi (Roi Et)	Cutting trees in the community forest is prohibited (500-baht fine since 1991).	NE39
Pla Khun (Roi Et)	Cutting trees in the community forest is prohibited.	NE41
Non Sung (Roi Et)	Cutting trees in the community forest is prohibited (500-baht fine since 1991).	NE43
Si Phon Thong (Roi Et)	Catching fish in the communal pond is prohibited (500-baht fine plus publication of name since 1988).	Cf. Appendix A
Wang Nam Yat (Chiang Mai)	It is prohibited to leave the public water supply running (100-baht fine per offense) and to shout when drunk (100-baht fine per offense).	N1

TABLE 3-1 (Continued)

Name of Village (Province)	Rules	Survey Number
Tha Ma Oh (Chiang Mai)	Theft results in the loss of funeral association membership (since around 1984).	N3
Nong Bua Luang (Chiang Mai)	People are required to attend wakes with the funeral host if the deceased is of the same <i>muat</i> (since 1984). Gambling is prohibited (since 1984). Failure to participate in village development activities incurs a 50-baht fine.	N13
Ton Kao (Chiang Mai)	A 50-baht fine is imposed for failure to participate in village meetings or communal work.	N14
Kut Chok (Chai Nat)	The headman must be informed when outsiders come to the village. All villagers are required to assist with funerals.	UC5
Phrong Ngu (Songkhla)	If a person's cattle eat another person's rice shoots or rubber tree saplings, a fine of 1 baht per rice plant or 50 baht per rubber tree is imposed (since around 1975). Damming waterways except for agricultural purposes is prohibited (since 1990: 200-baht fine per dam).	S5
Sathon (Songkhla)	There is a 500-baht fine for firing guns in the village without proper reason. Fines for theft are set according to the items stolen. Pigs that wander in another person's vegetable plot may be killed (however, the meat must be shared equally with the owner). If an outsider staying in the village (such as a rubber plantation worker) commits a theft or other unlawful act, he will be expelled from the <i>tambon</i> (subdistrict). These rules have been in force since 1972. As of August 1995, fines totaling 2,500 baht had been collected (added to the village development fund).	S7
Wang Lung (Nakhon Si Thammarat)	Fishing in the canal by illegal means (explosives, electric shock, etc.) is prohibited (since around 1985). Offenders who know this rule incur a 500 baht fine. A lighter penalty is imposed on those who acted in ignorance.	S11

Source: Surveys by the author during 1989-95.

sanctions may be imposed against actions that threaten the safety of people. The aforementioned *siang khong* ceremony is often used to find robbery culprits (for instance, in Thon and Si Phon Thong villages) (Suwit, Chop, and Sumet 1985, p. 277). The *siang khong* rushes toward the house in which stolen items are hidden and bangs against it. The ceremony can thus be regarded as a kind of communal sanction in the name of the spirit. People whose very presence constitutes a danger are sometimes regarded as incarnations of evil spirits and punished on that basis. Such people are called *phi pop* in north-

eastern Thailand and *phi ka* in the North. Studies reported that they were isolated from contact within the village and sometimes even driven out (Ko 1990, pp. 233–34; Tambiah 1970, p. 333; Turton 1975, pp. 455–56). People classified as *phi pop* apparently include certain types of magicians, as well as people who fail to harmonize with their communities (Tambiah 1970, pp. 331–32; Suthep 1968, pp. 115–18). A feature of both *siang khong* and *phi pop* is that sanctions are justified by linking public morality to animistic beliefs.

In central Thailand many villages lack the sense of solidarity as indigenous villages, and they appear to have no system for maintaining order. The author was, in most cases, unable to find any system resembling village rules in villages in central Thailand.

Buddhist Temple Support Groups

Ninety-five per cent of Thailand's population is Buddhist. Their temples are a common sight in rural areas of the country, with the exception of some areas in the South where a majority of residents are Muslims and in mountain areas inhabited primarily by animistic minorities. This section will delve into the meaning of temples from the perspective of how temple resources are related to people's organizational behavior.

A temple owns a variety of buildings and facilities which have developed from the initial level of minimum requirements through many years of expansion and repair. Therefore, at certain intervals requests are made to the villagers to mobilize their resources. The amount of resources needed for construction and maintenance is far larger than that needed for a village shrine. According to an elderly person in Si Phon Thong Village, the first temple-cum-monk's residence was built in 1932 by moving and renovating a private house formerly owned by a villager with funds donated by the villagers. In Thon Village, the wooden main hall of the temple was rebuilt in brick in 1947–49. On that occasion, the villagers agreed to bake 500 bricks per household and to collect a total of 20,000 baht in cash. This amount of money would have bought one-year's consumption of milled rice for 120 adults. These facts suggest that in constructing the temple, the villagers were virtually obliged to provide resources (Tambiah 1970, p. 150). As the villagers began to earn extra money and their community's economic level rose, they wanted to have a better temple building and started to solicit donations even from those outside the village by mobilizing their respective personal connections. The money thus collected was put under communal control.

The purposes for mobilizing resources for the temple include not only the construction of temple buildings but also annual events for the temple. On

such occasions, the villagers returning from temporary work in Bangkok and other big cities as well as relatives and friends come to participate in the event. The villagers have to warmly receive them and make preparations for an enjoyable festival. For example, Thon Village's largest annual ritual for listening to the story of Buddha's last great incarnation (*bun phrawet*) absorbs the time of most of the villagers starting with the one who is made chairman; then there are the assistants, accountants, and parade dancers as well as those assigned to prepare meals, maintain security, receive professional singers (*molam*), ensure lighting, and serve the guests and Buddhist monks. The returnees from big cities are also busy in collecting donations and arranging buses for their own homecoming. In Si Phon Thong Village, the villagers staying in Bangkok have a meeting to agree on arrangements for their homecoming and money collection. This is how a major temple event requires an organization for collective action and needs decisions on how to manage money collected from in and outside the village.

The practice of large-scale mobilization of personnel and resources is also seen in connection with the temples in central Thailand. On the occasion of the ritual for installing a Buddha image in Huai Rong Temple in 1990, for instance, a total of more than 500 villagers with twenty assignments were mobilized to perform the event. Funds are also raised by utilizing personal connections. Some villagers in central Thailand who have connections with successful businessmen in big cities can collect substantial amounts of funds. As will be noted later, however, the way to mobilize personnel and resources in central Thailand differs from that practiced in northeastern and northern Thailand.

There are other activities to manage and maintain the temples besides major occasions. In some temples the villagers customarily serve monks with meals during the Buddhist Lent (Sawing 1985, p. 23). This custom of serving meals by groups of villagers on a rotating basis can be seen at Thon Temple, Tha Kham Temple, and Huai Rong Temple.

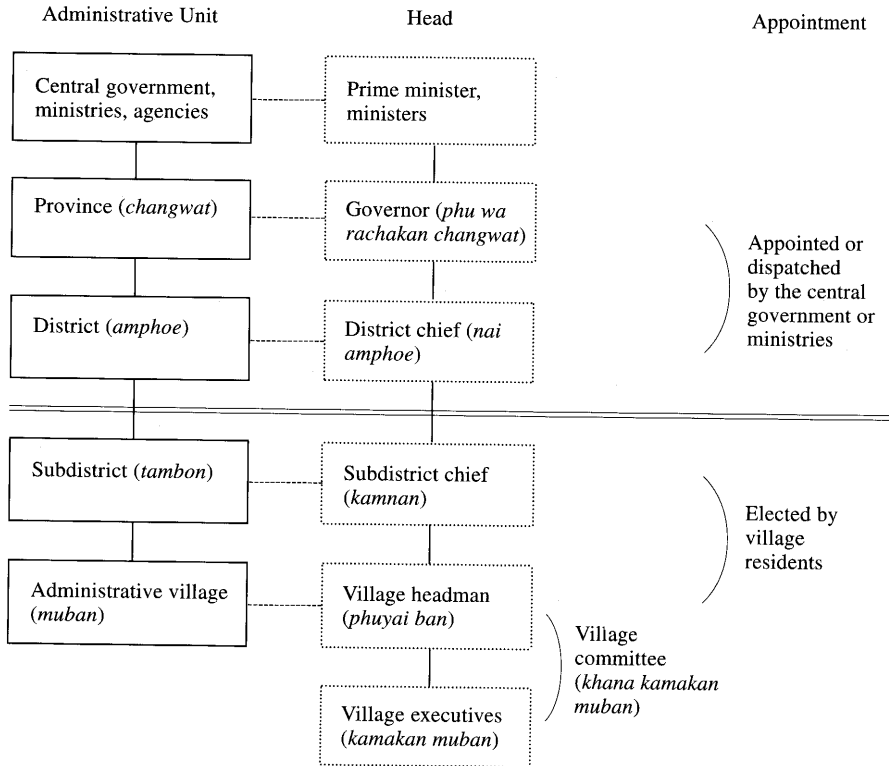
As we have discussed, the villagers generate common resources and put them under communal control for the construction and maintenance of temple facilities. Communal control of cash by villagers on a permanent basis used to be undertaken only for purposes connected with the temple. According to the account books of Thon Village between 1975 and 1980, about 60,000 baht were raised per annum (which is approximately equivalent to the cash income of five farming households), 97 per cent of which were donations and miscellaneous income from temple functions. Of this total, 98 per cent was spent to fund temple facility construction, temple events, and for the monks' living expenses. Such organized action by villagers for the sake of their temple

is undertaken annually, and resources such as cash have to be kept under constant control. This practice requires skill (accounting ability) and organizational norms on the part of the villagers. The division of labor for temple events also requires supervising ability. In this sense, temples provide the villagers with opportunities to acquire sufficient experience in organized activity as members of locality groups.

Administrative Villages and Villager Organizing

In the previous sections, we explained locality groups formed in response to the villagers' needs. However, locality groups can also be formed by organizations external to the village such as the state and its local authorities. It was only toward the end of the nineteenth century that a system was established in Thailand to divide the entire kingdom into a number of regions for easier administration. This reorganization incorporated regional governing agencies into the Ministry of Interior, which enabled the central government to directly supervise the local administrative system down to the district (*amphoe*) level. At the same time, local administration was divided into subdistricts (*tambon*) which in turn were divided into administrative villages (*muban*). It was decided to elect the headmen of these subdistricts and administrative villages through elections by the village residents. At first an administrative village was supposed to have about 10 households. However, under the Local Administration Act of 1914, the number was set at a population of more than 200, and landmarks such as rivers and roads were used for demarcating administrative villages (Tej 1977, p. 198). The administrative structure at the time of the author's study is shown in Figure 3-1. Administrative levels down to the district are part of the central government administration. The district central town possesses the district offices, which are under the Department of Local Administration of the Ministry of Interior, as well as local offices of the ministries and agencies involved in regional development. Subdistricts and administrative villages are under the autonomous jurisdiction of the villagers. At the time of the author's study, an administrative village was stipulated as having a population of over 400 or more than 40 households, while a subdistrict was set at a population of over 3,200 with more than 8 administrative villages (DOLA 1988, p. 9). The village headmen and subdistrict chiefs are directly elected by the villagers. Those who were elected before July 1992 are entitled to stay in office until the retirement age of sixty unless they are discharged, while those elected since then face reelection every five years. The subdistrict chiefs are elected from among village headmen within a subdistrict.

Fig. 3-1. Local Administrative Structure in Thailand (before 1995)



Source: Prepared by the author.

Note: The structure at the subdistrict level changed after enactment of the Tambon Administrative Organization Act in March 1995.

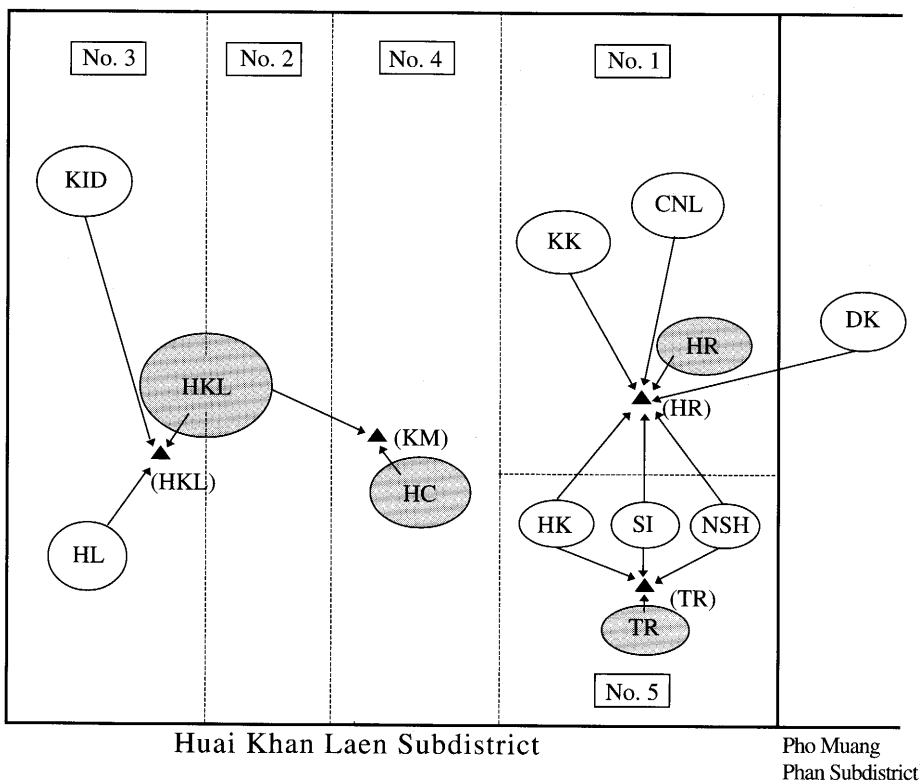
As the basic unit of villager autonomy under the local administrative system, the administrative village exhibits two major characteristics. One is that priority is given to demarcating administrative villages by the geographical conglomeration of their residents. Where there are spontaneously unified settlements of people, these are made into an administrative village as much as possible, but where no such spontaneous formation is found, waterways or roads are used to demarcate administrative villages. The size of an administrative village is based on the range over which people can maintain their acquaintanceship. In 1990 an average administrative village had 140 households and a population of about 750. Looking at administrative villages historically, we see that they have grown larger over time.⁹ Another major char-

acteristic is that village headmen have long been selected through elections among the villagers themselves. Thus village headmen elections reflect the social relationships of the villagers themselves. In other words, without a certain degree of influence among the villagers, few people have been able to become village headmen. Administrative villages in Thailand have thus been formed by more or less taking into consideration the unity and social relationships of the village residents themselves.

However, the degree of such considerations has differed with regions. For example, in the Northeast where the clustering of villager homes forms an indigenous village, these villages have often been automatically made into administrative villages. If their population was not large enough, multiple villages were often merged to form an administrative village. Later if the population of these merged villages increased, these villages could revert back to their former indigenous village base but with their status changed to administrative villages. Thus in the Northeast, social unity often coincides with geographic unity, and this tends to coincide with administrative unity. In contrast, the demarcation into administrative villages of the linear settlements and scattered settlements often seen in central Thailand is likely to be determined by canals or roads. Such villages sometimes experience discord due to the incongruity between the villagers' strong social relationships and the jurisdiction of administrative villages. An example is Huai Rong, an indigenous village located in Huai Khan Laen Subdistrict (Figure 3-2). Huai Rong Temple is located in Huai Rong settlement within the First Administrative Village, but the temple is also supported by people in neighboring settlements in the Fifth Administrative Village and even by people in Don Khum, a settlement in the neighboring subdistrict. Don Khum is closely related to Huai Rong in kinship terms, but administratively it belongs to another subdistrict. A look at the Fifth Administrative Village (see Figure 3-2) shows that some residents of HK, SI, and NSH settlements attend Huai Rong Temple and others TR Temple. Also, HKL settlement is divided between the Second and Third Administrative Villages, and its people attend either KM Temple or HKL Temple (Shigetomi 1995, pp. 52–53).

As the terminal level of administration, the administrative villages are supposed to serve as the agents for government functions, including (1) mediation of disputes among villagers, (2) registration of the population, (3) assistance in times of land registration and control, (4) assistance in tax collection, and (5) maintenance of security. However, the residents of administrative villages are not required to take collective action in order to perform the above-listed functions. A notable point is that administrative villages have no responsibility for paying taxes as an administrative unit. Basically the residents

Fig. 3-2. The Relationship of Temples to Settlements, Administrative Villages, and Subdistricts in Huai Khan Laen Subdistrict



Source: Prepared by the author.

Remarks:

- indicates settlements with their initials given in the circles.
 - ▲ indicates temples with their initials given in parentheses.
 - indicates a settlement with a temple.
 - indicates administrative villages (*muban*) with the numbers denoting the official village nomenclature.
 - indicates the borders delineating administrative villages (*muban*).
 - indicates the borders delineating subdistricts (*tambon*).
- Arrows indicate the temple attended by the villagers.

Abbreviations:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| CNL: Chong Nam Lai | KK: Khan Khlong Phai Isae |
| DK: Don Khum | KM: Kamphaeng Mani |
| HC: Huai Chana | NSH: Nong Song Hong |
| HK: Huai Khiao | SI: Saphan It |
| HKL: Huai Khan Laen | TR: Thang Rua |
| HL: Huai Lat | |
| HR: Huai Rong | |
| KID: Khlong I Dut | |

pay taxes to district offices individually, and the village headman is only expected to see that villagers pay their tax. Throughout its history, Thailand has never regarded the village as an entity responsible for tax payments.

A noteworthy function of the administrative village is to control its residents on behalf of the government. The Local Administration Act of 1914 stipulated the formation of a village committee (*khana kamakan muban*) which was made an advisory body for the headman. The village committee assumed the function of an executive committee in 1983 by rule of the Ministry of Interior. The village headman is authorized to appoint the committee executives. There is also a village meeting in which a representative from each household participates and makes decisions for the entire village. The district office summons the subdistrict chiefs and village headmen once a month to convey government policies. Partly to make these policies known to its people, the village meeting is expected to be held every month. In essence administrative villages in Thailand have two functions: one is to discuss management policies and the other is to build villager consensus.

This system of village administration set up by the government is being utilized by the villagers to reach a consensus on issues arising from their own needs. Because administrative villages had this system for organizing the residents, they were able to effectively receive resources in the forms of funds and equipment for development projects that the government began to provide with the start of the rural development policies in the 1960s. Initially these policies focused on the establishment of infrastructure and diffusion of technology and knowledge, and administrative villages functioned only as a conduit for such resources from the government to villagers. It was in the second half of 1970s that the government began to inject funds and materials to be managed by the administrative villages. Some early examples of resources provided to the administrative villages were funds for building toilets and improving sanitation and the supplying of fish fry for communal fish breeding projects (for detail, see Chapter 5). When there has been adequate management and control by administrative villages, these resources have provided continued benefits to the villagers. The injection of such resources by the government has given the administrative villages the essence of autonomy, or what autonomous management is intended to be. The residents in rural areas of Thailand, who had known few locality group activities except those related to the temple, have begun to share and manage the resources being provided through their administrative villages.

Mutual and Overlapping Relationships between Locality Groups

In the foregoing sections, we looked at three locality groups generally found in Thai villages and discussed their respective organizational functions. However, since these groups overlap, it is important to see what social organizations emerge when their functions are integrated. The way the three groups overlap each other differs according to regions, but no data are available that directly show the differences. Government statistics in particular show no data about indigenous villages which are not the locality groups officially acknowledged by the government. The author surveyed villages to see the cumulative geographical relationships for the three types of locality groups: administrative and indigenous village (I), administrative village and the temple (II), and indigenous village and the temple (III). His findings are shown in Table 3-2.

There are some points to note in examining this table. In the central region and the South, the number of samples for II is large because the author made every effort to find out about the relationships between administrative villages and temples within the districts. The samples for I and III are fewer because it was difficult to distinguish indigenous from administrative villages in these two regions. In contrast, the number of samples for II in the North and Northeast is relatively small because it was easier to distinguish between indigenous and administrative villages. It should be pointed out also in category C under I that the number for the Northeast is large because this region includes one particular survey area where some indigenous villages had been divided by the government into multiple administrative villages in order to increase their number to form a new subdistrict. It should also be added that the findings may not fully reflect the geographic diversity of the North because the number of sample villages was small.

Despite these limitations, the surveys point out cumulative trends in the mutual and overlapping relationships among the three types of locality groups. In the first relationship, there are many incidences in all the regions where an administrative village and an indigenous village almost overlap (A). In the central region and the South, there are more incidences than in other regions where an administrative village consists of several indigenous villages (B). In the Lower Central, geographic relationships between administrative and indigenous villages are often more complicated than in other regions (D).

In the second relationship (administrative village and the temple), the difference between the Central/South and the Northeast/North is clear. The pat-

TABLE 3-2

OVERLAPPING RELATIONSHIPS OF THE THREE LOCALITY GROUPS IN THE VILLAGES SURVEYED

Relationships of Locality Groups	Patterns	Central		North	Northeast	South
		Lower	Upper			
I Administrative village and indigenous village	A: Exactly overlapping	16	25	29	23	15
	B: An administrative village made of multiple indigenous villages	6	8	0	1	6
	C: A part of an indigenous village designated as an administrative village	10	12	0	25	1
	D: Other ^a	6	1	0	0	0
II Administrative village and temple ^f	E: An administrative village with a single temple ^b	2	17	17	17	7
	F: Residents from other administrative villages attend the same temple ^c	113	68	11	28	37
	G: Residents of an administrative village attend multiple temples ^d	0	1	0	1	0
	H: Other ^e	32	7	1	3	13
III Indigenous village and temple ^f	I: An indigenous village with a single temple ^b	1	9	17	30	3
	J: Residents from other indigenous villages attend the same temple ^c	50	42	11	4	20
	K: Residents of an indigenous village attend multiple temples ^d	0	0	0	6	0
	L: Other ^e	8	2	1	0	10

Source: Surveys by the author.

Note: Figures under I and II indicate the number of administrative villages, while figures under III indicate the number of indigenous villages.

^a A mixture of B and C, i.e., an administrative village formed from multiple indigenous villages with at least one of those indigenous villages split to form part of a neighboring administrative village.^b All the residents of a village attend a temple which is not attended by the residents of other villages. (One village—one temple)^c All the residents of a village attend a temple which is also attended by the residents of other villages. (Multiple villages - one temple)^d Residents of a village attend different temples in the same village which are not attended by the residents of other villages. (One village—multiple temples)^e A mixture of F and G, or J and K, i.e., residents of a village attend different temples which are also attended by the residents of other villages.^f Forest temples (*wat pa*) which emphasize individual ascetic practices and meditation are not included.

tern of an administrative village supporting a temple (E) is seen for more often in the Northeast/North than in the Central/South.¹⁰ In the Lower Central and South, the residents in an administrative village often attend different temples, while these temples in many cases are supported by residents in multiple administrative villages (H). The North, where all surveyed administrative villages overlapped indigenous villages, has many cases where a temple is supported by multiple administrative (= indigenous) villages (F, J). This phenomenon can be explained partly by the small size of administrative (= indigenous) villages and the relative geographic proximity between them.

In the third relationship (indigenous village and the temple), the residents of multiple indigenous villages attend the same temple in many cases in the Central/South (J). In some cases in the Lower Central/South, residents of an indigenous village attend different temples which are supported by the residents of multiple indigenous villages (L). This is in sharp contrast to the pattern in the Northeast where an indigenous village often has one temple (I).

These findings indicate that in the Northeast and North the indigenous village residents and temple support groups are usually identical. They also indicate that in almost all cases indigenous and administrative villages are identical, or an indigenous village has been divided into a few administrative villages. Therefore, from the perspective of administrative villages, their residents attend the same temple more often than not. In the Central/South, in contrast, administrative and indigenous villages do not overlap in many cases, and the residents' relationships with temples are more complicated. It is a common practice for the residents of an administrative village to visit multiple temples; and even those of an indigenous village often visit different temples.

The cumulative overlapping of the three locality groups (indigenous village, administrative village, and temple support group) should imply their close interrelationships in the area of social functions. The differences in the way the accumulation of overlap progresses produce the variations in social functions that can be observed from one region to another.

A look at the temple's relationships with indigenous and administrative villages shows that villager cooperative activities for the temple in the Northeast/North are organized on the basis of the indigenous village which had existed as a locality group even before the temple was constructed. Even when a temple is supported by multiple indigenous villages, the temple's management is undertaken through the coordination of these villages because the residents perceive their indigenous villages as a single social unit.

When an indigenous village overlaps an administrative village, the residents can apply the administrative village's management system in managing

the temple. When an indigenous village is divided into multiple administrative villages, the temple is managed with the administrative villages as groups subordinate to it (or through the coordination of administrative villages). Because locality groups, such as indigenous villages or administrative villages, are made responsible for the construction and maintenance of temples, the residents can accumulate organizational experience which is applicable to other kinds of group-based activities.

Such relationships of the temple with the villages, irrespective of either indigenous or administrative villages, are not found so often in the central region and the South. Moreover, as has been noted in the previous section, in these two regions, the indigenous village itself is not perceived as a locality group that supports a temple or receives the temple's religious protection. As a result, the residents show different forms of cooperation with the temple. For example, the construction of a temple is not perceived as something to be undertaken by an indigenous or administrative village. Usually temple construction depends on the efforts of well-wishers and volunteers. The construction of Thang Rua (TR) Temple (Figure 3-2) in 1973 was made possible by the donation of land and collection of funds by about twenty volunteers residing in multiple neighboring indigenous villages. In central Thailand the repair and expansion of a temple depend on the resources collected through personal networks of volunteers who propose to the abbot to collect contributions and funds. Temple events are often managed by an organization formed at the abbot's request. The villagers who gather in response to this request take on the tasks themselves and begin to gather the needed number of people within their respective personal networks (Shigetomi 1995, pp. 59–60, 76–77). Also in central Thailand the demarcation of administrative villages is often done in disregard of indigenous villages or the residence of temple supporters. This practice often prevents the residents from developing an indigenous sense of unity which is the basis for their autonomous activities. The existence of only official systems for a village's organized activities fails to motivate the villagers to undertake activities on their own accord. In such cases the role of an administrative village headman in temple events is often limited to maintaining local security (in cooperation with the police).

Communities and Villager Organization

The author defines a "community" as having the combined functions and characteristics of the three kinds of locality groups, namely, indigenous village, administrative village, and temple support group. In essence a commu-

nity is a locality group that shares the villagers' sense of integration, acquaintanceship, and social interaction. This study does not intend to identify communities within Thai villages in accordance with the author's definition of community. Rather it will confirm that different combinations of the three locality groups generate communities with different natures. This point will be clarified by observing the process of villager organizing.

Let us first look at a typical pattern in the Northeast and North, where the villagers of the same locality group share "a sense of unity as an indigenous village," "organizational institutions of administrative villages (institutions for organizing the villagers)," and "organizational experience through temple management." When the resources and information for development are brought into such villages, the administrative village becomes the most appropriate unit for utilizing those resources and mobilizing its residents. Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, many organizations, such as funeral associations and savings groups, are formed and operated at the level of the administrative village.

Even in these two regions, the ways the three locality groups overlap each other present some variations. The most frequent variation is the division of an indigenous village into multiple administrative villages. In this case, since each administrative village can maintain its residents' sense of unity, and since administrative villages have a system of self-administration, they are the most suited for organizing the villagers to carry out rural development.¹¹ When undertaking such organizing, previously experienced social interaction, such as activities concerned with the temples or defense, is often retained based on the indigenous villages. Thus if conditions are right, the villagers can be organized for development at the level of the indigenous village.¹² However, divided villages will alter their leadership in time, and their performance as administrative villages will begin to change. As a result, the sense of unity in an administrative village will become stronger, and eventually the temple or even the shrine for the guardian spirit may be separated from the indigenous village.¹³

If indigenous villages adjoin each other or if they are small in size, a temple may be attended by residents of multiple indigenous villages. In these cases temple support groups consist of residents encompassing several villages. This is often practiced even when the scope of indigenous villages coincides with that of administrative villages. In that event, however, the scope of an indigenous village (i.e., administrative village) remains the basis for the residents' sense of integration and shared autonomous system, and as such villager organizing is usually formed on the basis of indigenous village. Nevertheless, the residents retain their acquaintanceship within the scope of the

temple support group. This is why the villagers' organizational membership can sometimes be extended to the temple support group straddling several indigenous villages (e.g., Tha Kham Village Savings Group).

Another variation is the incorporation of multiple indigenous villages into one administrative village. In this case, people have little sense of unity at the level of the administrative village. At the level of indigenous villages, however, they often have an informal leader or an autonomous system as a subordinate unit of the administrative village (to elect an assistant village headman from among the indigenous village residents, for instance). In such cases, the villagers are often organized on the basis of indigenous villages rather than on the basis of the administrative village.¹⁴

These examples show that in most of the areas in the Northeast/North, we can find locality groups functioning to form the people's sense of unity and working to coordinate their organized activities. In these regions, therefore, it is easier to organize the residents on the basis of communities.

In contrast, no such community-bound locality groups are found in the average villages in central Thailand. Therefore it may not be altogether wrong to maintain that no communities exist in this region as Kemp (1988) had observed.¹⁵ In this region it is generally difficult to get the villagers to organize activities based on locality groups. Even when cooperative activities are necessary, the residents do not regard it as natural to organize such activities based on locality groups, nor do they have such experience. This is why the residents have had to organize themselves on the basis of kinship networks when they formed the Huai Rong Savings Group. Many examples of successful development organizations in central Thailand are based on social organizations such as peer groups and personal networks.¹⁶ Even when locality groups are involved, it appears that the functions of a temple support group (in the form of acquaintanceships or the abbot's influence) are often utilized.¹⁷

The foregoing observation indicates that understanding the nature of communities in different regions becomes important in organizing the villagers for development projects. Understanding needs to go far enough to know which locality groups can serve as the receiving institutions for resources and ideas for development, or which locality groups have the ability to independently form and manage development organizations. Participatory rural development in essence requires the ability for villagers to proceed with development independently. It is most important, therefore, to have an accurate understanding of the community structure which forms the basis for collective development activities.

Notes

- 1 Usually the objects worshipped as symbols of the *puta* were natural or man-made objects that inspired a sense of the supernatural. Examples include the ruins of an old settlement and an image of the god Vishnu (Pornpilai 1989a, p.11). In some communities, such as Thon Village, the *puta* was symbolized by a fragment obtained from a large anthill worshipped in the *puta* shrine of a nearby village. Since the word *puta* literally means paternal and maternal grandfather, it is often interpreted as meaning an ancestral god of people who migrated into the area. As indicated by the above examples, however, *puta* should in fact be seen as local deities based on the animistic beliefs of the Thai people.
- 2 A *cham* is a person thought to have the ability to talk with the *puta*. He acts as the representative of the village.
- 3 In one case, a drought coincided with a spate of illness.
- 4 In the Wang Phikun Subdistrict of Phitsanulok Province in upper central Thailand (UC 17), there are villages where large numbers of Lao Thai live intermixed with other settlements. Almost all the communities with village shrines are Lao Thai settlements.
- 5 Similar village layouts were reported by L. Sternstein (1965, pp. 35, 38) who conducted a survey of villages in Thailand.
- 6 Social structures in southern Thailand, especially in provinces near the Malaysian border, appear to differ from those in other regions of Thailand due to the presence of the substantial Muslim population. However, the author has not done any surveys of rural communities in these areas.
- 7 According to the aforementioned survey in Udon Thani Province, most of these were organized around 1961 (Blakeslee, Huff, and Kickert 1965, pp. 321–22).
- 8 There have been frequent references to the existence of the *khlong sip si* (14 moral laws) by the community culture theorists. However, these are general moral rules conceived by people in northeastern Thailand, and they are not rules determined by locality groups.
- 9 The number of households (population) in areas other than cities (*thesaban*) were divided by the number of administrative villages using data from the *Statistical Yearbook of Thailand*; the number of households per village was 144 (746 persons) in 1990 (NSO 1992). The population per village was 637 persons in 1966 (NSO 1968) and is estimated to have been only 400 in the late 1940s.
- 10 Statistical data show that the number of administrative villages per temple is 2.3 in the central region and 1.4 in the North/Northeast. In the Lower Central, the number increases (according to the author's calculation from the table in RAD [c1985 pp. 13–38]). This fact seems to reflect the relationships between an administrative village and the temple as stated in this chapter.

- 11 Many villages in Sam Kha Subdistrict in Roi Et Province are former indigenous villages split into multiple administrative villages. Their organized activities for rural development are mostly based on administrative villages (Shigetomi 1992b, pp. 75–76).
- 12 For instance, when resources used in organized activities (e.g., use of communal land) extend over pre-divided indigenous villages, and when more people than the administrative village residents are needed for organized activities, such activities can take place based on the former indigenous villages if the leaders of the several administrative villages have cooperative relationships (NE16) (see also Preeda and Weera 1992, pp. 21–33).
- 13 A good example is Thon Village and the adjacent Non Village (NE1). The latter started when a few households from Thon Village settled in a place not far from Thon. At first Non villagers worshipped Thon guardian spirit, but when Non was separated as an administrative village due to increased population, its residents began to have an enhanced sense of independence and set up their own guardian spirit and temple. Today the residents of the two villages have little sense of shared community (*chumchon*).
- 14 Phon Sawan settlement in Khon Kaen Province (NE23) (39 households in 1989) forms an administrative village together with a settlement (29 households) about one kilometer away. Phon Sawan settlement is an indigenous village having a guardian spirit shrine but no temple, and its residents attend a temple within a sanitary district (i.e., an autonomous district in a local municipality) about one kilometer away. The settlement has a rice bank and a savings group, but their organization and operation are not handled by the administrative village but by the indigenous village. In his survey of rural Thailand, Philip Hirsch (1990) has identified an indigenous village named Bung Khiew as having the most active organizational activity within the administrative village.
- 15 This does not mean that there are no communities in central Thailand. There may be some areas where communities can be formed depending on the cumulative relationships between the three locality groups. What the author means is that the typical pattern of locality groups in central Thailand makes it difficult to form a community.
- 16 In the absence of reliable social organizations, the villagers of Si Phran Subdistrict (cf. Appendix A) were able to organize only because some individuals possessed adequate management and administrative capabilities (Shigetomi 1995). In Ban Laeng Subdistrict in Rayong Province, the villagers were organized on the basis of peer groups to protect forests (Chantana and Surichai 1995). Yokkrabat Subdistrict provided a successful example of the Mae Klong Integrated Rural Development Project, which also pioneered in organizing villagers in central Thailand. In Yokkrabat, also, the formation of peer groups was regarded as important for organizing the villagers (Akin 1982).
- 17 In Bang Chan, the first community ever to be studied in Thailand, a temple abbot acted as the leader for organizing the residents in the construction of a school and

water supply system (Sharp et al. 1953, p. 47). In Huai Rong the influence of the temple abbot was a decisive factor in the building of a village cooperative shop (Shigetomi 1995).