

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In earlier attempts to develop, the less developed countries (LDCs) emphasized industrial development at the expense of agriculture. Agricultural improvement was import-oriented rather than being directed at the increase of their food-stuffs. Consequently, from 1955 to 1965, food output per capita in many highly populated LDCs had stagnated or declined (1). By the 1970's, the LDCs became the net importers of grain from the developed countries, a situation that reversed the trend since 1939 (2). Starting in 1975, a succession of droughts combined with increasing population has brought many LDCs to the threshold of famine.

At present, the advantages of increasing agriculture production in the Third World are recognized. Agricultural products constitute the largest domestic market for consumer goods and serve as sources of raw materials, savings, and export earnings (3). In addition, farmers comprise the largest reserve in the labor force for manufacture and other expanding economic sectors (4). It was suggested that effective small farms could reduce unemployment in the LDCs given that the growth in the industrial sectors was not rapid enough to absorb the rising number of laborers (5).

Although factors contributing to agricultural development have been clearly identified (6), most LDCs have found that in practice agricultural development cannot be easily realized. Apart from problems

which are idiosyncratic to each of these countries, Chang discussed four common obstacles hindering agricultural development, namely, small and fragmented holdings, unjust land tenure systems, lack of effective supporting services, and inappropriate ways of life (7). Piece-meal measures for development were also identified as self-defeating, and a broad frontal attack on all aspects of its development was advocated (8).

Agricultural cooperatives, combined with other necessary measures, are expected to foster agricultural development in the Third World. Land reform in Egypt, for example, was said to be successful because agricultural cooperatives were established to supervise ploughing and to help farmers gain access to important agricultural inputs, e.g., fertilizers, and insecticides (9). The concept of the multipurpose cooperative was first introduced in Germany by Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen (1818-1888) to free farmers from the grip of unscrupulous money-lenders and to serve as a means for obtaining agricultural supplies as well as marketing farm produce (10). Raiffeisen's cooperative model influenced the introduction of agricultural cooperatives in many Asian countries, including Thailand. Cooperatives, by definition, are voluntary organizations formulated on two essential principles, namely mutual cooperation and self-help (11). Agricultural cooperatives help improve the lot of farmers by providing four essential services; (1) agricultural credit, (2) agricultural inputs, (3) essential

consumer's goods, and (4) marketing farm produce (12). Besides, buying and selling as a group, the cooperative helps farmers achieve economics of scale and, thereby, increases economic efficiency.

Although the cooperative movements have been known to be successful in the West, their records in the Third World are mixed (13). The overwhelming control exercised by the government bureaucracy, the apathy of cooperative members, and the high degree of inequality in rural areas, etc., are among the problems cited to obstruct the cooperative development in many LDCs (14).

The Significance of the Research Problem

Since Thailand established her first cooperative society to assist farmers in 1916, suffice it to say that the country has, for a long time, recognized the potential contribution of cooperatives to the farmers who comprise the majority of her people. Thereafter, especially since the promulgation of the Cooperative Society Act in 1928, the number as well as type of cooperatives have proliferated (15). Despite the fact that agricultural cooperatives were regarded as important in the third national economic plan (1972-1976), which entailed more support from the government, it was widely agreed that the cooperative movement as a whole had not yet been successful. In 1979, only seven percent of the Thai farmer households were members of the cooperatives, and only 14 out of 680 agricultural cooperatives thus far established were

rated as "first class" or comparatively successful (16).

Although many factors have been blamed for the failure of agricultural cooperatives (17), this dissertation research was designed to study the factors pertaining to government bureaucrats who are directly and indirectly involved in the performance of the cooperatives. In particular, the research focusses on the bureaucrats' attitudes, as well as some determinants of attitudes toward agricultural cooperatives. Since Thailand has been known for the existence of strong bureaucratic control and the farmers were said to have a dependent culture (18), it is very likely that the bureaucrat's behavior, to a large extent, determines the progress or failure of the cooperatives. Instead of studying the civil servants' behavior, the researcher decided to study their attitudes toward the cooperatives because it had been widely accepted that attitudes and behavior were linked. In addition, the researcher would like to demonstrate that attitudes can be measured by using certain research techniques which have been developed in the West, e.g., Fishbein's salient beliefs (19), Likert's items analysis (20), and factor scores (21).

After appropriate attitude scales have been created and the civil servants' attitudes have been measured, some relationships between a rather wide range of independent variables, drawing from various social science disciplines, and the attitudes shall be subject to statistical test. It is the researcher's contention that one weak point of much past attitudinal research, especially on bureaucratic

attitudes, is that it has tended to rely on only one group of independent variables. In actuality, many factors are interacting to form or change an attitude ; therefore, in this research, socio-demographic factors comprise the first group of independent variables. The second group of independent variables is called the nearness or proximity to agricultural life, drawing from research in Social Psychology. In addition, as the civil servants work in formal organizations, organizational related factors are expected to affect the civil servants' attitudes as well.

It should be emphasized that the dissertational research is also a test of whether or not certain research techniques developed in the West can be used to measure and analyze the attitudes of Thai civil servants toward agricultural cooperatives.

Notes for Chapter One

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