



Politics of reconciliation and new local governance based on Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and the King Rama IX's Working Philosophy: Case studies of local administrative organizations in the eastern region of Thailand

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Abstract

The objectives of this research are to study the driving of local administrative organizations (LAO) in accordance with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), measure the level of SEP practices, and propose an appropriate model of reconciliation politics and local governance for the LAOs in the eastern region of Thailand. The research utilizes the integrated methodologies of case study, mixed-method, and lesson-learned method. The research results show that none of the 15 LAOs in this research fit in the very high level of SEP principles—or becoming a healthy workplace for all; nine of them occupy a high degree of SEP practices—or a level of understanding and being happy workplaces; four of them are at a moderate degree-or a level of being within the scope of the SEP and being sustainable workplaces; and, finally, the last two are not fit in the scope of SEP practices. Additionally, the research proposes five models for the LAOs' political driving.

Keywords: new local governance, Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, King Rama IX's Working Philosophy

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1. Introduction

From the historical analysis of the local government in Thailand, it is found that the current local government direction is in a state that does not follow the desirable model of development. This is because there is still a process of struggle between the groups that support decentralization under the policy framework of the constitution B.E. 2543—that based on old localism—and the groups that support the centralization of power after the coup in 2014, led by the government of the National Council for Peace and Order. This research project is an attempt to propose a third option, that is, to apply the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) of King Bhumibol Adulyadej in Thai politics and local government. The late king presents the important principles of morality and ethics in governing the country, such as the principle of unity, rule of law, citizenship building through education, etc. Therefore, this study will apply the moral and ethical principles for governing proposed by King Bhumibol Adulyadej. This will be made as the ethical base of contemporary decentralization theories in international academic circles, especially the new localism theory. This is because the new localism has

many fundamental principles consistent with the SEP and Working Philosophy of King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great Borommanatbophit, for example, the concept of local public value management of new localism and the working principle for common interest, the concept of self-management community with the working principle of self-supporting, and the concept of networked community governance with the working principle of 'know how to treasure unity' (*'ru rak samakki'* – in Thai), etc. [1]

2. Objectives

1. To study the operations of local administrative organizations (LAO) in the eastern region according to and fitting in the scope of the SEP principles and the King Rama IX's Working Philosophy.
2. To study the models for driving the LAOs' politics of reconciliation based on the SEP and the King Rama IX's Working Philosophy in the area of the eastern region.
3. To study appropriate models for driving the new local governance of the LAOs based on the SEP and the King Rama IX's Working Philosophy in the eastern region.

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The Research has been carried out by utilizing the three integrated research methodologies as follows: case study, mixed methods research in the combination of quantitative and qualitative research and lesson-learned methodology.

3. Theoretical Framework for the Study

This study uses the concepts of SEP, the philosophy King Rama IX's Working Philosophy, new localism, local governance, politics of reconciliation, community engagement, social capital, and networking. The theoretical framework for this study can be shown as follows: The research conceptual framework in Figure 1 is a hypothetical model, which was used as a working hypothesis and a tool for helping data collection and analysis as well as a guideline to search for an appropriate model in the conclusion of the final research. Since this research project is based on a qualitative research approach using inductive process research, it is, therefore, important to present the results from concrete to abstract conclusions [4].

In applying to politics and local governance, the SEP and the King Rama IX's Working Philosophy are considered as connecting mediators of the local government process. According to Chaiyon Praditsil, et al., [1] the factors of the SEP and the King Rama IX's Working Philosophy have effects on the politics of reconciliation and the new local governance of multi-sectoral networks' collaborations. As a result of these connecting factors, a working hypothesis for this research can be presented as follows:

1. Driving towards the politics of reconciliations of the LAOs in the eastern region. This driving is the results of basic factors of honest and sincere political leaders, mechanisms and processes of community engagement in the political decision making as well as social capital in the communities. Additionally, supporting factors are the result of the historical context of each community and the different background of each LAO. These factors have led the LAOs in the eastern region to operate in accordance with the model of honesty and sincerity, harmony (*'rurak samukki'* in Thai), common benefit focus, community participation, self-reliance, etc.

2. Driving towards new local governance of the LAOs in the eastern region. This driving is the result of the basic factors of the public-minded leaders' networks, learning process of the people, and collaborative networks between the LAOs and the people organizations in the communities. In addition, there are additional factors resulting from the historical context of the community and the background of each LAO that are different from place to place. These factors have led the LAOs in the eastern region to operate by using the King Rama IX's Working Philosophy approach, namely honesty and sincerity, perseverance, simplicity, patience, hard working, know how to treat

sure unity (*'rurak samukki'* in Thai), common interest, people participation, topographical and sociological approach, etc.

This research aimed to measure level of sufficiency economy by indicators of three level SEP as Figure 2.

4. Research results

First of all, the results of the first research objective—the level of SEP of the 15 LAOs in the eastern region—are summarized in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1 shows the result of quantitative study for measuring the levels of the SEP practice of the 15 LAOs in this study. Four levels of the SEP are divided: firstly, 'not qualified' if scores do not fall into the qualified level; secondly, 'qualified' if scores reach the level of sustainable workplaces; thirdly, 'understanding' if scores fit in the scope of a happy workplace; and finally, 'achieving' if scores reach a level of being within the scope of a healthy workplace of all. The study reveals that none of the 15 LAOs in the research fit in the very high level of achieving the SEP principles—or becoming a healthy workplace for all. Nine LAOs are at the understanding level, namely Klong Plu Subdistrict Municipality, Bang Sa Kao SAO, Khlong Hinpoon SAO, Ban Song District Municipality, Takad Ngao SAO, Koh Wai SAO, Ban Phra SAO, Bang Klua SAO, and Chanthaburi PAO. Two of them—Samaesarn SAO and Koh Mak SAO—do not qualify for their operations in accordance with the SEP principles because they have the problems of internal administration—namely a lack of transparency, unhealthy governance, and law infringement.

Regarding the qualitative study, five LAOs have spent budgets for projects and activities with wrong purposes. These LAOs have used a large amount of money for annual wages and other unnecessary expenditures, and only a little money left for spending on useful community development as it should be. In addition, some LAOs have not tried to solve a problem of community members' misconduct or bad behavior (*'abaiyamuk'* in Thai) related to their everyday lives.

There are four LAOs that have followed the principles of SEP, namely Huai Raeng SAO, Noen Kho Subdistrict Municipality, Koh Chang Tai Subdistrict Municipality, and Bo Phloi Subdistrict Municipality. The fact that all of these four LAOs can overcome the qualifying score—especially their characteristics of transparent management, good governance, and no violation of law—and attain the understanding level as can be seen from their participatory planning and operations, as well as succession planning. However, all of the four LAOs remain unable to create a happy workplace because of their internal problems, such as the lack of public minds of personnel in helping colleagues' works and creating an unhappy atmosphere

Output	Immediate outcome	Ultimate outcome
Qualifying (Sustainable Workplace)	Understanding (Happy Workplace)	Achieving (Healthy Workplace for All)
1. Transparent management, good governance, and non-infringement of law (50 points)	5. Internal management for building a happy workplace (50 points)	9. Internal management for building a healthy workplace for all (30 points)
2. Participatory planning (20 points)	6. Work of social infrastructure (20 points)	10. Promoting education, public health, and waste management (20 points)
3. Succession planning (15 points)	7. Support of agricultural career and community enterprises (15 points)	11. Developing natural resources and environment (20 points)
4. Support of work physical infrastructure (15 points)	8. Social and cultural work. (15 points)	12. Activities for reducing social problems and increasing social welfare available (30 points)
100 points	100 points	100 points

Figure 2: Indicators of three-level SEP for this research.

studied the LAOs' operations according to a new model of local governance, the SEP principle, and the King Rama IX's Working Philosophy in the eastern region. The study shows that each LAO could develop its own model of local governance, by mixing the new with the old philosophy. There are five models developed:

1. Model of local governance leading to the dissolution of political power. This model was obtained from the method of lessons learned in Klong Plu Subdistrict Municipality. It shows that local executives are able to break down the political polarization between the subdistrict headman ('*kamnan*' in Thai) and the chief executive of the SAO: resulting in overcoming their conflict and polarization. The subdistrict headman or village headman ('*puyaiban*' in Thai) are unable to send his/her representative to the election field against the chief executive because of his popularity with the people towards the work. In conclusion, in order to drive towards this local governance model, it is necessary to breakdown such political power of various parties and applies the three important principles of King Rama IX's Working Philosophy, namely topographical and sociological approach, honesty and sincerity, and self-supporting.

2. Model for applying the SEP and the King Rama IX's Working Philosophy to the old localism. This

model was derived from the lesson learned in Khlong Hinpoo SAO, Koh Wai SAO, Ban Phra SAO, and Bo Phloi Subdistrict Municipality. The model shows that The LAOs have adopted the old style of local administration, namely local governance in accordance with the decentralization policy of the Constitution B.E. 2540 (1997), with the important characteristics based on a liberal democratic ideology valuing too much to the election of representatives for becoming local administrators. Therefore, there is the legitimacy of local politicians to make the final decisions because they have already acted as representatives of the people. According to this model, the level of people participation is no more than just giving opinions. This style of traditional decentralization government is more focused on local governments than local community or civil society organizations. The main objective of this model is to let the LAO operate public work primarily for the people in the community. As a result, in order to follow this local governance, the four important principles of King Rama IX's Working Philosophy should be followed, namely economy and simplicity with maximum benefits, honesty, integrity and sincerity, knowing, loving and uniting ('*ru rak samukki*' in Thai), and topographical and sociological approach.

3. Model of the chief executive who wins the villagers' heart. This model of local governance was ob-

Table 1. Levels of the SEP for each of all 15 LAOs in this study.

LAOs	Sufficiency Economy Philosophy				Level of Sufficiency Economy
	Sustainable	Happy	Healthy	Total	
	Workplace (100 points)	Workplace (100 points)	Workplace (100 points)	(300 points)	
1. Khlong Phlu Municipality	95	95	78	268	understand
2. Bang Sa Kao SAO	94	88	76	258	understand
3. Khlong Hinpoon SAO	85	83	77	255	understand
4. Ban Song District Municipality	89	85	79	253	understand
5. Takad-ngao SAO	89	87	74	250	understand
6. Koh Wai SAO	86	81	79	246	understand
7. Ban Phra SAO	82	78	74	234	understand
8. Bang Klue SAO	84	76	80	230	understand
9. Chanthaburi PAO	82	78	64	224	understand
10. Huai Raeng SAO	84	67	60	211	Qualified
11. Noen Kho Subdistrict Municipality	85	67	51	203	Qualified
12. Koh Chang Tai Subdistrict Municipality	80	55	42	180	Qualified
13. Bo Phloi Subdistrict Municipality	84	48	49	175	Qualified
14. Samaesarn SAO	77	32	51	160	Not qualified
15. Koh Mak SAO	67	43	24	134	Not qualified

tained through lessons learned in Ban Song Subdistrict Municipality. The model shows a positive local governance process that results in dominating people's hearts. On the basis of the active management for the common, the LAO adheres and links to their community network and emphasizes villagers' participation at the level of joint decision making. It is obvious that the chief executive can win the hearts of the villagers because of his/her good work evidence. Obviously, in Ban Song in the past two decades, there have been no rival in election of the SAO chief executive. In promoting this model of local governance, the local executives should apply three principles of King Rama IX's Working Philosophy. These are honesty, integrity and sincerity, common interest, and people participation.

4. Solidarity model of local governance. This model was derived from the lesson learned in Takad-ngao and Huai Raeng SAOs. The results show that after the electoral competition process in these two SAOs and the winner becoming the chief executive, s/he invites his/her competitors for taking part in informal consultations on SAOs' operations, for example, organizing a coffeehouse forum on public affairs in the village, etc. In order to promote the solidarity model of local governance, the three principles of King Rama IX's Working Philosophy should be applied. These are common interest, people participation, and knowing, loving and uniting ('*rurak samukki*' in Thai).

5. Model of local governance in PAO that embraces the SEP for its operations. This model is obtained from the lesson learned in Chanthaburi PAO. The model shows that organizing a local management system needs to focus on collaboration between the PAO and other relevant partners—including other LAOs, community organizations, and provincial gov-

ernment agencies—by adopting the SEP and the King Rama IX's Working Philosophy as a political stand and as a guideline for their operations. For example, Chanthaburi PAO holds on a political standpoint of non-aligned or nonpartisan political entity, adheres to the concept of SEP, promotes the projects derived from the speech of His Majesty the King in the area, supports the infrastructure development projects, contribute to economic problem-solving of the people in the province, including exchange of goods between provinces, etc. In order to drive this model of local governance, the four important principles of King Rama IX's Working Philosophy should be applied. These are Knowing, Loving and Uniting ('*rurak samukki*' in Thai), economy and simplicity with maximum benefits, topographical and sociological approach, and people participation.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The research aims to study the politics of reconciliation and new local governance through applying the SEP and the King Rama IX's Working Philosophy in the eastern region. The study used integrated methodologies of mixed methods, case study, and lesson-learned method. 15 cases of LAOs were selected for the study. For the levels of the SEP practice fitting in the LAOs' operations, the study reveals that nine of them attain the level of understanding and obtain happy workplaces; while four LAOs are at moderate degree—or a level of being within the scope of the SEP and being sustainable workplaces. Finally, the last two cases are not fit in the scope of SEP practices. Additionally, the research proposes five models for LAOs' political driving, which are 1) model of local governance leading to the dissolution of political

power, 2) model for applying the SEP and the King Rama IX's Working Philosophy to the old localism, 3) model of the chief executive who wins the villagers' heart, 4) solidarity model of local governance, and 5) model of local governance in PAO that embraces the SEP for its operations.

According to this study, there are some recommendations as follows:

1. In order to develop towards a sustainable workplace, the LAOs should emphasize the importance of good governance in their management and succession planning.

2. In order to develop towards a happy workplace, the LAOs should focus on their internal management to encourage staffs' know how to treasure unity (*'rurak samukki'* in Thai), rejoice with others in their happiness or prosperity (*'mutita-chit'* in Thai), and maintain a calm state of mind and attitude to life

(*'xubekkha'* in Thai).

3. In order to develop towards a healthy workplace for all, the LAOs should reduce their expenditure, especially salary, wage, and unnecessary expenses, in order to increase saving and use for the development of healthy lives for all of their local community members.

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