

DISCLOSURE OF “ONE TAMBON ONE PRODUCT”: A TOOL OF POLITICAL POWER

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ABSTRACT

This article applied Michael Foucault's principle of discourse to show the reality under the well-known discourse “One Tambon One Product” or OTO. OTO was a remarkable policy developed during the government of H.E. Prime Minister Taksin Shinawatra with a hope to build up community capacities in term of economic earnings and to train local people to be entrepreneurs in the capitalist world. The policy was therefore entirely different from previous community development policies which were most based on local participation toward sustainable development. Unfortunately, after implementation for years, OTO never showed its achievement in term of real development. It has actually brought up income for some as well as poverty and conflicts for the others. Thai OTO communities have been pushed into the world of capitalism and consumerism based on struggling for non-stopping individuals' wants rather than cooperation as a unity in the community for coping with their essential needs together. In summary OTO was not a real development tool, but political tool for promoting a specific political party popular. Can we call it One Tambon One Product: A Strategic Tool for Development or Disaster?

INTRODUCTION

“One Tambon One Product” or “OTO” has become a discourse affecting to Thai national development in anticipation of economic strengthening by advance the business competition of community and promotion of community strength by encouraging local participation. Because of the benefit of this national development principle and the increasing number of economic outcome, resulted OTO to be the long-running well-known discourse, even now the OTO originator has not been in a position of Thailand's leader. There have been some notions that why this discourse was created and how it was constituted. This article applied Michel Foucault's principle to analyze the discourse.

In socio-political approaches, discourse is not merely language. It is seen as a system of power/knowledge, situated in a specific time and space. Analysis focuses on the production of knowledge, i.e., that which is understood to be truth or reality. It asks what sayable (natural, normal, unquestioned) is and how it is in this particular context. [1] Discursive practice is the frequent expression of discourse in action at parole level.[2] Discourse analysis is the study and investigation of process, event, and details which is constructed of the meaning and characteristic of many things in society surrounded us in form of discourse and discursive practice about the background, hegemony, meaning related to institute, person, places and impact, including subjugation from the discourse. [3]

THE ORIGIN OF “OTO”

“One Tambon One Product” or “OTO” was originated as a distinguish policy of the government of H.E. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, delivered to the National Assembly on Monday, 26 February 2001. One of these urgent policies was announced that the government would establish “One Tambon One Product Project” to encourage communities to apply their local wisdom to develop their own

products and then the government would have supported new technology, knowledge and managerial skill to link the community products to domestic and international markets by the system of stores, networks and internet.[4] Regarding to the government policy, the One Tambon One Product or OTOP project was created to promote the development of local community and empower the community strength.[5] OTOP has encouraged rural communities to depend on their local products and local resources. It was considered a way to create prosperity for the community in the upgrading of rural livelihood through producing or managing local resources that were turned to value-added products. It was also prominent as a symbol in accordance with local culture. The product could be sold in the domestic and international markets with emphasis on the following three basic principles:

- Local yet global
- Self-reliance - creativity
- Human resource development

The implementation of the OTOP project has the following objectives:

- To create job opportunities and income generation for the community;
- To enable the community to think and work by themselves;
- To promote local wisdom;
- To promote human resource development; and
- To promote initiative on the part of the community to develop products in accordance

with their livelihoods and local cultures. [6]

The government formulated the Prime Minister Office Regulation on One Tambon One Product National Steering Committee B.E. 2544 (2001), which was issued on 7 September 2001 to formulate policy, strategy and master plan in the implementation of the One Tambon One Product project. Furthermore, the Committee specified the standard and criteria in the selection and registration of outstanding tambon products, as well as in helping support the efficient operation with regard to the policy, strategy and master plan. [7] This led to the OTOP Product Champion Contest in 2003, 2004, and 2006.

THE OTOP PRODUCT CHAMPION CONTEST

In each year, OTOP entrepreneurs which were community entrepreneurs and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have been registered. These entrepreneurs must produce at least 1 of 6 groups of OTOP products composed of food, beverage, clothe and garment, furniture and decoration, handicraft and souvenir, and herbal products (including health products such as herbal medicines, cosmetics, and household hazardous substances). In 2006, the group of furniture and decoration, and handicraft and souvenir were combined together. Each of OTOP entrepreneurs can select only one famous product to represent in OTOP Product Champion Contest. The contest was conducted under the One Tambon One Product Selection Guideline of each year and determined the products from district level, provincial level, regional level to national level by the committee of each group of products from the related ministries. For example, the ministry of public health was responsible for OTOP herbal products, etc. [5] [8]



Fig 1: The Symbol of OTOP
Source: <http://pcoc.moc.go.th>



Fig 2: The Certificate of 4 Stars OTOP Product Champion B.E. 2547 and 2549
Source: <http://www.earthlife.co.th> and <http://www.happygem.com>



CLASSIFICATION OF OTOP PRODUCTS

The OTOP products represented to the contest, would be determined by 3 criteria, those were the strength of community and product, the potential of marketing, and the standard of product. The total score was 100 points and classified the potential of each OTOP products by sum score as follow:

The 5 star OTOP product getting score not less than 90, was the product with high potential to export.

The 4 star OTOP product getting score between 80-89, was the product with high potential to distribute in national level and could be developed to be 5 star.

The 3 star OTOP product getting score between 70-79, was the product that could be developed to be 4 star.

The 2 star OTOP product getting score between 50-69, was the product that could be developed to be 3 star.

The 1 star OTOP product getting score less than 50, was the weak product which was hard to develop. [5] [8]

As the result of those OTOP Product Champion Contest, there have been increasing of OTOP 3-5 star products in each year. Those were 6,737 items, 7,945 items and 9,420 items in 2003, 2004 and 2006 respectively. [9] These were the impact of OTOP project on community strengthening by the government.

RUSHING THE COMMUNITY TO THE CAPITALISM

As we have seen, the discourse “OTOP” was created under the frame of “development” by the government of H.E. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra by construction of new identity and meaning of “development” and “community strength” which constituted the knowledge and social practice to dominate the understanding of people, both the government officers and citizens, to understand that the appropriate development was to raise the potential of economic competition, resulted in the benefit from mode of production, and turned into asset for expanding of business and increasing productivity to provide more profit in accordance with industrialism under the capitalism. Moreover, the profit could be responded to the passion of consumption increasing along purchasing power under the consumerism. This discourse would urge the communities to get into the way of capitalism faster and also impede the other ways of community development, such as the production for consumption and usage of their community in line with the king’s philosophy, “sufficiency economy” [10] and the surplus products after consuming would be sold to generate income and became the circulating fund for self-reliance and supporting communities.



Fig.3: The Elements of Sufficiency Economy

ONE DIMENSION OF COMMUNITY STRENGTH : DEHUMANIZATION OF COMMUNITY

The “community strength” was subjugated to be only the strength of communities by collective of some production factors to produce the OTOP products, sharing some profit to communities, and expression some opinion to business engagement.[5] These impeded the progress of community strength which could be more dimensions of strength, such as the collective of consumer protection network, the cooperation of health products surveillance, or other social collective activities which became firmly social relationship e.g. the gathering of Thai rural community to harvest, or the involvement of people in religious ceremony.

The government policy was a discursive practice which did the "development" as “investment” by lacking of good arrangement. They threw a large amount to the OTOP entrepreneurs both direct and indirect way to urge them to spend more on investment of production or purchasing to serve their craving without considering about long term effects. Then, the community was push away into capitalism wheter they were ready or not. In addition, the government tried to improve the potential of OTOP entrepreneurs to increase their productivity by establishing “SMART OTOP Program” which was the training program in business management and marketing.[11] However, debts from the household sector were piling up quickly, whereas the economic outcome was not growth as much as expected [12] and also affected to the whole national economic system. For example, the operation of Small and Medium Enterprise Development Bank of Thailand (SMEs Bank) lost the capital about 2,800 million bahts from increasng of non-performing loan (NPL) reserv in 2006 of 3,214 million bahts from releasing the large amount of credit to serve government policy on the OTOP credit program and the asset capitalization project. [13]

Moreover, it was a dehumanization of community by reducing human value into “product”; the communities or OTOP entrepreneurs could create “value” only from a production of their products representing their local community or Tambon. If they have not had any products, they will be gazed from other people that they lack of “the development” and deficient of “the strength”.

NEW "SELF" AND "CLASS" OF INFERIOR

Besides, the community entrepreneurs’ right and equity were diminished by the action of government which constructed the new definition of “self” and “class” to the OTOP entrepreneurs by using of One Tambon One Product selection guideline as a tool to classify the potential of community product in the OTOP Product Champion contest. This guideline was constituted from the opinion of “the minority” which was “the specialist” to dominate “the majority” which was “the community” and let the OTOP entrepreneurs had to surrender “new self” and “new class” gave by the government, that was classification of OTOP products by the score level, received by dicision of the steering committee. Then, the communities were graded as same level as the products and resulted to the supporting from government which was inequity; the government was selective treated the entrepreneurs who were clasified to “the fittest”, which was determined “the new self” to be high potency and valuable persons to strengthen the economic growth. Later, they received more privileges than the 1- 2 star OTOP entrepreneurs. Those privileges were rights to join the 3- 5 star OTOP product expo on each region, the

OTOP exhibition in APEC meeting, the OTOP CITY expo exhibited at Impact Convention Hall, Muang Thong Thane on every December of each year, as well as the data of those 3- 5 star OTOP products were recorded and presented on website Thai Tambon (www.thaitambon.com) to advertise and promote marketing. [14]

Nevertheless, the 1- 2 star OTOP entrepreneurs were not received any privileges but they had to get “the new self” as “ the poorer” who lacked of potential and value to the economy and were classified as underdeveloped entrepreneurs or inferior community, which were the burden of development and were abandoned by government . Moreover, these “new self” and “new class” were not conformed to humanized value. A great number of the 1- 2 star OTOP entrepreneurs were preyed by government. As the deputy director of the community development department, Sayumporn Limthai, disclosed that after the government promoted the OTOP product production more than 5 years until 2006, there were more than 36,000 of registered and selected OTOP products. Fifty percents of those products was the 3- 5 star OTOP products, and the rest were the 1- 2 star OTOP products. Besides, the statistical report of the OTOP Product Champion Contest by the Community Development Department revealed, in 2004, there were 37,826 of registered OTOP products from each Tambon and 27,789 products passed to the national level of contest and became the 3-5 star OTOP products of 7,945 items. As a result, the rest of them which were the defeated products and the 1-2 star OTOP products about 30,000 items had to overcome the critical business administration and marketing without any attention from government. [15]

DOCILE FLYING TERMITES FLY INTO THE FIRE

The communities were only the follower of government which had to do as the government dictated and forced by submitting of the OTOP credit program and the asset capitalization project. Then, the communities had to managed the capital they received and also produced the products which were begun by the government promotion but it was not continuous. As a result, this affected to the collapse of community businesses in many areas as many cases showed in the news.

Atchariya Natechey, a teacher of the faculty of Social Science, Naresuan university, Phitsanuloke said the research indicated, most pattern of community promotion were the urge of collective training, study trip and supporting of capital and production factors which were the limited developping process. So,many of community businesses were collapsed; the 215 groups of OTOP entrepreneurs, there were only 5 percents or about 10 groups of them succeeded in business. [14]

Nuansri Suwanrangsri, the head of Kanla group, Phrasaeng disdriect, Surat Thane, the entrepreneur of OTOP beverage said that after they had collected of 30 members by forcing of the district community development officered with the fund of 50,000 bahts to start the business at 2002. At the same time, the district agriculture officer had suggested know-how to produce wine as well as provided the markets for us. Moreover, the district commerce officer and the provincial administration organization also had allocated some budget to improve taste and packaging. However, the circulation was still down, even we had used the strategy “buy 1 get 1”, then,we had to offer free drink to Phrasaeng people in the product expo.” [16]

Furthermore, the promotion of occupation to some OTOP communities, the government did not concerned about a compatible with the local resources and community life, causing them to change a peaceful way to produce the products that had to provide raw material or instruments beyond the area or from abroad, even it was not their cultural occupation or local wisdom, such as the production of herbal cosmetics, a product which composed of almost chemical material from abroad and mixed together with a little amount of herb extracted by community. Therefore, they produced the in-trend products or the products which were very popular in the market without any using of their own wisdom which contrasted to the principle of OTOP development as followed case.

Amnuay Sihavong, the Lord Mayor of Na Haew prefecture told that 3 last years, the popularity of Kra Chy Dam wine had effected to many communities of Na Haew about 34 vilages investing to cultivate the Kra Chy Dam instead of corn and extremely collected to construct "wine house", then there was at least one wine house of each village. At that time, the Kra Chy Dam wine was the best selling products. Later, the popularity had declined, resulted to utterly draw back of local liquor markets as well as the taxation cost was trouble those entrepreneurs. Moreover, there were seriously competitive among those entrepreneurs in the same area. As a result, most OTOP entrepreneurs in Na Haew was reluctant ended and leaved their wine houses desolate." He also said that Kra Chy Dam wine was over production and could not sell to other areas, especially, the native Na Haew people did not consume this wine and the community development officer also could not any help." [16]

OTOP COMMUNITY: A TOOL FOR GOVERNMENTAL POWER

The community entrepreneurs were governed to be a tool for power of government by the popularism policy. The communities were satisfied to "OTOP project" which brought the virtual prosperity and security never been in the pass, [16] and let them expected to get more and more supporting from the government even if it would be the dependent way in unsustainable development. Later, it was a popularity to "lofty person" that was the government's leader, and became a power base or voter base for the next election. In fact, OTOP project was a very important tool for popularity to H.E. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

However, the OTOP discourse has been a discursive practice, both in form of the supporting of occupation in accordance with the government policy, the OTOP Product Champion Contest, the OTOP product expo, and the mass communication of OTOP promotion through publication and multimedia for presenting the performance of H.E. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's government. As a result, the discourse was reproduced a set of constituted reality in many ways linked to the owner of this discourse, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Whenever saying "OTOP", it would be always referred to Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and brought to prolong of OTOP discourse.

GOVERNMENT CHANGED, OTOP NEVER CHANGED : LONG-RUNNING OF OTOP

Since the government changed in late 2006, Prime Minister General Surayud Chulanont changed a wording "One Tambon One Product" to "Local and Community Product" yet still used "OTOP" as a brand and described the meaning of OTOP into 2 parts, those were "Community Product" and "Local Product"; the community product was the OTOP product producing by the communities and the local product was the product producing by the ownership, partnerships or company. Besides, the reasons

why the Prime Minister Surayud's government did not use One Tambon One Product, were the government would like to promote the marketing potential more than the production for generating income to the communities. [18] This would be the elimination of thought and discourse from the age of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to reduce the popularity of Prime Minister Thaksin and relieve the social contradiction of different ideas about the ethic problem of Prime Minister Thaksin's administration which has not been judged.

On the other hand, even though its definition has changed, remaining of "OTOP" brand was still indicated the prolonging of OTOP discourse, referred to products or any processes about OTOP which were the products and processes of development and strengthening of communities. It was strongly confirmed the sustainability of OTOP discourse when Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej announced the government policy to the National Assembly on Monday, 18 February 2008 that the government had to improve the management efficiency of the One Tambon One Product project to enable each community to utilize its resources and local knowledge in developing their products. The Government stood ready to improve the access of communities to new know-how and funding sources, as well as enhanced the management and marketing capabilities of communities in order to linked local products with national and overseas markets. [19] Moreover, the government policy of Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat announced on Tuesday 7 October 2008 was also promoted the OTOP discourse by the urgent policy of improvement of efficiency in the management of the One Tambon One Product project by enabling communities to have access to new know-how and funding sources, as well as enhancing the management, product standards and marketing capabilities of communities in order to link local products with national and overseas markets, strengthen production networks among communities and engage the private sector in supporting entrepreneurs of community products. [20]

CONCLUSION

In summary, the OTOP discourse was beneficial served the government, especially to Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and also to other Prime Ministers who carried on the OTOP policy. Since this discourse has become popular, it was a powerful tool to rush the people and communities to the way of popularism and also push them to the way of consumerism under the capitalism which was opposed to "the Sufficiency Economy", the way of sustainable development. Moreover, the effects of the OTOP discourse have reduced the strength of community as well as retarded the helpful social involvement which would bring them to the individualism. So, it would be hard to move Thai to self-reliance, moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity based on wisdom and ethical approach in accordance with the king's philosophy, as long as Thai communities have not understood what they were dominated and how to free from a pool of this trapping.

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