
PART I

MINISTRIES AND SCHOOLS TRANSFORM

CHAPTER ONE

"THAI WISDOM" AND GLOCALIZATION

Negotiating the Global and the Local in Thailand’s National Education Reform

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About a hundred years ago, King Rama V strategically thought of ceding power over some small areas of land to Britain and France to protect the greater part of the Kingdom, instead of fighting in the battlefield where traditional weapons could not compete with the more advanced war equipment of the Europeans. When reinforced by implementing a strategic alliance with Russia to balance the superpowers, the country was saved and became the only one in the region never to have experienced being colonized. However, in the dynamic pattern of the economic battleground in the era of Globalisation when “information and currencies move across the national border at lightning speed” (Prawase 1998), the country was defeated. Historic Thai wisdom, containing the ability to think strategically, had been lost. With weakness of the macro-economic structure... the country collapsed on July 2, 1997, and the negative results of this collapse were felt by all Thai. (Supradit Na Ayudhya 2000:1)

In this paper, I argue that the "Thai wisdom" supposedly lost is emerging as a national phenomenon, a significant form of response to the forces of
globalization and a perceived "world culture." Revitalizing Thai wisdom has become part of the comprehensive educational reforms that followed Thailand's economic crash of 1997—the National Education Act of 1999. Recourse to Thai wisdom, and more specifically local wisdom, is a strategy aimed at revitalizing cultural knowledge and practices. I believe that this revitalization represents a form of resistance to the homogenizing aspects of globalization enacted through movements to enhance the capacities of local communities to chart their own cultural and economic paths.

The significance of the current educational reform projects that I will reference is that they are stimulating community participation processes for revitalizing Thai wisdom and developing locally relevant curricula. Furthermore, as the government begins to stall on implementing the new reforms, the fate of educational change in Thailand will increasingly reside with civil society and community-based projects like these, which are explicitly intended to promote local voice. Education projects like the ones I will reference are critical sites relative to globalization because they occasion globalization, where tradition and modernity are (re)invented (Lukens-Bull 2001) through the interplay of local and global forces.

Rung Kaewdang, the secretary-general of Thailand's Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC), the office responsible for educational policy development, is a major architect of the new reforms. Conceptualizing the revitalization of Thai wisdom as a cultural strategy, he notes:

In the past forty years ... Thailand's economic and social development ... depended too much on Western knowledge and know-how ... The economic crisis that has occurred during the past three years was the outcome of such mistakes and caused us to reconsider, review and re-evaluate our social and economic development plan ... We discovered that we had pursued Western ways of development and entirely neglected our own indigenous or local knowledge, the splendid treasure that has played important roles in building the nation's unity and dignity. Now it is the time we should turn back to our own philosophy, our own culture, and our own indigenous knowledge ...

Education in the globalization age should therefore be the balanced integration between global knowledge and indigenous knowledge. (Kaewdang 2001a)

GLOBAL REFORMS, THAI RESPONSES

Many argue that education systems worldwide are embracing rational global reform paradigms, creating "considerable isomorphism in schooling" characterised by "marketization, individualization, bureaucratization, and homogenisation" (LeTendre et al. 2001). Indeed, many Asia-Pacific countries, such as Thailand, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, New Zealand, and Australia, have adopted education reforms with similar themes: decentralized systems of administration and accountability; more community-level participation; teacher reform; higher education reform; new technologies; private sector involvement; educational standards, quality assurance, and performance-based assessments; and more learner-centered curricula (Cheng 2001; Hallak 2000; Kwak 2001; Lee 2001; ONEC 2001; Pascoe 2001). In part, these reforms reflect the influence of global capitalism, through which liberalization, reduced government spending, privatization, decentralized bureaucracies, and corporate managerialism are driving policies. For example, after the economic crash in 1997, international aid agencies mandated that Thailand focus on improving productivity, internal and external competition, the country's knowledge base, capability in science and technology, and political management in line with the tenets of "good governance" (The Nation 2001b; Supradith Na Ayudhya 2000). Like other countries in debt, Thailand had little option but to adopt these policies (Madrick 2001; Bowornwathana 2000). However, that does not mean that the adopted policies are universally, genuinely, or unambiguously embraced.

Bidhya Bowornwathana (2000) argues that in Thailand, reform drafters and politicians have insufficient time and expertise to develop indigenous solutions to major social, economic, and educational problems. Therefore, he claims:

Adopting a global reform paradigm is a good choice, from this perspective, because it silences domestic differences, pleases funding agencies, and presents convenient packages of ready-made reform programs. It is also easier to convince the public about the benefits of a reform proposal that has already worked well in a developed country than to build public support for a completely new indigenous reform program. (Bowornwathana 2000:398)

Furthermore, these reformers falsely assume that a successful reform strategy in one country can be transferred to other countries regardless of their contextual differences. Consequently, Bowornwathana argues that these national reform policies are unsuccessful in the long run. Even though governance reforms are still at an early stage in Thailand, he claims that "Thai citizens are not especially benefiting from the public reform initiatives" (Bowornwathana 2000:394). Though Bowornwathana was speaking specifically of Thailand's national governance reforms, the new education reform policies reflect the
same mandates and dilemmas, and foreshadow the same fate. The focus of this paper is on some local reform strategies, which, in spite of the above context, are nonetheless working to ensure that education will be contextualized in Thai wisdom.

THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN THAILAND: THE ECONOMIC CRASH AND A NEW CONSTITUTION

Critics had long claimed that Thailand's highly centralized, top-down, "chalk and talk" education system, with its standardized curriculum, rote learning, and high-stakes testing, had to go. Students, they said, needed to develop at their own pace and teachers needed to facilitate analytical, creative, and independent thinking skills. However, reform became a national priority only after the economy crashed in 1997 and the new Constitution mandated that the system be changed. The immediate causes of the economic crash were attributed to a lack of governmental financial discipline, adverse development, and a series of currency attacks (The Nation 2001a; Supradith Na Ayudhya 2000; The Economist 1997; IMF 1997; Neher n.d.). However, social critics diverge on the long-term causes and implications of the crisis, as Redmond describes:

The Asian economic collapse that began in Thailand in July 1997 has promoted two prominent responses—utterly different, and utterly predictable. One is that "the West knows best," that Asia has stumbled because it failed to absorb enough of Euro-American capitalism, democracy, and the individualistic ideas that support them. Others insist that the very suddenness of the reversal points to the opposite conclusion, that the wholesale consumption of foreign funds and value systems led to greed, blindness, and a breakdown in the moral balance and social control Asian societies thrive on. (Redmond 1999: back cover)

There has been much more consensus, however, that one of the long-term causes of the crisis was an inadequate education system (Zack 1997; The Nation 2001a). Hence, educational reform has become a mandated remedy:

As educators, we cannot deny the responsibility for the economic, social, cultural and political ill effects since people who caused all these problems are the products of our current educational system. (Kaewdang 2001b)

A new Thai Constitution aimed at extending civil liberties through decentralizing power and restructuring controls over the governmental, politi-
cal, and educational systems was approved shortly after the economic crash in 1997 (Phongsapichit and Baker 1998). The Constitution calls for more participatory democracy and contains an unprecedented number of provisions related to education, notably that the educational system and the teaching profession will be improved consistent with economic and social changes and that every citizen has the right to a 12-year basic and free education. Finally, the Constitution mandated that a new national education law be developed within two years.

THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ACT OF 1999

Two years after the economic crash and the adoption of the new Constitution, the National Education Act of 1999 was passed. Implementation was to be phased in and completed by 2002. This comprehensive Act addresses: teaching and learning; the revitalization of Thai wisdom; the empowerment of teachers; more student-centered instruction; administrative and fiscal decentralization; and a system of educational standards, quality assurance, and authentic assessment (Kaewdang 2001b). Encoded in the Act are two divergent themes (Jungck 2001; Cheng 2001). On the one hand, the Act calls for a tightly coupled system with more effectiveness, economic efficiency, accountability, measurable outputs, quality assurance, and standardization:

There shall be a system of educational quality assurance to ensure improvement of educational quality and standards at all levels. Such a system shall be comprised of both internal and external quality assurance. (Section 47, ONEC 1999)

On the other hand, the Act envisions a loosely coupled system with more decentralized authority and decision making, local participation, curricular relevance, and student-centered learning:

The Ministry shall decentralize powers in educational administration and management regarding academic matters, budget, personnel and general affairs administration directly to the Committees and Offices for Education, Religion, and Culture of the educational service areas and the education institutions in the (local) areas. (Section 39, ONEC 1999)

According to Hallak (2000:25), it is not so unusual that countries embrace seemingly contradictory policies like the above, as one of the consequences of globalization is that it generates both standardizing and diversifying phenomena. I see both standardizing and diversifying phenomena thematically reflected
in Thailand’s new educational reform policy. One theme is about democratizing and devolving power and the other is about developing ways to manage and assess efficiency and effectiveness. Watson (2000) suggests that when highly centralized systems move to less rigid forms of control, issues of how to assure equity and quality typically surface. As one consequence, states introduce centralized educational standards and monitoring systems (Watson 2000). Thus, decentralization seems to inevitably trigger, as it has in Thailand, more state standards and monitoring. The central dilemma is that reforms aimed at democratizing and decentralizing highly centralized government systems require long-term, developmental, constructivist, and high-risk innovations involving local capacity building, curricular innovation, transformative leadership and greater school diversity, while reforms aimed at standardization and performance-based managerial systems tend to thwart the formative nature of these long-term processes and changes.

Many believe that the Act’s emphasis on administrative and academic decentralization is especially vital for rural people, who constitute a 60 percent majority in Thailand, because the traditional curriculum has been largely irrelevant for them (Thongthew 1999; Kaewdang 2001a). The Act specifically emphasizes the importance of learning in the communities themselves through engendering more community participation in school affairs. While decentralization is intended, in part, to increase efficiency and local accountability, many reformers advocate it as a means of giving local stakeholders more voice and influence in their schools. Stakeholders, they say, can “benefit from local wisdom and other sources of learning for community development in keeping with their requirements and needs” (Section 29, ONEC 1999).

As Rung Kaewdang envisions, “As schools will have more autonomy to decide the local curriculum they deem necessary for local children, there is a possibility that Thai wisdom will enjoy the same status as modern knowledge. Our children and adults will learn to be Thais in parallel with the internationalization” (Kaewdang 2001b). Consequently, he explained, ONEC has researched “Thai knowledge” in order to “revitalize and return it to our educational system”:

[1] Local wisdom enables lifelong learning in society. It not only strengthens the community’s economic situation on the basis of self-sufficiency, but also moral values, and local culture among community people. In the globalized world, it is certain that most of the contents in the Internet will focus on the Western knowledge, ideas, and culture. However, if there is nothing done to promote the learning of local knowledge, our future generations will definitely not understand where we are in the world or even lose the root of their culture. Education in the globalization age should therefore be the balanced integration between global knowledge and indigenous knowledge . . . for sustainable development in any community, international understanding, and peace and harmony of the world. (Kaewdang 2001a)

In this paper, I suggest that revitalizing Thai wisdom has become a national strategy to encourage a more balanced mediation of “global knowledge and indigenous knowledge.”

THAI WISDOM/LOCAL WISDOM

Rung Kaewdang defines “Thai wisdom” and “local wisdom” as “the bodies of knowledge, abilities, and skills of Thai people accumulated through many years of experience, learning, development, and transmission. It has helped to solve problems and contribute to the development of our people’s way of life in accordance with the changing times and environment” (Kaewdang 2001a).

Thai wisdom has become a national phenomenon: It is a popular cultural campaign, sanctioned by law and firmly embedded in the new educational reforms. While the term or concept of Thai wisdom is not new, referencing and encoding it in national policies is (Srisalab and Sritongtuk 1999). In 1997, the right and the duty to promote Thai wisdom was incorporated in the new Constitution:

Section 46: Persons so assembling as to be a traditional community shall have the right to conserve or restore their customs, local knowledge, arts or good culture of their community and of the nation. . . .

Section 81: The state shall promote local knowledge and national arts and culture.

. . . . . . . . .

Section 289: A local government organization has the duty to conserve local arts, custom, knowledge and good culture. (Kaewdang 2001a)

Thai wisdom has become an umbrella theme linking sociocultural resources with economic growth and development. For example, the stated intent of the Office of the National Cultural Commission’s project “Thai Culture Fights off Economic Crisis” was to “help strengthen individuals and communities in their determination to become self-reliant economically, psychologically and socially and to rediscover the values of Thai traditional wisdom with a sense of pride” (Office of the National Cultural Commission 1998). Similarly, countless national and local exhibitions, demonstrations,
seminars, festivals, and development projects focus on preserving and promoting the distinctive qualities of Thai boxing, cuisine, music, dance, art, folktales, handicrafts, medical science, silk production, weaving, and herbal medicine. The need to revitalize Thai wisdom and local wisdom was formally enunciated in the National Education Act of 1999.

Attention to Thai wisdom escalated during the period when Western influences and global economics were intensifying. As a social and educational agenda, the focus on Thai wisdom turns the gaze inward, as if there were a necessary process in developing the country outward. I refer to Thai wisdom as both a process and a product of illuminating, revitalizing, and transforming cultural knowledge and indigenous practices in ways that enable people to be more strategic in negotiating the homogenizing currents of globalization. Thai wisdom, as incorporated in the education reforms, translates into a rallying call for affirming diversity, strengthening communities, enhancing local voice, and developing more locally relevant curricula in schools.

As I have observed the phenomenon of Thai wisdom escalate in recent years, I resonate with the observations of Mebratu, Crossley and Johnson (2000) that "amidst this intensification of globalization ... many communities are ever more forcefully acknowledging their distinctive characteristics and celebrating their cultural differences." I agree with them that "cultural forces deserve greater attention if we are to understand and deal creatively with the impact of globalization." My interest is in understanding how reformers are appropriating local wisdom in the interest of informing local curricula, and conversely, in understanding how local curriculum development processes are transforming local wisdom. For, this dynamic interaction is intended to strengthen the local voice in the interest of balancing official school knowledge within the context of globalization.

THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL

Commenting on the interaction of global and local influences, Thai philosopher and researcher Somr Kongladarom claims that "neither absolute homogeneity nor absolute diversity is likely when the global and the local are being dynamically negotiated. Instead, the local is permeated by the global to the extent that the local finds from the global what is useful, and employs various strategies to retain its identity" (Kongladarom 2000:9). Based on his case study of how Thai youth are using an Internet café in Bangkok, Kongladarom concludes that they are far from being passively acculturated by the Western-dominated Internet. His study describes how "Thai culture co-opts the Internet" and how "identity is being constantly negotiated" (Kongladarom 2000:1). Furthermore:

The global ... finds itself tempered by various locals to such an extent that eventually the global can no longer claim identity with any local. It is not that one local can claim globality at the expense of the other locals; on the contrary, the global that is emerging from the (ideological, political, economic, culture, social) interaction among the world's societies and cultures is such that it eventually contains elements from everywhere, but belongs to nowhere. The global, thus, becomes what I previously called "cosmopolitan." ... Its represents a makeshift mode of interacting among social entities compelled by the logic of advanced capitalism. (2000:9)

I submit that recourse to Thai wisdom and local wisdom is a strategic process in the construction of the "cosmopolitan."

Glocalization, a term coined by Roland Robertson (Featherstone, Lash, and Robertson 1997), is an apt concept here because it references the interplay between globalizing and localizing forces. This is an interplay between "both local idiosyncratic histories [and] broad global trends" (LeTendre et al. 2001), or as Robertson describes it, "the simultaneity, the co-presence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies" (Robertson 1997). I suggest that reform projects engaged in revitalizing Thai wisdom and increasing local participation and local curricula in schools are strategic sites because they deliberately occasion glocalization, where indigenization and homogenization are both at play.

THE RESEARCH

I have studied both public and private schooling in Thailand, with Thai colleagues, since 1985 (Potisook et al. 1993; Jungck et al. 1995; Leesatayakun 1998). I was in Thailand for the year (1999–2000) that these educational reform issues were a national priority and the National Education Act of 1999 was passed. Prior to the passage of the Act I observed several innovative research and development projects that I now realize were foreshadowing these reforms, some begun as early as 1997. Five of these early reform projects have been described elsewhere (Jungck 2001). I have continued to follow several of these early initiatives as they live on through continued funding and revised versions, at new sites.

When I returned for two months in 2001 to learn more about reform initiatives, I was struck by the heightened attention to Thai wisdom and local wisdom. In the following, I draw examples from three recent specific reform projects, two led by Kajornsin and one by Thongchew, summarized in Table 1.1. The projects illustrate what is involved in honoring local wisdom and developing a more locally relevant and empowering curriculum.
Kajornsin and Thongthew are university-based educational reformers and researchers who have led multyear collaborative reform projects in many different local communities. Collectively, all the research and reform projects summarized focus on coming to understand local communities, systems, processes, and capacities relevant to developing (versus implementing) participatory and student-centered reform goals in a variety of contexts.

LOCAL WISDOM AND LOCAL CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

It is the interplay between these two that brings both into clearer focus: Local curriculum development is informed by understanding and appropriating local wisdom, while local wisdom is understood and revitalized through local efforts to appropriate and transform it through a new curriculum. Both local wisdom and curriculum are transformed in the process—or at least that is the intent. One way to conceptualize this is as Lukens-Bull (2001) does in speaking of modernity and tradition in an education context. He claims that "imagining and (re)inventing modernity is necessarily linked to imagining and (re)inventing tradition. Imagining the two is the first step in the (re)invention of both" (2001:368). For example, through developing a more locally relevant curriculum, one that introduces the concepts of sustainability and integrated farming into a traditional rice-growing community based on mono-agriculture, local wisdom is at once affirmed and re-invented or transformed. A new local curriculum is "imagined." However, developing local curriculum through honoring and revitalizing local wisdom and garnering community participation represents an enormous shift in Thai education policy, a shift that makes the processes of globalization both explicit and imperative. How is local wisdom more locally defined in these projects?

Local Wisdom as Knowledge and Understanding

Reformers have defined local wisdom in ways specific to their field sites and experiences. For example, one university educator and reform project leader describes what local wisdom means to her in reference to the first project in Table 1.1:

Three years ago, when I worked in Ban Ta Wai, they produced this kind of artistic woodcarving as their local product and they are very proud of it, very much. I stayed in that village, rented a house so that I could learn from them. And there are several families that make woodcarvings, not

just one family, not just one factory. One family produces the shape, another family polishes, another family paints, another family sells it. So, a lot of families work on this product and they hand down to each other. . . . In the village, it is like a big family and you cannot miss one family; if you miss one family, it means the product will not come out like this. So, I think that this is the local wisdom. The way they cling together, you cannot find that in Bangkok—they have to work together. It's the old tradition: Because we are an agricultural community, we have to help each other, we need manpower. (S. Thongthew, interview, August 7, 2001)

Another educational leader, Kajornsin, who is on her second multyear reform project aimed at developing the capacities and processes through which local participants can produce local curriculum (Project 3 in Table 1.1), describes it this way:

I think that local wisdom is a person, somebody, a group of people who know something exactly. As they know, you know, in their daily life. Like at Ratchaburi, they are a dairy-farming community. So, we have many, many farmers who have dairy-farmed since a long time. So, they are experts in terms of dairy farming. Those people who know how to do, how to take care of their dairy farms, and those who are successful and get national awards, so those people who know exactly about the things they do in their occupations—in my opinion, those people have local wisdom. (B. Kajornsin, interview, August 15, 2001)

At one level, these reformers conceptualize local wisdom as expert knowledge, skills, and practical behaviors. For them, local wisdom is a system of meanings and understandings:

I look at this basket. . . . [i]t has no meaning in itself; we look at the people who make the basket, it has some purpose. . . . Why [did] they make this shape? Why not another? This is difficult [to learn], we have to be in that place for some time before you realize why they have to make it the way it is. (S. Thongthew, interview, August 7, 2001)

Local Wisdom as Reflection and Change

At another level, however, local wisdom is seen as the capacity to reflect and understand change, as Thongthew explains:

[A] lot of people believe that culture is something that is handed down to us and . . . we must keep it. . . . protect it, and hand it down to the people
### Table 1.1 Reform Projects Cited

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<th>Projects and Leaders/Informants</th>
<th>Reform Goals Addressed</th>
<th>Project Focus</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Project 1</strong>&lt;br&gt;S. Thongthaw, 1999</td>
<td>Decentralization&lt;br&gt;Local curriculum development&lt;br&gt;Incorporating local wisdom in school curriculum&lt;br&gt;Collaboration between teachers and local community&lt;br&gt;Local participation</td>
<td>Sites: 2 villages in northern and northeastern Thailand (a woodcarving community, a basket-weaving community) 20-month study, 1999–2001, of rural philosophy (local wisdom) and how it can be integrated into school curriculum&lt;br&gt;Collaboration among teachers, community members, and university educators/researchers to study the local communities and develop a curriculum based on community expertise, values, and future goals. Developed community-based curricular units, curriculum for a new local economy</td>
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<td><strong>Project 2</strong>&lt;br&gt;B. Kajornsin, J. Chuaratanaphong, T. Sienguecha, 1999</td>
<td>Decentralization&lt;br&gt;Cooperation of schools and community&lt;br&gt;Local curriculum development&lt;br&gt;Student-centered learning&lt;br&gt;Incorporating local wisdom into school curriculum</td>
<td>Site: 2 dairy farms in central Thailand, 2 schools, 5th grades&lt;br&gt;3½ year study, 1998–2002, to understand and develop local curriculum development processes&lt;br&gt;Collaboration among teachers and their students, local dairy farmers, provincial/district/school administrators, veterinarians and dairy extension agencies, community leaders, parents, and university educators/researchers Developed, taught, evaluated, revised, and retaught new curricula using an action research model</td>
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<td><strong>Project 3</strong>&lt;br&gt;B. Kajornsin, J. Chuaratanaphong, P. Potisook (unpublished)</td>
<td>Decentralization&lt;br&gt;Local curriculum development&lt;br&gt;Local participation&lt;br&gt;Collaboration processes&lt;br&gt;Incorporating local wisdom into school curriculum</td>
<td>Sites: Two villages in traditional rice- and vegetable-growing communities in central Thailand. One elementary school and one combined elementary/ lower secondary 2½ year study, 1999–2002, to understand local curriculum development processes through exploration in differing contexts&lt;br&gt;Collaboration among teachers, provincial/district/school administrators and personnel, and university educators/researchers Developed, taught, evaluated, revised, and retaught new semester-long curricula using an action research model</td>
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in that area. From another side, we believe that culture is something that is going on—okay, handed down to us from ancestors, whatever, but it has been adjusted and moves on, changes all the time, it is not the culture like in the past. So, for educators, who believe in this stance, culture is what is going on. When we look at the curriculum, or local culture, we look at it the same way, we try to see the culture. We do not know what had been before, but we try to collect the artifacts, talk with people in the area—especially the older people—look at ancient books. We compare that culture and see the way the people in the area are now behaving. Wow, how do they change that way? It's difficult to find out about culture in this second sense. We try to see wisdom, that is, the way they change: That's the wisdom, not just the material. We call it expressive culture. (S. Thongthew, interview, August 7, 2001)

The range of conceptions of local wisdom as I have heard and inferred them from reformers is broad and encompasses two major ways that anthropologists typically view culture: as a system of symbols and meanings and as practical activity having expressive or "performative" aspects (Sewell 1999). The latter conception is similar to Ann Swidler's notion that culture is like a "tool kit" containing "strategies of action" (Swidler 1984 in Sewell 1999).

Just as reform leaders in these projects had various conceptions of local wisdom, they also had a variety of strategies for incorporating it into reforms and, in the process, transforming it. Space does not allow me to describe these multiyear projects in detail; however, I will summarize some relevant parameters they all had in common.

Incorporating and Transforming Local Wisdom

In the first stages of the projects I observed, university-based team members spent anywhere from 6 to 18 months living in a community and interviewing community members, local school administrators, and teachers in order to study the local culture, resources, and ambitions before they and the community agreed to commence a curriculum development project together. In the next stage, teams of teachers, community members, and district curriculum administrators were assembled to work with the university-based educators. During this stage, experts (local and nonlocal) with experience pertinent to what was emerging as a desirable curricular focus were drawn into the project as well. For several months, team members would then educate themselves in specific areas (university reformers studied local wisdom, teachers studied the processes of curriculum development, community members learned how to participate, and all studied what was necessary for the new curricular content). Next, teams spent several months (often weekends at a time) jointly developing curriculum plans. After a new curriculum was developed it was taught for a semester, evaluated by all participants, revised, and taught again for another semester with a new class—such was the cycle.

The National Education Act of 1999 stipulates that up to 20 percent of a school's curriculum can be locally determined, so these projects represented only a portion of a school's total program. Though voluntary, these projects posed heavy demands on local school communities and teachers, who by tradition have not been expected, taught, resourced, or rewarded for developing and assessing their own curriculum. Similarly, neither Ministry officials nor project leaders have experience in studying or utilizing local wisdom as a basis for developing more relevant curricula. These projects are small in terms of national scope: Each involved one or two schools, one or two grade levels, and only particular curricular areas. They are huge projects, however, in terms of labor intensity, involvement of local participants, multiyear timelines, and the demands on all team members to learn new roles and embrace professional development. Most importantly, these projects foreshadow what is involved when there is a huge philosophical and organizational shift in terms of who develops and what counts as legitimate knowledge and curriculum. If revitalizing local wisdom and occasioning community participation are the means through which decentralization and localization proceed, then these projects are extremely important in terms of creating and understanding these new processes.

WISDOM, WISDOM EVERYWHERE, BUT "WHERE’S THE CURRICULUM?"

After studying a local community, project participants then had to figure out how to relate and transform what they learned in the communities to a specifiable curricular plan of action. I observed a variety of strategies for translating local wisdom into new and locally valued curricula. For example, Sunlee Thongthew viewed local wisdom as ensoced in the community and thus came to view the "community as the curriculum." She got local teachers (many of whom were not from the local area) to study the community much like ethnographers. They in turn developed a curriculum in which their students studied the community's curriculum by becoming apprentices to local artisans—in this case, woodcrafters (Thongthew 1999).

In Kajornsins's first project (number 2 in Table 1.1), located in a dairy-farming community (Kajornsins, Chuaratanaphong, and Siengluca 1999), the schools' regular curriculum structure remained in tact, but the content
was revised to be more thematically integrated around various aspects of dairy farming. Students were learning math, science, and modern technologies through visiting local dairy cooperatives, model farms, cattle breeding centers, and veterinary clinics where they were taught principles of genetics, cattle breeding, milking techniques, and animal care. While the traditional school structures and subjects were retained, curricular content was revised to infuse local wisdom, community experts and modern technologies.

Therefore, while reformers were learning ways of interacting with local communities and constructing relevant curricula within them, they were doing so in very different ways. All the projects I observed, however, were consciously tapping into local traditions, values, and practices while simultaneously introducing new currents and possibilities for both curricular and community development.

"Why Do We Have to Learn What We Already Know?"

Interestingly, a common curricular tension and philosophical question would surface at some point in all these projects. Local community members, after having been voluntarily engaged for some time in developing a local curriculum, would inevitably begin to wonder, "Why are we doing this?" Though not in these words, they began to ask one of the perennial questions in curriculum studies: What knowledge is of most worth? For example, Kajornsin explains that in her dairy-farming project, participants began to question, "Why do we have to teach dairy farming? Students, they know since they are born, they just know how to milk the cows..." (B. Kajornsin, interview, August 15, 2001). Thongthew describes how this same tension and question emerged in her project:

First of all, they go along with our local curriculum, they are enthusiastic, they work and just want children to learn, this is something new, and then, after a semester went by some of them decided they didn't want it, they said, "Why should we want our children to become like us? We want them to become doctors, someone else." (S. Thongthew, Interview, August 7, 2001)

Inevitably, community members would reach a point in these projects when they questioned the value and purpose of a new curriculum based on local wisdom. Implicitly, they were wondering if this was a curriculum of social reproduction when what they wanted was a curriculum of social mobility, something more empowering. While the agriculturalists and artisans in these communities understood that their traditional work was socially valuable, they also understood that they earned little for their labor, worked in difficult conditions, had low social status. Moreover, their children wanted something different. In contrast, the government curriculum, although reputed to be irrelevant and alienating, was nonetheless seen as high-status knowledge, as it was aligned with national tests, university admissions, desired credentials, and social status. Hence the question, "Why teach local wisdom?"

If revitalizing local wisdom and developing local curricula are intended to empower people to become more "strategic" globally and nationally, then these acts have to do more than honor and reproduce local wisdom. Leaders in all these projects believed that locally relevant curricula could be sociologically, psychologically, philosophically, and pedagogically more empowering than the state curriculum. In fact, Sumlee Thongthew, who recently completed a 20-month project in a northern village specializing in woodcarving, saw the traditional curriculum as the cause of, not the solution to, the socioeconomic problems in rural areas. The development of a more relevant local curriculum would, she claimed, "let [the villagers] use their own wisdom and become strong in their own way" (S. Thongthew, interview, August 7, 2001):

The equilibrium with nature and local wisdom in rural schools in Thailand has been weakened by the imposition of the National Curriculum for more than a century. The National Curriculum, much influenced by urban industrialized philosophy . . . has less regard for the long-term relationships of people with the natural environment and local culture . . .

It damages rural socioeconomic background and neglects the worthy purpose of community sustainable development. Growing migration from the rural areas to big cities emerges drastically as most graduates from rural schools find they do not have enough skills and lack attitudes necessary to work and live with nature in the rural areas.

A local curriculum emphasizing the study of rural philosophy for cultivating practices and knowledge will lead to . . . sustainable development in a village. . . . The constructed curriculum highlights relevant and meaningful subject matters to the learners, the provision of learners' control over their own learning process, and community feedback of the curriculum outcomes. (Thongthew 1999:14)

Speaking of her experiences in her first multiyear project in the dairy-farming community, Kajornsin saw the cognitive and pedagogical values of a locally relevant curriculum that engaged students in authentic ways of "learning how to learn." For her, involving local dairy farmers and scientists from agricultural agencies in the curriculum served as a way to both utilize
and enhance local wisdom while engaging teachers and students in a more relevant and constructivist, versus a memorization-based, pedagogy:

The students were taken out of schools to study... the demonstration dairy farms and local organizations became "laboratories" for information gathering. Therefore, students experienced "authentic learning."

By the end of [the] second semester, we found that most students had developed more responsibility, better work habits, more expressive ability and more creative thinking... The students' ability to work as a team had improved, they could present what they learned... they could construct their own knowledge. (Kajornsin et al. 1999:8)

There are many ways in which participants in these projects believed that what they were doing was psychologically, sociologically, and pedagogically empowering, enabling local communities to better understand and assert themselves. However, implicit in all these projects was the belief that local economic revitalization was necessary as well. In both global and local terms, these projects were expected to "add value" to communities and contribute to their economic viability and independence as well.

Transforming Local Wisdom

For Thongthew, one "value added" revitalizing economic component in the woodcarving village was the development of a local curriculum to prepare students to be local tourist guides in a new "junior hospitality business." The plan was that students would apprentice themselves to local woodcarvers in order to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for the local wisdom, and gain "work-study" experience as well. Ultimately, they would become knowledgeable, local tour guides, employable in tourism, one of Thailand's largest growing industries (Thongthew 1999). By recasting their old and respected indigenous woodcarving village as a tourist site, the community was at once reinventing their tradition and inventing a form of modernity as well.

Kajornsin has recently completed the community study and curriculum-development stages for a new project located in a traditional rice-growing community. Community members, local agricultural experts, teachers, and district academic supervisors worked for several months to develop a new fifth-grade curriculum unit focused on "integrated and sustainable" agriculture. Students and teachers will have three rai (about 1.2 acres) of land in which to learn about integrating ecologically compatible fish farms and vegetable gardens with their traditional rice fields. The new curricular project reflects a revitalization of the traditional Thai/Buddhist values of sustainability and environmentalism, values that had been marginalized with the introduction of modern monoculture. The economic value added to the community will be derived through increased productivity enabled by a more ecologically sustainable agriculture, and new natural food niche markets aimed at health-conscious consumers. While integrated and sustainable agricultural values are consistent with the Western science of ecology and are one form of modernity, a globally distributed, capital-intensive, and mechanized mono-agriculture has characterized the modernity of many poor countries. By revitalizing its local wisdom and tradition, this community is inventing a sustainable modernity upon which it can thrive.

DISCUSSION

Thailand has introduced a comprehensive and ambitious national education reform. The plan to decentralize academic and administrative powers to local levels represents a major shift in the philosophy, politics, and practices of education. Some recent projects have focused on revitalizing local wisdom and helping local communities create processes for developing locally relevant curricula. Schools and teachers seem fully capable of the kind of reflection and action that characterizes revitalization when given the purpose and resources to do so. Moreover, globalization occurs, for example, when communities like these revitalize their craft knowledge and re-create it in a world-class tourism center, or when poor rice farmers shift to sustainable, integrated agriculture and market their healthy "brown rice" in global networks.

At present, the links among revitalizing local wisdom, reforming local curricula, recovering the economy, and negotiating various global forces are weak in Thailand. As Thongthew notes about the prospects for educational change, "the new Bill does not provide financial resources that enable rural school teachers to accomplish the mission" (Thongthew 1999:11). Furthermore, schools are limited institutions and in order to revitalize rural philosophies and local wisdoms, authority, power, and economic resources must be decentralized as well. Some recent initiatives introduced by the new Thai Rak Thai government of Thaksin Shinawatra, aimed at rural development, move in this direction. However, the momentum of the Ministry of Education's leadership in educational reform has slowed down because of political disagreements over the nature, processes, and speed of decentralizing power. This gives more credence to political economist and social analyst Pasuk Phongpaichit's assertion that the greatest potential for economic recovery...
and educational reform rests not with the government, but within civil society and the local-level momentum of people's movements and NGOs (Phongpaichit and Baker 2001). Thus, these local education projects are critical sites, with high stakes, that occasion and reflect the interplay of various local wisdoms and various global forces. These projects reveal not only how long, labor intensive, and fragile these reforms are, but that the intent is for varied and nonstandardized outcomes. These Thai reformers are being more strategic and more "glocal" about globalization by supporting the local communities to revitalize their own cultural and economic resources in a significant way.

In terms of the larger questions raised in this volume, the Thai example is an interesting case. As a condition of emerging from the economic crisis of 1997, Thailand adopted the ideologies and policies of neo-liberal economics and applied much of this to its education reform. Is Thailand moving toward a globalized form of schooling, validating the hypothesis of educational isomorphism? In some ways "yes," and in other important ways "no." Certainly, its new education policies reflect an appropriation of the trends toward more decentralization, the use of national standards, and managerial rationality. Like most countries, Thailand is responding to similar global pressures and education reform trends. But, these trends are interpreted and accommodated into local histories, contexts, and contemporary priorities that change over time and vary tremendously within Thailand.

As Thailand moves slowly toward a more decentralized education system, and as it increasingly and strategically strives to honor notions of local wisdom, I have seen a deliberate movement away from the kinds of conformity and isomorphism suggested by world culture theory. Variation and not conformity has been the goal and, to date, the outcome of some early reform projects. Furthermore, internal and external isomorphism is seen as one of the causes of both economic and educational problems in Thailand, something these projects are strategically poised to resist and avoid.

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