From mid 1975, the Village Scout training project has been seen to be increasing in popularity. The news that we see in the newspapers does not give anymore details other than that the training is meant to create unity and to be apolitical. The project is, in addition, under the patronage of the King.

In September 1976, I had by chance the opportunity to participate in a training programme. In fact, before one can be admitted to a training programme, one has to send in the application form one or two weeks in advance, because of the excessive number of the applicants. ("Nowadays, Village Scouts has become a prestigious institution such that everyone will strive hard to be in". Daily Times, 14 June 1976). I had not gone through the process of application, but had made the arrangement with a nurse who was not then available for the training instead. At first, I was not granted the permission, but got accepted only later. So, on the afternoon of 1st September I registered to be trained as a Village Scout. There were altogether 497 trainees, 70% of whom were in their middle ages between 35 and 42 years old. The rest were in their sixties and seventies. Only 2-5% of the trainees were young men and women. The reason for this small number, especially among students was not clear. It might be the case that they were not interested in the training. It might be that the time did not suit them. Or it might be that this programme was specially meant for the villagers as there had previously been a programme which comprised mainly officials in the hospital in town.

After dividing the trainees into groups, the 20-25 so-called instructors organized a ceremony to greet the newcomers. This was like what happened in schools and universities at the beginning of the year. People are divided into different colours. Everybody had to walk through an arch made to look like a tiger head (the symbol of the scout). The trainees' faces would be covered with face powder. All through the ceremony, the instructors sang Village Scouts songs with which everybody looked pleased.
When night fell, each group which numbered 20 - 25 went back to the Scout houses near the training center which was situated in a school in a temple. The rule was that we must learn to live with other people, and help to improve the place where we stayed to demonstrate our unity. We were constantly examined and given marks. It was all a matter of competition. That night, after having chosen the leader and deputy leader of the group, we made the bed and practised giving salutes the Village Scouts' way by raising three fingers touching the right temple, and recited the three oaths of the Village Scouts. Everybody would be asked to learn by heart the three declarations which read:

"With my honour, I promise that
1) I will be loyal to the nation, the religion and the King.
2) I will always help other people.
3) I will abide by the rules of the village scouts.

In addition, the trainees had to keep telling themselves and their fellow friends day and night not to forget to wear the scarf of their colour. We were not given the "royal scarf" until the fifth day. The instructors themselves never ceased to talk of the sacredness and nobleness of the scarf ( "Another very important thing which should be done in preparation is to ask from the King the scarf which is held in high regard by everybody..." - Daily Times, June 14, 1976 ). I cannot help thinking of the students who are striving hard to get a piece of paper to assure themselves of their worthiness. The reasoning is the same. Only the form is different. To get something which society accepts as honourable to confirm one's existence or to confirm that one is "somebody" is a fundamental desire of every social man. To be conferred with a royal scarf and a certificate with one's name beautifully written and the signature of the director of the Village Scouts who is normally the governor of the town and an official identity card ( "The Boy scouts National Council has seen the important work done by the Village Scouts and agreed to include the activities of the Village Scouts as parts of the activities of the Boyscouts National Council. Announcement No C regarding Village Scouts 1973 dated 5th July 1973 authorizes the Governor to act as the director of the Village Scouts of the town" - Daily Times, 14 June 1976)
seems to be a very psychologically effective way of initiating Thai people with these same social values.

On the following morning, all the trainees wore ordinary clothes with a scarf of a particular colour for each group, and met at the training centre at 7.30 in order to be instructed. The instructors are of two kinds: those who are central and those who are local. Both have to undergo the same kind of training.

The daily training started from 7.30 and finished at 8.00 o'clock. From the beginning, everybody had to line up and sing the national anthem and other national songs in high praise of the King. A religious ceremony also took place. All these took 1 ½ hours. At night before retiring to bed, the same procedure was repeated except that the national anthem would not be sung again. One special thing to note is that when the songs praising the King were sung, everybody had to stand up facing the direction of the Royal Palace in Bangkok.

On the first day there were several instructors who talked about the activities of the Village Scouts saying that the main purpose was to "link the Thai identity of the people from different classes, different occupations, ages and to make one new class i.e. Village Scouts". Everybody was supposed to be equal, aged equally so that there would not be any discrimination between sexes and between ages in accordance with "the democratic spirit of equality". The instructors taught a number of songs to stimulate patriotism and to create a cheerful atmosphere to occupy people's time and make them forget everything except the Village Scouts activities. The songs that were sung could be divided into 4 different types:

1) Patriotic songs such as "We Fight", "Wake Up Thai", "Aynahya, Our Old Capital", "News"

2) Royalist songs such as "Ode to The King", "Ode to The Queen Mother", "They Are Like Our Father and Mother"

3) Cheerful songs such as "Village Scouts Tulang", "Village Scouts-Bamba", "Let's Be Merry"
4) Discipline songs such as "Punctuality", "Be considerate", "Any Work" etc. 

One can imagine 497 people sitting together, singing and clapping and sometimes dancing. This was more or less what the students used to do for their own schools or universities before 10th October 1973. The tradition died down after, and is now being revived again.

Apart from singing which was a principal part, there were several lectures by the abbot on the security of the country and on Thai tradition with demonstrations of the way youngsters should behave towards the grown-ups. There were plays showing how the communists were punished in hell, and showing the suppression of the communist insurgents. There were games and lessons on tying knots. In one "Li-kay" performance (a typical and local Thai play), a trainee was selected to play the part of a king of an unknown country. He was subsequently elected the chairman of the whole group. It was written in a small pamphlet containing Village Scouts songs that he was a well-to-do man and had given financial help to make the training programme possible. ("The Interior Ministry plays an important part in setting up the Village Scouts. It likes to appoint those who are rich and generous as head of the Scouts..." - Violence and coup d'Etat of 6th October by Puay Ungphakorn, in Patiroon (reform), Year 1 No. 1, 10 Dec. 1976).

Every night there were shows and performances. The dresses they wore were elegant and expensive. The value of the Thai culture, Thai tradition was emphasized every so often. We were told of the gradual development of the Thai flag and Thai National costumes, the fall of Ayudhya, the former capital of Thailand because of the traitor Phraya Chakri. We participated in different dances. There were also fireworks. On the fourth night there was a beauty competition to find out who would be the darling of the group. Most of the evening programs were designed to make people cheerful and forget their problems. There were dances and "ramwong" (Thai local dance) with the instructors and other "graduates" village scouts to make the trainees feel that they "belonged" to the group. To occupy oneself with lectures, lights, games and dances is a effective way for the unrealistic people to forget the reality. But this was only a short-term solution which was however used too often in real life. The poor who
"enjoy" drinking, gambling and loitering is an example. Even though most of the people who joined the programme were reasonably well off, some of them could hardly make ends meet. Some complained of the hardship in their lives, but admitted that they could not resist the temptation of music and of dancing. It seemed to make them forget.

The 5th of September was the day everybody looked forward to. They were going to be given a royal scarf, a certificate and an official identity card in a super grand ceremony. There were monks, very high-ranking officials such as the governor of the town, the Lord Mayor and hundred of Village Scouts from previous training courses to congratulate them. They were naturally bound to be proud and feel honoured while shaking hands with these important people. Before departing, we sang songs together. Many people cried knowing that the course had come to an end.

After this short course, I went home, my mind heavily laden with problems. Having read the intentions of the King for patronizing the Village Scouts, one of the King's photographs and especially having seen what the Village Scouts did on the 6th October 1975, the question I asked myself seemed to have multiplied in number. I believe that by writing out my own experiences and by people's own observations, we may be in a better position to judge what has been happening. My own observations are as follows:

The King's intentions of the activities of the Village Scouts

1) Prohibition of the use of Village Scout's activities for political ends

In fact the slogan "For the nation, the religion and the King" has in itself the political nature because they all deal with governing institutions. Several governors from Field Marshall Phibulsongkram, Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat, Field Marshall Thanom Kittikhachorn to Mr. Thanin Kraivichien have all used this slogan as their political ideology.

Moreover, the activities in the course of the training all involved politics. The punishment of the commanders who went to hell and the requests of the instructors and the abbot to be
"the eyes and the ears" for the government are good examples of the political nature inherent in the play and instructions. One of the songs called "News" reads something like "What is he doing? Where is he doing it? Whom is he doing it with? When is he doing it? Who is he? And how is he doing it? Just tell us!". The repression of the student movement have also been shown in several plays. Once in an area near Nakornpathom "the instructors and the actors played at killing some 'bad students' and hanging them. It is remarkable that this training camp took place only within a short interval of 4 - 5 hours with the hanging incidents of two electric workers in Nakornpathom itself. When the murderers were arrested, it was found out that most of them were also in the training camp. Some of them were instructors of the programme themselves"(A Three-Year Narrative for Those Who Are Still Living by the Anti-Dictatorship National Front). Suffice it to say that the Village Scouts hardly abide by the King's first intention of "non-politics". Dr. Ungphakorn, in his "Violence And The Coup d'Etat" wrote "The Village Scouts are set up on the pretext of non-politics but are in fact the very political tools used by the capitalists and the military alike. It should be evident from the April 1976 general election that the Village Scouts played a large part in persuading the candidates and the villagers to be prejudiced (against the progressive candidates). The Americans used this method in Vietnam but failed. They succeeded in Thailand because they gave false information and used the three sacred institutions of nation, religion and monarchy as a pretext for their vicious end. The Interior Ministry was largely responsible for the setting up of the Village Scouts... The Village Scouts' political assemblment of the 6th October 1976 is a clear proof of the intentions of this organization."

Several foreign newspapers wrote quite often about the Village Scouts. Le Monde of 7-8 October 1976 wrote that "The Village Scouts was a royalist and anti-communist organization". Some English and American papers held the same view. Details can be found for instance in the Sunday Times 10 October 1976.
2) Prohibition of the manifestation of power of the Village Scouts

Whenever there is a new training course, it is always big news. Later, there are two newspapers devoting a special column each day writing about the activities of the village scouts. And when Village Scouts meet, its intention are most likely to be hostile to the student movement. In Chiangmai, the Village Scouts threatened medical students who went to rural areas (because they were considered a "nuisance"). The Village Scouts' demanded to clear Thammasat University area where some two to three thousand students were staging a peaceful sit-in demonstration; and for the Prime Minister to dismiss the three progressive ministers on the afternoon of 6th October 1976, are more than enough as proof against the manifestation of power of the Village Scouts. Furthermore, one of the Government spokesmen, Maj. Gen. Chartchais Choonhavan, chose to wear the Village Scout's scarf instead of wearing his uniform when he came out to talk to the Village Scouts.

When Dr. Puey was about to leave the country, the Village Scouts demanded that the Thai International Airways should not take him (From the interview with Dr. Puey at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London on 19th October 1976).

The Sunday Times of 10 October 1976 wrote "A lynch-mob rushed to the airport where police arrested Puey, telling him that three of his students had revealed that he was a communist who wanted to destroy Thailand's beloved monarchy. Puey was told he would be taken through the angry mob, if he was lucky, to Bangkok police headquarters..."

3) No official "red-tape" system in the activities of the Village Scouts

The Thai civil service is full of hierarchy and classes and hypocrisy. The same applies with the Village Scouts. With them, no initiatives from the rank and file are needed. Orders from above are all powerful. One example is the acceptance without questions of the chairman of the group selected and preferred by the instructors. A great deal of time was spent on formality. The development plan of the villages was unrealistic and hypocritical. To encourage tidiness and cleanliness, the Village Scouts took the trouble to do everything themselves without encouraging
the villagers to know why and how they should keep things clean. Therefore, when the training course is over, the rubbish which was always in front of the house would be back there again.

The administration of the Village Scouts is also centralised and controlled by government officials. The first training programme which was launched on 9th August 1971 in Laokhon, a village in Loei province was administered by Mr. Virat Narinuthra, the education supervisor. The initiative came from Police Colonel Somkuan Harikul (the rank then), the area head of the Border Patrol Police section 4, and Mr. Viroj Poonsuk, the education inspector of Ubonrajathani and Mr. Somkiat Phromsakha Na Sukonnakhorn. The instructors were also recruited from the Border Patrol Police Section 4 and from education Section 9 of Ubonrajathani. There were only officials who were involved in setting up the Village Scouts.

Moreover, when the Scout National Council agreed to recognise and to include the Village Scouts as parts of the National body, an order number 6 dated 5th July 1975 was issued to the effect that the Governor of a town is also the Director of the Village Scouts of that area. Later the Interior Ministry issued another order to every Governor asking them to facilitate the work of the Village Scouts themselves, to be genuinely interested and to give reports to the Ministry regularly (Daily Times 14 June 1976).

In any training programme, the local authority will be responsible for the administration of the work. "The application to be trained as Village Scouts should be sent to Border Patrol Police Headquarters Phaholyothin Road, Tel. 2784513, which is the co-ordinating body of the training all over the country." (Siam Nisar 25 October 1976). On every level of administration, the government will be involved in making decisions. On the local level, for example, the Lord Mayor will be the chairman with all members of the local authorities such as the headmaster of a school as committee members. Therefore, government intervention and influence is undeniable in the administration of the Village Scouts.
4) Village Scouts have no uniform and no symbols.

It is true that village scouts have no fixed uniform. But the scarf, the scarf ring and the tiger head badge which are all given by the King are enough symbols to distinguish the Village Scouts as a particular group of people. This is the same with a Dome (a metal badge of Thammasat University) or a Phak Kiaw (a metal badge of Chulalongkorn University). The Village Scouts used their symbols to write themselves. A good example is the grouping on 9th October 1976.

5) That Village Scouts activities be the services of the people, by the people and for the people.

For this particular one, we still need to have more information and observations before we can judge for whom the Village Scouts' activities are. But from what we see, we can say that the Village Scouts do not belong to the people and are not controlled by the people. The initiative and control came from the Government.

6) Village Scouts should be the leader of self-development, occupational development and local development.

The intention is good and the output has been great. Several plans to develop the rural areas have been devised by concerned official sections and by different student organizations, with different kinds of supports. The student rural development section carried out researches and made plans to develop the Thai rural areas. The Suraburi (a province in the Center of Thailand) project, which lasted 2-3 years, with the students' close attention, did not come out altogether satisfactorily. Therefore, the presence of the Village scouts in villages for 4 - 5 days, with most of the time spent on singing, dancing and playing, can hardly hope to stimulate the conscience necessary for self-development; nor can there be the technical preparedness among the villagers.

7) Village Scouts should set themselves to examples of orderliness, discipline and economy.
6) No fees can be charged for the training programme. No extravagant use of money for campfire shows. And no consumption of alcoholic drinks during the training session.

Some of the regulations are regretfully disregarded. Some trainees did not eat together but have specially ordered food for themselves. Some did not sleep in the places provided and went elsewhere. One rule which everyone compiled with was the obedience rule. Everybody was always ready to receive and carry out orders from the instructors - to walk, to sit, to clap their hands or even to walk like a duck.

With regard to the expenses during the training, some elaboration is necessary here. Before starting, everybody had to buy their own rice and tinned food as provisions. As soon as they were given a place to stay, an additional amount of 40 - 50 baht must be given to pay for other food. Other items of expenditure were no less burdensome: the interior decoration, fancy dresses, campfire shows, stage decoration and actors' dresses. The beauty competition obliged the contestants to spend a large amount of money on making up and on dresses. The decoration of each colour's grand-stand to support their candidates all meant money collected from the trainees. All through the session, colour photographs were taken by a monopoly who charged 8 baht per print for individual photos, and 25 baht per print for the whole group photo. Everybody seemed pleased. Some never had a colour photo before. So it was quite a thrill to have one. In addition, every trainee was obliged to buy an embroidered badge representing a tiger head which cost 5 baht each.

On the last day, during the scarf-giving ceremony, the instructors asked for donations for religious purposes. The sum was "recommended". So out of 497 trainees came 9270 baht. It should not be now be surprising that those villagers who were poor could not afford this training. Apart from not having enough money to join, they would be losing their daily pay too.

5) To hold on the collective spirit and spread it among the people in order to create solidarity, harmony and unity.

This is the same with No 5. We need to have more information before we can decide if the unity among the Village Scouts is constructive or destructive.
10) Prohibit the use of fiscal budget for the activities of the Village Scouts.

Although there is no special allowance for the administration of the Village Scouts from the Government, the use of government officials, especially from the Interior Ministry to administer the activities of the Village Scouts, is an indirect way of spending government money. Government officials have a right to ask for a five-day leave to instruct the Village Scouts. The cooperation of government officials with the Village Scouts can mean a quick promotion for them too. The explicit use of government officials such as Interior Ministry officials and Defense Ministry officials including Border Patrol Policemen can only mean that this rule has been violated beyond recognition.

Furthermore, the guided tour of the Village Scouts to the Narayansit-Hua Hin parachute training camp can mean nothing except the outright and unashamed use of the taxpayers' money.

Apart from allowing government officials to take leaves in order to join in the Village Scouts training, each training course also involves other uses of money.

After agreeing to patronize the Village Scouts, the King gave 100,000 baht as an initial fund (Daily Times 14 June 1976). The latest news according to Police Maj. Gen. Charoenrit Chamus-romran was that "The King has to spend more than a million baht each month for scarfs and other things and would like the people who give flowers to switch to money instead for Village Scouts purposes" (Thai Rath 19 May 1976).

11) Village Scouts should be the first to use home-produced goods and eat what is being produced in the country.

Again the intention is noble. But the solution lies not in prohibiting people to buy foreign goods when they are already there but in correcting the economic structure which is an objective condition. The average income earners and the poor people who account for the majority of the population cannot hope to help to consume those expensive foreign articles. It is in fact those who are in the minority who are consuming luxury goods (and cause the balance of payments problem). So the plea to stop buying foreign goods leaving the economic organization
untouched is both invalid as an economic argument, and unrealistic as a policy.

During the training session, the advice to buy timshed food, fancy dresses, fireworks both home and foreign are all contradictory to this wish of the King.

12) Village Scouts have the duty to revive and protect the Thai culture, customs and the good traditions of their local areas.

I understand that customs and traditions are people's own creation. They are created to serve the people in a society. When society develops, there are bound to be changes. So the abolition or revival of certain customs or traditions are possible. But it is highly questionable if we should keep or revive those outdated and harmful customs or traditions. It is customary for some Thais to spend a lot of money having a "traditional" cremation, marriage or ordain and end up being in great debt. The superstitious "nature" of the Thais faith in the omnipotence of God to cause wretchedness or prosperity makes them narrow-minded and too ready to believe anything they are told.

It is unthinkable that all trainees were told that they would be cursed with misfortune etc; if they were disloyal to the three oaths. The implication of the "sacredness" of something which will protect the lives of the people is equally contemptible. The introduction of the beauty competition which is a bourgeois culture should be reconsidered with great care. Country girls have been misled into believing that beauty is the key to success. We only need to look into the lives of those girls who have been involved in a competition. It is to be regretted that beautiful girls are treated as objects of value, and can be sold and bought. These people have become advertisement girls selling soap, shampoo, sanitary towels. There are also those who become concubines or mistresses or even prostitutes. There are already too many examples of these unfortunate girls.

The information that I could collect both from the Thai and foreign press, from personal experience and from the behaviour of the Village Scouts on 6th Oct. 1976 with pictures of Village Scouts beating up other students cannot suggest anything other than that the Village Scouts are a paramilitary force disguised in an infor-
mally organized body using advanced psychological means to make use of the Thai people for a particular political group. With the present economic, social and military problems the use of psychological means to encourage the people to run away from reality and to seek day-to-day pleasure is very effective. The people who felt themselves inferior and neglected are now made to feel that the Government are taking care of them. They are now considered worthy enough to receive royal gifts, to shake hands and to talk to important personalities. They are taught and trained to be exceptionally obedient people. The ignorance of the villagers plus the use of the respected religious and educational institutions as leaders are more than enough to ensure success for the organizers.

Another point worth mentioning is the "coincidence" of the get-together between the Naravanun-Hua Hin parachutist unit and the Village Scouts before 6th Oct. 76, and their co-operation in attacking and killing the students at Thammasat University on 6th Oct. 76.

The last point is that the Village Scout organization is now a part of the Thai Scout National Council. The Thai Scout National Council is also a member of the World Scout Council, which never encourages boyscouts to have a political role. Therefore, there may be future conflicts between the two organizations. But that is not for us to decide. Given the information we have and the evidence from the mass media from different sources, we should be in a position to judge for ourselves if the Village Scouts activities are "of the people, by the people and for the people" or not.

Natee Pisalchai