

THE ADAPTATION OF THAI TRADITIONAL MEDICINE AND HERBS ENTREPRENEUR TO BECOME CULTURAL HEALTH SUPPLEMENTARY PRODUCTS: A CASE STUDY OF U-THAI PRASIT CORPORATION, MUANG DISTRICT, PRACHINBURI PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

The research on “The Adaptation of Thai Traditional Medicine and Herbs Entrepreneur to Become Cultural Health Supplementary Products: A Case Study of U-Thai Prasit Corporation, Muang District, PrachinBuri Province” has its main objectives to 1) study the method of operation of Thai traditional medicine and herbs of the entrepreneur who turns the local wisdom on drugs into cultural health supplementary products, and 2) study the mechanism for the adaptation of medical products based on local wisdom into cultural health supplementary products. The study utilizes the qualitative research method by using in-depth interview with the business owner, focus-group interviews with drugs producers, and interviews with related persons in the production process as well as customers.

The research finds that, at present, the entrepreneur must have a body of knowledge on traditional drug and herbs of the ancestry together with the training organized by Thai traditional medicine, Ministry of Public Health. Some of the drug ingredients have been adjusted due to the scarcity of raw materials. At the same time, the quality and standard of the product must be strictly maintained. Since, the market for cultural health supplementary products are huge, the entrepreneur must devise a plan for local, domestic and foreign markets. The marketing plans include selling method, the modernization of the products, the distribution, and the networking in order to prevent unnecessary competition. The operation has been changed from the curer, in the past, to become a fully business owner who can benefit from the indigenous wisdom. All in all, these entrepreneurs can maintain, preserve, and develop Thai traditional medicine and herbs and make them popular.

Keywords: Thai Traditional Medicine, Herbs Entrepreneur, Health Supplementary Products

INTRODUCTION

Thai drugs and herbs are local science that had been long-time practiced in daily life of the peasantry before the modern medicine was introduced in Thailand. Since Thailand is located in the tropical zone, there are many botanical plants and herbs growing in the ecological system. Moreover, there is a belief that man and nature are dependent on each other. The practice of medicine by Thai people, therefore, is undertaken together with the ritual activities (KomatraChuengsatiansup). The practitioner of Thai medicine is called “Mor (which means doctor)” to whom has been given respect by the society. If this Thai doctor has been given the duty to look after the noble family or the ruling class people, they will be called “MorLuang (official or royal doctor)” and he will be blessed with title and rank.

U-Thai Prasit Corporation has been doing its legacy of medicine business in PrachinBuri province where Thai medicine and herbs are used in various treatments at the Chao PhyaAbhaibhubejhr hospital. These medicine and herbs are also very popular as cultural health supplementary products. Due to its rich soil

and appropriate climate, PrachinBuri province is a treasure trove for invaluable herbs. Kun (the lowest conferred rank of Thai nobility, below Luang) U-Thai Prasit(Boon Boonpakdee) who is the grandfather of Mr. TawanBoonpakdee, the present owner of U-Thai Prasit Corporation, was a royal doctor of Chao PhyaAbhaibhubejhr (Chum A-Pai Wong), the very first governor of PrachinBuri province. During that time, Kun U-Thai Prasit had to take care the members of the governor's family which comprised of 22 wives and 44 sons and daughters (WeerasakChansongseang, 2556: 61). The major treatments in those days were about respiratory system, blood circulation, excretory system and gastrointestinal tract disease. It was a duty of the royal doctor to provide and/or concoct medicine and herbs to promote good health. The governor must always be in an excellent shape and physically strong. For the ladies, they should have a nice complexion and should be beautiful. Kun U-Thai Prasit has performed his duty in practicing Thai medicine and herbs for as long as fifty more years. In doing this, his son Mr. TheeraBoonpakdee, has been helping as an assistant and procuring the necessary raw materials. After Kun U-Thai Prasit passed away, Mr. Theera has been practicing the local medication and, later, has been licensed by the Public Health Ministry. Mr. Theera or "MorLuk In" practiced the Thai medicine and herbs at his clinic in PrachinBuri province from B.E. 2483 to B.E. 2540. When he died, there were more than 100 types of medicine for asthma, blood circulation, cough, body and heart tonic, and pain reliever, to name just a few. These medicines could be grouped into 10 categories as specified by the Public Health Ministry. The knowledge of local medicine and herbs has been transferred to the 3rd generation, Mr. Tawan who is an engineer, and his wife, Mrs. ChaloeipornBoonpakdeewho works at human resource department of Thai Broadcasting Company, Channel 5. The couple had no knowledge on Thai medicine and herbs. Mr. Tawan and Mrs. Chaloeiporn realizes that local medicine and herbs should not be used exclusively in the cure of diseases as what happened in the past. The body of knowledge can be adapted and adjusted in accordance with the rules and regulations set by Food and Drug Administration of Thailand. In B.E. 2545, the couple set up the company called U-Thai Prasit Corporation that had its main objective in providing cultural health supplementary products developed from Thai medicine and herbs.

U-Thai Prasit Corporation utilizes the accumulated body of knowledge on Thai medicine and herbs for the last 100 years and turns it into a modern business that fit life-style of the people by not damaging the primary value. The entrepreneur has to adjust himself with the rules and regulations set by the Ministry of Public Health. He has to study the production processes, drug and herbs market, and other related activities such as the marketing channel. These are crucial factors in doing business and in creating a successful career that are in relevant to the government policy in creating jobs and occupation by oneself.

The study of the adaptation mechanism of an entrepreneur who can adjust the science and occupation being taught in the academic institutions into practice in which it links modern knowledge and local wisdom. The knowledge has been applied into various products that serve the demand of the local as well as foreign consumers. This study is important since it provides knowledge of Thai medicine and herbs and the way to conduct business operation. The study portrays the linkage between the old and the new body of knowledge in performing Thai medicine and herbs business operations.

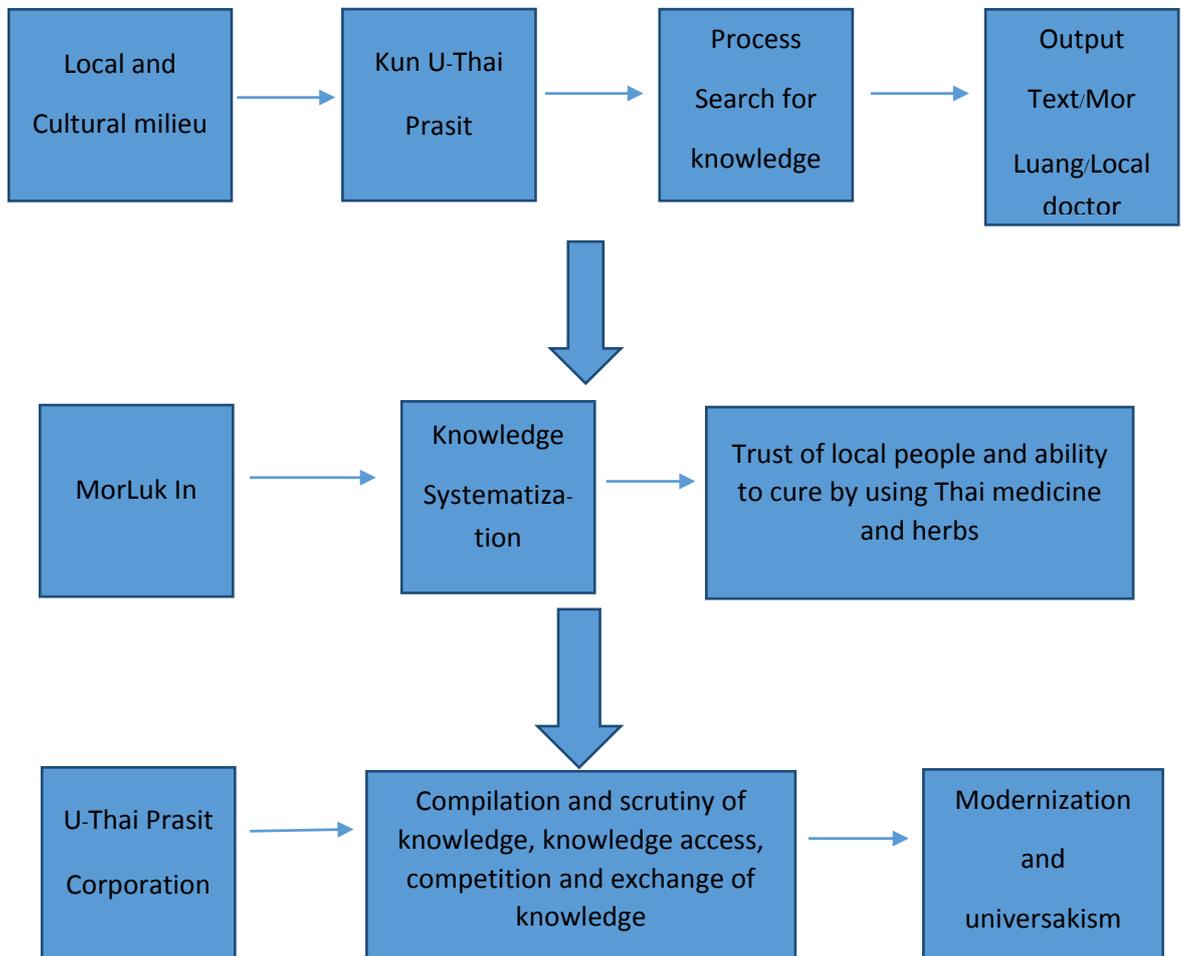
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. The method of operation of Thai medicine and herbs that have been practicing from the predecessors and the cultural health supplementary products.
2. The adaptation mechanism in developing local wisdom on drugs and herbs into cultural health supplementary products.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on the analysis of related data on local Thai medicine and herbs that have been developed into cultural health supplementary products by U-Thai Prasit Corporation. This study is not a pharmaceutical study

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Related Theory

1. Holistic Health Theory

Holistic health theory is a positive thinking about health. It gives its highest priority on the continuing wellness of life in which it means the state of balance, relevance, harmony, and dependability in physical, mind and soul dimensions between human and environment. There must be a systematic treatment for health as designated by oneself. The beneficial person and the assessor are the person himself. The holistic health method is wide open and allows both the traditional and alternative treatments. The holistic health processes concentrate on self-realization (PinnipaBuachum, 2544: 156-159). The concept is in line with the health, illness and medicine before the western treatment becomes popular. The human treatment based on anthropological perspective has something to do with religious activities and way of life that are related to social and cultural factors of man and his race (KomatraChuengsatiansup, 2548).

2. Innovation Theory

Innovation is a concept or a new invention that is beneficial to development of human quality of life and responds to the needs of people. The acceptance goes through education, perception, self-learning, relationship between traditional belief and the modern thought, motivation to make decision, data

assessment, social norms, willingness for change and integration of information. If the innovation creates income and is easy to be used, it will facilitate the process of acceptance (PrapapenSuwan, 2526: 110-111).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative research. The research methods cover the following:

1. Documentary study on PrachinBuri province.
2. Documentary study on U-Thai Prasit Corporation.
3. Focus-group interview with the relatives and related persons concerning knowledge of Thai medicine and herbs that belong to MorLuk In.
4. In-depth interview with the 3rd generation, Mr. Tawan and Mrs. ChaloeipornBoonpukdee.
5. Interview with drug producers at U-Thai Prasit Corporation, drug dispenser and drug users for the total of 20 persons.
6. The collected data are verified with the 3rd generation for comments.
7. Adjustment of the data as suggested.
8. Publication.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. The method of operation of traditional Thai medicine and herbs of the entrepreneur who turns the local wisdom on drugs into cultural health supplementary products.

1.1 The local Thai medicine and herbs knowledge has been accumulated from the 1st and the 2nd generation. The medicine and herbs are made from local ingredients found in the area of PrachinBuri province. The patients have confidence in the doctor who performs his medicine based on knowledge obtained from generation to generation. The doctor treats his patients like his own relatives. The external factors concerning the treatment standards, for example, quality control did not exist during that time in the past. Therefore, Kun U-Thai Prasit and his descendantMorLuk In used their own indigenous knowledge to cure various tropical diseases with local medicine and herbs. The medicine are used together with the tonic by considering the body system, sex, age with no segregation in the special kinds of treatment being practiced by the western medication. As a result, medical treatment for diseases and health are practiced on the patients at the same time.

1.2 When the local medication has been practiced by the 3rd generation or U-Thai Prasit Corporation, it was found that the external factors become the major forces in designating the way the medical business is done.

1.2.1 The quality control: The practitioner must possess the medical license of Thai medication in which he must be trained in order to obtain one. The ingredients of medicine have to be changed due to the changing environment. The producers must find a substitution with the same effect for those that are in scarcity. In this case, the entrepreneur must have the thorough knowledge of Thai medication and herbs. The producer must also provide all needed product information, such as ingredients, and production processes as specified by Food and Drug Administration, Public Health Ministry for quality assessment.

1.2.2 The changing ecological systems have some impacts on the disappearance of herbs in various types. The entrepreneur must find additional information and search for different kinds of herbs with the same attributes. The attempt is difficult and requires hard work and dedication. The forerunners in the 1st and the 2nd generations could operate their business freely by using social and cultural dimensions as important keys. But the 3rd generation is different. U-Thai Prasit Corporation must have an explicit knowledge of medicine and is obliged by the law concerning food and drug production.

1.2.3 The 3rd generation has analyzed the medical knowledge of their ancestors and tried to preserve the original product quality. U-Thai Prasit Corporation has been set up for the last 15 years and can produce more than 100 kinds of medicines in 10 categories. The modern medication includes cosmetics, for instance, facial soap and skin lotion with herbs. U-Thai Prasit Corporation has been using the knowledge on local medicine and develop them into cultural health supplementary products as follows:

- The original medicines that are still very popular at the present. These medicines include poor lymph disorder medicine, hemorrhoids, fever reliever, stomachache, blister, carminative medicine, and jaundice. All of these medicines are called by the names of the diseases. They are made into tablets for the convenience of the users.

- The tonic medicines for male and female, heart tonic, blood tonic, and pain killers for general consumers.

2. The mechanism for the adaptation of products based on local wisdom into cultural health supplementary products.

2.1 U-Thai Prasit Corporation must make sure that the customers understand the properties of the medicine. In the Thai society, the word “medicine” is used to call something that is used with the body. Therefore, there must be a label or product information that explains the medical properties for each type of drug whether they are used for treating the diseases or for promoting good health.

2.2 The medical business operation of U-Thai Prasit Corporation is not a medical service as what happened in the past. The 3rd generation has to adapt and adjust themselves all the time. They have to study the traditional medication and herbs and have to come up with the following strategies in order to survive. These strategies include:

- The popularity of traditional and modern medicines. The traditional medicines developed by the former generations are still in high demand at the present. The search for new products is also necessary in order to fulfill the need and desire of the customers. Since PrachinBuri province and Chao PhyaAbhaibhubejhr hospital are very famous for Thai medication and herbs, the company's cosmetics products such as soap and lotion are quite doing well. U-Thai Prasit Corporation uses its knowledge of medicine of both old and new and comes up with the products that are in need. The cosmetics products are sold to working people, teenagers and senior people.

- The company also develops the products that are in great demand such as inhalant, balsam, and fragrance that are popular among Thai people in various occasions such as funeral and birthday party. These products must be beautiful and should not be expensive. The company must take pro-active marketing activities together with the development of producer and distributors network. There must be a product expansion for the Chinese tourists who are in favor of the Thai inhalant and balsam.

- The market expansion into the border area of Cambodia. Since the western medication does not prevail in the border area of Cambodia, Thai medication and herbs are very popular among the peasants living in the borderline.

- The U-Thai Prasit Corporation develops its e-commerce by using the computer network to distribute its products. Internet is an important means to reach the customers who prefer on-line shopping in the modern society.

DISCUSSION

The study of the holistic health theory, anthropological theory, and the related research pertaining to anthropology and cultural studies as appeared in the work of KomatraChuengsatiansup (2549) on medical pluralism and health in social and culture dimensions together with concept of cultural transformation of

Franz Boas in bringing related knowledge of each group of people. The analysis study of human race in relation to belief, tradition, and rituals that are beneficial to health and the practice of local medical knowledge to treat various kinds of diseases. This knowledge has been passing on from the past into the modern society.

The study has something to do with the creation of value added on cultural and economic perspectives concerning Thai cultural legacy and Thai medication. The transformation of knowledge happens through the study of the real practice. There is an analysis of basic body of knowledge on applied Thai medication from the Thai massage and spa. The work of PimnapaBuachum (2554) on "The Application of E-Sarn Local Wisdom on Thai massage and Spa" found that most of the entrepreneurs are females, aged between 30-50 years old, having knowledge on Thai massage and using Thai herbs. The customers are in favor of using herbs in performing the massage. The cleanliness of the location is also important for the massage business. The selection of products is based on the product safety. The research conducted by UdomUdomwannakul on "The Transformation of Thai Massage of Ban Pa Bong" found that the transformation happens in the family by the forerunners who are local doctors. The practice of Thai massage is still popular among older people.

SUMMARY

The research on "The Adaptation of Thai Traditional Medicine and Herbs Entrepreneur to Become Cultural Health Supplementary Products: A Case Study of U-Thai Prasit Corporation, Muang District, PrachinBuri Province" discovers that the accumulated body of knowledge of local Thai medication and herbs has been done during the 1st and the 2nd generations in the manner of an inventor. The practitioners practice their medication freely and have been receiving popularity from the people based on social stratification and local tradition. The development of Thailand's public health has an impact on the 3rd generation who set up the U-Thai Prasit Corporation. They have to adapt and adjust their medical knowledge to fit with the changing environment and modernization. If U-Thai Prasit Corporation could not link its legacy knowledge with the present situation, a 100-years-old drug knowledge would be lost forever. U-Thai Prasit Corporation still preserves the original tradition and rites. The holy practice of WaiKru (paying respect to the teacher) and/or paying homage to JivakaKaumara-Bhrtya hermit (who is highly respected as the Great Master of Thai traditional medicine) are taken place every year. The observation of precepts, merit-making, and mind-calming are seen as a necessary means in running the business. The 3rd generation management realizes that the company is not a conventional doctor but the one who produces and provides medical services as well as preserves and develops Thai medication and herbs.

SUGGESTION

The preservation and development of local wisdom into a modernization is an alternative way to create an independent occupation and a stable income. The educational institution should promote and support the education on the management of indigenous knowledge.

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