An Investigation of Eldercare Practices in Thailand through Institutional Logics Lens

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to unfold the compelling logics that shape collective norms and behaviors, and to collect empirical evidence on how the changing context of the Thai family structure is affecting the geriatric and long-term care industry in Thailand. This study employs the constructivist grounded theory method under the theoretical view of the institutional logics perspective. A purposeful selection of participants is identified by their involvement and expertise in the area of study. Data collection from intensive interviews and non-verbal observations are retrieved and analyzed according to participants' experiences, perceptions, and perspectives. Through a comprehensive analysis, ranging from the beginning of the aging society phenomenon to the current development along with its rationale. This research revealed that, first, unlike other institutional theories, the institutional logics perspective is differentiated chiefly through the causal linkage of multiple derivations. Second, the two contrasting logics that emerged from the study were "individualism" and "communitarianism." Third, the community logic can function as the central core for Thai eldercare to facilitate informal care, social care, family care, as well as self-care. One most common practice is to rearrange living environments according to "universal design" principles in order to empower the independence of Thai elderly. Should the idea be implemented on a wider scale, such as urban and landscape designs, this aging in place approach could provide a promising alternative to reconnecting and restoring the communal relationship among urban communities.

Keywords: institutional logics, cultural reproduction, aging in place, universal design, constructivist grounded theory

Introduction

Within twenty years, Thailand will enter the stage of a "super-aged society," when the size of the older population, referring to those aged 60 and over, will double the number of the young (aged 15 and below). This rapid increase of Thai senior citizens ratio will become second only to Singapore within the Southeast Asia region (United Nations, 2015). Such a situation will result in several social issues that will require a holistic approach from both individual preparation and public policy planning. As the

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Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR) of Mahidol University has categorized Thai citizens born between 1963 and 1983 as "the Million Birth Cohort" or MBC for their comprising a population of one million and over. The total number of this group was far more prominent than "the baby-boomers" in Thailand ever were (Prasartkul & Vapattanawong, 2005).

Though many sociology experts and some policymakers are aware of this critical situation and its consequences, the communal baseline and orientation for unraveling this issue are yet to be solidified. There are several influences to consider, as there have been several shifts and changes in the Thai social context over the past decades. This MBC, who are now aged between 34 and 54, will remarkably lead Thailand into its "super-aged society" because their unique preferences and lifestyles could be far more adapted to the dynamic of the socio-cultural context in present days in contrast to those at the current aging stage.

The Institutional Logics Perspective (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012) was chosen in this study for it provides a new alternative to untangle complex social issues and to bridge the gap between social theory and practice in the real world. Institutional theory is related not only to sociological study but also to economics and political science. Seven institutional orders— the state, the market, the corporation, the professions, the family, the religion, and the community have different but collective parts in shaping and transforming each societal sector, including its norms and values.

Literature Review

In the early development of institutional theories, the growing attention to organizational studies and the structuration of firms was directed exclusively toward the institutional logics of "the state" and "the profession." Meyer and Rowan (1977) introduced three major components—institutional rules, legitimacy, and isomorphism—to the study of the organization and institutional theories. The two social orders were the most institutionalized ones because of their coercive characteristics of rules and regulations.

Next, the logic of the "the market" was identified (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), along with capitalism as a dominating force that drives this third social institution. With further emphasis on three types of isomorphism—coercive, normative, and mimetic—as the sources of rationalization for organizational development in various fields. Moreover, the intermingling among the state, the profession, and the market provided a framework for macrosocial institutional studies, focusing on normative qualities as well as the isomorphic nature of organizations.

Later on, Friedland and Alford (1991) discussed the lack of a cultural dimension and cognitive capacity in the institutional research context, and therefore, brought "the family" and "the religion" into a more comprehensive system, namely, the macro and micro social mechanisms. However, the linkage between the macrosocial and microsocial

levels is necessary to understand the whole dynamic process of the interinstitutional system. Recently, Thornton (2004, 2012) identified "the corporation," and then "the community," as the meso-social institutions that can bridge the gap between macro and micro social units and pinpointed "the profession" as another institutional order that creates constraints and opportunities for individual action in any industry.

Institutional Logics Perspective

Thornton, Occasio, & Lounsbury (2012) posited the four metatheoretical principles, including the embeddedness between agency and structure, the material and symbolism of institutions, the historical contingent condition, and the multi-level dimension of analysis. While the first principle has long been discussed and established throughout the development of institutional studies, the "material-symbolic" foundation of the institutional logics perspective emphasizes on detaching institutional logics from institutional orders. This semi-autonomous characteristic stimulates the co-existence of multiple logics, either collaborating or hindering, within organization, industry, or field.

As several logics can coexist and, at the same time, can gradually transform one another through time, the change from the reproduction process may take generations to reflect on. The historically-contingent aspect of the institutional logics perspective means that the dominant logics can lose their legitimacy across space and time. Depending on other stimuli, both materials and ideals, the dynamic of institutional logics are interchangeable. While some sets of logics complement each other, the others can be contradictory, and therefore weaken the other (Greenwood and Hinings, 1993; Scott and Christensen, 1995; Reay and Hinings, 2005; Lounsbury, 2009; Haveman and Gualtieri, 2017). The balancing nature of multiple logics is often referred to as pluralism: the continual rival of competing forces between institutional persistence and entrepreneurial changes.

However, this paper aims to fill a research gap on such institutionalization process with respect to the tensions between microfoundations and national contexts. Three research foci on institutional logics regarding eldercare practice involved the following: first, the underlying logics within seven institutional spheres, including the state (ST), the professions (PF), the market (MK), the family (FM), religion (RL), the corporation (CP), and the community (CM). Second is the existing interrelationships among the spheres, which will be assessed through the availability and accessibility of knowledge, information, and experience suitable for institutional logics. Last are the gaps among actual practices and ideal intentions.

Figure 1 offers a modified version of the cross-level model of how microfoundations influence institutional change, with further emphasis on social agents' role as strategic actors. Since the original model (Thornton, 2012) identified availability, accessibility, and activation as the key variants to the dynamic reproduction process of institutional logics and changes, most activating transactions were likely to occur through organizational decisions, practices, and identities.
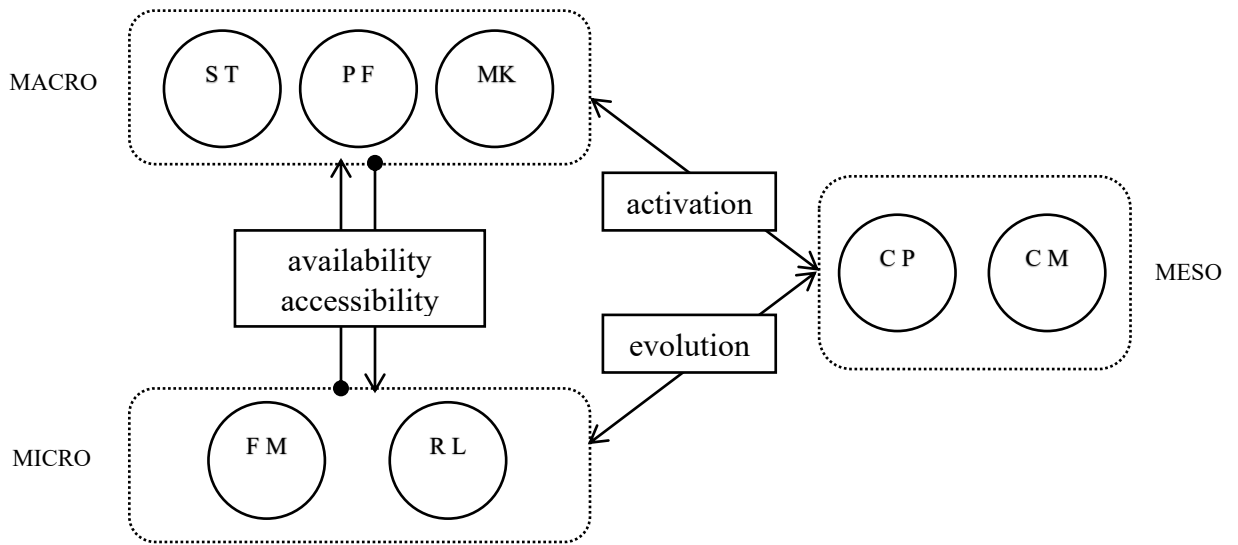
Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

The proposed diagram encapsulates the interconnection of multi-level analysis from macro to micro social levels, with emphasis on the potential of the social entrepreneur, who can manipulate institutional changes through meso-level institutions, such as the community (CM) or the corporation (CP). The dynamic of the inter-institutional system can be seen then to reinforce the never-ending cycle of reproduction and structuration process of socially-accepted logics.

Research Methodology

Focusing on the multilevel interrelationships within seven social orders, this research analyze the current approaches of Thai eldercare practices and follows the constructivist grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2006; 2014) using both document research and reflections from in-depth interviews with experts in the field. The key informants in this study are purposefully selected and categorized as a representative of two or more institutional orders according to their involvement or their influential capacity towards the development of eldercare practices, policies, or programs in Thailand.

The interview process began in July 2017. Five experts in eldercare services were contacted, and four agreed to participate. Snowballing through personal recommendations and random sampling through related public events led to the other eight key informants. The question guidelines for this study had been constantly revised and simplified to be more concise and open-ended in order to suit the nature of the chosen research method. Charmaz (2014) also recommended the immediate coding and reflexive memo-writing after each interview. Therefore, each semi-structured interview question was uniquely

developed from cumulative insights and expertise during the 18 months of research conducted.

Memo and extant literature were crucial resources contributing to the data corpus. The research analysis and coding process includes both emerging concepts and pre-existed knowledge online. In the first cycle coding, data from the interview transcripts were being coded with both 'in vivo' and 'process' coding methods, respectively. Looking into words tied with actions mentioned in the conversation helped to establish the actual practices in the eldercare industry.

The initial codes identified from the analysis were 112 codes. For the second cycle coding, Saldana (2013) recommended three coding methods: focused coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding. Focused coding was achieved through a digital application to generate textual-based analysis, such as Wordle (wordle.net) which provides a graphical diagram that helps to visualize the significance of each code mentioned.

Next, the axial coding method emphasizes the comparative analysis of the codes' characteristics and dimensions (Saldana, 2013; Charmaz, 2014). The relationships of codes from the initial phase together with closer attention to the key codes from the focused coding phase were re-organized.

Last, the theoretical coding aims to induce a pattern of the intertwining dynamics at a multiple-level of institutional logics. According to Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012), logics reside in institutional orders, and though interrelated, they are also partially autonomous. These complex subsystems of material and symbolic elements are loosely coupled and can be analytically segregated, blended, or reconfigured.

Figure 3 illustrates the three elements comprising each institutional logic that inseparably coexist and mutually drive the process of cultural reproduction—the ideal, the material, and the practice. The ideal represents the subjective characteristics of the findings, such as the concept, the goal, and the objectives of the policy or program. The material refers to the tangible aspects, such as the availability of resources and the efficiency of the operation process. And last is the practice as the outcome of the coupling between the ideal and material influences.
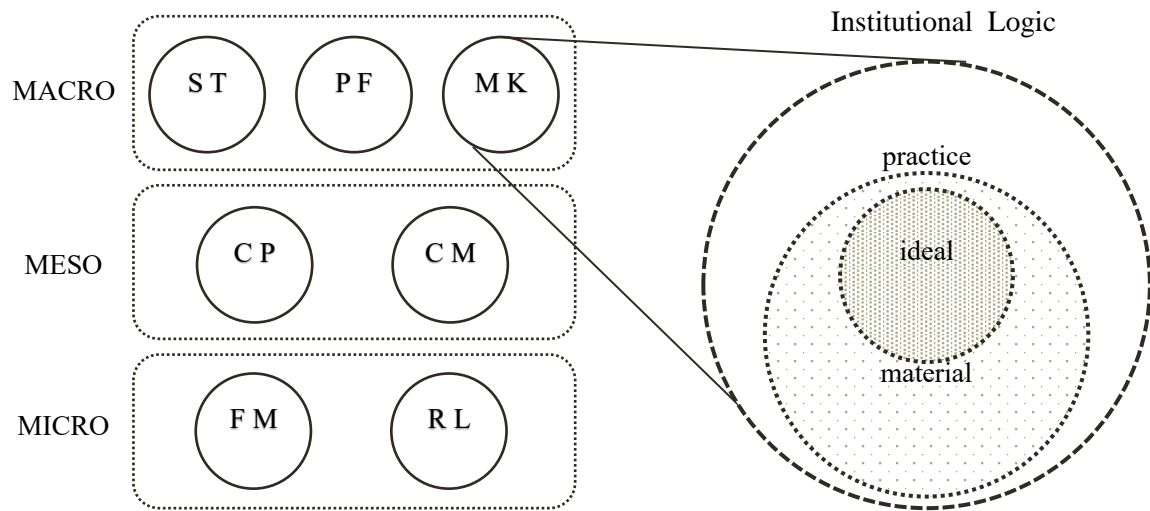
Figure 3 Diagram of Theoretical coding process

As institutional logics perspective encourages the holistic dimension of praxis as a key differentiator to bridge the gap between theory and practice, this study asserts the idea that though each module has its own spheres, their impacts from availability, accessibility, and activation are permeable through each other. The inner sphere represents the core conception—the ideal that drives the other spheres that are more tangible and practicable for actual actions. However, contrasting logics from any sphere can influence changes in the others, inward and outward.

Results and Discussion

The collected data and the analysis showed that multiple logics interplay simultaneously within each institutional order. A list of the institutional logics found in the seven social orders is provided in Table 1. A summary of the theorized codes is presented in hierarchical order on the social scale, not in order of social impact. The three levels included macrosocial, meso-social, and microsocial units.

Table 1

Summary of Institutional Logics

Institutional Orders		Institutional Logics		
ST - STATE	MAKRO	Ideal	Self-reliance	I L - 1
		Material	Decentralization	I L - 1
PF - PROFESSION	MAKRO	Ideal	Preventive living	I L - 1
		Material	Aging in place	I L - 2

MK - MARKET	MAKRO	Ideal	Customer-based	I L - 2
		Material	Capitalism	I L - 1
CP - CORPORATION	MESO	Ideal	Sustainable	I L - 2
		Material	Competitive	I L - 1
CM - COMMUNITY	MESO	Ideal	Collectivism	I L - 2
		Material	Communitas	I L - 2
RL - RELIGION	MICRO	Ideal	Selfless	I L - 2
		Material	Conscious living	I L - 1
FM - FAMILY	MICRO	Ideal	Kinship	I L - 2
		Material	Seniority	I L - 2

IL -1: Towards Individualism

The previous logic in eldercare services and programs reflected from the state was under the public development theory of social welfare. Obligations to support three population groups, including the elderly, the disabled, and the poor, were considered to be a charitable transaction upheld by the society as a whole. At present, the continual assignment is to ensure that older persons' rights are fully maintained in order to enhance their well-being. Four immediate strategies to leverage the elderly's capacity and well-being, in the long run, consist of part-time hiring, the senior complex project, reverse mortgages, and the National Saving Fund.

The first policy implies how the Thai government sees the elderly as a passive labor force while focusing on both their financial security and social well-being. This program not only promotes the public image of seniors as able-bodied individuals, but it also vitalizes their self-esteem and competitive capacity. Secondly, the Department of Older Persons attempts to enhance the elderly's living conditions through the "senior complex" program which will not exhaust the national funding but will sustain itself by a one-time lease payment along with monthly rental fees. The collaborative consensus under the participatory state approach helps enable such a small fee which targets the majority of Thai elderly with lower incomes. The third program, reverse mortgages, was adopted from other developed countries. It allows older people to convert their house into a daily allowance. Lastly, the Thai government has also initiated a special retirement fund institution aside from the Social Security Office. The National Savings Fund, or NSF, began in 2015 to provide another venue for Thai people who are not registered in the Social Security Office's system, but are willing to begin saving for their retirement plan.

For the state, all four policies explicitly reflect the "self-reliance" idea, as their strategic programs and activities are less charitable and more monetarily driven. It is more evident than ever that the Thai government public policies are now geared towards an independent living ideology. The programs and activities show the underlying logic

believing that improving the security and overall well-being of the elderly should delay the physical decay and consequently could retain the productivity rate of the nation.

For the profession, the term "preventive medicine" has gained higher attention in public health management as it is more sustainable and cost-efficient. The difference in this approach lies in its medical objective to protect, promote, and maintain health rather than curing. Common practices also aim to prevent illness, disability, and death.

The preventive medication idea coincides with the core concept of "active aging," which explicates the elderly's capability of living a proper and quality life. Other terms such as "successful aging" also refer to those elderly that are satisfied with their life and can rely on themselves while being able to help others, as well as the society. The World Health Organization has promoted a campaign to moderate aging population issues with the slogan "adding life to years," not the other way around. The idea is to enhance the quality of life and well-being of elders so that they can stay prolific and prosperous for the longest possible time. Unlike the common practice to cure disease and prolong the patient's life, this approach emphasizes holistic strategies and prevention methods from becoming a patient in the first place. Another profession related in this regard were architect and interior designer.

The environmental settings that correspond to this health prevention approach are aligned with the Universal Design philosophy. Key concepts involve self-esteem, empowerment, and independence as primary goals. The physical environment includes special designated spaces and devices as well as relevant technologies to help seniors live comfortably and conveniently on their own.

As for the market, an emerging trend in senior housing market corresponding to the new family structure and social changes is the assisted-living environment distanced from one's original home. The services encompass a special accommodation program equipped with advanced medical technology and attention, regularly monitored by skilled professionals. In the past, this eldercare practice is in line with the rehabilitation attitude commonly found in western developed countries. However, the trend in Thailand became more apparent when the Thai Red Cross Society established a special housing program, "Sawangkanives," targeting Thai senior citizens at the upper middle-income level.

Closely related to the market, the favorable logic in the corporation is "individualism." Most organizations in this study focus on competitiveness and strategic advantage in order to maximize their market share regarding eldercare products and services. However, the shared ideal of sustainable development prevails in some businesses. Corporate social responsibility is heavily utilized as a publicizing tool, and to some extent, can facilitate the logic of "communitarianism" as well.

IL – 2: Anchored in Communitarianism

Influenced by the long historical Chinese precepts of Confucianism, Thai people believe that a decent person must possess two traits: a pleasant social skillset and a devoted commitment to the family. However, the adaptation of values may result in different characteristics among each ethnic group. Maintaining a distinctive identity is the same process that occurs in all mankind. Fused with the Buddhist philosophy of selfless and sacrifice, most of the Thai Chinese Buddhist population in the urban areas are heedful and prioritize seniority and kinship in their own family. The observation of home improvement retails and tradeshows exhibits growing concerns and demands in home improvement and preparation for the "aging in place" concept.

For the family, the logics of "kinship" and "seniority" play a vital role in directing Thai beliefs and decisions toward eldercare practices. Honoring older persons and revering their experiences as valuable advice make possible for a senior employee to stay in the workforce. The extended retirement practice is more evident in any family-based organization.

For the religion, "selfless" and "conscious living" are most prominent virtue of the Buddhist doctrines. As sharing, or making merit, is one of the essential foundations of Buddhism, communitarianism reflected through religious beliefs is explicit in Buddha's instruction on everyday life practices.

In this study, the community represents the intrinsic characteristics or shared interests of its members as the salient features that bind them together as opposed to geographic location or boundary (Shigeharu, 2008). Digital lifestyles and particularly the widespread use of social media contribute greatly to how each individual develops different social selves and identities.

Although the sense of community of Thai urban inhabitants is very faint and has little potency to drive cultural reproduction processes, the virtual community, such as social groups, have shown a stronger influence on senior citizens' attitudes. The communitarian paradigm refers to the relationship of an individual and his or her community in a collectivist and socialist sense. Therefore, both material and ideal components of the Thai community reflect the "communitarianism" moral value.

Multiple tensions in Thai society

Figure 4 demonstrates that within the dynamic and hierarchical constellation of seven institutions, Thai society evolved through two binary ideals. The two categories that emerged from the study were "individualism" or IL-1, and "communitarianism" or IL-2. The coexistence of these two contrasting ideologies reflected the nature of the social mechanism; that is, while some institutional logics are conflicting each other, some that were incepted from similar ideals are harmoniously in concert as they operate in different guises to balance the heterogeneous nature of a society.
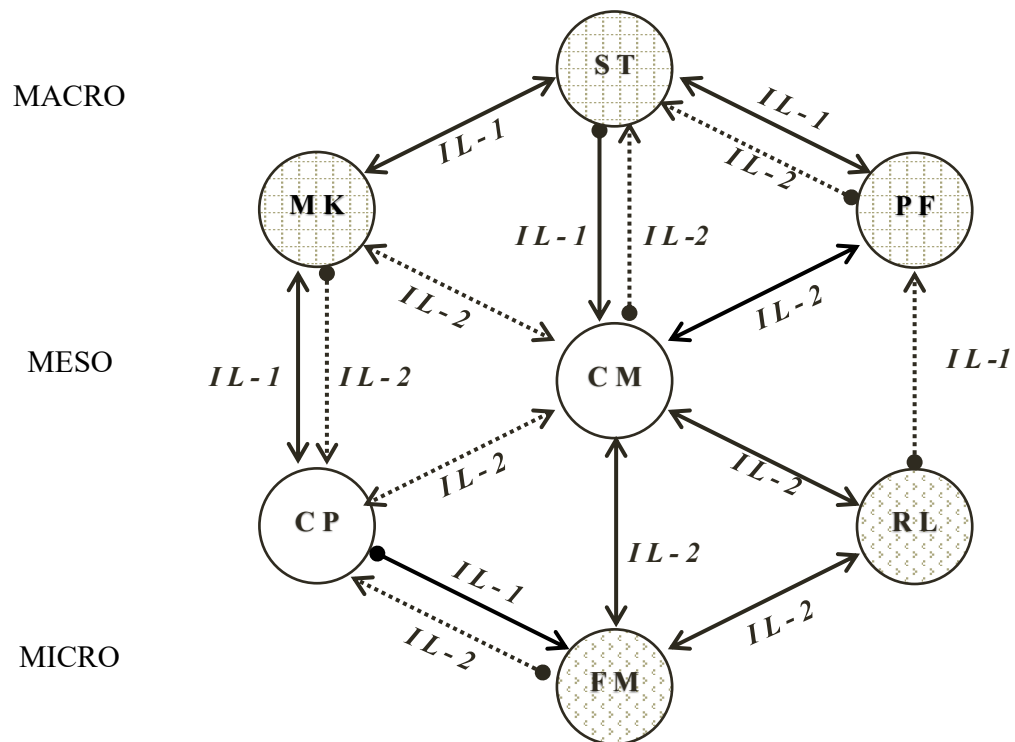
Figure 4 Diagram of Inter-institutional Relationships Among Institutional Logics

From the diagram, the institutional logics of Thai eldercare are geared superlatively towards an "individualist" ideology. Three social orders at the macro level—the state, the market, and the profession—complement each other through various ideals, materials, or practices. Notably, the "self-reliant" and "capitalist" ideal of the state (ST) and the market (MK), as they both share the same competitive sense and drive eldercare practices in the same individualist direction.

One cross-level, yet complementing, interaction is between the profession (PF) and the community (CM). The communal principles and practices are apparently under the "communitarianism" logic. While the medical profession suggests preventive medicine as an innovative approach to aging, another profession in social and environmental development recommends precautious living arrangements to support preventive practice. The "aging in place" approach coincides with the "communitas" concept, as it allows the elderly to prepare or adjust their own personal space within their habitual neighborhood in order to grow old comfortably without the need to rehabilitate.

One last set of harmonious relationships that occur at the micro level of Thai society comprises "kinship," "seniority," "selfless," "collectivism," and "communitas." All ideal and material reflections indicate the strong institutionalization of the communitarianism ideology. Dominating in the family (FM) and the community (CM), these two institutional orders have been driving the social mechanism of Thai eldercare practices through traditional values, beliefs, and accepted norms.

On the contrary, competing logics persists in two pairs. First, the contradiction between the state (ST) and the community (CM) is the result of social demographic changes and global trends versus the enduring and cumulative belief from ancient Siamese times. While the Thai government has made several efforts either to mitigate national financial risks or to empower sub-district municipalities through a "decentralization" strategy, only a few social groups have been able to sustain their vitality and vigor without central support. Moreover, the hidden sense of the "communitarianism" logic, nevertheless, emerged through the encouragement of municipalities and communities to care for the elderly. Volunteer groups providing social services in local villages are an evident result of how smaller units under local offices are being empowered. Numerous participatory researches of universal design and concerning social well-being have helped to signify the strong commitment to facilitate social care practices at the informal level.

Second, the interaction between two contrasting logics in eldercare practice was also found in the corporation (CP) and the family (FM). The stronger power of the individualist logic from organizations is affecting the Thai family institution through their "competitive" requirements. Most corporations operate under the mainstream idea of a capitalist market economy, either adopted or influenced by their default attachment to the individualist ideal. For a company to strive in any industry, strategic planning always includes efficiency or innovative solutions as the keys to achieving competitive advantages. Productivity has always been an indicator of each business's well-being.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In order to understand the social mechanism and its processual tensions, it is necessary to recognize the limitations as well as the constraints that govern its dynamic interplay. Multiple logics intertwined in the institutional sphere are quite common phenomena evident in several institutional researches. However, this study focuses on the policymaker or social actor, whose authority or supremacy can empower the change mechanism.

From the proposed diagram, this research shows how community logic can be positioned as the central core for Thai eldercare regarding informal care, social care, community care, family care, self-care, and many more. Institutionalized or formal care in hospitals and medical institutions are there, with limited availability and accessibility. Communitarianism logics, such as "communitas," "kinship," together with the development concept of "sustainability" in corporations, can contribute to a more socially-responsible setting, as well as public policies and planning. Additionally, religious institution can be strengthened both materially and symbolically. The Buddhist devotee, as a social actor, is already equipped with respectable aging programs and activities that can join forces with municipalities. Empowering the religious entities in local villages may be advantageous in this urgent quest to elevate Thai people's consciousness of their everyday conduct.

In housing development industry, several companies have reflected both the contrasting logics of "individualism" and "communitarianism." Diversity in the customers' preferences is a result of advanced marketing concepts in the "customer-based" strategy. In Thailand, another philosophy that has been less influential yet possesses impulsive recognition nation-wide is the sufficiency economy. Together with the rise in consumer consciousness and customer-based marketing, eldercare products and services in the Thai market may develop in a different direction to a more sustainable landscape.

As for the micro social level, different mindsets between generations can also lead to a new social setting. A recent logic that has emerged with new family structures and social conditions in Thailand is the logic of "self-reliance." The absence of extended family members, or even a spouse, shines through the abundance of condominium projects, or the variety of health insurance or retirement savings packages. Statistically, the Thai population imbalance is gradually and constantly leaning towards the tipping point. A higher dependency ratio caused by the nuclear family and the single household has created a new challenge that the traditional eldercare based on family members cannot measure up to. Together with the "competitive" requirement from the market and the corporation, professional or formal care has gained more acceptance in Thai society as the quality of eldercare products and services can compensate for customary guilt.

Furthermore, advancements in information-sharing technology and the flourishing of corporate social responsibility will enhance overall competitiveness towards both economic and social well-being for all Thais. For example, skilled nursing services are in high demand for Thai eldercare and the cost of these services is still higher than most Thai households can afford. Advancement in communication technology will help synchronize demands and supplies, the customization of caring details, and possibly patient-friendly employment terms.

All in all, the recent concept of sustainable development has emerged from the critical situation of natural depletion and catastrophic disasters that have caused tremendous damages around the world. The sustainable development ideal emphasizes recalling other benefits concerned with strategic policymaking. Aside from financial viability, this ideal requires environmental sustainability and social equity together. The emergence and its widely-accepted principles allow not only Thai society but the world's society to consider its meaningful existence, if there is any. Cultural inheritance, social identity, and the core competency of the country are reconsidered and reshaping the overall direction of Thailand to secure a favorable position in the world economy.

Limitations

This cross-sectional research design may be true only for the limited space and time on which is focused. The empirical data set may be applicable only to those studying the eldercare situations in Thailand in the same time frame or be utilized as a baseline data for future comparisons.

Next, the participant selection method employed in this research design was not entirely random. Self-selected participants may describe eldercare situations and issues based on their intense practices, experiences, or worldviews; however, there is a possibility that they will unintentionally be influenced by the probing questions of the researcher. Thus, extra precautions in interpreting the findings are essential. Further, the optimal balance between the natural setting and constructive conversation during the interviews must be exercised at all times.

Moreover, cultural constraints rooted in the ideal of hierarchy and seniority have proven to be a potential obstruction in obtaining reliable data. Within Thai natural settings, conducting an intensive interview with participants that have higher authority and seniority can be a challenging mission to probe the questions intended for the investigation.

Last, the theoretical view employed in this study is still under academic construction. This institutional logics perspective provides a comprehensive, extensive, and inclusive view of all possible arguments and conflicts within institutional studies. The interconnection and the proposed linkages were proven to be applicable to this study. However, the lack of clarification or definite criteria of what constitutes the logics may lead the research and findings into almost anything. By far, most of the logic constructs were still very abstract and wildly open to the researcher's interpretations.

Recommendations

Although, urban citizens in Thailand should have similar beliefs and virtues in terms of eldercare preferences, the historically-contingent aspect of the institutional logics perspective should be further tested. Eldercare practitioners and specialists should be aware of storming waves of industrialization, urbanization, and globalization that affected the Thai way of life momentously. How they have affected Thai conscious is another stimulating assumption to pursue.

Current study can provide a comprehensive consideration and contemporary outlook for a strategic planner to intervene and improve the ongoing practices of eldercare in Thailand. Therfore, further research into institutional logic theories, or constructivist grounded theory, in a different part of the world would provide greater insights into eldercare practices as well as other industries. Likewise, the theorization of institutional logics within the seven institutions in Thai society focused on here might yield different results if the study were conducted in different geographic or socio-economic conditions.

There is also a possibility that more in-depth study into each social institution would verify, or falsify, the institutional logics identified in this study. The accumulative reproductions, the role of the cultural entrepreneur, the coupling tension between the ideal and practical elements at any institutional level would also contribute to greater clarity of the institutionalizing process in Thai contexts. Moreover, a different theoretical perspective or a different research method would have provided additional or different

research outcomes to enhance the scholarly vigor of this growing field of institutional research.

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