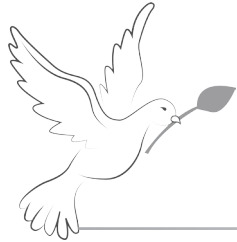


The Sufficiency Economy Based Community Development Management for Reducing Inequality among Poor Households*



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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the level of community development management towards the participation in social inequality mitigation, relevant activities and the application of the sufficiency economy philosophy by both individuals and households. The data was collected by the use of questionnaires with 1,200 samples as well as interviews with 20 community leaders from the sufficiency economy-based model villages in three poorest provinces in the northern region: Maehongson, Prae, and Nan. The research results showed that strong household leaders participated in community development management for mitigating social inequality at high level. They also received direct benefits from the activities under the village development projects organized by public sector. In addition, they were proud of the fact that their villages, families, neighbors and the public as a whole engaged in the conducted activities at a high level. In terms of practicing sufficiency economy-based activities individuals and in households, such practice was rated at a high level overall and by indicators, especially in regard to natural resources preservation and common sufficient way of living. The application of the sufficiency economy philosophy by both individuals and their households was executed at a high level, mentally in particular. They believed in the philosophy which suited them. They did not exploit others and were satisfied with their sufficient way of life. They could genuinely synthesize the participatory society of happiness towards the participation process for creating a pleasant society based on the sufficiency economy philosophy “Rectangular Ridge Model of Sufficiency” which simultaneously adheres to both nature and Buddhism.

Keyword: Public Participation; Community Development Management; Sufficient Economy; Social Inequality

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Introduction

“Public participation” is an essential behavioral foundation of social development. It is the first step to nation-building and national stability. The public participation is the groundwork of the state, public sector, private sector, and citizens, with regards to community and social building. This kind of participation apparently reflects certain behavioral characteristics such as collaboration, interdependency, interactions, knowledge exchange, shared responsibility, mutual benefits, supportive improvements, unity, and harmony; all of these demonstrate the interactions between humans, individuals and agencies, and citizens and the state. Community development in an area generally requires public participation as the main force. Public participation is a principle of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej (the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2011) stated that his majesty the king was a democratic leader who adopted “public hearing” for the purpose of administration, allowing the public and governmental officers from all levels to share their opinions on particular issues which require public opinions. This conforms to his majesty’s speech as shown below: “...most importantly, one should learn to be generous and resolute and vigorously listen to others, including criticisms, because to be a genuinely smart listener one needs to integrate knowledge and various experiences altogether in order to facilitate the administration and ultimately succeed...” (Bhumibol Adulyadej, His Majesty King., 2009) His majesty’s quote aimed to show the governmental officers that the genuine success comes from smart listening, arising from various kinds of intelligence. The more one listens, the more ones becomes adequately smart for problem-solving and self-development. As such, the participation clearly reflects the democratic principles. In the same manner, if a state desires to develop or govern community and society smoothly and peacefully, including to reduce social inequality among the citizens, public participation process must be established. This is because participation refers to a process in which the community members can engage in an activity alongside the community committee, ranging from sharing opinions, problem finding, collaborative planning, operating, receiving mutual benefits and following-up/evaluating. All of these activities reflect the main goal which is to build a harmonious society where people live together happily and peacefully (Phukamchanoad, 2009). Therefore, participation can soundly create deep-rooted harmony among the public, leading to the successful goal achievement. The primary participatory behaviors of the public include the participation in decision making, participation in implementation, gaining mutual benefits and participation in evaluation (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980). Once the participatory behaviors of the citizens became the key foundation of community development management, many countries began to emphasize the public participation which reflects democratic principles at the same time.



Particularly, in Thailand, the Section 76 of the 1997 Constitution clearly states that “The State shall promote and encourage public participation in laying down policies, making decision on political issues, preparing economic, social and political development plans, and inspecting the exercise of State power at all levels.” (Gazette, 1997). Moreover, the 2007 Constitution precisely affirm that public participation shall be a basic policy the state must implement because if there is the lack of public participation in community development or the local or state authorities neglect such participation, it automatically indicates that the Article 87 of the constitution is violated. The state shall follow the public participation policy by promoting public participation in policy implementation and socioeconomic development planning both at national and local levels. They shall encourage the public participation in political decision making and public services development. Last but not least, they shall promote and encourage public participation in checks and balances at all jurisdictional levels in the form of professional agencies, diverse occupational groups, etc. (Gazette, 2007). This constitution distinctly demonstrates one of its objectives, the alleviation of social equality, in its final statement: the participation shall consider the ratio of men and women. In other words, the community development management for reducing social inequality shall pay attention to “public participation” and avoid perfunctory operation. The state or any governmental agencies shall perform their duties conscientiously in order to achieve absolute development.

A main cause of Thai social inequality as reported by the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (2015) is the Thai economic structure. There is a huge number of informal labors, and the level as well as the quality of education are also problems by which the majority of the poor have only primary education or lower. Other factors include the ineffective governance and the lack of transparency, including wrongful practice and corruption among the governmental officers (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2016). These reflect Thailand’s social inequality in 6 aspects: income, education, health care, access to social welfare, infrastructure, land ownership and criminal justice system (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2016), which conforms to the research on social inequality mitigation in Wat Pracha Rabue Tham Community, Bangkok. The research figured out that there was measurable social inequality in six aspects as well; these include (1) access to education and youth development, (2) community physical development, (3) poverty resolution and community strengthening, (4) unfair jurisdiction, (5) access to state resources, and (6) participation in opinion sharing and state response to public opinions. There was inequality in all these aspects according to the samples, especially in terms of poverty resolution and community strengthening (Phukamchanoad & Khadthipong, 2012). People in any state with high inequality



inevitably face with low quality of life because the inequality broadens the gap of quality of life, creating a social class structure embedded with conflict. Therefore, it is necessary to apply the sufficiency economy philosophy of His Majesty King Bhumibol to the community development management. This “sufficiency economy” philosophy, announced on 29 November 1999, was defined as the guideline for all parties and the public. “Sufficiency Economy” refers to a philosophy for living at all levels ranging from household, community and state levels. It encourages the country’s development and administration on the middle path (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2001, 2007; The Chaipattana Foundation, 2007). This Philosophy aims to promote balance of living in community and society by developing, problem solving, strengthening, encouraging, supporting, maintaining and enhancing the quality of life. The goal of this research, hence, targets the strong model communities based on sufficiency economy philosophy in three poor provinces in the northern region: Nan, Prae and Maehongson. These provinces were found to have problems with perfunctory practice, lack of fieldwork, ineffective problem finding and solving, inability to recognize poverty, negligence on social inequality and lack of earnestness. Subsequently, there were also resolution, improvement and development after the genuine sufficiency economy had been applied in these areas. There was the need of the new participatory approach or ‘working like the poor’ according to His Majesty King Bhumibol’s speech on 4 December 1991. Most importantly, this research is a body of knowledge derived from local facts which can be integrated with the work of governmental agencies as well as the community in order to constitute genuine happiness in both urban and rural areas. By reducing the gap between the rich and the poor and creating the equality, there will be the increase of justice and the society will be sustainably secure.

Research Objectives

This research aims to analyze the level of community development management towards the public participation in social inequality mitigation. It also explores the level of sufficiency economy application both individually and in households as well as analyzing the pattern of public participation process in relation to community development management with the purpose of establishing a pleasant society.



Research Methodology

This research is a study using the mixed-method research design by which the researcher has formulated the research process as follows:

1. The unit of analysis or the population and samples of this research include the family leaders in the strong model communities based on the sufficiency economy philosophy where socio-economic conditions and tourism were well-developed in three Northern provinces: Nan, Prae and Maehongsorn. The samples were selected by Taro Yamane's formula in which there were 400 samples from each province; therefore, there were 1,200 samples in total (Yamane, 1973). There were also 10 samples from each province, consisting of community leaders, sub-district headmen, village headmen, village committee members who were close to the community or community mobilizers who were admired by the local people, and community members; there were 30 samples in total.

2. The research instruments for data collection were questionnaires and interviews.

3. The data collection process consisted of documentary research, the use of questionnaires with 1,200 samples, and the fieldwork interviews with 30 community leaders. The local researchers conducted the fieldwork study in the selected three provinces by using the snowball technique to access the household leaders towards the model community leaders based on the sufficiency economy philosophy.

4. The analysis and data processing were conducted by checking and editing the completeness of the collected questionnaires. Each item in the questionnaires was coded, and the coding was examined by SPSS Statistics. The descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean and standard deviation were used for describing the demographic information about the samples, while the inductive statistics or inferential statistics such as independent-samples t-test (T-test) and one-way ANOVA (F-test) were used for comparing and testing the quantitative data. The means were set between 4.21-5.00 (highest), 3.41-4.20 (high), 2.61-3.40 (moderate), 1.81 - 2.60 (low), and 1.00 - 1.80 (lowest). (Silpcharu, 2006) There were also the data testing using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (r) and the descriptive analysis of the interviews according to the specified content structure.

Results

The social contexts of the model communities based on Sufficiency Economy in the three northern provinces of Thailand (Maehongsorn, Prae and Nan) were relatively similar. The research results will be described below:



1) According to the demographic information, the majority of the samples were men aged 51 years old and above; they were Buddhists and married, although some of them were separated. Most of them had primary education degrees (Grade 1-6). The majority did not work in the field of agriculture, but were generally employed (34.83%). They had lived in the area/local community/village for 31-50 years. Their average monthly income was 15,000 baht, and their monthly expense usually did not exceed 10,000 baht. Each family tended to have around 4 members. Furthermore, in terms of the social characteristics of the household leaders, citizens who held the certain social statuses as the leaders (such as village headmen, village headman assistants and district headmen) also owned most of the lands. What they gained from the community were warmth, friendship from neighbors, love and bonds with people and the community they lived in. They received the protection of life and property when living in their village/community. Regarding the social group membership status, the majority of them were village savings group members. The local people had their close neighbors in the area by which everyone in the community talked to, discussed with, and asked for advice and help from their neighbors on a daily basis.

2) In regard to the community development management for social inequality mitigation at present, the public participation in community development management for social inequality mitigation in the three northern provinces was rated at high level in overall (mean = 3.57). The citizen in the three Northern provinces highly participated in the community development management for social inequality mitigation. This inclined to the receiving of mutual benefits as well as the awareness of and understanding about the community development management policy. However, there was a lower level of participation with respect to the problem finding and planning for the community development management. Nonetheless, it was still rated at high level, showing the readiness to work together.

3) In terms of the comparison between the differences in the level of public participation in community development management for reducing social inequality in the three northern provinces, classified by the demographic characteristics, the results showed that after testing the data with one-way ANOVA method (when the level of statistical significance was 0.01), the differences between the arithmetic means of more than three groups of the citizens are illustrated as follows:

Table 1 Comparison between the Differences in the Level of Public Participation in Community Development management for Reducing Social Inequality



Comparison between the Differences in Demographic Factors	Source of Variance	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Age	Between Groups	14.800		4.933	8.115	0.000*
	Within Group	727.070	196	0.608		
	Total	741.871	199			
Level of Education	Between Groups	42.554		14.185	24.336	0.000*
	Within Group	691.278	186	0.583		
	Total	733.832	189			
Duration of Residency in the Area/Community/Village	Between Groups	17.762		8.881	14.644	0.000*
	Within Group	718.635	185	0.606		
	Total	736.396	187			
Monthly Salary	Between Groups	36.888		18.444	31.764	0.000*
	Within Group	671.246	156	0.581		
	Total	708.134	158			
Monthly Expense	Between Groups	86.309		28.770	53.145	0.000*
	Within Group	622.545	150	0.541		
	Total	708.854	153			
Number of Family Members	Between Groups	32.091		16.045	26.812	0.000*
	Within Group	689.999	153	0.598		
		722.090	155			

* Level of Statistical Significance = .01



When considering the research findings in detail, it was found out that 1) the local people aged 51 years old or above participated in the community development management for reducing social inequality more than the local people aged less than 50 years old; 2) the local people who graduated from universities participated in the community development management for such purpose in these areas more than other groups with lower levels of education; 3) the local people who had lived in their village/community for less than 50 years participated in the matter more than this who lived there for more than 50 years; 4) the local people who earned 20,0001 baht or more on a monthly basis participated in the program more than those who earned 20,000 baht or less; 5) the local people who spent 15,001 baht or more on a monthly basis participated more than those who spent not more than 15,000 baht; and 6) the local people whose families consist of not more than four members participated in the management more than those with 5-member-or-more families.

The comparison between the differences in the level of public participation in community development management for reducing social inequality in the three northern provinces by t-test method (when the level of statistical significance was 0.01, and there were only two groups of population to test the different arithmetic means) showed that the local people who were not members of any social group participated in the community development management for reducing social inequality more than those who were members of a social group, with the level of statistical significance at 0.01, which would indicate the inequality among the members of those social groups.

4) The sufficiency economy activities committed by individuals and in households comprised of three main variables as follows:

4.1 Regarding the practice of sufficiency economy activities by individuals and in households, the research results showed that the practice was rated at high level in overall (mean = 3.98). Every aspect was rated at high level except the natural resources preservation which received the highest mean (4.06) and the increase of income which received the lowest mean (3.92)

4.2 In terms of the application of the sufficiency economy philosophy by individuals and in households, the level or the application in all six aspects were rated at high level in overall (mean = 4.02). All aspects were rated at high level by which the mentality aspect had the highest mean (4.20), showing that even if the family were under tough and scarce circumstances, they were still committed to rightful jobs as well as sufficiency and self-reliance.

4.3 Concerning the daily routines of the local people based on the sufficiency economy philosophy, the local people who lived in the three Northern provinces (Prae, Nan and Maehong-sorn) had similar lifestyles. They regularly made merits or donated (the average score = 8.36 out



of 10). They always switched off the lights and electronic devices before leaving home (the average score = 8.32 out of 10). Last but not least, they always unplugged electronic devices such as televisions, video players, computers, laptops and printers after use (the average score = 8.16 out of 10). The local people all agreed that it is important to save the electricity or unplug the electronic devices in order to avoid unnecessary spending or fire risks.

5) The comparison with the purpose of finding the correlation between the public participation in community development management for reducing social inequality and the practice of sufficiency economy activities by individuals and in households in the three northern provinces shows that the correlation coefficient of the two variables was 0.593, and the level of statistical significance was .000 (when the statistical significance was set at .05), by which the samples had a positive correlation with the activities at high level ($r = 0.593^{**}$). In terms of the comparison with the purpose of finding the correlation between the application of the sufficiency economy philosophy by individuals and in households and the participation in sociocultural activities, the correlation coefficient of the two variables was 0.583, and the level of statistical significance was .000 (when the statistical significance was set at .01). This means there was positive relationship between the application of the sufficiency economy philosophy by individuals and in households and the participation in social activities within the area at high level ($r = 0.583^{**}$).

After analyzing the demographic factors which influenced the dependent variables and explained the correlation between variables, the pattern of public participation was synthesized to establish sufficient and pleasant way of living. Once people live happily by reducing their greed to “have enough to get by”, the shape of happiness as well as its process and procedure will be formed systematically. The citizens can choose their own happy life by sharing ideas, helping each other and carrying on their lives together with their families, communities and eventually the society. The society of happiness refers to the ideal society everyone pursues because every society has physical, verbal and mental diversities. People have different levels of greed; there are the rich, the middle class, the sufficients, the poor, urban people who live with facilities and rural people who live a tough life. There are all kinds of people in the society. Therefore, it is necessary to manage one’s life sufficiently, and there should be the collective development management. It might be difficult to achieve the goal since all innovations require the first step as well as trial and error in order to adjust the philosophy to one’s way of living. Still, it is unavoidable for the creation of happy life. The researcher has designed the participation process for establishing the society of happiness based on the sufficiency economy philosophy entitled “Rectangular Ridge Model of Sufficiency” by connecting the results of the comparison between the demographic factors and the sufficient society development management factors, as illustrated in Image 1:

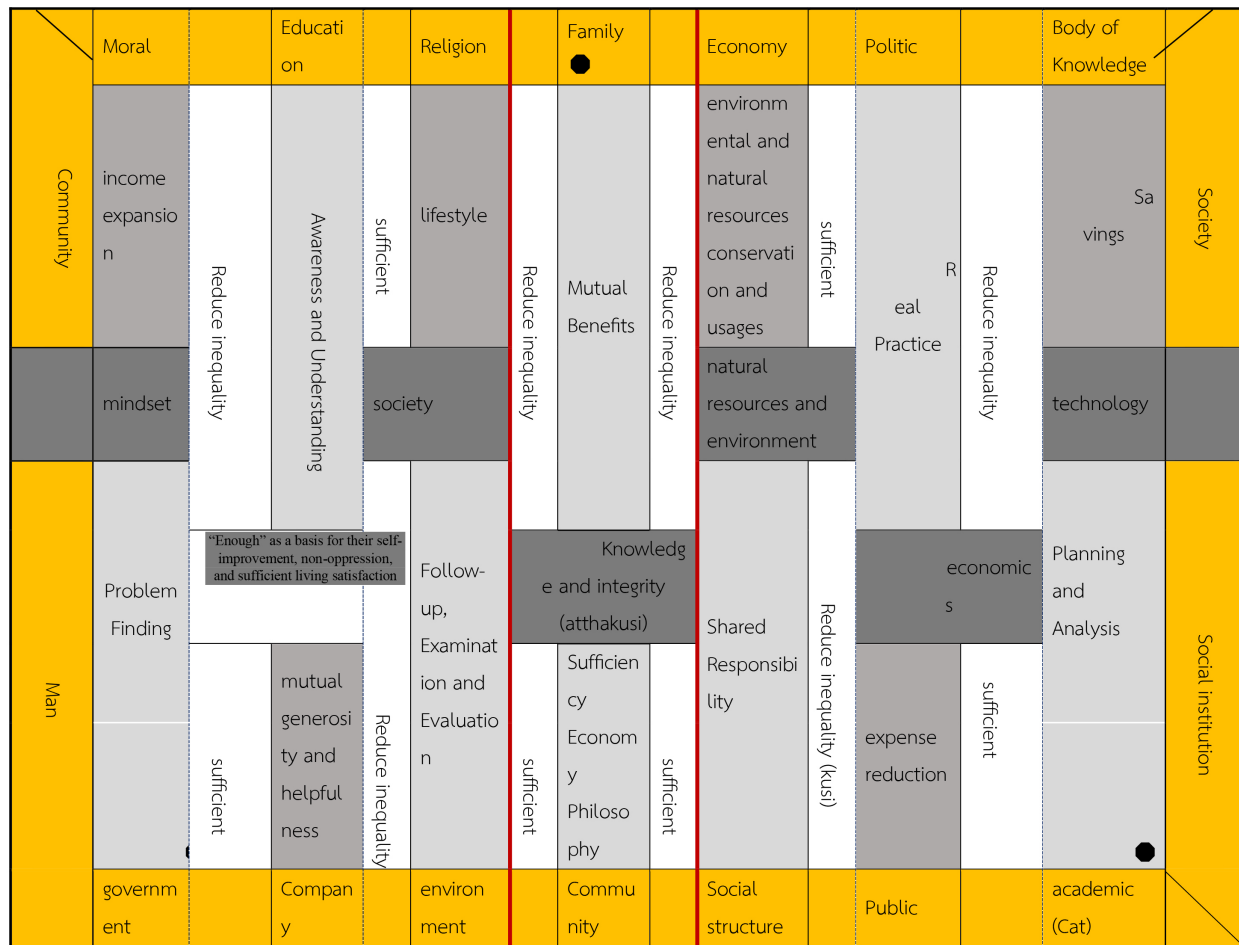


Figure 1. "Rectangular Ridge Model of Sufficiency"

Discussion

The local people, who lived in the model villages based on the sufficiency economy philosophy in Prae, Nan and Maehongsorn, applied the Buddha's teachings to their daily life and their work not only in the field of agriculture but also outside the field (they were mostly general employees). Their monthly income thus did not exceed 15,000 baht, while their monthly expense did not exceed 10,000, indicating that their savings did not exceed 5,000 baht on a monthly basis. They had been living in the community for more than 30 years, and most families had 4 or more members. Most of them were the land owners. They received friendship from their neighbors, had love and bonds with their neighbors, and had protection of life and property in their community. Most of them were members of village savings group. Every individual had his/her close neighbor who they could talk and discuss with as well as asking for help on a daily basis. The local people gave importance to religious ceremonies and merit making based on their belief. They were



committed to Buddhist principles and Buddhas teachings, inherited across generations; for instance, Offering by Drawing Lots (Kin Salak or Than Kay Salak) ceremony, Candle Worshipping ceremony, Life Prolonging ceremony, Town New Year's Event, Songkran festival and other village/ community development activities. Moreover, the participation in the community development management for social inequality mitigation in the three provinces was overall rated at high level, especially in terms of mutual benefits and understanding. The practice of sufficiency economy activities by individuals and in households was rated at high level in overall as well, particularly with respect to the use a preservation of natural resources, way of living, expense reduction and interdependency. This also included the switching off electronic devices after use or before leaving home as well as purchasing goods that are harmful to the environment or cause global warming. The application of the sufficiency economy philosophy by individuals and in households was overall rated at high level especially in terms of mentality, by which the word "sufficiency" could lead to self-development, avoidance of exploitation, satisfaction in one's life and consideration of the environment. Furthermore, in regard to rightful career paths, even if the whole family were facing difficulties in living, they were still committed to sufficiency and self-reliance. All of the above showed that the local people performed the sufficiency economy activities in the same direction. To illustrate, there were natural environment preservation, the application of the sufficiency economy philosophy, energy saving, supporting others, interdependency, self-reliance, avoiding taking advantage of others, satisfaction in life and daily merit making.

In addition, the local people who played a huge role in the society did not necessarily participate in the community development management for social inequality mitigation in the three Northern provinces. They actually participated in the sufficiency economy activities and the application of the philosophy less than the members of social groups both individually and in households. The research results also showed that the non-members of social groups rather participated in the management program and applied the philosophy more than those who were members of the social groups. It should be noted that the local people aged 51 years old and above tended to participate in the management program more than those who were younger than 51 years old. Apart from that, those who had lived in the area for not over 50 years participated in the program more than those who had lived in the area for more than 51 years; this indicated that the second generation of the village tended to play a significant role in this matter than their parents, which would be because of their different levels of education and differences in career paths. This could be also resulted from the fact that the second generation no longer worked in the field of agriculture (for example, working as governmental officers, opening one's own business, being employed by the private sector, etc.; 59.92%). The majority actually worked as



general employees (34.83%). However, those who worked in the area of agriculture participated in the sufficiency economy activities and applied the philosophy both individually and in households more than those who worked outside the field. Most importantly, the countryside society still mainly adhered to agriculture, particularly the non-sufficiency economy model villages or communities. Many households still did farming according to weathers in order to survive. Therefore, even though there are diversities in people, more complexity in the social structure, more occupational choices and more natural resources exploitation, many people still lived sufficiently under the same laws and regulations. There are the rich, the poor, those who could access to natural resources easily and so on. Although there are social inequalities in many aspects, they still need to live together. Hence, it is necessary to increase and decrease something to create fair balance for the majority. This could be achieved by creating cultural activities that encourage self-reliance and utilization of local resources. Traditional culture should be solidly preserved as the social capital of the northern people (Poonlab, 2011). The research thus designed the process of participation for establishing a pleasant society based on the sufficiency economy philosophy so-called *“Rectangular Ridge Model of Sufficiency”*.

Recommendations

It is necessary to promote freedom of expression among the citizens. This is because even if the citizens had high level of participation in community development management for social inequality mitigation in overall, there was a low rate of opinion sharing upon community development management whenever there were general meetings in the villages, sub-districts, municipalities, and districts. Nonetheless, the public agencies allowed everyone to express their opinions equally with the agreement that there should not be arguments towards others. The more arguments, the more conflicts. This is the reason why there must be a forum where “everyone can express opinions without shyness... everyone is equal”. Most importantly, there must be the practical application of the recommendations, including the feedback and further discussions on the application in the next meeting. Moreover, the local authorities shall conduct a fieldwork on self-adaptation for the public as well as using modern technology in accordance with the needs and financial statuses. Especially, among the youth, there should be the awareness raising on the sufficient use of modern technology. The “Rectangular Ridge Model of Sufficiency” should be integrated in both public and private sectors in order to enhance the model of sufficient happiness which will further establish people’s state power sustainably and practically.



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