

**“Disability” as an Opportunity for Improved Communications:
One of the Care Systems in the Thai Community**

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This paper attempts to trace how the presence of “disability” enhances communication between People with Disabilities (PWDs) and others in the community, and to explain how practices of community caring are seen through the eyes of PWDs in Thailand.

As the number of people living with serious disabilities increases, attention to PWDs in need of basic daily care will also increase. Most Thais with disabilities who live in the community depend on care provided by family members or neighbors who serve as Personal Assistants (PAs). It is not regarded as remarkable for families to care for PWDs in Thai society which has very cooperative kinship networks for trivial help or taking care in their house in case of family member difficult care PWDs, but especially among family members who live together. In addition to family support, most PWDs can utilize inexpensive community services for needs such as laundry, receive prepared food, and home repairs, and can also employ people to provide assistance with personal care. In the case of Thailand, PWDs are well integrated in the community.

However, my research in Thailand indicated that the meaning of “care” is different for PWDs than for non-disabled persons. From the perspective of PA, caring for PWDs is an expression of family love, friendship, and pity, and sometimes a means of merit making in the context of Buddhism. For PWDs, on the other hand, the meaning of care has more to do with maintaining their lives, social networks, personal identity, and so on.

Through the practice of “care,” they construct new relationships and acquire a new perspective on the place of “disability” in society. And people re-define what is possible and what is not. It means that irrespective of their “physical situations” people are able to create relationships among themselves. At the same time, there is a gray zone when it comes to ability. This gray zone is the space of possibility cause of changing relationships, position, ideas, and so on. And this will be useful for both of them. Therefore, to make this gray zone reach to ability, they need to make effort to re-create social relationships. Finally, this gray zone makes them further communication possible.

In the caring community, “disability” becomes a tool for communication among community members.

Thus, for PWDs, care provides not only services, but also access to resources for building relationships with others in the community, including both non-disabled people and other PWDs.

Key Words: Thailand, people with disability, community care-giving, community network