



Thailand's "Too Pan Suk" Gives Me Hope

By Dear Aunaetrakul

COVID-19 forces many of us to stay at home. In Chicago, IL, we've been sheltering-in-place for 2 months now. Each day is getting harder. Given the rising number of COVID-19 patients in Illinois, we don't know when this pandemic will end. During my first two weeks of sheltering-in-place, the news coverage was depressing. They constantly talked about the toilet paper shortage, school closures, the number of infected patients and how people should think about their jobs and finances. To manage my COVID-19 related stress and anxiety, I decided to stop watching the news altogether. It was too much for me.

Instead of turning on the news, I've been watching a lot of Thai dramas on Youtube. They are the greatest escape from the reality outside my house. I am currently watching "My Husband-in-Law" on Youtube. Last week, after watching an episode, I saw a suggested clip entitled "Let's Help Each Other Get Through COVID-19: Pantry of Sharing" in Thai. The clip was about 3 minutes long. To be honest, I clicked on the link because the title sparked my curiosity. After watching it, I spent about another hour watching clips about it.

Modeling after Jessica McClard's Little Free Pantry moment, the Too Pan Suk (in English literal translation is a cabinet of happiness or "Pantry of Sharing") initiative started by Supakit Kulcharvijit and his friends, invites people in local communities across Thailand to help their neighbors who are experiencing food insecurity by donating food to a community makeshift food bank. The concept is simple: "Give what you can, take what you need" (" 'Pantry of Sharing' Campaign," 2020)

Similar to the U.S, Thai working class and low income families are struggling to make ends meet due to COVID-19. The Too Pan Suk initiative started off by installing pantries in 5 locations - 4 in Bangkok and 1 in Rayong. The pantries are accessible and located in public areas. The initiative went viral on social media and quickly became a social movement. In less than a week, there are more than 800 mobile pantries nationwide and all are volunteer-based (Kulchartvijit, 2020).

Because the initiative is less than 2 weeks old, Thai media has been reporting people abusing the pantry. There are numerous videos showing people stockpiling and hoarding items. Since this is community-driven, people are educating each other about it. The government is also stepping in to inform donors about practicing good hygiene and how to keep the pantry clean on Facebook (PR Thai Government, 2020). It is great to see everyone coming together to support Too Pan Suk. I am positive that within a few weeks, more Thais will understand and adapt to its concept.

Being Thai living in America, the Too Pan Suk news makes me more connected to my home country. I wish I could hop on a plane to Thailand and donate food to a Too Pan Suk near my parent's house. The story gives me hope about humanity. People,

especially working class and low income, did not ask to be unemployed during this pandemic. They are already stressed enough about not having a stable income. Too Pan Suk allows them to get food freely without being subjected to humiliation. Since the initiative has gone viral and despite bad press, people are still donating food. It doesn't seem to slow down anytime soon. Thais are willing to help each other.

I have not seen Thais protesting in front of governmental buildings against the curfew or complaining how it infringed their freedom. People have been more than willing to stay at home for the collective good despite income losses. I believe collective responsibility is one of the reasons why Thailand is easing some of the restrictions sooner compared to other countries.

Last night, the government announced that they are allowing shopping malls to reopen ("Shopping Malls", 2020). In urban cities like Bangkok, shopping malls are an integral part of Thais' daily lives. A Thai shopping mall has everything you need from beauty salons, tutoring schools, restaurants, supermarkets, retail stores, and banks. You can get everything you need in one place. Despite the reopening, there is still a sense of economic uncertainty as businesses have to adjust their practices in order to meet the social distancing criteria. This means, some people will not be able to get back to work. Food pantries like Too Pan Suk are providing working class, and low-income families access to food which enable them to use their financial resources towards other essentials such as rent.

Too Pan Suk is more than addressing food insecurity. It is also teaching the next generation of Thais about acts of kindness. It shows that money isn't the only thing that can make a positive impact in their community. People can donate food and offer other in-kind services to help those in need. They can volunteer their time to organize or clean a food pantry.

I hope that Too Pan Suk lives beyond the pandemic. I see it as a way to bring people together to give and to receive help. It also exemplifies Thais' spirit of generosity and unity which is something I haven't seen in a while. The longevity of Too Pan Suk ultimately comes down to the local communities. It is up to them on how they want to sustain it. For now, I am going to enjoy watching Too Pan Suk news on Youtube for as long as I can.



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