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# Roots of the Thai Villagers' "Grass Tip" Uprising Following the September 19, 2006 Coup

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**Abstract**

The objective of this paper was to investigate how rural Thai villagers became involved with the Red Shirt movement and to identify the movement's constituents, their objectives or ideologies, and the root causes that led to the recent uprising by normally apolitical and passive villagers. This article adopts and modifies Scott's moral economy as a theoretical framework and starting point to answer these key questions.

Apparently the complicated and largely rural transition could be explained by moral economy no longer. Capitalism and the modern commercial market have become embedded in modern Thai society and are no longer considered a threat or something distant. Present day villagers and village life differ greatly from those in the 1960s and 1970s. New production technologies have been adopted, rendering the villagers dependent on the commercial economy. Traditional agriculture has been replaced by commercial farming or agri-business. Thai villagers have become semi-peasant, semi-proletariat; furthermore, their level of information consumption is now on par with that of their urban counterparts. Thailand's subsistence security and subsistence insurance need to be carefully defined in the context of these changes.

The vulnerable state of the subsistence security of Thailand's rural population can be compared to that of "a man standing permanently in the water so that even a ripple is sufficient to drown him." The shift to production of commercial crops in response to market demand has yielded insufficient income to Thai farmers, due, in part, to both the small size of individual farms and the increasing size of rural families. High production costs and low market prices have inevitably led to the undesirable situation of self-exploitation. More importantly, the cost of living in rural Thailand has increased dramatically as a result of the adoption of modern consumption patterns and consumer culture. At present, subsistence security relies solely on the sale of crops. Rice farming for personal or local consumption and for ecosystem maintenance is all but non-existent. Meanwhile, labor in the informal sector, where compensation is often below the minimum wage and neither benefits and nor access to social insurance are offered, is only able to provide for the most basic of needs. The imbalance between expenses and incomes has brought the subsistence security system to the brink of crisis. Further, the increasing debt and low savings rate of rural Thais place them in an extremely vulnerable position where their very survival is in question.

Given their vulnerable state with respect to subsistence security, rural communities are now faced with the possibility of crises at two levels. In addition to crises such as drought, food shortages, livestock pandemics, and crop damage that affect agricultural production, rural communities are no longer buffered from economic turbulence resulting from free trade, the oversupply of cheap merchandise manufactured in neighboring countries, unstable oil prices or raw materials costs, state privatization and restructuring, factory closures, etc. These latter events have resulted in the loss of a large number of jobs, and, as a consequence, villagers have increasingly turned to labor in the informal sector as a source of non-farm income.

Thailand is faced with the question of how to best ensure adequate subsistence security for its rural communities. Scott (1976) credited traditional communal networks and institutions for providing subsistence insurance to villagers in the face of crises. He considered state or political institutions, despite their vast resources, to be beyond the reach of villagers. This, however, was an assessment of Thailand's farming communities during the colonial era. Since then, new political institutions to administer social resources have become embedded in local communities. Today, villagers are deeply connected to the modern economic system in their everyday lives.

Over time, rural communities and communal relationships have been transformed, with new groups, institutions, and networks replacing traditional ones. These new institutions and networks have been created to provide subsistence insurance at both individual and household levels. Rural communities have experienced the establishment of various NGO-affiliated community organizations as well as state-run or state-sponsored organizations to provide social security in the form of career training, etc. Following the Asian financial crisis in 1997, Thailand has experienced the rapid establishment of social groups along with the spread of the concept of civil society. These organizations differ substantially from their predecessors, particularly in the fact they are not managed or controlled by the state.

In this context, the subsistence crisis has led to the establishment of various community movements concerned with specific issues such as land rights, public policies to solve the farmer's debt crisis, etc. Rural communities have been significantly transformed by the decentralization of provincial and central governments and subsequent political reform following the 1997 financial crisis. The traditional distance between state or political institutions and villagers' daily lives has narrowed

dramatically. Political reform and democratization have meant greater allocation of financial and material resources to provincial organizations. The increased participation by individuals in the shaping of public policies, enabled by political mechanisms such as general elections and annual fiscal planning, has paved a way to greater access to resources. These social and political transformations have become well-established in rural communities, and, consequently, formal subsistence insurance has come to play a greater role in ensuring the survival of rural villagers.

The existence of this new safety net has led to a sense among villagers that they are entitled to subsistence resources, either from the government, political party, provincial administration or other related institutions. These resources have become essential to modern life and have enabled villagers to survive. They have replaced the traditional relationship in agricultural society, and a new subsistence ethic has developed in which all parties involved are required to provide such resources, as standard practice, to ensure the villagers' survival. The villagers, on their part, have come to consider being provided for as an element of the basic subsistence ethic.

The villagers' perceived right to subsistence support, therefore, is closely related to their gaining of political rights, which enabled them to vote for political parties, and with them governments and the prime minister, who offered to implement public policies to support their lifestyles. Political rights are a prerequisite for maintaining the villagers' new social relationship. Any change that alienates villagers' rights–whether it be proposed by the elite, government, or whomever–would, as a consequence, devalue the above ethic. Thus, a modern "standard" has been established that the basic subsistence ethic shall not be violated by the elite.

This is why the September 19, 2006 Coup as well as the PAD movement was seen by villagers as a violation of the subsistence ethic. The PAD protests began before the 2006 coup and continued after the general election on December 23, 2007, when the People's Power Party and the Samak Administration came to. The Somchai Administration following the ouster of the Samak Administration, encountered similar protests, leading to the closure of the Bangkok Airport and the Constitutional Court's decision to dissolve the People's Power Party on December 2, 2008.

This coup had a different effect on Thai politics than coups in the past. It was the first time a coup was strongly opposed by villagers. The villagers considered the coup to be a violation of the subsistence ethic based on the newly formed social

relationship. This is similar to Scott's explanation of why capitalism and the modern market system, as well as the state, which were perceived by villagers as undermining the traditional relationship in agrarian communities, were met with opposition by villagers.

The idea of fighting to defend the new subsistence ethic, then, serves as a significant motivation for villagers to join the Red Shirt movement. Villagers' frustration was provoked when the coup government decided to set up armored security checkpoints along regular transportation routes. Frustrations were further escalated when some populist policies were terminated or brought under the control of the government (e.g. One Million Baht Village Funds, SML projects, etc.). The coup administration was seen as retaking the ground that the villagers had gained over the five years of populist policies under the Taksin Administration.

## 1. Introduction

The objective of this paper is to explore the characteristics of local citizens' movements since the September 19, 2006 Coup. Compared to earlier periods in Thai political history, recent years have witnessed a great deal of political transformation. The existence of two opposing mass political movements–the Yellow Shirt and Red Shirt movements, respectively representing anti- and pro-Thaksin sentiments–is unprecedented in modern Thai politics. These movements are independent and their behavior not influenced by the state. In this sense, Thai academics need to develop a new understanding of local mass politics. The previous concepts of a passive populace, local cronyism, populist policies, and patron-client relationships, etc. are no longer sufficient nor appropriate for describing the current situation.

Evidence of the shift in mass politics began to appear in 2001, when the Thai Rak Thai Party, campaigning on a platform of populist policies, handily won the general election. These policies greatly increased the popularity of the party's founder and then Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra. After an unprecedented uninterrupted four years in office, the Thai Rak Thai Party again won a landslide victory in the February 2005 elections.

Soon thereafter, Thaksin's popularity among the urban middleclass and upper classes fell dramatically due to widespread cronyism and collusion between politicians and businessmen. The party's landslide victory in the 2005 election was seen as the result of a massive nationwide effort to buy votes, particularly in rural areas. Urban voters claimed that the rural population voted for Thaksin only because they were seduced by his populist policies. This, along with the need to mitigate the political chaos resulting from the political confrontation between the government and the anti-Thaksin Yellow Shirt mass movement, were cited as justifications for the coup on September 19, 2006.

The coup leaders appointed General Surayuth Chulanond, a former army commander, prime minister of interim government. The Surayuth administration did its best to rid the government of influences of the Thaksin regime. Although some populist policies were deliberately terminated, many of them, especially those that were quite popular among the poor, were retained, albeit under different names. These actions represent efforts by the coup government to ameliorate the dissatisfaction of the rural

masses. In contrast to Thaksin's growth-oriented policies, the Surayuth government emphasized the concept of "sufficiency economy," which originated in the King's speech in 1997.

At the same time, the interim government, assisted by military leaders, attempted to bring the upcountry social movements under control. Martial law was imposed to prohibit political gatherings; the government's security control unit was revitalized to monitor the movement of certain individuals; formal leaders at the local level, such as village headmen and sub-district chiefs, were mobilized to help stabilize the situation.

Despite these efforts by the interim governments, the rural population did not lessen their political participation. They supported the pro-Thaksin political party in the 2007 election and helped to push it into power. However, the anti-Thaksin People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) again took to the streets, eventually occupying the Bangkok international airport. In the midst of this turmoil, the Constitutional Court ordered the dissolution of the pro-Thaksin People's Power Party. Though the party changed its name to the Pheu Thai Party in an attempt to retain power, during the cabinet formation process, a faction of the Pheu Thai Party decided to join the opposition, leading to the creation of the current Democrat Party Abhisit administration.

After the anti-Thaksin political party took over the government at the end of 2008, pro-Thaksin voters organized mass demonstrations in the streets. As these protesters wore red-colored shirts, they were dubbed "Red Shirts," to contrast with the urban middleclass, anti-Thaksin "Yellow Shirts."

The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) organized major anti-government rallies in April 2009, when Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva took office, leading to violent clashes with military forces. On March 12, 2010, Red Shirt protesters, refereeing to themselves as "have-nots" and "commoners," gathered in Bangkok in a bid to drive out Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, who they claimed represented the Thai elite and was insensitive to the needs of the poor majority. It was estimated that the majority of the 200,000 to 300,000 protesters comprised villagers from around the country, but mainly from the north and northeast.

The UDD called for the replacement of the *Ammatayathipatai* (aristocratic polity) or "Ammat"–a system in which palace insiders, the military, and bureaucrats could effectively ignore their popular mandate under the guise of an electoral

democracy. One of the UDD's favorite targets was Prem Tinsulanonda, president of the Privy Council. Protestors called for Prem's immediate resignation from the Privy Council.

In an attempt to legitimize the movement and to emphasize the movement's widespread and popular character, the UDD decided to draw a contrast with the *Ammatayathipatai* by calling the movement's supporters "*phrai*," a slightly dated term used in the class system in place until the middle of the 19th century to refer to the common people charged with working for the royal family and the aristocracy.

On May 19, 2010, Thai troops launched an offensive against the Red Shirt camp, firing live rounds and using armored vehicles to break through barricades. Troops using loudspeakers urged protesters to leave, saying their lives were in danger. The army terminated the operation after key leaders of the protest surrendered; however, at least six people died in the assault on the Red Shirt camp. Violence erupted elsewhere in the capital, with protesters setting fire to several key buildings including the stock exchange, and subsequently spread to other parts of the country. In an effort to re-establish control over the streets, the government imposed a nighttime curfew on Bangkok and extended it to 22 other provinces. Eventually, the Red Shirt protests were suppressed by the military, resulting in 91 deaths and more than 1,900 injuries.

Such active and continuous political participation by the rural population is rare in Thai history. As asserted later in greater detail, the current literature does not provide a convincing explanation for this most recent uprising. The objectives of this paper, then, are to examine the reasons behind and mechanisms employed in the present popular political struggle in Thailand. Specifically, I attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How did people become involved in the Red Shirt movement? Who are the movement constituents? What are their objectives or ideologies? Is the movement connected (or not) with politicians at local and national levels? How serious are the movement's conflicts with other political groups? And,
2. What are the root causes behind the current uprising by Thai villagers, who have previously been apolitical and passive?

The data utilized in this study comprised a survey of 400 participants in UDD demonstrations at the Pan Fah site in central Bangkok between March 15 and April 5, 2010, conducted prior to the author's tenure at the IDE program (Japan) between

January and June of 2010; the purposive survey was conducted using a questionnaire at eighty tents set up during the protest (representing different provinces and regions of the country), with five interviews conducted per tent. In addition, the paper includes a case study of Baan Klongyong, Nakorn Pratom province in Central of Thailand.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The term most commonly used by critics to refer to the Red Shirt movement has been “herd,” intended to bring to mind images of livestock being herded before their sale. The implication is that the movement participants are part of a mindless herd trapped by populist policy, having no real political conscience. The emcee of a certain TV program with a Yellow Shirt bias joked that the demonstrations were, for many of the villagers, the first time that they had visited Bangkok with pocket money and free transportation. Many similar comments have been uttered in relation to the current “color” dispute, intended undermine the legitimacy of the villagers.

Conventional academics tend to explain the “Thai villagers” uprising based on Herd Theory. From the author’s standpoint, it appears that these attempts follow the work of Anek (1992 and 1996) and, in particular, Ted Gurr’s relative deprivation theory (Gurr, 1970). The latter theory has had much influence on Thai academics in relation to the Red Shirt movement. In this paper, I review and criticize these two theories as being insufficient and inappropriate for the current situation and propose a modification of Scott’s “Moral Economy” as an alternative theoretical framework.

### 2.1 The Myth of “A Tale of Two Democracies”

Explanations of villager movements have, for a long time, been influenced by the work of Riggs (Bureaucratic Polity, 1966), in which he describes Thailand since the political reform on June 24, 1932, as having a democratic government governed by bureaucrats. Some academic and political analysts see no extra-bureaucracy while people participate passively in the political participation and are entrapped by the erstwhile political culture despite the development of new political institutions and structures.

Viewing Thai politics through an economic lens, Anek Laothamatas (1992) observed that the business sector has grown such that it now shares significant power with bureaucrats. Laothamatas’ other influential work titled “A Tale of Two Democracies: Conflicting Perceptions of Elections and Democracy in Thailand” (1996), views villagers as commoners who have gained political currency at the cost of democratic development. In Laothamatas’ analysis, the masses were party to the

establishment of a government prone to misconduct, while a minority of so-called "urban intelligentsia" were responsible for examining and terminating such governmental misbehavior. That is to say, even though an extra-bureaucracy has developed in Thai society, only the business sector has gained real political power and decision making authority.

Villager organizations established by patrons or prone to cronyism are rarely viewed as legitimate manifestations of political culture, on par with that developed among the urban middle class. Such analysis, popular in the past 4 or 5 years, is related to the earlier-mentioned "herd theory," which has attempted to explain the strong support of villagers for the incumbent political party as the result of vote buying. Similarly, such analysis serves as the basis for viewing political demonstrations as being influenced by populist policies and not political ideals.

### 2.2 Breakdown Theory and Relative Deprivation Theory

Ted Robert Gurr's work, "Why men rebel" (1970), was awarded the "Woodrow Wilson Prize" as the best political science book explaining Thailand's Red Shirt movement. It was translated into Thai in 1983 by Kannala Sukpanich, Government Department, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University and used as a textbook after been renamed "Political Psychology & Revolution." The work is often quoted in the context of the psychological motivations behind the Red Shirt movement.

The essence of Gurr's work was to posit political violence as the result of inequities leading to discontentment, threat, and aggression, much akin to relative deprivation theory. In Gurr's theory, individuals' subjectivity leads to mass political violence in various forms including revolutions and riots. Mass psychology theory and relative deprivation theory are similar in their focus on subjective analyses leading to ostensibly-irrational consequences. Gurr justified mass political violence as irrational and extreme action intended to threaten the social order. Such a view is understandable given that era in which it was written; during the cold war era numerous political revolutions were occurring in third world countries around the world. Gurr's work served as justification for the US's response to many such political events.

It is, however, worth noting that Gurr focused solely on political violence against the government and not violent actions taken by the government. As such, the

work is criticized for its bias in favor of government stability. Non-political conflicts are judged as commonplace, while actions taken by those discontent with the government are viewed as improper and illegitimate. This was the perspective of the elite hoping to maintain the existing social order.

Based on this view, even those sympathetic to the villagers explain the Red Shirt movement as that of a marginalized group angered and frustrated by social and economic inequities. Some analysts have even gone so far as to say that the masses had no real political conflict but were simply influenced by mass leaders. This hypothesis stems from the assumption that there are no longer any poor people in Thailand, which is based on the fact that Thailand's per capita income is above the official poverty line set by the government.

The hypothesis suggests that the aggressive and irrational actions taken by the masses, who had neither specific concerns nor expectations of specific benefits to be gained through their actions, were driven by emotion that was stoked by the movement leaders. Such analysis is questionable and careful consideration must be made as to whether or not there are any other plausible explanations for the Red Shirt movement.

In summary, Gurr's relative deprivation theory explains collective action in the terms of deviance; it posits violent political action in the form of rioting, terrorism, civil war, etc. as the result of grievances of people who perceive themselves as being deprived of that to which they feel entitled. The problem with this theory is that it relies on an assumption of the psychological state of the active party. Another influential work, Scott's "The Moral Economy of the Peasant" (1976), which examines the question, "Why and under what conditions do peasants or villagers resort to active rebellion or other forms of collective action," stands in stark contrast to Gurr's viewpoint, positing the individual peasant as a rational actor.

### 2.3 Scott's Moral Economy (1976)

Scott's moral economy is a rich and elegant theory of peasant society that explores the dynamics of peasant economics and values to explain patterns of peasants' collective action and political unrest. Scott's work traced the devastating impacts of the world market economy and modern state formation on the traditional agrarian order in Southeast Asia (Larson, 1987: 6). Peasant studies employing the concept of moral

economy are primarily interested in understanding and explaining what motivates peasants and how they resist their oppressors.

The incursion of the modern capitalist economy has destroyed traditional arrangements in agricultural society that form the basis of peasants' subsistence insurance. With respect to traditional arrangements, Scott describes the prevalence and sanctity of patron-client bonds, communal landholdings, and other kinds of risk-sharing and social welfare institutions characteristic of lowland Southeast Asia as well as other agrarian orders under pre-colonial or pre-capitalist conditions. Peletz (1983: 732-33) pointed that in "The Moral Economy of the Peasant," Scott first delineates the normative operation of these traditional arrangements geared toward collective insurance and then proceeds to examine their erosion in the face of colonialism and capitalist market forces.

Scott's moral economy is not completely novel and reflects the seminal works of Karl Polanyi (1957) and E. P. Thompson (1971). Polanyi contributes the important distinction between embedded and autonomous economies. Ancient or primitive economies are considered embedded economies, in which production and exchange is subservient to the purposes and practices of far more significant social, political, or religious institutions. The modern capitalist economy represents and autonomous economy in which production and exchange play a much more significant role and in which society increasingly serves economic ends and operates according to the constraints of pervasive, impersonal markets.

E.P. Thompson's work titled "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century" (1971), based on his study of eighteenth-century English food riots, contributes by explaining how and why the transition from an embedded economy to an autonomous market generates social and political unrest. The work explains that the "delicate tissue" of traditional social norms and reciprocities are unable to accommodate the "cash-nexus" of the emerging market order. Thompson conceives moral economy as popular consensus about what are legitimate and illegitimate practices. Such consensus is rooted in the past and capable of inspiring action (Arnold, 2001: 86-87).

> "It is possible to detect in almost every eighteenth-century crowd action some legitimizing notion. By the notion of legitimation I mean that the men and

> women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs; and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community." (Thompson, 1971: 50)

Scott argued that "subsistence ethic" was grounded in the nature of reciprocal social exchange and peasant economic practice. This ethic is universal and stipulates that everyone in a village community has a legitimate place in the social order as well as a guaranteed right to survive. According to Scott, villagers' fundamental notions of survival, social justice, legitimacy, and exploitation, as well as many of their political decisions, derived from this subsistence ethic. The normative order of peasant societies functioned in accordance with the "existential dilemma" of the peasants: the pursuit of a stable and secure subsistence in an environment of high risk. To maintain some minimum degree of social insurance or "subsistence security" for all members of a community, peasants naturally tended to subordinate self-interest to alternative ideals of community solidarity, self-sufficiency, and redistribution (Larson, 1987: 6).

Scott also examined how the "subsistence ethic" emphasizes the rights and obligations of all village members to help provide "subsistence insurance" to the collective whole. He argued that the moral economy of peasants rested on the collective assumption that the poor had a social right to subsistence. Peasants expected landlords, patrons and elites to provide safeguards against subsistence crises and to guarantee minimal social rights in the absence of civil or political rights. The peasants relied on these customary safeguards, their patrons, and traditional social norms because of limitations in state and political arrangements:

> "The last social unit, state, fits strangely in this company. It is often distinguished more by what it takes from peasants than what it gives, and its social distance from the peasantry, especially in the colonial era, was measured in light years. Nevertheless, both the traditional state-through regional granaries, public works employment paid in kind, famine relief,- and the modern state, through employment, welfare, and relief, may help peasants survive. The state's assistance, if it arrives at all, however, is hardly reliable." (Scott, 1976: 27-28)

What, then, makes peasants rebel? Scott argued peasants were likely to resort to violence against the traditional order, and their customary safeguards along with it, when their moral claim to subsistence insurance is violated by the state or by invasion of the modern capitalist market.

> "The development of capitalism, the commercialization of agrarian relations, and the growth of a centralizing state represent the historical locus of peasant revolts in the modern era. For, above all, these large historical forces cut through the integument of subsistence customs and traditional social relations to replace them with contracts, the market, and uniform laws." (Scott, 1976: 189)

Peasants do not cross over into acts of resistance or outright rebellion simply because of increases in exactions by those higher up in the social order. Rather, peasants tend to embark on resistive action when the demands placed on them are perceived as falling outside the range of what is considered morally just or culturally legitimate and when these are also judged to be more intolerable, in an existential sense, than the presumed consequences of insurrection.

In his critique and rethinking of Scott' moral economy, Arnold (2001) argued that the conventional conception of moral economy rests too heavily on the distinction between nonmarket and market-based societies and, thus, reduces to the unduly narrow claim that the moral indignation that leads to resistance and rebellion is based on the forced economic assimilation of a nonmarket groups. As such, Arnold re-conceptualized moral economy in terms of social goods, citing at least three reasons for doing so. First, by framing moral economy in terms of social goods, which exist in both modern and pre-modern societies, the concept is freed from limited applicability to a specific time or culture. Second, multiple social goods and moral economies exist simultaneously. Each moral economy represents a separate, but often nested, sphere of legitimacy capable of inspiring action. Unlike the overriding economic utility of rational-choice theory or the undifferentiated web-of-life of traditional moral economy, Arnold's reformulation of moral economy honors the moral complexity of human communities and much more accurately captures the underlying causes of politically significant moral indignation. Third, the grounding of theory in social goods minimizes the risk of over-socializing economic behavior. (Arnold, 2001: 85, 94)

Edelman (2005) argued that present-day peasants differ significantly from the peasants in the 1960s and 1970s when "peasant studies," and especially Scott's "The Moral Economy of the Peasant," were conducted. Today, more extensive and intensive involvement in markets have introduced a growing number of interconnected vulnerabilities. Peasants' widespread adoption of modern technologies, even when employed in traditional cultivation systems, has deepened dependence on the cash economy and exacerbated the impact of various environmental and health catastrophes often associated with industrial agriculture. Edelman also pointed out that "subsistence crises" such as droughts, floods, insects, crop blights, animal diseases, and plummeting prices still occur and that the impact of these are compounded by greater risk and uncertainty brought about by two decades of economic liberalization and institutional restructuring. (Edelman, 2005: 336)

Today, non-agricultural employment and entrepreneurial activity have become essential factors for ensuring the survival of the rural poor almost everywhere in the world. Rural culture has been influenced by urban culture to such an extent that it is necessary to consider the possibility of a new, contemporary rural moral economy, informed by urban imaginary and urban consumption patterns. At the same time, it is important to recognize that peasant expectations and living standards have risen. These new strains and new risks constitute a new "subsistence standard" and "new subsistence crisis" in present-day peasant societies.

> "Some small agriculturalists, much as Popkin predicted, adapted to the newly globalized economy by entering specialized, export-oriented market niches. Many more, as Scott (1976:59) had indicated regarding an earlier period\in Asia, found the insecurities of the new economic situation much greater than those they traditionally faced in protected local or national markets." (Edelman, 2005: 337)

There is, thus, a need re-conceptualize Scott's moral economy, taking into account the dramatic changes experienced by peasant societies in the past few decades and inextricable linking of the economic and social life of peasants with the market economy. In this paper, however, we will limit our discussion of Scott's moral

economy as starting point for our inquiry into the “root causes of the Thai villagers uprising.”

## 3. Background of the Redshirt Movement

The period between March 12 and May 19, 2010 witnessed the largest mass demonstrations in modern Thai history, organized in central Bangkok by the United Front for Dictatorship against Democracy (UDD), better known as the "Red Shirts." At their height, the demonstrations involved several hundred thousand protestors comprising mostly rural villagers. In this section, we consider the historical development of the Thailand's Red Shirt movement since the September 10, 2006 Coup.

### 3.1 Pre-Redshirt Opposition to the 2006 Coup, the Council of National Security (CNS), and the 2007 Constitution

First, it should be noted that the coup was both supported and criticized by various independent political groups whose views were expressed through demonstrations, political debates, and various other activities; most prominent among these, were groups such as the Saturday Group against Dictatorship, the 19 September Network against the Coup, the White Dove (*nogpirap khao*), and June 24th groups whose members were primarily ordinary citizens. While each group acted independently, groups collaborated from time to time to organize joint events.

Second, after dissolution of the Thai Rak Thai Party, a number of former party members established the PTV, which played a leading role in bringing together various independent political groups under the umbrella organization known as the "United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship" (UDD) (or *Naewruam prachatipatai khabrai phadetkarn* or *nor por kor*). The key objective of the UDD was to organize mass protests to topple the CNS and to oust the coup-installed Prime Minister, General Surayud Chulanont, a former army chief and Privy Councilor. The violent demonstration organized at General Prem's residence on July 22, 2007, was met with a crackdown by the military. This and other failures led to adoption of the new strategy of campaigning against the Draft Constitution of 2007. The UDD's efforts did not achieve the desired results and the new constitution was adopted by referendum on August 19, 2007. After their campaign against the draft, the UDD changed its name to the "National United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship (NUDD) Red in the Land" (*nor por chor*).

### 3.2 Birth of the "Red Shirt" Movement: Opposition to the PAD and Defense of the Elected Government

The NUDD returned to its fight against the PAD by organizing a demonstration to toppled the new government elected in the May 2008 general election. This demonstration marked the adoption of red shirts as a symbol for the movement. The first outdoor taping of the political talk show "Truth Today" was scheduled on October 11, 2008, in Rajamangala, to commemorate the promulgation of the 1997 Constitution. The more than 10,000 people who attended the event were required to wear red shirts. Similar demonstrations were subsequently organized, but momentum was lost when the People's Power Party (PPP) was dissolved by the Constitutional Court of Thailand on December 2, 2008.

### 3.3 Red Shirts Across the Nation: Opposition to the Abhisit Administration as Heir to the Monarchy

The actions of the Red Shirt movement can be divided into two distinct periods delineated by a series of violent crackdowns by the military.

During the first period, the Abhisit Administration was accused of coming into power illegitimately under the powerful influence of bureaucrats. A variety of mass protests were organized within Bangkok as well as the provinces. The long demonstration in front of the parliament turned violent, resulting, ultimately, in a crackdown by the military now referred to as bloody Songkran Day.

In the second period following the violent crackdown mentioned above, an attempt was made to coordinate mass demonstrations aimed at a variety of proposals to oust the Abhisit Administration from power. It should be noted, however, that these political actions appeared much weaker in comparison to the demonstrations in earlier period. They simply called for the dissolution of parliament. Nonetheless, these demonstrations again precipitated a severe crackdown by the military in May 2010.[1] A

[1] Violence peaked at two points in time: April 10, when 26 people were killed, mainly in the Phan Fah area, and from May 14 to 19 at Rajprasong Intersection

Total of 91 people were killed in violent clashes related to the demonstrations; many of those killed were unarmed civilians shot by the military. Approximately 1,900 protesters were injured and more than 100 leaders arrested and detained.

## 4. Root Causes of the Thai Villagers' Uprising

### 4.1 Transformation of Thai Villages into "Polybian," "Grass Tip" Communities

The Moral Economy model suggests a hypothesis regarding the fundamental causes of the peasant rebellion; namely, that the rebellion was the result of the intrusion of capitalism that dramatically changed the traditional villagers' way of living. According to Scott's study, the traditional agricultural community relied heavily on the patron-client relationship and reciprocal exchange between landlords and farmers. Such social relationships were critical components of the economic and livelihood system at the time.

This was, in any case, the state of rural villages forty or fifty years ago. Recent studies reveal that peasant societies in third world countries have undergone dramatic transformation in recent decades. In his book titled "The End of Peasantry in Southeast Asia," Elson (1997) points out that Southeast Asian peasants have shifted to the labor sector, while the economy has also evolved and the traditional agrarian economy has all but disappeared. Similar studies including Bryceson's "Disappearing Peasantries?: Rural Labor in Africa, Asia and Latin America" (2002), Bryceson and Amal's "Farewell to farms: De-agrarianisation and Employment in Africa" (1997), and Michael Kearney's "Reconceptualizing the Peasantry: Anthropology in Global Perspective" (1996) have discussed how peasants have adapted to a new way of life that could be described as "polybian."[2] In other words, peasants are no longer defined as rural cultivators whose most important means of livelihood is subsistence agriculture, i.e. production for self-consumption. Rather, in the current globalized world, boundaries between rural and urban are blurred because the rural population has shifted to different sources of income and developed complex forms of production. Agriculture has lost

[2]Amphibian (meaning *amphi*, both + *bios*, mode of life): present-day peasants have complex identities including that of migrants who move back and forth between "peasant" and "proletarian" life space. Poly (meaning many): reflecting the shift of peasant identities as farmers to that, not only of laborers, but of multiple other occupations. "Polybians" can adjust their color to match their immediate environment; they adapt their mode of being as they opportunistically move in and out of different life spaces. (Kearney, 1996:141)

much of its importance for villagers' livelihood. Thus, Kearney suggested that research much focus on individual responding to the internal heterogeneity of household and communities. (Kearney, 1996:133).

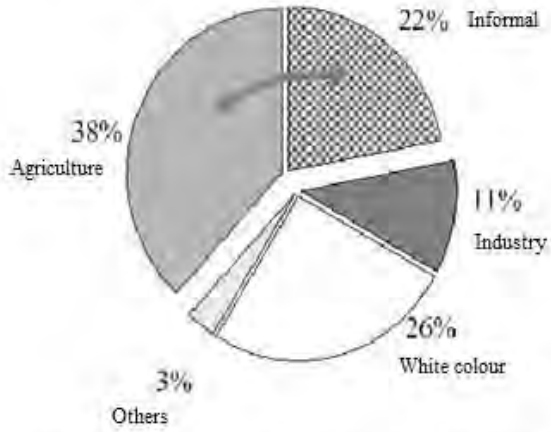
Given that Southeast Asia and Thailand experiencing such a transformation, Rigg (2003) also criticized the characterization of rural community as bounded and isolated from the outside world and especially from the market. Rigg demonstrates the intermingling of the concepts of "rural" and "urbanity," and argues that there is no clear distinction between "rural" and "urban" worlds, in which rural development is fundamentally linked to agrarian processes and urban development is linked to urban and industrial processes. Instead, he contends that there is ever-increasing integration between rural and urban spheres and that people cross the supposed rural-urban divide all the time.

Rural villagers have certainly achieved a better life and improved their socioeconomic status in this era of capitalism. An important strategy for attaining this modern, or better, life has been to put substantial effort into the education of their children so that they can gain access to the growing number of non-farm jobs (Rigg 2001: 49, 53-54). In his study in Ayudhaya province, Rigg discovered that whole communities had become a "dormitory villages" in which the majority of villagers left during day to pursue their livelihood elsewhere.

With the current economic status and attitude, including political culture, of rural villagers, it appears that traditional "peasants" no longer exist (Keyes, 2010). Rural Thailand is now seen as "cosmopolitan village" where information is readily available and consumed. Yos Santasombat (2008) revealed that the agriculture-based community is maintained, to some extent, in northern Thailand, albeit with significant modification of agricultural methods and simultaneous dramatic growth of the labor and service sectors.

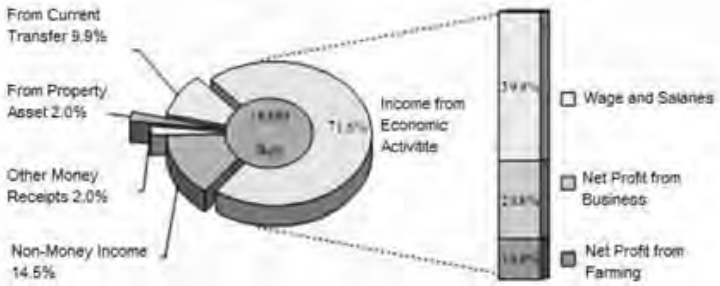
Rural Thailand is no longer a peasant society but is experiencing dramatic transition in terms of mode of production, livelihood choice, lifestyle, and attitude. The traditional embedded economy of rural villages has been displaced by a capitalist economy and the "strong community," used in academic circles to mean "cultural community," has been replaced by a "strong capitalist society."

**Figure 1 : Figure 1:Breakdown of Labor Force by Sector**




Source:http://www.csr.chula.ac.th/lecture_series/images/stories/pdf/inequality injustice01.pdf (Calculated by Pasuk Pongpaichit based on Labour Force Survey by National Statistic Office )

**Figure 2 Breakdown of Monthly Household Income by Income Source (2007)**




Source : National Statistics Office's Household Socioeconomic Survey (cited from www.nso.go.th/en/survey/house_seco/exec.pdf )

As indicated in Figures 1 & 2, while Thailand's agricultural sector (38%) constitutes more than a third of the Thai labor force, it comprises only 12% or so of the GDP. The proportion of farming households solely dependent on agricultural income is only 10.9 %. National surveys show that about 60% of rural income is earned off-farm. These data indicate that agriculture is no longer the basis for rural security.

A survey of 399 cooperative members in Baan Klong Yong,[3] a so-called "red" village located in the middle of Thailand, revealed that 52.6% are farmers (rice, vegetables, lotus, fruit, paddy field aquaculture, etc.). Among the 35.9% of cooperative members who reported their occupation as "labor," 26.6% worked outside the community and 9.3% worked within the community. The remainder of the survey sample reported employment in business, civil service, etc. Such occupational diversity is a consequence of the loss of farming land and concomitant increase in population over the past 3 or 4 decades,[4] which has resulted, on the one hand, in an intensification of small-scale farming and increase in the share of non-farm income on the other. Employment in the labor sector has become an important alternative for rural villagers, with quite a number of factories located on Bhuddhamonthon 4 Road, serviced by 2 or 3 buses transporting laborers between villages and factories in the morning and evening. The majority of laborers work in the informal sector, earning wages of approximately 200 Baht/day (paid bi-weekly) with overtime pay of 80 Baht, for an average total daily wage of 280 Baht/day.

[3] Baan Klong Yong is called a "Red Shirt" village, with approximately 70% of inhabitants affiliated with Red Shirt movement and 30% affiliated with the Yellow Shirt movement. The village is situated in Nakon Pathom province in central Thailand. The two elected MPs are Peu Thai Party members. Local Red Shirt protests were organized by a key local Red Shirt leader. These demonstrations were attended by 40 to 50 protesters, only 4 or 5 of whom were villagers from Baan Klong Yong.

[4] Between 1975 and present, land cooperatives have distributed approximately 20 rai (3.2 ha) of land to individual households. As a result, individual family members have received only 4 to 5 rai (0.6 to 0.8 ha) each, which is considered insufficient for farming.

**Table 1: Occupations of Baan Klong Yong Cooperative Members (numbers of respondents and percentages)**

| | Employment Location | |
|---|---|---|
| Occupation | In Baan Klong Yong | Outside Baan Klong Yong |
| 1.Farming | 180 (45.11) | 30 (7.52) |
| 2.Labor | 37 (9.27) | 106 (26.57) |
| 3.Business/Trade | 9 (2.26) | 5 (1.25) |
| 4.Self-employed | 1 (2.5) | 1 (2.5) |
| 5.Government/civil service | 5 (1.25) | 10 (2.5) |
| 6.Unemployed & Other | 15 (3.76) | - |

Source : The Author's Survey in Apichart and Team, 2010

Similar to the situation in the majority other villages, many Klong Yong villagers depend on non-farm income in the informal labor sector, which is not legally bound to the social security system. The 2010 labor survey conducted by the National Statistics Office showed that, of the 24.1 million Thais employed in the labor sector (62.3% of the total 38.7 million working population), 14.5 million (60%) are employed in the informal agricultural labor sector, while 31.4% are employed in the business and service sector and 8.6% in the manufacturing sector (Table 2). The informal labor sector in Thailand is criticized for its violation of fundamental rights of workers to job security, fair wages, safe and healthy work environment, as well as access to social security and other state services. More importantly, workers in the informal labor sector do not have the right to form unions necessary for negotiations with employers, as informal labor does not fall under the aegis of the Labor Protection Act of 1998. In addition, neither the 2004 House Labor Protection Regulations and the 2005 Agricultural Labor Protection Regulations, which have been insufficiently and ambiguously implemented, provide protection for informal laborers.

**Table 2: Employment in the Thai Labor Sector (2010)**

| **Labor force** | **Number (million)** | **Percentage (%)** |
|---|---|---|
| 1.Formal sector | 12.6 | 37.7 |
| 2.Informal sector | 24.1 | 62.3 |
| Total | 38.7 | 100.0 |

Source: National Statistics Office, 2010 ( http://www.ftawatch.org/all/news/21463)

**Table 3: Breakdown of Informal Employment by Sector**

| **Employment sector** | **Number (million)** | **Percentage of Provincial Income / State Income (%)** |
|---|---|---|
| 1.Agriculture | 14.5 | 60.0% |
| 2.Commerce & Service | 7.5 | 31.4% |
| 3.Manufacturing | 2.1 | 8.6% |
| Total | 24.1 | 100% |

Source: National Statistics Office, 2010 ( http://www.ftawatch.org/all/news/21463)

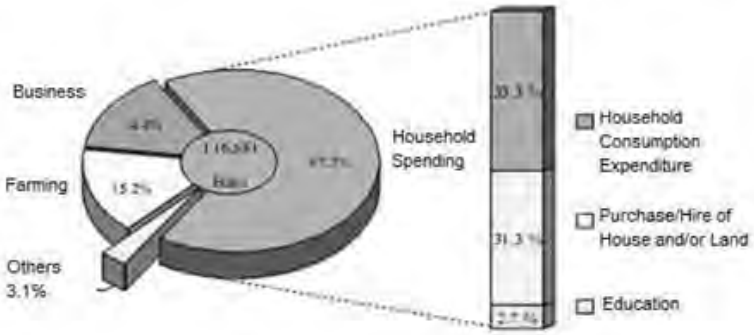
The lives of the Klong Yong villagers have not improved as remarkably as a result of the increase in non-farm income with the infiltration of capitalism as was observed in Rigg's study (2003). Many villagers lived in "dormitory village" not far from the city and had cheap meals provided by their own families in the village. The lack of coverage under the Labor Protection Act left these villagers without access to the national social security system and dependent on provincial and local social security. Their villagers' vulnerable position led to their political action and affiliation with certain political parties in the general election.

With respect to income, the average Klong Yong villager earns 6,728 Baht per month, which is much higher than the 1,443 Baht per month set as the poverty line by the National Statistics Office in 2010. Villagers' assets were remarkably high, with the average household owning 1.5 trucks and 1.1 cars. These vehicles are considered important tools for livelihood. Villagers are not solely dependent on farming but are engaged in diverse professions such as lotus farming, fruit production, whose products are sold directly in urban the markets. Thus, the lives of villagers are inevitably and closely related to urban life[5] (Apichart, et al 2010).

Klong Yong villagers, however, also carry a significant amount of debt (rather than savings), equaling, on average, 94,375 Baht per household, resulting and a net worth of 49,771 Baht per household. According to the National Statistics Office's Household Socioeconomic Survey, 63% of Thai households are indebted (owe more than they own). Average household debt is 117,000 Baht, with approximately 110,000 and 7,000 Baht borrowed from formal and informal lenders, respectively. Landowning farmers owe, on average, 85,000 Baht. The same figure for tenant farmers, on average, is 105,000 Baht. Farm workers have an average debt of 38,000 Baht. Perhaps a more positive way of describing this situation is that to say that 63 % of households have taken advantage of available credit; this high debt rate, nonetheless, also reflects families' struggle for survival (Apichart et al., 2010).

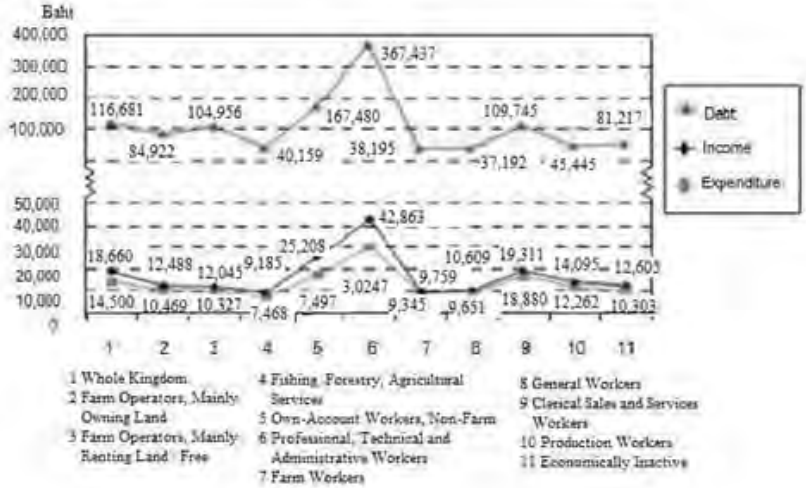
[5]Lotus merchant Somjai Khetboonlue (interviewed on May 2, 2010) first joined the Red Shirt protest on his way to Pak Klong Talad market to deliver lotus. He stopped by the demonstration and eventually became one of the protestors. Many Red Shirts had the same experience of coming to cities for work and joining protests afterward. Many merchants were partial to the Taksin Administration due its policy of abolishing the practice of street vendors paying bribes to police officers.

**Figure 3 Breakdown of Average Household Debt by Borrowing Purpose (2007)**




Source : National Statistics Office's Household Socioeconomic Survey (cited from www.nso.go.th/en/survey/house_seco/exec.pdf)

**Figure 4: Breakdown of Average Monthly Household Income, Expenditure and Debt by Employment Class (2007)**




Source : National Statistics Office's Household Socioeconomic Survey (cited from www.nso.go.th/en/survey/house_seco/exec.pdf)

With regard to the natural resources and communal space that constituted fundamental components of the traditional life support and economic systems, it should be noted that national food supply has decreased dramatically due to changes in the country's ecosystems. The damming of rivers and streams in the river basin area of central Thailand, which once served as a vital natural food source, in order to build highways has all but obliterated natural fishing, particularly in villages. Modern farm systems have altered the natural pathways of water, and the use of agrichemicals has resulted in pollution of waterways. The urban lifestyle model has had significant deleterious effect on the environment and ecosystems and has, thus, diminished natural food sources. As an example, in Klong Yong village, villagers no longer rely solely on natural resources for their livelihood; furthermore, the practice of subsistence farming has declined drastically. Paddy fields are no longer used for personal consumption. Vegetable production, however, remains a significant component of food security, with many families setting aside land to grow vegetables for on their own use. The introduction of new food production methods, such as aquaculture using paddy fields, has further displaced traditional agriculture and diminished the availability of natural sources. Given the above changes in food production, the practice of purchasing food has surpassed the traditional practice of producing one's own food. In other words, the traditional agriculturally economy has been almost completely supplanted by the "capitalist economy."[6]

The survey of UDD protesters indicated that the majority (approximately 83%) of Red Shirts were villagers who had migrated to Bangkok. 17% of protesters came from Bangkok and its suburbs, 29.0% were primarily farmers whose main source of income was farming and non-farm labor, 16.2% were small business owners, and 7.7% were laborer. Many of the protestor regularly traveled short distances between Bangkok and the villages of origin, and 22.3% were villagers who had moved to live or work in Bangkok.

[6] In view of "community culture" academics "strong community" used no more with non-traditional peasants, given above. However, if villagers have still been connected to community, it unavoidably turned "strong capital community."

Given its composition, which includes not only poor farmers but also small business owners (approximately 17%) with monthly incomes over 30,000 Baht, the Red Shirt movement is, perhaps, no longer a “grassroots” movement. The livelihoods of the protesters are closely connected to the urban and market economy. As a result of the above-mentioned transformations of rural society, the protestors, like their urban counterparts, have ready access to political news and information (see Table 4 in Appendix).

In other words, transformation of Thailand’s economy and society over past few decades, particularly that experienced in rural Thailand, has resulted in dramatic changes in livelihood and lifestyle. Commercial production, not small agricultural production is now the major livelihood of villages. Crops are cultivated primarily for the market, not personal consumption. Bearing this transformation in mind, villagers have become much more similar to industrial or service entrepreneurs in terms of lifestyle and livelihood. Farmers, who remain traditional in the sense of production method and objective (self-consumption), now support themselves with non-farm income. Villagers are now engaged in other professions such as handicrafts, factory labor, food vending, etc. Families in villages rely on income from such non-farm activities. New small-scale entrepreneurs emphasize modern and market-oriented production. Thus, it can be said that many villagers no longer live at the “grassroots”, but at the “grass tip.” As such, it would be a disservice to continue to view villagers as poor farmers, with low incomes, low education, and disengaged from politics.

Thus, the moral economy model alone does not explain the present day protests. So long as the protesters are considered only to be rural farmers, the question of why they have “suddenly” become politically active will remain unanswered. Rural Thais have become both producers and consumers. While they still remained engaged in farming, their livelihoods are, more than ever, connected to non-farm production. Modern (urban) lifestyles and attitudes have been assimilated into villager life. As producers-turned-consumers, rural villagers have created their own model that best suits them. Modern society, with no boundaries to information, has narrowed the gap between rural and urban individuals. Rural villagers of today, thus, are very different from traditional farmers.

## 4.2 New Social Relationship in a "Strong Capitalist Community"

### 4.2.1. The Collapse of Patron-Client Relationships and Traditional Customs

The study of Baan Klong Yong revealed that the community was dominated for 3 generations by a single, well-respected family with a wide network of extended family, until the dynasty was eventually brought down. With the development of an irrigation system in 1976, it became possible to cultivate hybrid or "Kor Khor" Rice 2 to 3 times a year. A group of Chinese merchants came up with a new business of not only buying rice but also, among other things, providing loans to farmers. This group played an important role in Baan Klong Yong politics, as well as its economy, and were eventually elected as community leaders, replacing the well-respected family mentioned above. With the loss of power and community standing, the family amassed huge debts as a result of unproductive farming, too many children, and its unwillingness to take advantage of modern production methods.[7]

The monopoly of the rice business by the Chinese entrepreneurs was diluted as a result of a number of critical changes in community circumstances, not least among which was the introduction of modern production technology. Previously, only 5 or 6 Baan Klong Yong villagers possessed modern equipment that enabled them to increase their production. Needless to say, new roads and a much-improved transportation system funded by the local government as a result of Thailand's decentralization policy in 1997, provided villagers easy access to modern technology and equipment. Entrepreneurs who were able to access this modern technology were able to diversify their businesses. In addition to producing rice, they bought and sold rice to mills. Farmers took on the role of business owner and found themselves in a position of choosing buyers and employing laborers. The expansion of livelihood opportunities, primarily as labor, marked a dramatic change in circumstances for the community.

[7] An 88-year-old, former village head with 12 children who became one of the most indebted farmers in the village after losing power.

Gone were traditional agricultural relationships, the patron-client relationship, and traditional customs.

The results of this research are similar to the conclusions of Shinichi Shigetomi's (1998) examination of the change in Thai community relationship from the "loose structure" perspective. Over time, previously-destitute farmers have built up and established their own community organizations that provide them greater benefit. More importantly, the establishment of these new organizations has required the adoption of new economic, political, and cultural "norms" by villagers, as the customary dyadic social relationships were no longer able to satisfy their needs.

### 4.2.2 Community Groups and Organizations under the New Social Relationship

In the new economic context and under the new community relationship, villagers received significant social support and no longer had to rely solely on their individual ability to earn money for survival. A number of groups and organizations were established to satisfy such needs and demands. In Baan Klong Yong, these groups and organizations included those formed by NGO's as well as those established by the state. In 1997, the year of the Asian financial crisis, the confluence of political reform, "people politics" and "civil society perspective" resulted in the development of social projects in which numerous villagers participated. These projects resulted in the development of interlinked groups and national networks, which marked a crucial step leading to mass participation in developing state projects.[8] The economic crisis brought about the Social Investment Program (SIP) that provided generous support to communities through various public interest groups and networks. Under the umbrella of the SIP, whose total budget was on the 3 to 4 billion Baht and whose goal was to promote and support community organizations and projects, various public associations provided significant financial support to communities through programs such as the

[8] In Baan Klong Yong such groups include a savings coop, community welfare coop, organic fertilizer-making coop, etc.

Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI), the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, and the Thailand Research Fund.[9]

It is worth noting that these citizens groups and organizations represented a dramatic departure from the past where such groups would have been perceived as being controlled by the state. On the contrary, they played an active role in managing natural resources and had substantial control over relevant SIPs. Lately state projects initiated and built up through people participation and activities. To promote and strengthen social networks, instead of having officials allocate natural and financial resources, the private sector was now being encouraged to participate in developing SIPs. Law and regulations were enacted to codify this new scheme. Since 1997, several groups in the Klong Yong community groups have accumulated funding and established vocational groups, etc. under the Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI) and Thai Health Promotion Foundation plan. Following enactment of the 2007 Community Council Act in 2011, approximately two thousand districts have reported creating an active council.[10]

The above-mentioned citizens groups and organizations are considered to be a powerful foundation for securing and supporting villagers' livelihoods in the current era of capitalism. For those who have turned to the informal sector for employment and have been excluded from the national social security system, these groups and organizations represent an alternative means of securing livelihood.

In addition to organizing to secure their livelihoods, communities have come together in order to have greater leverage in negotiations with the state with respect to relevant policies. Most Baan Klong Yong villagers are members of "The Farmers Network of Thailand," formerly known as the "Federation of Small-scale Farmers," which has organized protests over the debt moratorium. This network covers all provinces in central Thailand. Klong Yong villagers have frequently participated in network events. Pairoj Poonpol, a Klong Yong famer and active member of the network

[9]The state policy of providing direct financial support to NGOs such as the Community Organizations Development Institute (**CODI)** and the Thai Health Promotion Foundation helped create a closely integrated network within the community. As a consequence, members of such groups tend to support the Yellow Shirts over the Red Shirts.

[10]Community Council 2010 annual report

reported, “I’ve been a member since 2002, and have taken part in over 20 protests. I even met with Taksin in Petchburi province. I also was at the protest in front of the government buildings, I drove ahead of the others…”

In addition, the Klong Yong community set up a land cooperative in 1985. As in the case of other cooperatives, the land cooperative, whose primary task is the provision of loans to its members, is regulated and inspected by state. Villagers protested against the state solution to the Land Crisis of 2001, leading to the establishment of the Land Reform Network of Thailand in June 2008. This organization was the culmination of a movement organized around fundamental rights, rather than being merely an organization set up by the state. The joint protest organized by the Land Reform Network of Thailand and the Farmers Network of Thailand from March 4 to March 12, 2009, marked a critical moment in the recent history.

In an survey conducted by the author of 400 Red Shirt protestors, 70.3% were found to be villagers who were members of various other citizens’ organizations, while 38.8% had taken part in various other protests, (see Table 13 in Appendix)

The last 2 or 3 decades has witnessed the formation of a remarkable number of citizens’ movements. This trend reflects the expansion of villagers’ participation in the political process through various vehicles. Following the rural transition, farmers’ survival came to mainly depended on external factors such as the cost of gasoline, fertilizer, and so on, as well as the market prices. This integration with the outside world inevitably tied villagers up with the political sphere and public policies at both local and national levels. Related citizens groups and organizations banded together to increase their leverage in negotiations with or in fighting against the state.

### 4.3 Communities and New Political Spaces

#### 4.3.1 Political Reform, Provincial Administrative Organization and the New Political Geography

Thailand’s political reform of 1997 gave substantial authority and autonomy to provincial administrative organizations that previously had been partially elected and partially controlled by the state. Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO) and other

municipalities are clear examples of such devolution of authority. In the previous 4 or 5 decades, these organizations were partially under the control of the Interior Ministry. Following the 1997 political reform, the TAO was transformed into entity empowered to make any legal agreements without state approval or interference (Arghiros, 2002:228-230).

These and other modifications of the political structure have resulted in a new political geography at the local level. After the 1990s, the path to administrative decentralization was made clearer through the creation of elected administrative provincial organizations. The 1997 and 2007 Constitutions stipulated in no uncertain terms that state and local administrators must be elected. These reforms have not only empowered citizens but have also enabled them to become more independent. In some areas, local organizations have played an equal, if not greater role, in management than the state. This devolution of authority has led to more efficient allocation of public funds compared to the past. The 1997 Constitution and 1999 regulations of the decentralization plan clearly stipulated that 35% of the national budget must be allocated to provinces by 2006.

The result of increased budget allocation to local governments has been that provincial administrative organizations have come to play a greater role in managing public policies at the local level, particularly with respect to social security, quality of life, and public services, which used to be managed by the state. Article 287 of the 2007 Constitution stated that local administrations were required to facilitate the participation of ordinary citizens in the development and assessment of administrative action plans. In addition, Interior Ministry regulations, in conjunction with the 2005 local organization development plant, required the participation of ordinary citizens in civil forums, etc.

Taken as a whole, the decentralization of government over the last two decades represents a remarkable political transformation. Local administrative organizations have come to play a greater role in the lives of villagers. Such decentralization has not only helped in identifying a pathway to development, but has also paved the way to increased participation by ordinary citizens in local politics. Through the vehicle of general elections and allocation of local funds, villagers and politicians and villagers and politics, in general, have become much more closely interlinked.

**Table 4 : Local Administrative : Income Percentage**

| Fiscal Year | Gross Local Administrative Income (million Baht) | Percentage of Provincial Income / Government Income (%) |
|---|---|---|
| 1998 | 97,836.8 | 13.3 |
| 1999 | 97,747.7 | 13.7 |
| 2000 | 99,802.8 | 13.3 |
| 2001 | 154,633.1 | 20.9 |
| 2002 | 176,154.9 | 21.9 |
| 2003 | 184,066.0 | 22.1 |
| 2004 | 208,850.7 | 22.5 |
| 2005 | 282,000.0 | 23.5 |
| 2006 | 414,382.2 | 25.8 |

Source : http://www.trf.or.th/index.php?option=com_content&view= article0 &id =139:2011-03-11-07-59-22&catid=34:research-digest&Itemid=145

### 4.3.2 Populist Policies and Its Effects on the "Grass Tip"

While the populist policies introduced by the Taksin Administration are considered to have been highly effective in terms of promoting monetary and fiscal discipline as a whole, they were clearly designed to respond to the need for subsistence insurance arising from the adoption of a modern village lifestyle focused on modern, market-oriented production and based on non-farm income as well as informal sector labor. For example, the 30 Baht medical scheme, a project to fund low-interest loans in villages, was designed to facilitate consumption or usual investments, etc. and to serve as an alternative to other, less-consumer-friendly loan sources.

Baan Klong Yong villagers reported that insured crop prices, particularly for high mortgage rice, reached 12,000 Baht per ton under the Taksin administration, but fell to 7,000 to 8,000 Baht per ton under the Abhisit administration. One villager reported that the 30 Baht medical scheme helped elderly villagers to spend their last

days in the hospital and not to "die along the road side." The program made low-income villagers feel much more secure and confident about the security of their health. Similar programs such as One Tambon One Product (OTOP), the pension scheme, housing and insurance, and so on, helped increase villagers' incomes and confidence in their ability to survive.

In their survey responses, Red Shirt protestors described how they concretely benefitted from populist policies. 79.5% of respondents reported that they benefitted from the 30 Baht medical scheme, 50.8%, from the One Million Baht Village Funds, 27.8% from SML projects, and so on (Table 12 in Appendix).

Not only were the above-mentioned populist policies designed specifically with villagers' needs in mind, many projects, such as the One Million Baht Village funds, SML projects, were administered directly at the community level and not solely supported by the state from time to time, as in the past. Such policies were viewed by villagers as empowering and served to increase villagers' confidence in the government.

That is to say, even though these populist policies were criticized for being mismanaged and for lacking monetary and fiscal discipline, etc. they served as important economic-social insurance that perfectly matched the needs of the new middle class.

In addition, these populist policies promoted the establishment of closer ties among various groups as well as between groups and politicians and political parties. Such connections, in turn, yielded resources to enhance production. Take, for example, the Baan Klong Yong community Moo 8, a One Million Baht Village project established in 2004 and developed by the savings group that was previously supported by the Community Development Department. Initially, One Million Baht Village Funds were administered by relatives of the villager leader and local leaders were excluded from the committee. After the CNS government came to power after September 19, 2006, regulations were amended and the village leaders were assigned to be fund chairpersons; one of his subordinates was assigned to the position of deputy chair and another, the treasurer. More importantly, the committee included the village leader's sister and daughter-in-law. The village leader was widely known to be a loyal member and campaigner for the Thai Rak Thai Party's (the current Phue Thai Party); approximately 50 loans, not exceeding 20,000 Baht each, were approved for the leader's relatives and members of his political network. In most cases, loan recipients

were the same persons, and there were few cases on new loans. It was discovered that while financial records showed that these loans had been repaid, in reality they had not.

A similar situation occurred in the case of SML projects, which were administered by essentially the same committee. The approximately 250,000 Baht annual budget was spent for purchase of farm equipment such as mowers, small tractors, as well as insecticides, circulated among relatives and associates of the village leader.

Taken as a whole, the above describes the development of connections that support the villagers' new lifestyle and that overlap with familial networks. These connections vary widely in terms of groups of people involved and manner of involvement. It somehow turned subsistence security and safety valve to today villagers .

## 5. **Conclusion: Subsistence Ethic, Subsistence Crisis and Thai Villagers Uprising**

Analysis based on the concept of “moral economy” fails to fully explain the transformation observed in rural Thailand in recent decades. Capitalism and the modern commercial market have become embedded in the economy and lifestyle of Thai villages and are no longer viewed as a threat or considered something disconnected from the lives of villagers. Villagers of today differ greatly from those in 1960s and 1970s. The introduction of new production technology has led to the adoption of production models, i.e. commercial farming and agribusiness, that are dependent on the commercial economy. In this sense, and with respect to other factors of production such

**Table 5: Theoretical Implication and Conclusion**

| Topic | Traditional Moral Economy | New Moral Economy |
|---|---|---|
| 1.Basic assumption | -embedded & autonomous economy | -capitalism embedded deeply in rural community |
| 2."Risks" or "Crisis" (of the rural people who stand in the water) | -drought, food shortage, etc | -income , access to social protection from farm & non-farm |
| 3.Subsistence insurance & safety valve | -traditional, customary obligations | -new social relations & political space, political rights |
| 4.Subsistence crisis & uprising | -invasion of the state & capitalist modern market | -invasion of elites and undemocratic forces |

Source: Made by the Author

as procurement of materials or business loans, villagers have become “Polybian.” Villagers have not only become semi-peasant and semi-proletariat, their consumption of information has increased to a level comparable to that of their urban counterparts.

As Keyes (2010) described in his book, present-day rural Thai communities have become “cosmopolitan villages” whose attitudes and patterns of consumption appear increasingly similar to those in urban areas. Given these dramatic changes in circumstance over the past few decades, the subsistence security and subsistence insurance of rural Thai villages need to be carefully re-examined.

The present state of subsistence security for villagers can be likened to that of a man “standing permanently in the water so that even a ripple is sufficient to drown him” (Tawney, 1966, quoted in Scott, 1976: introduction). Many villagers are unable to earn an adequate income simply by producing commercial crops in response to market demand. This is because families have grown in size over time, while farms have remained relatively small. Given the high production costs and low product prices, villages have inevitably resorted to self-exploitation, which, clearly, is not a desirable solution. More importantly, the cost of living has increased dramatically following adoption of the modern consumption culture. Today, villagers’ subsistence security depends solely on the sale of crops. Rice is no longer farmed for personal consumption or to support the ecosystem. Meanwhile, employment in the informal labor sector provides for only the most basic of needs. The informal labor sector does not guarantee a minimum wage and provides no access to the legal social security system. Given the imbalance in the income and expenses of many villagers, to say nothing of the high debt and poor savings rates, it is clear that, in the case of many villagers, subsistence security is in a state of crisis. This has obviously put these villagers in a situation where survival is not possible. This fact finding turns out in contrast to Rigg’s study (Rigg, 2003) that proposing alternate way of living for villager’s better income.

Many rural Thai communities now face a two-fold uncertainty in subsistence. As in the past, they must deal with catastrophic events such as droughts, food shortages, livestock pandemics, crop damage, etc; in addition, the must now contend with modern economic and social crises originating beyond village boundaries. New, more complicated, crises associated with integration into the free market economy has led to a surplus of cheap merchandise manufactured in neighboring countries, unstable oil

prices and costs of production materials, privatization and restructuring, which, in turn, have led to the shutdown of local factories and loss of employment. The loss of a substantial number of formal jobs has resulted in an increase in the share of non-farm income earned in the informal labor sector.

Thailand is now faced with the question of how to best ensure adequate subsistence security for its rural communities. Scott explained the “moral economy” of traditional agricultural societies in terms of a subsistence ethnic in which the patron and client engage in a reciprocal exchange in which neither side has taken advantage of the other. This subsistence ethic helped, to some extent, in establishing fundamental rights and community norms and also represented subsistence insurance for all villagers. Given the dramatic transformations of rural Thai communities described above, it appears that traditional communal institutions or organizations have all but collapsed and can no longer be relied on as a safety net to protect against crises.

Scott credited traditional communal networks and institutions as being the core of the villagers’ subsistence insurance in the face of crises. He argued that, despite their vast resources, state and political institutions were beyond the reach of villagers (Scott, 1976: 27-28). However, this view applies to agricultural societies during the colonial era. Today, new political institutions to administer social resources have become embedded in the local community. Villagers’ lives are deeply integrated with the modern economic system. A “strong capitalist community” has replaced the “strong community” of the past.

Given the changes in circumstance described above, communal relationships have also been reorganized, with different groups, institutions and networks replacing collapsed ones. The new communal relationships were created to serve as subsistence insurance at both individual and household levels. Following the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and in line with the spread of the concept of “civil society” in Thailand, numerous community organizations and social institutions, some of them affiliated with NGOs, were established with the support of the state to provide social services such as professional training, etc. These organizations differed substantially from those of the past in that they were autonomous and not governed by the state.

Despite these positive developments, the persistent subsistence crisis led to the establishment of various community networks focused on specific issues such land rights, public policies aimed at resolving the farmer’s debt crisis, etc. Villagers from

Baan Klong Yong, situated in central Thailand have, from time to time, joined protests organized by such networks. Such gatherings helped to forge relationships among various communities experiencing similar subsistence crises.

Since the 1997 Asian financial crisis and subsequent enactment of political reform, rural communities have been significantly transformed as a result of the devolution of authority from the central to provincial and local governments. The result has been a significant narrowing of the gap between villagers' way of life and state or political institutions. Political reform and the process of democratization process have led to greater allocation of financial and natural resources to provincial organizations. Increased participation in the formation of public policy by ordinary citizens through mechanisms such as general elections and the annual fiscal plan has paved a better way to obtain access to natural resources. At present, these new social and political relationships have become well-established and integrated into a community's way of life. As a consequence, subsistence insurance has become a more concrete presence, essential for villagers' survival. Public policies and state development projects along with various economic support measures, including a health and medical scheme, have helped lower production costs and stabilize crop prices. Such populist policies were the reason that the Thai Rak Thai party in power at the time became so popular. The public policies implemented under the Taksin administration significantly supported small-scale farmers and the informal labor sector and provided subsistence insurance tailored to the "modern lifestyle" in rural Thailand. Political participation by ordinary citizens was encouraged by the creation of populist political parties and political campaigns at local, as well as national levels. This increased political participation extended even further, creating new social relationships at the community level. These social relationships included connections to political institutions that, in the past, were considered to be distant entities from the standpoint villagers. This social, economic, and political transformation became especially apparent after the political reforms of 1997.

In time, villagers have come to view the safety net created by these new relationships as resources to which are entitled, to be provided by the government, political parties, provincial administrations or other related institutions. They have come to rely on these resources as means of survival, necessary for maintaining their modern lifestyles. This safety net has replaced traditional relationships in agricultural

society and constitutes a subsistence ethic in which all parties involved are required to contribute to villagers' survival. From the standpoint of the villagers themselves, the new subsistence ethic is that they are entitled to being supported.

This sense of villagers' entitlement is an extension of the transformation in which villagers gained political rights and elected political parties and governments that implemented public policies that helped villagers maintain their own lifestyles. This new social relationship hinges on the right of villagers to social support. Any change that diminishes such right, regardless of whether it is initiated by the elite, the government, or whomever, would be considered to devalue the subsistence ethic. In this context, it is natural that villagers would take the stance that the basic subsistence ethic should not be violated by elite.

It is for this reason that the September 19, 2006 Coup and the PAD movement were viewed by villagers as threats to the new subsistence ethic. PAD protests began before the 2006 coup and continued after the general election held on December 23, 2007, when the People's Power Party and the Samak administration came into power. Following Samak's ouster, the Somchai administration encountered similar protests leading to the takeover of the Bangkok Airport and the Constitutional Court's decision on December 2, 2008 to dissolve the People's Power Party.

The 2006 coup had a different effect on Thai politics than similar events in the past. It was the first time a coup was met by strong opposition from villagers, who considered it a threat to and a violation of the ethic that serves as a basis for the social relationships that constitute villagers' subsistence insurance. In that sense, it was similar to the resistance by villagers to the introduction of the capitalist system and modern market, which, as Scott pointed out, threatened to completely overturn the traditional relationships in agricultural communities.

Thus, a significant motive for villagers to join the Red Shirt movement was to defend the present-day subsistence ethic and to prevent the loss of the subsistence insurance that they presently enjoy. Villagers' frustrations were provoked when the coup government set up armored security check points along regular transportation routes. Frustrations were further escalated when some populist policies were terminated or brought under the control of the government (e.g. One Million Baht Village Funds, SML project etc.). The coup administration was seen as retaking the ground that the villagers had gained over the five years of populist policies under the Taksin

administration, which had been the first government to be elected as a result of their votes and to establish a concrete subsistence insurance system. The September 19, 2006 coup and the 2007 Constitution, in the view of the villagers, represented political moves to directly take away their political rights. The standpoint of the villagers was worsened by the numerous PAD protests that led to the eventual dissolution of the People' Power Party (latest formed party).

The survey revealed that many Red Shirt protesters have taken part in more than one protest. 18% of respondents reported that they started participating in such events prior to the September 19 coup, while 35.0% said that they began thereafter. Asked what their motivation for joining the protest was, 35.5% answered that it because of the "September 19, 2006 Coup" while 20.3% answered reported that it was the "PAD demonstrations which led to the ouster of the Taksin administration (late 2005-2006)" (Tables 8, 9, 10 in Appendix for more details).

Baan Klong Yong is a so-called Red Shirt village, with approximately 70% of villagers reported to be supporters of the Red Shirt movement; however, only 4 or 5 villagers participated regularly in protests and only 10 to 20 villagers had ever participated in a protest. The question which arises in the case of this village is why the villagers' grievances did not lead to an active uprising. Scott predicted that if farmers in third world countries became angered by what they perceived to be a violation of their subsistence ethic, it would trigger a peasant rebellion that would spread throughout the region.

Resource Mobilization theory posits that collective action occurs when certain circumstances exists and necessary conditions are met. Farmers' anger over perceived violations of the subsistence ethic clearly exists in many parts of the world. The critical factor, then, in determining whether an uprising (or collective action) will or will not occur appears to be the presence of local leaders connected to the community and community organizations capable of mobilizing the masses. At the same time, other resources, such as groups and organizations fulfilling particular role, are required to strengthening and maintain the momentum of such protests.

Unfortunately, due to the incompleteness of the survey data at this point, I am unable to present a thorough analysis of the survey results here. This current analysis of the Red Shirt uprising, with particular focus on recent protests in Bangkok, falls short

in terms of its evaluation of the role of movement leaders and strategies adopted to deal with the state and counter-movement.

**Appendix**

**Appendix 1: 400 Red shirt questionnaire (March 20-30, 2010)**

**Table 1 Age of protesters**

| **Age** | **Number** | **Percentage** |
|---|---|---|
| 1. 20 yrs or less | 18 | 4.5 |
| 2. 21-30 yrs | 43 | 10.8 |
| 3. 31-40 yrs | 68 | 17.1 |
| 4. 41-50 yrs | 101 | 25.1 |
| 5. 51-60 yrs | 112 | 28.0 |
| 6. 61 yrs or more | 58 | 14.5 |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 |

**Table 2 Hometown**

| **Hometown** | **Number** | **Percentage** |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Bangkok and outskirt area | 71 | 17.7 |
| 2. Hometown in provinces but inhabit and work in Bangkok | 89 | 22.3 |
| 3. Provinces | 240 | 60.0 |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 |

**Table 3 Education**

| Education | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Primary | 139 | 34.8 |
| 2.High school/Junior vocational college | 131 | 32.7 |
| 3.Senior vocational college/Diploma | 34 | 8.5 |
| 4.Bachelor and higher | 96 | 24.0 |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 |

**Table 4 Profession**

| Profession | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1.Official/government officials | 29 | 7.3 |
| 2.State enterprise employees | 7 | 1.8 |
| 3.Businessman/Business owner | 47 | 11.8 |
| 4.Corporate employees | 26 | 6.4 |
| 5.Farmers/workers in agricultural sector | 115 | 29.0 |
| 6.Trade/small scale entrepreneurs | 65 | 16.2 |
| 7.Waged workers | 31 | 7.7 |
| 8.University students | 23 | 5.6 |
| 9.Homemakers | 20 | 5.1 |
| 10.Medical doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc. | 8 | 2.0 |
| 11.Others | 29 | 7.1 |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 |

**Table 5 Income/month**

| Income/month | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Baht 5,000 or less | 128 | 31.7 |
| 2. Baht 5,001-10,000 | 105 | 26.3 |
| 3. Baht 10,001- 30,000 | 103 | 25.6 |
| 4. Baht 30,001 or more | 66 | 16.4 |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 |

**Table 6 Membership of various network/organization**

| Membership status | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Trade Union member, etc. | 282 | 70.3 |
| 2.Non-membership | 118 | 29.7 |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 |

**Table 7 Period of protest organized by Redshirts**

| Period | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Prior to September 19, 2006 Coup (Thai Rak Thai as ruling party) | 73 | 18.1 |
| 2. Following September 19, 2006 Coup (Surayudh Administration) | 139 | 34.9 |
| 3. Following December 23, 2008 election (People Power as ruling party) | 28 | 7.2 |
| 4.Following People Power Party dissolved and Democrat as ruling party) | 57 | 14.1 |
| 5. The Court' s verdict to seize Thaksin assets | 25 | 6.2 |
| 6. Recent protest | 78 | 19.5 |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 |

**Table 8 Motive of protest**

| Motive of protest | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1.PAD demonstration casting out Taksin Administration (late 2005-2006) | 81 | 20.3 |
| 2.September 19, 2006 Coup | 142 | 35.4 |
| 3. Thai Rak Thai Party dissolution | 24 | 6.1 |
| 4.PAD demonstration casting out Samak-Somchai Administration, 2008 | 24 | 6.1 |
| 5.Democrat as ruling party following dissolution of People Power Party | 33 | 8.2 |
| 6. The Court' s verdict to seize Thaksin assets (February 26, 2010) | 15 | 3.7 |
| 7.Others | 81 | 20.2 |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 |

**Table 9 Participation methods**

| Participation methods | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1. One-self | 85 | 21.1 |
| 2.With family or close relatives | 98 | 24.5 |
| 3.As network member or with friends within community or colleagues | 16 | 39.9 |
| 4.As member of particular organization | 48 | 12.1 |
| 5.Orthers | 9 | 2.4 |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 |

**Table 10 Participation level**

| Participation level | Number | Percentage* |
|---|---|---|
| 1.Taking part only | 140 | 32.5 |
| 2.Financial support and/or others | 146 | 36.5 |
| 3.Media production and distribution | 55 | 13.8 |
| 4. Encouraging and convincing others to join | 137 | 34.3 |
| 5.As volunteers like security guards, etc. | 82 | 20.5 |

Remark : More than one answer allowed (* percentage)

**Table 11 Political party member**

| Political party membership | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Thai Rak Thai or People Power Party | 120 | 30.1 |
| 2. Others | 245 | 61.3 |
| 3.Non-membership | 35 | 8.6 |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 |

**Table 12 Direct benefit through populist policies**

| Direct benefit through populist policies | Number | Percentage * |
|---|---|---|
| 1. 30 Baht Healthcare Scheme | 192 | 79.5 |
| 2.One Tambol One Product (OTOP) | 148 | 37.0 |
| 3. One Million Baht Village Funds | 203 | 50.8 |
| 4. SME Bank | 109 | 27.3 |
| 5.Debt moratorium | 145 | 36.3 |
| 6. Housing Project for the Poor People | 113 | 28.3 |
| 7. SML (the Potential Enhancement of Small Medium and Large Size Community Project) | 111 | 27.8 |
| 8.Non-benefit or indirect benefit | 47 | 11.8 |

Remark : More than one answer allowed and exactly gain benefit, not only as good projects (* percentage)

**Table 13 Experiences**

| **Experiences** | **Number** | **Percentage** |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Took part in different political movements | 155 | 38.8 |
| 2.Never attend any political groups or activities | 245 | 61.2 |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 |

**Table 14 Self-description of participation**

| **Self-description of participation** | **Number** | **Percentage** |
|---|---|---|
| 1.Takshin supporters | 69 | 17.3 |
| 2.Democracy supporters | 323 | 80.7 |
| 3.Patriot | 8 | 2.0 |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 |

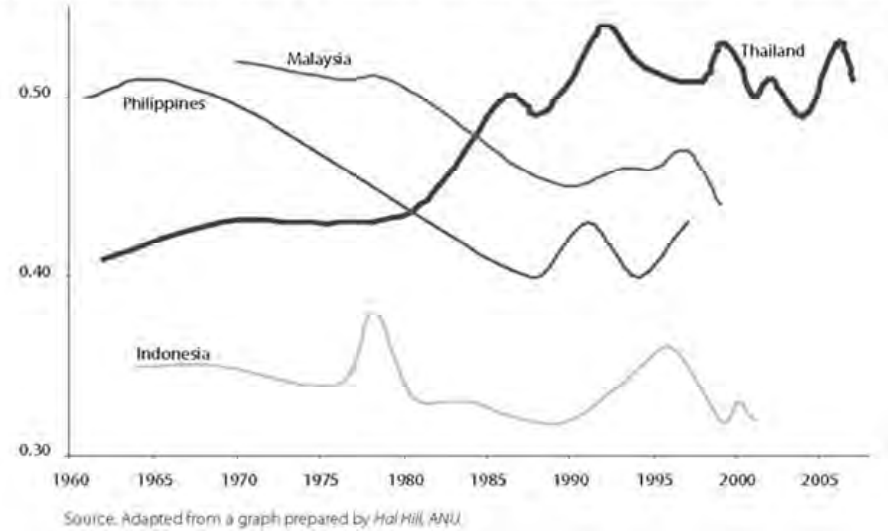
**Table 15 Personal conflicts**

| **Personal conflicts /no conflict** | **Number** | **Percentage** |
|---|---|---|
| 1.Have | 203 | 50.8 |
| 2.None | 197 | 49.1 |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 |

Table 16 : Household Assets Devided by Groups of Income in 2006 (1 = poorest – 5 = richest)

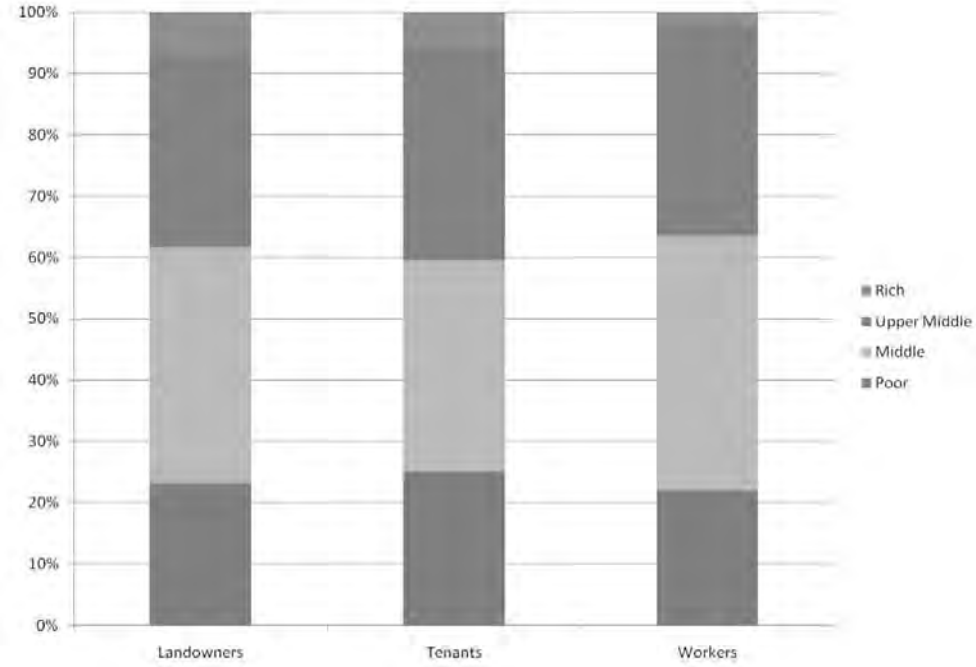
| Groups | Percentage of the total income |
|---|---|
| Group 1 | 1 % |
| Group 2 | 3% |
| Group 3 | 9 % |
| Group 4 | 18% |
| Group 5 | 69 % |
| | |

Figure 3.7 Gini coefficients of household income, selected Southeast Asian countries




Source: Adapted from a graph prepared by *Hal Hill, ANU.*

**Table 17 Percentage of Households by Average Income and Socio-economic Class**




(Source : the National Statistics Office of Thailand's 2007 Household Socioeconomic Survey )

It shows, for (1) landowning farmers; (2) tenant farmers and (3) agricultural workers, the percentage of households in four different income categories. Poor: household income of less than 60,000 baht per year.

- Middle: household income of 60,000 to 120,000 per year.
- Upper-middle: household income of 120,000 to 360,000 per year.
- Rich: household income of more than 360,000 per year.

These data give illustration of the importance of the "middle-income peasantry" (light green and dark green segments).

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