

Abstract

The study of Occupational Alternatives of Pak Phanang Farmers: A Case of Farmers at Ban Wat Bote Village, Koh Tuad Sub-district, Pak Phanang District, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province has twofold. First, it aims to understand the historical and sociocultural background and context of Pak Phanang that have provided a ground for capitalist development. Second, it aspires to understand changes and occupational choices of farmers under study in different aspects, especially pertinent to their reasons and conditions for adapting to different occupational choices. This study employs participant observation and interview techniques (both formal and informal interviews) with the use of a semi-structured interview guide to collect field data. Also, this study has adopted concepts relating economic behavior as proposed by Scott, Popkin, Keyes and Kearney to formulate key questions and analyze field data.

Research findings confirm that the economic development in the Pak Phanang area has apparently associated to the capitalist market system since the reign of King Chulalongkorn. The area was first developed in accordance with the direction and country's socioeconomic development policy in the early 19th century, aiming to make Pak Phanang as the center for rice production and trade. Later, the industrialization of agriculture in the area has been intensified according to the national social and economic development policy aiming towards the modernity of Thai society beginning in the 1960s onwards. The introduction of Black Tiger shrimp farm by private business investment has caused a conflict of resource utilization with rice farming in the area. The endeavor to resolve such conflict has brought the coming of Pak Phanang Development Project initiated by His Majesty King Bhumipol and the coming of commercialized plants, such as oil palm tree, under the global market's direction.

Investment patterns of Wat Bote farmers from the past to the present have apparently been along the line of the macro socioeconomic development of the Pak Phanang area. For decades, they have commercialized their rice farming. When shrimp farm was boomed, they switched to engage in such economic enterprise. Today, they are more interested in investing in commercialized plants, such as oil palm plantation following the global oil crisis. All these have confirmed that decision making of farmers in Wat Bote village have partly been conditioned by

economic opportunities and constraints from national development policy and global capitalist market. In addition, their occupational alternatives are also based on internal factors. All farm families under study have confirmed that they are striving for economic success and well-being of their families. They have tried every possible ways available for them to make their families achieve such goal. They have expressed a characteristic of farmers who have rational choices. Their economic behavior is also conditioned by their Buddhist religious belief with respect to being hard working, economical and self-sufficient as well as living a simple life.