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**Thai State's Domestic Practice on Agrifood Production and Governance:
The Catastrophic Consequences of Capitalist Logic Applied to Food**

Jirawat Suriyashotichyangkul*

Abstract

The mainstream agrifood system in Thailand was complex with transnational and national forces. With these two forces, small-scale farmers have been significantly oppressed, powerless, unequal, and poor compared with other social classes, dwellers in the city, and business sectors. To understand agrifood system and power relations in agriculture under the Thai context, this paper attempts to seek the factors that formulate the current practice of the Thai state in the agrifood system by considering the practices of the state in agricultural development with the time series analysis. Six significant periods from the past to the present (2021) are displayed an overview of the agrifood in Thailand and the dominant thoughts and role of the state in promoting and sustaining the hegemonic corporate agri-food system—engaging with the periodization of successive rural development policies and agricultural policies made possible the presentation of the state's rationale, orientation, objectives, and significant characteristics.

Keywords

Agriculture, Patronage, Capitalism, Industrialization, Agrifood

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1. Introduction

Almost a century ago, the mainstream agrifood system in Thailand was complex with transnational and national forces. Neoliberal ideology and global governance structure such as the rule of WTO regarded as the transnational forces pushed the agendas on capital mobility and protection of intellectual property rights which were highly influential for Thailand. Apart from that, the following events: the Cold War, the rise of Asian powers in the world economy, trade liberalization, financial instability, and volatility of capital flows at the global level took the part toward agrifood industrialization. Domestically, political, poverty, and social justice crises from multiple coup d'états has been relentlessly taking agriculture for granted to promote rapid industrialization, wealth accumulation from Sino-Thai business tycoons through their vertical integration of agribusiness, and patronage relationship between the state and agrifood firms leading to oligopolistic competition in the food market. With these two forces, small-scale farmers have been significantly oppressed, powerless, unequal, and poor compared with other social classes, dwellers in the city, and business sectors. The state was a key actor to inevitably constitute this effect, even though its current role on capitalism development was transformed from a principal expanding state capitalism to just a facilitator supporting private investment and private enterprise in the current mainstream agrifood system. To understand how the agrifood system and power relations in agriculture under the Thai context were formed and embodied, this paper attempts to seek the factors that formulate the current practice of the Thai state in the agrifood system by considering the practices of the state in agricultural development with the time series analysis. There are six significant periods from the past to the present (2021) that displayed an overview of the agrifood in Thailand and the dominant thoughts and role of the state in promoting and sustaining the hegemonic corporate agri-food system—engaging with the periodization of successive rural development policies and agricultural policies made possible the presentation of the state's rationale, orientation, objectives, and significant characteristics. This paper aims to be a beginning material to help contest the hegemonic corporate agri-food system and formulate the "counter-hegemony" consisting of alternative ideas and values to challenge and provide socio-ecologically sustainable alternatives to the hegemonic agri-food system accordingly.

2. Pre-National Economic and Social Development Plans (1932-1960)

The first and foremost for us to focus on Thai agriculture were back in 1932 when the rise of agricultural modernization began. According to Bernard (1996), Thailand was politically transformed toward a democratic monarchy during this year, dominated the monoculture of rice for export and international trade, and allowed Chinese migration to operate the rice-milling into burgeoning financial empires. Suehiro (2001) argued that this became the genesis that later could culminate in the division of labor among agencies such as the noble landlord, Chinese merchant, and the farmer and industrialization. It should note that, however, the formation of capitalism was yet immature in diversified commercial and industrial sectors until the 1960s. To elaborate, agrifood was the fundamental economic production until the middle of the 1960s. Research by Goss and Burch (2001) indicated that before the military coup of 1932, noble commercial elites whose existence was predicated on receipt of Royal monopoly were dominant and powerful in the role of the middleman for British traders and financial capital, which meant that the success of industrial enterprises through state protection was subject to the interests of the local elites. Goss and Burch (2001) gave an example that the state subsidized the Siam Commercial Bank and Siam Cement to compete against foreign competition, while the business of Siamese Steamship Company failed due to the absence of government protection.

Research by Goss and Burch (2001) indicated that in the 1930s, the five family groups (Wanglee, Bulasuk, Bulakun, Iamsuri, and Lamsam) of Chinese descent dominated the rice trade. Their business operation in international trade and local trading activities (mainly in timber, alcohol, agricultural inputs, and silk) were prosperous, resulting in the accumulation of wealth, which later was passed on to their second and third-generation Siam-born Chinese. They continued by stating that by 1938-39, 44% share of rice milled in Thailand was under the control of these families. When the rice mill business was stable, these families subsequently were interested in other related horizontal sectors, including banking, insurance, shipping, and the direct export of milled rice through overseas outposts in China, Singapore, Indonesia, and Europe. Several reasons to support the Sino-Thai tycoon families to succeed in their business. First, by the 1930s, Thailand was transited from an absolute monarchy to a democratic monarchy. The government thus adhered to the notions of self-sufficiency as a part of the Thai elite discourse on trade and economic policies by subsidizing the agriculture sector for the nation's development. Second, there was an oligopolistic competition after the Japanese occupation of Thailand during World War II. European trading relationship with Thailand was expelled, while at the same time, several local Chinese reaped handsome profits by selling

goods to the Japanese army¹. Research by Goss and Burch (2001) argued that although the European merchants wished to reconnect the relationship after the War, it was too late when they realized that the industries they were interested in, especially in the commercial and financial sectors, were now dominated by either the Chinese or the Indians. And third, the outcome of the Chinese Revolution in 1949 caused fear that the local Chinese might become a 'fifth column,' loyal to their country of origin rather than to Thailand². Hence, some regulations on travel and remittances to China were imposed to reduce contact between the Chinese residing in Thailand and communist China. When the remittance to China was restricted, domestic reinvestment became the only choice to generate profits and strengthen Chinese-Thai business groups' role in the economy.

According to Hart, Turton, White, Fegan & Lim (1989), the Thai government imposed the policies concerning rice which were the regulation of rice exports; the maintenance of a supply of low-priced rice for domestic consumption; the maintenance of government revenue from rice export taxes; and at the same time the maintenance or increase of farm-gate paddy prices. Research by Goss and Burch (2001) supported that the export taxes and premiums on rice (the 'rice premium' initiated in 1955) were aimed to fund the industrialization expansion. Until the mid-1960s, export taxes on rice accounted for between 10% and 15% of total state revenues. Paddy farmers were squeezed not only by the government controlling the rice export prices, which determined a low domestic price but also by the exporters and millers who underpriced for their profits. As Turton cited in Goss and Burch (2001) notes: "by keeping the domestic price of rice low and favoring oligopolistic rice exporters, government policies assisted a massive transfer of wealth from the paddy producers: in 1951, rice producers are estimated to have received about half the paddy price they probably would have received in the free market" (p. 973). Farmers were exploited by usurping their monetary benefit via industrial and trade policies, which taxed agriculture by increasing the price of production inputs and consumer goods while at the same time decreasing the price of rice domestically.

Research by Goss and Burch (2001) found that the army, during 1945-1951, was powerful, running the country because of the coups, while the relationship between the Thai authorities and Chinese nationalists went sour and bitter. Armed Chinese nationalists and the Thai police clashed, leading to striking, injury, and death. However, the Thai government normalized relations with Nationalist China as part of the war settlement and a prerequisite for admission to the United Nations in 1946. The year after reconciliation seemed to mitigate Thai-Chinese

¹ <http://www.endofempire.asia/0816-3-thai-chinese-relations-under-pressure-3/>

² <http://www.endofempire.asia/0816-3-thai-chinese-relations-under-pressure-3/>

tensions. The military officers who seized power soon realized that the pursuit of mutually beneficial relations with wealthy Chinese businessmen offered more benefits than suppressive policies on anti-communism. As a result, the army sought to participate in the Sino-Thai business groupings and create parallel public enterprises. As Akira Suehiro cited in Goss and Burch (2001) describes: “[this] was basically carried out in two ways, the incorporation of new firms sponsored by the state or the army and the reorganization of the structure of ownership and directorship of existing Chinese-owned firms. In both cases military leaders and other officers were invited to become board members and shareholders ... Although several distinguished Chinese families formed giant business groups by the early 1950s, they couldn’t continue and develop their enterprises without the political patronage of the military command. In this sense, the dominant capitalists in the 1950s were comprised of the army, the politico-bureaucrats, and their Chinese business collaborators. They were all consolidated into a system of capitalism” (p. 973). Chiengkul (2015) viewed that the patron-client relationships kept the cronyism and hegemonic agri-food governance going in Thailand when those on the top of the hierarchy reinforced their power through the support from those who were under, and simultaneously those who were on the bottom, in turn, received benefits from their patrons. This relationship contributed to the unequal relationship among members of the society, and therefore, the principle of democracy was corrupted in Thailand.

The collaboration with the business catalyzed economic expansion and the establishment of the public company by the state. Even though it was nascent sponsorship carried out by the government for the industrial activity in the 1930s, such sponsorship caused an effect in the 1950s when many new firms were established. According to Goss and Burch (2001), they put “by 1960, together with the industrialization policies led and controlled by the Field Marshall Phiboon Songkhram (1947-57), there were 100 state and public enterprises, 37 of which were established between 1953 and 1956. These state industrial enterprises were mainly grouped in areas associated with the agricultural sector or primary commodities: liquor distilleries, paper mills, sugar refining mills, gunny bag factories, and bamboo products factories”. The said agribusinesses were mainly concentrated for several reasons: less complicated production process without imported technology, the ability for sourcing the raw material, and gains from the established internal markets. And because of such reasons, Goss and Burch (2001) found that the agribusiness during this period was only a small-scale enterprise that later tended to slow down its pace compared with the industrial development when its share of GNP dropped from 50.1% to 40.7% between 1951 and 1958. Industrialization in Thailand continued to grow and expand to the rural area. At the same time, the US influenced and supported the government, which provided financial aid and programs during the Vietnam War (1955-1975) in driving the need for industrialization of the countryside. The top-down political order

without concerning the social and economic equalities in the rural area for years, especially the dwellers and farmers, subsequently contributed to the rise of the rural rebellion in mid-1965, demanding social justice.

3. National Economic and Social Development Plans at the Outset (1961-1973)

The Phiboon regime was overturned in 1958 when the Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat came into power. The government under Sarit abolished the constitution, dissolved the national assembly, and prohibited strikes, political parties, and unions. The Sarit regime also embarked on a policy promoting industrialization that relied heavily on private capital from domestic and foreign sources. Suehiro (1989) revealed that Field Marshall Sarit followed the recommendations prepared by the World Bank delegates who were expertise in economics and research during 1957-1958. The delegates recommended that the government promote the private sector rather than the state enterprise, improve infrastructure, and prepare a long-term economic plan. The restricted role of state enterprise under the Sarit regime seemed to be perceived as shifting the promotion of private industrialization. Still, Goss and Burch (2001) viewed that perhaps a more important motive was to eradicate the group of Phiboon supporters who were military and businesspersons benefiting from corruption which created an unfavorable environment for long-term private and foreign investment. Sarit's government enacted strict regulations concerning the expansions of existing state enterprises. According to Suehiro (1989), Field Marshall Sarit forbade the state to engage in commercial and industrial sectors in a way that led to the competition against the private sector, leaving the role for itself for infrastructure provision and improvement of the investment climate in the favor of the private sector.

Suehiro (1989) continued that Sarit's government also issued the Industrial Investment Promotion Act B.E. 2503 (1960) to support private capital. It established the Board of Investment to oversee all matters related to industrial promotion. With this Act and other regulations, the governments attracted the private capital, both local and foreign investors, through tax incentives, including tax assumptions, tax holidays, freedom to remit profits and acquire land, and a ban on the formation of labor unions. Moreover, the government came up with a measure to protect the local manufacturer by increasing the import duties on promoted industries from between 10% and 30% to between 45 and 60%. Such measures shaped foreign investors' behavior to move from import to local production, mobilize foreign funding and technology to Thailand, or shift to other business sectors such as financing and real estate.

In 1961 the government, in association with the institutional and financial support of the US, also introduced the first six-years economic plan called “the First National Economic and Social Development Plan”.

It should note that Sarit was in quite a close relationship with the US from several US assistance programs developed in the 1950s. The US capital began to be part of essential resources for the economic transformation and expansion of the country as between 1958 and 1967, US\$797 million in direct economic and military aid was channeled to Thailand, even though not all of them were aimed at productive and long-term investments as Bowie and Unger cited in Goss and Burch (2001) stated that “between 1966 and 1971 aid from the US military together with the loans granted by the World Bank accounted to one-third of public capital spending. Such foreign capital distribution in Thailand after 1965 contributed to the growth in the construction sector throughout the 1960s. Public investment went expansive without inflationary spending or external borrowing because of the foreign capital” (p. 974).

During the cold war in Vietnam (1955-1975), the government was amenable to the US capitals mobilizing into Thailand, but the Japanese also showed interest in both commercialization and industrialization. According to Hewison cited in Goss and Burch (2001), the Japanese capital rose to \$130 million from 1967 to 1972, compared with just \$41 million between 1951 and 1966. To maintain the established business in Thailand, foreign investors were necessary to navigate domestic production under the Sarit regime; otherwise, there was no way for them to compete against the local manufacturers. However, moving in that direction was also simple as these investors had no experience and capabilities of managing the production line within the Thai context. They had to partner or enter a joint venture with the local firms. In this sense, integration with foreign capital crucially reinforced the rise of local industrial groups.

Goss and Burch (2001) argued that the Sarit regime opened the door for new entrepreneurs to seek lucrative benefits with less dependence on military patronage. Instead, they tended to depend on foreign capital, advanced technology, capital mobilization capacity, and management efficiency for operating their business. Industries like textiles, car assembly, electrical appliances, secondary steel products, and food processing boomed because the National Economic and Social Development Plan emphasized rapid industrialization. Such emphasis was made at the expense of the agricultural sector. For example, according to Bello, Walden, Cunningham, and Pho cited in Chiengkul (2015), the government deliberated to decrease the price of agricultural products so that the industrial workers’ earnings continued to be low but purchasable those products for consumption through rice premium or ad valorem tax on rice exports. Such revenue was never spent on agricultural improvement. Apparently, the government intended to implement the subsidy policy for industries through

agriculture. At the same time, Puntasen and Preedasak (1998) supported that the living conditions of the farmers remained much worse than in their other sectors. The government could have had justifications to support its act why rice taxes were needed to grow industrialization and price stabilization. But it failed to justify why the rice farmers bore burdens from such taxes. Of course, the government could defend that its industrial policy partly brought the success of the agro-industry in Thailand, but it was by chance rather than by choice pushing the farmers of doing it.

Research by Goss and Burch (2001) indicated that since introducing the first national development plan in 1961, followed by the World Bank's development strategy, industrialization-oriented policies were successful as the growth of Thailand climbed to 7.3% for the period 1961-66 and 7.2% from 1967-71. At the same time, Hart et al. (1989) supported that these policies took the agricultural sector for granted and discriminated by favoring urban and industrial development, the accumulation of capital outside the rural sector, and the integration of the Thai economy into the world economic system. According to Goss and Burch (2001), it showed that between 1960 and 1969, agriculture's share of GDP declined from 38.1% to 30.5%, while manufacturing increased from 13.1% to 16.4%, and construction from 4.9% to 6.8%. With this trend, the World Bank cited in Hart et al. (1989) perceived that the discriminatory government policies on agricultural prices, industrial protection, and trade caused a massive net transfer of wealth from the countryside.

In 1966, the government established the Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operatives (BAAC), which attempted to supply a credit for the agro-industry to develop food supply and productivity and export in the foreign market. Yet, such an establishment did not guarantee better living conditions for the farmers. Research by Goss and Burch (2001) indicated that the agro-industry was extended to maize, cassava, kenaf, and sugar crops, although rice prevailed in production and export terms. Between 1958 and 1971, these crops were increasingly cultivated on the land from 17.6% to 31.8% because they were highly in demand for industrial inputs such as animal feed, beverage, rice sack, rope making, or textile.

Agro-industry in Thailand went well for production and export, while the small-scale producers remained independent to decide on production and finance independently. However, it should note that independence was limited and could not prevent the small-scale farmers from inequalities. This meant that growth did not translate to success for the farmers because when the price of agricultural input went up, the farmers had no financial ability to hold onto their lands. They became a tenant to sustain themselves. Phongpaichit and Baker (1995) stated that the formation from a landowner to a tenant of the farmers did not seem to be cautious by the government. Taxes continued to be collected either during good or bad

harvest years, which exacerbated the financial situation of the farmers. As Jasper Goss and David Burch (2001) put it: between 1962 and 1970, the income position of rural inhabitants declined, while the inequality in urban areas decreased rapidly, leaving the countryside alone to become marginally worse (please see Table 1). The government abolished the law, which restricted land possession not exceeding 50 *rai* (8 hectares) in 1958. However, Suehiro cited in Haberkorn (2011) argued that the land limit was per person, not per family, which opened the opportunities for the large landholders to evade the law by purchasing and possessing the land under the name of their children and other relatives. Therefore, according to Goss and Burch (2001), only 48% of 5.5 million farmers could own 16% of the total cultivated land. The rest of the cultivated land was transferred and belonged to those who were land speculators from the tycoon families. Turton cited in Hart et al. (1989) viewed an increase in income disparities and unequal access to means of production in different regions, where capitalist development was prevalent, job opportunities, and all social benefits, including health and education, were thus inevitable. People in rural areas lived in absolute poverty around, by estimation, 10 million, and there was considerable malnutrition and death, especially among rural children.

Feeney (1990) viewed that income disparity mainly affected the rural inhabitants in northeastern Thailand relative to other regions where it was landlocked, more distant from both major domestic and international markets. Its economy relied on lowland rice, upland crops, and forestry. The oppressed policy over the northeast region put rage and agony on the rural residents and became the last straw when the poverty hit this region very high to 74% in 1962/63 (please see Table 2) because of discriminatory treatment. As a result, in mid-1965, the rural insurgency in the northeast region emerged through tremendous support from the rural dwellers and food producers.

Table 1: Regional Mean Household and Per Capita Incomes in Thailand, as a Percent of the Center

Region	Mean Household Income						Per Capita GPP	
	1962	1969	1975	1981	1986	1992	1987	1994
Northeast	40.8	57.6	65.7	68.0	65.4	57.4	35.5	29.0
North	56.2	65.0	66.0	77.8	79.5	76.9	43.3	44.6
South	92.1	66.0	78.2	86.7	96.1	87.2	74.4	57.2
Central	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Bangkok	193.4	194.8	159.8	153.0	186.9	266.9	304.2	267.5
Nationwide	76.3	78.0	83.9	88.8	95.6	101.2	97.9	88.1

Source: D Feeny (1990)

Table 2: Incidence of Poverty by Region, 1962/63-1992

Region	1962/63	1975/76	1981	1988	1992
Northeast	74%	44%	36%	35%	22%
North	65%	33%	23%	21%	14%
South	44%	31%	21%	21%	12%
Central	40%	14%	16%	16%	6%
Bangkok	28%	12%	4%	3%	1%
Nationwide	57%	31%	24%	22%	13%

Note: Incidence is defined as the percent of the population groups who reside in households whose total income falls below the property line. For 1975/76, the property lines were 1,981 baht per person per year for presence living in a sanitary district and 2,961 baht per person per year for persons living in municipal areas. Property lines in baht per month for rural areas in 1986 and 1992 were 340 and 414; for urban areas, property lines were 517 and 636.

Source: D Feeny (1990)

The incident of rural rebellion ended up with the death and injuries of peasants, trade unionists, and students at the expense of those who sought equality and social justice and prolonged until the early 1980s. During this fight, the central government perceived this rural conflict as a national security problem. It was fearful that a communist movement led by the local people in the northeast would go nationwide rather than perceiving that the genuine grievances were from discriminatory treatment and social inequality both among regions and industries. As a result, the solution for the government to address the local insurgency was thus technical and strategic and less concerning equitable distribution, especially in the agricultural sector. Turton cited in Goss and David Burch (2001) stated that the government prioritized industrial expansion and put the agriculture sector in a marginal position for the national economy, which was worse than in the 1950s. It should not be surprised why only 6% of total public expenditure was allocated and spent on agriculture in 1974.

4. The Liberation of the Farmers and Massacre (1973-the 1980s)

According to Turton cited in Haberkorn (2011), the agricultural share of the gross national product (GNP) declined, which contributed only 32.2% in 1975 (compared with 50.1% in 1950). Export of rice also continued dropping from 33% in 1965 to 19% in 1974 and only 12.9% in 1975. Moreover, the rice mill paid the rice growers a low amount for their crops.

Although the government attempted to guarantee the price of the rice for the farmers in 1968, such a guarantee was never implemented and enforceable because most rice mills refused to pay it. The government was concerned about the income difference and poverty, which subsequently passed the Land Reform Act on 17 January 1975, allowing the government to appropriate any landholding greater than 50 rai with compensation. Such appropriation would be for further allocation to those who had no land. However, Cohen cited in Haberkorn (2011) argued that land redistribution for the farmers was in doubt when the Act provided exceptions for land appropriation: if one possessed animals, one could own 100 rai; if one worked the land oneself, one could own 1,000 rai; or if one engaged in “modern farming methods,” one could own more than 1,000 rai, at least for a time. There was no possible way that the Act could affect the landowners when they could exempt the land appropriation by hiring the farmers renting their land for agriculture. Apart from that, within the period of land survey for appropriation (1975-1979), the land over 2,216,340 rai of private and crown land was chosen for land reform. According to Suehiro cited in Haberkorn (2011), only 4% of them, or equivalent to 88,868 rai, primarily donated by the crown, were implemented to serve such a purpose. Ramsay cited in Haberkorn (2011) supported that neither of the farmers who participated in the land reform program was granted land ownership. Instead, they were awarded a “temporary land development contract”. Cohen cited in Haberkorn (2011) concluded that the opposition from landlords, a lack of financial support from the state, and a general unwillingness on the part of government officials to implement the Land Reform Act was a significant failure in land distribution.

The enthusiasm for rapid development in Thailand through industrialization at the expense of agriculture reached to point that enough was enough. People in the central or the capital tended to get away from poverty and access higher education, while some in other undeveloped regions were angry and remained exploited to be less fortunate. Haberkorn (2011) found that during the three decades, the rice growers underwent high rents, severe land shortages, and broad and growing economic inequity which caused them unable to feed themselves and their families. In mid-August 1974, a group of peasants from the central region of Thailand expressed their anger by giving up their citizenship and putting the ID card issued by the state into the flame. In the months when nearly forty years of military dictatorship came to an end and the democratic opening was inaugurated by the events of 14 October 1973, farmers decided to protest on the street for months asking the government to address their debt and ensure a fair price of rice as if it was the last resort to challenge the power of the ruling class and their state allies toward the eradication of agricultural hegemony. However, their voices remained unheard, their actions were still indifferent; the government did not even allow them to meet in person for receiving their collective complaint. When their attempts were

unsuccessful, the farmers were under pressure to act uncharacteristically by setting themselves free from indebtedness and capitalism. In other words, they made a public declaration to collectively cease to pay taxes and terminate the social contract with the government. The farmers decided to set up an autonomous, liberated zone that wished no engagement with the government. Such movement was under the threat of a possible criminal charge of rebellion which made the government be entitled to use force. However, farmers countered it back in kind.

Haberkorn Haberkorn (2011) pointed up that the tenant farmers both fomented revolutionary political transformation and changed the very forms and locations of politics in Thailand. Not only that, but such peasant resistance also greatly disrupted the agricultural hegemony dominated by the government and landowners. When the farmers collectively voiced up, the landowners felt it was a threat to them as it did not only mean that they were about to lose rice yields, but also that their power to solely determine how much rice would be paid by farmers as the rent was in shrink. In other words, they were fearful of change for equality, while the farmers, at the same time, realized their movement for democracy navigating toward open politics and change.

The farmers who had a desire for change, together with progressive students, journalists, socialists, and workers, began to raise awareness and advocate for each other about their legal rights in order to counter agricultural hegemony. In the aftermath of the 14 October 1973 movement, a group of farmers decided to form the first national, autonomous Thai farmers' organization called "the Farmers' Federation of Thailand (FFT)" urging to be treated with respect and to improve the lives of the Thai farmers. The FFT made a list of demands which was slowly responded by the government. Some laws regarding agrarian reform were passed, including the seed certification law, a land rental law, and a moderate land reform law. The great news arrived and brought gratification to the FFT when Land Rent Control Act (LRCA) was finally enacted in December 1974 and enforced throughout the country.

However, Kaewthep cited in Haberkorn (2011) argued that such gratification came with the price for the FFT to pay. The headmen of the FFT were on the watchlist and targeted one by one causing fear among them to continue the political movement. Between March 1974 and September 1979, 33 persons were assassinated, 8 persons were seriously injured, and 5 persons disappeared. Bowie cited in Haberkorn (2011) supported that at the highlight of the FFT backlash during March and August 1975, 21 FFT leaders were dead, including the northern president and national vice president, Intha Sribunruang, on 30 July 1975. Even before the incident of the massacre on 6 October 1976 and the relapse of military dictatorship, the fear was pervasive everywhere across the country and discontinued all FFT's activities and

movements. Up until now (2021), nobody knew who part of harassment, intimidation, threats, and assassinations was. Names were undisclosed to the public and it was thus impossible to perceive the reasons behind them thoroughly. Haberkorn (2011) concluded that critics based on the evidence surrounding the FFT's activities in the months preceding the killings were made that landowners and state rulers were profoundly unsettled and displaced because of the enactment and implementation of the Land Rent Control Act 1974.

Every time when Thailand was in political crisis, including poverty and social justice, the coup was in power. During 1977-1988, the prime ministers of Thailand, General Kriangsak Chomanan (1977-80) and General Prem Tinsulanonda (1980-88) were from the military coup. They both realized that use of armed forces was not the solution. Instead, the policy on agrarian development came in place to tackle equitable distribution. This was the first time that the military government changed its strategy from taking security measures to focusing on agriculture intensification and extensification. The Green Isaan project was an example initiated in order to help farmers and dwellers in the northeast for better income, health, irrigation, reforestation, electrification, and soil improvement. The ratio of poverty in the northeast was incredibly lower decreasing from 74% in 1962/63 to 35% in 1988 (please see Table 2 above), while residents in Bangkok who were poor accounted for only 3% in the same year. However, Studies by Pranee Tinakorn (1995) also affirmed that while absolute poverty declined, the gap in income inequality in each region extended during the periods under consideration (please see Table 3).

Table 3: Regional distribution of GDP and regional per capita GDP in current prices

	1960	1970	1980	1989
Distribution of GDP (%):				
Bangkok and vicinity	22.6	29.0	31.1	48.1
Centre*	28.8	27.7	29.0	18.5
North	15.4	15.1	13.9	11.4
North-east	17.4	15.7	14.4	12.9
South	15.7	12.4	11.5	9.1
Whole kingdom	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(Value in million baht)	53,984	136,060	684,930	1,775,978
	1960	1970	1980	1989
Regional per capita GDP (baht):				
Bangkok and vicinity	5,715	12,838	45,300	96,239

Centre*	2,537	5,005	20,447	30,587
North	1,454	2,739	10,511	18,833
North-east	1,046	1,782	6,294	11,981
South	2,594	3,958	14,052	21,955
Whole kingdom	2,056	3,956	15,280	32,028

Note*: Excluding Bangkok and vicinity (Bangkok, Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani and Samut Prakan).

Source: Pranee Tinakorn (1995)

The drop in absolute poverty in rural regions led to a further focus by the Thai government on agricultural improvement. For improvement, Goss and Burch (2001) indicated that the government mainly employed the technocratic growth-oriented approaches in order to increase rural income through agricultural export and commercialization. The development of the private sector for agricultural improvement became the focus of the government rather than establishing the new institution or regulations. Goss and Burch (2001) pointed out that the agribusiness was emphasized in the 4th plan on national economic and social development (1977-1981) in which the government visualized that the private sector needed to access adequate supplies of inputs, focus on the high-value crop, and utilize the agri-food processing facilities. To reify, agrifood production should be produced for export, locally sourced, low cost, and labor-intensive for the advantage of rural surplus labor. The 5th National Economic and Social Development Plan (1982-1986) continued the same on the agrifood production policy and justified 'economic justice' to tackle the plight of the rural poor. However, an authoritative report on development strategy in the 1980s by Somsakdi et al. cited in Hart et al. (1989) indicated that "in the coming decade, the strategy for agricultural development will likely emphasize the pattern already begun in the preceding decade," and that this strategy could only generate economic justice for farmers with middle and higher incomes, while the great majority of low-income farmers remained out of sight in the Rural Poverty Eradication Program of the Fifth Plan.

Apart from the plan, Goss and Burch (2001) added that the Board of Investment also played its part in stimulating agribusiness by attracting agrifood investors to transfer wealth to the designated areas with incentives such as tax-free holidays, duty-free technology and raw material imports, exemptions from export, income and sales tax, and tax credits for exports and infrastructure promotion. With these incentives, Japan showed interest to invest in Thailand. By 1977 of all registered capital in Thailand, one-third of it was from Japan while the USA pulled out their capital as the Vietnam war came to an end in 1975. However, it should note that the primary purpose of Japanese investment in Thailand was in the sectors of trade,

manufacturing, and construction. Agrifood contributed a few amounts of its investment. For example, *Sogo Shosha* Mitsubishi and Mitsui, which were a trading company in a wide range of products and materials, operated the business in food processing and imported to Japan to serve the growing demands of the Japanese consumers. Mitsubishi also subsequently took the joint venture with the local company, Charoen Pokphand Group (CP), developing the prawn aquaculture activities which placed CP in the dominating and powerful position in the agrifood market.

5. Transformation to Vertical Integration of Agribusiness (the 1980s and 1990s)

Thai agriculture was changing in kind of relationship, role, commodities, and productions. According to Krongkaew (1995), higher value-added crops and/or other agricultural activities helped expand the agribusiness such as prawns, frozen fowl, fruit, and flowers. Moreover, agrifood export was no longer for the perishable products but extended the business line for processing, packaging, or preservation. An article from the Economist described that the private agribusiness developed the business model by employing vertical integration which was a strategy for a company to expand the business operation by integrating different stages of the production path. For example, Goss and Burch (2001) added that the dominated Thai agrifood groups such as the Charoen Pokphand (CP) Group (shrimp, poultry, feed milling), the Metro (Srigrungwattana) Group (supermarkets, fertilizer), and the Betagro (Hong Yiah Seng) Group (feed milling, poultry) turned into producing the vertically integrated and value-added agrifood which constituted the agribusiness conglomerates embracing retailing, trading, production, marketing and much more. As such, Gulati, Minot, Delgao & Bora cited in Swinnen (2007) viewed that the concentration of vertical integration along the agrifood chains allowed the firms to play dominating role in product development, branding, supplier selection, and distribution. They now had the market power to control the entire supply chain including cost reduction and efficiency, and product quality from farming to retailing while the farmers themselves were no longer independent, self-employed or single proprietors.

Gulati et al. cited in Swinnen (2007) further described that due to several factors, both internal and external that affected the cost of agrifood production and logistic, buyers and sellers, thus, sought to figure the win-win solution to reach the marketing channel in order to maximize profit while preventing the risks. Contract farming was thus one of the means to secure the fixed price and volume of agricultural products under forwarding agreements that a farmer would receive from the contractual agrifood firm. The firm was obligated to provide

production support, financial assistance, and technical advice, and the farmer, in return, should deliver the products with the amount and quality requested by the former. For example, under the contract farming for livestock production, there were feed millers who were involved in supplying the young animals, feeds, veterinary medicine, and extension advice on credit to farmers who were responsible for animal farming in the shed, disposing waste, and providing all required labor and resources. To receive the amount and quality of agricultural products, the major decision-making for production was then in the court of the firm rather than the farmer. In other words, contract farming promised a higher return for a farmer but also indicated the considerable close monitoring and control over production influenced by a firm and the cost burdens arising from such influence for a farmer.

Research by Goss and Burch (2001) indicated that in the late 1970s, the feed company initiated the contract farming in swine production in Chachoengsao province imposing the farmers to carry out the complete array of inputs and services, including land and credit for initial investment and working capital. By the early 1990s, the rise of contract production in rural areas of Thailand ramified in animal feed, swine, shrimp, cashew, asparagus, tomato, eucalyptus, baby corn, bamboo shoots, pineapple, and mushrooms which were dominantly aimed to export to other countries. Apart from that, the surplus from contract farming encouraged the private to invent new processed commodities such as frozen and canned foods which later contributed a greater share of export from 8.3% to 9.4% between 1994 and 1997, while the export share from unprocessed commodities such as rice and rubber dropped.

Manarangsarn cited in Chiengkul (2015) criticized that although contract farming did not expand to all kinds of agricultural products, contract farming merged control over productive resources, processing, trade channels, and credit, while the growers were transformed into mere "workers in a vast agro-industrial assembly line" who performed specialized production skills. It should note that the farmers through contract farmers tended to lose the power to bargain against the contracting firm and usually bear the carry production risks, such as those associated with the weather and climate change. Moreover, some farmers needed to make a loan from the agrifood firms and traders with a high rate of interest because they had no way to secure enough capital for their farm operations. If the farmers were unable to repay, they could lose ownership over their lands because the lands were used as collateral to secure the loan. Limnirandkul, Yipmantasiri, Muangsuk & Kramol cited in Chiengkul (2015) added that while the bargaining power was lesser because of the above reasons, the earning from the agrifood return the farmers received might sometimes be lower than the laborers' income from the non-agricultural sector. Contract farming remained unsuccessful in uplifting the rural economy from marginalization; namely, Goss and Burch (2001) found out that "between 1981

and 1988, the rural incomes in the region were lower by between 0.8% and 1.4% in real terms and agriculture's contribution to GDP growth remained well below manufacturing and services, not managing to rise above 2% in the years between 1978 and 1988. Furthermore, the proportion of farm households in debt rose from 27% in 1971 to 52% in 1996" (p. 980).

Contract farming might smoothen the production throughout the food chain, hence, the farmers deliberated to be part of the arrangement. However, it also should note that some farmers, especially the small-scale ones joined such arrangement due to limited choices for the small-scale farmers in the sense that the farmers could not have complete freedom of choice under transnational hegemonic forces when the market was competitive, monopolized overproduction inputs and trade channels, including limited access of financialization in the agri-food system. Furthermore, the contract farming arrangement was made without direct intervention from the government. In fact, the active role of Thai agriculture promotion was shifted to the private firms, while the public sector now focused to encourage private investment rather than expansion of state capitalism. The government supported private investment and the private enterprises through a cabinet resolution in 1987³ and government projects as provided in the 6th plan on national economic and social development (1987-1991). The Thai government also concluded the bilateral investment treaties with neighboring countries⁴ such as Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam in order to facilitate the Thai investors operating their business with less political, legal, and commercial risks.

Contract farming has remained applicable until the present day. Chiengkul (2015) viewed that contract farming could not be greatly successful without a firm and long-lasting patron-client relationship, large agri-businesses in Thailand had strong political connections with political parties through financial support and other aid for an electoral campaign. These businesses, in turn, benefited from state concessions and favorable policies for agri-businesses. Pholnoi cited in Chiengkul (2015) gave an example that there was an attempt to pass the law on control of monopoly power and unfair trade practices in 2002, but it was unsuccessful when Nevin Chidchop serving as the Deputy Minister of Commerce was replaced by Mr. Wattana Muangsuk, who was married into the Jiarawanont family which owned the CP group. The patron-client relationship reflected how the capital accumulation was effectively prevalent in

³ Cabinet Resolution dated on 20 January 1987. Please see [http://www.sakonnakhon.go.th/inforcenter/file7/Contract Farming 1.pdf](http://www.sakonnakhon.go.th/inforcenter/file7/Contract_Farming_1.pdf)

⁴ The bilateral investment treaties between Thailand and Cambodia (1995), Laos (1990), Myanmar (2008), and Vietnam (1991)) were made. BITs in total according to reports submitted by Thailand to United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (<https://investmentpolicy.unctad.org/international-investment-agreements/countries/207/thailand>)

the group and indicated how the power of rural producers, who were already weak from the incident of rural rebellion, was undermined when the introduction of processed commodities in which production was in the hand of the private firms, not the rural producers, penetrated in the agrifood production and market.

Research by Goss and Burch (2001) indicated that the incidence of the 1997 economic crisis exacerbated the strength of the rural and reinforced the existing hegemonic agricultural practices in Thailand; namely, Thailand was subject to many austerity measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), such as the reduction of twin fiscal and current-account deficits, elimination of price distortions, the undertaking of interest-rate-ceiling adjustments, and abolishment of tariff barriers in order to meet the conditions for the USD 37 billion loan. Such conditions of the loan included streamlining the public budget that belonged to the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives which later affected irrigation and agricultural extension programs at large. Furthermore, the government issued the Foreign National Business Act of 1999 so that transnational companies such as Tesco (UK) and Carrefour (France), could collaborate with the local firms to lobby the government to operate their business in food retail in Thailand easier. The power of producers and consumers was weakened when the agrifood market was oligopolistic by a few players in the sector. In late 1999, the government took the USD 300 million in loans from the Asian Development Bank for restructuring the agricultural sector which was equal to 10% of the Agriculture Ministry's budget. The loan was spent on enhancing the previous state-subsidized agricultural projects which allowed the agribusiness to take a more active role in the planning and management of the whole sector. The transnational and domestic practices which followed the idea of neo-classical economy, western-centric modernization, and the patron-client mentality have maintained the status quo in the agri-food system of Thailand.

6. A Shift from Domestic Producer toward Cross Border Production (the 2000s – 2010s)

To meet domestic and export demand, agrifood companies like CP Group initiated to outsource agrifood production through contract farming in other countries due to the rising domestic costs of land, labor and agricultural inputs. Moreover, the emergence of globalization and trade liberalization mobilized people, and resources, including investment, anywhere and secured the private actors like the transnational corporations that the consumption of the same product globally would be possible via their distribution, marketing, and retail subsidiaries in many places. The Thai government supported the Thai private firms to reinforce their

competitive advantage in the global market by facilitating business operations in foreign countries. It, however, should note that Neighboring countries like Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam were the target because they imported substantially Thai commodities, including agricultural products.

In 2001, Thaksin Shinawatra, the Prime Minister, came to power. He had a network and good relationship with the business including CP Group. According to Greenfield (2006) and Prasertsuk cited in Chiengkul (2015), during his term, he rearranged state power and institutionalized the “CEO state” and got supported by the members of parliament who had business backgrounds and shared the seat of parliament for 30%. Moreover, Chiengkul (2015) added that Thaksin included big business representatives such as Mr. Pitak Intarawitayanunt, Mr. Wattana Muangsuk, and Dr. Ajva Taulananda from the CP Group to be part of his cabinet, which was no surprise why CP Group received several tax exemptions such as payment of import duty on machinery and payment of income tax for certain operations for 5-8 years from the Board of Investment during the first Thaksin administration (2001 to 2005). This suggested that CP Group enabled to push for favorable policies on agribusinesses.

One evidence was the Ayeyawaddy-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) which Thaksin Shinawatra pushed to establish in 2003 in order to leverage liberal economic regionalization linking countries and continents together to attract global capital and to support the CP Group to achieve its goal. Wood (2015) viewed that the ACMECS could not be successful without the CP Group who sought regional expansion of operations and cross-border trading; namely, Dr. Ajva Taulananda, the vice-Chairman of CP Group, was a key person who prepared the ACMECS legislation and served as the chairperson of the ACMECS Business Council which was in charge of advancing “cross-border contract farming of the expansion of supporting infrastructures, such as roads and distribution networks”. Therefore, it was no surprise when the ACMECS promoted the tariff-free arrangement over the maize which was one of the core agricultural commodities produced and exported by CP Group. CP Group now sourced their maize grain from both the smallholder production schemes and large-scale concessions, in Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar.

Thanks to the ACMECS, the value from foreign direct investment in CLMV by the Thai firms were gigantic which contributed to the economic growth both in the home and host countries (please see table 4). To strengthen such investment, the Thai government maintained the relationship through various forms including the provision of financial assistance to these countries. In 1996, the Thai government established the Neighboring Countries Economic Development Cooperation Fund (NECF) with the purpose to assist the Mekong mainstream and downstream countries. In 2005, however, Prachason (2006) argued that the fund was

transformed into the Neighboring Countries Economic Development Cooperation Agency (NEDA) for not only financial aid but also technical assistance. Within the same year, the Thai government, in association with the Thailand office of the United Nations disseminated a joint report indicating how Thailand contributed to its neighboring countries through aid, opening markets, and investment with regard to infrastructure.

Table 4: Thailand’s Trade with CLMV countries in 2006 (in USD)

	Export from Thailand	Import from Thailand
Cambodia	1,244,687,064	34,381,490
Laos	1,014,747,872	493,500,340
Myanmar	755,275,561	2,320,115,751
Vietnam	3,075,799,440	891,093,528

Source: Sajin Prachason (2006)

Prachason (2006) added that in 2005, cross-border contract farming was pinned down in the second ACMECS Summit as a priority project. The Thai government responded by setting up a strategic committee on contract farming and infrastructure to oversee Thai investments in neighboring countries. Thailand attempted to push this agenda because it aimed to formalize agrifood trading by the small traders on the border and to trade and invest the energy crops. The production from the contract farming outside Thailand was imported for feed processing in the country.

Facilitating the ACMECS at the operational level was under the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture which acted as a consultant for the investor providing information on the area, soil, and crops that were optimum for contract farming. The Ministry also invited the large agri-firms to join a survey trip to other ACMECS countries. The Thainews cited in Prachason (2006) reported that in 2006 there were delegates from eight companies whose businesses were palm oil and eucalyptus accompanied by the Thai Minister to Lao PDR to follow up on the contract-farming project. Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperation of Thailand (2006) reported that, later in the same year, the deputy minister and the representatives of CP Group traveled to Lao PDR to discuss with the host official the matter of potential production of maize, sweet corns, rubber, soybeans, and aquaculture in Luang Prabang province. Prachason (2006) added that not only providing support for the Thai investors, but the Thai government also provided technical support such as new technology and seeds to the Cambodian farmers that met the interest of investors’ businesses.

In order to flourish the contract farming in the ACMECS countries, Thailand simplified the tariff exemption process under the ASEAN Integrating System of Preferences (AISP) to facilitate trade and investment for cash crops and energy crops, improved the logistics with the road linkage construction, developed framework for investment and access to the resource in the hosting countries (e.g. Record of Discussion), provided official channel for consultation with the private sector, technical support, field visit facilitation, and credit support to investors. The host government also played an Important role to flourish contract farming. For example, the Myanmar government aimed to develop agricultural production, including grains and sugarcane for processing industries, by relaxing its agricultural policies over the years. The Lao PDR government together with the two companies, CP Group and Mueng Loei Thanyawan, concluded the contract farming as part of rural development projects for the four Southern towns in Xyabury province. Prachason (2006) viewed that the role of Thailand as a home country in negotiations with the hosting governments for concluding the contract farming created an impression that the Thai government was acting as a broker for its investors. With the joint forces of tripartite parties (home country, host country, and Thai investors), agricultural commodities were free from the tariff, registered land for contract farming, and the numbers of investors were fruitful during 2005-2006 in the host countries accordingly (please see Table 5). Moreover, in the following year, the number of registered traders/companies, areas, and crops under the ACMECS contract farming project during 2006-2007 touched a new high in all categories (please see Table 6).

Table 5: Number of Registered Traders / Companies, Areas, and Crops under the ACMECS Contract Farming Project by Country Border in 2005-2006

	Thai- Myanmar Border	Thai-Cambodian Border	Thai-Lao Border
Number of Registered Traders/ Companies	23	21	2
Registered Areas (rai)	60,200	67,340	210,000
Crops Entitled to Tariff Exemption	Maize, green bean, peanut, castor bean	Maize, green bean, peanut, soybean, sweet corn, sesame, cassava	Maize, soybean

Source: Termpittayapaisith cited in Prachason (2006)

Table 6: Total Number of Registered Traders/Companies, Areas, and Crops under the ACMECS Contract Farming Project in comparison between 2005/06 and 2006/07

	2005/06	2006/07

Number of Registered Traders/ Companies	46	114
Registered Area (rai)	318,920 (51,027 hectares)	1,751,452.25 (280,232 hectares)
Expected Production (tons)	290,430	1,272,503
Crops Entitled for Tariff Exemption	6 maize, sweet corn, soybean, peanut, green beans, and castor beans	11 maize, soybean, castor bean, eucalyptus, green beans, peanut, sesame, castor beans, and sweet corn

Source: The Secretariat of the Cabinet of Thailand cited in Prachason (2006)

It should note that while the Thai government assigned a significant role to the Commerce Ministry, Agricultural Ministry, Energy Ministry, and the Foreign Affairs Ministry to actively develop trading and investment in the ACMECS, its role is to prevent adverse consequences, including the case of contract farming was unfulfilled leaving the powerless farmers to bargain with the Thai companies and middlemen on their own. Shan Herald Agency for News cited in Prachason (2006) reported that many pieces of land located in the Northern Shan State, Myanmar were hastily confiscated by the authority in order to dubiously reserve for the contract farming project. Moreover, Prachason (2006) added that the Labor Ministry of Thailand which were responsible for labor welfare and working condition had minimal roles in the contract farming project by only examining the total numbers of returned migrants without paying attention to labor standards, laws, and protection. Engagement with the other non-state actors such as civil society to be part of the policy formulation and implementation of the ACMECS toward sustainable development in the sub-region was limited. Therefore, social impact assessments of the pre and post-contract farming in the ACMECS countries were unprepared. In fact, the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Thailand cited in Prachason (2006) revealed that of 280,232 hectares where that were registered areas for contract farming in 2006-2007, there was hardly provided a clear indication of the extent to which contract farming projects could contribute “employment and development in neighboring countries”. Given all the practices of the Thai government, it was reasonable to believe that contract farming in ACMECS countries was heavily business-oriented rather than balancing all interests of whole stakeholders.

According to Murrey (2007), Thailand today became one of the world’s largest food-processing countries, together with the largest rice exporter, including the agricultural products and processed food which accounted for around a fifth of Thailand’s total exports. The idea behind of expansion in the agrifood industry was partly because it was a foundation ingredient for

cooking Thai food. During Thaksin's administration, he wished to elevate and promote the Thainess to other countries through gastro-diplomacy. He believed that Thai food reflecting the Thai culture and values would attract and persuade more foreign tourists to visit Thailand and oppose the foreign influences by marketing and branding the national and authentic food in order to respond to the growing abundance of foreign foods. With this strategy, Thai food became one tool to showcase the uniqueness of Thainess that any place could not provide. According to the Economist (2002), gastro-diplomacy was formulated and embraced by using the national food to attract the desire of the other for political, diplomatic, and commercial reasons. Ichijo and Ranta (2016) described that the gastro-diplomacy allowed Thailand to use a 'soft power' resource to improve the image of Thailand, standardization, and homogenization of the Thai food culture which entailed the national identity. For example, the government launched the cultural program called "Global Thai" in 2002 which intended to establish the Thai restaurants around the world from 5,000 to 20,000 in 2008, providing the culinary classes and information on Thai food in order to claim the authenticity of Thai culture. To reach such a goal, much support from the government such as loans, supervision, and recommendation, including matchmaking with the Thai food industry for opening the global Thai restaurants, were provided. Apart from that, Sirijit (2005) added that the government also took part in establishing the Thai culinary school in order to train and supply the Thai chefs to those Thai restaurants overseas. The Thai gastro-diplomacy was a strategic linking with the Thai state's economic, agricultural, and diplomatic policies in order to achieve the national goals - not only attracting more foreign investment domestically through national branding but also reinforcing the symbolic power of articulating and representing Thainess.

7. Pracharath versus Prachaniyom (Paddy Pledging Scheme) (the 2010s - Present)

The current situation concerning contract farming in Thailand did not seem better compared with those where the Thai agri-companies invested aboard. According to the study on contract farming of five commodities (pork, chicken, fish, sugar cane, and maize) in four provinces of Thailand conducted during 2010-2012 by Thadsanakulpan cited in Chiengkul (2015), it found that the bargaining power of the small-scale farmers remained low compared with the agri-businesses. Of 41 farmers who made the survey, 90.2% of them felt that most of the production risk and investment cost was carried by them; 87.8% felt like an underdog to bargain the terms in the contract farming, including price, product quality, and harvest period; and 73.2% underwent with the price fluctuations due to the lower price they received from the companies.

Apart from the contract farming that the farmers had to face with the unequal market and uncertain revenue because of volatile prices of agri-food commodities, rice production also has no exception. Yet, the government policy on rice, the paddy pledging scheme, was a controversial program for rice production in 2011, exacerbated the mainstream agri-food system, and hindered sustainable agriculture development in Thailand. According to the National Rice Policy Committee cited in Mahathanasetha and Pensupar (2014), the paddy pledging scheme aimed to support the farmers not to trade their productions immediately after harvest so that they did not necessarily sell their rice at the lowest price when it was oversupply. Also, the government itself viewed Thailand as a strong competitor in the global rice market. The government was quite confident to overprice the rice export and adjust the trading terms in its favor. Therefore, the government stockpiled and decreased the rice export quantities.

Welcher (2017) and Mahathanasetha and Pensupar (2014), noted that the government, through this scheme, intervened in the price of rice by 15,000 baht/tons (USD 500) which was 46 percent above market prices and almost doubled the domestic price of rice in 2010. This scheme was no need to hesitate for the farmers to sell to the government agencies than to Thai exporters; therefore, Sahapattana (2015) noted that the government became the biggest rice trader with rice stock in over 2,500 warehouses around the country enabling control of the price for export and domestic rice trade. However, Mahathanasetha and Pensupar (2014) argued that in 2012, the government borrowed money from the Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives about 7 billion USD to pay the farmers who participated in the paddy pledging scheme, while the stockpiles of paddy in the warehouse operated by the rice mills increased to 14.7 million tons in the production year 2012. The price of rice in the global market speculated by the Thai government went unrealistic when other countries like India and Vietnam also increased production and export of rice it was difficult for Thailand to sell the rice at the above-market price. India and Vietnam were increasing their volumes of exported rice (please see Diagram 1 indicating that rice export and world rice market share in Thailand were shrunk during the implementation of the rice-pledging scheme). This difficulty contributed to financial and management strains from storing and maintaining a huge pile of paddies. The Public Warehouse Organization (PWO) and Ministry of Commerce cited in Sahapattana (2015) reported that the cost of storage (renting a warehouse) was about THB 20 per ton of paddies per month and the cost of maintaining the stock (labor, quality control, fumigation, and insurance fees) was approximately THB 100 per ton of paddies per month. This meant the longer the rice was kept in the warehouse, the less possible to sell and pay the farmers finally.

Diagram 1: Rice exports by the world's major exporters, 2010-13



Source: Ineichen cited in Namchaidee (2017)

In 2014, the Bangkok Post reported that the paddy pledging scheme went scandalous and became upheaval when the many farmers in many provinces walked in the street to protest because they yet received the payment from the government a half year ago. Economists projected that more than 1 million farmers remained unpaid by the government who participated in the paddy pledging scheme which amounted to a total of THB 130 billion. The delayed payment affected the economy because purchasing power in rural areas dipped and the impact could exacerbate if the delay is prolonged. Some Farmers suicide when they could not receive the payment as promised. The Nation also supported this by giving the example that Thongma Kaisuan, a Thai farmer from Roi Et province, who joined the scheme was found dead hanging from a tree on 26 January 2014 which might be related to the overdue payment under this scheme. With no payment, the debt was accrued. Farmers had to borrow money from both informal and formal sources with a high rate of interest for a new round of production and self-consumption. Simultaneously, Welcher (2017) stated that the government suffered from the loss of price speculation approximately USD 16 billion. In order to compensate for such loss, the government issued long-term bonds to cover the incurred debts.

The effect of the paddy pledging scheme attracted the farmers to grow rice which to some extent affected the agri-food system in Thailand. With the pledging price, the demand for production and all related costs (prices on input, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, labor, land rent, and logistics) also grew subsequently. The Post Today Newspaper reported that farmers in the central region of Thailand underwent an increasing rent from THB 500 per rai⁵ per harvest to THB 800-1000 per rai per harvest from the landlords. The same newspaper cited in Chiengkul (2015) also produced a news article revealing that some landlords sought the lucrative gain from this policy by purchasing more lands and rent for the farmers growing more rice. According to the Ombudsman's study cited in Chiengkul (2015), in 2014, the paddy pledging scheme did not contribute to farming productivity and farmer income because all the production costs including the rent of the land also increased.

Intensification of rice production because of this policy led to environmental problems. Given the criteria for the government to pledge the rice which was based only on the type of rice, dampness, and impurity, the farmers could only concentrate on quantity rather than the quality of rice by heavily using chemical fertilizers, pesticides, including the genetically modified seeds that were short time harvested. The Office of Agricultural Economics cited in Chiengkul (2015) noted that the average percentage of increasing prices borne by the farmers from imported inputs per year between 2007 and 2011 was 10.36% for chemical fertilizers, 6% for pesticides and herbicides, and 386.42% for walk-behind tractors. Although the increasing volume of input helped the farmers could maximize their productivity up to 3 to 5 times (usually 1 or 2 times) a year-round without resting a land, it adversely affected the quality of rice, chemical contamination on rice, and long-term export.

This scheme was scandalous and adequately justified why the government was ousted by the yellow shirt who, in the narrow sense, was portrayed as a group of anti-Thaksin and Thaksinomics. In May 2014, the military junta, under the name National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), led by General Prayuth Chan-ocha (henceforth Prayuth), therefore, claimed his legitimacy to stage a coup. One of the most important reasons was the corruption and adverse outcomes from the paddy pledging scheme. Under repressive military rule, Kongkirati and Kanchoocharat (2018) described that civil liberties, free speech, criticism, and political activity were restricted, censored, prosecuted, and prohibited. The military junta has established itself as the new ruling elite by enhancing its status, scope of power, budgets, and manpower, including concentrating the power in the agricultural sector and strengthening the hegemonic agri-food system through a policy of "Pracharath" scheme.

⁵ 1 rai equals to 1,600 square meters.

Pracharath (*pracha* literally meaning people and *rath* meaning the state.) was initiated in September 2015 which partnered between the government, the private sector, and other groups in society such as civil society groups with an aim to strengthen the country's economy with the local level and to help to the rural poor, without sounding like a Thaksin's populist policy. The military government assigned 12 steering committees as the national committee working together with Pracharath Rak Samakkee Social Enterprise (Thailand) Company Ltd. and the 76 provincial branches across the country of Pracharath Rak Samakkee Company Ltd. to generate the profit under the 3 thematic areas: agriculture, agro-processing, and community-based tourism⁶. According to Kongkirati and Kanchoochat (2018), The private sector welcomed this initiative and was renowned as a 'big brother' because the business was expected to nurture and support the small firms with technical aid and assistance. In return for its generosity, big brother firms received a 200% tax reduction on their expenditure. Sontirat Sontijirawong, Deputy Minister of Commerce, stated that the tax incentive undoubtedly attracted large firms as the companies could save millions for running the business while their reputation rose up from participation without implementing an in-house corporate social responsibility (CSR) program.

However, the emergence of the Pracharath policy was a dubious endeavor criticized by most civil society organizations for two main reasons. First, civil society organizations viewed that enforcement of city planning laws was weak with an absence of environmental impact assessments in the special economic development zone. Second, the direction of the Civil-State policy was driven and led by the largest Thai transnational agrifood conglomerates, together with a bureaucratic mechanism. Although it, on the surface, seemed that the giant agricultural conglomerates took the baton from the government guiding and nurturing the local and small businesses in order to promote them and the country's competitiveness, including the level playing field competition, Kongkirati and Kanchoochat (2018) argued that Pracharath Rak Samakkee Company, in practice, designed the project without consultation with all-inclusive stakeholders (mainly between the big brothers and their local counterparts), especially the controversial and different matters on resource allocation and public goods in rural areas. This is supported by the fact that, according to Isra News, it reported that Pracharath Rak Samakkee Social Enterprise (Thailand) Company Ltd. was registered on 29 April 2016 with a registered capital of THB 100 million. As of 16 January 2018, Mr. Thapana Sirivadhanabhakdi (president and CEO of Thai Beverage) owned 84,998 shares (84.99 percent) of the company, while other companies and directors of the company owned equally 1 share meaning that the majority

⁶ <https://prsthailand.com/en/aboutus>

shareholder dominated the control of the company in the manner for his/her favors without an objection. Therefore, level playing field competition fell short of Pracharath policy's vision.

Rukhamate cited in Chiengkul (2018) also viewed that Pracharath policy through the pilot Pracharath projects in 5 provinces (Phuket, Phetburi, Buriram, Chiang Mai, Udonthani) was led by the private sector to achieve the mission and goals of the Pracharath Rak Samakkee Social Enterprise (Thailand) Company Ltd., while the role of government was to support the private sector both through favored policies and policy implementation. The Bangkok Post News (2016) reported that Isara Vongkusolkit who was a deputy chairman of the Pracharath's executive committee and the owner of Mitr Phol Group, Thailand's top sugar producer, attempted to push forward the agenda of land zoning in order to upgrade agricultural production. His business on sugar plantations also got the benefit from this attempt as he put "Zoning will be clearly divided in two: one zone for major crops such as rice, rubber, tapioca and sugar, and the other vegetables and fruits. Farmland consolidation will be required, while new technology and machinery will be used to cut production costs and raise productivity" (unknown page, cited from Bangkok Post, 2016). The government decided to impose zoning regulations on cash crops which were similar to Isara Vongkusolkit's suggestion regarding the governance of the local farmers' activities.

News from Thairath cited in Chiengkul (2018) also revealed that the government acted as the facilitator between the buyer (large agro-industry and retail companies) and the seller (farmers) by collecting the data regarding what the buyer needed prior to encouraging the seller to grow the agricultural commodities that met the buyer's demand. Not only at the policy level, but the provincial branches of the Company also connected their well-off network without inclusive participation from the civil society. Kongkirati and Kanchoochat (2018) and Rukhamate cited in Chiengkul (2018) viewed that the combination at the policy and grass root levels could constitute the long-term dependency on the local communities, power asymmetry (from vertical rather than horizontal power relations), and hierarchical capitalism. To elaborate on this point, large-scale farming of key agricultural commodities is one of the Pracharath agricultural policies. Research from Lienchamroon, Faikham, Lertsatienchai, Buaphet, Arunotai, Hassarungsee, and Chuenglertsiri (2017) noted that on 21 October 2016, the Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operatives and The Bank of Agriculture and Co-operatives (BAAC) signed the MOU, along with the Thai and international animal food industry and seed company group (CP, Monsanto, Syngenta, Pacific Seeds) with the purpose of transforming the paddy farm approximately 8,000 acres into the maize cropping area. Biothai, an NGO closely monitored this policy and viewed that the large companies like Monsanto or CP were likely the largest beneficiary because the market share of seeds controlled by them, and the 70% of

seeds from CP were sold through BAAC's mechanism called Thai Agricultural Business Co. Ltd (TABCO). TABCO was an intermediary for procurement of agricultural materials and responsible for running 60 Agricultural Marketing Cooperatives nationwide who they are also the BAAC clients; therefore, according to Chiengkul (2018), it was apparent that this initiative was to respond to the needs of the agro-industrial companies producing a tremendous amount of maize which subsequently used for an animal feed without thinking thoroughly about the diversity and security of other agrifood commodities, as well as the process of decision making regarding who got to decide, by what means to utilize the farming resources, and for what purpose remained unanswered.

To succeed in encroaching on the rice farming by producing maize instead, a Handbook on the Project to Support Credits to Develop Large-Scale Farms (2016) noted that the government agreed to subsidize the interest from the loan by around 3-3.5% per year, for the farmers who participated in the Pracharath agricultural policy meaning that they had to pay the loan with the interest of 0.01% per year instead to the BAAC. On the surface, it was aimed to support the farmer groups accessing funding for agricultural production on the large-scale farm and increasing productivity and efficiency. However, Chiengkul (2018) argued that this policy did not apply to the small-scale farmers who were not in the program or were interested in alternative sustainable agrifood production, i.e., organic farming. They still were entitled to pay 5-7% interest for their agricultural loan from the same bank. Also, access to finance helped the agribusiness rather than the borrowers (the farmers) because the money was mainly spent on the means of production such as chemical fertilizer, pesticides, and seed owned by the large agri-companies enabling them to reinforce their dominant position under the Pracharath agricultural policy. Inequality concerns were brought back to the table again when the policy in question allowed the large agribusinesses to usurp the benefits in the agri-food system by utilizing the state mechanisms and resources, while the existing issues such as land grabbing, oligopoly, and right violations associated with them never been touched to address. This meant Pracharath agricultural policy reproduced the hegemonic agri-food system and paved the way toward hierarchical capitalism manipulated by a few numbers of Sino-Thai agrifood tycoons.

8. Discussion: What are the interests, objectives, or strategies that formulate the current practice of the Thai state in the agrifood system?

Given the practices of the Thai government on agriculture, the external forces like globalization and transnationalism transformed into a new form of governing structure that

defined the rules of production and trading, where the government was no longer a dominant player whose power was shifted to the large agrifood conglomerates to lead the agrifood agendas. Dominating in the agricultural inputs for production (such as seed, chemical inputs, and farm machinery) and product development according to the contract farming, including the entire agrifood supply chain proved the process of transformation. The private actors were so impudent that they were able to set their own standards for the best quality of commodities that met their demand and to lobby the government to pass the law or not for their favor such as the laws combating monopoly, the use of farm chemical, relaxation of trade constraint. Small-scale farmers, on the other hand, underwent land grabbing, oligopoly, and right violations associated with the agribusiness conglomerates for almost a century. The fact that interest and agendas of this group were rarely disregarded owing to an absence of participation and negotiation in the public sphere which negatively affected their livelihood and food security, it seemed that the marginal farmers were pushed to be excluded in the politics and lost political capital to challenge with food justice and democracy.

But why does the government allow for such transformation? Does this mean the government is weak? What are the benefits of the government letting the private be in charge? It seems to me that the government from the early to mid-1940s was very powerful overthrowing the absolute monarchy and establishing itself to govern the countries and execute policies. According to Hewison (1989), the elite ruling class compromised the economic development between socialism and capitalism and viewed that some form of state intervention was necessary for economic progress. Even though economic development remained tied to agricultural development, a huge amount of rice export brought only a small amount of return. The government thus viewed that industrial development could be a better solution to increase the state revenue. However, economic development run by immigrant Chinese merchants was not free from the bureaucrat's control and depended on political protection. In fact, the American scholar Fred Riggs cited in McVey (1992) who did the research on Thailand's bureaucracy argued that the government perceived these immigrants as social and political outsiders, or "pariah entrepreneurs"; therefore, the government took numerous policies and measures to prevent the influence of the economy operated by the Sino-Thai businessmen. Instead, the government tended to set up state-owned enterprises to compete against them. From this conduct, McVey (1992) viewed the government as a powerful and independent institution that was impervious to any demands from other social groups in the society. Doner and Ansil (2018) argued that even though the government had xenophobia over Chinese immigrants and merchants, the Chinese remained economically dominant. They could escape from state intervention by initiating its organization within their community to exchange information for business opportunities among the group, diversifying business lines

and activities, formulating concerted action in the face of government regulation, operating to avoid excess competition, and restricting entry of new entrepreneurs into the trade.

The Chinese realized that economic power and property ownership could be diminished without political protection; therefore, cooperation with the powerful political officials was a solution to survive and be more competitive in business against other competitors through the government supports in the forms of quotas, permits, licenses, and lucrative contracts. When the group was stronger, the local Chinese deepened their relationship with the government by inviting high-level officials to sit on the board of the company. When the officials were part of the business, it was convenient for the company to induce the policies it favored through them. Hewison (1989) viewed that the public interest of the officials was then blurred and replaced by personal gain. At this point, it was difficult to distinguish what hats the officials were wearing administering the country - the bureaucrat, the politician, or the businessman. No matter what hat they were wearing, it was certain that the autonomy of the state was under constraint. The clientelism relationship between the government and the business was thus founded since then. Such a relationship went firmer when Field Marshall Sarit seized the power and forbid the state enterprise to be a business rival with the Sino-Thai companies.

Not only favoring the domestic capitals, but the government also welcomed the foreign capitals through a tax incentive for investment promotion in order to stimulate the rate of sustainable economic growth. The large domestic capitalists concurred with this initiative as they viewed that rapid industrialization required large capital, technical, and knowledge. The locals reinforced their business strength by entering the joint venture with the transnational capital for a mutual benefit. Apart from that, the privileges that were granted to the foreign investors also applied to the locals which provided more opportunities for the expansion of domestic capitalists. In essence, the government recognized the importance of 'business confidence' in expanding accumulation and fully and voluntarily supported the private sector for mutual benefits. This practice helped me to understand how clientelism grew in Thailand because co-dependency between the government and the business is critical to gain what they are pursuing: extra-bureaucratic funds and personal gains for the government and political backup for the private sector. According to David Morell cited in Doner and Ramsay (2018), he put "without money, no network; without network no power; and without the power, no money" (p. 250). It is thus undeniable that the government together with the entrepreneurs was the key engine to run toward capitalist development through the operations of the state apparatus. This tendency was not changed up to the present.

The next question to follow is even though this practice generated a burden for the rice farmers and social conflicts, why did the government choose to neglect agriculture and the

farmers? Industrialization was the priority of the government. Favoritism for industrialization indicated a shift of agricultural employment toward greater productivity of industrial labor. When the government was involved in the business by sitting as a Board company, its concentration lay within the industrial or financial area rather than agriculture. The promotion in those fields was thus emphasized by the government. The growth of industrialization while the share of agriculture was sluggish is evidence to support this. However, the codependency relationship was not enough to indicate why agriculture was treated for granted among the other sectors. Additional explanation was, according to Doner and Ramsay (2018), because the interest of the two was in convergence; namely, the government viewed that rice export did not promise the significant expansion for Thailand to be economically self-sufficient, especially since there was a rare case of large-scale agriculture. Industrialization was a more profitable and appropriate solution to achieve the goal, but it required a large amount of capital for the heavier industry which only the private sector could support. Also, the rice farmers at that time were able to access the land, and independence to make a decision over agricultural production and finance on their own. The farmers could extract the resources above and under the land without impoverishing themselves. The government patron computes that misallocation of resources, income disparity, and an inability for production of the farmers are somehow a small price to pay its clients. Put simply, industrialization policy was the key to economic and capital developments while taking the surplus through taxation from rice producers. As Hewison (1989) said, "Policymakers had come to believe that industrial development would be the panacea for 'backwardness,' and that prosperity would naturally flow from industrialization. It had become an accepted fact that Thailand could no longer depend on agriculture alone and that industrial expansion had to proceed" (p. 86). I agreed it is true that the government was not weak letting the businesses control the national economy. In fact, De Schutter et al. (2019) also viewed that "the private and the public sectors shared the very same logic of modernity which divided the world into two spheres: the public (state) and the private (market)" (p. 389). Farmers were just labor, not a foundation of the nation as propagandized by the government. De Schutter et al. (2019) added that "the state and private both conspired to create the binary vision of the state and market duopoly through mechanisms, such as revolving doors, regulatory capture, and the military-industrial complex" (p. 390). Therefore, government apparatus on food, land, seeds, labor, including knowledge were designed in the way according to economic logic but failed to take social and ecological impacts on the agrifood system into consideration.

Capital development did not concentrate on industrial, commercial, and financial activities, but also on agrarian. Primary commodities were the foundation for export earnings and income of the peasants living in the countryside; therefore, argo-industry through capitalist production

emerged to increase economic development. The promotion and further expansion of the agro-industry appear certain to remain an important element of state policy. The government deviates from its formal duties of a public role in providing food for human survival and now redefined and treated it as a tradable commodity. Food security has never been the national priority but using the agrifood industry for earnings rather than a fundamental necessity for human survival or a natural product that could benefit all of us. The production and exchange of food, as with any other commodity, came to be driven by imperatives of profit and accumulation.

The main reason that the government views food as part of agricultural production as a trading commodity is because the government perceives its role as the state trustee protecting the national interest. Economically, its interest is to collect more tax and revenue. The government somehow translates tax as equal to capital. The more capital is accumulated, the more tax will be collected. This perception indicates that the government is not under the oppression of the agri-firms sector to serve what it needs through a state policy over the powerless farmers, but it is more a convergence of interests they both are pursuing. High yield of agricultural production, monoculture, and massive use of chemical fertilizers owned by the agribusiness is thus essential for the government to fulfill its imperative incumbent. Moreover, the patronage relationship ensures that the clients will be loyal to serve the doner's demands if they both can be able to be reciprocal. However, national interest does not limit to the economic aspect. The government fails to translate national interest on social and environmental aspects in a sustainable manner which constitutes gross inequality, repression, and oppression among the classes in the capitalist system.

9. Conclusion

This paper suggested that the hegemonic practice and governance structure of the agrifood system in Thailand intertwined between neo-classical/neo-liberal economic ideas and hegemonic historical-cultural ideas specific to the context of Thailand. The hegemonic agricultural practice represented certain characteristics including commodification, intensification, and extensification of cash-crops production with the application of technology, export-oriented industrialization, free trade and market competition, privatization of agrifood products and natural resources, as well as deregulation for investment which has been continued and reproduced for almost a century since the agricultural modernization in Thailand. However, such practice generated market failure, food security from largescale

monoculture, and food safety from excessive use of the generic modified seed, pesticides and chemical fertilizers because it did not take into account environmental and social costs.

In the beginning, the state was regarded as the prime agency in taking charge of dominating agricultural production including a subsidy to guarantee price stabilization. The government policies assisted a massive transfer of wealth from the paddy producers. Farmers were exploited by usurping their monetary benefit via industrial and trade policies which taxed agriculture by increasing the price of production inputs and consumer goods, while at the same time decreasing the price of rice domestically. It was then no surprise that the living conditions of the farmers were much worse off than their other sectors. Farmers living in the rural areas underwent high rents, severe land shortages, and broad and growing economic inequity which caused them unable to feed themselves and their families. When farmers demanded to be treated with respect and fairness by democratic movements, the government and the landowners felt it was a threat to them as it did not only mean that they were about to lose rice yields, but also that their power to solely determine how much rice would be paid by farmers as the rent was in shrink. Although farmers' movement toward agrarian reform was successful, some of them were assassinated, seriously injured, and disappeared by the use of armed force contributing very fear everywhere across the country discontinued all agrarian activities and movement.

The lesson learned from the above event plus the emergence of globalization and multinational corporations triggered the state's role from the direct state support in agriculture to just the mediator. Development of the private sector for agricultural improvement letting this sector access adequate supplies of inputs, focus on the high-value crop and utilize the agri-food processing facilities became the focus of the government rather than establishing the new institution or regulations. Therefore, Thai agriculture, not only in its own territory but also in neighboring countries where the Thai large agribusiness operated, was changing in kind of relationship, role, commodities, and productions. Agricultural activities expanded for processing, packaging, or preservation meaning that the private agribusiness turned into producing the vertically integrated and value-added agrifood which constituted the agribusiness conglomerates embracing retailing, trading, production, marketing, and much more. The concentration of vertical integration along the agrifood chains allowed the firms to play dominating role and to have market power controlling throughout the entire supply chain including cost reduction and efficiency, product quality from farming to retailing while the farmers themselves were no longer independent, self-employed, or single proprietors.

The state took the agricultural sector for granted and maintained its patron-client mentality with the large agrifood firms which constituted unequal power relations in the market and

social inequality at the expense of the farmers and nature. With its practice, farmers, therefore, were considered as labor for capital accumulation. Given the overview of Thai agriculture, it is essential for the state and corporations to change their view on agrifood that offered much more than just only a tradable commodity but also an essential resource, a cultural determinant, a human right, a public good, and natural resource. Agrifood production should always be translated for economic prosperity, together with social and ecological well-being holistically. In order to perceive these dimensions of agrifood, alternative ideas, and values that promote a fairer, more equitable, and ecologically sustainable agri-food system should be upheld to challenge the hegemonic agrifood system in order to equitably redistribute benefits at large in Thailand and other places where the large corporations' supply chain are located.

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