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A Regional Economic History of Thailand

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A Regional Economic History of Thailand

Porphant Ouyyanont



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PREFACE

A regional economic history of Thailand is important for a broad picture of the economic changes in the country for a number of reasons. First, most existing studies focus to a large extent on Bangkok and the economic progress of this city and the central areas. This is understandable. Bangkok itself, since its inception as Thailand's capital in 1782, has always been the most significant urban centre in Thailand — indeed, the only city of considerable size in the country until the very recent period. Thus, Bangkok has been the centre of court and government, manufacturing production, consumption, finance and foreign trade, and a host of other economic activities. This has naturally induced historians to look mainly at Bangkok for significant changes in the Thai economy, and to ignore what is happening in the rest of the country.

Again, there is a cultural dimension to Bangkok's centrality in the story of Thailand's economic development. Bangkok has traditionally been seen as the focus of social changes, and regional developments have been obscured by such an emphasis on the capital. Equally, many of the existing sources, whether records of government departments, newspapers, or descriptions by foreign travellers, all tend to pay attention primarily to Bangkok.

Of course, Bangkok is a major part of the story of Thai economic development, and in this study Bangkok is given a prime place as one of the important regions of Thailand. But we also emphasize changes in the other regions, give importance to the ways in which Bangkok had an impact on the other regions, as well as how changes in the other regions affected Bangkok.

Another reason for a regional approach to Thai development is that for much of the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, the realities of communications and transport in Thailand meant the existence of quite separate regional economies. Certainly river transport linked many parts of the country, but away from the main river arteries, road transport was often non-existent and local specialization and regional commercial hubs were prevalent. Such regional economies often fall below the radar of studies whose focus is national rather than regional. We may reflect, for example, that until the close of the nineteenth century, links between the northern cities of Chiang Mai and Lampang were often more developed with Burma (through overland trade) than they were with Siam proper. In the South, the mining industries were linked with Penang and Singapore rather than with Bangkok.

Regional diversity in raw materials, climate and soil, topography, access to the coasts or river communications, all encourage distinct regional economies to appear. Such distinct regional economies follow to some extent the major administrative regions which form the basis of much statistical material. Thus, Bangkok, the Central Region, the North, the Northeast, and the South, all to some extent display the main economic patterns which are our concern here.

Of course, administrative divisions can only be a rough guide to economic realities, and although we shall use the main administrative divisions (inevitable since so much official material is based on these divisions), we will also note the occasions where different regional classifications seem appropriate.

Any regional economic history of Thailand must place great weight on population patterns and agricultural systems. The broad distinctions between the “sticky rice” subsisting communities in the North and Northeast, and “*suay* rice” communities of other regions are fundamental to regional economic patterns as they developed. Thus, the subsistence crops affected work systems (such as communal methods of agriculture), the existence of export crops (sticky rice was never produced as a significant commercial crop), and the regional patterns of income distribution.

Indeed, one of the main purposes of this study is to explore the origins of the regional inequalities in wealth and income that we see in the present day. It is a contention of this study that such patterns can be traced back to the nineteenth century and beyond.

Finally, a theme of this study is to explore how the various regional economies were gradually drawn into a national economy. This involves looking at the evolution of administrative structures, the development of a national transportation network, and the necessary financial and other infrastructures that enabled a national economy to develop.

Various major sources of the study come from the following:

(1) Ministry Records from Bangkok National Archives

The most important materials for a study of the book are from the National Archives in Bangkok. Of those following sources of documents were often quoted: the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of the Capital, the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of Agriculture, Office of the Prime Minister, and the Ministry of Communications. There still exist thousands of documents in the Thai language written of the economic basis of Bangkok since the second half of the nineteenth century. However, it was very difficult to read them all in a limited length of time of my research. Possibly, it would take several years. Therefore, an attempt was made to limit the task to an identification of all documents necessary for writing of this book. So many of the useful unpublished data remained unexplored and need to be analysed. Of the most important sources from the Bangkok National Archives cover a number of aspects of this study.

Files from the Ministry of the Capital contain the following information: the population census, house and shop tax, the revenue which was collected by the Ministry of the Capital, the administration of Bangkok, especially the improvement of conditions of sanitation in Bangkok, report on the Chinese affairs in Bangkok and the provinces, the record of price of land in Bangkok, etc.

Files from the Ministry of Agriculture contain the following: canal construction in the Central Plain, rural labour markets in the provincial areas, such as source of labour supply in rice cultivation, the methods of payment for hired farm labourers, wage rates for unskilled and skilled labourers, etc.

Files from the British Consular Report contain information on regional production and exported trade from various *monthons*, the conditions of

work and income of migrant labourers, for example, *Khamu* workers in teak industry, shipping lines called at Bangkok Port, etc.

Files from Office of the Prime Minister contain information on national highways construction programme and the inspection of ministers in the provinces.

(2) Official Publications

Besides the archival sources, important information were obtained from the Thai Government including Department of Post and Telegraph, Central Service of Statistics, Ministry of Commerce and Communications, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Office of National Economic and Social Development Board, and National Statistical Office.

Department of Post and Telegraph's publication on the 1883 Bangkok Postal Census (*sarabanchi*) recorded the names of the residents (household heads) and their occupations and/or economic activities, social relation of masters and their corvee labour, ethnicity, type of houses, owner or renter status, and addresses classified by roads, ditch and irrigation canals, and clustered villages and river, the departments to which household heads were attached, the title and/or rank of household heads. The source is significant for understanding the economy and society of Bangkok in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Zimmerman's survey, *Siam: Rural Economic Survey, 1930-31*, was published by the Ministry of Commerce and Communications. The first nationwide rural economic survey provides invaluable information on various aspects of rural households including incomes, expenditures, farm costs, marketing, regional problems, etc.

Data from the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives on the 1953 Thailand Economic Farm Survey and Agricultural Statistics of Thailand provide information on household income and expenditures, cash and income in kind, agricultural production, etc.

Data from Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board on Gross Domestic Product, Gross Regional and Provincial Product, and Income Distribution and Poverty Study provide information on national, regional and provincial economic development.

Data from the National Statistical Office on the Population and Housing Census, the Labor Force Survey, Business Trade and Services Survey, Industrial Census, Agricultural Census, the Household Socio-Economic Survey, *Statistical Yearbook of Thailand* provide information on the structural changes in demographic situations, and the working conditions and changing economic conditions in Bangkok and the provinces, especially in the countryside.

(3) Newspapers, Research and Theses

Last but not least, other sources were consulted, including newspapers, such as *The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail* (in the early twentieth century), research and theses, especially in the field of provincial and regional history.

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This book aims to bring together my various published and unpublished academic works, pursued for some 20 years, and such works are included here in the bibliography. In the course of writing this book, I had the opportunity to visit various academic institutes. In Japan, I undertook research at Kyoto University Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies in June 1998–May 2000, and at Kyoto University Centre for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) in December 2003–May 2004. I am most grateful to these institutions and to Professor Yoshihiro

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In Singapore, I was invited as a Visiting Senior Fellow attached to the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute (formerly the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies) between August 2014 and January 2016. Here I had the opportunity to revise my manuscript and undertake additional research. I am particularly grateful to Mr Tan Chin Tiong, Director of the Institute, and to Dr Michael Montesano and Dr Terence Chong, coordinators of the Thai Studies Programme, for inviting me.

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Sole responsibility for the views expressed in the book, of course, rests with the author.

Porphant Ouyyanont
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GLOSSARY

<i>Amphoe</i>	District, administrative subdivision of province
<i>Chao Phraya</i>	The highest rank of the Thai ancient civil nobility
<i>Changwat</i> or <i>Changwad</i>	Province
<i>Chanot thidin</i>	Land deed denoting full title
<i>Chao</i>	Lord, ruler
<i>Hab</i>	A measure of weight equal to 60 kg
Isan	Northeast-region of Thailand
<i>Khlong</i>	Canal
<i>Krasuang</i>	Ministry
<i>Krom</i>	Government department
<i>Kwien</i>	A Thai capacity measure equal to 1,000 kg
<i>Luang</i>	Conferred rank, higher than “Khun”, below “Phra”
<i>Monthon</i>	Unit of provincial administration, one <i>monthon</i> contains a set of <i>changwats</i>
<i>Mueang</i>	City, town

<i>Nakhonban</i>	City administration
<i>Nai Roi</i>	Caravan trader or labour broker
<i>NS5, NS3, NS3K, NS3khor</i>	Land deed denoting occupancy rate
<i>SPK 4-01/NK/STK/KSN</i>	Land deed denoting right of utilization
<i>Phra</i>	Conferred rank, higher than “Luang”, below “Phraya”
<i>Phraya</i>	Conferred rank, higher than “Phra”, below “Chaophraya”
Picul	One picul equal to 133.5 lb or 60 kg
<i>Rai</i>	Unit of land; 1 <i>rai</i> = 0.16 hectare = 1,600 square metres
R&R	Rest and Recuperation
<i>Suai</i>	Tax, especially tax in kind
<i>Tanon</i>	Road
<i>Tical</i>	European word for Thai baht
<i>Tumbon</i> or <i>Tambon</i>	Group of villages, official administrative subdivision under <i>amphoe</i>
<i>Wat</i>	Buddhist Monastery

ABBREVIATIONS

ACMECS	=	Ayeyawady–Chao Phraya–Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy
AEC	=	ASEAN Economic Community
BCR	=	British Consular Report
BTWM	=	<i>Bangkok Times Weekly Mail</i>
DORAS	=	Development Oriented Research on Agrarian Systems
ESCAP	=	The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
EWEC	=	East–West Economic Corridor
GDP	=	Gross Domestic Product
GMS	=	Greater Mekong Subregion
GPP	=	Gross Provincial Product
GRP	=	Gross Regional Product
ILO	=	International Labor Organization
kg	=	kilogram
km	=	kilometre
N.A.	=	National Archives, Bangkok

NESDB	=	Office of National Economic and Social Development Board
NSEC	=	North–South Economic Corridor
NSO	=	National Statistical Office
PRO	=	Public Record Office
TDRI	=	Thailand Development Research Institute
USOM	=	United States Operation Mission

SIAMESE MONEY AND WEIGHT

A. Money:

800 bia	= 1 fueang
2 fueang	= 1 salueng
4 salueng	= 1 baht
1 satang	= 1/100 baht
4 baht	= 1 tumlueng
20 tumlueng	= 1 chang

B. Expressed as decimals of baht:

1 bia	= .00015625
1 fueang	= .125
1 salueng	= .25
1 baht	= 1.0
1 tumlueng	= 4.0
1 chang	= 80.0

REIGNS OF THE KINGS OF THE CHAKRI DYNASTY

Rama I	Phra Phulthayotfa	1782–1809
Rama II	Phra Phutthaloetla	1809–1824
Rama III	Phra Nangklao	1824–1851
Rama IV	Mongkut	1851–1868
Rama V	Chulalongkorn	1868–1910
Rama VI	Vajiravudh	1910–1925
Rama VII	Prajadhiphok	1925–1935
Rama VIII	Ananda Mahidol	1935–1946
Rama IX	Bhumibol Adulyadej	1946–2016
Rama X	Maha Vajiralongkorn	2016–