

The Thai Village Economy in the Past (Chattip Nartsupha)

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Thai Economic History

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Topics

- Primordial village communities
- Subsistence village communities under the Sakdina system (1455-1855)
- Shifting away from subsistence economy (post-Bowring)

Primordial village communities

Primordial village communities

- Characteristics
 - Rice producers, occupying low-land basin.
- Contrast with tribal communities



Social structure of primordial communities

- Social structure
 - Ownership of land & ruling system.
- The importance of self-rule
 - As shown by peasant rebellions



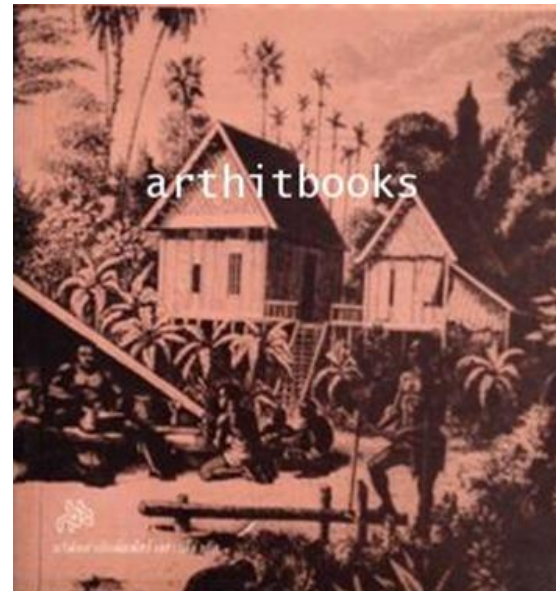
Subsistence village communities under
the Sakdina system (1455-1855)

Sakdina system and the villages

- Sakdina system & village communities.
 - Entitlement over land.
 - King, nobles, and commoners
 - Commoners lost entitlement when?
 - Sakdina system was not actually interested in owning the land, why?

Sakdina system and the villages

- The sakdina system did not penetrate into the village. This contrast with Western feudalism.



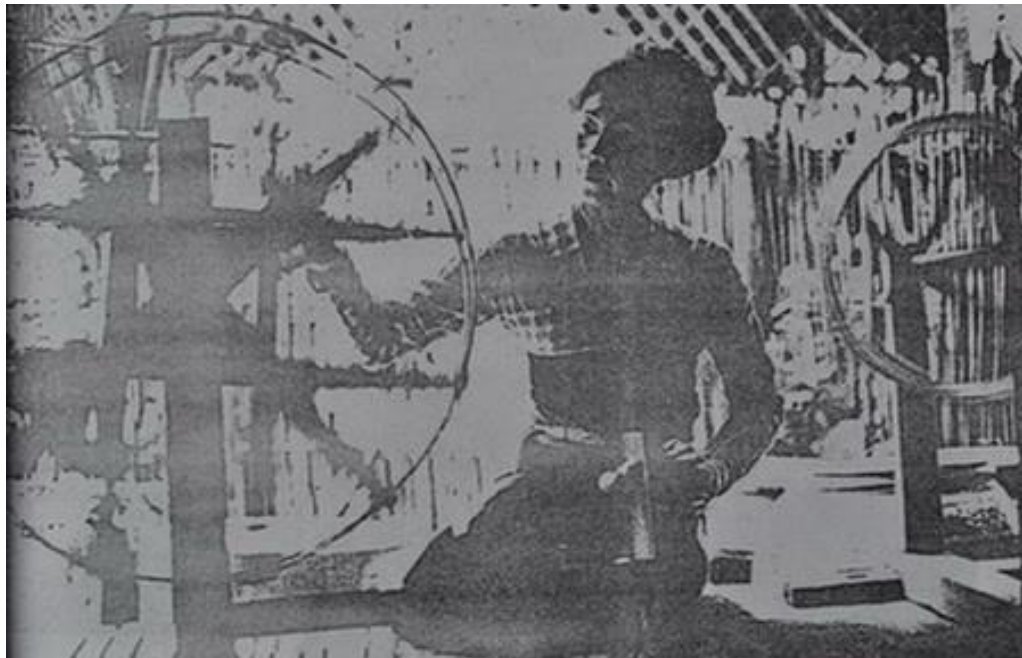
- This helped prolonged the Thai sakdina system.

Thai village communities under sakdina

- Thai villages communities under the sakdina system continued to be self-reliance.
- Evidences
 - Lack in use of technology in agricultural production.
 - Other activities as evidences of self-reliance

Thai village communities under sakdina

- Textile weaving was an important activity. Women had to be able to do weaving. Each village weaved their textile for their own use.



Thai village communities under sakdina

- Village subsistence economy
 - Self-consumption & limited exchange.
 - Only activity beyond self-reliance was collecting forest products
- Implications
 - Ammar Siamwalla's observation “**international trade co-existed with subsistence economy**”.

Villages' production under *sakdina*

- Production in village economy
 - Most crucial factor: labour
 - But no division of labour & labour market
- Abundance of land: implication?
- Villages' production relations were also characterised by **(1) inner cohesion; and (2) state's extraction.**

Villages' production under *sakdina*

- Villages' inner cohesion
 - Moving together
 - Allocation of land.
 - Family ties
- **The strength of inner cohesion meant there was not much division in villages.**
 - **Divisions was mainly villages/state and peasants/nobles.**

Villages' production under *sakdina*

- The extraction of labour and reactions



Villagers' Beliefs

- Villagers' beliefs indicate the significance of their self-reliance and self-rule.
 - “Ghosts of ancestors” VS "national-level ghosts".
 - Buddhism beliefs VS Non-Buddhist beliefs.



Implications of villages under Sakdina

- Bourgeoisies & village communities.
 - Villages did not produce merchants or craftsmen.
 - How about travelling traders



ขบวนเกวียนของ 'นายฮ้อย' อีสาน
พ่อค้าแห่งที่ราบสูง

- Limited interaction between villages
- It was only until the Chinese settled that the domestic trade grew, still.

Shifting away from subsistence
economy (post-Bowring)

Post-Bowring central region

- Impact of Bowring Treaty
 - Increased rice production.
 - From 5% of export to 50%
 - From 5.8 millions rai in 1850 to 9.2 millions in 1905
- The central plain was the main production area.
 - Production was increased through expanding land use. Farmers were brought to settle along newly dig canals.

Post-Bowring central region

- Impact on cultivating farmers
 - The replacement of corvee by cash payment
 - Losing significance of common ownership
- But evidence suggested that Thai village communities tried to remain subsistence, and did not fully embrace the market system.
 - Continuing to produce for self-use & limited introduction of new production technology.

Post-Bowring central region

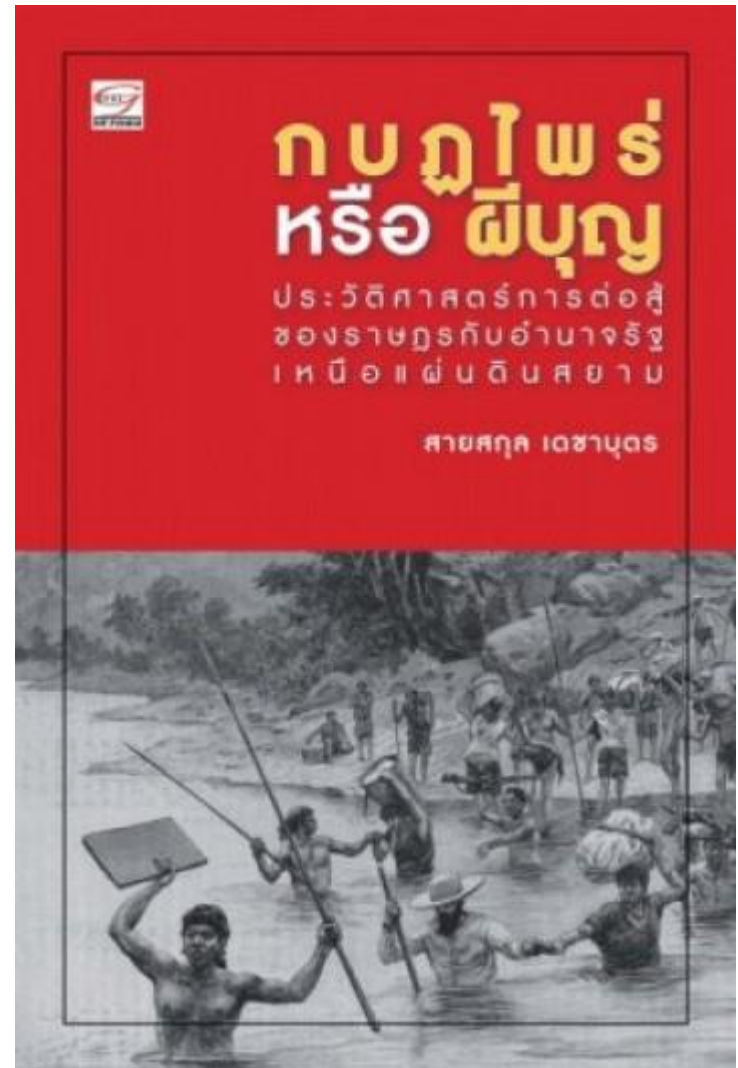
- Market system dominated more by Chinese
 - Chinese as the middle man, linking the villages to the market system
 - The Chinese played role as lender
 - Chinese causing the emergence of landless farmers
- Parasitic-capitalism, therefore, was the main threat to the self-sufficiency of village communities.

Post-Bowring in other regions

- Northern region
 - Export of timbers and forest products, but these did not affect village communities.
 - Difficulty in transportation a factor
- Southern region
 - Main export was tin. But operation of tin-mine was owned by outsiders (Chinese and Western capitals).
 - Subsistence economy existed until WWII

Post-Bowring in other regions

- Isan region
 - Highest degree of subsistence. Trade in Isan was mostly trade in forest product. The access of Chinese merchants were limited.
 - Isan peasants the most rebellious



Summary

- Village economy in the past was subsistence economy.
 - Village communities were dragged into capitalism, but they resisted.
- State and markets were aliens to the village communities.
 - Villagers resisted the extrusion of state and market.
- Thai capitalism was parasitic of state. Their extraction relied on privilege, and limited their effect in changing rural communities.

Counter-arguments to Chattip

Overall criticism

- Romanticising rural life by putting too much emphasis on persistence, rather than on transformation and adaptation.
 - His stressing of the value of “subsistence” too normative.
- The timeline (400 years+) and the source of information (oral history) are loose.

J.Kemp (The dialectics of village and state in modern Thailand)

- Village communities was in fact more of the unit of public administration that began after Rama V reform.
- The system actually born out of the reform of public administration, and were means to rule peasants.

K.Bowie (Unravelling the myth of subsistence economy)

- A closer look at weaving in the 18 century Northern Region.
- Found the emphasis on subsistence to underplay
 - Division of labour
 - Class division
 - Poverty
 - Internal trade
 - And the changing dynamics of production and consumption