

ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to study the impact of rice and rubber on the economy and society of the planters in the Songkhla Basin from 1896-1996. This study also includes the impact of the factors, both inside and outside the country, that affected the production development, the relation of the production to, consumption and purchasing. It also focuses on the problems caused by rice and rubber production.

The study finds that before 1910, the economy and the way of life of the peasants in Songkhla Basin were under feudal system. The farmers used the old traditional production processes. They depended on natural sources and primitive tools. The purpose of growing rice was mainly for family consumption, not for trade. The purchasing under the capitalist system occurred only in urban regions, in particular, the coastal towns like Songkhla. There was no capitalist since the profits were used for supporting the feudalism, not for recovering the cost of production. The peasants' lives under feudal system were torturous. They were tyrannized and requisitioned by the government. Thus, they had to form a community cooperation to protect themselves.

Between 1910-1957, the economics and lifestyles of rice and rubber planters were changing. The rice planters began to grow rice for trade while those who stayed on the higher land began to plant rubber trees as their secondary occupation.

Rice production can be divided into two categories. The first one was production in vast area by the Chinese capitalists. The production was for trade. They used machines to do the coordinate process cultivation. They could gain high profits as they not only produce and sell the rice, but also cheated peasants by purchasing at very low prices.

The second one was production in small area by local peasants. The aim was to sell the overproduction rice to gain money and use as their children's educational capital and to upgrade their social status. This production was of the traditional system. There was no technological improvement, but the rice growing area was expanded.

Money did not play a major role for the peasant as there was an abundance of natural resources. The capital was used for supporting education and purchasing consumer goods only.

The rubber planting in Songkhla Basin was begun with Chinese funds and labor under the support of the Thai government. Later, Thai farmers took on the planting as their secondary occupation to support their family income. The planting technique was old; the products had low quality and the merchant forced the price down. However, as the cost of rubber production was low, the low price of the rubber did not bother the planters. Thus, capitalism did not affect their lives in particular.

Between 1957-1996, the economic and social conditions of the lives of the rice and rubber planters changed dramatically. For the rice planters, the explicit change was the alteration in their way of life from self-sufficiency through production to production for trade. Meanwhile, the rubber planters took on rubber planting as their vocation. Thus capitalism was introduced to the community. The market was run by the invisible hand.

Rice production for trade required new means of production such as tractors, insecticides and chemical fertilizer. Thus the production costs increased and the prosperity of the ecosystem decreased. The rice planters tended to depend more on the market system. If they had to sell the rice at low price, or could not do the harvesting because of natural perils, they would lose out and have no budget to produce rice in the next season. They had to raise a loan for the family needs and for purchasing the materials needed for production for the next cultivation. Also, they had to plant according to the demand of the market.

Furthermore, the good relationship within the community began to fade away. Money played a crucial role in the society as farmers had to purchase the production materials and consumer goods. People began to show a lack of mercy. Meanwhile, the failure of cultivation motivated the younger generation to leave their communities and abandon the fields to find new jobs in the urban region.

On the same hand, the economy and way of life of the rubber planters were much the same as the rice planters. Taking rubber planting as their vocation, the planters had to pay for good quality rubber and for improving the production

technology. The cost of production increased while the price of the produced rubber was low. The planters had low profits or even deficits. There was no reserve fund as the money was used for daily consumption. The rubber planters, too, had to take loans when extra money was needed. Some gave up and changed to fruit orchards since they provided more profit. Some found new secondary occupations. The youngsters then tended to leave the farm to work in factories and let the elderly, who were lacking of strength to expand the farm, take care of the field. The division of land due to inheritance also decreased the size of the field.

The problem in rice and rubber planting was that the planters were in deficit for many reasons, such as, the products had low quality, the merchants rolled the prices back and cheated. Thus, each farmer tried to form a cooperation and improve their products and to enhance the chance of bargaining. However, there was only little cooperation and success was rather limited.

In my opinion, the peasants should be less dependent on the market system. They ought to do multi farming instead of mono farming and revive the ecosystem by using organic fertilizer and natural insecticides instead of chemical ones. Meanwhile, the government should urge coordination among the peasants. The campaign of using Thai products made from rice or rubber should be launched. There should be more research on rubber and rice seeds. Moreover, the government should allocate enough budgets and academic support to the planters rather than guiding them or telling them what to do. These methods may help improve the economy and way of life of the rice and rubber planters in Songkhla Basin in the future.