

Strengthening Thai Social Value with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

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Abstract

It is the empirical truth that Thai social value has been changed since the emergence of technology advancement. This study aims to (1) evaluate the level of sufficiency economy practice of the populace in urban and rural communities (2) compare the practical use of sufficiency economy between urban society and rural community and (3) to investigate opinions the cultivation of sufficiency economy-based social values. The three cities considered in the study were Ubon Ratchathani, Si Sa Ket, and Surin. 350 people living in both urban and rural communities in those cities were the population analyzed in the 12 month study. The tools employed were questionnaires and interviews that were analyzed through descriptive statistics: mean, standard deviation, and t-Test. The study reveals that (1) the practical use of sufficiency economy in the aspects of the three core elements and two special conditions were as follows: doing the right job ($\bar{x} = 4.41$); maintaining Thai being ($\bar{x} = 4.29$); effort into useful things ($\bar{x} = 3.99$); opening mind to globalization with careful consideration; ($\bar{x} = 3.88$), and being honest ($\bar{x} = 4.37$) (2) The practical use of sufficiency economy between urban society and rural community was compared, regarding the hypothesis stated that an application of SE between urban society and rural community is not different, and the sub hypothesis that an application of sufficiency economy between urban society and rural community is different. The finding revealed that the SE on the aspects of moderation and moral integrity are statistically different at 0.05 resulting rejection of main hypothesis and accepting sub hypothesis and (3) the

most important factor of cultivating social value that based on sufficiency economy is being a role model.

Keywords: Strengthening Thai; Thai Social Value; Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

Introduction

Environment greatly influences value changes, particularly in rapid globalization based on the development of transportation and information technology (Danthamrongkul, 2003). As such, it reveals that the growth of relationships between the economy, politics, technology, and culture connects people, organizations, and business sectors together as if it were a global village as people from all over the world are melted together influenced by economics, socio-cultural mores, technology, and politics. The social change has proceeded rapidly because of the advancement of science and technology which consecutively take place to the value of Thai people.

As we consider the effects of globalization, the social values tend to focus on material possessions rather than the traditional Thai focus on mental and spiritual aspects. So, people are dominated by lustful desires and cupidity and it brings about the improper social value infiltrated into the society as follows: (1) paying excess attention to accumulation of currency and wealth; the rich are perceived as being more accepted in society. They acquire all they want and desire by just paying money. So people struggle to live affluent life styles, (2) preferring a luxurious life reflected in the use of imported brand-name products that they hope will lead to being recognized as high-society persons, (3) failing to estimate their ability to pay for this life style, (5) lacking self-discipline, (6) embracing the lottery and believing in superstitions (6) prefer outstanding self-esteem, fawn upon powerful and corrupted person.

Both urban society and rural community are so distinctive in their characteristic, particularly independent mind, adherence to nation, religion, and king; while maintaining proper customs. These two factors identify responsibility and the way of life of Thai people. Influenced by foreign culture, life is somewhat changed, for example, there's a variety of jobs, the social gap between the rich and the poor is increasing, and life is really competitive focusing more on money. Though the rural community still keeps up their identity, their life is also getting changed because of the

context in this globalized era, the economic growth, demand from market, and the inability to control some factors from the outside.

Development that is based on the Sufficiency Economy philosophy is development that is based on thoughtfulness and sustainability. This kind of development emphasizes moderation, rationality, immunity, and the application of knowledge, carefulness, and morality in making decisions and taking actions. The Sufficiency Economy philosophy provides a guide to appropriate ways of living and behaving. It was developed from the traditional Thai lifestyle and can be applied to all situations. It derives from an understanding of the always-changing world and aims at of stable and sustainable development by protecting from dangers and crises sake. A Sufficiency Economy is not an “economy of the poor,” as some have said. It does not call for extreme austerity or belt-tightening. The King has advised his subjects to get rich, but he also encourages them to share their wealth with others and wants them to be able to maintain their riches in bad times. He gives three principles and one foundation for national development. And they can be applied to benefit the management of any organization.

The first principle is that reason, not desire, should be the source of guidance. It is not wise to follow a tide thoughtlessly. Thailand should have the courage to choose its own way of development instead of following a global tide. The second principle is moderation. One must know one’s basis and potential. This knowledge will reveal what one is and how one should grow successfully. The third principle is immunity, because one cannot know what will happen tomorrow. When situations change rapidly, it is difficult to work out a development plan because there are many risk factors. A planner needs to have vision and must try to foresee possibilities, good and bad. With a vision for the economy, for instance, planners can consider whether biodiesel should be introduced to cushion the impacts of fuel prices. Immunity is the result of risk management.

Decisions and actions that reflect the Sufficiency Economy philosophy require knowledge and morality as their base. Knowledge means adequate information and thoughtfulness to integrate fields

of knowledge in making plans. Morality means honesty, patience, perseverance, and wisdom as the fundamentals of life. The Sufficiency Economy philosophy will lead to balanced and sustainable development, and those who apply it will be ready to cope with all kinds of changes involving the economy, society, the environment, knowledge, and technology as illustrated in Figure1.

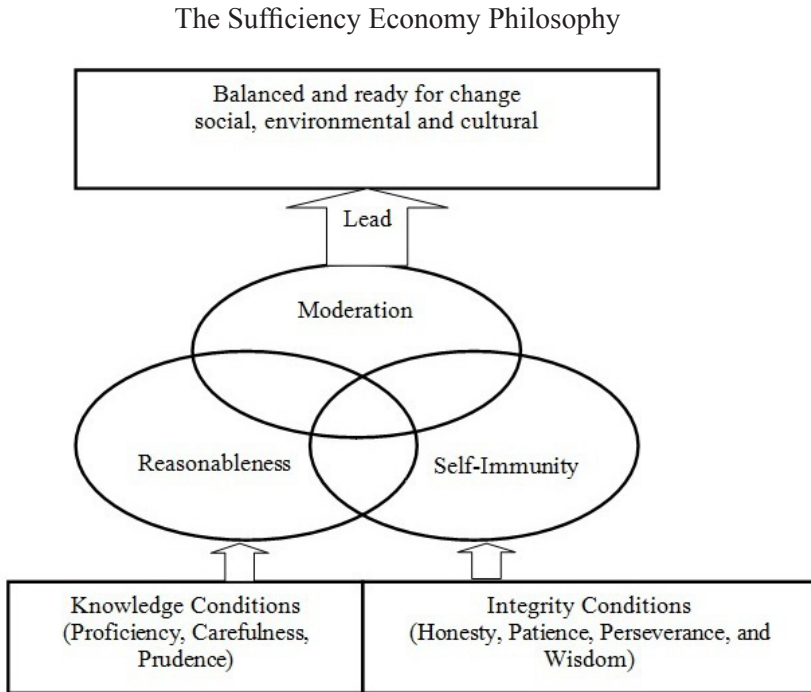


Figure 1: To illustrate the meaning of sufficiency economy with a simple image.

In the three lower northeastern provinces (Ubon Ratchathani, Si sa ket, and Surin) the people have a similar way of life. Living without the influence of globalization in the aspects of economic, society, politics, and cultures is unavoidable factors. The competitive life brings a lesser degree of interdependence because people's lives are in a rush resulting in the dismissal of some good core values.

As aforementioned, social values that are based on global-

ization seems to go the wrong ways rapidly and continually. It probably influences the spirit and morality which are two traits greatly important to the country's development. This challenges the author to conduct the study on the application of sufficiency economy principles to strengthening proper social values and ending improper behavior of people in response to globalization that focuses on materialism rather than mental health. It tends to cause disunity and competitiveness in Thai society rather than good social norms and rules.

Research Objectives

1. Study the level of sufficiency economy practice of populace in urban society and rural community
2. Compare the practical use of sufficiency economy between urban society and rural community
3. To investigate opinions the cultivation of sufficiency economy-based social values

Significance of the Study

Strengthening social values have been traced by people in Thai society in rapid globalization growth by following proper social norms in order to be social advancement and nation security.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study includes:

1. Target areas of the study is the lower northeastern provinces; Ubon Ratchathani, Sisaket and Surin
2. Population of the study is people living in urban society and rural community in the three cities who are chosen as samples in this study 350 by multi-stage sampling technique.
3. Variables are urban society and rural community as independent variables and characteristics of sufficiency economy as dependent variables.
4. The study took 12 months from September 2013 to August 2014.

Review Literature

1. Globalization

Globalization refers to the process of international integration arising from the interchange of world views, products, ideas, and other aspects of culture. Advances in transportation and telecommunications infrastructure, including the rise of the telegraph and its posterity the Internet, are major factors in globalization, generating further interdependence of economic and cultural activities. Globalization that results a series of life includes the change of socio-cultural context, consumerism, media and technology, and particularly people are lured to work in the city by education system (Thai Fund Foundation 2009). To cope with a result of globalization, an individual should be able to lead reasonably a comfortable life without excess or overindulgence in luxury. That is, if extravagance brings happiness it is permissible only as long as it is within the means of the individual.

2. Concepts of Social Structure

Thai structures are divided into 2 types; urban society and rural one. In the society rural-urban disparities have become different. The rural family in the typical village setting is an extended family with many generations living in one house, or many houses within the same compound. It is here that the Thai child learns codes of behavior that will guide him throughout much of his later life, whether it is spent in the village or beyond it with close relation to their parents. Its local environment and custom are similar, for example, person does remember the goodness done to him by another and remember to reciprocate it. With regards to religious activities, people are constantly engaged in merit-making, and numerous other religious ceremonies. These activities are religious rituals. On the other hand, the urban society is rather more formal. It is economic-based community. So the urban life stresses on power and prosperity with luxurious life being to climb up social ladder (Thai Social Structure, 2012: online).

The Thai's way of life, however, is not similar throughout the

country because of the diversity of geography, natural resources, as well as the migration of population and ethnic group resulting different social characteristic, based on the influence of politics and economic situation (Institute for the Promotion and Development of Learning Innovation, 2013: online). One outstanding similarity of Thai citizen is over 80% of population are in agriculture sector. The presentations of most Thai interactions are honest and sincere, and the Thai are bound for sincere and deep reciprocal relationships. Reciprocity of kindness, particularly the value of being grateful is highly valued characteristic trait in Thai society. Buddhism has exerted a strong influence on the people's everyday life. Religious and spiritual life has secured a very high and important place in the cognition of Thai people in general. With regards to religious activities, the Thai are constantly engaged in merit-making, and numerous other religious ceremonies. These activities are religious rituals. And as Buddhist country, there are such activities to perform all year around, at home, at work, and in the community.

The ways to bring up each person is different depending on the surroundings, habit, behavior, thought, belief, as well as the values that a nursing mother has under the changing circumstance of globalization. The rural-urban society has been with Thai people for times. The cities have been changed, according to times and technology. People prefer materialism to mental state like money comes first.

3. Importance of Social Values

Characteristic of Thai social values are a practical and typical source of social norm for people that include:

- 1) Value running counter to the behaviors of the overarching society or culture may be transmitted and maintained within small subgroups of society. It is used to promote the creation of roles in society which allows for people of different levels of social class structure to be able to function properly.
- 2) Been seized upon in the society for times, values is regarded

as the identification of human group. By the distinctive and different learning process of people, innate behavior of individual lasts for long by repetitive learning cycle.

3) The value adhered to people's mind is as required by human group. It is characterized by diversity of values that is disguised in those. So, significance in each single value is different that make people choose what to rely on.

4) The value is accepted among cluster members as a social norm identifying the individuality and ideology as the base of making decision for whether it be admiration or condemnation.

5) Value is regarded as custom for making decision and solving conflict in any situation. A decision will be made up based on several values, but the value sometimes against itself. Therefore, the value system is the combination of all criterions to opt for alternative.

6) Value and motivation: motivation is another factor of values as same as other ones, for example, mindfulness, sensation, and behavior. Emergence of values and practical way is caused by motivation which is the best practice leading to success.

7) Value and human need: safety, love, and esteem are typical needs of human. Most people have a need for stable self-respect and self-esteem. This may include a need for status, recognition, fame, prestige, and attention. Value is other form of human need that is target-oriented and is practices through the certain society.

4. Values of social Thailand

In regard to review literature from several papers as the secondary data, it reveals that Thai typical values are both positive and negative depending on an individual's attitude and experience. If it is considered negative, that's avoidable circumstance. On the contrary, if it is regarded positive, people should keep following to be the strength of society as in Table1.

Table 1: Distinction of values between urban society and rural community.

No.	Difference	
	urban society	rural community
1	Enjoy luxury life with wasteful spending	Save economy
2	Brand name materialism	Local product prefer
3	Fawn upon plutocrat	Respect individual 's generosity
4	Materialism	Admiration for morality
5	Be selfish and be with competitive life	Be generous and sacrifice to public matter
6	Believe in rationale	Believe in superstition
7	Prefer lottery	Prefer gambling
8	Less joining religious activity	Much prefer to join religious activity
9	Competitive and time-based life	Natural-based life
10	Lack of discipline	Interdependent community

In sum, it is noticeable that rural-urban disparities are much different causing by diverse context, for example, urban work life is so competitive in such prime time to climb up the social ladder; on the other hand, rural life is not much adhere to external factors. Their lives typically tie to self-managed agriculture sector. But, what connects their lives together is the belief in luck and fortune. Good luck brings happiness and convenience in life, particularly the luck in lottery which is a popular off-sweat activity. However, typical values involved in this study of rural people living in those three provinces Ubon Ratchathani, Sisaket, and Surin do not cover overall answer. Conducting further study on globalization based values is such interesting topic. Negative impact from globalization is harmless to people's way of life if living with carefulness.

Methodology

Population, samples, research tools, data collection, data analysis,

and statistic used for analysis are detailed as follows:

1. Population in this study is people living in urban society and rural area in the lower three cities 4,992,434 people (Office Statistics Thailand 2012, : online).

2. Probability sampling technique was used to identify sampling by applying multi-stage random sampling; systematic sampling and stratified sampling. There are three important steps as follows:

Step 1: sort out type of society; urban society and rural community

Step 2: stratify population to province, district, and sub district

Step 3: sample size was calculated by the use of Yamane (1973) with an error 0.05 and got 350 people of sample group

Step 4: a purposive sampling technique was used to choose 6 people as qualitative sample group

3. Research tools were questionnaires and semi-structured interview that based on scopes, objectives, and conceptual framework of the study.

4. Data collection:

Primary data was collected from sample group through 350 sets of questionnaire and checked its validity later.

Secondary data was collected by reviewing Thai social context in the aspects of society, economics, politics, and technology from conference proceedings, journals, textbooks, and electronic media.

5. Data analysis and statistics used:

Part 1: An analysis of population's general information by descriptive statistic; frequency and percentage.

Part 2: An analysis of opinion toward globalization impact in aspects of economics, society, politics, and culture in both positive and negative side, present its percentage and describe results under the table

Part 3: An analysis of relations between socio-economic and politic and cultural aspects and value, present in table form, and describe below

Hypothesis

Hypothesis : The application of the sufficiency economy philosophy in urban society and rural communities is different.

H₀: Application of the sufficiency economy philosophy in urban society and rural communities is not different.

H₁: Application of the sufficiency economy philosophy in urban society and rural communities is different.

Results

1. General information on respondents

Most of the respondents were male (54.50%) earning approximately 5,000 THB per month or average income is 12, 697 THB per month, and 10,001-15,000 THB per month, respectively. In order, respondents' education background is diploma to bachelor (41.10%) and below senior high school or vocational certificate (40.00%). The respondents' job is farmers (29.00%), and government employees (20.00%). For marital status, they are married (56.00%) and single (36.50%). 70% Live in rural communities and 30% in urban society. Regarding accommodations, 85% own their house and 12.50% rent their house.

2. Practical use of sufficiency economy application

Based on the sufficiency economy philosophy, mean and standard deviation was rated as very important as follows; (1) the practical use of sufficiency economy in the aspects of the three core elements and two special conditions were as follows: doing the right job ($\bar{x} = 4.41$); maintaining Thai being ($\bar{x} = 4.29$); effort into useful things ($\bar{x} = 3.99$); opening mind to globalization with careful consideration; ($\bar{x} = 3.88$), and being honest ($\bar{x} = 4.37$) as in Table 1. As the significant results in the table, it will be analyzed and discussed in the summary and discussion section.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

Characteristic of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy	Demeanor Level		
	\bar{X}	S.D.	Degree
Moderation			
1. Select appliances that are affordable and cost effective	4.39	0.72	intermediate
2. Integrity in their occupation	4.41	0.70	intermediate
3. Seeking savings in consumer products	3.99	0.93	intermediate
4. Spending money efficiently	3.83	0.94	intermediate
Reasonableness			
1. Maintain the uniqueness of Thailand	4.29	0.75	intermediate
2. Popular consciousness Thailand	4.25	0.77	intermediate
3. Not gambling or using narcotics	4.01	1.09	intermediate
Self-Immunity			
1. Invested in something useful	3.99	0.93	intermediate
2. Foresight to think about long-term effects.	3.85	0.90	intermediate
3. Not invest over the talent of their own.	3.84	0.88	intermediate
4. Saving money	3.69	0.96	intermediate
Knowledge Conditions			
1. Investment to achieve more knowledge	3.68	0.88	intermediate
2. Sharing and exchanging knowledge with other-people	3.81	0.77	intermediate
3. Continuous learning activities	3.62	0.93	intermediate
4. Consider the data from various data sources for discretionary	3.88	0.81	intermediate
Integrity Conditions			
1. Being honest	4.37	0.71	intermediate
2. Being patient and persevering	4.28	0.84	intermediate
3. Being careful	4.10	0.82	intermediate
4. Being responsible	4.29	0.73	intermediate
5. Not exploiting or hurting others	4.30	0.81	intermediate

Source: Survey and calculations

Remarks: 4.51-5.00 = the most important, 3.51-4.50 = important, 2.51-3.50 = Intermediate importance, 1.51-2.50 = slight importance and 1.00-1.50 = least important

3. A comparative study of sufficiency economy application between urban society and rural community

The comparative study of the application of sufficiency economy principles in urban society and rural community for the aspect of moral integrity is statistically different 0.05 but for moderation and reasonableness they were not different as shown in Table 2. As the significant results in the table, it will be analyzed and discussed in the summary and discussion section.

Table 3: Comparative study of sufficiency economy application between urban society and rural community

Sufficiency economy principles	Urban Society		Rural Society		t	df	Sig.
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.			
Moderation	4.10	0.72	4.17	0.64	-.713	197	.476
Reasonableness	4.18	0.73	4.18	0.67	-.002	197	.999
Self-Immunity	4.05	0.68	3.75	0.74	2.592	197	.010*
Knowledge Condition	3.88	0.70	3.68	0.64	1.955	197	.052
Integrity Condition	4.10	0.76	4.33	0.57	-2.387	197	.018*

Source: Survey and calculations

*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level

4. To investigate opinions the cultivation of sufficiency economy-based social values

Arranged from the top down, sufficiency economy based guidelines for cultivating culture and strengthening value are (1) being a good model by following the sufficiency economy principles, (2) displaying unity, (3) supporting community people to learn and apply the sufficiency economy principles to their lives, (4) be under the Buddha's footsteps, (5) establishing a social agreement, (6) starting to learn the sufficiency economy principles by applying them into routine activities,

and (7) disseminating the strengths of sufficiency economy to community as shown in Table 3. As the significant results in the table, it will be analyzed and discussed in the summary and discussion section.

Table 4: Sufficiency economy based guidelines for cultivating and strengthening Thai social value
(arranged in order of decreasing importance)

Guidelines for cultivating and strengthening Thai social value	Significance	
	amount	ordering
1. Strengthen community people living with sufficiency economy	179	3
2. Establish a social agreement	179	5
3. Be unified	179	2
4. Be a good model by following the sufficiency economy principles	179	1
5. Apply sufficiency economy principles in routine activities	179	6
6. Follow in the Buddha's footsteps	179	4
7. Disseminate the strengths of sufficiency economy in the community	179	7
8. Encourage the faith for positive social values	179	8

Source: Survey and calculations

Remark: More than 1 reply

Summary and Discussions

1. Regarding the three elements and two conditions, mean and standard deviation of social values arranged from the top are moderation; it is important to strengthen moral fiber, so that everyone adheres first and foremost to the principles of honesty and integrity and finally, they will live happily in society. Reasonableness includes maintain Thai culture because the Thais are generous and mutually depend on each other. Next, self-immunity: it is to invest for the utmost benefit for living. Knowledge: it is to open the mind to receiving surrounding information and considering

it well before making decision. Ethics: it refers to integrity. If we are given faith in our ability, we will be loved and trusted by other people.

2. Looking at the application of the sufficiency economy principles in a globalized society we see a difference between urban society and rural communities in the aspects of self-immunity and ethics. It is statistically different (0.05) because the context between these two plays an important role in routine activities. Urban life is really competitive but rural life is interdependent. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen the moral fiber of the people, so that everyone, particularly public officials, academics, and business people at all levels, adhere first and foremost to the principles of honesty and integrity. In addition, a way of life based on patience, perseverance, diligence, wisdom, and prudence is indispensable in creating balance and in coping appropriately with critical challenges arising from extensive and rapid socio-economic, environmental, and cultural changes in the world. A competitive life tends to directly lessen morality. Regarding the aspects of moderation, reasonableness, and knowledge, these are not different because these three are important in responding to shocks from the outside and from the inside. In this way we can hope to maintain balance and be ready to cope with rapid physical, social, environmental, and cultural changes from the outside world.

3. Based on sufficiency economy philosophy there are seven steps to strengthen and cultivate positive social values arranged from its top significance. Step 1: be a good model by following the sufficiency economy principles to help people around you realize the value of this life style and get some ideas to do so. Step 2: work with unity because it helps empower you. Step 3: promote sufficiency economy based life to other people in the community because sufficiency life starts with basic sufficiency in food and adequate living, using techniques and instruments which are economical but technically sound. Step 4: always follow Buddhist doctrine as life practices. Step 5: establish a social

agreement. If community people step forward united by the same agreement, it will bring a good practice to public. Step 6: practice by doing activities and using the principles in daily life until it develops life skills. Step 7: share the experience of the sufficiency economy based life to help other people learn and try out.

Recommendations

Research reveals that between the moderation and integrity between urban society and rural community was different statistically 0.05 resulting more immunity and morality aspects in the latter group. This indicates that the values of urban society seem improper, particularly life-led morality and globalization-based factors, for example, people keep thinking that globalization brings the advancement to their life; meanwhile, it causes the mental regression because of rising materialism. It is suggested that all concerned sector should all be responsible for cultivating and supporting sufficiency economy based values by importantly be a good model.

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