

The Role of Small-Scale Farming in Familial Care

Reducing Work Risks Stemming from the Market Economy in Northeast Thailand

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Abstract

At present, Thailand's market economy is placing pressure on familial care within rural households. An increasing amount of people are making their living in the current market economy and moving to urban areas in search of employment. The provisioning of care has come under greater risk, especially for women and couples of working age who are exposed to the possibilities of losing employment opportunities. While caregiving has been a responsibility of the household, shifts in working patterns have weakened its ability to care for children and the elderly. However, the capacity to care in northeast Thailand is still higher than in other regions of the country. This article discusses the balancing act that takes place between a progressive market economy and familial care as provided within households in northeast Thailand to demonstrate the importance that rice farming plays in familial care even if income from farming is limited.

Keywords: care, fertility decline, migration, skipped generation household, subsistence economy, wet rice farming

To date, care relations—a generalized reciprocity between family members across generations and/or from close-knit community members, and/or from public services—have mediated the negative effects of a market economy on welfare. OECD countries, in particular, have relied more on the latter (Rechel et al. 2013). However, what happens to people living in countries such as Thailand, a mid-income newly industrializing nation (NIC) where the market economy prevails but services to support familial care are only weakly supported by the public sector? In what ways can we consider how care relations respond to the vagaries of the market economy and how people provide for livelihood in rural areas?

This article takes northeast Thailand as a case study to observe what kinds of mediations take place and intends to contribute to discussions that focus on developing understandings on how people balance between fertility and economic growth. It is generally accepted that, regardless of cultural and regional differences, a clear correlation exists between economic growth and a decline in fertility to an



unsustainable level (e.g., Myrskylä et al. 2009; Tuljapurkar 2009). Thailand is also currently undergoing a period of transition, rapidly urbanizing and industrializing (e.g., Rigg 2005), and the total fertility rate (TFR) has come to show a remarkable decline (Knodel et al. 2013). However, there are regional variations in fertility levels, and the highest level is in northeast Thailand. The objective of this article is to explain the relatively efficient balancing that takes place between work and care in northeast Thailand. It demonstrates that a balancing act takes place in a progressive market economy influencing the provisioning of care in northeast Thailand households. First, this article assumes that childbearing, child-rearing, and care for the elderly are risks that diminish the value of labor as labor enters the market. It then examines how households manage such risks for people who are in the labor market. Finally, we argue that wet rice farming as a subsistence-oriented economy is an integral and crucial activity in allowing the household to combine welfare into it.

An Analytical Framework for the Study on Work-Care Incompatibility

In many industrialized nations, people make a living by participating in the formal labor market, while populations in other countries are partially involved in them. A major way to secure a better life in a hypothetical highly marketized society is capital accumulation by individuals. It has been argued that under a hypothetical *laissez-faire* situation, giving birth and caring for children, are, for spouse or other kin, viewed as obstacles to the accumulation of capital (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001). Furthermore, the increase in the shift toward market participation by female workforces has led to longer periods of study and a higher quality of education allowing them to professionally establish themselves in the market. Continual career development becomes a prerequisite to remain competitive in the labor market. As such, childbearing, child-rearing, and care for the elderly can become disruptive risks that threaten opportunities for education and career building. Caregiving for aging parents also shortens work opportunities in the market, in turn decreasing potential income and a person's value in the labor market. Caring for others may harm the accumulation of capital that would secure improved health and a higher standard of living, especially in the later stages of life. Striving for higher economic growth may involve making a more capable labor force for the market and increasing the number of participants. Yet, this can be to the detriment of the overall provisioning of different forms of familial care.

Historically, market economies appear to have never provided welfare to the extent that has been expected, so care has been delivered from other sectors. The conceptual formation of the male breadwinner household, one that consists of a husband in the labor market and a wife as the homemaker (previously prevalent in the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Japan), arose with the expansion of the wage labor market (e.g., De Vries 2008; Saito 2014). Women provided care to children in the form of unpaid domestic

work. Even in contemporary countries where tensions exist between performing motherhood duties and participating in the labor market, the role of kin in provisioning welfare is by far not negligible. Research conducted on British women suggests that the existence of geographically and emotionally close relatives who can provide childcare increases the likelihood of having a first and subsequent birth (Mathews and Sear 2013a, 2013b). In addition, care for the elderly in European countries is mainly provided through the unpaid work of a spouse or an adult child in the family (e.g., Kraus et al. 2011). Although informal care is still important in those countries, it is projected that care provided by the family will not meet the demands for elderly care in the foreseeable near future (Pickard 2015; Rechel 2013). Consequently, research has focused on ways to relieve family burdens through a sharing of care by means of public services (e.g., ESHRE 2010; Rechel et al. 2013). It is believed that government intervention is a prerequisite to balancing economic growth and the provisioning of care.

Earlier studies in OECD countries have demonstrated that low fertility is because of the postponement of childbearing due to the incompatibility between motherhood and women's labor force participation (e.g., ESHRE 2010; Rindfuss and Brewster 1996). In the context of this article, we understand that motherhood is a risk that prevents women from participating in the formal labor market. Although fertility is by no means determined only by incompatibility, ease of childbearing, and child-rearing, it may increase the likelihood of having children. To situate the above discussion, our argument turns to how Thai households manage to reduce risks that would hinder young couples participating in the labor market.

Conditions of the Market Economy and Care in Thailand

Thailand has a population of 67.2 million (as of 2017) with both the industrial and services sectors being the main contributors to GDP. The third-largest economy in Southeast Asia, since the 1980s, it has undergone a large transition from a rural to industrialized economy (ADB 2015). Agriculture accounts for 8.3 percent to GDP in 2016 and is a major exporter of rice and other consumables (Statista 2018; WBG 2018). Since the 1990s, Thai's urban centers have expanded placing pressure on young people in rural areas to migrate to urban areas in search of employment. Disparities in wealth and income distribution have been a major concern for successive Thai governments, but policies trying to ameliorate inequalities between and across regions have, to date, not been hugely successful.

Currently, government intervention in the provisioning of welfare for young couples is minimal, and TFR has been undergoing a decline. As previous research has pointed out (e.g., Konchan and Kono 1996; Knodel and Saengtienchai 2007; Rigg and Salamanca 2011), the contemporary Thai household economy largely depends on the market economy. In rural villages, nonfarm employment in the village and other regions is increasingly a major source of income. The younger generation is willing to

enter the labor force, and subsequently, the economic basis of the rural household has shifted from farming to wage labor (Rigg 2005). This has been accompanied by both the migration and commuting of young adults from rural to urban areas in search of wages (Knodel and Saengtienchai 2007; Rigg and Salamanca 2011). Furthermore, this has been accompanied by the rapid commercialization of farming. In northeast Thailand, in addition to cash crops such as sugarcane and cassava, Para rubber and oil palm plantations are expanding (Rambo 2017). In other words, nationwide, the household economy has become increasingly incorporated into the market economy.

Simultaneously, economic growth also suggests that the structure of caregiving is undergoing a transformation. Corresponding to the argument in the previous section about the implications of work restructuring care practices in industrialized nations, care for children and the elderly may be threatened through increased participation in the labor market. The avoidance of childbearing by young couples or putting it off until later years can reduce risks for young workers to attenuate their value in the market, and this may account in part for a decline of fertility in Thailand. However, the avoidance of childbearing is also likely to reduce potential welfare benefits at a later stage in their lives. John Knodel and colleagues (1992) have demonstrated that ordinary Thai parents expect to be provided care by their children and concluded that a reduction in the number of children is a primary force underlying an anticipated erosion of familial support and the ability to care for the elderly. Although the Thai government currently supports elderly people through Old Age Allowance and free government medical services, family members—particularly coresidents and those living nearby children—are still the primary sources of assistance for elderly persons who need help with basic daily life activities (Knodel and Saengtienchai 2007; Knodel et al. 2013). In addition, the migration of children to urban areas contributes positively to the material well-being of their elderly, rural parents (Knodel and Chayovan 2009; Knodel and Saengtienchai 2007). Including remittances and contributions to farming activities, recent technological changes in communications such as the prevalence of cheaper mobile phones and improvements in transportation in terms of road conditions and long-distance bus travel have attenuated the negative impact of migration on social support (Knodel and Chayovan 2009; Knodel and Saengtienchai 2007). According to Knodel et al. (2013), for parents whose children all lived outside the parents' own locality, the percentage of parents who saw their children on a monthly basis, as well as those who saw them at least once during the year, increased between 2007 and 2010.

Focus of This Study

We examine, from the viewpoint of risk management, the state of provision of care and work in households in northeast Thailand. The increasing number of “skipped generation households,” a form of household in which grandparents are the major caregivers of grandchildren (Piotrowski 2008), may reduce risks for young couples in

the labor market. While previous research has claimed that farming's importance for the household economy has declined, farmers themselves view farming in a negative light (Knodel and Saengtienchai 2007; Rigg and Salamanca 2011). Here, we argue and demonstrate that farming plays a vital part in the current and future welfare of children and that of the younger generation.

We use a wide range of statistics provided by the national statistical offices in each of the regions/countries—and based on our research experience in the regions—and we conduct a comparative analysis of other regions including Bangkok, central, northern, and southern parts of Thailand, and adjoining countries such as Lao PDR (Laos) and Cambodia. Occasionally, passing reference is made to Japan. The term “work,” as used here, is economic activity regardless of raising money and does not include any kind of domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare. We classify Laos and Cambodia as societies with poorly developed market economies, Japan and Bangkok with highly developed ones, and other regions in the middle. In other words, Laos and Cambodia would not have much incompatibility between the provisioning of care and work, whereas Japan and Bangkok would have a great deal of incompatibility, and other regions sit in the middle. With these assumptions, we analyze the relationship between providing care and work, as well as the balancing process with the market economy in northeast Thailand.

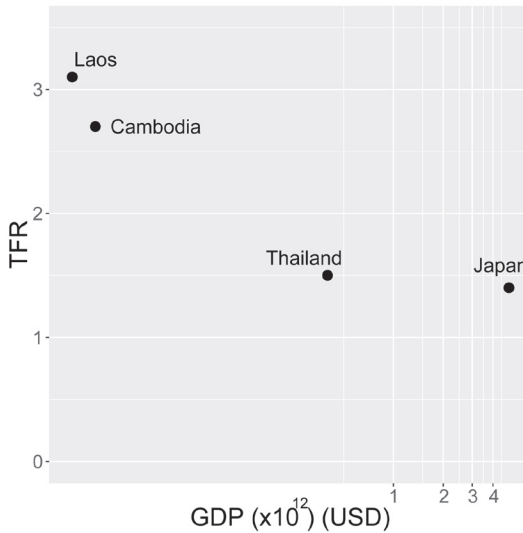
Northeast Thailand is recognized as the poorest in the country trapped by persistent poverty. Because of constraints in the ecological setting including infertile soil, erratic rainfall and, a relative absence of water catchment areas, agricultural productivity has continued to be low and unreliable to meet yearly basic needs (Fukui 1993). Inhabitants have diversified their livelihood portfolio in order to stabilize the provision of food for consumption (Rambo 2017). Out-migration to Bangkok and to central Thailand has been a major source of income for households in the northeast since the late 1980s (Konchan and Kono 1996), and at present, out-migration, especially among young adults, seems to be accelerating. This has led some researchers to claim that the labor force in northeast Thailand is precipitously shrinking because of a falling birthrate and an aging population (e.g., Hoshikawa 2014). Simultaneously, improved agricultural techniques and increasing investments in agriculture have increased the stability and productivity of wet rice production, which in turn has become a reliable source of income since the late 1980s (Grandstaff et al. 2008; Watanabe 2017).

Economic and Demographic Profiles of Regions and Neighboring Countries

Regional Variations of Market Economies and Work Risks

GDP is high in Japan, low in Laos and Cambodia, and moderate in Thailand (Figure 1). In Japan, for example, most of the economically active population is in the formal

Figure 1: Relationship between GDP and total fertility rate (TFR) in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Japan in 2013.



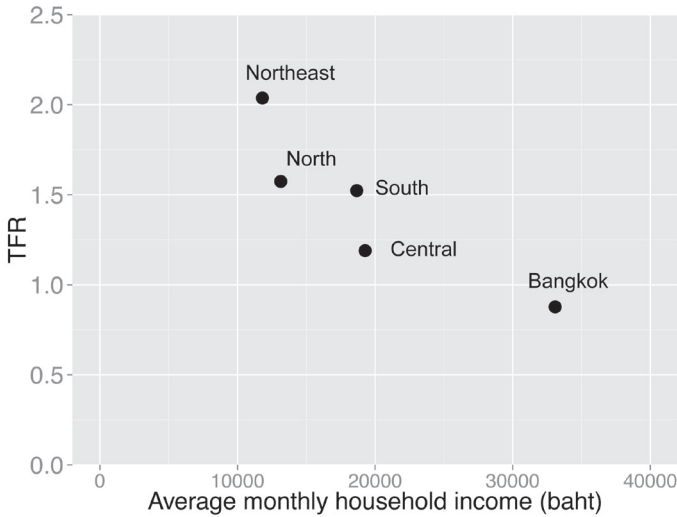
(Sources: WBG 2017a, 2018a)

labor market, yet this accounts for only a small portion in Laos and Cambodia. As the cultivation of cash crops such as maize and rubber and the production of goods from wildlife such as non-timber forest products are expanding in both countries, cash is becoming a prerequisite for daily life. A great portion of households in these two countries currently make their living from mixed livelihoods comprising rice farming, cash crops cultivation, livestock raising, small business, and hunting and gathering.

Childbearing and child-rearing are risks for working women in Japan, whereas they do not appear to be risks in Laos and Cambodia. TFR in Thailand is as low as in Japan even though a much smaller share of the economically active population might be in the labor market in Thailand. This would be partly attributable to whether there is risk sharing via state intervention. Care is expected to be provided by kin and family in Thailand (Knodel and Saengtienchai 2007), while the Japanese government provides several types of childcare support, which mitigate the fertility decline to some extent.

In Thailand, there are regional variations over the extent of the pervasiveness of the market economy into the household economy. Figure 2 shows the variation of TFR and the monthly average household income. It is clear that there is a decline in TFR as income increases. Compared with Bangkok, TFR in the northeast is 2.3 times larger, and income is 35 percent of that in Bangkok. Most of the economically active population in Bangkok is in the formal labor market, while the working population in the northeast is both in the labor market and on farms. While agriculture has become increasingly commercialized and the rural household economy more geared

Figure 2: The relationship of average monthly income in household and TFR in Thailand in 2006.



(Sources: NSO 2007, 2014b)

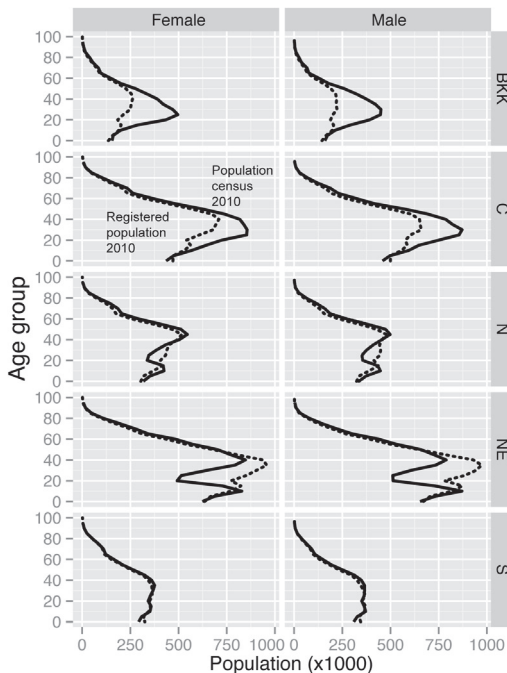
to the market in the northeast (Rigg and Salamanca 2011), wet rice farming also generates a portion of in-kind income that contributes to the subsistence economy of the household. The population in Japan and Bangkok live in a market-oriented economy, whereas a large portion of the people in Laos and Cambodia live in a subsistence-oriented one. The northeast is nestled in between. In sum, childbearing and child-rearing represent risks that disrupt livelihoods, but to a larger extent in Japan and Bangkok than in Laos and Cambodia.

Managing Risk Reductions through Kin

Childbearing and child-rearing are risks that disrupt work for women in both market and subsistence economies and the degree of risk for a female worker might be partly dependent on whether they can obtain support from kin. Kristin Snopkowski and Rebecca Sear (2013) examined kin influence on fertility using data from the 1987 Thailand Demographic and Health Survey and concluded that living with kin before marriage reduced age at marriage, while living with kin after marriage enhanced childbearing. Nao Sato (2012a, 2012b) has described the case of a village in Siem Reap province in Cambodia, where a kin network largely cares for children and the elderly. Children stay in several kin houses while they are growing up, and kin, especially grandparents and other siblings of parents, provide full care. The elderly also regularly move between their children's houses. This sharing and distribution of caregiving duties among kin in a social mechanism reduces the burden on women who participate in the labor market.

Northeast Thailand, the largest source of labor in the country, has provided a large amount of out-migration (see Figure 3; Hoshikawa 2014). The migrants need to change their residential registration, but in most cases they are unwilling to make this change because of bureaucratic hurdles (Rigg 1998). Therefore, the difference between the resident registration and the national census suggests migration as shown in Figure 3, and migrants from the north and the northeast head to Bangkok and the central region. Migrants, both male and female, from their late teens to their forties are more likely to reside in Bangkok and the central region both temporarily and permanently. What is notable is that 1,134,765 (22 percent) women and 1,401,925 (27 percent) men aged 20 to 49 of the northeast were registered but absent in the region. Consequently, Bangkok's population of that age group is 1,177,305 and 1,210,616 larger for women and men, respectively, than the number of registered residents. In the central region, the population is 980,739 and 1,103,965 larger for women and men than the number of registered residents. In the south, in- and out-migration appear to be balanced for all ages and both sexes. The trend of out-migration from the northeast and north might have started quite early, perhaps as early as the 1960s. Today, however, the destinations are expanding to include the central region outside of Bangkok, and the number of migrants has increased dramatically over the past 40 years (Goldstein 1973; Hoshikawa 2014).

Figure 3: Differences between registered population and census in 2010 in Thailand.

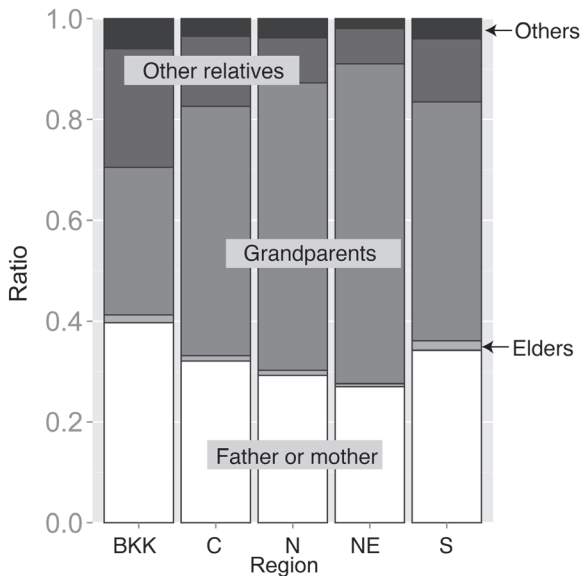


(Sources: NSO 2010, 2014c)

The kin system is important for migrants' welfare, because most of the migrants to urban areas are likely to be in the labor force, and therefore childbearing and child-rearing are, to a certain extent, risks to their work and employability. As Figure 3 and earlier studies (Knodel and Saengtienchai 2007; Rigg and Salamanca 2011; Shirai and Rambo 2017) show, migrants are more likely to leave their children in their home village, leading to an increase in the ratio of "skipped generation households" in rural areas. Kin seems to help reduce risks for the migrated members of family to discontinue work. Children between the ages of 0 and 17 are more likely to grow up with grandparents (Figure 4). The proportion of children not residing with their parents in the northeast is 66 percent, while it is about 40 percent in Bangkok. The principal reason for the absence of fathers or mothers is work in other regions. Sixty-three percent of the caregivers in the northeast are grandparents against roughly 40 percent in Bangkok, whereas 27 percent and roughly 40 percent are reared by fathers or mothers in the northeast and in Bangkok, respectively.

In addition to leaving children in home villages, many infants who were born in Bangkok are likely to be sent away to northern or northeast regions (Table 1). Comparing the estimated total population in the cohort zero to four years old during 2010 with the 2010 population census as the same cohort, the population was only 62 percent of the estimated zero-to-four-year-old population in Bangkok. Conversely, in the north and the northeast, the population was 1.2 times larger than the estimate.

Figure 4: Persons who take care of children 0–17 years old in a household in 2008.



(Source: NSO 2008)

Table 1: Population of Zero-to-Four-Year-Olds in 2010

Region	Sex	Estimated*	Census	Census/Estimated
Bangkok	Female	247,910	154,877	0.62
Central		493,103	435,539	0.88
North		268,713	317,032	1.18
Northeast		523,263	623,256	1.19
South		324,870	293,277	0.90
Bangkok	Male	265,778	159,511	0.60
Central		524,510	458,474	0.87
North		285,903	335,818	1.17
Northeast		552,280	652,931	1.18
South		345,269	309,152	0.90

*Estimated by the 2006 childhood mortality rate provided by the UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (WBG 2017b) and the number of births by region compiled by the National Statistics of Thailand (NSO 2014c). Early childhood mortality rate (zero to four years old) in 2006 is 17 percent. The total estimated population is 33,878 (1.9 percent) and 57,854 (3.0 percent) larger for women and men, respectively, than census. This is attributable to being an overestimation, missing on the census survey (NSO 2010) and out-migration of children to other countries.

(Sources: NSO 2010, 2014; WBG 2017b)

The State of Work of Women and Elderly

Women are frequently placed in a dilemma between work and care for children and the elderly. Whether the elderly work decides the capacity for care by the younger generation as children are the most common main source of income for elderly people (Knodel et al. 2013). The degree of risk that can potentially hinder work very much depends on its nature. Earlier studies have noted that for women, and for young couples, a greater incompatibility between work and caregiving in industrialized societies derives from the inflexibility of work schedules and from the clear separation of workplace and home (Rindfuss and Brewster 1996).

On farms, with the exception of agricultural workers who sell their time to landowners, work schedules are relatively flexible, and place and time are shared between work and caregiving. Caregiving can jeopardize women’s productivity, but it is not unusual to see a grandmother and her grandchildren or a mother and her children at the workplace at the same time. Compared with women in the formal labor market, women on farms seem to be at less risk of having their work hindered when it comes to caregiving. In other words, the autonomy of women and their ability to engage in multiple tasks reduces the probability of turning childbearing and child-rearing into larger risks that hinder work. Farming is one form of work that allows a combination of work and care to be combined by virtue of a shared place and time.

Subsistence-Oriented Wet Rice Farming for Women and the Elderly

A Decline of Farming as an Income Source

Household farming provides preferable conditions for combining work and caregiving. However, although urban-rural differences in fertility are still remarkable, fertility is declining across all regions with observable intraregional variation. This may be partly associated with changes in the number of farming households and livelihood portfolios reflected by differences in the degree of the pervasiveness of the market economy.

In addition, we assume that the subsistence part of the household economy may be associated with the persistence of preferable conditions for the balancing of work and care in farming households. In other words, the predominance of cash income and the market economy in the household economy may alter the advantages of farming in terms of working conditions. *Alícia Adserà* (2004) compared working conditions to TFR in OECD countries and found that self-employment exerts a negative influence on TFR. One reason for this is that self-employed workers (i.e., small retailers, cleaning services) are more likely to be at the bottom of the earnings scale and that they may face more income uncertainty and be unable to take advantage of maternity benefits that payroll workers have. It is reasonable to find that we can observe a similar situation with farming. Commercializing a full range of farming activities, especially for small-scale family farms found predominately in our referenced regions, may force them to struggle with lower and/or a lack of stability of income, which in turn may make couples put off having children. However, northeast Thailand does not seem to show this. We assume that the household economy in the northeast is shared by a market-oriented and subsistence-oriented economy that stabilizes and/or secures life. In addition, we assume that a subsistence-oriented economy will still play a vital role for welfare in the household, even though it is not important as a source of cash income.

In Laos and Cambodia, where the subsistence-oriented economy plays a pivotal role and farming is at the center of most people's livelihood, rice accounts for a major part of the household economy. Since rice production is crucial for home consumption and survival, stable rice production is a primary concern for households as was the case with northeast Thailand. In this region, households used to strive to stabilize rice production through possessing larger plots of land with different physical features and working several parcels of wet rice fields under different hydrological conditions to counteract fluctuations in rainfall (*Fukui* 1993). From the 1990s, there was an increase in the trend toward the modernization of rice farming and migration to Bangkok. In part, this signifies that the economy is shifting toward a market-oriented form (*Konchan and Kono* 1996; *Rigg and Salamanca* 2011). As such, wage labor has become a more important component for the livelihood of households, which has largely minimized the effects of yearly fluctuations in rice production in the household

Table 2: Income Sources for Household Holding Farms by Region in 2010/2011 (%)

Items		Central	North	Northeast	South
Wet rice	Farm	29.3	29.9	19.2	1.1
Upland crops		1.2	8.4	1.8	0.0
Vegetables		3.1	3.7	1.2	0.5
Fruits and trees		15.0	5.2	3.9	55.9
Industrial crops		8.8	11.2	12.0	0.0
Livestock		2.7	5.3	6.2	3.9
Fiber crops		0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Flowers		0.4	0.1	0.1	0.0
Fishery		8.0	0.5	0.9	1.5
Oil crops		0.0	0.5	0.1	0.0
Other agricultural incomes		1.2	2.0	2.1	1.4
Other plants		0.3	0.5	0.5	0.0
Subtotal			70.0	67.3	48.0
Agricultural labor	Nonfarm	3.6	6.0	5.3	6.9
Other agricultural services		0.5	1.0	1.6	1.1
Nonagricultural services		3.8	4.1	5.5	3.9
Nonagricultural labor		3.6	4.2	7.9	8.6
Salary		13.2	10.5	12.4	8.5
Working in other countries		0.0	0.0	3.2	0.0
Working in other region/ remittance		0.9	3.2	8.9	0.8
Agribusiness		0.2	0.1	0.8	1.0
Sale of agricultural land		0.0	0.0	0.3	0.1
Sale of other agricultural property		0.4	0.2	0.3	0.0
Lease of land		0.0	0.0	0.1	0.2
Inheritance		0.1	0.0	0.1	1.7
Interest		0.8	0.1	0.2	0.2
Support from government		1.0	1.1	2.1	1.1
Other		1.9	2.2	3.3	1.6
Subtotal		30.0	32.7	52.0	35.7
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(Source: OAE 2012)

economy (Konchan and Kono 1996; Watanabe 2017). At present, farming has become more commercialized, and income from nonfarming activities now accounts for a larger proportion of the livelihood of households (Grandstaff et al. 2008).

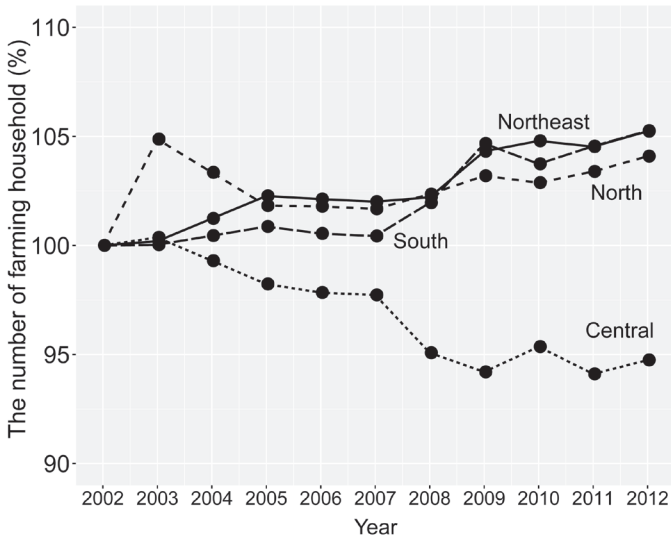
Table 2 shows that farming in the northeast is economically less important than in other regions. In the northeast, income from farming accounts only for 48 percent of total income, whereas it stands more than 60 percent of income in other regions. While wet rice is an important source of income compared with the other sources listed in Table 2, it only accounts for 19 percent and is substantially smaller than that in the central and northern regions. Wage labor accounts for 45 percent of total income in the northeast, while it is less than 30 percent in other regions (OAE 2011). Farming households in the northeast are likely to show a preference to diversify income sources, while households in other regions are more dedicated to farming.

Increasing Farming Households and Investments in Wet Rice Fields

Although farming is just one source of income for households, the number of farming households has shown an increase by as much as 5 percent when compared with 2012 (Figure 5). This constitutes an increase of 137,985 households (OAE 2013). Although the national proportion of farming households to the total number of household decreased from 47 percent in 2002 to 43 percent in 2012, this increase in the northeast has continued since 1975 (Grandstaff et al. 2008).

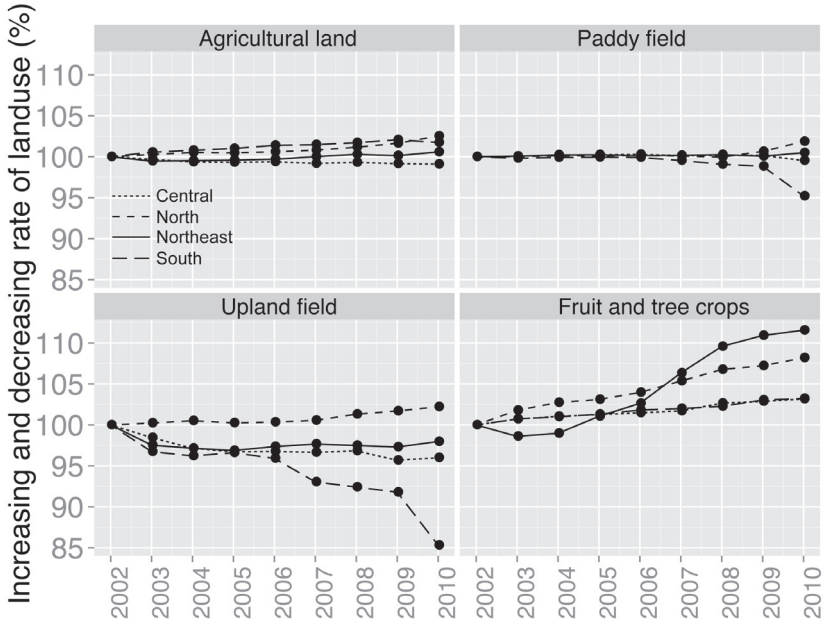
Additionally, farming areas are slightly increasing in all regions except in the central part (Figure 6). Compared with 2002, areas increased 1 to 3 percent in the

Figure 5: The number of farming households in Thailand, 2002–2012 (2002 = 100).



(Source: OAE 2013)

Figure 6: Land-Use Changes in Thailand, 2002–2010 (2002 = 100).



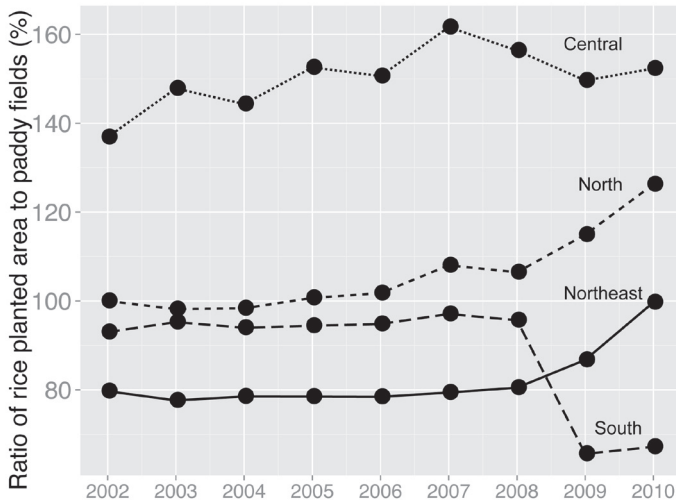
(Source: OAE 2011)

regions except in the central by 2010. Increases in areas for fruit trees and tree crops are likely to contribute to increases in total farming areas along with the replacement of upland areas for fruit trees and tree crops.

Contrasting areas for paddy fields show a comparable constant, and areas planted with rice sharply increased in the north and the northeast regions from 2008 (Figure 7). Compared with 2008, the planted area for wet rice increased 21 percent in the north and 24 percent in the northeast by 2010. While the planted area might have increased in both the wet and dry seasons in the north, the increase in the northeast could be attributable to the expansion of planting to marginal fields in the rainy season because of its predominance of rain-fed agriculture.

An increase in the producer price of rice from 2006 may be one of plausible drivers for an increase in planted areas in the north and the northeast. The price increased almost threefold from 2002 to 2007 (FAO 2018). However, fuel prices in Thailand have shown considerable increases especially since 2006 (Energypedia 2014). The price of gasoline was 16 baht per liter in 2002 and increased to 32 baht per liter in 2008, and diesel price also increased to 23 baht per liter by 2008 from 14 baht per liter in 2002. As such, power tillers and harvesters are currently prerequisites for land preparation, and prices of other inputs such as chemical fertilizers might also increase with a rise of fuel prices. It is likely that an increase in the producer price did not significantly raise net income from wet rice farming because of an increase in production costs.

Figure 7: Ratio of rice planted area to paddy fields in Thailand, 2002–2010.



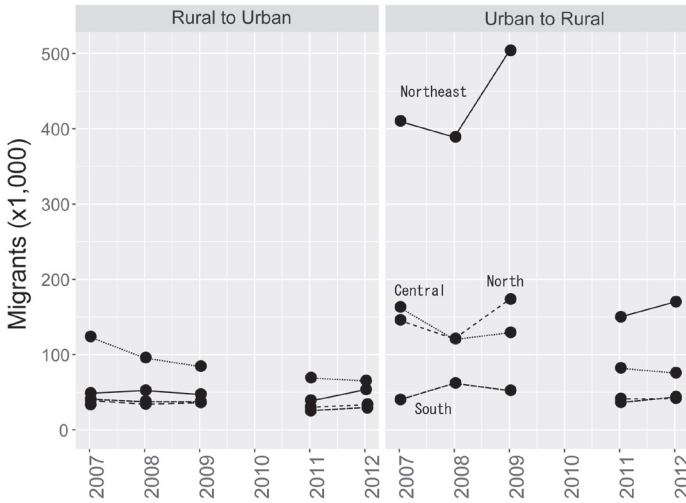
(Source: OAE 2011)

Another plausible driver is a decline of the labor market. The global financial crisis in 2008 resulted in rising unemployment in the labor market and lower worker earning in Thailand (Pongpattananon and Tansuwanarat 2011). This crisis might have sent wage laborers working in urban areas back to their home villages. In the north and the northeast, a rise in the labor force in rural areas could be absorbed by farming households and contribute to a sharp rise in planted areas. The number of migrants from urban to rural areas increased 30 percent in the northeast and 43 percent in the north from 2007 to 2009, while the number of the migrants did not remarkably change in other regions (Figure 8). For comparison, a similar pattern was seen during the Asian financial crisis in 1997 in which many laborers from the northeast also returned to their home villages (Subhadhira et al. 2004).

What is important to note here is that one reason why farming households can accept returners in the north and the northeast is that households possess idle paddy fields, despite the fact that marginal land has shrunk because of water-saving technologies from the late 1980s (Grandstaff et al. 2008). Sukaesinee Subhadhira and colleagues (2004), through an analysis of the 1997 financial crisis, demonstrated that the capacity of the agricultural sector to support returned labor depended much on the agricultural resources that each village possessed.

In addition to the presence of idle land, especially in the northeast, consumption within the household may be another overriding reason. Expenditure for food and beverages in the northeast is smallest in Thailand and is about 27 percent of total expenses, whereas it is more than 34 percent in other regions (Table 3). Expenditure for purchasing rice is smallest in the northeast. In contrast, households in other regions use more than 10 percent of their expenditure on rice. However, it is only 4

Figure 8: Migration stream from 2007 to 2012.



(Source: NSO 2013)

percent in the northeast. This trend has not shown changes since at least since 1986 (Grandstaff et al. 2008) and suggests that wet rice fields offer an important livelihood strategy for maintaining families in times of economic and social change.

The importance of rice farming in the northeast for home consumption is unlikely to decrease by any significant degree. Although rice continues to undergo commercialization (Grandstaff et al. 2008), northeastern farmers seem to prefer to grow rice for not only sale but also consumption (Table 4). While the use of non-glutinous rice varieties is expanding to planted areas as a commercial crop, glutinous rice, which is staple food for northeastern people, continues to be grown in certain areas in the northeast. In addition, comparing a 10 percent increase of the share of consumption and sales with the purpose of use from 1993 to 2003, the share increased only 2 percent from 2003 to 2013 (Grandstaff et al. 2008; Table 4). What this further suggests is that the subsistence part of rice farming is likely to provide an important

Table 3: Average Nonfarm Expenditure of Household Holding Farms by Region in 2010/2011 (Baht)

	Central	North	Northeast	South
Food and beverage	41,503	31,690	21,289	45,294
Rice	7,432	3,090	766	7,777
Clothing and housing	80,531	61,233	58,057	78,789
All expenditure	122,034	92,923	79,346	124,083

(Source: OAE 2011)

ground in securing livelihood and combining welfare for people who are not only on the farm but also in the labor market.

Households in the northeast have had to contend with widely fluctuating rice yields on a yearly basis (Miyagawa et al. 2006). However, wet rice farming in the northeast does offer a stable and reliable source of food directly consumed in the household, which can assure the certainty of the economy in terms of obtaining food to survive. More importantly, laborious work, such as the preparation of land and its harvesting, have become mechanized, and labor-saving techniques, such as direct seeding, are widely adopted. This may partially permit the elderly to keep working into their later years.

It should be noted that investments to improve farming conditions have become possible thanks in part to remittances from outside the region. In the northeast, these are higher than in other regions, but their contribution to household income is decreasing (Table 2). Remittances accounted for more than 15 percent in the early 2000s (Grandstaff et al. 2008) but were 8.9 percent in 2010/2011. On average in 2010/2011, 15,980 baht were remitted from other regions, probably by adult children working in Bangkok or in the central region. Remittances are a crucial component of out-migration and allow the family to engage in riskier agricultural activities (Stark and Lucas 1988). Especially for poor households, remittances are an effective means for overcoming income shortages (Osaki 2003). The meaning of remittances in the northeast tended to be understood from the point of view that people from the northeast must send money home because of persistent poverty. Admittedly, there are a certain number of households that use remittances for direct consumption (Shirai and Rambo 2017). However, some other households receiving them used this money to invest back into farming and housing (Grandstaff et al. 2008; Knodel and Saengtienchai 2007). John Knodel and Chanpen Saengtienchai (2007) have reported that children send money to their fathers to buy rice fields, cattle, or a house. Terry B. Grandstaff and colleagues (2008) has also reported that a large portion of remittances during the late 1980s went into agricultural investments. As part of a care strategy,

Table 4: Planted Area of Wet Rice, Purposes of Use, and Rice Varieties in 2013

	Planted area (ha)	Purpose of use (%)			Varieties (%)	
		Consumption	Sale	Consumption and Sale	Non-glutinous	Glutinous
Central	2,218,469	1.7	75.1	23.2	99.6	0.4
North	3,250,380	7.0	37.5	55.6	82.6	17.4
Northeast	6,003,605	13.2	0.5	86.3	67.1	32.9
South	177,518	21.3	26.6	52.1	99.7	0.3

(Source: NSO 2014a)

(Source: 2013 Agricultural Census, National Statistical Office Thailand)

these would not only improve food security for all household members, but also allow for the retention of village women and elderly working on rice farming longer than before.

Future Areas of Study

Because of limitations with our methodology and available data, we can only shed light on to the state of balancing in one part of household life cycles in Thailand. Including more recent data from 2010 onward and referencing other studies within Thailand and surrounding nations would allow us to present a more nuanced regional comparison. In particular, Thailand's political context since 2014 has undergone a significant shift from democratic to military rule, and locating this in the discussion would allow for a deeper analysis. Studying the temporal and spatial arrangements of work, childbearing, child-rearing, care for the elderly, and continual care through the life cycles of couples, individuals, and institutions involved with their arrangement under various conditions sheds light on how northeast Thailand is responding to change. Future research requires a more detailed empirical approach that furthers analyzes the life-work balance in marketized societies in both Southeast Asia and to allow comparison with other NICs in the developing world.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated the current state of balancing between a progressive market economy and welfare in the household in northeast Thailand, and results show that farming is central for households and that the subsistence part of wet rice farming assures livelihood.

In the northeast, farming is likely to provide preferable working conditions that allow for combining work and caregiving. Women on farms can share work and child-rearing in the workplace because of flexible working conditions, and having kin on farms has advantages for women in the labor force because it reduces risks associated with child-rearing. Young couples working in urban areas or in the labor market could either leave their children behind or send them to the couple's parents' household. In addition, farming prevents the elderly from being confined strictly to a prescribed care receiver role and relegate them to the role of a reduced family member in the later years of their lives. It allows them to work longer, which in turn provides autonomy and allows the filial family to reduce the burden of caregiving to parents. The subsistence part of farming, especially wet rice farming, plays a vital role in maintaining household welfare, although it is not the principal source of cash income. Persistent investments in agriculture significantly improve productivity and may convert farming into a reliable source of household economy. More importantly, what we see here is

that the farming goes against the vagaries of the labor market, strengthening mutual dependency among household members. This ultimately means that the household, incorporating farming as one facet of a range of livelihood practices, will face fewer risks when caregiving for children and the elderly. What this article makes clear is that continuing agricultural investment in the northeast might not be so much for income improvement, but part of a series of socioeconomic strategies to provide the basis for livelihood and caregiving for both people in the labor market and on farms.

The case of northeast Thailand does not offer a universal model, but it is reasonable to say that it is not an exceptional case. What it shows is that there are variations in how to balance care and work. Although small-scale (especially subsistence-oriented) farming is most likely to be viewed in a negative light in a marketized society, the inclusion of familial care can offer a richer, more nuanced picture of how families in NICs that still have extensive small-scale farming practices weather the changes taking place. Including welfare as part of an analytical framework can help us think about how the above conditions play out in NICs in the Global South.

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