

*The Development of Salaya Through Agricultural Livelihood Transformations*¹

Tawan Wannarat, Silpakorn University, Thailand

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Abstract

A number of recent studies similarly indicated dramatic change in the traditional rural society: subsistence farming was not the main way of life in Thailand rural anymore. Agricultural production is aimed to produce for sales at market rather than for subsistence. Salaya was one of those rural areas transformed over recent decades as the consequence of the expansion of urbanization, the decrease of agricultural land, the mobility of labour and migration. The research aimed to study economic transformation –changing in way of living in a case study of Salaya- in the peri-urban area close to Bangkok, Thailand. The research applied a case study approach through observation, participation and documentation. The study found out that there are changes in people livelihood in various types of income earning which led to a decrease in the number of farmers and agriculture areas, and the emerging of new styles of entrepreneurs who transform themselves from agricultural labour. As a result of the process, the alteration in living of the residents of Salaya was regarded as crucial in promoting basic understanding of further convoluted issues such as the shifts in people’s attitude and social relationships.

Key words: peri-urban, transformation, local entrepreneurs

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¹ This article was abridged from the research entitled “The Changes and the Process of Democracy Establishment in Rural Areas of the Central Region of Thailand”.

Introduction

A number of recent studies similarly indicated dramatic change in the original rural society. Apichat Satitniramai et al. (2013) reviewed past literature in his study entitled “Re-examining the Political Landscape of Thailand” and drew a conclusion that the restructuring of society and economy in the last twenty years had a notable impact on people’s living, particularly of those who were in rural society. Mass production became the main manufacture in the agricultural sector instead of minor domestic production and brought modern economic life to rural people.

Salaya was one of those rural areas transformed over recent decades as the consequence of the expansion of urbanization, the decrease of agricultural land, the mobility of labour and migration. As a result of the said processes, the alteration in living of the residents of Salaya was regarded crucial in promoting basic understanding of further convoluted issues such as the shifts in people’s attitude and social relationships.

History of Salaya

Salaya—a sub-district previously regarded as a part of Nakhon Chai Si District, Nakhon Pathom—was currently known for the location of Mahidol University; however, this area used to be recognized as the outskirts distantly located from three cities, namely Nakhon Pathom, Nonthaburi and Bangkok. Khlong² Maha Sawat was built through this area as the main watercourse to Phra Pathom Chedi according to King Rama IV’s intention and later became an important shipping route linking Chao Phraya River and Tha Chin River.

The king appointed special officials to draw maps of the eight-thousand-acre land near the canal and divided it into forty-seven plots given to his children under management by those special officials assigned to take care of benefit arising from the land.

The king’s idea of building Khlong Maha Sawat and reclaiming the land nearby implied that Salaya before the royal development project was unsettled land, which was later possessed by people who moved from Tha Chin riverside villages for reasons of its location near the capital, and eventually grew into one of large cultivated fields in the region. Land ownership was later transferred after the royal family donated plots of land to local temples while villagers and the special officials appointed by the king gradually bought land from the former owners.

In 1878, King Rama V’s gave orders to build Khlong Thawi Watthana (also called Khlong Kwang), linking Khlong Maha Sawat to Khlong Phasi Charoen, and also instructed to build Khlong Nara Phirom to connect Khlong Maha Sawat to Khlong Yong (Apilak Kasempholkul, 2010).

The arrival of railway stations—such as the construction project of railroad lines to the south, the launch of the railway line from Bangkok Noi station to Phetchaburi

² A Thai word for a canal

station in 1897, Salaya station, Wat Suwan station and Khlong Maha Sawat station—created new settlements along the lines.

In 1955, Phutthamonthon Sai 4 Road was built branching off from Phetkasem Road—the main road from Bangkok to Nakhon Pathom, Ratchaburi and other southern provinces—which originally reached only Phutthamonthon area and was eventually expanded into Salaya area.

In 1983, Borommaratchachonnani Road (Pinklao – Nakhon Chai Sri Route) was opened making transportation to Bangkok become more convenient.

Markets and schools were brought about as a result of the overcrowded settlement. According to this reason, Wat Suwan Market located beside Khlong Maha Sawat was opened in the First Village to be a major local centre for trading, such as agricultural products, food and drink, and to be a meeting point of the community for it was situated near Wat Suwan station where the locals departed for Bangkok.

As time went by, this marketplace declined remaining only three or four wooden sheds and was replaced with Salaya Market which was the new bigger centre easily accessible for the locals. Moreover, three big department stores were launched nearby aggravating the situation of Wat Suwan Market.

Salaya in the Present Time

Salaya at present was a part of Phutthamonthon District and was divided into two administrative sectors which were Salaya Subdistrict Administrative Organization and Salaya Subdistrict Municipality. Salaya Subdistrict Administrative Organization's administration covered the First – the Third Village and some part of the Fourth – the Fifth Village while Salaya Subdistrict Municipality's administration covered the remainder of the Fourth – the Fifth Village and all of the Sixth Village. This noteworthy phenomenon implied that Salaya—the area which used to be only rice fields—has been developed into urban community described as follows:

Land use in the First Village was mostly for residency and agriculture based along side streets near Khlong Maha Sawat. The bulk of cultivated land was large rice fields and orchards up to 16 – 20 acres.

The Second Village was cultivated fields mingling with 4 – 5 housing estates of 100 – 200 houses. In addition, detached houses, 2 – 3 medium-sized industrial factories and small and medium-sized rice fields sparsely filled along local streets.

The Third Village, which was the location for Salaya Subdistrict Administrative Organization office, was mainly filled with small rice fields and detached houses. Medium-sized industrial factories, schools, terrace houses and dormitories were also built along streets connecting to main roads.

The Fourth – the Sixth Village administered by Salaya Subdistrict Municipality were rather urbanized villages and were the locations for governmental offices, including Mahidol University. The main road cutting through these villages were Borommaratchachonnani Road, Phutthamonthon Sai 4 Road and Highway 3004

surrounded by dormitories, convenient stores, gas stations, marketplaces, townhouses, hardware shops and many others.

In conclusion, nowadays various activities were preceded in Salaya, such as business, residence and farming, which was entirely different from the past when there were only rice fields covering the area.

Varieties of Occupations in Salaya

Occupations in Salaya

According to the territory of Salaya—which was fertile land with efficient irrigation for it was surrounded by canals, such as Khlong Maha Sawat, Khlong Yong and Khlong Thawi Watthana—and its location close to Om Noi – Om Yai industrial estates, the residents of Salaya were given various occupational choices from farming (for example, rice, lotus and fruit) to factory work. Moreover, the expansion of urbanization as results of highway construction projects and the arrival of governmental offices, particularly educational institutions (for instance, The College of Dramatic Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology, Kanjanapisek Wittayalai Nakhon Pathom School and Mahidol University), in these two past decades has increased job opportunities for the locals.

The expansion of industrial factories in Salaya brought about numerous street construction projects which helped the locals go to work or ship agricultural products to the town more conveniently. Farmers were able to cultivate various kinds of vegetation according to current sale prices, for example, rice fields were changed into lotus farms or water mimosa farms. Moreover, after factories, government offices and education institutions came into existence in the area, dormitory business and stores also came about to serve consumers of all purchasing power from minimum wage to high salary.

According to the survey, there were three kinds of livelihood of the inhabitants of Salaya as follows:

1. Farming

Farmers in the area were generally the middle-aged who lived by farming for generations. Most cultivated land was in the First and the Second Village which were under Salaya Subdistrict Administrative Organization's administration. Nearly all the agricultural land was rice fields while some were orchards (such as pomelo and mango orchards or orchid farms). In addition, a small number of lotus and water mimosa fields were also found in the area.

Cultivated land whether big ones of more than 8 acres or minor ones were mostly for rent and not many farmers had their own land. The owners of the land were probably temples, government departments, cooperatives or private individuals who were not the locals.

2. Retailing

Stores of big and medium size were mostly high street stores of 1 – 2 townhouses, such as hardware stores, drug stores, motorcycle shops, restaurants and barbershops, while small ones were set in sheds located along local streets and selling food or agricultural products from shop owners' farms. Furthermore, mobile shops and stalls were generally found in community areas.

Big and medium-sized shop owners along high streets were mostly newcomers while the owners of small ones located along local streets were largely the natives who used to earn a living by farming or still continued farming but ran the business in spare time. Moreover, from the survey, 40% of these small store owners also did another job simultaneously with a trading business.

3. Labour

There were both employees in industrial factories and daily paid workers, such as agricultural labourers, delivery workers or motorcycle taxi drivers.

It was also found that there were a number of workers who earned a living simultaneously by all these three types of activities in both the household and the individual level. There were husbands in some families run farming while wives run a shop while some farmers did business in their spare time from farming.

However, the survey did not cover skilled labour in private companies or government sectors who lived in townhouses which rapidly increased over a recent decade.

Orchards or Lotus Farms to Rice Fields Transformation

58-year-old farmer who used to run an orchard and a lotus farm recounted that, unlike an orchard or a lotus farm, a rice field needed less labour to work each job from transplanting rice seedlings to grinding rice kernels, and a farm owner's duties were only to employ and supervise those workers. Moreover, most farmers were getting older and none of their children wanted to continue farming which meant they lacked labour to run the old farming business and had to change the cultivated land into rice fields. During the interview, it could still be seen that the lotus farm of the interviewee was in the process of transformation into a rice field.

The flood crisis in 2011 was also one of the reasons behind the change. A number of farmers gave up pomelo orchards for it took a long time to re-nourish pomelo trees until the next harvest season. In the meanwhile, the government's rice mortgage scheme in 2012 - 2013, which suggested high rice sale price, was the important persuasive factor encouraging orchard farmers to turn their land into rice fields.

However, some young orchard farmers still determined to renew damaged pomelo orchards by separating a part of their farm to run a rice field in order to earn short-term income before pomelo harvest and to be prepared for the possible future flood. An interviewed farmer held the opinion that orchard farming was steadier than rice farming because its sale price rate was more stable and able to be negotiated, unlike

rice farming whose sale price rate was usually unstable and uncontrollable even though it took a shorter time until harvest.

Transformation from Farming to Wage Labour or Small Business

The origin of the change was that most agricultural land was rental land. When the landowners such as temples, government sectors and private individuals planned to sell their land for development—for example, housing estates, industrial factories, golf clubs or government offices—farmers who leased the land had to give up farming and became workers in a golf club or a factory. By the way of illustration, 50-year-old motorcycle taxi driver used to lease 10-acre land to grow rice for generations with the labour of his household and helpful neighbours, and later employed workers instead of domestic labour along with starting motorcycle taxi driving as a part-time job, and eventually only did driving job after the leased land was sold for housing development. The other case was a worker in a golf club who used to lease 12 – 16 acres of land to run rice fields but stopped farming after the land was sold and turned into a golf club while none of his children decided to continue farming.

The Cultivation of Rice along with another Part-Time Job

This case was largely found in the Second Village where farmers aged between 25 and 40 run small rice fields by employing workers and labour-saving equipment which gave them spare time to take a part-time job, such as daily wage worker and motorcycle taxi driving.

It was also noteworthy that these farmers had to do a part-time job since they run their farms on small land—whether of their own or rental one—which did not provide enough income.

This survey result was consistent with the study by Warunee Polprasert (2000) entitled “The Studies of Land Use Change of Salaya Community; Amphoe Phutthamonthon, Nakhon Pathom Province” which indicated that the proportion of cultivated areas were gradually reducing while urban areas were steadily expanding. Furthermore, from an informal interview with Chief Executive of Salaya Subdistrict Administrative Organization, it was also found that the number of agricultural areas in Salaya has dropped to 30% of Salaya area which stressed the steady decrease of farming areas.

Individual Entrepreneur in Salaya

Self employ entrepreneur

The origins of small stores selling food or agricultural products from shop owners' backyard gardens, such as bananas, beside local streets were various as follows:

1. Employees who were laid off after the Asian financial crisis in 1997 preferably decided to start a small business of their own rather than to apply for a new company due to their age considered too old to find a new job.
2. The convenient means of transport owing to the street construction projects attracted visitors to the area and consequently increased business opportunities.

3. A housewife whose husband did farming started a business to earn extra income.

These business owners mostly were the locals or ones who moved in with the locals after marriage. For instance, a wife with the age of 50 years who owned a restaurant recounted that she moved to Salaya after marrying a local rice farmer. At first, she worked in a factory around Om Noi and later started a restaurant with a small shop after being laid off due to the Asian financial crisis in 1997.

Small-Medium Scale Enterprise Owners of medium and large-scale business were mostly from the middle class, graduated in Sciences and Health Sciences and used to work for private companies until gaining enough experience to start their own business. For example, the case of a drug store owner who graduated in Pharmacy worked in a drug company for seven years and left the job to start his own store. The other case is an owner of an agricultural hardware shop who has worked as a salesman in an agricultural equipment company for ten years before starting his own shop.

Nevertheless, some business owners did not start a business with a high social cost like the above-mentioned examples since they did not graduate a degree and had no experience for never working for any company before. They initially used to run a small stall or work as a general labourer until saving enough money to lease a townhouse and open a permanent shop beside high streets.

Community Enterprise

The early community enterprises in Salaya were established in the area which seemed to be the most rural in Salaya. Nevertheless, community enterprises recently became more in the area which seemed to be the most urban ones. Some community enterprises were closed down; however, some were still able to run and satisfactorily grew. In this article, only one community enterprises name Salaya Preserved Fruit Products Community Enterprise, were discussed owing to their interesting features in growth, evolution and relations with other organizations in both formal and informal ways.

Origin

Jongdee Settha-Amnuay, Boonlert Settha-Amnuay³'s daughter, was the native of Salaya who was unable to continue the higher education in Nakhon Chai Sri District⁴, in which Salaya was included at that time, due to her bad health condition.

By reason of a bad health state, Jongdee was not able to labour over her father's orchards business but still able to ship the products from the orchards such as watermelons, pomelos, mangoes, water minosa and morning glory) by train to Sala Namron Market near Thonburi Station for she had good skills of communication.

³ Boonlert was one of four orchards owners who joined the Khlong Maha Sawat Boating Tourism Project.

⁴ Salaya was considered an isolated area because it was away from the centre of Nakhon Chai Sri District and Phutthamonthon District Authority has not been still established at that time.

Moreover, seeing there was no road in the neighborhood and the only means of transport in the area was by boat, Jongdee started a gas station business at her house available for motor boats and machines by selling to those who came to add fuel at the station and shipping to the neighbourhood. Jongdee added that the business was run successfully selling gas more than ten tanks a day partly because of her practical skills of communication, customer service in mind as well as intimate connections with neighbours.

Until the launch of Borommaratchachonnani Road in 1984, the extension of roads in Salaya in 1992 which encouraged road transport instead of travelling by boat and the incident of gas explosion in the vicinity, Jongdee eventually decided to close down the business.

After the permanent shutdown of the gas station business, Jongdee planned to set up a fruit preserves business starting with 7 - 8 members and was supported by a agriculture technical officer of Phutthamonthon District Agricultural Extension Office, who later became a Chief Assistant of Phutthamonthon District Agricultural Extension Office and invited Boonlert to join in the agricultural tourism project of which Jongdee also served as a treasurer.

She registered the fruit preserves business under the name of Salaya Preserved Fruit Products Community Enterprise with the increasing number of members which were presently thirty-three. All members were the villagers of the First Village from various ways of life from farmers to teachers and sellers, and had an active role in the selection of a new member. The latest four members of the enterprise were those who used to work in the other community enterprise which was closed down lately.

Activities of Salaya Preserved Fruit Products Community Enterprise

The products of this community enterprise recently became many and various; not only preserved fruit products but also artificial flowers from clay, cloth from lotus thread, rice crackers, steamed rice in lotus leaf wrap and Khao Tom Mad (coconut sticky rice in banana leaves). The income was distributed to members with additional privileges, such as t-shirts given on special occasions, birthday parties for members and economic aid given in the cases of sickness or decease. Moreover, the association also engaged in social activities, for example, the craft workshop programmes for the students from Wat Watsuwannaram School, charity events on National Children's Day and National Day of Older Persons, the big cleaning and planting campaigns on the canal side and the provision of food tents on the launch day of Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University.

Furthermore, the income of the enterprise not only came from trading but also from providing lunch boxes and snack boxes for events, attending contests held by government departments and serving as the demonstration centre for those who came to observe the activities of the association on Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, Diversified Farming Theory, the local and healthy dishes workshops (such as rice crackers, steamed rice in lotus leaf wrap and 5-coloured bean juice).

Relations with Mahidol University

There were numerous professors who were interested in the origins and history of Phutthamonthon District, particular the history of the area along Khlong Maha Sawat. The examples of those professors conducting studies in the areas were Assistant Professor Iam Thongdee from Institute of Language and Culture for Rural Development (the previous name of Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia), Associate Professor Waraporn Srisupan from Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities and Assistant Professor Apilak Kasempholkul, Ph.D. from Faculty of Liberal Arts. The flow of academic staff formed a strong relationship between the education institute and the community, particularly Dr.Wattana Thiampathom who was a native of Salaya and served as the former deputy of Phutthamonthon hospital in 1994 until retirement in 2014.

Dr.Wattana Thiampathom was from a decent family for he was the grandson of Khun⁵ Nikhom Salachapana—a village chief of Sala Thammasop Sub-District connected with Salaya—and was the son of Thaworn Thiampathom—an important Buddhist attendant of Wat⁶ Watsuwannaram. He used to serve as the former deputy of Phutthamonthon hospital and was a respectable figure among the locals of Salaya as they informed, “You should discuss with Dr.Wattana. He is such a wise man with an all-round education!” Owing to the fact that his family estate of 80 acres was located not far away from Boonlert Settha-Amnuay’s orchards which were the location for Salaya Preserved Fruit Products Community Enterprise, Dr.Wattana had a good personal relationship with Jongdee Settha-Amnuay which consequently led to the close relations between the community enterprise and Mahidol University as Assistant Professor Apilak Kasempholkul, Ph.D. described him as “a human bridge between Mahidol University and the community.”

The more sectors of Mahidol University tended to visit the community enterprise for field trips after the business produced not only preserved fruit products but also local and healthful products, for example, Faculty of Nursing visited to observe healthful food production while ASEAN Institute for Health Development, students and foreign researchers visited to observe Thai local food production.

Informal Group in the Agricultural Sector

Unlike the above-mentioned registered businesses, there were also informal groups which were mostly of those labourers’ in the agricultural sector in Salaya, Khlong Maha Sawat and Khlong Yong Sub-District. There were 2 - 3 groups in each area and were 7 - 15 members in each group aged between 20 and 50 from near villages who could work in the vicinity.

Workers in the agricultural sector were normally employed to work in rice fields. According to an interview with a lotus farmer, there were many detailed processes in lotus and orchard farming which depended largely on manual labour rather than machinery, such as lotus flowers and lotus leaves harvest and making bunches of lotus. Due to the elaborate manual processes, general labourers were unlikely to take these jobs while farm owners were also unlikely to hire these workers as it was not worth hiring to do these light tasks. Moreover, workers preferably tended to work in

⁵ A Thai title for a senior non-commissioned officer

⁶ A Thai word for a temple

rice fields instead of lotus farms or orchards since they needed less manual labour and rather depended on labour-saving equipment.

The examples of jobs labourers were employed to do were to plough a field, sow rice seedlings, and inject herbicide and fertilizer.

All tasks were done by machine and tools of workers' while employers paid for seeds, fertilizer, herbicide, wages (50 Baht per field per person) with drinking water and energy drinking provided for the workers.

According to an interview with a farm owner, employers normally hired familiar workers, except the time when those familiar ones were unable to work for them because the group has planned to work for another employer. In this case, the workers' group would contact another group to take the job. It was not necessary that all members of a group had to work for the same job. If there was a job in a small farm, a group might send a small group of members to do the task in order that other members would be able to take another job they wanted.

The groups of these labourers seemed to be set up more than 15 years according to the time when rice farming method has been changed through years. In the recent years, many cultivated fields were shrunk down as results of selling land to industry and housing development projects by landowners or dividing family land to relatives. This situation led to the existence of agricultural labour because after some rice fields were shrunk down to 4 – 6 acres from which farmers were not able to earn sufficient income, they had to work in another farm to earn more money. Meanwhile, the need for agricultural labour was emphasized after the young generation gave up farming causing a lack of labour to the older generation who were incapable of labouring over farms.

The above-mentioned phenomena encouraged labour in the agricultural sector which eventually became the prime workforce replacing mutual labour exchange among the community. The system was helpful for farm owners who lacked labour, and in the meantime, created jobs for those with low education so they did not have to move to urban cities working as workers in the industrial sector.

Conclusion

Instead the fact that cultivated land was continuously shrunk down to 30% of the whole area, agriculture was still a major livelihood in Salaya. However, farmers who continued farming for generations had to adjust to the new means of cultivation which was different from the past method.

The transformation in Salaya was a notable example proving that the extension of road construction was highly relevant to urbanization. The road development of both main and local streets brought about a number of shops, industrial factories and housing estates to the area.

The expansion of road construction did not only brought the change in physical conditions but also led to convenient transport for the locals to work outside Salaya,

such as in industrial factories, golf clubs and schools. In addition, this convenience of transport also promoted tourism businesses and community enterprises.

The development in Salaya has transformed the area into the semi-rural community which steadily became more urban. There were not only farmers in the area any longer, but in fact, these farmers who lived in Salaya for generations have increasingly become entrepreneurs of various businesses simultaneously with farming by gaining long experience and making formal and informal connections with the locals and people from other communities. These relations sometimes caused conflicts rather than support; however, most of them were beneficial to those enterprises.

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