

Report on Thailand Field Research (8/31~9/12)

Bangkok & Phuket

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Undoubtedly, the field research in Thailand was exciting and fruitful, largely beyond our expectation. We spent almost one week mainly acting in the capital, Bangkok and the last three days in its famous tourism city, Phuket. Thanks to the spotless arrangement by Kyoto University and Thammasat University, I think we have completely fulfilled all those aims of the research that were designed before our departure. Besides the academic part in which we communicated with the students and professors from Thammasat University and we did presentations about our own research in Kyoto University, the activities out of the campus also taught us a lot and gave us a chance to know about a country that is enjoying high-speed economic development but cannot get rid of a series of civil society issues at the same time, like corruption, excess expansion of metropolis.

The **1st** day, we went to visit the campus of Thammasat University and listened to the historic start and the democratic fight by Thammasat students against autocratic government. We got to know Thammasat University started as a source of democracy and therefore they channeled so many brilliant students graduated from social science with strong faith to democratize Thailand to every position of the society. They fought against dictatorship and even sacrifice their lives. From the official statistic, over 70 students were killed in that campus. Coincidentally, China also experience the same tragedy in the Tian'anmen protest. Anyway I can't say students did wrong from any perspective, and I believe this history will tell the truth.

In the first two days, we also had lectures teaching us the basic knowledge about Thailand. Thailand's political reform went so far beyond the economic modernization by Rama V in the early twentieth century, which enabled Thailand survive from the faith of being colonized by western countries. However, at that time, Thailand noble class and the king were still entitled to utmost privilege and political and economic power. People were still owned by the lords and had no freedom to move. After World War II, Thailand economy experienced a transition from export substitution to import substitution. It was successful and the Asian Miracle proved that. But nowadays what we see worry me a little. There is so much foreign investment in Thailand and actually I feel foreign companies have occupied every chance of Thailand development. As an open economy without strong national market and manufacture capacity, Thailand is exposed to so much risk of fluctuation of world market.

Another fact is, farmers are still poor, even though Thailand export so much rice to world market. The government uses the price scissors to squeeze the profit from farmers, in which large proportion may be corrupted and less is for investment to infrastructure.

For the other days staying in Bangkok, one very important part was the formal presentation and discussion with student from Thammasat University. Based on the feedback from professors, I think all of us did very well. Certainly it was good experience and we can better our presentation skill further. After the lecture, we took a breath and went to the real field research. We went to visit CP food, industrial park and also the old capital Ayutthaya. CP food is

a respectful Thai company. The first time I know its name was when I was an undergraduate student they donated to build a stadium in our campus. The place we visited was one of its branches to produce meat products for fast food use. We found several interesting points besides their modern and environment friendly facilities. First, they hire the people from Cambodia not only the Thai. Multinational company is always seeking to control the labor cost and get higher profit. People from less developing countries like Cambodia would more like to work in a low-pay unsanitary environment. Even though the salary to Thai people is still lower than many developing countries, they have chance to find a better job than work in slaughter factory. The other one is about the trade mark. It is the first time I heard about the Halal, a trademark to access the Islamism consumers.

Since Sep.9th, we stayed in Phuket mainly for organic farming research and meeting the governor to know about the regional development policy. As I was born in north China, it was really new thing to see how to grow a pineapple in Phuket. Phuket pineapple is famous in Thailand but rare is exported outside. In Phuket, people are enjoying the booming tourism economy and therefore there is constraint on land to grow more pineapple to meet even domestic demand. Although pineapple farms utilize the spare land in the rubber farm, the rubber is also seeing a same development constraint. In sum, agriculture is becoming a peripheral, fragile sector like the situation in other developing countries. One unexpected interesting thing is when people took the Phuket pineapple to north Thailand, a new kind pineapple was created, which is smaller but sweeter because of arid climate in north. Nature is so creative.

Contrast to the traditional farming, organic farming is developing in Thailand and the farm owner we visited was so firm with what he is doing. During the conversation, we knew he was not actually educated well about organic farming by others, but all his achievement was based on his own experiment and learning from local knowledge. He believed in heart what he did was right to the environment and he tried to use local varieties to improve them. I think to a new sector in agriculture with shortage of strict governance, farmers' faith becomes so important to maintain its quality.

Also, we felt lucky to get a chance to talk with the governor or Phuket, and we got lots of concrete information about the development policy. Phuket is still insisting on its tourism sector and try to attract more visitors through building international conference hall. However, we also can see the conflict between local people and government during this process. The day we visited, there were so many protest people standing outside of the cityhall against government policy that aimed to clean and regulate public beach.

As a summary, I really enjoyed this field research. It was my first time to visit Thailand and everything made me excited except the spicy food. People there are so peace to foreigners partly because they have purely religious belief. Thank all my team members, they were so cooperative that we spent quite a good time there. After those official schedule, we had long time to chat and play together, which gave me good chance to know about each other. I leant a lot from them from every aspect like academic writing, language training and their national background.

At last but not the least, hope the faculty of economics, Kyoto University can keep this kind of overseas field research continuing. I believe every my junior schoolmate can learn much beyond their expectation.