

Dissertation Title Analysis of Farmers' Happiness Under Levels of Sufficiency Economy

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ABSTRACT

Although Thailand has previously applied the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SE) in its development paradigm, few quantitative studies focus on the magnitude of the effect of SE on happiness. This study aimed to achieve the following objectives: 1) to classify Thai farmers in terms of their SE levels, 2) to evaluate the levels of their subjective and objective happiness, and 3) to analyze the effect of SE and other factors on their happiness.

This study focused on the farmers who live in upper northern Thailand, specifically in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Lampang provinces, given that these provinces have the most agricultural households in the region. A total of 700 farmers from all provinces were interviewed from March to May 2013 to reduce any errors. However, only data from 671 of 700 respondents were analyzed.

To address its first objective, this study constructed SEI index from the evaluated criterion of correlation between agricultural practice and SE, together with the evaluated criterion of correlation between livelihood and SE.

The significant findings can be summed in five points. First, all groups of agriculturalist (i.e., farmers, orchardists, and peasants) implement SE in the same manner, thereby confirming that such philosophy is widely applied by each occupation. Second, a high absolute income is correlated with a high SEI level. Third, farmers with high SEI level feel that their current income is enough. Fourth, farmers with high SEI level feel that they are not poor although they earn a low income. Fifth, the happiness of farmers with a high SEI level depends less on money. Finally, the SEIs in production and SEI in livelihood are consistent.

To address its second objective, this research defined subjective happiness as directly self-reported, given that one is the best judge of the overall quality of his/her own life. By contrast, objective happiness can be appraised from the factors that people should attain to lead a good life. The results with regard to subjective happiness indicated that most Thai farmers are “quite happy” and “happy.” The objective happiness composite index comprised the following seven dimensions: economics, social status, family, health status, culture and religion, education, and freedom. Among all dimensions, freedom received the highest score, followed by culture and religion. The objective happiness index had a mean of 6.18.

To address its third objective, this research estimated the Ordered Logit model for self-reported happiness. In particular, the probability of being happy was set as a function of SEI, objective happiness, absolute household income, relative income, attitude toward relative income, income aspiration, and control variables (i.e., age, gender, and health).

SEI was determined to be strongly positively related to subjective happiness. Subjective happiness was further determined as positively correlated with objective happiness and

absolute income. The effects of SEI, objective happiness, and absolute household income were compared. The findings demonstrated that the adoption of SE can increase one's happiness. However, the power of objective happiness and absolute household income to overcome unhappiness is limited. This result suggests that SEI can improve the actual inner happiness of people.

This result further suggests that farmers assign more importance to their attitude or perception than the realistic situation they are in. Furthermore, this finding entails that individuals do not assess their life in isolation from all others; instead, they always compare themselves with others, thereby revealing the adverse influence of social comparison on happiness. Income aspiration was determined to be capable of significantly negatively affecting subjective happiness. In particular, the gap between aspiration and achievement has a negative effect on subjective happiness.

After the effects of objective happiness, household income, relative income, and income aspiration were controlled through the research model, SEI still affected subjective happiness. This result confirms that SE can effectively affect one's mental happiness, which is the core of the SE function.

The estimated Ordered Logit model was adopted as an analysis based on point-in-time; hence, the research findings do not provide details about the transmission mechanisms of SE into subjective happiness. To describe these mechanisms, this study gathered a literature review, which was then synthesized and summarized in six transmission mechanisms; SE prompts the following consumption behaviors: create moderate consumption, reduce conspicuous consumption, and reduce social comparison, SE develops individual immunity, helps to create social capital, and creates a giving and sharing society. Moreover, SE produces happiness through participation in religious activities and strengthening of religious beliefs, and The New Theory is a new farming system that contributes to happiness.

Finally, five policy implications are suggested. First, Thai farmers should be supported in the adoption of SE. Second, their income should be increased to a necessary level. Third, education and academic knowledge remain an important aspect in farming. Fourth, raising income equality can increase happiness. Finally, public relations campaigns should be improved.



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