

SOCIAL CLASS OF THE RURAL HOUSEHOLDS IN THE NORTHEAST, THAILAND

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Abstract: *This study tried to examine the social class of rural northeast households, Thailand. The mixed methodology was employed in this research. It started with a qualitative phase in two villages that have a high proportion of elderly. In-depth interviews were conducted based on an interview guideline with the 22 key informants. Wealth ranking was also conducted with 28 heads of households. In quantitative phase, interview schedule was administered as a research tool to 372 three-generation households. Data collection was collected during March, 2014 –November, 2015. Qualitative data and quantitative data were analyzed by the inductive analytics and descriptive statistics respectively.*

The results were found that the production system still dominated in the rural households of the northeast, Thailand. Social class was divided by the consumption patterns of the households in two villages and those also correspond to the official criteria. The social class of the rural households; the rich, the medium, and the poor were reflected in the economic capital accumulation, which was transferred, creation, cache and investment. Those processes provided many chances and the social class which affected the rural households to social mobility.

Keyword: *Social Class, Rural Households, Northeast, Thailand.*

INTRODUCTION

The family institution is one of the social entities in which the members are interrelated in one way or another from being married (a marriage couple), from kinship, or from living under the same roof (Onkvisit and Shaw, 1994). Many academics (McFalls, 2003; Scott and Marshall, 2005; White and Klein, 2008) see the family as a number of members living together, resulting in certain family's behaviors in the area called their "household". Households in the rural areas are composed of many single families living and relate to one another as kins. Households are therefore a social group that exists for a longer time than other social groups. They may consist of very young to elderly members who live

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together and hold a certain status and role from the time they were born until their death (White and Klein, 2008; McFalls, 2003). The household was thus the interesting unit of this study.

The household as an institution has its important reproductive role, respond to the members' emotional security, and is a socialized institution. As an economic unit, the household responds to the members' supervision and builds economic and social status (Cheal, 2002). These major duties compel the household to accumulate important elements for their existence (Wolf, 1966), and these elements have been seen as the household capital. A household may own manufacturing inputs, which could be labor, businessmanship, or entrepreneurship. The duties of the household involve decision on utilization of capital such that it results in utmost benefits and welfare of the members. Utilization of capital can be in the form of bartering with other economic units (Kaewthep and Hinwiman, 2008), building of cultural capital through increasing educational opportunities and levels of the members, encouraging members to work as government officials in order to have contact with governing authorities, and obtaining acceptance from others through the symbolic capital from their own knowledge, skills and wisdom. The latter leads to the extension of social capital and building of beneficial networks (Becker, 2008; Berk, 2008).

In the course of national development that follows the present-day arising economic trend, changes also take place in the household components. The former family that included the father, mother, children and relatives became a family with father, mother, grandparents, and children (owing to the present old-aged society). Meanwhile, households have developed according to the consumerism trend, driving members to accumulate capitals in different forms. This may change the social class of households and thus led the researchers to become interested in knowing: "What are the criteria in determining social classes of the northeastern rural households in Thailand?" Due to the fact that civilization has arrived in the rural society and brought about socio-economic changes that forced households to accumulate different capitals; differences in social classes could be reflected.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To study the social classes of rural households in the Northeast of Thailand

THEORIES AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Analysis of social classes in early eras was influenced by the conflict theorists such as Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Max Weber (1864-1920). The two concepts were parts of the emergence of sociological and economic, and political concepts during the time when the western socialism turned into the industrial society. The concepts of social classes during the later eras still are influenced by these two major concepts.

Analysis of social classes according to Marx appears in "*The Communist Manifesto*" (1848), which states that, "*The histories of human of all kinds from the past to the present all involved class struggles*". Turner (2003) explained social classes as the group of people holding different position or status according to the principles of job classification in the production organization or the economic system, such as laborers and employers. The characteristics of social classes depend on the pattern of capitalism production or production factors (Ritzer, 1992a). Marx believed in the major conflict between the two classes, namely, the super class and the lower class. Social groups polarize into the classes with distinction. Class relationship has its root in "production relationship" or the pattern of ownership and control of production, especially when use of resources is concerned.

The Structuralism, the later development from Marxism, sees education as social reality contrastive to observation. However, there is a need to understand the structural issue, where an individual is loaded with something determined from the structure. Therefore, each social class in the capitalism has certain duties, but may not always receive equal benefits (Ritzer, 1992a).

In short, Karl Marx and the later Marxism believe that social classes are determined by distinction structures with importance placed on economic capitals. It is believed that social classes have the power to change the society, especially the lower class that struggles towards ownership of production factors. This is the background behind power and chances in the use of production factors in order to develop oneself towards social mobility.

In the 20th Century, Antonio Gramsci proposed that in the society, social class structure, class conscience, and class action have changed considerably. Thus, other issues should be taken into account such as consumption. Cultural capital, economic capital and class distinction should be understood (Ritzer, 1992b). Antonio Gramsci (1971) and Edward Bernstein (1990) discussed idealism domination of people in the society through consumption. It is believed that all human beings who are social members are dominated ideally from the capitalism class people, making capitalism extend and develop on and on. People in the society think they need to consume and believe in capitalism in order to exist (Marger, 2005; Ritzer, 1992b).

Besides, Pierre Bourdieu (1990), a French sociologist who is influenced by Marx and Weber, proposed a concept on social area and social classes. Bourdieu sees that social classes are determined from social relations in all aspects rather than production and economy. It is believed that the major problem of capitalism during the end of the 20th Century was in the consumption process instead of the production process. The reason is excess of production in the capitalism which

leads to an approach towards mass consumption in order that the goods and services are rapidly used up (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Kaewthep and Hinwiman, 2008).

Thus, the researchers believed that households have a role of reproduction in order to carry on and respond to the needs of members in their living under the agricultural production and kinship community but at the same time in the course of the change in economic capital accumulation under the capitalism's economic structure. Therefore, social classes are likely to emerge in the rural society.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was aimed at studying the social classes of rural households in the Northeast of Thailand. The Sequential Mixed Method Design (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009) was applied. The initial step was the qualitative research which was performed in 2 areas, namely the South Isan village in Nakhon Ratchasima and the North Isan village in Khon Kaen. The two villages had the highest proportion of members from the three generations in the Northeast (as computed from the census data of the Governing Department, Ministry of the Interior, 2013). Agricultural production was their major occupation. The analysis units comprised both the community level and the household level. At the community level, the semistructured interviewed was conducted with 22 major informants based on the developed interviewing tool for data collection, with participating and non-participating observation. At the group level, the in-depth individual interview was conducted with 28 households with 3 generation members, the younger generation already inherited from their parents. There were both evidence of the inheritance transfer and oral transfer at the time of data collection. The researcher made the community economic status through interviewing major informants and the present household heads in order to determine the criteria for measuring social classes of the community households. Finally, the inductive analysis was performed with the obtained data.

In the quantitative research the group level analytical unit was applied, i.e., the rural households with 3 generations. The results of the qualitative research were used to develop the interview form, which was the instrument used in data collection from the household heads or their spouses of 372 households. The two-stage sampling technique was used (Creswell, 2009) by considering the province showing the highest number of members from 3 generations in the Northeast (from the census data of the Governing Department, Ministry of the Interior, 2015). The sampling was performed at the district and sub-district levels that showed the highest proportion of members in the three generations. Thirty villages were chosen. The descriptive statistics was applied to analyze the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study on social classes of the northeastern rural households are discussed below in the topics of:

1. the community contexts of the northeastern rural households,
2. the state's criteria for establishing social classes,
3. the criteria related to social classes of the northeastern rural households, and
4. social classes of the northeastern rural households.

1. The Community Contexts of the Northeastern Rural Households

The physical contexts of both of the rural northeastern villages, the South Isan and the North Isan villages are mixed deciduous forests fertile with natural resources and water resources passing the villages. Land use patterns of both villages began from forest encroachment and land claiming for subsistence. Therefore, the amount of land for housing and preempted subsistent land depended on the labor and hardworking of the household members. However, household subsistent land decreased in size owing to the government's expropriation for the purpose of reservoir construction at Lam Samlai near the area of the South Isan village. In addition, the land title documents the villagers hold is only the Por. Bor. Tor. 5 (Local Maintenance Tax) which only certifies the right under the Land Law. This means the villagers can only subsist on the land without any title deed. Households in the past were able to claim only 1-3 rai (0.2-0.5 ha) of land per household.

The North Isan village faced limitation in housing land due to the forest pirate robbery. People therefore clustered closely together, having an average of not over 1 rai (0.2 ha) of land per household. The villagers changed their patterns of production regularly, leading to deterioration of the fertile land. Meanwhile, housing extended on the road around the village. With the arrival of public utilities and transportation route, people found it more convenient to expand their housing into the other areas around the village.

The North and the South Isan villages' main occupation was agriculture. Each village applies several production systems, but normally they grow rice for household consumption. If the harvest is in excess, they would sell the products. The produces that bring major incomes to the South Isan village are sugar cane, cassava, and vegetables. Husbandry is done for supplementary income. The North Isan village holds integrated farming as the main occupation, receiving the main income all through the year from growing vegetables and raising cash farm animals. Therefore, the North Isan villagers received higher average incomes from farming

than the South Isan village who only sell their produces once a year. Nevertheless, the households of the two villages raise supplementary incomes from employment in and outside agriculture. Household members are also encouraged to be employed outside farming or migrate to work in other regions for both short and long terms.

2. The State's Criteria for Establishing Social Classes

The researchers analyzed the criteria of the government to establish social classes. For instance, the Office of Community Development, Ministry of the Interior measures poverty based on the basic needs which have been stipulated. In the 11th Development Plan (Information from basic needs of 2012-2015), a poor household is defined as a household receiving less than 32,000 Baht per person per year (904 USD) (Department of Community Development, 2015). The research study found that only 5.1 percent of the poor households (income lower than the basic needs) received the lowest income of 7,200.0 Baht per year (202USD), whereas the median household income was 138,559.5 Baht per year (3,890USD) and the highest income was 3,211,400.0 Baht per year. (90,157USD).

The criteria used by the National Statistics Bureau, the Office of the Prime Minister have been done through a survey of socio-economic conditions of households related to citizen classes and 10 household categories of expenditures (National Statistics Bureau, 2015). In general, households spending a high amount for consumption are placed at a good social status. Households spending lower than the standard criterion or lower than the poverty line are considered poor households. The research found that in general the average consumption of households is 190,968.7 Baht (5,361USD) annually, with the lowest being 6,200.0 Baht (174USD) and the highest being 1,200,000.0 Baht (33,689USD). It should be noted that there were 11 percent of households spending an overall amount of over 352,000.0 Baht (9,882USD) (Table 1). When considering the annual consumption expense of rural households, the details are as follows (Table 2 and table 3):

In agriculture

Most of the households spent between 10,001-20,000Baht (283-564 USD)(29.3%) and 20,001-30,000 Baht (565-847 USD)(23.5%) for agriculture investment; with the highest being 250,000.0 Baht (7,019USD)and the lowest being 1,000.0 Baht (28USD).

In business

Some households hold supplementary occupation in business or trading in order to build more incomes for the family. These households need to invest in business.

The highest investment was 600,000.0 Baht (16,845USD) with the median of 48,000.0 Baht (1,348USD). It was noted that these households spent more on business than on agriculture.

Household expenses for consumption and food

The amounts spent on food and consumption goods were taken into account. It was found that over 50.0 percent of households spent more than 50,001 Baht (1,413 USD) with the median of 540,000.0 Baht (15,160USD). The highest expenditure found was 960,000.0 Baht (26,951USD) and the lowest was 1,000.0 Baht (28USD).

Expenses on public utilities

These included tap water and electricity tariffs, telephone charge, cooking gas, transportation and others related to the living of household members. Most households (34.2%) paid from 5,001-10,000 Baht (142-282 USD) on this, followed by 11,001-20,000 Baht (283-564USD) and lower than 5,000.0 Baht (140USD) at 28.7 and 20.5 percent, respectively, with the median of 9,600.0 Baht (269USD).

Expenses on children education

Most of the households with dependable members (28.8%) spent around 10,001-20,000 Baht (283-564 USD) for children education, with the median of 18,100.0 Baht (506USD). Households with few number of children spent less on children education. The lowest amount spent was 500.0 Baht per year (14USD). On the contrary, families with a higher number of dependable members who were at school or university spent a high amount on education. The highest amount found was 276,000.0 Baht (7,719USD).

Expenses on health care

Households having members with chronic diseases who needed to be treated regularly spent as high as 84,000.0 Baht (2,349 USD), which was the highest amount found. Most households used the overall health security rights (the golden card) (41.4%) and some was found spending the lowest amount of 30 Baht (0.8 USD).

Expenses on vehicles

The installment payment for vehicles was taken into account including the down payment in that year. It was found that most households that paid for vehicles (53.4%) spent over 50,001 Baht (1,413 USD), with the highest amount being 240,000.0 Baht (6,713USD) and the lowest being 2,400.0 Baht (67USD).

Expenses on housing

It was found that 27.8 percent of households having expenses on accommodation spent less than 5,000.0 Baht (141 USD) for repairing, while 25.0 percent spent more than 50,001.0 Baht (1,413 USD) for extending their houses for better living. The median was 11,000.0 Baht (308USD) in this respect.

Expenses of debt payment

This involved households having debt from a loan source. Most of the households in this category (24.1%) had to pay the amount of over 50,000.0 Baht per year (1,413USD) including interest. The median was 30,000.0 Baht (839USD). Some households with the highest debt from agricultural investment had to pay 620,000.0 Baht (17,341USD). However, the low amount of debt of 24.5 percent of households was below 10,000.0 Baht (280USD), with the lowest being 600.0 Baht (17USD).

Expenses on vice

This means expenses on extravagant goods or alcohol, gambling, or underground lottery. The average expenses on this was 10,387.5 Baht (291USD) to lower than 1,000.0 Baht (28USD) per month. It was noted that as high as 3.7 percent of households paid over 40,001.0 Baht (1,119USD) on vice, with the highest amount being 60,000.0 Baht (1,678USD).

Social expenses

This involved entertainment and religious activities such as traditional merit making, celebrations, funerals, and social get-togethers. The average donation money was 13,718.2 Baht (384USD) yearly or 1,000.0 Baht (28USD) per month. Most

Table 1
Percent of rural households classified by the total expenses on consumption

<i>The total expenditure on consumption of rural households (Unit: Baht per year)</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Less than 32,000 Baht per year (Less than 904 USD)	2.2
Between 32,001-96,000 Baht per year (905 - 2,712 USD)	24.7
Between 96,001-160,000 Baht per year (2,713 - 4,519 USD)	30.6
Between 160,001-224,000 Baht per year (4,520 - 6,327 USD)	17.5
Between 224,001-288,000 Baht per year (6,328 - 8,134 USD)	7.8
Between 288,001-352,000 Baht per year (8,135 - 9,942 USD)	6.2
More than 352,000 Baht per year (More than 9,943 USD)	11.0
Total	100.0 (372)

Mean = 190,968.7 (5,394 USD), Median = 140,200.0 (3,960 USD), S.D. = 161,262.8 (4,555 USD), Maximum = 1,200,000.0 (33,895 USD), Minimum = 6,200.0 (175 USD)

households paid for social expenses at an amount lower than 5,000.0 Baht (141 USD) (38.7%), followed by 20,001-30,000 Baht (565-847 USD)(22.3%), with the highest amount being 199,000.0 Baht (5,566USD).

Categorizing social classes of households by the National Statistics Bureau were based on expenses on food and consumption goods and utilities. The amount was computed into the average expense for food and consumption per person per month of rural household. The result was compared with the criterion set for the poverty line (National Statistics Bureau, 2014). This will be discussed under the topic on the social classes of the northeastern rural households.

Table 2
Percentage of rural households classified by expenses for consumption and by categories

<i>Categories of consumption</i>	<i>Expenses for consumption (Unit: Baht per year)</i>							<i>Total</i>
	<i>Less than 5,000</i>	<i>5,001-10,000</i>	<i>10,001-20,000</i>	<i>20,001-30,000</i>	<i>30,001-40,000</i>	<i>40,001-50,000</i>	<i>More than 50,000</i>	
<i>(USD per year)</i>	<i>< 141</i>	<i>142-282</i>	<i>283-564</i>	<i>565-847</i>	<i>848-1,129</i>	<i>1,130-1,412</i>	<i>> 1,412</i>	
In agriculture	3.7	11.7	29.3	23.5	10.2	8.3	13.3	100.0 (324)
In business	9.5	7.4	13.7	11.6	4.2	10.5	43.2	100.0 (95)
Household expenses for consumption and food	1.1	3.0	5.1	6.2	23.2	10.5	50.8	100.0 (370)
Expenses on public utilities	20.5	34.2	28.7	7.7	3.6	3.0	2.5	100.0 (366)
Expenses on children education	8.3	15.4	28.8	18.6	7.7	3.2	17.9	100.0 (156)
Expenses for health-care	41.4	27.6	13.8	13.8	0.0	0.0	3.4	100.0 (29)
Expenses on vehicles	6.8	0.00	15.1	17.8	5.5	1.4	53.4	100.0 (73)
Expenses on housing	27.8	19.4	25.0	0.0	0.0	2.8	25.0	100.0 (36)
Expenses of debt payment	14.3	10.5	17.3	12.0	9.0	12.8	24.1	100.0 (133)
Expenses on vice	47.1	18.7	17.6	9.6	3.2	2.1	1.6	100.0 (187)
Social expenses	38.7	17.0	22.3	11.8	6.6	0.3	3.3	100.0 (305)

Table 3
Number, mean, median, standard deviation, maximum and minimum classified by expenses for consumption and by categories.

<i>Categories of consumption</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Minimum</i>
<i>(Unit: Baht per year)</i>						
In agriculture	324	31,495.6	23,450.0	28,716.4	250,000.0	1,000.0
In business	95	74,374.1	48,000.0	99,603.7	600,000.0	1,200.0
Household expenses for consumption and food	370	66,340.9	54,000.0	76,304.6	960,000.0	1,000.0
Expenses on public utilities	366	14,669.5	9,600.0	27,945.8	480,000.0	480.0
Expenses on children education	156	34,109.2	18,100.0	43,911.8	276,000.0	500.0
Expenses for health care	29	11,159.0	6,000.0	15,847.5	84,000.0	30.0
Expenses on vehicles	73	44,625.0	30,000.0	66,853.4	620,000.0	600.0
Expenses on housing	36	67,098.0	60,000.0	54,587.6	240,000.0	2,400.0
Expenses of debt payment	133	34,738.9	11,000.0	47,447.8	200,000.0	1,000.0
Expenses on vice	187	10,387.5	6,000.0	12,009.1	60,000.0	500.0
Social expenses	305	13,718.2	7,000.0	18,079.0	199,000.0	200.0

3. The Criteria Related to Social Classes of the Northeastern Rural Households

With the assistance from household leaders and major community informants, the community economic status was categorized into 3 groups, namely, well-off households, moderate status households, and poor households. The differences and similarities between the North and the South Isan villages are elaborated below (Table 4).

1. Size of subsistent land

The size of subsistent land is the first indicator used by both villages for determining the social classes. Similarly, they define well-off families as families owning over 50 rai (8.0 ha) of subsistent land. Moderate households possess from 5 to 49 rai (0.8-7.9 ha) of subsistence land. Poor households do not own subsistent land. The North Isan village believes that households owing small land are not able to produce enough food for the members the whole year round and have to buy foods whereas households with sufficient land are able to produce enough food and retain it for their own consumption.

2. Number and type of vehicles

Both villages use this indicator to determine social classes. The South Isan households possessing farm vehicles such as a tiller car, farm truck, or tractor; or more than one pick-up truck or car are considered well-off. Moderate status households own one car or one or more motorcycles. On the contrary, in the North

Table 4
The criteria related to social classes of the northeastern rural households

Indicators	Villages	The criteria related to social classes		
		Well-off Households	Moderate Households	Poor Households
Size of subsistent land	South Isan	Over 50 rais (8.0 ha)	5 to 49 rai (0.8-7.9 ha)	Do not own subsistent land
	North Isan	Over 50 rais (8.0 ha)	5 to 49 rai (0.8-7.9 ha)	Less 5 rais (0.8 ha), Do not own subsistent land
Number and type of vehicles	South Isan	More pick-up truck or farm vehicles	One vehicles or motorcycles	Only bicycles
	North Isan	More pick-up truck or farm vehicles	Only motorcycles	Only bicycles
Income per year	South Isan	Over 100,000 Baht (over 2,800 USD)	50,000-20,000 Baht (1,400-560 USD)	Less 10,000 Baht (less 280 USD)
	North Isan	Over 60,000 Baht (over 1,680 USD)	60,000-36,001 Baht (1,008-1,680 USD)	Less 36,000 Baht (less 1,008 USD)
Savings per year	South Isan	Over 100,000 Baht (over 2,800 USD)	Able to provide loan (1,400-560 USD)	50,000-20,000 Baht NA
	North Isan	Over 60,000 Baht (over 1,680 USD)	60,000-12,000 Baht (1,680-336 USD)	NA
Sources and amount of debt	South Isan	Do not have debt/ commercial bank	BAAC/ the village funding	The non-formal sources/ do not have debt
	North Isan	NA	NA	NA
Characteristic of house	South Isan	Constructed with aluminum doors and window showing beauty and modern style	Have been renovated	Old houses inherited from parents or without any renovation.
	North Isan	NA	NA	NA
Number and types of electrical appliances	South Isan	NA	NA	NA
	North Isan	Own all types or over 10 types of appliances	Own 4-8 types of appliances	Own 1-3 types of electrical appliances
Number or mobile telephones	South Isan	NA	NA	NA
	North Isan	Own more than 5 mobile phones	Own 3-5 mobile phones	Own less than 2 mobile phones
Occupational skills	South Isan	NA	NA	NA
	North Isan	Farmers and merchants	Farmers	Employed in farms

Remark: NA means the village did not consider that indicator.

Isan village, households possessing just one car or one farm vehicle are considered high-status households. Moderate households own a motorcycle only. Both villages share common opinion towards a poor household in this respect, i.e., households having only bicycles which have been inherited from the parent generation.

3. Income per year

The criteria used by the South Isan village is the money accumulated per year. High amount of accumulation means the household is richer than others. It should be noted that the range of incomes as the criteria is not consistent. They believe well-off households should earn over 100,000 Baht (2,800USD), moderate households should earn from 20,000-50,000 Baht (560-1,400USD), and poor households earn only 10,000 Baht (280USD). The North Isan village relies on the criteria of incomes close to the basic needs. Therefore, households earning lower than 36,000.0 Baht (1,008USD) are poor households. Moderate households earn double this amount or 36,001-60,000 Baht (1,008-1,680USD) and the well-off families obtain over 60,000.0 Baht (1,680USD).

4. Savings per year

The criterion of savings per year of both villages are of the same pattern. In the South Isan village, a household is considered rich if the savings reach 100,000 Baht (2,800USD), or the household is able to provide loan to villagers. Moderate households have savings at an amount from 20,000-50,000 Baht (560-1,400-USD). In the North Isan village, a well-off household's savings is over 60,000 Baht (1,680USD), and a moderate household's savings is between 36,001-60,000 Baht (1,008-1,680USD). Poor households of both villages do not have savings.

The different indicators for determining social classes of the North and the South Isan villages are as follows:

1. Sources and amount of debt

The South Isan village relies on the loaning sources to indicate social classes. Rich households do not have debt because of adequate incomes. Rich households are also defined by the fact that they are able to make loans from a commercial bank since this kind of bank requires savings security before approval of the loan. However, the amount of loan in this case must be in the hundreds of thousands or million Baht to be able to be categorized as a rich household.

Moderate households make loan from the Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives, Community Cooperatives, or the village funding, all of which require

land as the guarantee. They can also be members of the savings group of a community's organization in order to make a loan. The amount of loan is in the tens of thousands to a hundred thousand. Poor households mean those having no debt because they do not have any credit to borrow money. However, some poor households loan money from the non-formal sources as one leader said:

“... Rich people (well-off) are people who have a lot of debts. They are able to make loans from various sources owing to good credit. Most villagers borrow from BAAC or the village funding and pay back year by year.... Poor people don't even have subsistent land, so they don't have any credit at all. They just make ends meet day by day. If they borrow from a non-formal source, they have to pay the interest daily. So they are still poor....” (Chairman of the Community Enterprises, South Isan village, aged 42 years, interviewed March, 2014)

2. Characteristic of house

This is another indicator of social classes seen only in the South Isan village. Rich people's houses are constructed with aluminum doors and window showing beauty and modern style. Households that have been renovated belong to moderate-income people. Poor people's houses are usually old houses inherited from parents without any renovation.

3. Number and types of electrical appliances

The possession and number of electrical appliances are indicators used by the North Isan village to classify social classes. Poor households usually own 1-3 types of electrical appliances (such as electric fan, radio, electric rice cooker). Medium-income households own 4-8 types of appliances (television, DVD player, radio, electric fan, refrigerator, electric kettle, rice cooker, and computer). Well-off households own all types or over 10 types of appliances. One North Isan villager from the children generation said,

“... Rich houses have many utilities. They have television, refrigerator, washing machine, you name it. No question if they buy them in cash or installment. If they have many, then they are rich...” (GCn8 (A pseudonym), aged 39 years, interviewed March, 2015).

4. Number of mobile telephones

This is another indicator for social classes especially used in the North Isan village. Poor families do not have mobile phone or own just 1-2 of them. Moderate households own 3-5 mobile phones, whereas rich households own more than 5 mobile phones. One villager from the parent generation said,

“... Everyone must have a cell phone. Our children bought it for us. They said they wouldn't have to go look for us...Having a cell phone, we have to add money. We spend a hundred Baht a month on our phones (mom and dad). The children pay

1,000 Baht. If they have more phones, they pay more..." (GCs3 (A pseudonym), aged 48 years, interviewed March, 2014).

It can be seen that the present households and villagers in the North Isan village follow capitalism pattern of consumption by acquiring materials which may be items of electrical appliances and mobile phones for convenience of life.

5. Occupational skills

The North Isan village also classify social classes from occupational skills which mean one cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In this respect, they define poor families as those being employed in farms since they do not have their own subsistent land. Moderate-status households are farmers and earn sufficiently on their own. Well-off households own a lot of subsistent land and can produce a great amount of products. Rich families may also run businesses and earn a lot each day, especially wholesale households that sell consumption goods and foods at the district level.

The analysis of economic status in the communities shows that although the North Isan village use cultural capital or occupational skills to indicate social classes, both villages see the importance of economic capital, especially the size of subsistent land, number and types of vehicles, incomes, savings, loan sources, characteristics of houses, number and types of electrical appliances. Categorization of social classes like this results in households accumulating economic capital to be sufficient for household members' consumption. In short, rural northeastern households rely on indication of economic capital through consumption as the important criteria for determining social classes.

4. Social Classes of the Northeastern Rural Households

Households in the North and the South Isan villages are faced with socio-economic impact, leading to the social value in locating items that facilitate and decrease time in their farm production. For instance, they turn to use pesticides and chemicals in plantations, replace farm animals by machinery (tillers, water pumps), substitute household labor with hired labor, and decrease the time to sell products by buying vehicles that transport the produce to the market instead of waiting for the middlemen. Abundant natural resources in the community also facilitate agricultural production, leading to their adoption of urban lifestyles influenced by mass media. Rural households in this regard change their patterns of consumption. They become more acquainted to convenient foods and begin to accumulate more of an expensive consumption goods (household utensils, electrical appliances, vehicles, telephones), notwithstanding if these items have to be acquired by installment payment or loan money. The trends of the two villages to make loan for household expenditure and vehicles become higher than the loan for agricultural investment.

However, when we considered social class categorization of the National Statistics Bureau that is based on the poverty line as the criterion (National Statistics Bureau, 2014) and relies on the average monthly expense per rural person on foods and consumption, it was found that the poverty line of the Northeast areas outside the municipality in 2014 was 2,231 Baht per person per month (63USD). This denotes that households spending lower than 2,231 Baht on foods and consumption goods are categorized as poor. Thus, this research relied on the class criteria of well-off rural households with an average expense higher than the poverty line, i.e., over 2,232 Baht; of medium households with an average expense between 1,501-2,231 Baht (42-63USD), and of poor households with an average monthly expense per person less than 1,500 Baht (42USD). When the criteria were used to analyze social classes in the quantitative study, it was found that most rich households spend an average monthly between 2,501-3,000 Baht (71-84USD) for consumption and between an average monthly between 2,001-2,500 Baht (56-70USD) at 32.1 and 30.4 percent, respectively. The moderate-income households mostly (82.3%) spend an average of between 1,501-2,000 Baht (42-56USD). Poor households spend between 501-1,000 Baht (14-28USD) and between 1,001-1,500 Baht (28-42USD) at 43.9 and 43.5 percent, respectively. The highest amount spent on consumption per person per month was 9,300.0 Baht (260USD) and the lowest amount found was 58.3 Baht (2USD) (Table 5). In short, the National Statistics Bureau used consumption of households to classify household social classes.

Meanwhile, the results of economic status categorization of the North and South Isan villages reflected that rural households and major informants determine social classes from consumption of economic capital. From evaluation of social classes in the South Isan village, we found that most households are at moderate status (90.0%), while there are 5.0 percent each of rich households and poor households. Most of the rural households grow rice and field crops as their main occupation. In the North Isan village, integrated farming is practiced. At present, members of households are also found employed outside farming. This made many households become classified as well-off (20.0%). The majority of the households (60.0%) have moderate status and the rest of 15.0 percent are poor households because they do not own subsistence land (Table 6). It can be said that accumulation of capital, which is an indicator of social classes means household consumption that reflects different social classes in the villages. This can be similar or different according to the types of indicators, and the criteria in determining social classes may be the same or different.

It is interesting to see that categorization of social classes by governmental organizations, *e.g.*, the Department of Community Development and the National Statistics Bureau, take into account the social class criteria of the northeastern rural households; which reflect household consumption as the main priority. This agrees

Table 5
Percentage of rural households classified by expenses for consumption per person per month and by social classes of the northeastern households

	<i>Social Classes of the Households *</i>		
	<i>Well-off Households</i>	<i>Moderate Households</i>	<i>Poor Households</i>
<i>Expenses for Consumption (per person per month)</i>	<i>> 2,232 Baht > 62.5 USD</i>	<i>1,501-2,231 Baht 42.0-62.5 USD</i>	<i>< 1,500 Baht < 42.0 USD</i>
Less than 500 Baht (Less than 14.0 USD)	0.0	0.0	12.0
Between 501-1,000 Baht (14.1-28.0 USD)	0.0	0.0	43.9
Between 1,001-1,500 Baht (28.1-42.0 USD)	0.0	0.0	43.5
Between 1,501-2,000 Baht (42.1-56.0 USD)	0.0	82.3	0.0
Between 2,001-2,500 Baht (56.1-70.0 USD)	30.4	17.7	0.0
Between 2,501-3,000 Baht (71.1-84.0 USD)	32.1	0.0	0.0
Between 3,001-3,500 Baht (84.1-98.0 USD)	17.9	0.0	0.0
More than 3,501 Baht (More than 98.0 USD)	19.6	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0 (56)	100.0 (79)	100.0 (237)

Mean = 1,473.4 (41.3 USD), Median = 1,248.6 (35.0 USD), S.D. = 1,037.3 (29.0 USD),
 Maximum = 9,300.0 (269.4 USD), Minimum = 58.3 (1.6 USD)

Remark: * means the rural household spending per month per person for food and consumption lower than the poverty line of the area outside the municipality in the Northeast, 2014.

Table 6
Percentage of rural households classified by social classes of the northeastern households and by the criteria related to social classes

<i>Social Classes of the Rural Households</i>	<i>The Criteria Related to Social Classes</i>		
	<i>Government</i>	<i>South Isan Village</i>	<i>North Isan Village</i>
Well-off Households	15.1	5.0	20.0
Moderate Households	21.2	90.0	65.0
Poor Households	63.7	5.0	15.0
Total	100.0 (372)	100.0 (153)	100.0 (130)

with the viewpoint of Pierre Bourdieu (1990), who supports the criteria of consumption patterns for measuring social class. Bourdieu relied on two criteria: economic capital ownership and social capital ownership (including cultural and symbolic capitals) (Ritzer, 1992b), since Bourdieu believed that the important problem of capitalism towards the end of the 20th Century was consumption processes as opposed to production processes. It should be understood that in capitalism, manufactured goods exceeded demands; therefore, the question of mass consumption became the point of interest in order to rapidly use up the goods and services (Allen and Anderson, 1994; Kaewthep and Hinwiman, 2008).

In addition, academics such as Jonathan Rigg and Mark Ritchie (2002) proposed that education has changed production styles and lifestyles of rural people. Thus, consumption should be considered since people have been more interested in the changes of the ways of living until these have compelled folk people to negotiate and adjust themselves for risks. Anan Kanjanapan (2011) mentioned the fact that more people live on the economic capital basis necessitates households to build higher incomes, both from selling products and hiring labor. The family status is hence in-between, “not an investor, nor a laborer”. In other words, the change of lifestyles made some rural households unable to accumulate capitals or depend on their own capital. Although they are farmers, they are not the true producer since the income from produces has to be divided into parts for business investment, for production-related technologies, for debt-paying, etc. Household members obtain a portion just as if they are laborers. This condition leads to emergence of classes. This group of villagers can be categorized as the middle or the lower class since they live under risk of being poor if the income portion they receive becomes less or a higher portion is taken away for other purposes (Kanjanapan, 2010).

The community context dimensions of the South and the North Isan villages and other rural northeastern places are similar to the conditions discussed above. Thus, it can be concluded that consumption is the criteria to categorize social classes of rural households. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) also stated that formation of social classes is flexible especially in the social capitalism. Individuals are able to move up the scales of classes very rapidly depending on consumption through their existing capital. Maintaining differences in consumption patterns is maintaining differences in social classes as well.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Social class distinction in Thailand changes according to political and governing development. Multiplicity of social class categorization methods depend on definitions, economic factors, related social aspects, such as families, political positions, official positions, economic and political power, wealth, education, and occupation. In the past before the national social and economic development plan, no matter what criteria were used for categorization of social classes, rural households which were considered farming households were classified as the lower classes since it was always difficult for them to have access to resources. They, particularly the Isan rural households, did not also have negotiating power in the economic system and were taken advantages by the privileged class (Lao-an, 2010).

The results of the study indicate that the national development policy under the national social and economic development plan forces rural households to

adjust themselves by growing cash crops. This has led to socio-economic changes which was the starting point of social class distinction since rural families do not have equal chances to adjust themselves. Well-off households are able to occupy a place in commercial production, while medium and poor households are not equally adjusted. However, all households attempt to acquire social mobility through accumulation of economic capital according to the consumerism trend. This correlates to the survey on "Thai rural consumers" of Ogilvy and Mather Advertising(Thailand) Co. Ltd. (2003) which found that after the economic crisis, the urban lifestyles have changed. The group with purchasing power, i.e., having higher income than 10,000 Baht per month, is increasingly interested in obtaining modern daily utilities. This shows that medium-status people emerge in Thai society.

Rural medium-status people are like their counterpart in cities, *i.e.*, they are overridden by the power of capitalism as a result of marketing economic power and populism policy of the government in that time which encouraged consumption at the grass-root level in order to rapidly restore the economic condition. From the study of the criteria for determining social classes of governmental organizations and criteria related to social classes of rural households in the Northeast, it is confirmed that rural households at present classify their social classes based on consumption as the indicator.

It should be noted that the different indicators for determining social classes of the national Statistics Bureau and the Department of Community Development make the statistics of poor households differ at 63.7 and 5.1 percent, respectively. From the criteria of the South and the North Isan villages the proportion of poor households are 5.0 and 15.0 percent, respectively; which are closer to the social classification of the Department of Community Development.

The research results led to recommendations that the criteria for determining social classes of governmental organizations, particularly from the National Statistics Bureau which are based on the concept of poverty line of the western countries may not be suitable to analyze the distinction of Thai rural social classes. The dimensions of rural society also enable rural households to adjust themselves for social mobility all the time. Therefore, social class categorization should take into account the criteria of social classes of rural areas in the Northeast.

Moreover, the government should support capitals for rural households, including cultural capital, economic capital, social capital, symbolic capital. At the same time, the social supporting systems and infrastructures should be improved by the governmental organizations at the implementation level, for instance, organizations related to agricultural extension should disseminate knowledge and

support farming households to produce more effectively to be able to accumulate capitals. This will enable social mobility of the households. Relevant organizations in rural area should set strategic plans in developing households with different social mobility in order to strengthen rural households appropriately.

Acknowledgment

This article is a part the study entitled; "Social Mobility of Rural Households after the Intergenerational Transfers of Capitals, Thailand." was supported by Research Fund for Supporting Lecturer to Admit High Potential Student and Research on His Expert Program Year 2011, from Graduate School, Khon Kaen University, Thailand.

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