



# ASIAN REVIEW

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## Changing Asia

### Introduction: Changing Asia

*Jirayudh Sinthuphan*

### Vulnerability to poverty of rural farm households in Thailand

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### Administrative reform for public administration capacity in Bangladesh

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### Ageing and modernization theory

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*Yanuar Sumarlan*

### Discourse "eat boys, become immortal":

### The reflection of conflicts between Thai women and Thai social values

*Somprasong Saeng-in*

# **ASIAN REVIEW**

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**Changing Asia**

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## Introduction: Changing Asia

*Jirayudh Sinthuphan*

The world is constantly changing. Rapid technological, socio-political and climate disruptions have already imposed new challenges on human life and society. In order to persist, we must learn to adopt new ways of thinking and working. The five articles in this issue of the *Asian Review* address the issue of change and new challenges in societies across Asia.

Asia is increasingly threatened by intensifying inequality and an aging population. Its neo-liberal free-market ideology has not only resulted in its widened social disparity but also in the lack of knowledge and skills needed to develop proper mechanisms to protect the public. Without proper state intervention, rural populations are left behind and are vulnerable to poverty as demonstrated in the study by Thitiwan Sricharoen about vulnerability to poverty of rural farm households in Thailand. Likewise, Marie-Helene Thomas draws our attention to the effect of modernization ideology on Asia's changing attitude towards old age and filial piety. With its youth-orientated ideology and its industrialization ambition, Asia's aging population is considered counter-productive and hence less important. Unless Asian societies can come up with a new ideology and cultural mechanism, older individuals will soon be left behind to fend for themselves as opposed to being respected and celebrated in old age.

Transborder migration is another challenging issue that Asia has to take into consideration. This can either be the result of transnational capital flows or a consequence of the world's growing refugee crisis. For decades, several countries in Asia, bound by International accords and bilateral agreements, have played host to waves of refugees who have crossed into their territories. Yanuar Sumarlan elucidates the Indonesian experience as a transit country and its refugee policies. He clearly points to his country's failure to deal with successions of international refugee crises and its inability to come up with alterna-

tives to the country's "fossilized refugee policy." A reform in refugee policy at all levels is needed—whether it is at the national, regional or international level—in order for partner countries to catch up with the evolving refugee crisis and to build a better mechanism for service delivery.

Administrative reform and capacity building for service delivery is the subject of the article by Muhammad Azizuddin. Citing case studies of local public institutions in Bangladesh, the article recognizes the constraint of administrative reform driven by a political agenda and bureaucracy. In order to achieve real reform, the country must rethink its hierarchical colonial and postcolonial administrative structures to embrace more civic involvement. It proposes that an involvement of local stakeholders in public governance and service delivery is key to the success of administrative reform and the betterment of public service.

The final article in this issue of the *Asian Review* focuses on Thailand's changing gender norms and values. Using an analysis of the rising trend of older women dating younger men, Somprasong Saengin exposes hidden conflicts between female desire and social values within Thai society. It has been decades since feminism was first introduced to the country. The boundary between love and sex has long since faded yet Thai society at large cannot accept these changes and confines the female population within its archaic social norms.

Changes are inevitable. Human society must learn to accept this fact and to adopt new ways of seeing the world. We may try hard to resist but, unfortunately, it is the only way to survive.

## **Vulnerability to poverty of rural farm households in Thailand**

*Thitiwan Srirachoen*

Abstract—This research intends to estimate vulnerability to poverty, specify vulnerable groups and identify strategies that households use to address the exposure to risk of rural farm households in North-eastern and Northern Thailand. This study was conducted in four provinces of Thailand in the Northeastern region (Kalasin and Buri Ram provinces) and the Northern region (Chiangmai and Nan provinces). Data on a total of 1,400 households was collected in the year 2014. The research methodology applied was the feasible generalized least square (FGLS) method, which was employed to determine how log consumption impacts the welfare status of households.

The result on vulnerability to poverty analysis was reached by the feasible generalized least square (FGLS) method. Upon subjecting the data to analysis, the first stage of the OLS revealed that 48% of the variation in log consumption (a measure of well-being) can be explained by the following factors: household size square, family member education, household head education, non-farm occupation of the household head, disabled persons, unemployed family members, non-farm full-time employees, own livestock, monetary assets, tangible asset value, total borrowing, expenditure on risks, risk severity, unemployment, theft of producer goods, crop loss via insects, working disability by accident to the household head, and theft of crops.

The estimates show that about 53.57% of households were vulnerable to poverty. The comparison of observed poverty status based on the vulnerability index shows that 75% of farm households are poor, whereas another 25% are non-poor. The classification of poverty status based on observed poverty status and the vulnerability index can be classified into four groups. Firstly, poor households with high vulnerability to poverty account for 9.64%. Secondly,



households that are currently not poor but have a high vulnerability to being poor in the future account for 43.93%. Thirdly, poor households that have a low vulnerability to poverty account for 19.14%. Finally, non-poor with low vulnerability to poverty account for 27.29%.

Policy recommendations for the factors influencing poverty are as follows: 1) theft of agricultural commodities; farmers should install lighting, keep watch at night, use technology networks like video cameras or smart phones to catch thieves; 2) a solution to the disabled family member problem is suggested by the government creating social worker jobs, education in specific skills and employment education and planning for a smart city for the disabled; 3) for crop loss caused by insect and plant disease issues it is suggested that farmers reduce pesticide use, employ crop rotation and practice organic farming; 4) unemployment problems can be solved by increasing the specific skills of labor consistent with factory demand and government consideration of a migrant policy; 5) providing rural education by using innovative tools and methods to the challenges posed by home-school distance; beyond formal education, the study suggests education in specific skills and employable education.

Keywords: Vulnerability to poverty, poverty, risk management, feasible generalized least square, farm household

## **Introduction**

Over the last four decades, Thailand has made remarkable progress in social and economic development, moving from a low-income country to an upper-income country in less than a generation. Thailand's economy grew at an average annual rate of 7.5 percent in the boom years of 1986 to 1996 and 5 percent following the Asian crisis during 1999 to 2005. Historically, economic growth has been the key driver of poverty reduction in Thailand. However, GDP grew by less than 2 percent a year in 2014 and 2015. Looking ahead, the World Bank forecasts the growth rate of Thailand will be 2.9 to 3.3 percent for 2016-2018 (World Bank, 2016).

Poverty has declined substantially over the last 30 years from 67% in 1986 to 7.1% in 2015 during periods of high growth and rising agri-

cultural prices (World Bank, 2018). However, poverty and inequality continue to pose significant challenges, with vulnerability as a result of faltering economic growth, falling agricultural prices and ongoing droughts. Poverty in Thailand is primarily a rural phenomenon. As of 2014, over 80 percent of the country's 7.1 million poor lived in rural areas. Moreover, an additional 6.7 million were living within 20 percent above the national poverty line and remained vulnerable to falling back into poverty (World Bank, 2018). Although inequality has declined over the past 30 years, wealth distribution in Thailand remains unequal compared with many countries in East Asia. Significant and growing disparities in household income and consumption can be seen across and within the regions of Thailand, with pockets of poverty remaining in the Northeast, North and Deep South (World Bank, 2016).

In Thailand, the poverty line has been utilized for assessing and monitoring the poverty situation. Thailand's poverty line was 2,575 Baht per person per month in 2013; 2,647 baht in 2014; and 2,644 Baht in 2015. The average poverty line from 2006 to 2015 indicates that northern and northeastern region had the lowest poverty line (Table 1).

*Table 1. Poverty Line (Expenditure) by Region and Province: 2006 – 2015 (baht/person/month)*

Region and Province	2015	Average 2006-2015 (10 years)
Whole Kingdom	2,644	2,334
Bangkok	3,132	2,841
Central Region	2,827	2,539
Northern Region	2,377	2,087
Northeastern Region	2,355	2,042
Southern Region	2,724	2,400

Source: Data, 2006-2015. Data from the Household Socio-Economic Survey, National Statistical Office. Processing by the Development Indicators database and social NESDB, Office of The National Economic and Social Development Board.

By all estimates and available definitions, the poverty of households in the Northern and Northeastern region of Thailand is strikingly widespread and pervasive. It is more a rural phenomenon in Thailand with almost 90% of poor people in rural areas. Furthermore, this extreme poverty is aggravated by the high level of vulnerability and the large variance in levels of essential food consumption. Households experience poverty differently and there are different aspects of poverty like deprivation, powerlessness, vulnerability, seasonality etc.

Poverty is one of the chronic social problems of Thailand and both the former and current government set different strategies to eradicate it. Various interventions have been undertaken to strengthen the grassroots economy, as well as to reduce the incidence of poverty. However, it is difficult to solve these problems due to the complexity of the economy and society and especially the vulnerability of the household itself. There is widespread poverty in Thailand and many households suffer spells of chronic and transient poverty. Also, the ability of households to cross a given income threshold or poverty line is very limited.

Poverty is dynamic. In solving the poverty of Thailand, policy makers need to understand poverty from a multidimensional view and solve the poverty problem directly by target groups. This will not only help people who are in the poverty group but will include people who are expecting to fall into poverty in the near future or who are in the vulnerability group. Therefore, this research focuses on identifying the vulnerability to poverty group in northern and northeastern Thailand.

### **Literature review/research gap**

Poor rural households are vulnerable. Their livelihood systems are often so fragile and finely balanced that a small misfortune can destabilize the households for many years. Crises and shocks which either require immediate outlays of cash or which diminish already low and irregular incomes, or both, have long-term effects on livelihood strategies and welfare (World Bank and DFID, 1999). Chambers and Conway (1992) were among the first to give a scholarly definition of livelihood. In this research context, livelihood is, therefore, defined as:

The capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustain-

able when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base (Chambers and Conway, 1992: 7-8).

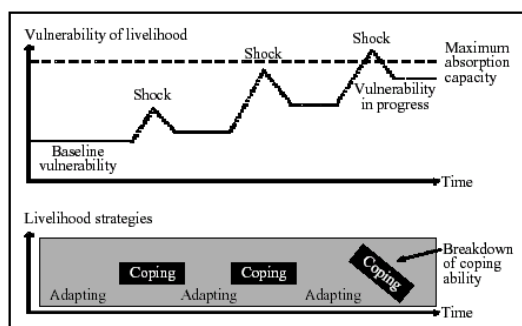
The sustainable livelihood framework can be used as an analytical tool to identify and assess internal and external factors to the household that affect its socio-economic survival.

Livelihood strategies will differ with regard to whether people have to deal with gradual changes or sudden shocks and crises. Adaptive livelihood strategies seek to mitigate risks through livelihood adjustment (e.g. family planning or accessing insurance) or change and diversification of income creating activities. This type of strategy is quite deliberate and adjusts the livelihood to long-term changes and challenges (i.e. socio-economic trends). Coping strategies (e.g. migration, sale of livestock or reduction of consumption expenditure) seek to minimize the impact of livelihood shocks and are a short-term response to sudden or periodic shocks (Carney et al. 1999, Korf, 2002). Coping strategies, although providing some protection in the short run, limit the poor's long-term prospects of escaping poverty (Kanbur and Squire, 2001). Holzmann and Jorgenson (2000) differentiate adaptive livelihood strategies further into risk reduction and risk mitigating strategies. While the so called risk reduction strategies aim at reducing the probability of a shock occurring, the risk mitigating strategies look at reducing the impact of a shock on the livelihood.

Figure 1 illustrates how the exposure to shocks and crises affects the vulnerability of livelihoods and how households adapt to and cope with these externally imposed conditions. The concept of vulnerability and the related adaptive and coping strategies can be used to assess which shocks, crises and which institutional changes in the socio-economic framework influence the livelihoods of the exposed population and in what way. Starting from baseline vulnerability, short-term shocks (e.g. natural disasters, death of an animal) suddenly upset the precarious equilibrium and increase the current vulnerability level. People adopt strategies in response to the livelihood crisis. The immediate response relates to coping strategies. The system recovers and, eventually, households employ new adapting strategies to develop a new portfolio of livelihood activities. The revision and expansion of adapting strategies

can include the adaptation of existing informal local mutual-aid agreements and/or the development and adoption of formal or semi-formal micro insurance schemes for certain risks. Figure 1 shows that the livelihood concept is dynamic in that it attempts to understand change and complex cause-and-effect relationships (Murray, 2001).

*Figure 1. Effects of shocks on the vulnerability of livelihoods*



Source: Adapted from Korf (2002: 3)

## **Research method**

The purpose is to identify vulnerability, risks and risk management strategies of households in the northern and northeastern region of Thailand. Vulnerability is an important aspect of the household experience of poverty. The fieldwork for the research was conducted between April and December 2014.

Questionnaires were distributed to the research area. After getting all of the distributed questionnaires back, the process of checking, encoding and analyzing data was initiated. The statistical treatment of data was through the use of both descriptive and inferential statistics, such as the frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation to describe household characteristics. Finally, the quantitative method applies the econometrics model. Feasible generalized least square methodology was employed to find the vulnerability measurement in this study.

By assuming that consumption is log-normally distributed, estimates can be used to form an estimate of the probability that a house-

hold with characteristics  $X_h$  will be poor or the household's vulnerability to poverty level.

$$\hat{V}_h = \hat{\mathbf{P}}(\ln c_h < h \mid X_h) = \phi \left[ \frac{h c - X_h \hat{\beta}}{\sqrt{X_h \hat{\theta}}} \right]$$

Data sources were obtained from questionnaires of 1,400 households. The research area was in the northeastern region of Thailand, in Kalasin and Buri Ram provinces, and in the northern region, in Chiangmai and Nan provinces. The method (feasible generalized least square-FGLS) was employed to determine how log consumption impacted the welfare status of households in the research area. It was recognized that one of the basic assumptions of ordinary least square (OLS) is that the error term must have a mean zero and constant variance and that once this constant variance assumption is violated, there is bound to be heteroscedasticity. The relaxation of the constant variance assumption (Chaudhuri, 2000) is a method of determining how the variance of the error term (i.e., now a measure of log consumption) impacts overall well-being (proxies by expenditure on food and non-food items) (Oluwatayo, 2004).

An advantage of the estimation strategy used in this research – using a FGLS approach to estimate the variance of the idiosyncratic component of household consumption – is that it yields a consistent estimate of the true variance of consumption even when consumption is measured with error unless the measurement error varies systematically with some household characteristic(s). It may in fact be the case that measurement error correlates with some observable characteristic of the household. For instance, rural households derive a larger share of their food consumption from their own production than urban households evaluated at imputed (not reported or observed) prices. If this is the case, it is possible to obtain unbiased estimators of consumption variance by estimating separate models for rural and urban areas. Concern about systematic measurement error is another reason for estimating separate models at as disaggregated a level as possible (Emil D Tesliuc, and Kathy Lindert, 2002).

## **Findings, conclusions**

### *Vulnerability to poverty in rural farm households in the Northern and Northeastern regions of Thailand*

The results of the model for the log consumption equation and variance of the log consumption (OLS) are shown in Table 2 below. Upon subjecting the data to analysis, the first stage of the OLS reveals that 48% of the variation in log consumption (a measure of well-being) can be explained by the following factors: household size square: family members of below primary education: family members with primary education: family members with secondary education: family members with vocational education: family members with bachelor level: education of the household head: below primary education level of education of the household head: literacy of the household head who cannot read or write: non-farm occupation of the household head: disabled persons: number of unemployed family members: non-farm full-time employees - adult: the belonging of livestock: monetary assets: tangible asset value: total borrowing in last 12 months: expenditure on last five year risk: severity of risk: unemployment in 2014: theft of producer goods in 2014: theft of producer goods during 2010-2013: crop loss due to insect and plant disease in 2014; working disability by accident to household head during 2010-2013: theft of crops during 2010-2013. The rest, 52%, can be attributed to the disturbance term.

The low  $R^2$  value is not uncommon and is due to the measurement error (from unobserved and omitted variables) associated with the use of cross-sectional data in consumption studies. However, this measurement error indirectly accounts for the importance of the disturbance term, a variable that captures idiosyncratic factors (which include risk associated with income) (Oluwatayo, 2004). All the variables included in the analysis have some influence on household well-being. For example, education of family members, non-farm occupation of the household head, disabled persons, number of unemployed, animals owned and unemployment in 2014, have a negative influence on the consumption expenditure of households in the study area.

Generally, most of the model's coefficients (log consumption and variance of log consumption) come up with expected signs. In all samples, household size square, education of the household head:

below primary education level of the household head, literacy of the household head, non-farm full-time employees, monetary assets, other asset value, total borrowing in the last twelve months, expenditure on the last five year risks, severity of risk, theft of producer goods in 2014, theft of producer goods during 2010-2013, crop loss due to insect and plant disease in 2014, working disability of the household head because of accident during 2010-2013, theft of crops during 2010-2013, are positively significant in explaining welfare in the research area.

For instance, a strong relationship is apparent between log consumption and the theft of crops during 2010-2013, whereby a household which has theft of crops has a positive effect on log consumption. An increase in the theft of crops leads to an increase in log consumption of 1.178 Baht. In recent years, theft from farms has become a more common occurrence. Access to high value agricultural equipment, crops (paddy, fruit, vegetable) and cattle that can easily be turned into cash has sparked new interest from thieves. In particular, crop theft is increasing and leading to thousands of Baht in uninsured losses by unsuspecting farmers. In several cases the thefts occur months before discovery of the loss and recovery is almost impossible. For instance, in the research area of Kalasin, the surging rice prices caused the widespread paddy theft of premium quality fragrant rice from a farmer's granary. Therefore, households with a high number of thefts have higher consumption expenditure than households without thefts.

This example is the same as the relationship between log consumption and the working disability of a household head by accident and crop loss through insect and plant disease. In the uncertain case of the household head who faces an accident and is then disabled, he or she cannot work. As a result, the household income is affected directly. An increase in the number of working disabilities of household heads through accident leads to an increase in log consumption of 0.890 Baht. Their family members must pay for the hospital and other health costs to cure their household head. The next important risk to hit households is crop loss through insect and plant disease. An increase in crop loss via insect and plant disease leads to an increase in log consumption of 0.867 Baht. In the area of study, farmers lose their high-value crops particularly rice, maize, vegetables and fruit to insects, pests and diseases every year. The damage and production loss



leads to monetary loss. In spite of increasing pesticide use, the losses in all major crops still increase in relative term. Farmers take the risk of toxic contamination. Therefore, their consumption expenditure is also higher because of the higher pesticide cost, spending to compensate yield loss and spending for taking care of their health.

On the other hand, unemployment in 2014 also had a strong relationship with log consumption but in a negative sense. An increase in unemployment led to a decrease in log consumption of 0.61 Baht. Households, which encounter high unemployment, have less consumption than households that do not encounter unemployment. In the research area, households are hit by unemployment risk. Households, which expect that their family members may be laid off from factories in the future have low present consumption, secure their incomes and plan to save for the future.

In the same direction, households that have disabled family members have a strong relationship with log consumption in the opposite direction. An increase in the inability of a person leads to a decrease in log consumption of 0.435 Baht. Vulnerability is most often associated with poverty but it can also arise when people are isolated, insecure and defenseless in the face of risk, shock or stress. In the case of disabled people in local areas, all of them stay alone while their family members go to work on the farm. They eat less and must help themselves in all daily activities. Disabled people do not work and cannot earn their own income. They are a potentially vulnerable group.

*Table 2. Model for estimating vulnerability to poverty by OLS*

Variable	Total OLS			
	Log(ctn)	P> t	Var(ctn)	P> t
Household size square	0.013 (0.002)	0.000	0.001 (0.005)	0.816
Family members: below primary education	-0.370 (0.032)	0.000	0.086 (0.086)	0.315

Variable	Total			
	OLS			
	Log(ctn)	P> t	Var(ctn)	P> t
Family members: primary education	-0.293 (0.029)	0.000	0.072 (0.078)	0.352
Family members: secondary education	-0.411 (0.032)	0.000	0.009 (0.085)	0.912
Family members: vocational education	-0.322 (0.049)	0.000	-0.205 (0.131)	0.117
Family members: bachelor education	-0.281 (0.042)	0.000	0.133 (0.112)	0.234
Education of household head: below primary education	0.447 (0.063)	0.000	0.235 (0.167)	0.159
Education of household head (level)	0.068 (0.031)	0.032	0.337 (0.083)	0.000
Literacy of household head: cannot read or write	0.320 (0.088)	0.000	1.424 (0.234)	0.000
Non-farm occupation of household head	-0.088 (0.021)	0.000	-0.070 (0.056)	0.210
Disabled person	-0.435 (0.198)	0.028	-0.436 (0.525)	0.406
Unemployed family member	-0.164 (0.029)	0.000	0.074 (0.077)	0.336

*Vulnerability to poverty of rural farm households in Thailand*

Variable	Total			
	OLS			
	Log(ctn)	P> t	Var(ctn)	P> t
Non-farm full-time employees (adult)	0.128 (0.014)	0.000	0.106 (0.038)	0.006
Own livestock (1=have, 0=no)	-0.120 (0.049)	0.014	0.508 (0.130)	0.000
Monetary assets	0.000 (0.000)	0.000	0.000 (0.000)	0.883
Tangible asset value	0.000 (0.000)	0.002	0.000 (0.000)	0.215
Total borrowing in last 12 months	0.000 (0.000)	0.002	0.000 (0.000)	0.410
Expenditure on last five years risks	0.000 (0.000)	0.002	0.000 (0.000)	0.589
Severity of risk	0.236 (0.043)	0.000	-0.034 (0.114)	0.767
Unemployment, 2014	-0.610 (0.231)	0.008	0.800 (0.615)	0.193
Theft of producer goods, 2014	0.687 (0.180)	0.000	-0.380 (0.477)	0.426
Theft of producer goods, 2010-2013	0.487 (0.165)	0.003	-0.305 (0.439)	0.487
Crop loss (insect, plant disease), 2014	0.867 (0.174)	0.000	0.002 (0.463)	0.997

Variable	Total			
	OLS			
	Log(ctn)	P> t	Var(ctn)	P> t
Working disability (accident) of household head, 2010-2013	0.890 (0.217)	0.000	-0.313 (0.577)	0.588
Theft of crops, 2010-2013	1.178 (0.218)	0.000	-1.085 (0.578)	0.061
Constant	13.432 (0.151)	0.000	-3.061 (0.402)	0.000
Observation	1,400		1,400	
R-squared	0.480		0.072	
Prob (F)	0.000		0.000	

Source: Own calculation.

Note: Log (ctn) = Log of consumption.

Var (ctn) = Variance of consumption.

Standard errors are in parenthesis.

The results of the regression model by FGLS are demonstrated in Table 3, which presents the determinants of vulnerability to poverty by FGLS and variance of consumption. The signs of the coefficients found that the education of the household head below primary school, the theft of producer goods in 2014 and crop loss from insect and plant disease in 2014, have a positive impact on log consumption but a negative impact on variance of consumption.

Household size square has a negative impact on log consumption, as well as on variance of consumption. For families with a large number of family members, the consumption expenditure is also high. When households have high expenditure, it causes them to have less money left for other consumption items. If the households are attacked by natural risks, like drought or flood, it will result in crop loss, which makes it probably difficult to achieve smooth consumption.

Family members' education below primary education, primary education, secondary education and vocational education; education

level of the household head; illiteracy of the household head; non-farm occupation of the household head; a disabled person; non-farm full-time employees (adult); monetary assets; tangible asset value; total borrowing in the last twelve months; expenditure on the last five year risks; severity of risk; unemployment in 2014; theft of producer goods during 2010-2013; working disability by accident of the household head during 2010-2013; and theft of crops during 2010-2013, all have a tendency to increase log consumption and also to increase consumption variance. For example, if households have more monetary assets, they will have more ability to consume and have sufficient assets to smooth their consumption during difficult times. Therefore, households may either sell the assets or rent them out. Moreover, the accident incidence of household heads as a kind of risk that hits households leads them to spend more to manage risks, which affects household consumption and its variance.

*Table 3. Model for estimation of vulnerability to poverty by FGLS*

Variable	Total			
	OLS			
	log (ctn)	P> t	Var (ctn)	P> t
Household size square	-0.034 (0.005)	0.000	-0.019 (0.001)	0.000
Family members: below primary education	0.575 (0.078)	0.000	0.329 (0.016)	0.000
Family members: primary education	0.845 (0.067)	0.000	0.416 (0.014)	0.000
Family members: secondary education	0.258 (0.080)	0.001	0.221 (0.017)	0.000
Family members: vocational education	0.109 (0.126)	0.389	0.147 (0.026)	0.000

Variable	Total			
	OLS			
	log (ctn)	P> t	Var (ctn)	P> t
Family members: bachelor education	-0.024 (0.108)	0.826	0.081 (0.023)	0.000
Education of household head: below primary education	0.009 (0.161)	0.956	-0.107 (0.034)	0.001
Education of household head (level)	0.993 (0.076)	0.000	0.357 (0.016)	0.000
Literacy of household head: cannot read or write	1.914 (0.222)	0.000	0.662 (0.046)	0.000
Non-farm occupation of household head	0.350 (0.053)	0.000	0.152 (0.011)	0.000
Disabled person	1.461 (0.505)	0.004	0.639 (0.106)	0.000
Number of unemployed	-0.075 (0.075)	0.313	0.003 (0.016)	0.830
Non-farm full-time employees (adult)	0.074 (0.037)	0.048	0.001 (0.008)	0.942
Own livestock (1=have, 0=no)	-0.015 (0.125)	0.904	0.025 (0.026)	0.333
Monetary assets	0.000 (0.000)	0.601	0.000 (0.000)	0.000
Tangible asset value	0.000 (0.000)	0.282	0.000 (0.000)	0.594

*Vulnerability to poverty of rural farm households in Thailand*

Variable	Total			
	OLS			
	log (ctn)	P> t	Var (ctn)	P> t
Total borrowing in last 12 months	0.000 (0.000)	0.605	0.000 (0.000)	0.023
Expenditure on last five year risks	0.000 (0.000)	0.028	0.000 (0.000)	0.008
Severity of risk	2.980 (0.076)	0.000	1.090 (0.016)	0.000
Unemployment, 2014	0.675 (0.594)	0.256	0.412 (0.124)	0.001
Theft of producer goods, 2014	0.090 (0.461)	0.845	-0.138 (0.097)	0.152
Theft of producer goods, 2010-2013	0.453 (0.425)	0.286	0.070 (0.089)	0.434
Crop loss (insect, plant disease), 2014	0.437 (0.448)	0.329	-0.062 (0.094)	0.512
Working disability (accident) of household head, 2010-2013	0.737 (0.559)	0.188	0.077 (0.117)	0.511
Theft of crops, 2010-2013	1.280 (0.560)	0.022	0.192 (0.117)	0.102
Constant	No constant		No constant	
Observation	1,400		1,400	
R-squared			0.993	
Prob (F)	0.000		0.000	

Source: Own calculation.

Note: Log (ctn) = Log of consumption.

Var (ctn) = Variance of consumption.

Standard errors are in parenthesis.

*Relationship between vulnerability to poverty and observed consumption*

The relationship between vulnerability and poverty is demonstrated in Figure 2. Figure 2 illustrates this relationship for the whole research area, while the remaining graphs focus on the extremely poor, the very poor, the poor and the non-poor. Each figure uses marginal box plots to illustrate the density of the two distributions (consumption and vulnerability) for the sample being considered.

All of the figures have a horizontal line at the 0.5 vulnerability level, separating those who are more likely to be poor – the vulnerable to be found in the upper part of the graph – from those less likely to be poor –the non-vulnerable to be found in the lower part of the graph.

The graphs have vertical lines at the level of extreme and total poverty lines (the left-hand line) and at the extreme poverty line (the upper right-hand graph). These lines separate the extremely poor from the moderately poor and the non-poor.

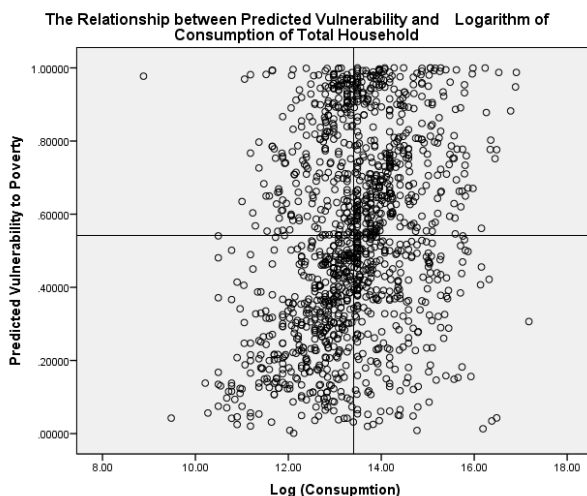
Figure 2 illustrates the positive relationship between vulnerability and (the logarithm of) consumption. The relationship between vulnerability and current consumption is positive, which is different from what is expected. The expected direction of vulnerability and current consumption is positive because a household which has high current consumption indicates low vulnerability. This is because the household has a high power of purchasing.

However, the results of the study are consistent with the real situation of household livelihoods. It means that the more the consumption the more the vulnerability because the source of money spending on consumption comes from loans. In the background, farm households are vulnerable. Farm occupation has a high risk from unexpected weather, production price and other factors, while the returns are quite low. Farming is costly with the continuing increase of input factors. This is not consistent with the theory of high risk and high return. Although farm households have a high risk from this variation, they must continue with their farm working and find some part time job



or secondary occupation to seek money in order to support family consumption. A lot of farm households change their main occupation from farm working to do other kinds of job such as hired construction worker, trading and so on. Moreover, there are a great number of farm households that are in debt. More consumption means more vulnerability. Households must save a part of their income for debt repayment, so less is left for consumption. Some households repay debt and borrow again because income does not match or balance expenditure. In other words, this may be because vulnerable households have limited income for spending. With a large household size and a small number of employees in a household, money received must be shared among all family member for consumption. Hence, the increase in consumption causes an increase in vulnerability to poverty.

*Figure 2. The relationship between predicted vulnerability and the logarithm of consumption of the total household*



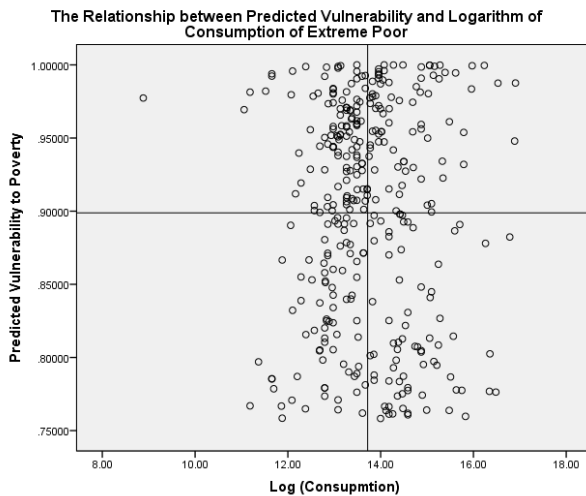
Source: Own calculation.

Note: Mean of log consumption is at 13.40366.

Mean of predicted vulnerability to poverty is at 0.54166.

Figure 3 demonstrates the relationship between predicted vulnerability and the logarithm of consumption for the extremely poor. The graph zooms in on the “extremely poor” part of the previous graph. As expected, almost all of the extremely poor are among the highly vulnerable. The mean of predicted vulnerability to poverty of the extremely poor household is at 0.89882. The marginal box plot of the graph indicates that almost all households have a vulnerability index in excess of 0.76, with 25.06%. The rate of exit from the extreme poverty pool is extremely low. This means that the majority of the extremely poor in 2014 were also poor in 2015. This segment of the population should be supported through social programs that increase their human capital and their other assets.

*Figure 3. The relationship between predicted vulnerability and the logarithm of consumption of the extreme poor*



**Source:** Own calculation.

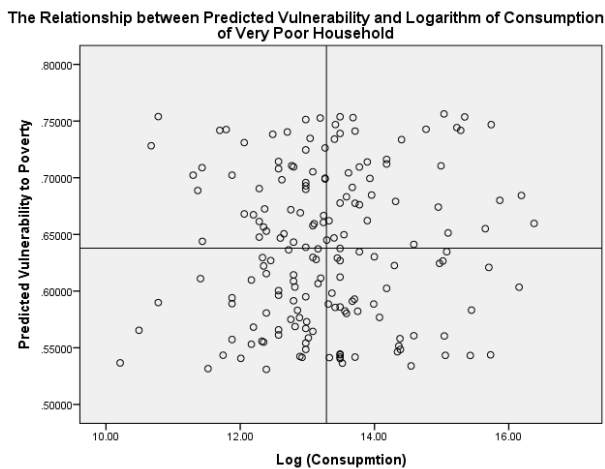
**Note:** The mean of predicted vulnerability to poverty of the extremely poor household is at 0.89882.

Figure 4 shows the relationship between predicted vulnerability and the logarithm of consumption of very poor households. The graph

presents the joint distribution of vulnerability and current consumption among the very poor group. From the marginal box plot, it can be seen that very poor households have a vulnerability index in excess of 0.33 but less than 0.75. The mean of predicted vulnerability to poverty of very poor households is at 0.63782. This means that currently poor households will still be poor in the next period.

Figure 5 presents the relationship between predicted vulnerability and the logarithm of consumption of poor households. The graph presents the joint distribution of vulnerability and current consumption among poor households. From the marginal box plot, it can be seen that poor households have a vulnerability index in excess of 0.33 but below 0.528. These poor households have a 14.29% vulnerability to be poorer in the future.

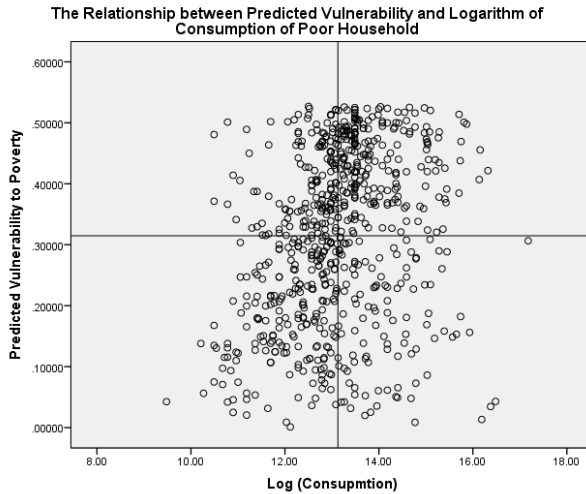
*Figure 4. The relationship between predicted vulnerability and the logarithm of consumption of very poor households*



Source: Own calculation.

Note: The mean of predicted vulnerability to poverty of very poor households is at 0.63782.

Figure 5. The relationship between predicted vulnerability and the logarithm of consumption of poor households

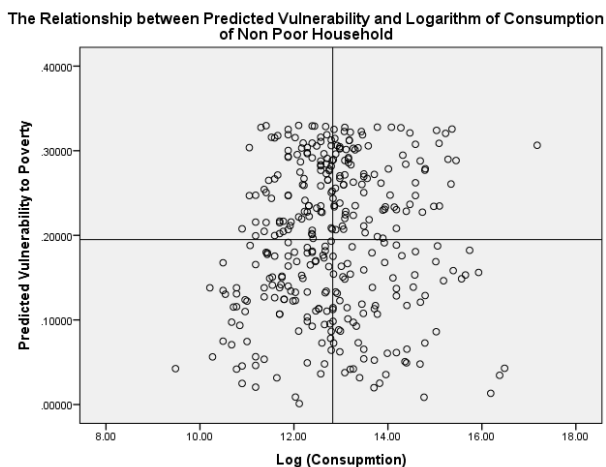


Source: Own calculation.

Note: The mean of predicted vulnerability to poverty of very poor households is at 0.37468.

Figure 6 presents the relationship between predicted vulnerability and the logarithm of consumption of the non-poor. The graph presents the joint distribution of vulnerability and current consumption for the non-poor. 25% of the non-poor are not vulnerable and those who are vulnerable have consumption levels close to the poverty line. Another part of non-poor groups accounts for 75%, that are not poor at present but who are at risk of falling into the poor group in the next period.

*Figure 6. The relationship between predicted vulnerability and the logarithm of consumption of the non-poor*



Source: Own calculation.

Note: The mean of predicted vulnerability to poverty of non-poor households is at 0.19497.

### *Discussion of the vulnerability to poverty group*

The concept Thailand uses to calculate the poverty group is most frequently the poverty line as the cut-off for households that stay below the poverty line and are poor and households that stay above the poverty line and are not poor.

Therefore, poverty line measurement in Thailand is based on the concept of physical subsistence and is called the “absolute” approach. People are defined as poor if they do not have sufficient income to satisfy their basic needs. The poverty line defines the minimum basic needs of people and is the threshold income below which one is considered to be poor (NSO, 1999).

Thailand’s poverty line in the year 2014 was at 2,647 Baht per capita per month (Table 4). The rural headcount ratio in terms of expected household consumption was less than the poverty line at 28.79%.

*Table 4 Poverty Line (Expenditure) by Region* (Unit: baht per capita per month)

Poverty line	2014	2015
Country poverty line in 2015	2,647	2,644
Northeastern poverty line in 2015	2,387	2,355
Northern poverty line in 2015	2,355	2,377
Bangkok	3,133	3,132
Central Region	2,832	2,827
Southern Region	2,735	2,724

Source: National Statistics of Thailand, 2017.

When comparing using the regional poverty line of the north-eastern region of Thailand, which was at 2,387 Baht per capita per month, the percentage of expected consumption of households lower than the poverty line was 28.86%.

The poverty line of the northern region of Thailand in 2014 equalled 2,355 Baht per month per capita (Table 5).

*Table 5. Comparison of expected consumption and the poverty line*

Expected consumption	Freq.	%
Country poverty line in 2014 (2,647 Baht per capita per month)		
Expected consumption less than poverty line	403	28.79
Expected consumption more than poverty line	997	71.21
Total	1,400	100.00
Northeastern poverty line in 2014 (2,387 Baht per capita per month)	Freq.	%
Expected consumption less than poverty line	202	28.86
Expected consumption more than poverty line	498	58.29
Total northeastern province	700	87.14

Northern poverty line in 2014 (2,355 Baht per capita per month)	Freq.	%
Expected consumption less than poverty line	139	19.86
Expected consumption more than poverty line	561	80.14
Total northern province	700	100.00

Source: Own calculation.

Poverty and vulnerability in Thailand arise as a result of transient rather than chronic conditions. The main causes of poverty are the lack of land ownership, lack of capital, education and skills, debt, irregular employment, large families, aging and sickness and uncontrollable outside forces (Taneerananon, 2005). This could be the result of chronic conditions (e.g. low level of assets and endowments) or a transient situation (e.g. a temporary setback due to shocks). In terms of vulnerability, the main causes are low expected consumption and high variance of consumption. In order to provide policy advice, the literature (e.g. Bidani and Richter, 2001) should be followed: the pool of vulnerable households divided into two mutually-exclusive groups namely (1) those who are vulnerable due to the high volatility of their consumption or the HV vulnerable, and (2) those who are vulnerable due to their expected low mean consumption or the LM vulnerable (Alayande, 2004).

The result of this study shows two groups of vulnerable households, which are, high and low vulnerable households. The estimates show that about 53.57% of households are vulnerable to poverty (Table 6).

*Table 6. Vulnerability to poverty households*

Vulnerability households	Freq.	%
High vulnerability $\geq 0.5$	750	53.57
Low vulnerability $< 0.5$	650	46.43
Total	1,400	100

Source: Own calculation.

The comparison of observed poverty status based on the vulnerability index shows that 75% of farm households are poor, whereas another 25% are non-poor (Table 7).

Table 8 shows the classification of poverty status based on observed poverty status and the vulnerability index. Poverty status can be classified into four groups. The first severe group is the poor household with high vulnerability to poverty. This group can be counted at only 9.64%. The second group is the household that is currently not poor but has high vulnerability to being poor in the future, accounting for 43.93%. The third group is the poor household that has low vulnerability to poverty, accounting for 19.14%. The last group is the safe group that is not poor and has low vulnerability to poverty. This group has 27.29%.

*Table 7. Comparison of observed poverty status based on vulnerability index*

Poverty status	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	1,050	75
Non-Poor	350	25
Total	1,400	100

Source: Own calculation.

Note: Poor = Chronic poor + frequently poor + infrequently poor.

Chronic poor = Chronic poor.

Transient poor = Frequently poor + infrequently poor.

*Table 8. Classification of poverty status based on observed poverty status and vulnerability index*

Poverty status	Frequency	Percentage
1.Poor and high vulnerability	135	9.64
2.Not poor but high vulnerability	615	43.93
3.Poor but low vulnerability	268	19.14
4.Not poor and low vulnerability	382	27.29
Total	1,400	100.00

Source: Own calculation.



Note: Poor is a household that has consumption below the poverty line. A high vulnerability household is a household that has a 50% probability to be below the poverty line. A low vulnerability household is a household that has a vulnerability index less than 0.5.

The comparison of vulnerability to poverty and household characteristics classified by non-vulnerable and vulnerable households in frequency and percentage of population results are discussed. A vulnerability profile by selected household characteristics is displayed in Table 9. When concentrating on the non-vulnerable group, the northeastern region contains a higher percentage (59.69%) than the northern region. When comparing between non-vulnerable and vulnerable groups, it is indicated that northern households are vulnerable with 62.57%. In the analysis of the province, it is indicated that Chiangmai, Nan and Kalasin province have a high percentage of vulnerable households, while Burriram province has a high percentage of non-vulnerable households.

*Table 9. Comparison of non-vulnerable and vulnerable households classified by region and district*

	Non-vulnerable		Vulnerable			Total (Row)	
	Freq.	% (Col)	% (Row)	Freq.	% (Col.)		% (Row)
<u>Region</u>							
Northeast	388	59.69	55.43	312	41.60	44.57	700
North	262	40.31	37.43	438	58.40	62.57	700
Total	650	100.00	46.43	750	100.00	53.57	1,400
<u>District</u>							
Burriram	231	35.54	66.00	119	15.9	34.00	350
Kalasin	157	24.15	44.86	193	25.7	55.14	350
Nan	140	21.54	40.00	210	28.0	60.00	350
Chiang Mai	122	18.77	34.86	228	30.4	65.14	350
Total	650	100.00	46.43	750	100.00	53.57	1,400

Source: Own calculation.

Table 10 is a comparison of vulnerability to poverty and household characteristics classified by non-vulnerable and vulnerable households. The calculation in the percentage in the columns and rows gives another view of the comparison. In the overall number of households, non-vulnerable households account for 46.43%, the remaining vulnerable households account for 53.57%. The average household size in the research area is between 4 and 6 people. The comparison of vulnerability to poverty and household size illustrates the interesting result that a larger household size has the tendency to have a lower number of vulnerable groups. For instance, a household size of between 1-3 people has high vulnerable households, amounting to 71.89%. Household sizes between 4-6 people have lower vulnerable households with 42.95%. Household sizes of between 7-9 people have a lower percentage of vulnerable households with 32.99%. It is the opposite direction for household sizes of more than 10 people, which contain the highest percentage of vulnerable households. This clearly indicates that the larger the household size the lower the vulnerability to poverty. The reason behind this may be because the larger household size has a larger social network. Working family members who work in other areas send money back to support the family. The network ties are very strong. Family members have a very close relationship and frequently interact. In a great number of northeastern families members work abroad and are married to foreigners. Therefore, the ability to support other family members is high. In Thai culture, parents invest in their children's education. After their children complete their education, they support their parents. The advantage of a large family is the sharing of the cost of living in a household. Not everyone needs to buy all home appliances. So, not everyone needs to purchase everything. This results in the economy of scale. Therefore, they have savings. Savings are the engine for consumption smoothing as well. Another reason may be because larger numbers of family members indicate a greater number of people participating in the labor force, which means the opportunity for acquiring income is also high. Most of the households in the research area do farm work, which requires a labor supply to help their own household farm to save farm investment costs. In farm work, family members join together to work on the farm and also share the crop production. Rice and other crops produced for their own household consumption and the rest of

production are sold. So, labor supplies are known to be the primary engines for consumption smoothing of households. Lastly, the life of rural farm households is simple. Many households spend less on food because they plant crops and feed animals. Some households collect vegetables from their own fields so it is not necessary to spend a lot by cash. That is why their consumption expenditure is not high.

However, poverty incidence as well as vulnerability to poverty worsens as one moves from medium size to bigger family size households. The vulnerability to poverty increases sharply to 66.67% with the largest family size. An overcrowded household size of more than ten people affects the poverty incidence. Farms in the study area are mostly small size and do not need a great amount of labor participation. Some family members are distinguished by unemployment. Farm profit is not enough to support household expenditure of the largest family size. Larger numbers of family members, above ten people, cause a decline in household savings. Hence, in this case labor supplies and saving are not representative of smooth consumption at all.

When comparing the vulnerability to poverty with the gender of the household head, it can be said that household heads are generally male. There is no difference between vulnerability groups classified by male and female household heads. Concerning the relationship of vulnerability to poverty and the age of the household head, age plays an important role in separating households, which nearly all fall into the vulnerable and non-vulnerable groups. The highest risk of vulnerability to poverty is with household heads below 30 years old. Cross-tabulation results show that young household heads aged less than 30 years old have a pretty high percentage of households falling into the vulnerable group because their household head may have little experience in organizing household income. These households represent 52% of the vulnerable group.

An increase in the age of the household head is found to decrease vulnerability to poverty. Older household heads aged 31-50 years old are active in the labor force, have a high possibility of earning a lot of money and have high experience of livelihood. As a result the middle-aged family boss frees families from vulnerability to poverty. On the other hand, household heads aged between 51 and 60 and 61 and 70 years old are mostly in the vulnerable group and account for 51.14% and 61.80%, respectively. It is recognized that Thailand is becoming

an aging society. Cross-tabulation results indicate that 22.36% of household heads are retired beyond 60 years old. The vulnerability to poverty declines for household heads aged above 70 years old. This may be because the household head at this age may have a certain amount of savings. They have a lot of lessons from the past about how to improve their own income and expenditure flow. They can handle household consumption well and have strategies to handle risks. Although the elderly have fewer opportunities to seek income they are non-vulnerable because they have the other family members to support them.

The last point is the relationship of vulnerability to poverty and the education of household heads. The results demonstrate that household heads with an educational background below primary school are safe in the non-vulnerable group, while household heads who have a primary and secondary education have the risk of falling into the vulnerable group and account for 60% and 55.52%, respectively. The results are very interesting and suggest that higher education can lead households far from the opportunity of falling from the vulnerability into the poverty group. Cross-tabulation results identify that 90.16% of household heads who have a bachelor's education stay in the non-vulnerable group.

*Table 10. Comparison of vulnerability to poverty and household characteristics classified by non-vulnerable and vulnerable households*

	Non-vulnerable			Vulnerable			Total (Row)
	Freq.	%	%	Freq.	%	%	
	(Col)	(Row)	(Col)	(Row)	(Row)		
<u>Household size</u>							
1-3 persons	149	22.92	28.11	381	50.8	71.89	530
4-6 persons	429	66.00	57.05	323	43.1	42.95	752
7-9 persons	65	10.00	67.01	32	4.3	32.99	97
> 10 persons	7	1.08	33.33	14	1.9	66.67	21
Total	650	100.00	46.43	750	100.0	53.57	1,400
<u>Gender of household head</u>							
Male	500	76.92	46.82	568	75.7	53.18	1,068
Female	150	23.08	45.18	182	24.3	54.82	332
Total	650	100.00	46.43	750	100.0	53.57	1,400
<u>Age of household head</u>							
< 30 years	12	1.85	48.00	13	1.7	52.00	25
31-40 years	84	12.92	53.16	74	9.9	46.84	158
41-50 years	229	35.23	50.22	227	30.3	49.78	456
51-60 years	192	29.54	42.86	256	34.1	57.14	448
61-70 years	89	13.69	38.20	144	19.2	61.80	233
> 70 years	44	6.77	55.00	36	4.8	45.00	80
Total	650	100.00	46.43	750	100.0	53.57	1,400
<u>Education of household head</u>							
1. Below primary school	80	12.31	56.74	61	8.10	43.26	141
2. Primary school	326	50.15	40.00	489	65.20	60.00	815
3. Secondary school	145	22.31	44.48	181	24.10	55.52	326

4.Vocational school	44	6.77	77.19	13	1.70	22.81	57
5.Bachelors degree and above	55	8.46	90.16	6	0.80	9.84	61
Total	650	100.00	46.43	750	100.00	53.57	1,400

Source: Own calculation.

The number of last year's risk hit households classified by vulnerability proposes that 61.49% of non-vulnerability households did not encounter any risk. On the contrary, vulnerable households faced with one to two risks involved about 57.48% and 63.21%, respectively (Table 11).

*Table 11. Number of last year's risk classified by vulnerability household*

Number of risks hit household	Non vulnerable	Percent (Row)	Vulnerable	Percent (Row)	Total
No risk	182	61.49	114	38.51	296
One risk	270	42.52	365	57.48	635
Two risks	117	36.79	201	63.21	318
Three risks	81	53.64	70	46.36	151
Total	650		750		1,400

Source: Own calculation.

### **Theoretical and practical implications**

There are some factors which the models suggest have an effect on poverty. The policy implication suggests the main factors, for example, theft of agricultural commodities, working disability of household heads and disabled family members, crop loss through insect and plant disease, unemployment and education.

Firstly, the statistical results show that theft of agricultural commod-

ities matters. Crop theft has long been a problem for farmers. They have a lot of challenging risks already and theft makes it more difficult for them. People generally think that crop theft does not do much harm but if it happens many times, it certainly has an impact. Theft is not stealing only crops but also valuable farm equipment, tools, generators and welding equipment. Farmers should not neglect this problem. They should manage an area of grass land since the wilderness surrounding the farm will be the hiding place of thieves. Farmers should install lighting, keep watch at night, use technology networks like video cameras or smart phones to catch thieves. Farm dogs can help to watch the farm. To sum up, the best way to prevent theft is taking stock of possessions, have locking storage, placing bright lights or motion sensor lighting around the outside of the farm and securing gates with chains and locks. In addition, farmers should discuss with the community the organization of mutual help.

Secondly, in the model, working disabilities of household heads and disabled family members have an influence on poverty. There is no easy solution for this policy implication. Thailand is a poor country. The government does not have enough budget to support all groups of people. Cash donations to non-profit organizations who are offering assistance to disabled people are important. However, a lot of disabled people are not assisted by these organizations and need family support. The disabled people need the financial aid for survivors and on long-term recovery efforts. The recommended policy is that government should help workers rendered unemployed due to disability by creating social worker jobs. For example, some in wheelchairs can operate telephones. Governments can give incentives for private companies to participate in hiring disabled people through tax discounts. In addition, special education programs to help them to do basic activities by themselves can reduce pressure on the family. Moreover, the smart city is an idea to help them have access to the city. Accessibility apps can make life easier for people with disabilities. Governments can help them by planning smart city projects, providing public places where disability is welcome: a wheelchair ramp, an automatic front door, a wide bathroom stall with a grab bar, Braille text, low-flicker lighting, glare-free floors, scent-free soap, etc.

Thirdly, the next important variable in the statistical model is crop loss caused by insect and plant disease affecting major *crops* grown

in the research area. Pests are any kind of *insect*, plant, disease or weed that hurts the farmer's profits. Almost all farmers spray to mitigate *crop damage* caused by pests. The use of toxic *pesticides* to manage pest problems has become common. Nonetheless, pesticides are not only harmful and poisonous to humans but also to the environment. Farmers are dependent on costly insecticide use. The insects build resistance to the insecticide then the farmers spray more and more, which results in poor health. Health costs increase household expenditure. This study recommends that farmers should reduce insecticide use and find alternative ways such as planting crops that resist disease. Some crops can naturally withstand pest damage and grow well. Another way is to rotate crop planting. Some farmers grow different crops and wait for a few years before growing the same crop on the same field. The next suggestion is to have organic farms. Currently, organic farms are popular in Thailand. Some organic farmers tend to spray less *pesticide* on their fields than other farmers. It is the best *way to protect crops using a natural method*. For instance, farmers keep pests away from field. Some farmers grow plants that naturally keep the pest out, surrounding their main crops. Another way is to use a natural enemy or insects that eat the pests but do not hurt the crop. Some farmers burn diseased crops in order to stop the pest spreading to healthy crops. The next suggestion is using plastic bags to wrap mango to protect the mango skin, or to bump against the branches and also to protect disease and insect. In addition, many farm households face risks from the unplanned production system. In some seasons farm households are promoted to produce the same kind of crop. After the harvest season there are is plenty of production leading the price to decline and farm households are competing with each other to sell the production. Therefore, farmers can think differently to speculate and forecast the tendency of production quantities and price at the beginning of the cropping season.

Fourthly, unemployment plays an important role in household poverty. Unemployment is categorized in human and social risks. The result indicates that rural unemployment occurs significantly among the young generation, especially in the northeast region since the education system has not adjusted to be consistent with the labor market. Rural employment requires skilled labor rather than formally educated labor. The local factory owner will inevitably hire the under skilled



employee. To solve this problem, the factory owner and local government should join together to arrange training programs in specific skills that are consistent with factory demand. Another problem relating to the unemployment issue is the uncompetitive local labor to migrant labor. In reality, there are already a number of legal and illegal migrants working in the agricultural sector. Their wages are generally lower than those of Thai workers. Hence, Thai laborers who are the hired labor on farms are unemployed. This problem is beyond the capacity of local government to solve alone. The national government should reconsider labor market policies to protect workers, issue job creation policies and migrants workers' policies.

Finally, the statistical results imply that education has a significant effect on poverty. Many poor households suffer from increasing school enrolment and transportation cost. A long distance-to-school effects school attendance and there is inefficient teacher distribution in rural areas. The discussion is over providing access to education in rural areas. It is challenging for the education system development to use innovative tools and methods to the problems posed by home-school distance. In addition, the provision of school transportation has become an option. Local government can help to improve transportation networks. Beyond formal education, the research result indicates that education in specific skills and employment education are important. A number of children drop out at the end of primary and secondary school to help support their families because families cannot afford education fees and they are supposed to take care of their families. Therefore, the provision of skills based education like basic courses similar to crafts, carpentry, welding, electrical maintenance, engine repair, robot controlling and computer software learning is being demanded by the factory.

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### *Acknowledgements*

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# **Administrative reform for public administration capacity in Bangladesh**

*Muhammad Azizuddin*

**ABSTRACT**—This paper aims to understand the reform-led administrative capacity for service delivery in Bangladesh. It also explores the links between administrative reform and service delivery capacity in the context of local administration relating to MDGs universal primary education. It represents a qualitative empirical study with gleaned data and seeks to answer the question of whether the Bangladeshi administration is sufficiently capable of delivering public services. Findings show that the capacity is limited and not up to the standard of a contemporary public service ethos. In addition, the management of local administration is conservative in their approach. The research implies an information gap for the governments of developing countries and SDGs for further actions in partnership.

**Keywords:** Administrative reform, capacity building, local administration, MDGs, SDGs, developing country, Bangladesh

## **Aim, objective, method and theory**

The capacity of public institutions to deliver services is a crucial issue for governments worldwide. Public administration as “government in action” (Richardson and Baldwin 1976) functions as an agent of public management with a formal organizational setting and functional stability as well as legislative guarantees. With the increase in state functions, as Vartola describes, “public administration is increasingly seen as taking care of matters of common concern, as a provider of social services and is, in general, a positive phenomenon” (Vartola

1984, 124). However, there has been a quality gap in public service delivery capacity. Administrative reforms are generally meant to reduce this gap by facilitating the capacity building opportunities (Ciprian, Gabriela and Dimbu 2010) of public institutions. Though administrative reform has been a regular phenomenon, the issue of capacity remains a central theme in academic as well as rational debates (Farazmand 2009).

This qualitative study aims to understand the administrative capacity for public service delivery in developing countries, linking national administrative reform programmes and their implementation at the local level in Bangladesh. It refers to development programme efforts with capacity dimensions making specific reference to the universal primary education of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the country. The study has investigated whether the Bangladeshi administration is sufficiently capable of delivering public services. Thus, discovering the plight of public service delivery in Bangladesh, fills the literature gap in administrative science, governance and development and has implications for Bangladeshi and developing countries' government and their Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The theoretical perspective of this study was based on the literature of organization, management and capacity discourses in the area of administrative science. A couple of concepts such as capacity, administrative reform and local administration were typically emphasized in the theoretical construction of institutional capacity and service delivery. Field research in the context of public administration and policy implementation merits systematic conceptualization of relevant concepts (Yin 2009). This qualitative study used both primary and secondary data to substantiate its findings. Keeping the objectives of the study in mind this study used an unstructured interview schedule to collect non-statistical data and achieve in-depth responses from forty respondents in Bangladesh (Quarantelli 1994; Harrell and Bradley 2009) and included Members of Parliament (MPs) and local Councillors, academics and expert observers, civil servants and service recipients. Administrative reform commission reports, books and peer-reviewed journal articles were used as a secondary data source. To sort out the relevant pieces of literature, the study adopted a systematic exclusion process (Olsen 1991) and the data was analysed by applying case study and content analysis techniques (Yin 2009). This section

of the paper follows the link between the capacity building of public administration and administrative reform. A contextual narrative of local administration, public service delivery and MDGs in Bangladesh is discussed afterwards. The conclusion follows the constructive discussion of the research results and findings.

### **Capacity building and administrative reform**

The institutional capacity for public management is regarded as a fundamental issue of public administration (Brillantes and Fernandez 2008). However, capacity discourse on public administration remains ambiguous and vague (Pazirandeh 2010). Roheetarachoon and Hossain (2012) argue that “scepticism exists in the literature as to whether public administrations are capable of effective service delivery” and “whether their capacity can genuinely be built in such PSR [Public Sector Reform] scenarios.” With a “diverse understanding and attitudes, and a wide array of opinions for conceptualizing” (Roheetarachoon and Hossain 2012) the notion can be understood as the enhancement of administrative workability at different levels featuring an individual or organization capable of effective and efficient service delivery (Teskey, Schnell and Poole 2012). It is well known that reforms are a conscious effort to address changes in the environment and the resulting demands for correction (Laitinen et al. 2015; Caiden 1969; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004; Pollit and Bouckaert 2009). It has been opined that administrative reform streamlines the public administration system aiming at optimizing the capacity of public institutions for public management and development programme implementation (Ciprian, Gabriela and Dimbu 2010; Levy and Kpundeh 2004). Ciprian and others have tagged administrative reform as a “special public policy” (Ciprian et al. 2010) to facilitate the reorganization of the institutions of governance aiming at rationalizing and building the capacity of administrative machinery to adopt public administration in changing the environment (Flynn 1998). Therefore, capacity building of public institutions through administrative reform for policy implementation is the offspring of the fields of public administration and governance (Heeks 2001).

Caiden, Sundaram and Jooste have added that administrative reform initiatives also try to “head off crises in the capacity to govern”

(Caiden and Sundaram 2004, 373, cf Dror 2001) and “can aid in the capacity building process” (Jooste 2008, 18). Cuthill and Fien (2005) argued that it could be considered as the “means to the end” of building the institutional capacity of public administration for public management. They considered capacity building further as “the continuous process resulting in administrative reform for effective and efficient responses to changing needs” (Cuthill and Fien 2005, 63). Stimulating institutional capacity building and improving service delivery also makes public administration more responsive to the needs of citizens. There is a functional relationship between administrative reform, capacity building and service delivery and they can be considered as complementary tools for sustainable governance.

### **The context of local administration, public service delivery, MDGs and primary education in Bangladesh**

Public institutions in countries, especially developing ones, have long experimented with administrative reform as a means of improving institutional capacity. Such reforms are embodied by governments’ intention for better public service delivery for their citizens. A Bangladeshi political slogan “*Administration for Services to the People*” is a case in point. The country, having gained independence from Pakistan following a bloody war in 1971, is characterized by high levels of poverty, economic dependence, a colonial legacy and traditional administrative practices. The traditions have related to ancient Bengal, imperial Mughal and colonial British India (1757-1947) via post-colonial Pakistan (1947-1971) with bureaucratic phenomena. This legacy has complicated government efforts to meet the desires of the nation (Zafarullah 1998). Despite numerous reform initiatives, development policy implementation capacity for public service delivery in the Bangladeshi public sector remains low (Azizuddin 2014).

Local governance in Bangladesh consists of a three-tier hierarchical organizational structure. It comprises Districts (64), Upazilas (508) and Union Parishads (4546). Upazilas are middle-level local governance public institutions and fully decentralized administrative arrangements designed to provide services on Bangladesh’s periphery. The system was initiated in the early 1980s on the recommendation of the Committee for Administrative Reform and Reorganization

(CARR), 1982 (GoB 1982). The main objective of this organizational change was to enable more efficient resource mobilization at the local level and less dependence on national government. It is entitled to some public service delivery to the citizen. The main service provisions include, primary and mass education, health, family and youth welfare, law and order, communication and infrastructure development, agriculture and irrigation, fisheries and Veterinary. Public administration and management at the Upazila level have been characterised by spells of progress and periods of stagnation (Khan 1999). The system was introduced in 1983 but abolished in 1991. It was revived again in 1998 via the Local Government (Upazila Parishad) Act of 1998 (GoB 1998) and formally established a decade later with an elected authority entering office in 2009 (As-Saber and Rabbi 2009).

The poor social and economic plight of developing countries is widely known. The lack of institutional capacity for public management is a significant obstacle to social and economic development. The United Nations introduced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 to confront developmental issues head-on, intending to eradicate poverty by 2015. The Organisation has extended the programme with some additional goals and targets in the name of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and fixed a new deadline of 2030. The MDGs constitute an assemblage of narrowly focused sector-specific development ideas and campaigns. The goals are broad, providing targets related to most aspects of development: poverty, education, health, gender, environment and international partnership. They have extensively influenced development agendas and human capital investment, having eight goals related to different socio-economic development domains including poverty, education, health, the environment and development cooperation. (Azizuddin 2014: 95-97) Given the processes and influences from which they originated and developed, the goals are coherent. They “could stimulate a change in national priorities if donor funding for MDGs causes governments to change their strategies to take advantage of opportunities for external investment” (LIDC 2010, 24). They recognize the need for solidarity with the poor and the need to address issues of extreme poverty (Azizuddin 2014, 109).

The UN considers primary education, “Universal Primary Education,” as the second goal of MDGs and an effective way of alleviating



poverty through MDGs programmes with due emphasis on primary school completion and adult literacy rates. Primary education in Bangladesh, as in other countries, has been a principal concern as the cornerstone for national human resource development. It is the foundation for learning and the entry point for young children to experience further levels of education. It constitutes the beginning of the formal education process with eight years of academic schooling. Indeed, making primary education universally available by 2015 remains a key goal for the UN's MDGs. The Government of Bangladesh duly responded to the UN MDGs in reference to its primary education. It adopted various demand-side intervention programmes to aid in achieving the primary education targets linked to the MDGs. These include the Food for Education Programme, the Primary Education Stipend Programme (PESP) and the Primary Education Development Programme (Azizuddin 2014, 106-107).

## **Findings and discussion**

### *Mismatch between administrative reform and public management*

Although administrative reform initiatives pave the way to improving public institution capacity at the local level, the process has not proceeded smoothly. Upazila governance in Bangladesh, for example, replaced the traditional "field administration" with a democratically elected local authority (Rahman, 2010). They are, in this regard, a unique combination of state administration and local self-governance. The reform sought to ensure that local administrations could deliver services effectively.

Upazilas have the status of an executive agency and are responsible for most public services. They have considerable authority to plan and implement projects of local importance and interest. However, institutional weakness has hampered the process of capacity building at this level in the Bangladeshi governance edifice.

Local administration in Bangladesh is officially recognized as decentralized authorities (Gob 1998; GoB 2013; Azizuddin 2014). However, the power to exercise authority independently at the Upazila level is limited. Upazila Parishads (Upazila Councils) depend on national financial allocations and administrative approval of the

national administration. In the case of primary education, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MOPME), along with its attached departments and directorates, plays a prominent role in local governance. Undesirable political interference from the national government and insufficient administrative support has affected the capacity of the Upazilas to provide public services.

Support staff from the national bureaucracy work on deputations at the local administration level to facilitate faster decision making and implementation. Primary education staff and teachers work under the administrative control of the local Upazila Parishad (council). However, traditional administrative structures, financial dependence, shortages of appropriately skilled staff, partisan politics and the bureaucratic status-quo stand in the way of improving service delivery.

Local Upazila administration is unable to function effectively as an institution of local self-governance. Key functionaries in the local administration of Upazila Parishad lack both political and administrative knowledge and the appropriate skills for service delivery. Furthermore, service recipients are frequently unaware of the role of public services and national and international developmental goals. Organizationally, support staff are less able to develop or manage the systems. They have so far maintained the “status quo” and neither has learnt from its actions nor public feedback. Local administrations are consequently not responsive to local needs. The implementation status of local administration regarding primary education is unclear and significant achievement of the MDGs’ targets seems unlikely.

Capacity building efforts so far have not been effective. Administrative reforms have been designed in a piecemeal manner and poorly implemented. Collective vision, participatory governance, rational review of powers and functions, allied legal and statutory reforms and the development of necessary infrastructure and human resources remain underdeveloped. The government of Bangladesh has struggled to address these issues and efforts to improve local administrative capacity have also fallen short. Without the incorporation of indigenous social values, national development policies and international development programmes such as the MDGs are unlikely to be successful.

*Administrative capacity in disarray*

Administrative reform is an essential tool for institutional capacity building. However, administrative reform initiatives are frequently politically motivated. Moreover, the bureaucracy has resisted the implementation of reforms. Empirical research confirms that administrative reforms in Bangladesh have been mostly superficial (Azizuddin 2018; 2008).

Local Upazila administrations, in spite of their formal independence from central authorities, are incapable of effective service delivery. This is particularly true in the area of primary education. A substantial number of young children, especially in economically depressed rural areas, do not complete their primary education (GoB 2013). Achieving universal primary education, therefore, remains a challenge.

Bangladesh has a complicated institutional legacy. This has had a profound influence on public administration, local institutions and the provision of primary education service delivery in the country. Moreover, this legacy has remained mostly unchallenged owing to a lack of political will and bureaucratic resistance to change (Zafarullah, 1998). Long-term reform initiatives have not addressed local needs and reform proposals have been overly ambitious and poorly implemented (Azizuddin 2008).

Furthermore, they did not reflect local norms, values and culture. The “contextual governance philosophy” (Vartola 2011) has been either intentionally or subconsciously disregarded or merely overlooked. Local administration in Bangladesh remains in a state of disorder and has a “low modicum of self-governance” (Starussman 2007, 1104).

Primary education is the foundation for further education of human capital. It is essential because it provides the foundation for future human resource development. An appropriate, well-supported primary education policy has far-reaching effects on human resource development. Improving primary education should, therefore, be at the core of Bangladesh’s poverty alleviation strategies (Njero 2013, 728).

Administrative reform initiatives with local government for public service delivery and the achievement of national and international developmental targets can only be successful with active civic

involvement. Local knowledge of national and international development programmes like PRSP (Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper) and MDGs is therefore essential. Local administration in the country must be well organised and adequately equipped to manage and administer public services and goods. Local stakeholders such as the Primary School Management Committee (SMC) need to be engaged more forcefully in civic life.

Although the colonial and post-colonial legacy in Bangladesh looms large, its progress over the last decade in implementing the MDGs has been commendable. However, local administrative capacity remains weak. As a result, the quality of primary education generally falls below expectations. While there is an evident lack of resources at all levels of the system, education at the local level will only improve if administrative structures are more responsive to local needs.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides a qualitative answer to the research question, examining the reform-led capacity of public institutions for service delivery, concerning primary education in Bangladesh in the matter of MDGs universal primary education. It bears out that the administrative capacity of the public institutions like the local administration of Upazila in Bangladesh experiences inefficiencies. It has been realised that the local administrative reform initiatives so far seem to be mainly the reflections of imported and instructed rather than “tradition based modernity” (Chowdhury 1987; 2013). Thus the overall status of local administration service delivery capacity in the country remains inadequate and the significant achievement of the MDGs target with universal education seems unlikely. To that end, genuine political commitment and full-hearted bureaucratic support and active involvement of the citizens are crucial. The combination of the familiarity of the local context with the “public governance” approach involving all the local actors and factors is crucial to success.

Although the study was only based on qualitative information, the research is able to contribute to the literature of public administration and development, providing an understanding of local administration and development and the institutional capacity for public management with a micro-focus on Bangladesh. The research has broader implica-

tions in public administration capacity building for the governments in Bangladesh and countries with a similar socio-economic situation in the world, providing information on local administration service delivery. It also has implications for SDGs for further interaction with countries in implementing development programmes and the achievement of development targets. Future studies could include a large sample size by following a systematic sampling process to infer results for further improvements in public service delivery in Bangladesh.

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## **Ageing and modernization theory**

*Marie-Helene Thomas*

ABSTRACT—Societies are moving towards a greying-nation at the fastest rate the world has ever seen with increasing numbers of centenarians each year. Current life-expectancy rates indicate that a person can expect to live 20 to 30 more years past the age of retirement. However, the modernization theory argues that the value of older people in society is decreasing with modernity and as a society moves away from tradition and towards a youth-oriented ideology, older people are left behind and deemed to be less important. Research is demonstrating that, with modernity, the concept of filial piety in Asian countries is declining, which results in an increase in older individuals living by themselves and feeling neglected as opposed to being respected or celebrated in old age.

Keywords: Ageing, modernity, modernization theory, ageism, elderly, filial piety

### **Ageing**

Ageing is an aspect of life that is inescapable. The rich, the poor, the black and the white, everyone is fated to undergo this process. According to Woodward (1991), an ageing population has become a worldwide phenomenon with centenarians constituting the fastest growing segment of the population, resulting in a growth in the study of human ageing. Age is a socially constructed category and differs culturally and historically across different societies. Ageing is defined as having four criteria: ageing is universal (occurring to all members of the population); ageing is progressive (a continuous process); ageing is intrinsic to the organism; and ageing is degenerative (Bond et al. 1993).

There are varying approaches to ageing depending on the angle

from which it is being analysed and measured. For instance, chronological age is the amount of time a person has been alive, the days, the months, the years. This age is factual and cannot be disputed. On the other hand, the biological or physiological age of a person refers to how old they appear and is based on lifestyle factors such as diet, exercise and stress levels. Chronological age is out of one's control, while biological age can be influenced by how an individual chooses to live (Basaraba 2018). Another approach to measuring ageing is social age, where a person is defined in terms of their social role and where they fit within a social setting (Barak and Schiffman 1981). For example, when teenagers reach the age of 21 their social age changes because they are able to consume alcohol legally. Regardless of which approach is being used to measure a person's age, the classification of "old age" is never desired. Old age is often feared because it is associated with the idea that our time on earth is running out. For this reason, youth, beauty and goodness are the core concepts of modern culture believing in the notion that youth will fade and beauty is fleeting and the idea that "a stereotypically attractive appearance must be a youthful appearance" (Featherstone and Hepworth 1993, 312). In spite of the fact that there is an abundance of old people who are beautiful, beauty remains connected to youth.

There is a widespread assumption that the bodies of older people are too painful to look at because this evokes the awareness of our fated mortality. Furthermore, one major source of pride for modern cultures is the ability to control nature through scientific and technological endeavours. Therefore, the ageing population is seen as a symbol of failure; that science has failed in its quest for mastery over nature (over the physical degeneration of old age) (Holmes and Holmes 1995). Another aspect that modern societies value is independence but old age is associated with incompetence and dependency (Hurwicz 1995). In addition, people living in modern societies see themselves as things to be sold and employed successfully in the market but older people do not fit into this scheme and are seen as no longer useful (Holmes and Holmes 1995). Finally, due to the physical changes that mark their bodies, older people in modern consumer-oriented societies lack the ability to engage in the consumption lifestyle that characterised their lives during their youth (Schwaiger 2006).

## **Ageism and modernity**

In 1963, the term “ageism” was coined to define “a process of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin colour and gender” (Biggs 1993, 85) and in 1968, the term “gerontophobia” came into existence. Ageism is the notion that it is acceptable to talk about people mainly in terms of a chronological category as opposed to taking into account their needs, desires and capabilities (Stott 1981). Two different dimensions of ageism will be discussed in this paper; the first part lays out the aesthetics of ageism while the second part reviews the socio-economic dimensions of ageism.

Ageism is similar to sexism and racism in that it, too, is a form of oppression. However, there is an important difference, namely, that everyone has the potential to eventually grow old which is why challenging ageism should be in everyone’s interest. However, in spite of this fact, ageism is now more common than ever. Ageism causes younger generations to perceive older people as being of a different species. By identifying older people as inhuman they reduce their own fears concerning death and ageing (Biggs 1993). Jon Hendricks (2005) asserts that even compassionate ageism, often known as the phenomenon of “poor dear,” is as dehumanising as its negative counterpart because both portray people through a stereotypical lens. Some common acts of ageism express condemnation for older individuals who still engage in sexual activity or to elders who dress in styles supposedly inappropriate for their age (Donnellan 1992). Jean Coyle (1997) sums up three main sources of ageism. Firstly, individual sources such as frustration, aggression, rationalisation and death anxiety. Secondly, social sources including modernization, competition and segregation. Thirdly, cultural sources such as differing values and orientations, language (words used to describe old people more often than not have negative connotations) and humour (jokes made about older people marginalise them further).

Modernization theory argues that older people in modern times are not as respected and valued as they were in the past. Cowgill and Holmes (1995) argue that the concept and definition of old age is relative to the degree of modernization that a particular society has undergone. Modernized societies have a higher proportion of older people

due to the reduction in birth rates and the increase in lifespan due to technological advance. On average, 3 percent of the total population of pre-industrial societies were over the age of 65 while in modern societies, 13 percent are. Sanitation, medical diagnostic skills and preventive medicine change the vital statistics of a population. However, life-extending medical advances may be a mixed-blessing for the older population because in the past if they were alive it was because of their own strength whereas in modern societies they are often kept alive by modern medicine. It is argued that in modern societies,

... we are now developing a generation which is over-burdened with the care of old people who no longer have any relationship to the rest of the world, who are using up family funds, hospital beds and social resources (Holmes and Holmes 1995, 270).

Furthermore, the aged earn more respect in societies where they constitute a low proportion of the total population because rarity can equal value.

Modernization theory suggests that societies that are modernizing favour the young. In the Renaissance, old age was respected and seen as the most desirable period of life filled with wisdom and experience (Bond et al. 1993). In societies rich in ceremonial and religious rituals, older people held positions of responsibility and authority. Since they have lived a long life, they act as mediators between this world and the supernatural world. While the aged have a greater advantage in more stable pre-industrial societies, in complex consumer societies, the information and knowledge held by older people has become obsolete causing their social participation to decline thus losing their family and social status (Holmes and Holmes 1995). While youth and innovation are celebrated, the skills and knowledge of older generations become redundant (Bond et al. 1993).

It is argued that modernization fosters age consciousness, especially through the mass media. Research done in 1988 showed a lack of older people present on television. In the United States, old men appeared every twenty-two minutes while old women appeared every four to five hours. This was similar in advertising where even though the role required an older person to play the part, the agency often refused to use those over fifty. On the other hand, whenever they did appear it

was usually with the purpose of complementing the main characters. Moreover, they were usually portrayed as ill, miserable, lonely, forgetful and enfeebled. In the instance that an older person appeared able and youthful, the audience tended to interpret this as a comical exception to the rule (Biggs 1993). Many negative images arise from the media, which portray older people as victims of poverty, neglect and crime. This leads to their being viewed as weak and vulnerable as opposed to resilient and resourceful (Donnellan 1992). Negative stereotypes of old people that are displayed in the media create a form of symbolic stigmatisation, which gives the experience of growing old a negative meaning (Featherstone and Hepworth 1993). Furthermore, stereotypes of ageing work to marginalise older people. Even stereotypes that are positive create a sense of inferiority and vulnerability, such as “little old lady” (Hocky and James 1993). This exaggeration of false representations leads younger generations to believe in certain characteristics of old age that vary greatly from what is actually experienced. A Harris Poll conducted in 1975, showed that often times younger people in the United States identified several factors they believed to be characteristics of old age, whilst the older people themselves stated that they were not experiencing these factors (Biggs 1993).

The final argument that modernization theory puts forward as a potential cause of increased ageism in modern life is the retirement policy, which is a recent invention (Holmes and Holmes 1995). In pre-industrial Britain people stopped working when they were no longer able to but in modern societies people stop working when they reach a specific retirement age. This is a shift from a functioning view of ageing (pre-industrial societies) to a chronological view (modern societies) (Bond et al. 1993). In addition, pre-industrial societies tended to see a shift from one societal role to another once a person reached old age and the prestige of the role usually increased (i.e. from a hunter to a counsellor). However, in modern societies there is no role or position available for older people once they retire (Hocky and James 1993). Cowgill and Holmes (1995) explored the relationship between the status of older people and modernization in fourteen different societies. The data collected generally supports the idea that there is an inverse relationship between the two. Therefore, according to the modernization theory, it is the changes brought about by modernity that result in the increase in ageist attitudes towards older people.

## **Ageing in Asia**

Ageing in Eastern and South-eastern regions was traditionally viewed in honorific terms, where older people gained status and respect as they aged. However, research has shown that older women in Eastern and South-eastern cultures are affected by modernization. It should be noted here that although there are several factors which have led to the transformation of Asian societies, since this paper is exploring the arguments laid out by the modernization theory, the following examples are cases of older people who have been influenced by the specific changes brought about by modernization as argued in the theory.

Women in India say that, in the past, they were respected by their grandchildren but, nowadays, exposure to modernity and formal education have caused young Indians to view their grandparents as old fashioned (Goodman and Harper, 2008). According to Pedro de Magalhaes (2011), studies in China show that 58 percent of disabled older people in Hong Kong claim not to have anyone to share their problems with. Similar findings have been found in Guangzhou where the clients of the Home-Based Elderly Service Programme have said that although in urgent situations they can seek assistance from their children (usually the eldest son), they do not receive routine attention or care because their children do not live with or even near them. They usually only get to see their children in cases when the older individuals are hospitalised due to prolonged injury. The main issue these older people are faced with is loneliness. Modern technology has made it so that people are now living longer than ever but many are living with chronic disease or permanent illnesses, which means that they are highly dependent on others. Family members in China are forced into the tough decision of whether to send their aged parents to homes for the elderly or to take care of them themselves, which can lead to much stress.

In Malaysia, the majority of older people are taken care of by their family members but this trend is changing due to demographic and social changes resulting from modernization, rapid development, urbanisation and rural-urban migration (Goodman and Harper, 2008). It is argued that the belief in filial piety in modern industrial society is weakening and that this change in values will have a signifi-

cant impact on the care of the elderly and welfare in Malaysia. One case study has shown that a 33-year-old woman has constant conflict with her ageing mother regarding how to bring up her children. She prefers to be more strict and teach her children important values at an early age while her mother wants to talk to the naughty grandchildren in a loving way or spoil them (Asia Pacific Centre 2000).

As Japan immerses itself in modernity the lives of the older generation become greatly influenced by the youth-oriented ideology that is common to modern nations. One major consequence is a decline in the value and status of older people in Japan as well as a weakening of the oriental filial piety obligation. This is because religious traditions in modern societies are not so effective and beneficial towards the aged. This results from a particular set of values, a particular level of technological development and a particular form of social organisation that is future-oriented (Holmes and Holmes 1995). As Japanese women age they must rely on their daughters and daughters-in-law to support them and care for their wellbeing. This request is viewed by many as appropriate and fair because all they are asking for is to receive what they have given, the “generalised human care involving body management and emotional support” (Lebra 1979, 338). However, in Japan, filiocentric dependency from parents, which has long been the norm, is being threatened by modernization, which influences patterns of intergenerational support (Holmes and Holmes 1995).

Modernization has brought about educational opportunities that have reversed the traditional cultural ideology by teaching Japanese youth the value of individual choice, leaving filial piety to the affective bond of kinship. Furthermore, the modern system of education that was introduced at the turn of the century strengthened the sense of age stratification and increased ageist attitudes (Wada 1995). Perhaps it is for these reasons that in 1973 Japanese women aged seventy-five and over had the highest suicide rate in the world (Lebra 1979). Therefore, a nation that was once seen as a utopia for the old is witnessing more and more elderly people being abandoned and living alone.

## **Conclusion**

The dissatisfaction that older people have regarding their aging selves is worsened by ageist attitudes that exist in modern societies.



The majority of people are afraid of old age and death and for this reason they display ageist attitudes. Placing older people in a different category is an attempt to avoid the inescapable fact that they, too, will one day age and die. Modernization is identified as one of the sources of ageism. Modernity brings about ageist attitudes for various different reasons. First of all, older people are not as valued and respected as they were in pre-industrial societies. One of the reasons for this is the growing number of older people as a result of the increase in life expectancy, thanks to technological advances and the decrease in birth rates. Furthermore, societies that are modernizing favour the young placing value on youth and innovation while neglecting the knowledge of older generations. In addition, the mass media fosters age consciousness by reshaping the perceptions that younger people have with regard to older people. This results in people becoming more aware of the stigma attached to old age, which in turn leads to an increase in ageist attitudes. Finally retirement policy, which is a modern invention, has created a shift from a functioning view of ageing to a chronological one where older people are made redundant when they reach a certain age as opposed to when they are no longer able to contribute practically to society. For these reasons, changes brought about by modernity have led directly to the increase in the ageism shown towards older people.

The weakening of filial piety in Asian societies brought about by modernization has had a direct impact on the ageist attitudes that exist in such communities. If the life of an older person is one that people can look forward to, particularly in supposedly utopian Japan, then the division between the young and old will decrease and there will not be such a fear of old age. It is apparent that modernization has led to the decrease in family status and social value of older people and for this reason the prospect of entering the stage of old age is one that is gloomy and dark. The reason ageism is more prevalent in modern societies has to do with the fact that older people are seen as being useless and unworthy of attention. Things were different in Asian countries because older people were more respected and there was a time when individuals claimed that the age of retirement was the best period because this was when they could spend their days relaxing and playing with their grandchildren. However, due to the influence of modern youth-oriented ideas resulting in the weakening

of the concept of filial piety, older people in these nations can expect to be neglected in old age.

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## **Political economy of pragmatic refugee policies in Indonesia as a transit country**

*Yanuar Sumarlan*<sup>1</sup>

ABSTRACT—After some influence by the Australian government through the Bali Process, Indonesia—out of its typical pragmatism-cum-flexibility type of approach to refugee issues—began obviously to apply a more securitization-based refugee and asylum-seeker policy in the early 2000s. This paper asks a simple question, “Has Indonesia been truly capable of (1) restricting refugees and asylum seekers’ movement and (2) to processing the refugees’ and asylum seekers’ claims to concluding parts?” This paper argues that the alleged securitization-based policy on refugees or asylum-seekers has had little impact on refugee rights such as freedom of movement and the right to get a claim processed. The simple reason is that Indonesia has no capacity to launch such a paradoxical mix of iron-fist and refugee-spoiling policy. Through some historical accounts of how this iron-fist policy has come about, and how it actually has had little impact on the right to claim to be refugees and asylum-seekers, this paper reveals the natural order of this set of policies has failed to restrict refugee movement and to fulfill their right to claim [to be refugees or asylum-seekers] to be processed. The paper finds that Indonesia’s incapacity and thus its failure to limit freedom of movement and to expand refugee status determination has affected the overall achievement of fulfilling refugee and asylum-seeker rights negatively. In a way, this finding corroborates what Missbach (2017) found to be the Indonesian Government’s “inconsistent and ad hoc approaches.” As this paper has revealed by these facts, the national, regional and global actors and contributors of all kinds to the refugee and asylum seeker issue need to rethink the way to understand the policy stagnancy that this paper dubs a “fossilized refugee policy.”

Keywords: rights to movement, claims to be refugees/asylum-seekers, Bali Process, Indonesia’s refugee policy.

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## Introduction

When the first Indochinese refugee crisis broke in the mid-1970s, right after the end of the Vietnam War, Indonesia quickly decided to be a ‘broker’ between the hundreds of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers wanting to evade the victorious communist regime and those third countries who were willing to accept them. The Indonesian Government, still fresh from its role in the invasion of East Timor, needed salvation—among other reasons—from its damaged reputation among its neighbors through a conscientious humanitarian response to a human rights crisis. Sixty-five nations suddenly threw their full support behind Indonesia’s initiative to turn an island near Singapore into a refugee processing center for those who wanted to be resettled to willing third countries all over the world. Thinking that the whole tragedy would end within ten years (after 1979), the Indonesian authorities were soon caught up in a nasty surprise. After 1988, the boat people from Indochina had returned to the South China Sea to look for refuge and asylum in third countries; however, this time, the compassion of the third countries had dwindled.

This time, in the era categorized by “post-compassion fatigue,” the third countries that had previously been so generous in providing asylum decided to add a screening process and a door through which to return refugees and asylum seekers to where they came. Then the concepts of detention, restriction of movement, the right to get claims processed, securitization of refugee issues, repatriation, and others began to appear in the refugee status determination parlor. Indonesia, in a way, had become the victim of its previous success in brokering between the players and actors that had come around later in the ASEAN theater of refugee conflict. Indonesia’s evident lack of capacity to both restrict the movement of refugees and asylum seekers and to process/determine refugee and asylum seeker status has never been discussed nor exposed so far.

After some time, from the mid-1970s to the end of the 1990s, some authors and critics started to judge and comment on Indonesia’s decision to be part of the hidden “brokerage” around this set of refugee issues. After a long period of discretion and observation, Indonesia’s approach to its refugee policy as “inconsistent and *ad hoc*” (Missbach 2017, 34) because “it vacillates among a permissive *laissez-*

*faire* attitude that allowed thousands of asylum seeker to pass through Indonesia freely; a hasty and heavy-handed use of incarceration in an overcrowded system in keeping with the interests of Australian government funder; and a pragmatic shift to Alternatives to Detention (ATD).” Nethery and Gordy pointed out that the Detention system in Indonesia was an “incentivized policy transfer” (2014). Disagreeing that Australia is a “hegemon” that practices “burden-shifting” to its ASEAN neighbors, Kneebone (2015, 36) claimed that the supposed circuit of power relations could easily be broken through “circuit breakers” launched by ASEAN members or Indonesia in particular.

Vis-à-vis these sets of explanations, this paper attempts to offer a different perspective to expose Indonesia’s failures and incapacity to deal satisfactorily with refugees and asylum seekers. In other words, Indonesia was merely a broker in an international or regional crisis for fulfilling its political-economic agenda. Indonesia’s principled position in the refugee crisis has been stated once and will never be changed for a long time to come: Indonesia is merely a transit country, and the fact remains despite some devolutionary changes. All the higher expectations that other countries had put on Indonesia’s shoulder were merely the product of activities that had been set to create the illusion of a capability to deal with refugees and asylum seekers.

This paper is made up of two premises and one conclusion. The first premise is that “Indonesia has little capacity to restrict freedom of movement as the sheer size of refugee waves is beyond its capacity to handle.” The second premise would be as follows: “For some reason, the Indonesian authorities are only trying to mobilize external resources to fulfill refugee rights to have their claims determined and asylum seekers to have resettlement in a third country.” The following simple conclusion concludes this simple syllogism. The “simple supports through the training of officers to detain or facilities to keep refugees or asylum seekers in detention centers indefinitely (official or community-based) are not sufficient to deal with the problem of never-ending waves of refugees flowing through Indonesia.” Without real support in terms of refugee movement restrictions (which is not encouraged by any international standards) and the fulfillment of claim processing (which is given by the third countries), Indonesia is helpless.”

After this Introduction, this paper is divided into the following four parts. First, the paper begins with the earliest approach of Indonesia’s

official policy on refugee management at the end of the Vietnam War that was fertile ground for a set of similar security-based approaches to refugees and asylum-seekers. Second, the paper shows the dialectical metamorphoses of Australia's refugee policy into the early 90s. Third, the paper reveals the historical phases of Indonesia's refugee policy under the allegedly strong influence of Australia's immigration policy—besides Indonesia's political and economic agenda—since the 1970s to 1990s. This revelation should be an eye-opener as to why the securitization policy has always been claimed as “close” to Indonesian policy-makers' hearts—although it is not. *Fourth*, the paper analyzes the real [in]capacity of Indonesia in its refugee policy devolution to deal with the two most important rights of refugees and asylum seekers: freedom of movement and claims determination.

### **Indonesia's earliest opening gambit: An island for Indochina crises**

Before the fall of Saigon in April 1975, around 140,000 Vietnamese who had been associated with the former South Vietnamese Government were evacuated to resettle in the United States (UNHCR 2000, 81). This US-organized evacuation was followed by the personal exodus of Vietnamese by boat to Thailand (5,000 refugees), Hong Kong (4,000 refugees), Singapore (1,800 refugees), and the Philippines (1,250 refugees) (UNHCR 2000, 81). The Vietnamese government evicted the fleeing refugees (70 percent of whom were of Chinese descent) through scare tactics (“anti-bourgeoisie and reactionary”) by forcing them into concentration camps for forced labor (Fandik 2013, 165). The UNHCR, for example, opened an office in Beijing and donated USD8.5 million to the Chinese Government to settle more than 250,000 Vietnamese refugees by the end of 1979 (UNHCR 2000, 82). At the end of 1978, around 62,000 Vietnamese boat people were scattered in camps throughout Southeast Asia (UNHCR 2000, 82).

On 20-21 July 1979, 65 governments answered the invitation of the UN Secretary-General to an international conference in Geneva on Indochinese refugees (Robinson 2004, 319). When worldwide resettlement pledges increased from 125,000 to 260,000 [resettlements], Vietnam agreed to try to halt illegal departures of its distressed population (Robinson 2004, 319). The first refugees or boat people

arrived in Tarempa Island in Riau Province (92 refugees) on 19 May 1975 on their “way” to Singapore; the first group of refugees who wanted to stay in Indonesia’s territory arrived on 25 May 1975 in a horrible condition in Pulau Laut (Laut Island) in the Natuna Islands (Fandik 2013, 166). Wave after wave of incoming refugees kept local government units very busy. Actually, on 28 April 1975, Lt.Gen. Poniman, the commander of naval territorial defense, mobilized an island in Riau Province called Pulau Bintan to be accommodation for the incoming Indochinese refugees (Fandik 2013, 167).

After the Geneva conference on Indochinese refugees, Indonesia and the Philippines pledged to establish regional processing centers to speed up resettlement, and new pledges were made to the UNHCR for around USD160 million in cash and in-kind (Robinson 2004, 319). Australia, for instance, decided to admit almost 150,000 Indochinese refugees out of over 2,000,000 refugees and asylum-seekers after the end of the Vietnam War (Coughlan 1991, 84)<sup>2</sup>.

Complaining loudly in June 1979, five members of ASEAN (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand) warned that they had “reached the limit of their endurance and decided that they would not accept any new arrivals” (in a joint communique at the 12th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Bali, 28-30 June 1979) (UNHCR 2000, 83). The UN Secretary-General quickly called an international conference in Geneva on 20-21 July 1979 and invited 65 governments. With no formal commitment made regarding asylum, this Conference endorsed the general principles of asylum and non-refoulement (Robinson 2004, 320). In this case, countries of first asylum, nevertheless, expected that no refugees would stay in their territories for more than a specified period. A *quid pro quo* was set: first, asylum countries would keep refugees, and second, asylum take them later (‘an open shore for an open door’) (Robinson 2004, 320). The pushback of refugee boats was reduced, and arrival rates fell as Vietnam stopped clandestine departures to allow the direct departure of willing refugees. After around 450,000 Indochinese refugees were resettled in Southeast Asian camps within 18 months (from 1980 to 1986), refugee officials began to be optimistic about solving this regional crisis (Robinson 2004, 320).

To follow up on the UNHCR conference on Indochinese refugees in July 1979, the late President Soeharto met Thailand’s Prime Minister,



Kriangsak Chomanand, and sent Foreign Ministry Kusumaadmadja in April 1979 to Geneva to meet UNHCR Commissioner Paul Harthing (Fandik 2013, 167). Indonesia's proposal to offer an island (either Rempang or Galang Island) as a refugee processing center was agreed; on 15-16 May 1979, UNHCR opened an office in Jakarta and invited 24 countries to set a processing working team made up of Indonesia's Public Works Department, Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Internal Affairs (Fandik 2013, 167). On 2 July 1979, the Ministry of Defense appointed a team called the Vietnam Refugees Management (P3V or *Penanggulangan dan Pengelolaan Pengungsi Vietnam*) led by Maj. Gen. Moerdani and run by one Navy Rear Admiral and a police Lieutenant Colonel (in Presidential Decision No. 38/1979/11 September 1979)<sup>3</sup>. All refugees scattering around Indonesia's places and islands were relocated to Galang Island to isolate and avoid the refugees' impact on the local population. Japan's Foreign Minister, Sunao Sonoda, offered USD 57 million to all countries that built shelters for Vietnamese refugees (Fandik 2013, 167). The plan was to build barracks to hold 100 refugees (for 10,000 refugees in the first wave of development of barracks with some electricity and another 10,000 refugees for the next round).

Western countries were growing fatigued and suspicious of the Vietnamese boat people's motives for leaving their motherland (UNHCR 2000, 86). In the late 1980s, international willingness to resettle all Vietnamese asylum seekers waned, and resettlement numbers hardly kept pace with the rate of arrivals in the first asylum countries (ASEAN members). In mid-1987, suddenly, the arrivals of Vietnamese began to rise again. Thousands of Southern Vietnamese discovered a new route that took them through Cambodia and then to Thailand's east coast (UNHCR 2000, 88). Tens of thousands of others from North Vietnam took another route to Hong Kong, and more than 18,000 boat people poured into Hong Kong (UNHCR 2000, 88). On 15 June 1988, the Hong Kong administration announced a plan to detain any Vietnamese arriving after that date to await a "screening" process; Malaysian authorities resumed the pushback against Vietnamese boats toward Indonesia in May 1989. The regional and international consensus set in 1979 was collapsing; another formula was required, although this time, it had to preserve asylum but without guarantees of resettlement [for refugees] (UNHCR 2000, 88).

Thus, in June 1989 began the era of The Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) to reconfirm some of the elements of the 1979 Agreement such as the commitment to preserve the first asylum, to reduce clandestine departures and promote legal migration, and to resettle refugees in third countries (UNHCR 2000, 88). Some new elements were introduced such as the commitment to institute regional refugee status determination procedures and to return those whose applications were rejected (UNHCR 2000, 88).<sup>4</sup>

Despite the massive mobilization of military resources and manpower to deal with this Indochina refugee crisis in the mid-1970s to late-1980, the Indonesian government under the strongman Gen. Soeharto appeared to de-emphasize the securitization of the refugee issues.

### **Australia's quick dialectical metamorphoses of refugee policy**

Although a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, Australia narrowed its interpretation of the term refugee after the Indochinese refugee experience (Coughlan 1991, 85). This section explains the evolution of Australia's refugee policy after 1996 (under Prime Minister John Howard of the Liberal Party) and securitization. This history of policy evolution over time is essential as the Australian Government is one of the most significant sources of capacity for the Indonesian Government to deal with refugees and asylum seekers in terms of a willing third country to resettle the refugees stranded indefinitely in Indonesia.

The term "securitization" appeared after the Liberal Party Government led by John Howard (1996-2007) began to tighten the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers to accommodate the perennial 'fear' (skepticism and rejection against non-Anglo-Celtic immigrants) held by Australians. During the Howard Government, for example, Watson (2009) claimed that the issue of boat arrivals after the Tampa incident was securitized successfully by the Government. When the Labor Party Government led by Kevin Rudd replaced the Howard Government in 2007, however, this new Government (2007-2010, 2010-2013) de-securitized the issue of asylum seekers (McDonald 2011). Eventually, only a sharp increase in the refugee influx in 2009

forced the Labor Party-led Government to take security-centered measures. When the Liberal Party-led Government resumed power in 2013 (until recently), the Australian Government re-securitized the asylum seeker issues (Paulsen 2016, 64).

These changes and transformations of Australia's refugee and immigration policy have seeped into Indonesia, among others, through a process called "incentivized policy transfer" (Nethery and Gordyn 2014) or "exporting detention" (Nethery, Rafferty-Brown, and Taylor 2012).

### **Contextual devolutionary transformation of Indonesia's refugee policies**

For simplification purposes, this process of transformation will be divided into five landmarks or turning points of policy life. This type of staging of the policy lifecycle is picking the stages offered by Kneebone (2014, 31-35) to Indonesia's refugee policy during a rather short period between the early 2000s and 2015: Pragmatic Acquiescence for Securitization (2001-2008), Prevarication for Conflicted Responses (2008-2013), and the Regional Approach to the Andaman Crisis (2015).

This paper marks the refugee policy of Indonesia into five critical phases: (1) the Indochina Crisis (1975), (2) Mandatory Detention-cum-Tolerance, The Third Wave (1992, 1999-2001), (3) the influence of Australia's Detention-Centered Policy (2009/2011), (4) the Andaman Crisis (2015), and (5) President Jokowi's Political Turn (2017). This section will explain these stages. However, these phases do not mean that every phase marks a fundamental turn or change from the previous phases. Indonesia's governments' basic tenet on refugee issues has been constant.<sup>5</sup>

The more critical issue connected with the evolution of Indonesia's refugee policy over time is the impact of these transformations and changes on the two most important or key rights of refugees and asylum seekers (MacIntosh 2012, 181): to have their claim determined (claim determination) and not to be detained (freedom of movement).

## **The Indochina crises (1979-1992)**

### *Pre-compassion fatigue (1979-1989).*

Galang Island (80 sq.km) was set to be the refugee processing center of three refugee sites (camps) in an area of 16 sq.km. The UNHCR equipped the Galang Camp with a camp administration office, PMI (Indonesian Red Cross) Hospital, schools, a Catholic Church, a Buddhist temple, a cemetery, and a Youth Center (set up and run by refugees). The Camp was divided into three sites: Site IA, Site IB, and Site II to accommodate about 250,000 boat people from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam from 1975 to 1996. With the full support of many countries, the UNHCR and other institutions, and resettlement pledges for 125,000 to 260,000 refugees (and pledges totaling about USD160 million), Indonesia had no trouble in processing the refugees' claim determination through UNHCR assistance. In fact, more than 450,000 Indochinese refugees were resettled from Southeast Asian camps within 18 months (Robinson 2004, 320).

When the refugees were forcibly relocated from the scattered islands by Indonesian naval vessels, their freedom of movement was severely curtailed. Nevertheless, the refugees' right to their asylum seeker or refugee status to be determined was widely respected. From the estimated 145,000 to 250,000 refugees who had passed through Galang Island, around 132,000 had resettled to a third country; around 6,000 to 8,000 long-time residents remained in the camp in 1996 (most were later forcibly repatriated to their home country) (McBeth 1994). Although the processing center was run with a heavily militarized system and security-centered methods, Indochinese refugees were getting their claims or right to be determined. Furthermore, the then President Soeharto only used the term "refugees" to represent the forced migrants and never "illegal immigrants" (Lee 2015, 44). The Refugee Processing Center in Galang Island was fully operational in December 1980 (Hargyono 2015).

### *Post-compassion fatigue (1989-1992).*

When Vietnamese arrivals were peaking again in 1987 and 1988, most countries knew that the old consensus was crumbling. Facing a rising tide of asylum seekers at their doors and convinced that Indo-

chinese refugees no longer deserved automatic refugee status, Western countries reduced their resettlement quotas and set more selection criteria (Robinson 2004, 320). Another Conference on refugees was set in June 1989 in Geneva; this time 70 governments agreed to adopt a new regional approach, which was known later as the Comprehensive Plan of Action (or CPA)<sup>6</sup> (Robinson 2004, 320). This Plan finally established inter-locking and inter-dependent commitments among the first asylum states in Southeast Asia, the resettlement countries, and the governments of Vietnam and Laos. Some commitments were similar to the ones of the 1979 agreement, such as the preservation of the first asylum, reduction of clandestine departures [of refugees], promotion of legal migration, and resettlements of refugees in third countries (Robinson 2004, 320). However, this new Plan offered a set of radically new ingredients: screening (Refugee Status Determination) and repatriation (voluntary and mandatory).

The last two ingredients drastically reduced the chances for refugees' success in getting resettlement in a third country. Those arriving after 17 March 1989 had to undergo a procedure to determine their genuine refugee status under the Refugee Convention of 1951; asylum seekers who arrived after that date were facing the chance of being repatriated to their home country if the determination process failed (Hargyono 2015). In June 1993, out of 9,000 refugees who had not been granted resettlement in the third country, only 2,000 agreed to return home to Vietnam (Hargyono 2015).

Around this time, Australia's Hawke Government was committing itself to resettle 11,000 long-term Vietnamese [in refugee shelters on their way to Australia] boat people during 1989-1992. Nevertheless, when some boatloads of not only Vietnamese but also Cambodians arrived quietly on Australian shores in late 1989, both the Australian public and Government were agitated. Calling these refugees "economic migrants" and "queue jumpers," in 1992, the Australian Government decided to announce a new method of mandatory detention for all types of unlawful non-citizens (Phillips and Spinks 2013). This year marked the seeds of the beginning of the heavy influence of Australia's refugee policy on its Indonesian counterpart.

Noticing the reduced support for its relaxed approach to the refugee crisis in this post-compassion fatigue stage, Indonesia reignited some moves to re-securitize the issue through a new launch of discursive

practices by some agencies, namely the Police and the Directorate-General of Immigration. To attract dwindling resources from the tired third countries, Police and Immigration officials fired some salvos through media to demand a budget increase to tackle the “threat” of the transit forced migration (Lee 2015, 49). These two agencies, however, worked their discursive practices through different themes: Immigration officials typically focused on the demand for basic needs, faster status processing procedures or refugees’ escapes from camps; Police officials pounded their media messages on the sophistication of people-smuggler networks run by international actors, locals, state apparatuses and corrupt security forces (Lee 2015, 49). The two agencies, nevertheless, shared something in common. Both argued through rehearsed media reports that the geographical condition of Indonesia was peppered with “ratlines” (or hidden passages) ready to be used by the people-smuggling networks (Lee 2015, 50). Both agencies kept their media statements to three themes: lack of detention centers’ quality and quantity, lack of funding, and lack of personnel.

As part of the legal history related to the repercussions of the Comprehensive Plan of Action of June 1989, Indonesia’s refugee policy evolved into a very tolerance-based set of treatment for refugees or asylum seekers who were living in its territory. Immigration Law No. 9 of 1992 epitomized this security-cum-tolerance-based approach to deal with non-criminal refugees or asylum seekers. Allowing the UNHCR to build an office in Jakarta for accommodating the Galang Island’s Refugee Status Determination during the Indochinese refugee crisis (1975-1992), the Indonesian Government let people--seeking refugee status--to apply in the UNHCR Jakarta’s office that would later issue UNHCR attestation letters or identification cards. These cards or letters protected the refugees and asylum seekers living in Indonesia while waiting for the results of their claims (resettlement) (Taylor and Rafferty-Brown 2010a). Although appearing as tolerant, Indonesia provided refugees or asylum seekers little chance for local integration (Taylor and Rafferty-Brown 2010a). Some asylum seekers and refugees had been residing in Indonesia for many years in a kind of limbo or death or ‘dying’ slowly. This trouble had motivated asylum seekers and refugees to pay people smugglers and to travel to Australia by boat to secure a more meaningful life (Taylor and Rafferty-Brown 2010b). In a way, Indonesia was a place where a lot of residing asylum seekers

and refugees were waiting for their chance to go to Australia illegally—through a set of well-organized human smuggler networks—whenever the chance appeared<sup>7</sup>.

*Half-mandatory detention-cum-tolerance approach (1992-2001)*

Immigration Law No. 9 of 1992<sup>8</sup> itself was using “detention”, although loosely, for foreign nationals. For example, this Law provides that a foreign national in Indonesian territory could be placed in immigration detention when (1) they did not have a valid immigration permit, (2) they were awaiting expulsion or deportation, (3) they had filed an objection to an immigration action and were awaiting a ministerial decision, and (4) they were subject to immigration law enforcement, and (5) they had completed a sentence or period of punishment but had not yet been repatriated or deported (Article 44:1, Article 31 of Government Ordinance No. 31 of 1994). However, in ‘particular circumstances,’ a person could be accommodated outside of detention (Article 44:2 of Law No. 9 of 1992); in practice, Indonesian officers rarely detain asylum seekers (Lawyers Committee for Human Rights 2002, 45-47).

Research in Australia and at a global level has revealed that detention policies affect very little in asylum seekers’ decision-making processes to migrate (Koser 2010; Richardson 2010). Furthermore, Australian officials attributed the failures of Australia’s domestic policies to the ability of asylum seekers to live in relative freedom in Indonesia, thus allowing these people to set up and wait for opportunities to use people-smugglers syndicates to come to Australia (Nethery and Gordyn 2014, 186). Australia also actively encouraged Indonesia to detain asylum seekers in the Immigration Detention Centers. In 1995, as part of Australia’s role in supporting Indonesia in the East Timor case, Indonesia signed a surprising “security agreement” with Australia that shocked its ASEAN neighbors.<sup>9</sup> This agreement, however, went from bad to worse when, in 1998, Indonesian President Habibie opened the chance for East Timor to either remain part of Indonesia or become independent. When a referendum through ballots (mediated by UN Mission in East Timor) produced the decision to be independent, civil unrest ensued. Australia sent humanitarian intervention to East Timor with 4,500 personnel of the Australian Defense Force; in September 1999, the relationship between Australia and Indonesia

was at rock bottom (Paulsen 2016, 48). This sour relationship was quickly restored through diplomatic and ministerial missions from both countries from 2000 to 2001 (East Timor was freed in 2002).

Wave after wave of refugees from the Middle East coming during the late 1990s, the terrorist attack of 9/11, and the Bali Bombings suddenly regrouped both Australia and Indonesia into another form of the alliance into the early 2000s. The flow of asylum seekers from the Middle East began pouring in around 1999. Indonesia's proximity to Australia (around 120 nautical miles from Java's southern shore to Australia's Christmas Island) turned the archipelagic state into a porous transit point before refugees' embarking on sea journeys to Australia. Taking measures to discourage these waves of boat people, Australia engaged in intense cooperation with Indonesia by producing some laws and policies (Crock et al. 2006). Accidentally, just a few days before the 9/11 Attack, Australia sent an envoy of the Foreign Minister, Defense Minister and Immigration Minister to Jakarta on 6 September 2001 to secure future cooperation with Indonesia (Paulsen 2016, 49). Four months after the 9/11 Attack, Australia and Indonesia signed an MoU on combatting international terrorism through cooperation, including intelligence sharing and building capacity between government agencies (Kemlu 2015). Two terrorist bomb attacks in Bali's tourist spots on 12 October 2002 (202 lives taken), the JW Marriot Hotel bombing in 2003, the Australian Embassy bombing in 2004, the second Bali bombing in 2005 and the JW Marriot and Ritz Carlton Hotels bombings in 2009 finally cemented a greater cooperation between Australia and Indonesia particularly in counter-terrorism (Paulsen 2016, 50). The landmark of this big cooperation was the Lombok Treaty signed in 2006 to cover defense, law enforcement, counterterrorism, intelligence, maritime, aviation, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, emergency cooperation, International Organization cooperation, people-to-people cooperation and community understanding (Kemlu 2006).

These agreements and cooperative gestures were smoothly preceded in the late 1990s through the mid-2000s through two important arrangements between the two countries: The Regional Cooperation Arrangement (RCA) in 2000 and the Management and Care of Irregular Immigrant Project (MCIIP) in 2007<sup>10</sup>. The Regional Cooperation Arrangement (between the Australian and Indonesian Govern-



ments with the International Organization for Migration or IOM) dictated that the Indonesian authorities intercept people thought to be planning to travel irregularly to Australia or New Zealand and then refer these people to IOM for ‘case management and care’ (IOM Indonesia 2010). Refugees or asylum seekers who revealed their wish to claim asylum were referred by IOM to the UNHCR that later determined such claims according to UNHCR’s mandate (Nethery et al., 2012, 95). The IOM maintained material supports for these individuals pending the determination of their asylum claims and the finding of any durable solution; the IOM also offered repatriation assistance to individuals who wished to return home any time (under the funding by Australia) (IOM Indonesia 2010).

Thus, the smooth path to the full mandatory detention was prepared long before the Immigration Law of 2011 (to run this “new” approach) was launched. For example, Indonesia let most asylum seekers who fell under the RCA to live in Australian-funded accommodation under IOM management in five designated areas: Cisarua/Cipayung (West Java Province), Jakarta (DKI Jakarta Province), Medan (North Sumatera Province), Pontianak (West Kalimantan Province) and Lombok (West Nusa Tenggara Province) (Stenger 2011). Moreover, people living in the IOM accommodation had to respect curfews (Biok 2009), agree to be monitored as to their whereabouts (UNHCR 2005), and need travel permission from their area of residence (Nethery et al. 2012, 95).

#### *Full mandatory detention (2009-2015)*

After quite some time of “warming-up,” the vision of a full-blown version of a full mandatory detention system was begun through the new Immigration Law No. 6 of 2011 (enacted in May 2011 to replace the former Immigration Law No. 9 of 1992). This new Immigration Law of 2011 had at least five differences compared to its 1992 Version (Nethery et al., 97-98). First, if the 1992 Immigration Law stated that officials *may* deny entry to foreign nationals, including those without valid travel documents, the 2011 Immigration Law stated that officials *shall* deny entry to certain foreign nationals and those involved in international crime, prostitution, human trafficking, and people smuggling activities (Article 13:1) (Nethery et al., 2012, 97). The change in the wording might indicate the removal of discretion from

officials over whether to detain or not to detain a suspect. Second, if the 1992 Immigration Law stated that ‘in particular circumstances,’ a person may be detained outside of the detention centers (Article 44:2), the 2011 Immigration Law provided that any foreigner in Indonesian territory be placed in immigration detention in cases where the foreigner (a) had no valid immigration permit or travel document, (b) was subject to immigration law enforcement or the cancellation of any permit, (c) was waiting for expulsion or deportation (Article 83:1). Moreover, the 2011 Immigration Law only allowed accommodation outside of the detention for children, sick people, women about to give birth, and the victims of human trafficking or human smuggling (Articles 83:2 and 87).

Third, the Immigration Law of 2011 was made in eight years with its passage owing much to the persistent diplomatic efforts of the Australian Government over the period (Alford 2010; Brown 2011). The focus was on combatting people smuggling and human trafficking that the previous 1992 Immigration Law lacked; some provisions appeared to be modeled on Australian immigration law (Nethery et al. 2015, 97). Fourth, noticeably, the Indonesian language used in the new 2011 Immigration Law is very clearly derived from English equivalents such as detention referred to as “*detensi*” or “*pendetensian*,” immigration detention houses as “*rumah detensi imigrasi*” and detainees as “*deteni*” (Nethery et al. 2015, 97). Fifth, for the Indonesian Government, asylum seekers have never been a policy priority as they have been in Australia; the older 1992 Immigration Law allowed the detention of asylum seekers; yet, Indonesian officials rarely did that until the Australians began to encourage such an action (Nethery et al. 2015, 97).

Shortly before the application of the newer 2011 Immigration Law, for example, Australia funded both the UNHCR and IOM for budget year 2008-2009 as much as USD807,727 to the UNHCR for capacity-building, USD1.6 M to the IOM for interpreting services for displaced persons, and USD386,000 to the IOM for educational and social services for refugees and irregular migrants in Indonesia (Kneebone 2017, 34). Then later, in 2014, IOM Indonesia (2014) reported 13 Immigration Detention Centers in 13 provinces, operating under “arbitrary rules.” However, the deterrent effect of such anti-smuggling laws was debatable (Missbach, 2015). (By June 2015, Indonesia had

5,277 refugees and 7,911 asylum seekers registered in UNHCR Indonesia as reported by the UNHCR (2015).)

*The Andaman Sea crises (2015)*

Some estimated 6,500-8,000 refugees had departed from Myanmar and Bangladesh by boats in 2015 alone (Petcharameesre et al., 2016). In May 2015, the authorities found 26 bodies in the mass grave of smuggled Rohingya near a trafficking camp in southern Thailand, and this signaled an emergency to tackle.<sup>11</sup> Without authority, fisherfolks from a village called Seunuddon near Lhokseumawee port brought 578 passengers to shore; later Indonesian authorities warned them not to engage in such rescue operations (McNevin and Missbach 2018, 295). Despite the warning, fisherfolks from two other villages near the port of Langsa brought in more boats to land on 15 and 20 May 2015. Totalling 1,807 passengers (578, 820, and 409 people per boat), the saved boat people reported 23 of them had perished on board on the way (UNHCR 2015b). Most of the 500 Bangladeshi nationals were repatriated to Bangladesh, but the rest (Rohingya) were taken to Langsa and housed in a converted warehouse in Langsa Port (Thom 2016, 47).

The three most affected countries (Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia) began to work cooperatively to broker a solution (Kneebone 2017, 36). The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of these countries met on 20 May 2015 ahead of an international meeting on 29 May to discuss this “irregular movement of people” into the countries (Kneebone 2017, 36). Trying to “find a solution to the crisis of influx or irregular migrants and its serious impact on the national security of the affected countries,” the meeting produced a joint statement that “the three countries had taken necessary measures ... on humanitarian grounds, beyond their international obligations”<sup>12</sup> as the issues “cannot be addressed solely by these three countries” (Kneebone 2017, 36).

This issue had been prolonged because the focus of the Bali Process (reconvening in March 2016) was a mere “Declaration on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime” (Bali Declaration on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons, and Related Transnational Crime or the Bali Declaration, 23 March 2016). The Declaration itself was labeled as “Australia’s initiative to counter this terrible trade in human beings” (Kneebone 2017, 37). As Indonesia itself was burdened with around 13,000 refugees and asylum

seekers waiting in limbo for resettlement, the Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi could only call for refugee-receiving countries to be more receptive to the migrants who had been waiting for resettlement—by the way, the Declaration produced no outcome on resettlement (Kneebone 2017, 37). Then soon, the scene moved to the next stage where the Indonesian President Jokowi decided to “change” the rules of the game slightly. The country (Indonesia) needed a safeguard to face more waves of refugees from never-ending humanity crises in Myanmar-Bangladesh border areas.

*President Jokowi's political turn (2017)*

As the much-celebrated Presidential Regulation No 125 of 2016 was signed on 31 December 2017 by President Jokowi, the term refugee as in the 1951 Refugee Convention was *de jure* accepted in the Indonesian legal system. This Presidential Regulation (or *Peraturan Presiden* or *Perpres* in local terms) decentralizes authority to the provincial governmental units to accommodate refugees temporarily. Nevertheless, Baskoro (2018) reported that some immigration officers complained that although they had already called the provincial or district governmental units for help, the governmental units' responses were very poor. This Regulation No. 125 of 2016 sets a presumably “better” set of refugee and asylum seeker policies such as rescue procedures at sea, standard detention facilities, and shelters with health and religious facilities (Afghanistan Analysts Network 2018). The individual heads of detention centers and shelters, however, were still in charge of Standard Operating Procedures, and this Regulation mentioned no provisions that address refugee integration. The Regulation's Article 26 merely stipulates that shelters for refugees should be located near a health clinic and religious service, but no other facilities are mentioned (Afghanistan Analysts Network 2018).

**Analysis and conclusion: The reasons and Indonesia's true capacity to fulfill rights to claim determination and restrict refugees' freedom of movement**

During the first stage of the Indochinese refugee crisis (1975-1996), the capacity of Indonesian officials to restrict refugee movement and determine refugee status claims was so much reliant on the

external resources. To ensure that the refugees and asylum seekers were kept in a place, for example, the Indonesian authorities set three sites/camps in a 16 sq.km-large complex with facilities like religious services, churches, temples, schools, barracks for refugees, barracks for staff, the UNHCR office, etc. These facilities were set in 1980 and, in reality, served around 250,000 to 260,000 refugees. The capacity of the officials to monitor the refugee movement was severely curtailed because of a lack of personnel and equipment to cover thousands of islands that were spread widely in territories of at least three countries (Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia). The fulfillment of claims determination in the earlier part of the Indochinese refugee crisis or pre-compassion fatigue (1975-1989) was smooth and relatively fast with the support of many third countries that were willing to resettle these refugees. During this “easy” time, the Indonesian authorities, with their agencies, tended to de-securitize the immigrant issue in their media stunts by labeling the refugees openly as “refugees” who needed “humanitarian” assistance.

Unleashing a media content analysis, Lee (2015, 40) offered five reasons for Indonesia’s benign refugee policy during this Indochina Crisis (in two phases, i.e., pre- and post-Comprehensive Plan of Action): subconscious drivers, cost-benefit calculation, good public relations, attracting resources and maintaining legitimacy. Around a decade before the Vietnamese boat people arrived in Indonesia’s territory, a failed coup allegedly staged by the Indonesian Communist Party was crushed by President Gen. Soeharto who later portrayed communists as “evil.” Seeing the poor Vietnamese were cruelly treated by a communist regime, arguably it served as the subconscious driver for the Indonesian elite not to securitize the migrants fleeing the communist Vietnam government (Lee 2015, 40). Karyotis (2012, cited by Lee 2015, 41) claimed that “subconscious drivers” in policy-making might be based on certain values which might have come from Indonesia’s state official ideology called *Pancasila* (Five Principles: Monotheism, Humanity, Unity in Diversity, Representative Democracy and Social Justice).

“Cost-benefit calculation” appears within three themes. First, the Indonesia Government’s non-security approach in handling Indochinese refugees was intended to neutralize the negative portrayal of Indonesia for the annexation of East Timor (Lee 2015, 41). Second,

a non-security approach fitted the regional and global atmosphere that allowed for attracting resources. Third, the approach was meant to maintain state legitimacy by showing that the government was controlling the inflow and outflow of forced migrants; it also showed the government's active role at the global and regional levels (Lee 2015, 41).

"Good public relations" were represented by providing a refugee processing center and taking an active role in solving the refugee issues in the Southeast Asia region. The vast majority of Indonesian government officials, especially the Minister of Foreign Affairs, highlighted the humanitarian aspect of the Indochinese refugees' issues (Lee 2015, 43).<sup>13</sup> The Indonesian government's decision was "soft" compared to that of other neighboring countries like Singapore (total rejection), or Thailand and Malaysia (rejection, pushbacks after increasing surges of refugees in 1979). Despite the refusal to openly accept the link among the benign refugee policies, the Foreign Affairs Ministry's, the Military's and Gen. Soeharto's repeated insistence on a "humanistic" approach to helping Indochinese refugees provided enough "consistency" (Lee 2015, 44). An official openly announced that "offering an island could elevate Indonesia's position because it was a humanitarian offer" (Tempo Magazine 31 March 1979).

"Attracting resources" from the international community was one of the motivations for the Indonesian government to de-securitizing the issues of Indochinese refugees (Lee 2015, 45). The increase in resettlement quotas from developed countries was important to ensure that all refugees would leave Pulau Galang as soon as possible (Lee 2015, 45). In the news reports, Indonesian officials proposed USD18.5 million for the Refugee Processing Center in 1979; the representatives of 24 countries like the US, Japan, and Australia accepted the proposal (Tempo Magazine 20 May 1979, Kompas 16 May 1979 cited by Lee 2015, 45). Not only care for refugees but also financial support were channeled into the development of facilities on the island and its economic activities; the Indonesian Navy also worked as suppliers of refugees' food (Tempo Magazine 1 March 1980 cited by Lee 2015, 46).

"Maintaining legitimacy" meant that a centralized authority to isolate and manage refugees—who were mostly Vietnam's Hoa minority ethnic or Chinese descendants—was very important when the suspicion against anything Chinese was high (after the alleged

failed coup in Jakarta ‘supported’ by China’s Communist Government in 1965) (Lee 2015, 47). Soon after ‘victoriously’ stopping the coup, Gen. Soeharto took power and suspended diplomatic relations with China in October 1967 until 1990. The ways in which the Indonesian government highlighted the fact that the issue of refugees was not easy to handle (but still under Government’s control) sent a message that the Government was still comfortably in control (Lee 2015, 47).

This discursive analysis by Lee (2015), however, only claimed that the de-securitization of refugee issues by the Indonesian Government was launched deliberately on the media discourse of a few actors among the rank and file of the Government at that time. At the practical level, the enormous size of military and civilian resources mobilized for the single purpose of controlling refugee movement and of securing the fulfillment of investigation of their asylum-seeking or refugee status claims spoke volumes about the high alertness in dealing with such security-relevant issues. Furthermore, ten years after the first wave of Indochinese refugees, the Indonesian Government, just like other governments, suffered from “compassion fatigue” (coined by Coughlan 1991). The Indonesian Government returned to securitize the refugee issues both at a discursive level (labeling refugees as “illegal immigrant”) and an implementation level of forced repatriation (scrapping the *non-refoulement* principle) (Lee 2015, 49-55).<sup>14</sup>

This smoothness and willingness from the third countries went down sharply during the post-compassion fatigue time (after 1989) when Vietnam was failing to keep its earlier commitment to monitor illegal departures of its people (from Vietnam or Cambodians or Laotians from conflict areas where the Vietnamese were involved). When the usually open third countries like Australia or Hong Kong decided to set a screening process to exclude “economic migrants,” these countries also reduced the refugee intake. Malaysia even resumed its usual “pushbacks” against any boats that came to its shores. Against the protests of the US and other big countries, ASEAN members agreed to re-open the refugee repatriation system either voluntarily or mandatorily for those who failed to pass the screening processes. Obviously, the capacity of a transit country to deal with refugee and asylum seeker flows was mainly reliant on the willingness of the third countries to absorb the refugees and the cooperation of the home countries to accept their fleeing citizens back. As Indonesia has never

ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, it fully allowed the UNHCR (and the IOM or other capable institutions) to process the refugee claims and then set any resettlement process for asylum seekers to any third country (Taylor and Rafferty-Brown 2010b, 145-157).<sup>15</sup>

During the troubled time of the post-compassion fatigue, the Indonesian authorities, through the Police force and Directorate-General of Immigration, began the discursive practice of securitization of the refugee issues. The media messages that these two agencies kept sending were “lack of personnel, lack of facilities, and lack of funds” to keep up with the increasing “threat.” The Indonesian authorities returned to their usual labeling of refugees as “illegal immigrants” and the discursive practice and treating them harshly with a kind of *antirefoulement* action through a policy of “forced repatriation.”

When the stage of half-mandatory-cum-tolerance began in 1992 to 2001 through an Immigration Law of 1992 that allowed ample room for officials not to detain a foreign suspect under “particular circumstances,” research in Australia linked the failure of Australia’s policy to curb the irregular movement of refugees there to this loosely-applied Immigration Law of Indonesia. The refusal of Indonesian officials to detain all foreign suspects spoke volumes about the inability of the officials to restrict the refugees or asylum seekers’ movement (or to pin them down somewhere with sufficient facilities) and to fulfill their rights to have their claims processed. Nevertheless, knowing that this loose approach by the Indonesian authorities would create a pool of refugees or asylum seekers eager to find their ways to Australia, the Australian authorities quickly sent envoys to Jakarta to offer some assistance (in funds or in kinds) for Indonesians to curb and detain the refugees from making movements. For some years after 1992 and 2011, despite the worsening relationship between Australia and Indonesia around 1999 to 2002, Australia successfully convinced the Indonesian Immigration to build or refurbish its 14 main detention facilities in 14 provinces (“detention facilities” can cover prisons, police stations, warehouses, or any places deemed proper to house refugees and asylum seekers).

These detention centers and other facilities and services to detain the refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesian territory finally got full-blown activation under the fresh Immigration Law No. 6 of 2011. Overcrowding, among other things, is a significant problem with some-



times reports of 25 refugees being crammed in two rooms supposedly for 11 people or 59 detainees staying in a room for 30 (Nethery et al., 2012, 100). This massive problem has led to even further incapacity to monitor or limit the movement of the detainees in every Detention Center. Australia's decision to stop accommodating asylum seekers or refugees who pass through Indonesia after July 2014 broke most of the capacity of Indonesian Immigration to provide rights of claims determination despite the existence of the UNHCR and IOM in Jakarta and other places. Indonesia was left alone to deal with the detention of refugees, to limit their freedom of movement and the right to get claims determined or processed.

When these two capacities had been cut off almost totally, in 2015, another wave of refugees in boats from Myanmar and Bangladesh became the straw that broke the camel's back. During the so-called Andaman Sea Crisis, Indonesia quickly mobilized its closest neighbors Malaysia and Thailand to solve the crisis through a call regionally (ASEAN) and internationally for another meeting. The Bali Process, however, reconvened with a cold shoulder and offered a resolution to "condemn the human smugglers, traffickers and international criminals" involved in the Andaman Crisis.

Without much hope left to both detain the refugees (already staying or incoming from unresolved conflicts somewhere else) and to offer determination or processing for asylum seekers and those with refugee status, Indonesia needed to improve its capacity to face the coming waves of boat people from the region's conflicts. For its Political Turn in early 2017, President Jokowi used the power endowed in him by the law to set a gambit called a Presidential Regulation (*Peraturan Presiden* or *Perpres*) signed on the eve of the last night of 2016 to finally "acknowledge" refugees' existence in Indonesia. This Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 defines "refugees" along with the definitions used by the 1951 Refugee Convention. However, the real intention was to expand the capacity of the state apparatuses beyond Immigration and the use of standard detention centers. This Regulation mobilizes all Armed Forces and Police Force (even community members) to rescue (intercept) refugees wherever they are found and authorizes community-based detention centers whenever necessary. This Regulation seems to revoke the old and fossilized rule that "Indonesia will never acknowledge refugees legally" in the hope of

creating some illusions that the system “is evolving somewhere.” An increased capacity to detain or house more refugees and asylum seekers with more personnel and “detention centers” in many kinds and forms did not automatically translate into the better capacity to restrict the freedom of movement of refugees and asylum seekers and to process or determine their refugee or asylum seeker claims.

Therefore, this paper will end by answering the very question stated at the beginning. Having passed through the different stages of different levels of commitment, involvement, and intention, Indonesia has proven to be unable to (1) restrict the freedom of movement of refugees and asylum seekers staying or waiting in the country and (2) provide satisfactory process and determination of refugee and asylum seeker claims for status (refugees and resettled asylum seekers). The illusion of the capability to restrict the movement of refugees through a functional immigration system and detention centers was produced only after some assistance from the Australian Government to refurbish or build the Immigration Detention Centers as well as any other forms of detention facilities in many Indonesian provinces. The total breakdown in the whole system of refugee and asylum seeker claim-processing happened when the Australian Government closed the resettlement door for all who passed through Indonesian territory after July 2014.

### *Endnotes*

1 This paper is written under a Project Entitled “A Comparative Study of the State Policies and Practices Towards Asylum Seekers and Refugees in ASEAN: The Cases of Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia (Principal Investigator Dr. Sriprapha Petcharameesre of IHRP Mahidol University).

2 For Coughlan (1991, 84-85), Australia’s refugee policy was more of a foreign policy tool than an implement of Government humanitarian concern. The overwhelming determinant of Australia’s Indochinese refugee policy has not been domestic or humanitarian consideration but rather the political desire of the Australian Government and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to improve Australia’s relations with Asia, especially with the ASEAN members like Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.

3 Suspiciously, to guard an island as small as 80 sq.km., Indonesia needed to mobilize a military operation codenamed *Halilintar* (Thunderbolt) using one destroyer, two frigates, one submarine, three tanker ships, three Nomad military planes, and some military units of the Air Forces. Around 20 ships were operating around the areas (Fandik 2013, 168-169).

4 Carruthers and Huynh-Beatie (2011) reported that from 145,000 to 250,000 refugees who passed Galang Island, around 132,000 had been resettled to third countries; the majority of around 6,000 to 8,000 long-term refugees who remained there until 1996 had been repatriated forcibly (part of the Comprehensive Plan of Action of June 1989). During the visit of Vietnamese President Le Duc Anh in April 1994 to persuade the refugees to come back “home,” around 500 refugees protested against repatriation, and 79 refugees launched a hunger strike; one refugee burned himself to death and some hanged themselves (Hargyono 2015). The “screening” process under the CPA was notoriously corrupt, with officials asking for USD1,000 to 7,000 from asylum seekers waiting for their claims to refugee status (Hargyono 2015). The camp on the island today is part of a pilgrimage site—for some 100 to 200 tourists per weekend—of the “dark tourism” (coined by Stone and Sharpley 2008 to represent tourism to locations associated with death, suffering, violence or disaster) dreaded by the Vietnamese government (Carruthers and Huynh-Beatie 2011 citing Fadli 2009).

5 Indonesia has traditionally been a transit country for refugees and asylum-seekers, rather than a destination country. This claim was one important reason why it had not ratified the Conventions Related to the Status of Refugees. The commitments arising from ratification, in particular, covering the prohibition on refoulement or expulsion would overburden an archipelagic state with a large ocean territory and one which had many internally displaced persons as a result of disasters and conflict (Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination 2007 on Summary Record of the 1832<sup>nd</sup> Meeting held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday 9 August 2007: Consideration of Reports, Comments and Information Submitted by State Parties under Article 9 of the Convention, UN Doc CERD/C/SR.1832 (14 August 2007) para 34).

6 The five main objectives of the CPA (United Nations 1989) were (1) reduction of clandestine departures through official measures against boat organizers and through mass information campaigns as well as opportunities for legal migration under the Australia-sponsored Orderly Departure Program, (2) provision of first asylum to all asylum seekers until their status had been established and a durable solution found, (3) determination of the refugee status of all asylum seekers in accordance with international standards and criteria, (4) resettlement of those who are found to be genuine refugees in third countries as well as all Vietnamese who were in first asylum camps prior to the regional cutoff date, and (5) repatriation of those found not to be refugees and re-integrating them in their home countries (Robinson 2004, 320).

7 The staggering size of 1,440 Indonesian boat crew serving in Australian jails between September 2008 and September 2013 (Indonesian Foreign Minister, *Diplomasi Indonesia 2013: Fakta dan Angka*, Jakarta 2103, 17) and 568 Indonesians reported by the Australian Federal Police (Missbach 2016) show the sophistication

and size of the smuggling network on the Indonesian side alone.

8 The Indonesian Government used many lower regulations rather than Acts/Laws to run this Law, such as Government Regulation (President-made) No. 31 of 1994 on Alien Control and Immigration Action, Ministerial Regulation (Minister-made) of Minister of Justice and Human Rights No. M.05.II.02.01 of 2006, etc (Nethery et al. 2012, 94-95). The most significant change from this Law of 1992 to its successor (Immigration Law of 2011) is the use of the phrase “the authorities *may* detain ...” (in Immigration Law of 1992) and the phrase “the authorities *shall* detain ...” (in Immigration Law of 2011).

9 After restoring diplomatic ties with China in August 1990 and becoming the Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement for 1992-95 period, as well as hosting the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in November 1994, Indonesia agreed with Australia (Prime Minister Keating) to signing a “security agreement” quietly in December 1995 (Sukma 1997, 235). The agreement officially termed the Agreement on Maintaining Security (AMS) consists of three points. First, both sides agreed to consult regularly at a ministerial level on matters affecting their common security. Second, both agreed to consult in the case of adverse challenges to either party or to their common security interests and, if appropriate, consider measures that might be taken either individually or jointly and following the processes of each party. Third, the two countries would promote beneficial cooperative security activities (Sukma 1997, 235).

10 One of the first components of this MCIIP was the renovation and refurbishment of Indonesia’s two largest Immigration Detention Houses (*Rumah Detensi Migrasi* or *rudenim*) in Jakarta and Tanjung Pinang up to international standards (IOM Indonesia 2009, 88-89). Another part of MCIIP was the collaboration between Indonesian Immigration and IOM of ‘Standard Operating Procedures’ or SOPs Manual for all detention houses, detention rooms, and border checkpoints (IOM Indonesia 2009). These SOPs “use human rights instruments for their framework, provide guidance on the care of all detainees (on food, healthcare, communication, grievances and other aspects of life), and provide for the needs of special groups including individuals with disabilities and unaccompanied minors” (IOM Indonesia 2009).

11 With the refusal by Australia to resettle refugees processed in Indonesia and UNHCR after 1 July 2014, Indonesia was facing the grim prospect of refugees residing in its territory indefinitely. When the authorities found out about mass graves in Thailand near the Malaysian border known as reception points for Rohingya smuggled out of Myanmar, the crisis began in May 2015. The Rohingya were held, beaten, and murdered in camps in Thailand unless and until payments extorted from their families abroad were received (by smugglers) (McNevin and Missbach 2018, 295). Smugglers *en route* to the camps abandoned their Rohingya ‘cargo’ at sea. When some of the abandoned passengers steered their vessels towards the coasts of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, the authorities refused them permission to land. (The Bali Process stayed silent, and Australia refused to get involved.) Indonesian, Malaysian and Thai authorities provided these boats with fuel, water, and other provisions and returned them to the sea (Amnesty International 2015).

12 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia, "Joint Statement: Ministerial Meeting on Irregular Movement of People in Southeast Asia," available at: <<https://www.kln.gov.my/archive/content.php?t=3&articleId=5502813>>.

13 This island-lending policy might have something to do with the Indonesian government's military intervention in East Timor in 1976. Indonesia had been seen by the International community as an abuser of human rights (Lee 2015, 43). On 10 May 1978, Vice President Walter Mondale met Gen. Soeharto in Jakarta and said that the Carter Administration "does not question the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia ... There are problems with how to deal with our mutual concern regarding East Timor and how to handle the public relations aspect of the problem" (US Department of State 1978, 36-37).

14 Later, in 1989, when more "economic refugees" appeared in Galang Island, two main actors began a new discursive practice of complaining about the "threats," demanding more "budget" for increasing "problems," or complaining of "lack of personnel"; these were the Indonesian Police and Directorate General of Immigration (Lee 2015, 49-55).

15 Taylor and Rafferty-Brown (2010b, 145-157) gave the five stages of refugee or asylum-seeker handling through the Immigration and UNHCR's system that are still relevant to this day. The *first* stage is "registration" that takes place whenever asylum-seekers want the Attestation Letter or Asylum Seeker Certificate (both in English and Indonesian) (with a photograph, necessary details like name, date of birth, statement that a holder is a person of concern by UNHCR). To get this Attestation Letter, the refugees complete a Refugee Status Determination form (RSD) with help from UNHCR's implementing partners (usually NGOs) that will submit this completed form to UNHCR. The *second* stage is "interview" (around six months) after the initial registration stage. In Indonesia, this interview is usually done by a UNHCR protection officer, via an interpreter if necessary (Taylor and Rafferty-Brown 2010b, 153). *Third*, after the "interview," the interviewing officer makes a "refugee status determination" based on the information procured through the interview and other information from all the sources available to UNHCR on conditions in the countries the asylum-seekers are applying. Asylum-seekers are assessed against the definition of refugee in Article 1A(2) of the Refugee Convention (Taylor and Rafferty-Brown 2010b, 154). If the asylum-seekers fit into the exclusion clauses in Article 1F of the Refugee Convention, their applications will be rejected. For the *fourth* stage or the "notification of the initial decision," generally in UNHCR's procedural standards manual, the decisions should be issued within a month of an applicant's interview (Taylor and Rafferty-Brown 2010b, 155). This decision must take the form of a letter written in English stating the reasons for the decision in very generic terms and, in the case of rejection, advising that they have 21 days to seek review of the decision (Taylor and Rafferty-Brown 2010b, 156). The availability of a "review" stage or the *fifth* stage is an essential safeguard against incorrect decisions; unfortunately, an independent review is something that the UNHCR is incapable of providing as it is not a state. Typically, the review of an initial unfavorable decision/rejection is conducted by another UNHCR officer (UNHCR, 'Procedural Standards for Refugee Determination under UNHCR's Mandate' [Procedural Standards, 1 September 2000] [2-17]-[2-18]).

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## **Discourse “eat boys, become immortal”: The reflection of conflicts between Thai women and Thai social values**

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ABSTRACT—This research aims at studying the discourses from various genres on the Internet containing the sentence “กินเด็กเป็นอมตะ” (eat boys, become immortal) or the same meaning in order to discover the conflicts between Thai women and social values. By using Critical Discourse Analysis in all examples, the following conflicts were found: A Thai woman should not love a younger man; Thai women should not be single; Thai women are not equal to men; Thai women can overpower men but it is inappropriate; Love between Thai women and younger men is materialistic and temporary; The discourses reflect the conflict of love in real life and ideal love; Because of the fading boundary between love and sex, her thoughts and actions are different from the past.

Keywords: Thai woman, Thai social values, Thai culture, critical discourse analysis

### **Introduction**

Much linguistic evidence, such as proverbs, lessons, laws or literary rhetoric, reflects Thai women's identity that has been created in a role the way men want. The result is an inequality in society which has led to the mobility of rights and living of Thai women. Jarernphorn (2005, 6-8, 260-261) indicated that 1987, it was the beginning of a clear change in Thai women's rights in many dimensions. There was the praising and glorifying of women in many fields, particularly, in business, trade and investment, and even in the political field with female politicians. It is evident that this change in Thai women's rights was in line with a knowledge and understanding of Western women's rights.

As Thai society changed due to foreign cultural flow and Thai women themselves were better educated, they realized the rights and the equality they should have. As a result, the power of men became shaky and unstable. This has led to the mobility of women at every level and has included their own behavior. By searching the term “eat boy” or “be immortal” on a search engine, the researcher found that the communication phenomenon occurred around 2012. Thai people commonly communicate with the message in a funny way. Speakers tend to be around 30 years old and above, mostly female and LGBT, who have the sexual orientation of a woman. They call themselves “ป้า” (aunts) and often talk about their love of eating, wanting to eat boys or buying a boy to eat. This is a metaphor comparing “eating a boy” to making love or having sex with a younger man and as a result to “become immortal” with the refreshment or happiness. This discourse is used to talk and communicate in a variety of channels from personal conversations to journalism. It has become a phenomenon of discourse which may be linked to the identity, role and thoughts about love of some Thai women that have been by the influence of social change.

### **Aim and method**

This research aims to study the language of the discourse, namely, “eat boys, become Immortal”, which appeared on the Internet in 60 discourses which contain the term “eat boy, be immortal” or “eat boy” or “be immortal” in a context related to love, sex or relationships. The purpose is to find conflicts using the process of critical discourse analysis and the method consists of content analysis at a micro level perspective of both written and oral studies and a social context analysis or macro level perspective which includes issues related to power and inequality among groups in society (Phanphothong 2013, 45-50, 62).

### **Micro-level analysis:**

#### *The core sentence of the discourse*

The core sentence of the discourse can be divided into three parts. The first part mentions the person who does the action or the subject, such as the word ‘aunt’. The second part is a description of the action,

i.e. eat the boy, and the third part is the result of the action, i.e. immortality. The researcher separately describes the following.

The first part talks about the person who does the action or the subject. There is the use of female pronouns to call oneself or others a middle-aged woman, including ป้า (aunt or auntie), ป้าแก่ (old auntie) or sometimes even อีป้า (old hag). Addressing a person in this way is a rhetorical device or exaggeration. It is also used in addressing other genders, for example, the words ลุง (uncle) or เขี่ย (elder brother) for males. However, this research focuses on females because the researcher was not aiming to collect data which is used with males or other alternative genders.

The second part is the action of the discourse. This includes the words ‘eat boy’, ‘eat young man’ and ‘buy to eat.’ The word “eat” in this sense has the metaphorical meaning of making love or having sex. For the term เต๊ก, the direct meaning refers to a young child. Childhood is the period of pure, innocence and naivety. In the use of the kid metaphor to refer to lover, there are two implications: pure brightness, youthful, active and cheerful,

The third part is ‘be immortal’ or ‘undying’ or sometimes ‘the elixir.’ Here there is the use of metaphors in a similar way. This comparison links to the tales or the beliefs of the old culture or which admire good health and endurance. So, there is the production of medicine and the searching for raw materials to cook all food which is believed to give them eternal life. Furthermore, immortality also comes with youthfulness and permanent beauty. When immortality is the ultimate goal, ‘boy eating’ can also become one of the desires of many Thai women as well.

To conclude, the core sentence of the discourse consists of 3 parts which are the doer ‘aunt’, the action ‘eat boys’ and the result of the action to ‘be immortal.’ They are a series of messages which are usually used in communication or interpretation together but can be separated depending on context when the communication occurred. However, when they appear together, this means old women or the transgendered who demand love or to have sex with younger men. Also, this way of using the message may be used to refer to oneself or to other females.

### *Internal context*

This type of context surrounds the message. It helps the message recipients to understand and interpret and it is the condition for choosing the words to communicate in the message as well (Angkhaphanichakit 2014, 48-49). To analyze the discourse requires an internal context analysis to examine the hidden meaning. The researchers found issues of meaning that reflect the conflict between a woman’s love and the values of society as follows.

#### *1. A Thai woman should not love a younger man.*

This is the main issue that is reflected in the discourse. It can be seen from using many linguistic strategies that indicate a negative meaning.

ต่างวัยแล้วไง?! (1) คนบันเทิงหญิงถูกมอง กินเด็ก (2) แต่ความรักแฮปปี้สุดๆ (3)  
[Different ages, and so what?! (1) Celebrities are criticized “eat boys” (2) but their love is very very happy.(3)] ([www.thairath.co.th/content/800536](http://www.thairath.co.th/content/800536))

The meaning of this example looks positive but the presupposition can imply unconcern (1), the selection of the verb “to criticize” and its passive voice form\* (2) and the opposite result that indicates so much happiness from the decision (3) reveal the hidden different meaning. These linguistic strategies reflect the negative attitude of a Thai woman in love with a younger man that strongly influences Thai people, both those surrounding and, especially, women who are in this kind of relationship. Even if they wanted to follow their own desires, they are concerned by social perspective towards them.

#### *2. Thai women should not be single.*

Because the content of the discourse is about love, couples and marriage status it often links to the issue of single status concern. This can be seen in the word “โสด” (single or unmarried status) in many messages. From the lexical strategy in the internal context, the nega-

\* In Thai language, ถูก is put in front of the verb to transform it into the passive voice form and it is always used for terrible meanings such as: he is hit (เขาถูกตี), a car is stolen (รถถูกขโมย).

tive perspective of society towards the single status of Thai woman is also shown.

นิยายรักที่ว่าด้วยเรื่องการตามหารักแท้ที่ยั่งยืน...กับการพิสูจน์ความเชื่อที่ว่ากินเด็กแล้วจะเป็นอมตะ...นิยายที่ทำให้กำลังใจเหล่าสาวโสด (1)...ร่วมลุ้นไปกับสาววัยหลักสี่ที่ริจะหัดเคี้ยวหญ้าอ่อน (2) ที่ฟังดีกรีชายหนุ่มที่สาวโสดอยากได้เป็นแฟนแห่งชาติ [Love novels that talk about finding where true love is... and the approval of the belief of ‘eating boy to be immortal’... Novels that encourage single women (1)...Let’s cheer a 40 year old woman who dares to chew young grass (2) whom all women want to make a national husband.] ([www.readawrite.com/a/64ef2ea64628f8637405b177544a8c7a](http://www.readawrite.com/a/64ef2ea64628f8637405b177544a8c7a))

In this example, choosing the verb “encourage” (1) to use the single women can imply that single status is a disappointed or hopeless status and, in the same way, using the verb “dare” in the phrase “dare to chew young grass” (2) shows that love with a younger one is hard to achieve for those old and single women. In other words, those women are not worthy of young boys.

### 3. Thai women are not equal to men.

In this conflict issue, discourse users have the opinion that Thai Society still has the perspective that aged women can have younger lovers but society has not given them a chance yet. Users of the discourse usually compare their rights, actions and behavior with males”. This shows that they are still concerned about gender inequality in society.

เดี๋ยวนี้อะไรๆ มันเปลี่ยนไป ผู้หญิงก็รักกับผู้หญิงได้ ผู้ชายกับผู้ชายก็รักกันได้ ฉะนั้นถ้าผู้หญิงมีอายุจะรักเด็กมันก็ไม่ผิด (1) หรือผู้ชายแก่จะหลงรักก็เด็กๆ เดี่ยวนี้มันมีทั้งหมู่บ้านเลยมั้ง (2.1) มันเป็นเรื่องปกติของสังคม ผู้ชายแก่ๆ รักเด็กผู้หญิงเล็กๆ ซื้อมัน ซื้อรถให้ เพื่อปลดปล่อยอารมณ์ ไม่คิดบ้างเหรอ ว่าผู้หญิงที่แก่ก็อยากจะได้เด็กเหมือนกัน (2.2) [“For now, everything has changed. Women can love with women, men can love with men. So if aged women are going to love with a younger one, it’s not wrong. (1) Or an old man loves a young girl, might happen in all villages these days? (2.1) It’s normal. Old men who love younger girls buy

\*\* “Chewing young grass” is a part of the Thai proverb “an old cow chews young grass”. Young grass can be a metaphor for a young man.



them houses or cars to release their emotions, don't you think that old women want to have boys as well. (2.2)] ([thaich2.com/news/detail.php?id=146](http://thaich2.com/news/detail.php?id=146))

This message example uses the strategy of giving examples to explain the conflict of aged women whose love is not equal to other genders such as LGBTs (1) and males (2.1, 2.2).

#### *4. Thai women can overpower men but it is inappropriate.*

The discourse has a relation to an interpretation about sexual power regulation or relationships as well. Calling oneself or a person “aunt” or an older person is considered in terms of power because Thai social values admire children who pay respect to their elders. In this meaning, using an older person to address can suggest that those young lovers are obeying and under control.

...บางครั้งการที่สาว ๆ อายุเยอะกว่าเขา มันจะทำให้เรากลายเป็นผู้หญิงบ้าอำนาจ (1) เจ้าก็เจ้าการไปทุกอย่าง (2) ประมาดว่าเรื่องนี้เพื่อฉันเถอะ ฉันแก่กว่าเธอ ฉันผ่านมามากหมดแล้ว...ถึงเราจะแข็งแรงแกร่งแคไหน ก็หัดทำตัวเป็นผู้ตามเขาบ้าง (3)... [Sometimes when a woman is older than a man, it will look like she is power-crazy (1), bossy in everything (2). It's like “believe me, I'm older, I've been through these all before... Even though we are mighty, we must try to be followers sometimes (3)] ([goodlifeupdate.com/lifestyle/62851.html](http://goodlifeupdate.com/lifestyle/62851.html))

Therefore the internal context of the example reflects the role of some women who can overpower men. However, it also indicates that society still accepts women who play the follower role more than the leader role as in this message that use a modification strategy. The adjective “power-crazy” (1) and adjectival phrase “bossy in everything” (2), that describe the power of women, both have a negative meaning. Thai modern women realize this value so they need to keep their potential only for the right occasion (3).

#### *5. Love between Thai women and younger men is materialistic and temporary*

Because the discourse has mentioned the relationship between “aunt” and “boy”, the internal context emphasizes the age, beauty,

youthfulness, appearance, fitness, strength and especially sexual performance.

...มาดonna ราชีนีเพลงป๊อป ตกเป็นข่าวแยกทางกับไอ้หนุ่มรุ่นลูก อาบูบาคาร์ ซูมาโฮโร่ วัย 26 ปี ที่เกิดในไอวอรี โคสต์ และเด็กกว่าเธอถึง 32 ปี ไปได้ไม่ทันไร ก็ได้หนุ่มๆ หล่อๆ ใหม่ๆ สดๆ มาตามใจเรียบร้อยแล้ว คราวนี้เป็นนายแบบชาวโปรตุเกส เควิน ซามปาญโญ่ วัย 31 ปี ลำบากตรงสเปกเธอเลยทีเดียวนะ และแน่นอนเด็กกว่าเธอ 27 ปีด้วยกัน... [... Madonna, the Queen of Pop, became news when she broke up with teen 'Arboubakar Sumahoro, 26 years old, who was born on the Ivory Coast and is younger than her by 32 years. But suddenly, she's already got a young, handsome and fresh man to heal her heart. This time it is a Spanish model, Kevin Sampayo, 31 years old, who is muscular as is her type and, of course, he is younger than her by 27 years as well...] (<http://www.siamdara.com/hot-news/inter-news/1100768/album/201706222048504>)

With the characteristics of such communication, society looks upon this group of women as having to look at love in terms of objects, appearances and looks. They can buy love or sex with money. On the other hand, society looks upon “the boy” who is a lover as having a relationship only in the hope of money, reputation or objects. This is because society stereotypes are that older women are not as beautiful as young women, so their love is not from the heart but for other reasons, as in the following examples.

...ส่วนคนที่ชอบเปย์เด็ก อันนี้ภาษาอังกฤษเรียกว่า Sugar mamma! มันคือสาว ๆ อายุเยอะ ที่งานการดี มีหน้ามีตาในสังคม แต่ดันไม่มีผัว!! (1.1) (Oops!) (2.1) เลยต้องหาทางระบายช๊ักหน่อย (3.1) โดยการหาเด็กเปย์เล่น (3.2) โดยหารู้ไม่ว่าเด็กพวกนี้ก็คือ Gold diggers ที ๆ นั้นเอง (1.2)... – แหมम्म (2.2) ก็คุณอายุมากกว่า ผ่านอะไรมามากกว่า ประสบการณ์มากกว่า แน่นอนเงินได้คุณยอมมากกว่า...อยากได้สามีเด็ก ทำงานเก็บเงินไปจ๋าาา...” [...people who like to pay for boys are called ‘Sugar mamma’ in English! This means old women who have a good career and fame but don't have a husband!! (1.1) Oops!! (2.1) So she has to find a way to release her needs (3.1) by paying for boys just for fun (3.2) but never knows that these boys are ‘Gold diggers... (2.2) this is because you are older, have been through many more things, have

more experience and, of course, you have more money.... Want a young husband? Save moneyyyyyy...] (<https://www.facebook.com/slangaholic/posts/1499888846697844>)

Readers can interpret the negative aspect toward the relationship between an older woman and a younger man by many strategies. The first strategy is choosing English words to define an old woman such as “sugar mamma” and the young man as a “gold digger” (1.1, 1.2). The second is a sarcastic exclamation such as making a slip of tongue (2.1) and sarcastic admiration (2.2). The last one is the lexical strategy of choosing words and phrases that insult this relationship such as “release her needs” (3.1) and “paying boys for fun” (3.2).

#### 6. *The discourses reflect the conflict of love in real life and ideal love.*

The discourse context reflects the popularity of loving a young person, especially appreciating a young male superstar so that it relates to the hashtag phenomenon “สามีแห่งชาติ (National Husband)”. This term is commonly used by Thai women and means a famous male person whom Thai women are crazy about as if they want him to be their husband.

ยอมใจชะนีไทยสายมโนจริงๆ ที่จู่ๆ ก็มีแซชแท็ก #สามีแห่งชาติ... หนุ่มดีที่ฮอตที่สุดตอนนี้ หนีไม่พ้นหนุ่มเจเจ ด้วยความขาว ตี เกาหลี น่ารัก .. ไม่เว้นแม้แต่แก๊งกวาง สาวแท้ที่หมู่บ้านหัวเมืองยังเคลิ้มไปกับรอยยิ้มละไมไทยแลนด์ของน้องเจเจ เอาชะเอวยากกอดดีพรากรู้เยาว์เลย ดักดีหิวมาทำสามีได้ กะจะให้เซ็ด... [Totally give up to imagine-type Thai women because suddenly there is the hashtag #National Husband... The hottest Chinese looking guy at this moment is no one but JJ with his whiteness, Chinese looking, Korean style, and his cuteness... Not only homosexuals but all women in the country are attracted by JJ's warm smile. He makes people want to commit child abduction, knock him off and make him their young husband...] ([www.wongnai.com/articles/most-wanted-celebrities?ref=ct](http://www.wongnai.com/articles/most-wanted-celebrities?ref=ct))

Sometimes, the internal context reveals that a woman who has husband or lover who is old or of the same age, usually uses the discourse to mock her lover in terms of sexual ability which is not as good as “the boy” in her dreams.



Figure 1. Sarcastic meme (<http://www.hajungbay.com/category/HubbyBoredom/เปื้อน...ผัว.html>)

Recently, when I frequently talked about Charyl Chap-puis\*\*\*, my hairy husband would make green eyes at me and ask ‘Is he your husband?’ I want to retort that if I have sex with him one time or two times would be great. Really really great life! (1) Sick of husband!

Even though it is a meme the ironic joke (1) reflects another dimension of Thai women’s love. While they have love in real life, they also have love in their imagination where they can express the idea that they love or like someone very clearly. Unlike in the past, the expression of love is not the proper way of women.

*7. Because of the fading boundary between love and sex, her thoughts and acts are different from the past.*

Talking about love is appropriate when it is not about sex. In other words, it is suitable to talk only in a private area (Jarernphorn 2005, 216-217). However, when “eating boys” can be accepted and interpreted by the recipient whether to look at love or look into sex, discourse users are more comfortable when communicating in public areas. The blurry boundary of love seems to reflect the desire of Thai women to be clearer that it is not only the mental joy but also sexual pleasure but the frame of tradition and culture that pressures them not to communicate what they need freely.

Whether the discourses are kept from various types and forms it appears that society views love between Thai women and younger people in a negative way. Thai women who are affected by this discourse

\*\*\* A famous soccer-player who is designated as one of the “National Husbands.”

are divided into 3 groups: single women, old women and women who love younger. These 3 groups are the ones that are criticized by society. Even if they have a modern personality or mind, they are still under the influence of old traditional values. This results in conflict in their minds about their role. At the same time, the conflict also reflects the change in Thai women whether in terms of power, leadership identity and characteristics of love or relationships with both the dimension of reality and the dimension of imagination. Also, the form of love has changed more objectively.

### **Macro-level analysis: Historical and social context**

There is much linguistic evidence that suggests that the former Thai society expected women to play a role that men defined according to a patriarchal ideology where the male is superior and the woman's role is that of good slavery, a good daughter to her parents, a good wife to her husband or a good mother to her children. There are words that reflect the role and identity of the ideal women, such as ladies, mothers or hind legs of elephants (followers). Thai society has set the role and space for women to live in and follow for the benefit of men. (Phanich 1998, 254-255; Chahongrum et al. 2013)

For Thai women, even though they live under men's command, they cannot claim so much for their rights because of the social conditions and the culture within the power of males. When Westerners brought in knowledge and technology, women became more educated. They also brought in the concept of rights and liberties, equality and gender equality. Thai women started to develop ideas and their views started to change. When foreign countries developed knowledge, there was a new field that studied rights, roles, ideologies and issues related to women. Then, it became widespread in Thailand that women's rights and gender equality were increasingly demanded.

More and more, Western media has affected the idea of modern women in various Asian countries, including Thailand. Whether in the form of films, TV programs, novels, fashion magazines, documentaries, music videos, etc., all media has influenced the idea of identity and the ideas of Thai women. Especially in love and relationships, the flow of Western media has played a very important role for Thai women. They have started to dare to express themselves about love and



Figure 2 : Images of Korean artists and actors ([music.sanook.com/2362697/](https://music.sanook.com/2362697/) and <https://www.daradaily.com/news/47179/read/>)

sex. They have dared to be free from oppression. They now dare to do what before only men could do. This effort is also clearly supported by the three waves of media.

The first wave is the arrival of foreign culture that affects Thai culture. It is the popularity in society of the up and coming Korean entertainment culture, which has been gaining popularity in Korean



Figure 3 : Images of Thai artists and actors (koatidnews.com/4926-2/; teen.mthai.com/variety/123242.html)

culture through young, well-known young artists, as well as actors in dramas and movies. It became a favorite among teenagers and Thais before the television and the media in Thailand expanded this trend

by importing Korean dramas, movies and more music. As a result, its popularity began to expand.

The next wave is the mainstream media and alternative media in Thailand that are furiously responding to the flow of Korean culture. Whether TV shows or movies, they usually involve a love story between young men with good looks and of a young age. Even though it is love for the same sex, in the eyes of most viewers who are female, there is often pleasure with those characters or actors. With more and more popularity, it has become a discourse “สามีแห่งชาติหรือผัวแห่งชาติ” (National Husband) which means that the actor is popular or frenziedly followed by women, (as if) females across the country wished to be his spouse. For these reasons, the discourse “aunt eats boys, become immortal” has been supported by the media and the popular discourse towards young men is as mentioned.

The last supporting wave that the researcher noticed was the supportive flow of discourse related to the identity of Thai women which has changed into a more confident, strong and courageous manner. Since 1987, due to being educated and influenced by Western culture, this change has begun to widen in Thai society. It started with a group of artists, actresses, celebrities and business women who showed off their standpoint of being confident women together with their lifestyle philosophy. As a result, it affected the positive image of modern women as a women of a new generation with much of the talent and reputation. Women who are powerful and successful have unquestionably become a pervasive topic.

Being a woman with this new idea is not limited to love and relationships but includes work, family and living in every dimension. They do not have to follow men and some of them show that they can live without a man or a loved one. Thus, some Thai women have broken out of the group which follows the old tradition and have become a group of women with modern ideas. This group is not worried if they are single. They do not worry whether they are old or who they are going to love. Their happiness is not due to their husband or lover but is created by themselves, such as in their appearance, currency, success in work or by doing satisfying activities. They also dare to communicate their ideas. Success in their lives is not a matter of having a spouse or having to treat a husband but they are at liberty and have the power to do follow their own desires. However, most of the evidence indi-





Figure 4. (Top) A topical poster of an online article about a Thai female superstar, “10 super strong single moms” ([entertain.teenee.com/thaistar/177392.html](http://entertain.teenee.com/thaistar/177392.html))

Figure 5. (Bottom, left) The title picture of a Youtube video, “Superstar that is very rich and beautiful.” ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vuf4gC0-uFA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vuf4gC0-uFA))

Figure 6. (Bottom, right) A commercial banner for an online store, “Ready?? To be very thin, beautiful and rich” ([deskgram.net/explore/tags](http://deskgram.net/explore/tags))

cates that they cannot be fully independent because Thai society which is in the cultural flow of “Old semi-new” is still the society where they have to live.

The discourse “pretty and very rich” and the discourse “buy or pay to eat” result in women valuing more materialistic pleasures. The discourse encourages women to stand on their own. This idea is in line with the supportive discourse “เซิดซูแม่เลี้ยงเดี่ยว” (admire single stepmother). This became a phenomenon where pregnant women without their husbands showed off their strength together online

and it became a controversial issue in society for a while. This self-insistence is also in line with the identity of confidence through the discourse “หญิงไทยไม่แคร์สื่อ” (Thai women care nothing) which means they are brave and confident enough to express opinions or decisions on matters.

Thus, the discourse “eat boys, become immortal” is linked to other discourses promoting the new ideals of Thai women to create popular trends or phenomena in society, with the changing role of women. The courage to talk about love and sexual orientation, which are hidden, develop into a discourse that reveals the identity of another group of people in society, including single women, unmarried women and old women who are often pressured and framed in terms of love based on values or old social norms. The discourse lets these people have the opportunity to change role from those who have fallen under the control of the original tradition to a voice to which society must pay attention.

In addition, the discourse “aunt eats boys, become immortal” also has obvious results in terms of communication. The first aspect is the issue of love for younger people. It is a new challenge in Thai society. In addition to the Thai entertainment industry that has taken this issue into account through movies or dramas which focus on teenage actors, there is an outbreak among Thais who use this discourse as a communication point, in items such as pages, memes, hash tags, etc., as well as links to other issues in everyday life and it turns towards communication in broad society. Another aspect of communication that the discourse supports is the linguistic phenomena of women who call themselves or the older ones “Aunt” or “Grandma.” A woman who calls herself this way does not really have a kinship status or sufficient age to be aunt or grandmother but such an address can make their conversations sound fun and colorful.

It is concluded that Thai society is related to this discourse in terms of both the creators of the discourse and the recipients of the discourse. In terms of the creators, the social framework and the decline of the female population work as oppressors. Together with the support of both domestic and foreign media and also the support of other discourses, they lead to the creation and extension of this discourse. In terms of the recipients, Thai society is influenced by the results of the discourse that link to other discourses which have a consistent

ideology of women. It also provides opportunities for three groups of Thai women: single women, old women and the group of women who love the younger. Originally, they are pressured and their loves are usually limited by the society but this discourse has helped the society to be concerned more about their roles, thoughts and problems. In other words, it is the start of common communication topics in society and a linguistic phenomenon.

### **Conclusions**

The researcher found conflicts between love and social values in 3 groups of Thai women, namely, single women, older women and women who love younger men, and Thai social values. The root of conflict has been formed since the past. Patriarchy caused pressure on Thai women about their love and husbands. Then Western culture spread to Thailand via Colonization and Globalization and along with it came equality and new roles for woman which Thai women needed in order to set themselves free. Until the age of the Internet and online communication, Thai women were influenced by the modern woman image which was constructed by the international and Thai entertainment media.

The researcher also found from the conflicts that a valuable love in Thai values is a love which is separated from sex and object. This idea still remains and plays an important role in Thai society. When this social value is combined with a decrease in the male population who like women, these oppressions are reflected in the discourse “aunt eats boys, become immortal” that they use to tease or to communicate the righteousness of their love. However, because of this discourse, they have become more and more involved in society. The media and related entities have made this discourse widespread but even if Thai women have developed thus far, they still have to live in Thai society as before. To directly refuse the main discourse, which in this case are cultural and traditional values, may bring some problems to their lives. Thus, they use indirect means of communication to express her desires, to create rights and power for themselves through irony and humor, and to reduce conflicts that may arise from not following tradition in a compromising manner.

### *Implications*

What the researcher mentions in the conclusion can be explained by Radical Feminism Theory that is based on the inequality which Patriarchy has caused to women (Sangkhapanthanon 2016, 287-288). Thai women's loves were limited due to the values and expectations of society that regarded the role of Thai women based on the old tradition that continues to the date. In other words, they should not be single but, at the same time, they should not have a husband or lover of a younger age. And because sex or love cannot be expressed publicly, they must keep love in their private space but, at the same time, be open to others to join in the decision. For the culture which the society itself is composed of, new and old people together with complex and various values, whenever they open their minds to the ideas of people around, many values from those people will have a greater effect on their suffering. Moreover, because Thai people are so dependent and attentive on each other, most conflicts do not come from "outside" people but from close people, such as friends, relatives, parents, etc., who try to get involved in their lives and decisions. When women cannot escape from these close people and the attitude cannot be changed that easily, a choice that most Thai women make is to choose to handle the conflicts that are reflected in the research to tease the notion of "eating boys" in funny way or be silent or indifferent to those pressures.

However, society has developed the identity of a group of women who are brave enough to think and take action, be confident and ready to dominate men. As a result, a group of women chooses to "eat boys" and be indifferent to the social value framework. Consequently, from the dimension of conflict with culture and society, Thai women are divided into two groups. The first group is a changing group but they have not yet abandoned the old values. The second group is the liberal group that entirely accepts the change and also calls for society to be open-minded and to accept their role and ideas to a greater degree.

When old identity begins to disappear along with the end of the old age, the identity of women in the new generation of materialistic love and women who have the power to live on their own, will soon become the replacement. This phenomenon will certainly affect Thai society in the future. The first issue will be the blurred boundaries of

love and relationship. This issue shows that the ‘space’ of women’s love has changed dramatically. From sexual boundaries which are personal, it has become public and has become a fun topic to commonly talk about. In accordance with Aeawsriwong (2014: 171), it is said that culture changes all the time. Sometimes a change can be rapid because it is affected by external influences. Private spaces and public spaces will be more “blurred” or blended together. Even though this blurring shows the good side of the freedom of ideas for women who have many benefits, such as the receiving of more accurate sexual information, acknowledgement of desires or sexual desires and access to sexual problems which leads to solutions. However, communication about vague and easier sex and love is likely to marginally affect adolescents and groups with socio-economic status. This is because people of this age primarily learn and exchange experience about sex and love with friends. (Bunyanuparbphong 2004, 73-74 and Nilpad 1998, 107).

As a result, if the data or content about sex is not broadcast with guidance or inserted with a good attitude towards love and sex, this data will turn out to be a stimulus for sexual desire instead. (Sinlapasuwan 1993, 127-128). Even though proper sexually transmitted disease prevention increases and sexually transmitted diseases decrease, however, the stimulation will result in younger teens having more sex. Expert doctors consider that this phenomenon will lead to unwanted pregnancy problems and illegal abortion, while the new born babies are not taken care of effectively. (Arunakul 2016)

The next issue is the modern female identity. Their self-confidence and self-reliance, which is related to living without men, is a new symbol of success. This identity is associated with fewer marriage statistics while the statistic of divorce is rising. This impacts on the population of the next generation and aged society. For this reason, Thai government projects aimed only at supporting pregnant women with supplements or giving benefits to pregnant women are a policy that solves consequences not the root cause. If the government wishes to increase the population of the country in order to reduce the severity of the phenomenon of an aged society, the project should consist of public relations to publish the perspective of good relationships within the family and also make it the dream of Thai women to have the goal of a warm family. This is to balance the discourses so that Thai women will not focus too much on the new identity

In the core sentence, “Aunt (ป้า)” or those who are referred to by this discourse, must be older or at least senior but not too aged or old since there is no use of this discourse with the word grandmother and grandma. This is because Thai society has an idealized image of aged women as a good example. They follow tradition and cherish being a lady. They are also considered to be a dependable place for their children (Poonsri 2010, 172-174). On the other hand, middle aged women, who the discourse is usually used with are not innocent women but packed with many experiences as they have lived full lives. They understand love and female feelings and are still full of lust and sexual desire. Even though they are old, they do not abandon the actual world and live with religion as is Thai society’s perspective towards senior women. Using the word ‘ป้า’ (aunt) is related with the idea of Thai society about women of this age considering they are more fluent in sex than women of other ages. This can be seen in many Thai morals, for example, ‘กระดิ่งจาลนไฟ’, ‘แม่มะพร้าวเนื้อตัน’, ‘โกแก่แม่ปลาช่อน’, which means that all women in middle age have experience and they are good at love and, especially, sex.

However, an awareness of the status of “aunt” does not always match with the truth. Many times the researcher found with direct experience that those who call themselves “Aunt” may not be old or actually have the relative status as an aunt. The word ‘ป้า’ (aunt) in this respect is considered to be hyperbole or exaggeration. Addressing oneself in this way also reflects the regulation and superiority that Thai society admires in the seniority system. Thai society gives rights and empowers older people to receive respect and trust from the younger people. Representing oneself as an aunt or grandma even though that person is not old enough or does not actually hold that status is considered as another way of showing their power.

Finally, the use of metaphorical terms of the core sentence can also reflect the thought of women as explained in the deconstruction theory of Jacques Derrida. The approach of this theory is to decompose the text and question its meaning by considering the decomposed text with its presuppositions and rhetorical forces. The important principle of this theory is binary opposition analysis that can highlight and criticize high culture and mass culture which can reveal the hidden meaning that pretends to be unnecessary but is, in fact, highly necessary (Chantavanich 2014, 234-238).

As indicated before, Thai social values do not accept that women express their love and sex stories in public and especially, it is forbidden if the case is about “Aunt (ป้า)” who has such relationship with “เด็ก (Boy)”. Here comes the use of the metaphorical verb “to eat (กิน)” in the core sentence to talk indirectly about her desires. The word “กิน” in the Thai schema has the principle metaphor of “1) putting something into a container” and the motivating metaphors are “2) getting rid of something”, “3) hitting something”, “4) damaging something”, “5) getting something”, and “6) eating is temptation” (Singnoi 2006, 82-100). The metaphors 1) 3) 5) and 6) relate to sexual actions. In the nature of sex, the woman is taking or getting the body and the feeling of the man into herself like a container and also the bumping sound is like hitting. Her sexual feeling is temptation. When having sex becomes eating, the thoughts and expectations of women change from passive to aggressive because eating contains concepts of putting something in the mouth, no need to wait or be shy but possible whenever hungry.

By this, the concept of กิน is deconstructed from “eating” to “having sex” because the negative concealed meaning of sex is replaced by the other word. Consistent with “be immortal (เป็นอมตะ)”, this metaphor deconstructs the concept of love and sex from the activity of reproduction to be an activity that can absorb nutrients in the body for good health or immortality. This evidence is the flow of meaning which Derrida calls in French “difference” (Chantavanich 2014, 237). When immortality is the ultimate goal of life, the boy is idealized to be the ultimate value of lover so the discourse will praise skincare cosmetics and anti-aging surgery in order to make women young as long as they have the chance for their goal.

### *Suggestion*

Even though the senders or generators of the discourse play important roles in constructing and spreading the value of the discourse only 8 from all 60 samplings of this research can imply a female sender. The anonymous characteristics of online communication have caused the obscure discussion about senders.

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