Towards an ethical agri-food system?

Resistance and alternatives to the corporate control of the agri-food system in Thailand

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1) Introduction

The most pressing problems inherent in the current system of agricultural food production, trade and consumption, would be the periodic hikes in food prices, sometimes referred to as “food crisis”, as well as chronic poverty facing small-scale farmers in Third World countries. To a certain extent, these are technical problems which call for scientific solutions to increase the supply of agricultural products. Nevertheless, an over-emphasis on such technical solutions can serve to increase the dominance of large agricultural related businesses which have monopoly control over advanced technologies.

This paper will attempt to explain the Thai agri-food system as part of the global capitalist system, using a neo-Marxist and neo-Gramscian approach, focusing on agricultural production and poverty problems facing small-scale farmers. It will discuss the current hegemonic form of agri-food production, as well as counter-hegemonic movements in Thailand. The discussion of hegemony in the agri-food system would include the current capitalist agri-food production model, as well as the propagation of ideas that legitimise the current form of agri-food production. Counter-hegemonic forces in Thailand that the paper will focus on include alternative agriculture farming groups, as well as different variants of the Thai localism philosophy that motivate these groups. The paper will also discuss different forms of co-optation of opposition, and lingering cultural hegemony in Thailand, which might serve to weaken counter-hegemonic forces. As part of the conclusion, the paper will gauge the counter-hegemonic forces’ effects on the Thai agri-food system as a whole, and discuss the limitation of this paper.

2) Hegemony in the agri-food system

Hegemony in the agri-food system in this paper refers to both the hegemonic capitalist agri-food production model, and the corresponding hegemonic ideas that support such agri-food production model. Section 2.1 will discuss a framework that can be used to understand the capitalist agri-food production model, as well as concrete examples which support the theoretical claims.

2.1 Hegemonic capitalist agri-food production model

Agriculture and food are important to the capitalist accumulation process in many ways. First, cheaper food can decrease the value of labour power and hence wage costs. The


first phase of what has been called the "corporate" food regime (1980s–1990s) was characterised by low world price of traded agricultural commodities against small-scale producers across the world, to provide cheap food for wage earners in the North whose wages were declining. The second phase (2000s onwards), however, sees rising world prices of food against consumers - a symptom of the tensions within the agri-food system, which will be discussed later in this section.3

The second channel that agriculture and food is linked to the accumulation process is through the appropriation of agricultural resources, such as farmlands, that can lead to the displacement of small-scale farmers or "depeasantisation", which then serve to widen the pool of reserve army of labour, as a basis to extract more surplus labour. It should be noted that with enough reserve labour in the market, or if governments help absorb rising food prices, then the importance of having cheap food to aid capital accumulation is diminished.

The general mechanism to appropriate agricultural resources, can be understood through David Harvey's concept of "accumulation by dispossession", which is the releasing of a set of assets at very low (and in some instances zero) cost. Overaccumulated capital can then seize hold of such assets and immediately turn them to profitable use.4 In the context of the present day corporate agri-food system, accumulation by dispossession include the direct expropriation of peasants through global market forces such as destabilising effects of food imports or dumping of developed countries' food surpluses, contract farming relations, the appropriation of land for agro-exporting, the concentration and centralisation of agri-businesses and supermarkets, and the more indirect disposessions through privatising public supports of small-scale agriculture which enable the consolidation of corporate agriculture,5 as well as the appropriation of indigenous knowledge, genetic resources and other natural resources such as biodiversity and water.6

There is also monopoly appropriation of surplus from "semi-dispossessed" peasantries (these are small-scale farmers who have lost their non-market access to their means of subsistence but still hold formal and/or legal ownership to some of their means of production those who might potentially be part of the reserve labour) through market exchange relations in the agri-food chains. Corporate capital and its chains of subcontractors may, with monopoly/monopsony power in the market, appropriate surplus labour via the provision of credit, seeds, other inputs and market access, while the labour process and partial ownership of means of production are left in the hands of the direct producers.7 Contract farming arrangements, the amalgamation of monopoly power in the agri-food chain, can also be profitable for agri-business capital because they push the costs of production risks to semi-dispossessed farmers.

Many elements in the current capitalist or corporate agri-food model seem to operate in the ways that serve capital accumulation, as described previously. The industrial

agricultural production method, brought about by the Green Revolution, involves extensive use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, hybrid seeds, and advance technologies that are expensive and fossil fuel dependent, and are biased in favour of large-scale farming. The growing use of genetically modified (GM) seeds does not only replace biodiversity with monocultures and increase the crops’ vulnerability to events such as drought, but also contribute to economic problems facing small-scale farmers. These technologies are in the hands of large agri-businesses, and increasing reliance on these technologies mean giving the companies more power and control over agri-food production, and hence power to appropriate surplus from small-scale producers. Monsanto, the world’s biggest agricultural biotechnology company, for example, implemented the “Terminator Technology” or genetically engineered infertile seeds in developing countries, which lock farmers into annual seed contracts and hence serve to destroy traditional replanting systems. This is also one good example of the appropriation of genetic resources and indigenous knowledge discussed previously.

Agri-food chains are often subjected to high business concentration. In addition, with the increased in vertical concentration along the agri-food chains in both developed and developing countries, supermarkets now play a huge role in product development, branding, supplier selection and distribution. As economically powerful companies with monopoly power in the market, these businesses are able to manipulate the market to benefit themselves. Neo-liberal policies, particularly liberalisation and financial deregulation, have also encouraged agri-business consolidation and strategic alliances between agri-businesses, the chemical industry and biotechnology.

Some international regulations imposed on developing countries by the World Bank, the WTO and the IMF have had negative “accumulation by dispossession” consequences. Free Trade agreements such as NAFTA and CAFTA have been argued to bring bankruptcy for the farmers of developing countries and make them dependent on food imports from developed countries. The markets of developed countries, however, remained highly protected.

As mentioned in the first paragraph of this section, the second phase of the corporate food regime (2000s onwards) sees rising world prices of food against consumers. This is a reflection of the present general accumulation crisis where, as short-run solutions to accumulation crisis, there has been increasing concentration and centralisation of capital in

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8 There are many authors who have addressed these issues. Examples include Clare Herrick, “The Southern African Famine and Genetically Modified Food Aid: The Ramifications for the United States and European Union’s Trade War,” Review of Radical Political Economics 40, no. 1 (2008), 62 and Witoon Lienchamroon and Suriyon Thanitchanukit, From the Green Revolution to Bio-engineering: Lessons for the future of Thai agriculture. (Bangkok: BioThai, 2008). (translated from Thai)
9 For example, see Vandana Shiva, Seed of suicide: The ecological and human costs of the globalization of agriculture (New Delhi: Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, 2000).
10 For example, six companies control 85% of the world trade in grain, three companies control 83% of world trade in cocoa, and three companies control 80% of the banana trade. Shawn Hattingh, “Liberalizing Food Trade to Death,” MRzine, May 6, 2008.
13 Esther Vivas, “Food Crisis: causes, consequences and alternatives,” Climate and capitalism, June 27, 2010. There are other authors who have discuss these issues. For example, Walden Bello, Food Wars (London: Verso, 2009).
the agri-food chain, as well as increasing financialisation, which prioritise short-term profits and asset-strippings rather than investments to increase productivity. The general accumulation crisis is related to both food and energy crises. The growing fear of "peak oil" or the scarcity of fossil fuel energy, as well as environmental concerns, drive governments in developed countries to support alternative fuels such as bio-fuels, which compete with food crops for agricultural inputs such as land and raise food prices.  

The conjunction of food, energy and global economic crisis has also prompted international capital markets to engage in speculative ventures in land, food and bio-fuels as investment in agriculture appears to present one solution to the profitability crisis of capital. Investment in physical agriculture's assets include everything from raw land to grain elevators in food processing plant. Some are also hoping that investments in land in developing countries (land grabs) for the production of bio-fuels and/or biomass, undertaken largely by private investors and sometimes by governments through state firms and sovereign wealth funds, would lead the way towards a new round of accumulation or the "new bioeconomy". Excess speculation by non-commodity traders are also seen as contributing to volatile, rising food prices. Hedge, index and risk funds have invested heavily in the futures markets for commodities such as grains and other food products, inflating a price bubble that has pushed the cost of basic foodstuffs beyond the reach of the poor in many countries. While these financial market actors benefit from the boom, rapidly falling prices after the bubble bursts can harshly affect millions of food producers throughout the world.

The problem with financialisation in agriculture and food, however, is not just commodity speculations that help inflate the prices of food, but also how agro-food transnationals reproduce the logic of finance capital, seeking to "capture profits through price inflation" rather than through productivity advances. Agri-businesses with monopsony/monopoly power in the market can benefit from profit squeezing of petty commodity producers and by putting upward pressures on food prices paid by consumers, rather than a revolution in productivity gains.

The rising food prices in recent years seem to indicate that there is a growing contradiction within the capitalist agri-food system, as cheap food is seen as essential to keep wages level down. However, this contradiction is also perhaps a reflection of the changing nature of the capitalist agri-food system. Rising food prices, partly driven by competition for

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17 Ibid, 3.  
19 Ibid, 4.  
resources and fossil fuel exhaustion, might not prove to be significant obstacles to capital accumulation, now that, for example, accumulation by dispossession has created a large amount of reserve labour. In addition, states often shoulder the problem of rising prices of food, as well as giving other forms of assistance and subsidies to agri-businesses. Partly, this is because states have often internalised neo-liberal policies and way of thinking (discussed more in the next section). Various food stabilisation measures, such as food subsidies, price control and restricting exports, are makeshift policies meant to alleviate the problem of rising prices of food (which threaten the reproduction of labour).

The Thai case study will also give examples of how the state subsidises agri-businesses.

2.2 Hegemonic common sense in the agri-food system

Within a stable food regime such as the corporate agri-food system, there are hegemonic principles or assumptions which appear as implicit, natural rules such as assumptions about divisions of agricultural labour, the role of trade, efficiency over ecology, land use patterns, and so on. Hegemonic ideas in the corporate agri-food system are generally the belief in free, open market relations, and that the corporate control of the agri-food system is the most efficient and best system for producers and consumers alike. Large agri-businesses' control of the food chains is favoured. Land grabbing in developing countries is also often justified to ensure food security. In sum, hegemony in the agri-food context also include ideas that justify the current workings of the corporate agri-food system, stopping people to question how the whole system is organised and to look for alternatives, ensuring the continuation of the hegemonic capitalist agri-food production model.

3) Hegemony in the Thai agri-food system

The Thai agri-food system can be seen as part of the global capitalist agri-food system. Similar to the situations at the international level, there are indications of monopoly control at different levels in the agri-food chains, enabling the appropriation of surplus from small-scale farmers (section 3.3 and 3.4). There are also different channels of accumulation by dispossession at work (section 3.3 and 3.4), aided by state policies (section 3.2). The Thai state has internalised neo-liberal policies and modernism worldview, which translate to agricultural policies that orient the agriculture sector and rural livelihoods toward serving the market, promoting cash-crop production for export, contract farming, loose regulations on land grabbing and so on. The Thai state has also intervened and implemented certain policies to benefit certain groups of domestic capital, such as the rice mortgage scheme. The land grabbing phenomenon is also increasing (section 3.2.1), possibly due to the interests in future profitability of agriculture and bio-fuels production (suggestion by the CP group in section 3.2). Moreover, the industrialised model of agriculture has also brought about the problem of soil erosion, other environmental and health problems (section 3.4). These issues will be discussed in the following sub-sections.

24 McMichael, "A food regime analysis of the 'world food crisis',' 286.
3.1 An overview of the Thai agricultural sector

The agricultural sector accounts for 11.46% of GDP in 2009 (industry and service accounted for around 45% of GDP each). It has been estimated that around 24.5 million people out of the 63.9 million people in Thailand, or around 38%, are associated with the agricultural sector in 2010. Out of the 39.2 million people in the labour force, an estimate of 17.4 million of them work in the agricultural sector - around 44.4% of the total workforce. This indicates that a large number of population still depends on the agricultural sector. Important agricultural products include rice, rubber, cassava, maize, palm oil. Between the year 2009 and 2010, there was a massive increase in futures trading of agricultural commodities in Thailand. In 2010, around 40% of those who engaged in the futures trading of agricultural commodities at the Agricultural Futures Exchange of Thailand (AFET) were non-commodity trader speculators. The effects of such futures trading in the agricultural sector warrant more study.

3.2 The Thai state’s policies and their implications

The state’s development policies have consistently favoured capital accumulation in the industrial and urban sector at the expense of the agricultural sector, and corporations over small-scale farmers. The exportation of agricultural products was used to gain foreign exchange and in effect, subsidised the growth of urban industries. The Thai state had also depressed the prices of agricultural commodities to keep industrial workers' wages low. However, in recent years, the prices of food have been rising. The causes of these changes need further study, but it could be due to the high costs of production, rise in fuel (transport prices), and monopoly control over agri-food trade channels.

Vertical integration of farming, processing and high value-added exports is encouraged by the state, and agro-industries has been growing rapidly. In recent years, the Thailand Board of Investment (BOI) has been promoting foreign investments in bio-fuels production and other agro-processing industries, especially since 2008-2009. In 2010, as part of the ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement (ACIA) negotiation, the BOI suggested that Thailand should remove certain fisheries, forestry activities as well as plants genetic improvements from the sensitive list, allowing foreign investors to invest freely in these areas. This could accelerate the process of accumulation by dispossession such as land grabbing and monopoly control over genetic resources.

27 Office of Agricultural Economics (Thailand), Basic information on the agricultural sector 2010 (Bangkok: Office of Agricultural Economics, 2010), 1-2.
28 Office of Agricultural Economics (Thailand), Agricultural Economics Indicators 2010 (Bangkok: Office of Agricultural Economics, 2010), 4.
29 Office of Agricultural Economics (Thailand), Agricultural Statistics of Thailand 2010 (Bangkok: Office of Agricultural Economics, 2010), 168.
30 Prachachart Thurakit Newspaper, “Futures trading of agricultural commodity products booming. Rush to speculate on rice.”, December 14, 2009. (translated from Thai)
33 There are many oppositions from NGOs who are concerned about land grabbing from small-scale farmers, the further destruction of forest areas, the competition for fresh water in agriculture, the increase control over genetic materials, bio-piracy, the privatisation of indigenous knowledge, as well as increase in monopoly control over the seeds market, not to mention the increase in competition for the usage of basic infrastructure and public
The current government’s policy of rice mortgage, where the government promised to buy rice at the price which is a lot higher than the market price, has been criticised that it allows for large scale corruption, and that it allows large capital to benefit from the high prices of rice, while small-scale farmers might not benefit as much as they should. For example, small-scale farmers do not have the means to transport their rice to the mills, so they had to sell to middlemen at low price, or are sometimes cheated by rice mills. In Karnchanaburi province, some farmers have reported to the authorities that somebody else used up their quota to sell rice to the scheme. There are reports that some landlords in Ayuthya and Lopburi province have increased land rents (50-100%), stop renting to landless farmers, or buying up more land in response to this policy.

It has been suggested that large agri-businesses in Thailand have ties with political parties, educational institutions, the civil service, and other prominent institutions in Thailand through financial support and by giving other aids. They, in turn, benefits from state concessions and public research. On the other hand, small local community enterprises are sometimes sued to protect the rights of these agri-businesses. For example, locals involved in the Nam Phrae and Khuan Pak community enterprises were arrested for selling maize hybrid seeds in competition with agri-businesses.

One very influential agribusiness in Thailand is the Charoenpokaphan (CP) group. Thanin Jearawaranont, President of the CP group, has proposed that under the global context of food-energy crisis, Thailand should reduce land for rice production from 62 million rai to 25 million rai using CP rice seeds, spending the other 30 million rai for rubber plantation and the other 12 million for palm oil. Despite the fact that there has been some recognition in the Thai bureaucracy and studies which suggest that the CP hybrid rice seeds cannot compete with traditional rice strains (more expensive and not much more productive than traditional seeds - discuss more in section 3.4), the CP group is very influential in the decision making process of the Thai state and their suggestions usually receive positive responses from the Thai state. The Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operatives (BAAC), as well as local agricultural promotion offices, have mobilised to encourage farmers to join the project to grow CP hybrid rice.

researches between small-scale farmers and agri-businesses. BioThai foundation, Thai life foundation (RRAFA), and Sustainable agriculture foundation Thailand, Public policies’ implications on food security, ASEA\textit{n} free trade arrangements, and effects on farmers, natural resources, and the agricultural sector (Bangkok: BioThai, 2009), 9-14. (translated from Thai)

Sompon Iswilanont, senior researcher at the Knowledge Network Institute of Thailand, suggested that from his fieldwork, the rice mortgage scheme mostly benefited large-scale farmers because small-scale farmers cannot afford the high transport cost to the mills. In addition, more and more small-scale rental farmers are being pushed off their land, or rental prices are increased. Interviewed by Krungthep Turakij (Bangkok Business Newspaper), “Warning rice mortgage scheme disaster collapse in the agricultural sector and risk of loss of profits”, April 16, 2012, http://www.bangkokbiznews.com. (translated from Thai)


Thai post newspaper, “Hand over to DS1 to deal with corruption in rice mortgage scheme. Threaten to blacklist- Boonsong organised the team”, February 24, 2012, http://www.thaipost.net/node/53054. (translated from Thai)


3.3 Monopoly control in the Thai agri-food system

3.3.1 The monopoly control over farmlands

For quite some time, there have been growing conflicts between the state’s control over forest areas and local usage of land, and the mass purchases of land all over the country by capitalists, who often leave the land un-utilised.40 Land grabbing is likely to increase, partly due to the increased interests in bio-fuels production. The figure for landless farmers and farmers who had insufficient land for farming has been estimated to be around 6.7 million people (1.5 million households).41 At the national level, statistics indicate that most of the land in the country is in the hands of few people. A study in 2000 found that about 10% of the total population owned more than 100 rai of land while around 90% hold less than or equal to 1 rai of land. The study also found that there were over 20 million rai of farmlands left un-utilised.42 In recent years, there are reports of an increased level of large-scale purchases of agricultural land, such as in Ayuthya province - an important agricultural area.43 A recent study in 2012 by the office of the Ombudsman Thailand has suggested that despite the 1999 law which regulates the purchase of land by foreigners, there are still land buying through the use of nominees (such as corporations registered in Thailand). A rough approximation suggests that foreign ownership of land in Thailand can be as high as 1/3 of total land in the country (100 million rai from 320 rai). These lands are used as agricultural land, as well as real estate businesses.44

3.3.2 The monopoly control over trade channels

The rice trade in Thailand, for example, is dominated by few big firms which enjoy a certain amount of monopoly power in the market. In 2007, the ten biggest rice exporters controlled 70% of the rice export market. The biggest company was the Nakhon Luang rice trading group which exported 17.6% of total rice export.45 A study by Narong Phetprasert from Chulalongkorn University found that some farmers had to sell their rice to rice mills even though they knew the rice mills were cheating on them, and that they were paid less than what they should had received. This was because they lacked other channels to sell their rice and it would cost just the same to transport the rice to other mills.46 The study also found that gross revenues and net profits of Jasmine rice traders have also been quite high, as compare to that of farmers.47 There are also monopoly control over trade channels in other food products. The CP group alone controlled over 20% of the market in chick production,

42 Rai is a unit which is equal to 1,600 square metres. Pricha Watanyoo, Land Economic Policy of Thailand in the New Century (Bangkok: Land Development Department, 2001). Quoted in Land Reform Network, Alliance of People’s Groups: Grass-roots Politics, (Bangkok: Land reform network, 2003), 10.
45 Than Settakit Newspaper, “Fat rice traders! 6,000/ton profit export to Malaysia”, June 12, 2008.
20% in the pork retail sector, 40% in animal feed and 20% of the total export market in 2001.

### 3.3.3 The monopoly control over other productive resources

There have been increasing monopoly control over agricultural seeds markets in Thailand. Markets for maize seeds, for example, are now dominated by agri-businesses. The situation can exacerbate with the state's promotion of hybrid seeds and/or GM seeds despite the fact they might not provide benefits to small-scale farmers. There have also been attempts by foreign agri-businesses to patent rice strains such as Jasmine rice which is traditionally grown in Thailand.

### 3.3.4 The problem of landlessness, debts and monopoly over credits

The problem of increasing landlessness is linked to the problem of farm debts, which is linked to the industrial model of agriculture. Due to high costs of production and low prices of agricultural products, small scale farmers are usually unable to afford to buy basic necessities and invest in another round of farming. Hence, they usually have to take out loans. Often, farmers rely on informal channels which charge exorbitant interest rates, as they find it difficult to get loans from formal channels.

The higher the debts, the more likely that small-scale farmers have to sell their land to repay these debts. The growing level of debts, then, is linked to landlessness. In 2009, 6 million farmers were in debt to a total extent of 1 billion baht and 30% of these loans were non-performing loans. Another recent research project of the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce (in 2009) found that, from a survey of 2,018 farmers around the country, the average debt of farmers was around 243,000 baht/household (a 16% increase from 2008).

### 3.3.5 Contract farming

Contract farming can be seen as the amalgamation of monopoly control over productive resources, processing, trade channels, and credit. The Thai state has also played a crucial role in promoting agro-industries and contract farming. As mentioned in section 3.2, large agri-businesses in Thailand may have, to a certain extent, been able to capture state apparatus and influence public policies. Compared with other Asian countries, by 1990 Thailand probably had the most extensive experience with contract farming in the widest

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53 Around 25% of the farmers surveyed also commented that the reason for the rising debt was due to the rising cost of production, which included labour, fertiliser, pesticide costs, and rental costs.

54 From Dr Sansit Piriyarangsan's interview, at the time was the head of the Farmers’ Reconstruction and Development Fund, in *The Economics team's editorial, Thairath newspaper, 15* June 2009. (translated from Thai).

range of crops.\textsuperscript{55} There have been many studies which suggest that contract farming yields lower benefits to small-scale farmers than to the contracting companies. For example, the 2003 report by the Thai Senate Committee on Agriculture and Co-operatives found that in most of the contracts, farmers had to follow conditions set by the companies which were not equitable.\textsuperscript{56} Another study found that with contract farming, over 70\% of small-scale farmers costs of production will be in different forms of payments to agri-businesses, or as high as 85-90\% with fish and chicken raising contract farming.\textsuperscript{57}

3.4 Green Revolution technology

The Green Revolution has caused soil degradation and the reduction of biodiversity (such as loss of traditional rice, fish and plants genes), toxin in soil, water and food, as well as many new plant diseases, which all have negative impact on local food security.\textsuperscript{58} High-yield variety (HYV) seeds or hybrid seeds have been found to increase production but not too significantly. HYV rice, for example, managed to increase productivity by 37\% in the past three decades but the productivity level is actually lower than agro-ecological and sustainable farming practices base on indigenous knowledge by 20\%, not to mention that the costs of production is a lot higher, which contributes to the high debts problems facing farmers in Thailand discussed in section 3.3.4.\textsuperscript{59} Despite these problems, the Thai state continues to support such technology. In 2003, it approved the national plan to develop biotechnology from 2004-2011, or to promote biotechnology/bioengineering investments from domestic and foreign capital, arguably repeating the trap of the Green Revolution.\textsuperscript{60}

4) Counter-hegemony in the agri-food system

4.1 Counter-hegemony at the global level

From a neo-Gramscian perspective, progressive social change will not happen automatically after a certain stage of economic development, but can only be produced by historically situated social agents whose actions are both enabled and constrained by their social self-understandings.\textsuperscript{61} In the context of contesting hegemony in the agri-food system, it is important to build up a counter-hegemony to both counter the hegemonic ideas about how


\textsuperscript{57} Lienchamroon, “The role of agri-businesses and the changes in rural Thailand and Thai society,” 8.

\textsuperscript{58} This problem, namely how mono-cropping and Green Revolution has destroyed fishes and other sources of food for small-scale farmers, has been discussed in studies such as by Lienchamroon and Thankitchanukit, \textit{From the Green Revolution to Bio-engineering. Lessons for the future of Thai agriculture}, 156.

\textsuperscript{59} Another study on rice hybrid seeds also suggests a similar story. BioThai foundation has done a fieldwork in 2008 in Kampanget and Uttaradit province to study the effects of a hybrid rice strain developed by CP company, and found that CP hybrid seeds only increased productivity by 15\% while the costs were around 5 times higher than local seeds. Hence, it was not sensible economically for farmers to use CP hybrid rice seeds. In addition, farmers cannot save CP hybrid rice seeds for the next round of plantation, unlike traditional open pollinated seeds, so they would have to buy rice seeds every year from the company. BioThai, “Report on the problems of hybrid rice seeds: case study of hybrid rice owned by the Charoenpokapand group,” 18-20.

\textsuperscript{60} Lienchamroon and Thankitchanukit, \textit{From the Green Revolution to Bio-engineering. Lessons for the future of Thai agriculture}, 275.

the agri-food system should be organised, and also to give practical alternatives or create some forms of counter-hegemonic movements to counter the hegemonic capitalist agri-food model at the material level.

One important counter-hegemonic transnational agrarian social movement is La Vía Campesina (Peasant Way), an umbrella body that encompasses more than 120 small-scale farmers’ and peasants’ organisations in 56 countries. It supports food sovereignty as an alternative to the current paradigm. Food sovereignty has multiple meanings depending on context, but generally it means building an alternative, decentralised understanding of food security in which material want-satisfaction is not subordinated to the market but embedded in ecological principles of co-operative production relations and forms of agro-ecology. Countries should also stimulate the recovery of their national food producing capacity through peasant and family farms. This calls for land reforms, floor prices, credit, and other forms of support to small-scale farmers. Farming technology must also be changed to be compatible with agro-ecological principles, based on respect for nature, local cultures and traditional farming knowledge.

There is room to contest hegemony as it is not an unproblematically dominant ideology which simply shut out all alternative visions or political project. Contesting existing hegemonic ideas or existing "common sense" is not an easy task, but social agents can draw on materials from their social and cultural contexts to create "a new common sense". Common sense is an combination of historically effective ideologies, scientific doctrines, and social mythologies. It is not monolithic or univocal, but a syncretic historical residue which is fragmentary and contradictory, open to multiple interpretations and hence potentially supportive of emancipatory social visions and political projects. For example, religion can be used as a key component in the construction of hegemony or as a tool of contestation and resistance in the advancement of a counter-hegemonic project. The case of the Brazilian landless movement (MST), an important member of La Vía Campesina, is a good example. The MST has made used of religious ideas, as well as socialist, nationalist and communitarian ideas to build up their counter-hegemonic movement, which both practically and ideologically challenge the existing hegemonic project. For example, by re-making nature-society relations through agro-ecological practices.

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64 It has been scientifically demonstrated that ecological farming systems can be more productive, can better resist drought and other manifestations of climate change and are more economically sustainable because they use less fossil fuel. Rosset, “Food Sovereignty and the Contemporary Food Crisis,” 462. Another important study is from the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) *Agriculture at a Crossroads. Global report.* 2009, http://www.agassessment.org/index.cfm?page=iaastd reports&itemid=2713.
4.2 Counter-hegemony in the Thai agri-food system

4.2.1 An overview of alternative agriculture movement

In reaction to the problems facing small-scale farmers in the agricultural sector, in the early 1990s grass-root rural organisations emerged, such as the Small-scale Farmers of the North-east (So Ko Yo Oo) and the Northern Farmers Network, and governments have made some concessions.\(^{68}\) In recent years, agrarian social movements are weakened due to political polarisation, which makes large scale mobilisation difficult.\(^ {69}\) In general, there are two major types of resistance in the Thai agri-food system. The first can be called the alternative agriculture movement, and the second is the movement of landless farmers who try to push for community land deed projects. This paper will focus on the first movement as a case study. Alternative agriculture movement tries to counter the hegemonic model of agriculture by adopting new production methods which are ecologically sustainable (e.g., growing different varieties of plants instead of mono-cropping) and with lower costs of production, and also by organising farmers' groups to increase their bargaining power in the markets. Their success in bringing about structural changes in the agri-food system, however, is still rather limited, as can be seen from state policies which consistently favour corporate interests in the agri-food system.

Alternative agriculture movement has originated in the mid 1980s. The term "alternative agriculture" includes both agricultural production and farmers' way of life, that allow for the restoration and preservation of the ecological and environmental balance, with fair economic and social returns that increase the quality of life of farmers, consumers, and local social institutions. Its goals are the happiness and survival of humankind. Overall, it means the production and processing of agricultural products, culture, and way of life, that moved way from, or beyond the Green Revolution.\(^ {70}\) There are many forms of alternative agriculture, such as shifting cultivation, organic, agro-forestry, natural and integrated farming. Integrated farming, for example, means growing different varieties of plants and raise animals in the same area, making sure they complement each other. This is seen as the most efficient way to use resources, which also ensure environmental balance. Alternative agriculture also include the King of Thailand's "New theory" which is the principles of managing small farming lands and water resources, to ensure household food security.\(^ {71}\)

In 1989, a network of NGOs and small-scale farmers formally organised the first Alternative Agriculture network in Thailand. The movement has received inspirations from alternative agriculture movements in other countries. For example, principles of natural farming of Masanobu Fukuoka from Japan, and organic farming experiences in Europe.\(^ {72}\) The most important foundation of the movement, however, is accumulated knowledge and experiences of Thai individual farmers, who applied traditional knowledge to create

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\(^ {69}\) Witoon Lienchamroon, personal interview with the author, 5th April 2012.


\(^ {72}\) *Ibid*, 151.
alternative forms of agriculture, such as Mahayoo Sunthornchai in Surin province. These individuals form networks across regions and provinces through group learning, exchanging knowledge and information.73 Sometimes, the whole community participates in alternative agriculture, such as at Ban Sampaknam, Ampur Chumpae, Khon Kaen province (73 households).74 There are around 50,000-100,000 farming households which engage in sustainable agricultural in different forms, or around 500,000 households, if include those who use some forms of sustainable farming techniques such as bio-pesticides.75

Some farmers have organised their own self-help groups similar to agricultural cooperatives, as well as seed saving groups and alternative agriculture farming schools. Examples include community rice mills in Naso community, Yasothon province (Northeastern Thailand). With the spread of cash-crop rice growing in Thailand, the locals in Naso community had experienced rising costs of production while the price of rice was determined solely by middlemen or rice mills.76 The Naso locals then thought that their situation could improve further if they were to build their own rice mill to process and sell their own rice, bypassing the middlemen.77 The mill started operating in August 1991. The processed rice is being sold in different markets and is also being exported to Europe and Asia.78 The mill also received help from accountants from Bangkok who had taught accounting skills to local members.79 Nevertheless, it has always been the locals who managed the mills.80 By September 2000, the group had over 1,045 members (900 households).81

There are also producer groups which draw inspirations from religion and self-sufficient economy (discuss more in 4.2.2) such as the Dharma Ruamjai foundation (DRF) farmers group which grow organic Jasmine rice in Yasothorn province. In 2006, they have agreed to adopt the moral conduct within the group by committing to give up on liquor, smoking and gambling and have used these moral codes in the new brand for their organic Jasmine rice called “Moral Rice”. During 2006-2009, there were 108, 82 and 160 farmers participated in the Moral Rice network program which have produced 168, 464 and 1,464 tons of rice paddy respectively. The DRF farmers group has also established 16 Moral Rice learning centres across Yasothon and nearby provinces for public knowledge sharing.82

Alternative agriculture and other agrarian social movements in Thailand have also been supported by NGOs, which also publish reports on food security and agri-food related issues, campaign for the banning of certain pesticides and the introduction of GM seeds, organise alternative agricultural products market, and so on. Examples include the BioThai

73 Lienchamroon and Yaimuang, “Alternative agriculture: from individual farmers to social movements,” p.272
74 Ibid, 276.
77 Ibid, 126-127.
80 Ibid, 154.
82 Branding as the marketing strategy for organic products: A case study on Moral Rice Juthatip Patrawart As. J. Food Ag-Ind. 2009, Special Issue, S256-S263 p.256
foundation, Sustainable Agriculture Foundation (Thailand), Agri-nature foundation, Community of Agro-Ecology foundation and others. These groups usually have linkages or alliances with smaller local-level NGOs in different parts of Thailand, as well as environmental activists and other consumers organisation. There are also quite a few farmers' groups and alliances which organise themselves according to specific concerns such as the Contract Farmers' network and the Thai Land Reform network, which occasionally come together to, for example, protest against the state's attempt to impose heavy fines on small-scale farmers for creating green house gas through agricultural production.83

There is a recognition that the problems in the agri-food system cannot be solved only by farmers at the village or community level, as the problems are related to production, consumption, and related government policies, making them relevant to other people in society.84 The Alternative agriculture network has been expanding, and also involves other groups of people in the society, such as the Asoke Buddhist community, academics, civil servants in different departments, such as from the Ministry of agriculture and Health Ministry.85 There are also alternative markets and "green shops", which link farmers to consumers and other groups in the Thai society, such as businesses, the media and consumer organisations.86 In addition, there seems to be an intuitive understanding of how agri-food problems are part of the global capitalist system. One form of such critique manifests itself in the form of Thai localism.

### 4.2.2 Traditional, cultural, religious knowledge and inspirations

A lot of people in Thailand who are involved in the movement which try to resist the current agri-food system and offer alternatives, are influenced by what can generally be called the Thai localism way of thinking. The Thai localism discourse (appearing under names such as the community culture school of thought, self-sufficiency and self-reliance) has started since the 1980s, along with the alternative agriculture movement, but has gained more attention after the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and after King Bhumipol's speech the same year, urging for a self-sufficient economy.87 There are also many scholars who have elaborated on what self-sufficient economy means, and look at alternative agriculture as a starting point for a new form of ethical economy.

For his majesty the King, self-sufficient economy is a philosophy which can be used to guide people at different levels, starting from family, community, up to the state level. It infers the development and management of the country using the "middle path" (Buddhist term which means not too extreme and not too slack), to cope with the globalisation age. "Sufficient" means reasonably enough, and having the immunity to protect oneself from possible negative effects of changes that may occur internally or externally.88 The term self-

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83 Over 34 farmers have been sued by the state to pay the fines of over 13 million baht in total and it has been estimated that more than over 2,000 farmers will be sued in the near future. Napaporn Chamthaptim, “The Land Reform Network pushes to cancel the global warming model which is unfair to the locals,” The Nation newspaper (weekly), February 14, 2012. (translated from Thai)

84 Lienchamroon and Yaimuang, “Alternative agriculture: from individual farmers to social movements,” 278.


86 Lienchamroon and Yaimuang, “Alternative agriculture: from individual farmers to social movements,” 274.


88 This means carefully utilising knowledge from different disciplines in policy planning and practice. In addition, the foundations of the minds, especially of government officials, theorists, businessmen, and so on, are also important, as they ought to have moral conscience, integrity, suitable knowledge, patience, and other
sufficient economy does not mean every family must produce all the basic needs such as food and clothing by themselves, which is too extreme. It has a wider meaning, which means the importance of having enough, curbing one's greed, and minimal takings from other people. Enough could mean a lot more than just basic needs, and could include luxury items, but not at the expense of other people's needs and well-beings. It also means living within your means. 89

Other scholars have elaborated on the principles of self-sufficient economy. Self-sufficient economy, which emphasises the importance of recognising what is "enough" or sufficient, and within reasons, could be seen as having a foundation in Buddhist views of economics. Dr. Apichai Pantasen, a scholar in Buddhist economics, has discussed how self-sufficient economy ideas can be used to alleviate poverty problems. In his interpretation, the practical form of sufficiency economy is the King's "New theory" agriculture which emphasise how small-scale farmers need to make sure they can produce enough to meet the basic needs at the household level, to solve absolute poverty problem and allow them to have some savings. If farmers form production and processing groups, they should aim to serve local needs first, before selling at regional, national or international level. Some of their profits should also be used for community services and welfare, to help those in need. 90 In addition, internal community-to-community exchanges would stimulate local economies, increase production and level of savings in the community, so that saving groups can raise capital for productive investments in the communities. To make this happen, it is recognised that there must be support from other groups in the society, including from the government, local administrations, religious groups, academics, local wise men or community leaders. Other scholars who advocate similar views include Dr Eakawit Na-Thalang, who criticised how capitalism leads to natural and ecological destruction, suggested using Buddhism as a model to picture alternative developmental path, 92 and Professor Saneh Chamarak, who suggested that self-sufficient economy is about finding new principles and a new path based on self-reliance and ecological sustainability. 93 Self-sufficient/sustainable agriculture is also

89 King Bhumiphol Adulyadej's speech on the 4th of December 2007 and 2008, and 17th January 2011, at Dusit palace, Bangkok, quoted in ibid, 74 and 77.
91 Such principles are designed to create immunity from possible negative side effects from economic linkages with the outside world. Exchange systems within and between communities are also expected to reduce external/foreign economic instability which the Thai government cannot control. Ibid, 93.
92 He holds a view that human greed is leading to natural and ecological destruction, and one must not remain in carelessness/lack of mindfulness, living life uncritically in the capitalist current that has no bound. To get ourselves out of existing calamity, one must have the courage to step outside of the capitalist system. Self-sufficiency could be a solution, as it means forcing ourselves to think about what "enough" is, or what the middle path is, in accordance with Buddhist teachings. Eakawit Na-thalang, “Self-sufficient economy: a way out of disaster,” in Safety and stability through self-sufficiency economy, ed. Pitaya Wongkul (Bangkok: Withithat institute, 2008), 81-82. (translated from Thai)
seen as a starting point, which hopefully would lead to higher levels of sufficiency economy such as at the community level.\(^\text{94}\)

Another variant of Thai localism is the “community culture” school of thought, mainly associated with the work of the founder, Chatthip Natsupa. There are different interpretations of community culture, sometimes appearing as a romanticism of the past where village life is seen in a utopian light. A more balanced view is offered by Pasuk Phongpaichit, that community culture is not a philosophy which pushes for a retreat or escape from modernity and globalisation, but it is a strategy to offer a long-term way to integrate everyone into the national and international economy from the bottom up, where communities would build on their own wisdom and resources but not statically and not in isolation, and with help from modern ideas and technology.\(^\text{95}\) In general, this school of thought is usually seen as being similar to that of self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

There are some academics and activists in Thailand who reject the capitalist system, but at the same time, cannot wholeheartedly accepted the community culture school of thought because it often appears to give too much importance to the past as development ideals for the future.\(^\text{96}\) Nevertheless, they still believe in the work that they have been doing, and in expanding the alternative production-consumption network, linking producers and consumers to create new social exchange relations through these alternative markets. To them, creating alternative agriculture and market is not a propagation of conflicts between urban and rural areas, nor an appeal back to the past, nor a dogmatic belief in any social theory, but practical solutions derive from years of learning-by-doing experiences of the people involved in the movement.\(^\text{97}\) Even when they do not agree with certain localism philosophy, in practice, their strategies and methods converge with the practices promoted by those in the Thai localism group. For example, they both value ecological balance, having strong ties within and between communities, and give importance to empowering small-scale farmers in the market system.

There are also some scholars who are very critical of Thai localism, seeing such self-reliance or self-sufficient ideas as conservative forces. For example, Hewison (1999) suggested that it is not politically sound nor economically viable, and saw it as a kind of populist politics which is reactionary, romantic, anti-urban, and encourages chauvinism.\(^\text{98}\) McCargo (2001) also suggested that such localism discourse is a call to return to Thai agrarian roots, which is conservative and nostalgic, and also closely resemble the official Thai nationalism which is elitist and statist.\(^\text{99}\) The problem with most of these studies is that, they do not take into account different forms of localism, as some forms are more progressive than the others, and that there are people who are inspired to empower themselves and create alternatives to the agri-food system through these ideas, without thinking that they have to re-live the past. In addition, Thai localism is rather compatible with counter-hegemonic ideas in other countries, such as food sovereignty principles which promote a decentralised understanding of food security and aim to empower small-scale producers. The MST, for

\(^{94}\) Ibid, 126.  
\(^{95}\) Ibid, 138.  
\(^{96}\) Lienchamroon and Yaimuang, “Alternative agriculture: from individual farmers to social movements,” 293-294.  
\(^{97}\) Ibid, 294.  
example, has made use of religious ideas, as well as socialist, nationalist and communitarian ideas to build up their counter-hegemonic movement (section 4.1), similar to how alternative agriculture groups in Thailand make use of traditional and Buddhist values.

Some critiques have interpreted self-reliance in an exaggerated manner, as meaning a complete withdrawal from the market economy or as an obstruction to modernity and urbanisation.\(^{100}\) In some instances, self-sufficiency has been transformed to fit the agenda of the bureaucracy or adapted to make it more compatible with mainstream economics.\(^{101}\) These can be considered examples of "co-optation of opposition", where concepts of self-reliance and self-sufficiency have been discredited or distorted to fit the world views of state managers and neo-liberal elites. More examples will be discussed in the following section.

5) Co-optation of opposition and cultural hegemony in Thailand

The biggest problem in the construction of counter-hegemony is that of "co-optation of opposition" or "trasformismo". The term refers to a deliberate strategy to prevent popular participation and systemic change within the policies and procedures of political institutions through ideational distortion.\(^ {102}\) It can also be understood as a strategy of assimilation and domesticating potentially dangerous ideas by adjusting them to dominant coalition, to obstruct the formation of class-based organised opposition to the status quo.\(^ {103}\) There is also co-optation in the current corporate agri-food system. Harriet Friedmann has used the term "corporate-environmental food regime" or "green capitalism" to refer to the corporate response to pressures by social movements. For example, the concerns about food safety and about environmental effects of industrial farming, have inspired businesses to enter the organic and fairtrade food markets.\(^ {104}\) In addition, there have been attempts at transforming the discussion on food security to make it compatible with corporate interests. For example, GM seeds and land grabbing in developing countries are being justified as methods to ensure food security.\(^ {105}\)

There are different forms of co-optation of oppositions in Thailand. Some of these attempts are similar to what is happening in other countries, such as how agri-businesses attempt to "green wash" themselves through tapping into organic niche market. This section will also discuss how the Sakdina mentality or patron-client relationships can be seen as a form of cultural hegemony in Thailand, and how it has been used to aid other forms of co-optation of opposition, such as the granting of political patronage to certain farmers' groups, rural populist policies which simplify the problems in the agricultural sector only as stemming from the lack of money, and the re-interpretation and implementation of self-sufficiency policies by the bureaucracy.

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100 Ibid, 180.
Because of the growing environmental and health concerns, more businesses have become interested in organic food production and marketing. It has been argued that such interests in sustainable agriculture, but with profit maximisation as a priority, might destroy the real essence of sustainable agriculture. For example, one of the main essence of sustainable agriculture is to grow diverse range of organic products, but companies might prefer mono-cropping of certain products that they can market, without thinking about local food security and interests of local communities. In addition, many large agri-businesses have entered the market even though they still sell chemical inputs and engage in industrial form of agriculture. For example, CP has been encouraging organic farming in Northeastern Thailand, alongside industrial capitalist forms of agriculture. Large agri-businesses have also started contract farming on organic products, forcing farmers to buy seeds and organic fertilisers from them, and sell the products to them at the prices they set, in exchange for getting loans to produce. Farmers lack the freedom and power to negotiate, and organic farming in this manner became just a profit making tactic. Even though these products might pass the organic standards, such production methods are not truly sustainable, as they only serve to increase the corporate control over agriculture at the expense of small-scale farmers.

The Thai state has made some attempts to promote alternative agriculture, but the forms promoted are diluted versions of alternative agriculture implemented by networks of individual farmers, where there are only mild changes in the production system. For example, there is no emphasis on helping farmers reduce the costs of production and use resources as efficient as possible. Sometimes, the state promotes growing different crops in one farm land, but are not concerned with how each crops aid one another in an ecological manner, so it turned out to be just promotions of different types of mono-cropping in one farm. There is also co-optation at the rhetoric level, where the state attempts to adopt similar terms and writing styles as that of small-scale farmers, NGOs and academics who work towards building alternative forms of agriculture. However, there are minor differences, for example, the state's definition of alternative agriculture would still allow the use of some chemical inputs.

"New theory" agriculture promoted under the civil service is also problematic, as most officers do not understand the project, and focus too much on quantitative expansions (such as number of farmers who participate) rather than to ensure to quality of each project. Similarly, the civil service's mechanical promotion of "self-sufficiency economy" is also problematic, and it has been argued that such policy has become a tool of bureaucratic ideological control. For example, the civil service has used the self-sufficiency program to

109 Ibid, 178.
111 Thanwa Jitsanguan and et al., Report on the guideline and policy to develop sustainable agriculture: a case study of the Northeastern area, 86, quoted from Ibid, 229. (translated from Thai)
112 Ibid, 237-249.
113 Ibid, 235.
114 Phruk Thaotawil, “Self-sufficiency project at the village level: elitist control over the rural sector,” Fah-Diewkan academic magazine 6, no. 2 (April-June 2008): 71 and 73. (translated from Thai)
teach and impose certain morality on the locals, using the people's fear of authority to force them to co-operate, and use the King's name to legitimise their project, not to mention that they try to implement standard programs on every regions without taking into account local differences, nor involve local farmers in the decision making process. Because such self-sufficiency policies promoted by the bureaucracy are so problematic, it serves to confuse and alienate people from the real understanding of self-sufficiency, and its associated principles such as self-reliance, and alternative agriculture to serve local communities, and so on.

One of the reasons why the Thai bureaucracy implemented rural development policies in such controlling manners, could be due to the "Sakdina" attitude that still exist in its working culture. Thailand used to be, for a very long time, under the rule of the absolute monarchy in which the Sakdina system had regulated the social order since the late 15\textsuperscript{th} Century. Essentially, the basic hierarchical cleavage in the Sakdina society was between the royalty and aristocracy on the one hand and the peasantry on the other. Even when the Sakdina and corvee system were abolished, it has been argued by many academics that the traditional personal linkages between the people of different classes persisted in a form of hierarchical patron-client relationships. In a hierarchy of relative power, those higher up in the hierarchy maintain power through the support of those below them. Those lower down in the hierarchy in turn expect tangible benefits from their patrons. The patronage roles are typically filled by state officials, politicians and middlemen.

In addition to the remaining patron-client relationships, the “Sakdina attitude” or the “Sakdina culture” are still pretty much alive in the minds of the people. The terms are usually used to refer to how those in positions of power tend to see the people below the hierarchy as “subjects” or as “peasants” to be ruled over paternalistically. The rulers also expected these people to “know their place”, which often implies that they should not make too many demands on the more powerful people. The people lower in the hierarchy can internalise this attitude and think that it is the natural order of things to behave in the expected manner. The Sakdina attitude has become infused in the ways the bureaucracy implements development policies, and can be seen as a form of cultural hegemony, that also affects the state and civil service's rural development policies.

Another form of co-optation is through providing political patronage to selected farmers' self-help groups, to satisfy their demands, but also keep them under control. A report from the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) suggested that in most provinces where there were viable profit-making state promoted co-operatives, politicians (national and local) were usually behind them as advisers. Agricultural co-operatives and farmers’ groups, if they have to rely on the patron-client relationships, may only be able to develop as cases of “special concessions” from the state, and might not seek to network and expand on their own initiatives, or to demand national-level supporting policies.

Populist rural development policies, which were a mark of the first Thaksin administration (after the 2001 election) also reinforce the hierarchical patron-client attitude,
while claiming to solve rural poverty problems. The rhetoric of Thaksin and the Thai Rak Thai party in general had tried to forge the rural population’s dependency on their policies, establishing Thaksin and his party as “saviours”, or the biggest patrons of the rural poor, regardless of the fact that the policies were unlikely to contribute much to solve the structural problems of rural poverty, as they suggests that the problems facing small-scale farmers and the rural population are mainly due to the lack of money. From a quick outside glance, policies such as the debt moratorium for small-scale farmers and the scheme to provide a one million baht fund for each village, or to give money to rural villages in general, would benefit the rural population including small-scale farmers, but the fine prints of these policies could serve to reinforce the hegemonic forms of capitalist agriculture. For example, giving them more credits would enable them to buy more chemical fertilisers under the control of large agri-businesses. Post-Thaksin governments have not departed from such populist policies, and there is a danger that the rural population will (if they have not already) become accustomed to such hand-out policies, and might not think about bringing structural changes in the production method and in the agri-food system.

6) Conclusion: gauging the counter-hegemony effects on the agri-food system and future directions

This paper has tried to explain how the Thai agri-food system can be seen as part of the global capitalist agri-food system, where there are problems such as the monopoly appropriation of surplus from small-scale farmers and many forms of accumulation by dispossession which destabilise the livelihood of small-scale farmers. The paper has also discussed alternative agriculture movement in Thailand which try to counter problems in the capitalist model of agriculture. The people in the movement are often inspired by traditional and Buddhist ways of thinking, such as that of self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

One danger of such ways of thinking, however, is that it can be rather passive. For example, self-reliance and self-sufficiency means being content with what one has, and farmers might not demand for policy changes at the national level. Self-reliance and self-sufficiency way of thinking do not prohibit participating in wider market relations at national and international level. However, farmers might only aim to do what they can at local community level, instead of moving forward, because they are content to stay at that level. In addition, the number of people involved in the alternative agriculture movement is still relatively small, compare to those involved in capitalist forms of agriculture. This potential passive tendency can prove to be problematic, as the analysis of the problems in the agri-food system suggests that there ought to be changes at the level of state policies and national laws (also at the international level), or to alter the way of thinking about the economy as a whole, to be able to create an alternative agri-food system which is fairer and ecologically sustainable. For example, government policies which favour large agri-businesses, industrial form of agriculture, GM seeds, foreign direct investment and land grabbing, ought to be reconsidered. To be able to implement changes at the structural level, perhaps there ought to be

118 Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker had suggested that the TRT populist rural policies were actually attempts to replace the old local patron-client relationships and transfer the rural people’s loyalty directly to the TRT party. Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, Thaksin: the business of politics in Thailand (Chiang Mai: Silkworms Books, 2004), 188-189.
119 There are quite a few studies of the Thai Rak Thai rural development policies such as Ammar Siamwalla and Somchai Jitsuchon, Tackling Poverty: Liberalism, Populism or Welfare State. A paper presented at the annual Thailand Development Research Institute academic seminar, 10-11th November 2007 (Cholburi, Thailand, 2007). (translated from Thai)
some forms of political mass mobilisation or a creation of a political party to push forward an alternative agri-food system, and also to reach out to more members of society. In addition, cultural hegemony in the form of patron-client relations mentality, or the common sense that it is a natural order to be under protections of certain patrons, as well as the lure of populist policies and rural development policies imposed by the bureaucracy, must be overcome.

There are other issues which have not been discussed in details in this paper, but could prove to be potentially very important to the future development of resistance and alternative movements in the agri-food system in Thailand. First, it is possible that the current political polarisation has divided the people's movement and weaken them quite significantly.\textsuperscript{120} Second, the landless peasants movement needs further study, as they represents another form of counter-hegemony by trying to implement community land deeds in some parts of Thailand. Third, there is a need for extensive fieldworks in Thailand to understand the problems in the agri-food system and counter-hegemonic movements better, without succumbing to neo-liberal or modernist frameworks of analysis, or romanticised analyses of counter-hegemonic movement. Fourth, it is also important to look at why there is substantial food price increases in Thailand in recent times, and the implications on agri-food system and capital accumulation. Lastly, it would be useful to compare the Thai situation with that of other countries, and perhaps look for ways to establish common ground and strategies between agrarian social movements in these countries.

\textsuperscript{120} In general, the political polarisation is between those who support the political party associated with Thaksin Shinnawatree and rural populist policies, or are against what they see as the old feudal elites (the red shirts or the United Front For Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), and those who are against Thaksin or see themselves as choosing the side of the Thai monarchy over Thaksin (such as the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD)).
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