

The “Populism” Policy and Building/Diminishing Economic “Inequality” and “Unfairness”: Empirical Suggestion on Pork-Barrel in Thailand’s Rice Trading Business

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Abstract

This research objective is to demonstrate the pork-barrel in Thailand’s rice trading business among rice farmers, millers, and exporters, under the conduct of the government before and after its populism policy, which has created pork-barrel in a way that has built or diminished economic inequality as well as unfairness. With regression analysis, we found that the benefit sharing structural model among rice farmers, millers, and exporters, before the policy implementation indicates a proportion of 68-2-30, whereas it becomes 17-22-61 after the implementation. After classifying the populism policy as two different regimes of paddy pledging and rice farmer income guarantee, it is observed that the benefit sharing structural model for the paddy pledging scheme is 17-22-61, which shows a tendency to generate deeper economic inequality and unfairness than that under the rice farmer income guarantee scheme, which seems to mitigate such problem at the benefit sharing of 87-4-9.

Keywords: Populism policy, Thailand’s rice trading business, Rice farmer income guarantee, Rice pledging

1. Introduction

1.1 Economic “Inequality” and “Unfairness”

Under severe controversies in the Thai society at present, the problems which are considered as the real cause of this crisis (Yodpuang, 2011) and the most important matter (Thai Post, 2009) requiring an urgent resolution (Manager Online 2011) as a “national priority”, are “inequality” and “unfairness” of our brothers and sisters living on “the same land but seems like a different world”.

“Economic” inequality and unfairness are particularly the clearest aspects of disparity (Achavanuntakul, 2011: 38) besides “civil rights” and “opportunities” (Yodpuang, 2011) in “accessing resource and basic infrastructure” (Phongpaichit, 2011).

The analysis of the empirical data on economic and social situation of households by the National Statistical Office which are assessed by the Social Data-based and Indicator Development Office under the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (2010), indicates that the country’s past economic development has caused an increase of income of the majority of Thai population (Achavanuntakul, 2011: 38), causing the proportion of the impoverished to decrease from 42.21 percent in 2531 to 8.21 percent in 2009. However, this appears contrary to “the Gini Inequality Coefficient” of income, which has hardly altered from 1998 at 0.487 until 2009 at 0.485. Likewise, the 4.58 percent income allocation of the poorest population, accounting for 20 percent of the whole population (244 baht/month) has minimally increased to 4.79 percent (1,503 baht/month). At the same time, 20 percent of the total population who are among the wealthiest has increased their income allocation from 54.37 percent (2,897 baht/month) or 11.88 times of the poorest 23 years ago, to 54.19 percent (16,993 baht/month) or 11.31 times of the poorest in the past two years.

With the current overall situation of the country’s income distribution, it cannot help believing “the rich still get richer and the poor get poorer” (Matichon Online, 2011) as always happened in the past. It is also currently happening in many countries around the world, resulting from developments and policy strategy which

disproportionately emphasize economic growth, ignore the significance of income distribution and stability with equality and fairness, as well as neglect to prevent such inconsistency from getting worse (Phongpaichit, 2011: 7-9).

1.2 “Farmers” Who Work the Hardest but Remain the Poorest

“Farmer” is considered a very important occupation as he is the producer of “rice”, the main staple of the Thai population and the number one agricultural export of the nation. Farmer is also respected as “the backbone of the nation” which has been written in a song portraying that “farmers are hard working as the backbone of the nation. Thailand will be powerful because it is an agricultural nation”. Despite this fact, the farmers, who are the majority of the population, or approximately 3.7 million households (Wongsamut, 2010), bearing such burdens, turn out to be those who “work the hardest” and in the meantime, they are also “the poorest” in the Thai society (Sichan, 2003: 40).

Such destitution was depicted by Teera Wongsamut (2010), Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, during the first National Rice Conference on 16 December 2010 at Kasetsart University. The message was that Thai farmers are impoverished not only in comparison with other occupations but also in itself. In other words, farmers’ income is below the “poverty line”. This is due to various causes, including the average farmland of 15 rai held by a farmer, which is less than the minimum of 35 rai to cover the costs of farming, natural disasters, price fluctuation, as well as limited bargaining power in price (because the price mainly depends on global market price) (Jermstittiparsert, Sriyakul and Rodboonsong, 2011).

The abovementioned is consistent with the statistical data of poverty and income distribution of the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (2010), which reveals that the number of the poor in the agricultural sector (out of total of 5.7 million agriculturalist households, farmers account for 3.7 million households or 65 percent) is more than two million people. At present, these two million poor people reflect the majority or more than 40 percent of the poor in the entire country, approximately five million people.

1.3 The “Populism” Policy and Building/Diminishing Economic “Inequality” and “Unfairness”

While the production of rice, export quantity, the world market price, as well as the money circulated in the Thai rice trading business, are projected to continue to increase, farmers who bear burdens and the highest risks, still cannot overcome the deadly cycle of “in-season rice farming is all about stubbles and debts, and off-season one is all about debts and stubbles” (Sichan, 2003: 41). This reflects the very existence of the problem of inequality and unfairness in benefit sharing among relevant people.

Since 1965, there have been efforts to innovate and provide assistance by government policies in order to reduce poverty (Puapongsakorn and Jarupong, 2010: (1-2)), including lessening inequality between producers and consumers in the urban area (Siamwalla, Pinthong and Tosanguan, 1981: 197), with the application of the rice price support policy or the minimum price guarantee.

The result of such policy implementations turned out to result in more unfair distribution of economic rents, and millers became the main beneficial of 54 percent. Rank second was government officers and politicians at the share of 27 percent; followed by farmer leaders at 6 percent and farmers for only 13 percent (Puapongsakorn and Jarupong, 2010: (2-1)).

The failure of direct price intervention in the aspects of loss, failure to support price, as well as the trend of increasing and severe inequality, caused the government to switch to indirect intervention to market mechanism, that is the paddy pledging scheme from crop year 1981/1982.

The significant change of the paddy pledging program occurred in 2001 during the Thaksin Shinawatra administration when the government announced to expand its goal of pledging from 2.5 to 8.7 million tons and to augment loans to 100 percent of the leading goal price. Afterwards, the government assigned the leading goal price higher than the market price for 30 percent in the next three crop years.

The research of Puapongsakorn and Jarupong (2010: (2-4)) on benefit sharing in the in-season paddy pledge program for crop year 2005/2006 indicated the change from the policy having been implemented for more than two decades. The farmers participating in the program received large benefit share of 37.25 percent. The exporters who won the

government rice bidding came second with 23.42 percent share. The millers participating in the program accounted for 18.01 percent. The cost borne by the government accounted for 13.69 percent and the remaining 7.63 percent share went to central inventories and surveyors, as well as qualitative and quantitative depreciations.

During the Samak Suntoravet administration, the paddy pledge price was increased up to 14,000 baht per ton in 2008, which was considered raising the paddy pledge scheme to become a full-fledged “populism” policy in order to respond to the voting constituencies and political positions.

The policy was altered again in the 2009 Abhisit Vejjajiva administration which abandoned paddy pledging and turned to rice farmer income guaranteeing. Up till now, there has been none of research demonstrating benefit sharing structure of such policy enforcement. Only comments and rhetoric from academics (Wisutthatham, 2011) and exporters (Funny S., 2011) exist and they are by far the proponents of the rice farmers’ income guarantee scheme and opposed to the paddy pledging scheme.

In contrast, the rice farmers themselves give support to paddy pledging and even indicate their opinion against the rice farmers’ income guarantee that “such policy is to assist the rich, and real farmers will not receive much benefit from it” (Wongkorawut, 2011: 107).

2. Objective

First, the researchers aim to analyze two relationships: (1) between the first difference of the world market price of rice and that of the domestic market price of rice and (2) between the first difference of the domestic market price of rice and that of the domestic market price of paddy, before and after the implementation of the populism policy of paddy pledging and rice farmers’ income guarantee.

Later, the study will reveal whether the determination, as well as the change, of the first difference of the domestic price of rice and that of the domestic price of paddy, is influenced by the first difference of the world market price of rice and that of the domestic price of rice. If so, how much does the influence have effects for each application of policies/schemes?

Next, the researchers aim to prove that there is a pork barrel, i.e. benefit sharing, in the Thai rice trading business, among three interested groups, which are rice farmers, rice millers, and exporters, by applying the abovementioned empirical data on correlations and rates of change of both pairs of variables. This will indicate the nature of benefit sharing, in a way that could build or diminish economic inequality and unfairness in the rice trading business, which came from the government policy implementation, whether it is recognized as populism or not.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data and Variables

The researchers select to use the time series data collected from the Agricultural Trade Support Bureau, Department of Internal Trade of the Ministry of Commerce of the total of 136 months, from January 2000 to April 2011, for the following variables:

3.1.1 The first difference of the world market price of rice (CHGFOB) which is transformed from the world market price of rice (FOB) by the first difference method to represent the changing rate of price at which exporters sell to their foreign customers during each time period.

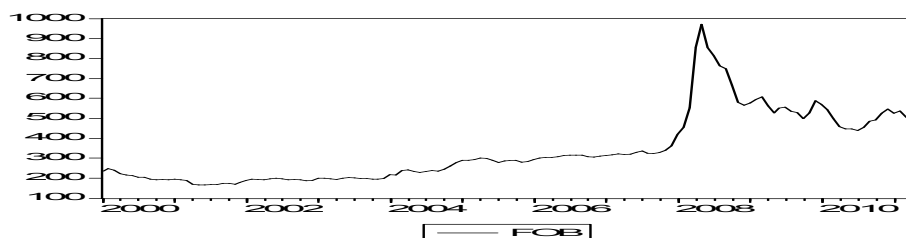


Figure 1. The World Market Price of Rice

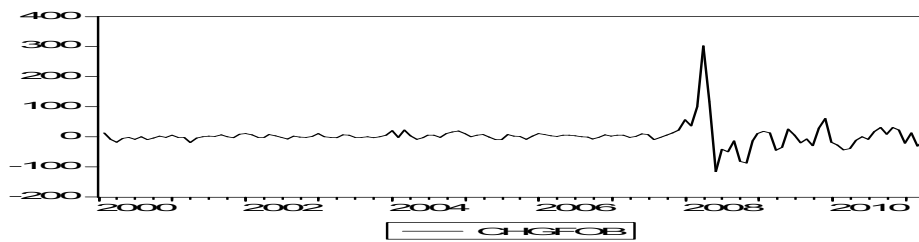


Figure 2. The First Difference of the World Market Price of Rice

3.1.2 The first difference of the domestic market price of rice (CHGBANGKOK) which is transformed from the domestic market price of 5 percent rice (BANGKOK) by the first difference method to represent the changing rate of price at which millers sell to their exporters during each time period.

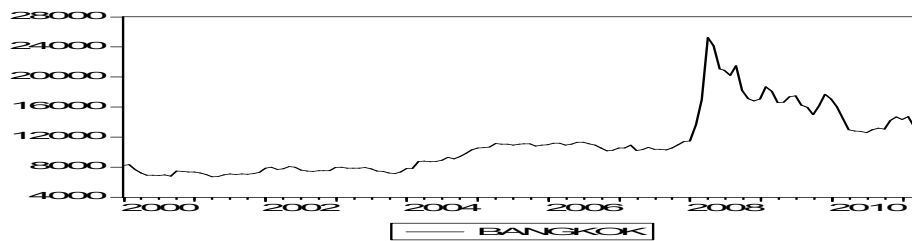


Figure 3. The Domestic Market Price of Rice

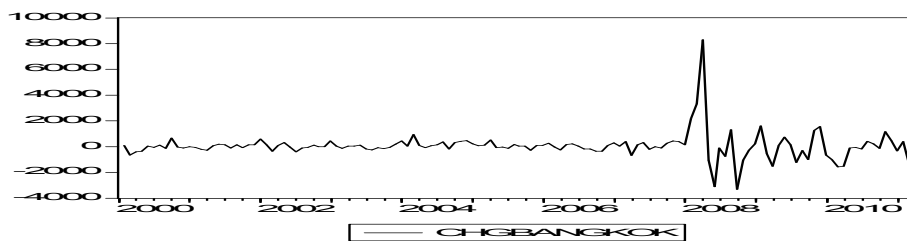


Figure 4. The First Difference of the Domestic Market Price of Rice

3.1.3 The first difference of the domestic market price of paddy (CHGRICE) which is transformed from the domestic market price of paddy at 15 percent moisture (RICE) by the first difference method to represent the changing rate of price at which rice farmers sell to their millers during each time period.

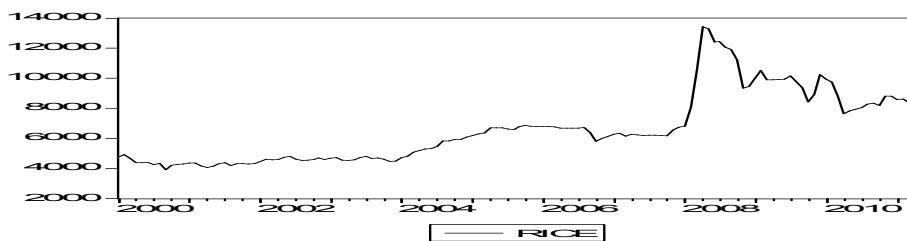


Figure 5. The Domestic Market Price of Paddy

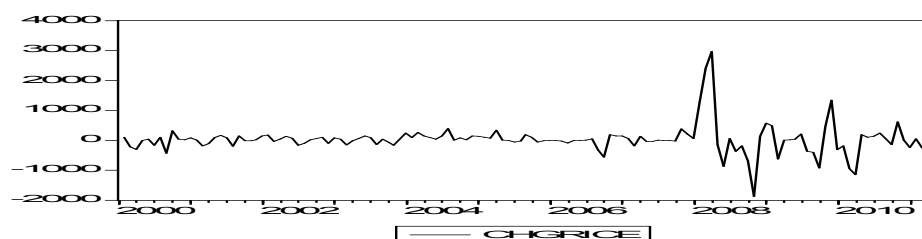


Figure 6. The First Difference of the Domestic Market Price of Paddy

3.2 Data Analysis

The data are analyzed by regression analysis available in a built-in computer program application.

4. Research Result

4.1 Before the Populism Policy Implementation (January 2000 - March 2008)

Initially, the researchers show whether, before the populism policy implementation, the correlation between the first difference of the world market price of rice and the first difference of the domestic market price of rice, and that between the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy and the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy exist. The question also asked is whether they are influenced by the first difference of the world market price of rice, and if yes, for what proportion.

Table 1. Regression Analysis on the First Difference of the World Market Price of Rice and the First Difference of the Domestic Market Price of Rice

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	-1.889514	21.70279	-0.087063	0.9308
CHGFOB	27.91590	3.751695	7.440877	0.0000
R-squared	0.671813	Prob(F-statistic)		0.000000
Newey-West HAC Standard Errors & Covariance (lag truncation=4)				

Table 1 indicates that before the populism policy enforcement, the first difference of the world market price of rice has a positive correlation with the first difference of the domestic market price of rice. Every change for one US dollar of the first difference of the world market price of rice causes the same-direction change of the first difference of the domestic market price of rice for 27.92 baht. The first difference of the world market price of rice explains the first difference of the domestic market price of rice at 67.18 percent.

Table 2. Regression Analysis on the First Difference of the Domestic Market Price of Rice and the First Difference of the Domestic Market Price of Paddy

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	6.855135	11.57959	0.592002	0.5552
CHGBANGKOK	0.575596	0.081747	7.041189	0.0000
R-squared	0.776803	Prob(F-statistic)		0.000000
Newey-West HAC Standard Errors & Covariance (lag truncation=4)				

Table 2 indicates that before the populism policy enforcement, the first difference of the domestic market price of rice has a positive correlation with the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy. Every change for one Thai baht of the first difference of the domestic market price of rice causes the same-direction change of the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy for 0.58 baht. The first difference of the domestic market price of rice explains the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy at 77.68 percent.

Every change for 27.92 baht of the first difference of the domestic market price of rice will cause a change in the same direction of the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy for 16.07 baht.

At the average currency exchange rate of 1 US dollar equivalent to 40.01 Thai baht during the period, the change of the first difference of the world market price of rice at every one baht will cause the first difference of the domestic market price of rice to change for 0.70 baht and the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy to change for 0.40 baht.

Therefore, when considering the pork barrel derived from the change of the world market price of rice every one baht, the domestic market price of paddy, representing the benefit share to the rice farmers after calculation for the portion for milling paddy to rice at 1.67:1, results in 0.68 baht. The millers receive the difference at only 0.02 baht and the exporters at 0.30 baht.

4.2 After the Populism Policy Implementation (April 2008 - April 2011)

Next, the researchers show whether, after the populism policy implementation, the correlation between the first difference of the world market price of rice and the first difference of the domestic market price of rice, and that between the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy and the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy exist. The question also asked is whether they are influenced by the first difference of the world market price of rice, and if yes, for what proportion.

Table 3. Regression Analysis on the First Difference of the World Market Price of Rice and the First Difference of the Domestic Market Price of Rice

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	-159.3955	170.7596	-0.933450	0.3572
CHGFOB	17.57973	5.672764	3.098971	0.0039
R-squared	0.439045	Prob(F-statistic)		0.000000

Newey-West HAC Standard Errors & Covariance (lag truncation=4)

Table 3 indicates that after the populism policy enforcement, the first difference of the world market price of rice has a positive correlation with the first difference of the domestic market price of rice. Every change for one US dollar of the first difference of the world market price of rice causes the same-direction change of the first difference of the domestic market price of rice for 17.58 baht. The first difference of the world market price of rice explains the first difference of the domestic market price of rice at 43.90 percent.

Table 4. Regression Analysis on the First Difference of the Domestic Market Price of Rice and the First Difference of the Domestic Market Price of Paddy

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	-28.88301	57.70964	-0.500489	0.6200
CHGBANGKOK	0.360805	0.073215	4.927994	0.0000
R-squared	0.497396	Prob(F-statistic)		0.000000

Newey-West HAC Standard Errors & Covariance (lag truncation=4)

Table 4 indicates that after the populism policy enforcement, the first difference of the domestic market price of rice has a positive correlation with the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy. Every change for one Thai baht of the first difference of the domestic market price of rice causes the same-direction change of the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy for 0.36 baht. The first difference of the world market price of rice explains the first difference of the domestic market price of rice at 49.74 percent.

Every change for 17.58 baht of the first difference of the domestic market price of rice will cause a change in the same direction of the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy for 6.33 baht.

At the average currency exchange rate of 1 US dollar equivalent to 32.91 Thai baht during the period, the change of the first difference of the world market price of rice at every one baht will cause the first difference of the domestic market price of rice to change for 0.53 baht and the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy to change for 0.19 baht.

Therefore, when considering the pork barrel derived from the change of the world market price of rice every one baht, the domestic market price of paddy, representing the benefit share to the rice farmers after calculation for the portion for milling paddy to rice at 1.67:1, results in 0.32 baht. The millers receive the difference at only 0.21 baht and lastly the exporters at the highest benefit share of 0.47 baht.

4.3 After the Paddy Pledging Regime Implementation (April 2008 - October 2009)

At this stage, the researchers show whether, after the paddy pledging regime implementation, the correlation between the first difference of the world market price of rice and the first difference of the domestic market price of rice, and that between the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy and the first difference of the domestic market price of rice exist. The question also asked is whether they are influenced by the first difference of the world market price of rice, and if yes, for what proportion.

Table 5. Regression Analysis on the First Difference of the World Market Price of Rice and the First Difference of the Domestic Market Price of Rice

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	-307.9085	341.7926	-0.900864	0.3810
CHGFOB	13.22464	6.631904	1.994094	0.0635
R-squared	0.282090	Prob(F-statistic)		0.000000

Newey-West HAC Standard Errors & Covariance (lag truncation=4)

Table 5 indicates that after the paddy pledging regime enforcement, the first difference of the world market price of rice has a positive correlation with the first difference of the domestic market price of rice. Every change for one US dollar of the first difference of the world market price of rice causes the same-direction change of the first difference of the domestic market price of rice of rice for 13.22 baht. The first difference of the world market price of rice explains the first difference of the domestic market price of rice at 28.21 percent.

Table 6. Regression Analysis on the First Difference of the Domestic Market Price of Rice and the First Difference of the Domestic Market Price of Paddy

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	-131.5186	109.4077	-1.202097	0.2468
CHGBANGKOK	0.256527	0.061354	4.181126	0.0007
R-squared	0.316621	Prob(F-statistic)		0.000000

Newey-West HAC Standard Errors & Covariance (lag truncation=4)

Table 6 indicates that after the paddy pledging regime enforcement, the first difference of the domestic market price of rice has a positive correlation with the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy. Every change for one Thai baht of the first difference of the domestic market price of rice causes the same-direction change of the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy for 0.26 baht. The first difference of the world market price of rice explains the first difference of the domestic market price of rice at 31.67 percent.

Every change for 13.22 baht of the first difference of the domestic market price of rice will cause a change in the same direction of the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy for 3.44 baht.

At the currency exchange rate of 1 US dollar equivalent to 34.14 Thai baht the change of the first difference of the world market price of rice at every one baht will cause the first difference of the domestic market price of rice to

change for 0.39 baht and the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy to change for 0.10 baht.

Therefore, when considering the pork barrel derived from the change of the world market price of rice every one baht, the domestic market price of paddy, representing the benefit share to the rice farmers after calculation for the portion for milling paddy to rice at 1.67:1, results in 0.17 baht. The millers receive the difference at 0.22 baht and lastly the exporters at the highest benefit share of 0.61 baht.

4.4 After the Rice Farmers' Income Guarantee Regime Implementation (November 2009 - April 2011)

At this stage, the researchers show whether, after the implementation of the rice farmers' income guarantee regime, the correlation between the first difference of the world market price of rice and the first difference of the domestic market price of rice, and that between the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy and the first difference of the domestic market price of rice exist. The question also asked is whether they are influenced by the first difference of the world market price of rice, and if yes, for what proportion.

Table 7. Regression Analysis on the First Difference of the World Market Price of Rice and the First Difference of the Domestic Market Price of Rice

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	-121.7549	60.12796	-2.024931	0.0611
CHGFOB	28.92340	2.093555	13.81545	0.0000
R-squared	0.899614	Prob(F-statistic)		0.000000

Newey-West HAC Standard Errors & Covariance (lag truncation=4)

Table 7 indicates that after the rice farmers' income guarantee regime enforcement, the first difference of the world market price of rice has a positive correlation with the first difference of the domestic market price of rice. Every change for one US dollar of the first difference of the world market price of rice causes the same-direction change of the first difference of the domestic market price of rice for 28.92 baht. The first difference of the world market price of rice explains the first difference of the domestic market price of rice at 89.96 percent.

Table 8. Regression Analysis on the First Difference of the Domestic Market Price of Rice and the First Difference of the Domestic Market Price of Paddy

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	52.43527	66.19733	0.792106	0.4406
CHGBANGKOK	0.569554	0.090677	6.281123	0.0000
R-squared	0.811494	Prob(F-statistic)		0.000000

Newey-West HAC Standard Errors & Covariance (lag truncation=4)

Table 8 indicates that after the rice farmers' income guarantee regime enforcement, the first difference of the domestic market price of rice has a positive correlation with the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy. Every change for one Thai baht of the first difference of the domestic market price of rice causes the same-direction change of the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy for 0.57 baht. The first difference of the world market price of rice explains the first difference of the domestic market price of rice at 81.14 percent.

Every change for 28.92 baht of the first difference of the domestic market price of rice will cause a change in the same direction of the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy for 16.48 baht.

At the currency exchange rate of 1 US dollar equivalent to 31.61 Thai baht the change of the first difference of the world market price of rice at every one baht will cause the first difference of the domestic market price of rice to change for 0.91 baht and the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy to change for 0.52 baht.

Therefore, when considering the pork barrel derived from the change of the world market price of rice every one baht, the domestic market price of paddy, representing the benefit share to the rice farmers after calculation

for the portion for milling paddy to rice at 1.67:1, results in 0.87 baht. The millers receive the difference at only 0.04 baht and the exporters receive the share of 0.09 baht.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

The analysis of the relationship between the first difference of the world market price of rice and the first difference of the domestic market price of rice and between the first difference of the domestic market price of rice and the first difference of the domestic market price of paddy for each policy/regime, brings about the model of the structure of pork-barrel among rice farmers, millers, and exporters in the Thai rice trading business as follows:

Before the populism policy implementation, rice farmers received the highest share of benefits that is at 68 percent, whereas the exporters acquired at 30 percent and the millers at 2 percent.

After the application of the populism policy, the structure of benefit sharing altered. Rice farmers who previously had been the highest benefiter of 68 percent were reduced their benefit share by more than half to 32 percent. Meanwhile, exporters and millers received higher benefit shares of 47 percent and 21 percent consecutively.

When classifying the populism policy as the paddy pledging scheme and the rice farmer income guarantee one, the researchers found that paddy pledging provided the highest of history-recorded share of benefits to exporters at 61 percent. In the meantime, rice farmers acquired the lowest history-recorded benefit share of merely 17 percent.

Comparing with the structure of benefit sharing in the regime of rice farmers' income guarantee, the share of benefits to rice farmers turned out to be the highest in the history at 87 percent. During the same period, exporters received the benefit share of 9 percent and millers' of 4 percent. All of these imply that the populism policy, which is observed as more advantageous than disadvantageous and at the same is deeply attached to the Thai society, has become one variable which could either build or diminish economic inequality as well as unfairness.

In the case of the Thai rice trading business, outcomes of the analyses show that even though paddy pledging has been recognized and applauded by rice farmers, such regime provides the highest benefit share to exporters and the least to rice farmers. On the contrary, the regime of rice farmers' income guarantee turns out to be the regime appropriating the highest benefit share to rice farmers. However, likely due to the fact of continuously decreasing world market price of rice, as well as the policy, the rice farmer income guarantee regime has not been approved nor appreciated by rice farmers.

So as to examine the actual phenomenon of these regimes/policies, the researchers interviewed three experts who are Chaiyawonnagat (2011), Ratriengrabin (2011) and Mr.S. (2011). The information from the interviews is found to be close to the empirical data results.

Table 9. Comparison of the Benefit Sharing Classified by Each Policy/Regime Implementation

	Rice Farmers	Millers	Exporters
Before the Populism Policy Implementation	68	2	30
(Experts)	50-55	15-20	30
After the Populism Policy Implementation	32	21	47
(Experts)	30	15-30	20-70
After the Regime of Paddy Pledging	17	22	61
After the Regime of Rice Farmer Income Guarantee	87	4	9

5.2 Recommendation

This analysis of the empirical data is, therefore, a reminder to two groups of peoples. First, a group of people having their interests in establishing a government policy must be more thorough in issuing or applying any populism policy regime because besides the poverty aspect, an aspect of inequality and unfairness is also one important problem in the Thai society, which becomes more and more severe these days. Second, and the most important of all, is civil people who need to realize the necessity of proofs and the truth whether different policies established and applied by the government are implemented with good faith or with a hidden agenda, as well as whether and how much they are

beneficial to the public as a whole.

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