THE REGIONAL RAPID GROWTH CITY AND URBANIZATION IN THAILAND

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Abstract

This article aims to investigate the driving forces affecting the regional rapid growth in Thailand, and impacts of the regional rapid growth to understand the dynamic of urbanization development, and understand condition causes the impacts that may affect to the city. The study selected Udon Thani Province, Thailand as a case study. This study collected data from academic and semi-academic documents, semi-structured interview, participatory and non-participatory observations, and group discussion. The informants were residents within municipality area, government and private officers related to city development, and NGOs. The results found that the driving forces affecting the regional rapid growth to Udon Thani province including 1) historic events during the World War II to the Cold War, 2) events during the Vietnam War, 3) Capitalist Policies, and 4) the establishment of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The study also found impacts of the regional rapid growth in Udon Thani province including 1) the land use change, 2) economic and society change, 3) road and traffic problems, and 4) waste disposal problem
Introduction

Urbanization and the growth of the modern city nowadays are important issues which the city stakeholders have to realize especially the developing countries in Southeast Asia including Thailand. Adoption of the National Economic and Social Development Plan affected many changes to Thailand's economy and society. Country’s economy has relied more on industrial manufacturing than agricultural production. This made the city changed rapidly, and could not control worrisome issues such as the increase of population, pollution, and etc. Beside Thailand, these causes took place in other cities in the Southeast Asia including Jakarta, Manila, and Ho Chi Minh City where economic and infrastructure could not support the increase of population.

Later Thai government has adapted policy which focused on the growth distribution to the regional city by applying the “Growth poles” theory to develop regional city as a regional core of economic growth. In Thailand, Chiang Mai and Khon Kaen cities were selected provinces which were pushed into the regional city for the growth of industry, and to reduce the congestion and pollution of the main city (Primate Cities such as Bangkok). This policy is an attempt by government to solve problems from the primate city, and to distribute the growth to other areas over the country. By the way, even the policy is good in overview, but it led to the creation of new problems regarding the sustainability of the secondary city both of urban and rural areas. It reflects the inability of the state to impose regulations that make it more sustainable (Glassman and Sneddon, 2003).

Udon Thani, where located in the Northeastern region, is a city where is growing and expanding rapidly. Advantage of the location makes the city to be hub of the region which is full of regional conveniences such as transportation route which link between the central and northeast region, and up to international boundaries. Now Udon Thani become the 3rd highest economic growth in Northeratern region

Udon Thani is the center of the Greater Mekong Sub Region Service Complex (GMS),
and as a financial hub for trading with Laos, China (Yunnan), and Vietnam, and also be an air transportation hub to link to Indo-China countries. By the way, even Udon Thani now is growing continuously, but many problems start occurring more and more. According to Buapan et al (2013), a research revealed that the urbanization of Udon Thani has expanded to various directions. Firstly, Udon Thani becomes a retail hub of the Mekong River Basin. There are many large retail store in Udon Thani. This makes the city grow up in term of economy. By the way, Udon Thani is facing with problems of commercial investment by the multinational corporations and the issue of resource degradation and pollution. Secondly, Udon Thani as the world’s Ethnic settlement. Udon Thani now is full of various foreigners due to the regional war in the past which brought foreigners came and lived within Udon Thani. The being of military hub of Udon Thani in the past mad economy grew up rapidly until now. By the way, people is quite worry about the impact that could be followed in many aspects such as drug problem, decease from the internal labour, the cultural changes, and etc. Thirdly, Udon Thani is declared as an agricultural industry of the region. This policy makes the investment worth higher in agricultural sector of the city. By the way, it will be a race of water supply using between agricultural sector, industrial sector and urban communities. Land within urban area has owned by the outsiders more and more. The outsider has come to the city for various activities such as studying, working, cross-nation marriage, and the use of temporary services from neighboring countries (Laos) such as shopping or health treatment. These result in a substantial infrastructure modifications, and lead to the problem of land speculation.

This paper tries to reveal and make the understanding of urban development in Udon Thani. The study focuses on the driving forces of city development and impacts from the urban development in Udon Thani. In addition, the paper also shows the connection and relationship of various perspectives such as history, policy, current problem in the city, and etc. The study expects to describe the development of the regional rapid growth city to contribute to policy formulation, and issue the approach of urban development in this region.

**Objective**

- Investigated driving forces affecting the regional rapid growth of Udon Thani Province, Thailand
- Investigated impacts of regional rapid growth of Udon Thani Province, Thailand

**Research Methodology**
This research using qualitative approach by focusing on the driving forces and impacts of the regional rapid growth in Udon Thani Province, Thailand to understand the dynamic of urbanization development, and understand condition causes the impacts that may affect to the city. Research area was Udon Thani Municipality area. This study collected data from academic and semi-academic documents, semi-structured interview, participatory and non-participatory observations, and group discussion. The informants were residents within municipality area, government and private officers related to city development, and NGOs. Then the data was examined by triangulation process that is; the data was considered from its source, duration and location to find similarity and difference of data. After examination, if the data went to the same direction, it could be concluded that the data was reliable. In contrast, if the data was different, it would be examined by triangulation process: examining the data from the first and the second source with the third one. If two among them were similar, they were considered credible. After data examination finished, the data was categorized as the issue studied. After that, the data was analyzed and compared in each issue to find the conclusion. Content analysis approach used to interpret and inductive conclusion was created. Finally, description analysis was used to present the data by describing the facts found based on the theoretical framework.

Result
1. Driving Force of Udon Thani Rapid Growth City
   1.1. Historic event during the World War II to the Cold War

   Udon Thani is now becoming the headquarters of the Esan region. The city has been declared as the center of agricultural products such as tobacco and sugarcane which will distribute to Nakhon Ratchasima, Khon Kaen, and Bangkok. The city is also the distribution center of caravans and goods to neighboring countries (Laos, Vietnam). Udon Thani has historical events which boost Udon Thani growing rapidly. One of the driving forces is the historical events during the World War II to the Cold War. There was the construction of rail service from Khon Kaen to Udon Thani, and had completed in 1937, this resulted in the convenient of shipping goods. During the Cold War era, the America had concerned about the stability of Southeast Asia during the years 1954-1962, and then they had supported the road construction to help Thailand protecting themselves from enemy. This included the construction of Mittrapab road, the major route to Esan region, from Sara Buri and Nong
Khai which later was a strategic road for the American military in the Vietnam War, and was the gateway to promote the Northeastern economy.

1.2. Events during Vietnam War (1964-1974)

After the United State of America’s declaration of war on North Vietnam in 1953, this was an attempt to fight against the expansion of Communism in Indo-China region. The U.S. government had asked the Thai government to allow the United State settled eight air-based operative sites for the Vietnam War including Don Muang airport (Bangkok), Nakhon Phanom, Takhi (Nakhon Sawan), Utapao (Pattaya), Ubon Ratchathani, and Udon Thani.

Due to the being of suitable strategic location which is not far from neighboring capital cities in Indo-China countries, Udon Thani had been selected as the U.S. Air-force base in 1964 to facilitate military activities during the Vietnam War. The American selected Udon Thani base because it could help the American reduced costs of transportation, and shorten time to fly to the bombs dropped in Laos and Vietnam. Furthermore, it was also a camp for mercenaries known as the Tiger hunters to go to battlefield with Laotian soldiers, under the command of General Vang Pao. Number of American army at that time had increased in Thailand, since the war declaration by the U.S. government to Vietnam. So, the headquarters of U.S. Air Force had been established in Udon Thani Air Force base under the command of the 7th U.S. Air Force division. Udon Thani was also the location of Ramasun Station which was an important station for spying the top secret news and was the largest and most complicated station in the Southeast Asia or the second largest in the world followed the America's largest station in Augsberg Germany (Puangthong Rungswasdisab Pawakapan, 2006).

Figure 1 US Air Force Base in Thailand
American troops arrived and stayed in Thailand since 1964, and the U.S. militants increased in 1968 up to 48,000 of American troops. By the way, number of American troops stayed in Udon Thani air force base was around 8,500, and there was more than 10,000 of local Thai workers to work in this base.

Due to reason above, this made Udon Thani grew rapidly, and helped creating careers to Thai people who worked both inside and outside the army barracks. Business and entertainment places were set to response the needs of American soldiers. Although the arrival of American troop would lead to the big economic changes, but there was also the big change in social condition as well. During 1964 -1974, Udon Thani municipality expanded rapidly, and population increased to 46,686 in 1967, and caused Udon Thani became the 5th biggest city in Thailand. (Daranee Thavinpipatkul, 2008)

Photo: Ramasun Station, Udon Thani
Source:www.flickr.com/photo/

1.3. Capitalist Policies

General Chatchai Choonhavan, the 17th Prime Minister of Thailand, had issued The remarkable policies including foreign policy with neighboring countries particularly in Indo-China region. So many policies issued at that time such as the collaboration in negotiations between 4 Cambodian parties to cease hostilities, and to establish the government under the Cambodian leadership, King Norodom Sihanouk. By the way, his “widely known policy” in the foreign affairs was “The transformation of the Battlefield into a Market Place” in 1988, this policy made the border trade with neighboring countries in Indo-China region where
used to be recognized as the illegal trade for a long time. The investment value also increased from 300 million Baht in 1988 to 1,200 million Baht in 1989 and 2,000 million Baht in 1990. In addition, Mr. Kaison Phomvihan, leader of Laos government had reformed economic system from socialism to liberal economy by using capitalist policy "NEM: New Economic Mechanism" to approach the country’s economic policy. In 1986, New foreign affair policy caused Laos opportunities to boost their economy. Many companies both domestic and foreign investment group and the international aid from donor countries had come to Laos continuously. For instant, Thailand had reached an agreement with Laos in building of the friendship bridge across the Mekong River in 1989. This project was funded by Australian government. The bridge was used as symbol of peace and permanently relationship between Thailand-Laos. So, this brought to the starting point of coordination in infrastructural development, regional transportation within the region.

From the table, the trade value between Thailand - Lao PDR in 2011 was 111,019 million Baht (est. 3,470 Million U.S. Dollars) and the value of goods through customs in Nong Khai was about 40% of the total. Almost all consumer products purchased from Thailand. All Goods through customs would use Udon Thani as a distribution center. Therefore, the economy of Laos directly affected to the growth of Udon Thani.

![Figure 2. Thailand-Laos Trading, 2009-2011](image)

### 1.4. ASEAN Economic Community: 2015

AEC is the cooperation development between the Southeast Asian Nations. ASEAN has established under the Bangkok Declaration on August 8th, 1967 by the first five countries,
namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Brunei and Vietnam has join the community a member in 1994 and 1995, and Cambodia and Laos join the community as well in 1997 and 1999 respectively.

Thus in the 9th ASEAN Summit in Indonesia in Oct 7\textsuperscript{th}, 2003, the ASEAN countries have agreed to establish an ASEAN Community which consists of three main pillars.

1. ASEAN Economic Community: AEC
2. Socio-Cultural Pillar
3. Political and Security Pillar

Pillars of the ASEAN Economic community will be run in 2015 to assist ASEAN nations about economic growth within the community. The community allows nations to freely boost the economy in terms of goods, services, investment, and skilled labor. Udon Thani is the Northeastern Regional City where also got impact from ASEAN community establishing. Impact on Udon Thani is that migration of international labor and goods because of its location which is near Laos border, and easy to link to Vietnam and Southern China.

2. Impact of the rapid growth in Udon Thani city

2.1 The land use change

The rapid changes occurring in Udon Thani urban area nowadays results in the increase of living density. Land has been changed for commercial and residential purposes more. The growth of Udon Thani City causes more demand of land using especially in urban area. Land prices are much higher. Those who have low incomes cannot be the owner of the land in urban area anymore. The land has been transferred to businessman or investing group who have come to the area with enormous funds. In addition, due to the land price which is expensive; it causes the use of land for a maximum return such as the reclamation of the building that blocks the natural flow of water, and then result in problem of water drainage and pollution.

In the past, Udon Thani was not a big city. The area surrounded by farming communities. However, Udon Thani later has grown with greater integration. The construction of residences, roads, and other infrastructure occurred continuously, and pushed the land price was higher than the past especially in urban area. Most of the land was sold and transferred from the local to traders who came from both within the province and outside the province. In addition, the study found that the loss of agricultural lands has affected the food security of Udon Thani people. Farmers who had sold their lands to the capitalist would not have their own land to do agricultural activity anymore, and it resulted in the loss of
resources or sources of subsistence. The effect would not only occur to farmers, but also affected to other stakeholders such as local food buyers, local labours, and etc. By the way, the food security of people living in urban area may not depend on the agricultural land around the city only. They have more chance to access to food source in other areas. The taste of food nowadays also makes people in urban area have tried something new and different. So, they do not depend much on local agricultural products. Therefore, the food insecurity of people in urban area needs to be considered by ecosystem and context in each area.

2.2 Economic and society change

Udon Thani’s economy has expanded continuously since the United States had set up military base in Udon Thani in 1965. However, the economic growth at that time caused from the U.S. army spending or consumption purpose. It was not the production system by itself.

Considering the strength of economic growth in Udon Thani, found that Udon Thani has a geographical advantage more than other areas in Northeastern area. It is the transportation hub of the Northeastern region which easily linked to Indochina region to neighboring countries such as Vietnam and Laos. The economic growth of Udon Thani currently is displayed by the expansion of the trade, more commercial buildings such as department store or big retail store, more labour employment. In addition, the policy from both central and local government is also a factor which pushes Udon Thani to be a center of the logistics and air transportation hub in this region.

Societal issue, economic growth in Udon Thani has attracted legion foreign workers from neighboring countries such as China, Vietnam, Laos, and Burma come to work and live in the city. They mostly have worked in service sector such as in the restaurant, construction site, and business site including agricultural market. By the way, Most of them enter the city by illegal immigration process. The next one, the study found there are group of the cross-nation marriage who mostly come from Europe and North America. They have married Udon Thani women, and took residence either temporarily or permanently. These two kinds of new comers sometime make conflict with local people in some issues. Both sides need to learn each other's culture so that they can live together peacefully. Another issue is the health problem; it is also a problem that needs to be focused on. The entry of foreign workers may bring some unknown diseases into Udon Thani, and may cause harm to people who never
known the unknown diseases before, for instance, a case of the diphtheria which spread from neighboring countries through labor migration.

2.3 Road and traffic problem

Traffic condition in Udon Thani is problematic especially in the morning and evening which are the time that many people who live outside municipality area are traveling to work and study in urban area. It causes many vehicles on the road, and then causes the traffic jam. Traffic jam problem is not only happening in the downtown area, but it also happens in the suburbs area especially in the eastern bypass road where is full of a suburban residential area. However, the relevant authorities have tried to solve the problem such as constructing more roads to resolve traffic problems in the Eastern bypass road. The construction will begin in 2017.

2.4 Waste disposal problem

The study found that there were complaints about the garbage truck from those who live along the road to the landfill facility. The garbage truck often has a problem on the leachate that flows out of the garbage truck during the carrying process. The leachate makes trouble to road user so much. Sometimes accident occurs due to the leachate that flows out of the garbage trucks, and made the road slippery. In addition, people who live in nearby area have to endure with the smell of garbage. The study also concern about the waste disposal system in the business sector especially in the major-size entrepreneurs. Currently the study found that waste disposal system has been installed in some businesses only. Most of businesses still use the services from the local municipality to remove the waste and do the waste disposal. Big business is groups produced lots of garbage each day, but the agencies that manage the waste disposal still limit, and affect the smell pollution to urban area. The industry as well, each day the waste is numerous produced, and the waste in the factory mostly were electronic waste or waste from industrial activity which is very dangerous to environment. Udon Thani does not have garbage disposal system of these categories. These wastes are currently being forwarded to large industrial waste disposal systems in other province. However, electronics waste was produced a lot, so the plant is unable to load and forward the waste to disposal area. It would be necessary to find out a place for store the waste to await the waste transportation to the disposal area.

Conclusion and Discussion

These fast growing social, economic and ecological problems are very challenging for stakeholders, who involve in the urban development, in developing country as Thailand.
Well-managed cities do not happen by chance, but are achieved with clearly development objectives which are generated by cooperation between government agencies and local people. The ways to accomplish creation of sustainable city including the need of local people, the need which is based on resource allocation, reviewing existing development guidelines, development of integrated infrastructure. In addition, encouragement of private sector participation (PSP) is essential to develop the city. The planning process should focus on requirements of people in developing the city in the next 10 to 15 years. Both private and public sectors should have the cooperation to develop the city. In addition, resource allocation should be focused on to construct the rapid growth city sustainably, or enable the private sector to address other infrastructure challenges. Collaboration between the government and private sector is also necessary to advise the city to keep on track in the planning cities.

Regarding to the Asean Economic Community AEC which will be effective in 2015, that is a big challenge to Udon Thani city. This will affect to various aspects including economics, socials and environments, and also affected to the Indo-China countries. This is very essential to study all big impacts and changes in Udon Thani for this research project.

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REFERENCE


