

Before Becoming the “Lottery Capital”: Agricultural Transformation and the Emergence of “Lottery Entrepreneurs” in Wang Saphung District, Loei Province, 1980s-1990s

ก่อนจะเป็น “เมืองหลวงแห่งลอตเตอรี่”: ความเปลี่ยนแปลงทางการเกษตรและการก่อตัว
ของ “ผู้ประกอบการลอตเตอรี่” อำเภอวังสะพุง จังหวัดเลย ทศวรรษ 1980-1990

Nopphon Kaengjampa

นพพล แก่งจำปา

Faculty of Humanities, Chiangmai University, Thailand

Corresponding author

e-mail: nopphon_k@cmu.ac.th

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คำสำคัญ: ความเปลี่ยนแปลงทางการเกษตร, ลอตเตอรี่, ผู้ประกอบการลอตเตอรี่, วังสะพุง

Abstract

Background and Objectives: The state lottery is a legalized form of gambling permitted by many governments as it serves as a significant source of national revenue. In Thailand, the lottery generates no less than 50 billion baht annually. Despite the availability of more efficient technologies, human-based distribution remains the primary mechanism through which lottery tickets reach consumers. This is particularly true in Wang Saphung district of Loei province, a rural area located in the northern part of Northeast Thailand, where lottery vending has become a widespread occupation—so much so that the area has been dubbed the “Lottery Capital.” This article aims to explain the emergence of “lottery entrepreneurs” in Wang Saphung and to analyze how this development is connected to the district’s agricultural transformation during the 1980s–1990s.

Methods: This research employs a qualitative methodology, drawing on in-depth interviews with “lottery entrepreneurs” whose households are based in Wang Saphung district, Loei province. Primary documentary sources—including statistical datasets and agricultural transformation survey reports—were also examined. All data were analyzed using historical critique and synthesized in a descriptive-analytical format.

Results: Findings reveal that, from the 1980s onward, Thailand’s capitalist-oriented development policies incorporated Wang Saphung and Loei province into the national economic system by heavily promoting commercial agriculture. This restructuring compelled local residents to adapt to new economic conditions in various dimensions, particularly as shifting crop systems reduced the amount of time they spent in agricultural work. Such changes became a driving force behind increased movement out of agriculture and into non-farm employment. At the same time, the evolving agricultural practices of Wang Saphung residents coincided with the state’s modifications to the lottery distribution system during the 1990s. This created opportunities for certain individuals—those with leadership qualities, risk-taking ability, and capacity to bear uncertainty—to reposition themselves as “lottery entrepreneurs.” These individuals organized groups of vendors, supported them financially, facilitated transportation and accommodation, and trained them in sales strategies. Their role significantly contributed to the growing popularity of lottery vending among Wang Saphung residents.

Application of this study: The findings provide insights into the complex and multifaceted nature of economic transformation in Thai rural society. This issue is of significant importance for formulating targeted rural development policies that are responsive to actual conditions.

Conclusions: This article examines the formation of “lottery entrepreneurs” in Wang Saphung district, Loei province, in relation to changes in Thailand’s agricultural economic structure during the 1980s–1990s. The emergence of lottery entrepreneurs reflects the broader agricultural transformation that integrated rural populations into the capitalist economy. While this phenomenon demonstrates the adaptive capacity of rural people, who continually seek pathways to economic survival, it also underscores the need for support systems that ensure stable livelihoods—so they do not have to rely solely on individual resilience.

บทคัดย่อ

ที่มาและวัตถุประสงค์: ลอตเตอรี่ คือธุรกิจการพนันที่รัฐบาลของหลายประเทศอนุญาตให้ประชาชนเดิมพันกัน โดยถูกกฎหมายเนื่องจากเป็นแหล่งที่มารายได้สำคัญ ในกรณีของประเทศไทย แต่ละปีลอตเตอรี่สร้างรายได้ให้รัฐไม่น้อยกว่า 50,000 ล้านบาท โดยที่การจำหน่ายจ่ายแจกด้วยแรงงานคนยังเป็นกลไกหลักในการกระจายสินค้าไปสู่ผู้ซื้อถึงแม้จะมีเทคโนโลยีที่สามารถทำหน้าที่ได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพมากกว่าก็ตาม โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งประชาชนในอำเภอวังสะพุง จังหวัดเลย พื้นที่ชนบทซึ่งตั้งอยู่ตอนบนสุดของภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือของประเทศที่ประกอบอาชีพดังกล่าวอย่างแพร่หลาย กระทั่งถูกขนานนามว่าเป็น “เมืองหลวงแห่งลอตเตอรี่” บทความฉบับนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่ออธิบายการก่อตัวของ“ผู้ประกอบการลอตเตอรี่”โดยพยายามเชื่อมโยงกับบริบทความเปลี่ยนแปลงทางการเกษตรในพื้นที่ ช่วงทศวรรษ 1980-1990

วิธีการศึกษา: การวิจัยนี้ใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ ดำเนินการรวบรวมข้อมูลวิจัยด้วยการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก “ผู้ประกอบการลอตเตอรี่”ที่มีภูมิลำเนาอยู่ในอำเภอวังสะพุง จังหวัดเลย ประกอบกับข้อมูลเอกสารชั้นต้นประเภทสถิติ และรายงานสำรวจการเปลี่ยนแปลงทางการเกษตร ตรวจสอบประเมินค่าข้อมูลทั้งหมดด้วยวิพากษ์วิธีทางประวัติศาสตร์ และนำเสนอรายงานการศึกษาในรูปแบบพรรณนาวิเคราะห์

ผลการศึกษา: ผลการศึกษาพบว่า นับตั้งแต่คริสต์ทศวรรษ 1980 เป็นต้นมา นโยบายพัฒนาของรัฐไทยภายใต้ระบบเศรษฐกิจทุนนิยมผนวกเอาอำเภอวังสะพุง และจังหวัดเลยเข้าเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของระบบอย่างเข้มข้นด้วยการส่งเสริมให้ประชาชนปลูกพืชพาณิชย์ ทำให้คนวังสะพุงต้องปรับตัวเข้ากับวิถีเศรษฐกิจแบบใหม่ในหลากหลายมิติ โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งการมีช่วงเวลาที่ผูกพันกับการเกษตรลดลงจากการปลูกพืชอย่างใหม่ที่เป็นปัจจัยสำคัญผลักดันให้คนวังสะพุงเคลื่อนย้ายออกไปทำงานนอกภาคการเกษตรเพิ่มมากขึ้น ขณะเดียวกัน วิถีการเกษตรของคนวังสะพุงที่เปลี่ยนไปก็สอดคล้องเข้ากับความต้องการกลไกในการกระจายลอตเตอรี่จากการปรับเปลี่ยนนโยบายการดำเนินงานลอตเตอรี่ของรัฐในช่วงทศวรรษ 1990 ส่งผลให้คนวังสะพุงบางกลุ่มที่มีความเป็นผู้นำ การกล้าได้กล้าเสียและมีศักยภาพในการแบกรับความเสี่ยงเล็งเห็นช่องทางแห่งโอกาสผันตัวเองมาสู่การเป็น“ผู้ประกอบการลอตเตอรี่”โดยรวบรวมผู้คนไปขายลอตเตอรี่ภายใต้การสนับสนุนด้านเงินทุน การเดินทาง ที่พัก ตลอดจนการแนะนำวิธีการขายของตน พร้อมกับทำให้อาชีพจำหน่ายลอตเตอรี่ได้รับความนิยมอย่างแพร่หลายในหมู่นักวังสะพุง

การประยุกต์ใช้: ผลของการศึกษานำมาซึ่งความเข้าใจในแง่มุมการเปลี่ยนแปลงทางเศรษฐกิจของสังคมชนบทไทยที่เป็นไปอย่างสลับซับซ้อน ประเด็นดังกล่าวมีความสำคัญอย่างมากต่อการกำหนดนโยบายการพัฒนาสังคมชนบทที่ตรงเป้าหมายสอดคล้องกับสภาพการณ์ความเป็นจริงที่เกิดขึ้น

บทสรุป: งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาการก่อตัวของ “ผู้ประกอบการลอตเตอรี่” ในอำเภอวังสะพุง จังหวัดเลย โดยเชื่อมโยงกับการเปลี่ยนแปลงโครงสร้างเศรษฐกิจการเกษตรของรัฐไทยในช่วงทศวรรษ 1980–1990 การก่อตัวของผู้ประกอบการลอตเตอรี่อื่นเป็นผลมาจากการเปลี่ยนแปลงทางการเกษตรที่คนชนบทถูกผนวกเข้ามาเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของระบบทุนนิยม แม้จะสะท้อนให้เห็นถึงศักยภาพของคนชนบทในฐานะผู้ประกอบการที่พยายามเคลื่อนไหวให้ชีวิตมีทางออกตลอดเวลา แต่ก็ควรมีการแสวงหาแนวทางรองรับชีวิตพวกเขาให้มีความมั่นคงโดยไม่ต้องต่อสู้บนลำแข้งของตนเองเพียงลำพัง

Introduction

The state lottery is a form of gambling that many governments legally permit, as it constitutes an important source of public revenue. In the case of Thailand, more than 2 billion lottery tickets are sold each year, generating no less than 50 billion baht annually for the state. Despite the advent of technologies and innovations that could carry out the distribution more efficiently, human labour remains the primary mechanism through which lottery tickets are delivered to consumers. This is especially evident in Wang Saphung district, Loei province, a rural area located in the northernmost part of Northeast Thailand, where large numbers of residents engage in lottery vending to such an extent that the district has been dubbed the “Lottery Capital” (Krungthep Turakij, 2022).

According to the National Statistical Office’s 2010 survey of lottery vendors—the only official survey of its kind—there were 7,007 residents of Wang Saphung whose main occupation was lottery vending. This figure accounted for 60.87 percent of all 11,511 lottery vendors in Loei, far surpassing Phu Luang and Phu Ruea districts, which ranked second with 1,004 vendors each, or 8.72 percent (National Statistical Office, 2010). Even so, these already high proportions still underestimate the actual situation, as many vendors fall outside the formal survey system. Heads of local administrative and economic offices in the area estimate that there are no fewer than 40,000–60,000 lottery vendors in

Loei, more than half of whom are domiciled in Wang Saphung (Naewna, 2020; Krungthep Turakij, 2022). Beyond statistics, a range of symbolic evidence further reinforces Wang Saphung’s reputation as the lottery capital. One example is the song “*Sao Wang Saphung*” [“The Girl from Wang Saphung”], composed by the renowned Isan luk thung songwriter Sala Khunwut and performed by legendary molam singer Siriporn Ampaipong, known for her distinctively husky voice. The song tells the story of a young woman from Wang Saphung who leaves her hometown to “help people find hope, giving them a path to become millionaires” [English translation] (Ampaipong, 2002) by selling lottery tickets in major cities. Among buyers nationwide, it became widely recognized that the ones bringing luck and fortune directly into their hands were, in many cases, vendors from Wang Saphung. Further evidence includes the emergence of the Wang Saphung wholesale lottery market, whose trading volume rivals that of wholesale lottery markets in Thailand’s central regions, and the construction of a monument dedicated to ordinary lottery vendors in Wang Saphung (Khaosod Online, 2022).

These observations raise important questions: How did lottery vending become such a widely preferred occupation among the people of Wang Saphung? And what conditions and factors enabled this area to become known as the lottery capital?

A review of existing literature shows that studies explicitly focusing on lottery entrepreneurs have received relatively little attention. Most research on the Thai lottery industry has concentrated on management and organizational structures, with a consistent conclusion that the existing system enables political interference and serves as a source of benefits for influential groups (Treerat & Liamcharatskul, 2009; Sonsuphap & Thitilak, 2011; Tansirimongkol, 2012). Other studies emphasize consumers and gamblers, viewing lottery purchasing as a manifestation of structural problems and social inequality (Economic Intelligence Center [EIC], 2017; Chatupitpornchan, 2021; Thammaniwong, 2004). Research specifically addressing lottery entrepreneurs (Kitcharanu, 1998; Phakakrong, 2001; Thiemtan, 2002; Sirisak, 2003; Pruksatevet, 2013; Chantajam, 2018) offers only surface-level accounts, and none provide an in-depth explanation of how lottery entrepreneurs came into being.

For this reason, the present article aims to examine the emergence of lottery entrepreneurs in Wang Saphung, Loei, by linking this phenomenon to the broader context of agricultural transformation. The analysis begins in the 1980s, when Thailand’s state-led development policies under a capitalist economic framework began to intensively integrate rural areas such as Wang Saphung into the national system through the promotion of commercial crops. These policies required Wang Saphung residents to adjust to new economic patterns in multiple dimensions, especially in terms of decreasing time spent in agriculture, alongside a growing movement of labour into non-agricultural sectors. Over time, lottery vending became the most popular form of employment among Wang Saphung residents. The findings of this study not only fill an important gap in knowledge about Thailand’s only state-run gambling enterprise, but also contribute to a deeper understanding of socioeconomic change and the adaptive capacity of rural populations under real-world conditions.

Research Objectives

This study aims to examine agricultural transformation and the emergence of “lottery entrepreneurs” in Wang Saphung, Loei, during the 1980s–1990s.

Conceptual Framework

This article analyzes the socioeconomic conditions of Wang Saphung, Loei, through the lens of agricultural transformation. Jonathan Rigg’s work demonstrates that the changes affecting rural Thailand and Southeast Asia over recent decades are highly complex, to the point that “the rural” can no longer be neatly classified within a single mode of

production. Rural life has become “more than rural,” in the sense that households conduct economic activities in urban settings and derive the bulk of their income from non-agricultural sources, while retaining rural roots and continuing to identify themselves as farmers (Rigg, 2019 : 1–14).

At the same time, this article draws on the framework of economic transition from “peasantry” to “entrepreneurship” proposed by Atthajak Sattayanurak. This perspective argues that the shift is driven by profit motives and pride in creating new products for the market, combined with the pressures generated by existing modes of agricultural production that prevent rural people from achieving a decent standard of living (Sattayanurak, 2016 : 37–39). This framework is employed to explain the emergence of lottery entrepreneurs in Wang Saphung, especially from the 1980s onward, when residents were compelled to alter their agricultural practices in line with the Thai state’s development agenda. Despite such intensive adjustments, many were unable to achieve upward social mobility and therefore sought alternative routes, eventually transforming themselves into lottery entrepreneurs.

However, in the early phase of the emergence of “lottery entrepreneurs” examined in this article, not all lottery vendors possessed entrepreneurial characteristics. Robert F. Hébert and Albert N. Link argue that entrepreneurial talent tends to align with leadership qualities, particularly the ability to take risks and bear uncertainty. Early entrepreneurs were often found among merchants and military leaders: generals planned and executed military strategies that depended on risk, while early traders exposed themselves and their assets to dangers similar to those faced by military leaders, to the point that they were sometimes indistinguishable from adventurers. Entrepreneurial functions, Hébert and Link contend, are closely tied to the availability of capital and to the risks inherent in commercial investment (Hébert & Link, 2009 : 8). Building on their argument, this article identifies which groups of lottery vendors can be considered entrepreneurs and explores how their characteristics are shaped by the socioeconomic context of Wang Saphung.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design. Data were collected primarily through in-depth interviews with lottery entrepreneurs whose permanent residences are in Wang Saphung, Loei—an area widely known as Thailand’s lottery capital. Participants (n = 50) were selected using purposive and snowball (referral) sampling. Due to space limitations, only selected interview excerpts are cited in this article. To avoid potential negative consequences for the individuals and communities mentioned, all personal and community names appearing in the text are pseudonyms. The interview data were analyzed in conjunction with primary documentary sources, including statistical records and reports on agricultural transformation. All data were critically assessed using historical methods, and the research findings are presented in a descriptive-analytical format.

Research Results

The author organizes the presentation of findings into three themes, corresponding to the stated research objectives.

1. Historical Development and the Expansion of the Commercial Economy

Loei is one of the 20 provinces of Northeast Thailand (Isan), located at the northernmost edge of the region. It covers an area of approximately 11,424.612 square kilometers (7,140,382 rai) and has a total population of 637,341, ranking 14th among the provinces in Isan (National Housing Authority, 2023 : 13). The general landscape of Loei is

characterized by mountain ranges undulating like ocean waves. The Loei River, originating in the southwestern highlands, flows through the provincial capital before joining the Mekong River to the north—a span of roughly 120 kilometers—serving as a vital waterway sustaining communities along its banks. Because of this mountainous terrain combined with a climate marked by harsh winters, Loei came to be known as the “City of Sea-like Mountains, the Northernmost of Siam” (Fine Arts Department, 2001 : 3–10). Wang Saphung, one of Loei’s 14 districts, lies about 22 kilometers south of the provincial capital. It covers roughly 1,166 square kilometers (728,750 rai) and is administratively divided into one town municipality, two subdistrict municipalities, eight subdistrict administrative organizations, and 144 villages, with a combined population of 111,116—the second largest after Mueang Loei district (Loei Provincial Statistical Office, 2023 : 5).

Clear evidence of Loei’s historical development appears in the 19th century, particularly during the period of reconstruction following the conflict between Lao principalities along the Mekong and the Siamese court during the Anouvong Rebellion of 1826–1828. A major transformation occurred later, at the turn of the 20th century, during the administrative reform that established the *monthon* system. Loei became one of 13 cities incorporated into Monthon Udon in 1899 (The Royal Thai Government Gazette, 1899). Wang Saphung, however, had originally been under the jurisdiction of Lom Sak, a town to the southwest that is now part of Phetchabun province, before being transferred to Loei’s administration in 1907 (The Royal Thai Government Gazette, 1907). This administrative shift naturally linked Wang Saphung’s economic and social development to that of Loei as a whole.

Another significant transformation took place after World War II, when the Thai state implemented rural development policies, particularly in Isan. Massive investments were made to improve infrastructure to support economic growth, alongside efforts to promote the cultivation of commercial crops for emerging industries. These changes reshaped local production systems on a wide scale (Samutkhupt et al., 1995 : 89–94). In Wang Saphung, one of the most notable developments was the rise of “cash crops,” grown for sale alongside rice cultivated for household consumption. According to the commemorative volume published for the royal visit to Loei in 1955, the province then had approximately 131,015 rai of paddy fields and 16,498 rai of upland rice. The area also featured extensive cultivation of other field crops, particularly cotton, the province’s “No. 1 cash crop” (Royal Visit Organizing Committee, 1955 : 50). Originally grown for household use, cotton was transformed into a commercial crop after the war when the government introduced new cotton varieties suitable for the textile industry and established ginning factories. Loei rapidly became the province with the highest cotton production in Thailand (Lekhakul, 1981 : 25).

The second most important cash crop was chili (Royal Visit Organizing Committee, 1955 : 51). which was widely grown for sale, especially in Pak Puan subdistrict, Wang Saphung. Annual chili festivals testified to the crop’s local significance (Kritsanaphuti, 1986 : 28). Other crops commonly grown included tobacco, maize, beans, and sesame, though these were typically for household use rather than commercial sale.

Because Loei’s geography enabled the cultivation of both rice and cash crops, residents remained tied to agriculture for much longer periods each year compared to those in many other Isan provinces. This is evident in migration statistics: of 210,535 residents, only 6,045—or just 2.87 percent—migrated out of the province. This stands in stark contrast to Maha Sarakham, which had the highest out-migration in the region at 127,300 out of 499,373 residents, or 25.49 percent (Keyes, 1966 : 39–41).

Thus, in the early stage of Thailand’s mainstream economic development—when Wang Saphung and Loei were first being integrated more deeply into the commercial economy—local transformations remained limited. Although some cash crops were already being introduced to supply industrial markets, the livelihood patterns of Wang Saphung and Loei residents largely remained rooted in subsistence-based production. Their “feet were still planted in the mud” of their rice fields, and life continued to revolve around village-based agrarian rhythms. This situation, however, began to shift markedly upon entering the 1980s.

2. Agricultural Transformation in the 1980s–1990s

In By the 1980s, the commercial economy in Wang Saphung and Loei had intensified considerably. A series of subdistrict-level development surveys conducted by the Department of Community Development, Ministry of Interior, between 1977 and 1986, revealed significant expansion in both the variety and volume of "cash crops." The five most widely cultivated crops at the time were maize for animal feed, and various types of beans, kenaf, cassava, and cotton (as shown in Table 1)

Table 1 Population, Landholding, Occupations, and Cash Crops Cultivated in Subdistricts of Wang Saphung District, Loei Province, 1980s

Sub-district	Population		Landholding (Rai)		Occupation (Households/%)				Cultivated Land for Sale (Households)				
	People	Household	Richest	Poorest	Average	Farmers	Traders	Others	1	2	3	4	5
Wang													
Saphung (20 villages)	14,472	2,541	65	5	21	2,141/84.2	400/15.8	-	Beans 2,041	Maize 1,912	Cotton 363	Tobacco 150	Kenaf 136
Pak Puan (8 villages)	5,364	980	37	4	10	850/86.7	61/6.2	69/7.0	Maize 650	Beans 541	Chili 186	Cotton 23	-
Phanoi (11 villages)	10,532	1,698	49	4	22	1598/94.1	56/3.3	44/2.6	Maize 1,366	Beans 798	Cotton 260	Cassava 104	Mulberry leaves 25
Nong Ya Plong (21 villages)	22,359	3,629	200	3	12	2,976/82.0	653/18.0	-	Maize 2,819	Beans 1,764	Cotton 2,100	Kenaf 1,377	Cassava 700
Sai Khao (16 villages)	11,216	1,841	500	1	11	1,826/99.2	15/0.8	-	Kenaf 1,013	Beans 995	Maize 561	Job's tears 412	Cassava 78
Phabing (4 villages)	3,599	667	100	2	17	667/100	-	-	Beans 538	Kenaf 445	Chili 405	Maize 346	Cotton 122
Nong Ngiew (19 villages)	12,250	1,770	160	1	16	1,732/97.9	38/2.1	-	Maize 1,765	Beans 1,225	Cotton 951	Cassava 552	-

Note. Adapted from National Archives of Thailand, (8) Mt 5.4.1.52/1. (Dec. 24, 1976–1986); (8) Mt 5.4.1.52/21 (June 1977–1986); (8) Mt 5.4.1.52/22 (June 1977–1986); (8) Mt 5.4.1.52/26 (July 1977–1986); (8) Mt 5.4.1.52/43 (Sept. 1977–1986); (8) Mt 5.4.1.52/49 (Dec. 1977–1986); (8) Mt 5.4.1.52/53 (Jan. 1981–1986)

Alongside the cultivation of commercial crops, agro-industrial factories that relied on agricultural raw materials in the area also expanded. According to investment-planning surveys for Loei conducted in the late 1980s, the number of applications for factory operating licenses rose sharply—from 7 factories in 1987 to 258 factories in 1992—an average annual increase of 125.4 percent. Even so, the industrial-production sector did not become a major economic driver in Wang Saphung, as most new factories were small-scale enterprises and generated relatively limited employment (Manager Information Service & Institute of Policy Studies, 1994 : 8–10).

Beyond the shift toward commercial agriculture, the easing of ideological conflict during this period—particularly the decline of the “communist ghost” that had long haunted Thai society—and the increased safety and accessibility of former conflict zones contributed to another transformation. Given its geography and natural resources suited to tourism, Loei began receiving strong state support for tourism development. In 1981, *Anusan Autsahakan*—the state’s tourism public-relations magazine—published a special issue titled *Anusan Autsahakan: Loei Province Guide*. By 1986, the Tourism Authority of Thailand had conducted systematic surveys and analyses to develop formal tourism policies and plans for Loei (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 1986). At the same time, Loei’s provincial authorities pursued tourism promotion policies of their own, which stimulated the growth of tourism-related businesses, including the construction of large hotels and the expansion of accommodation in scenic districts such as Phu Kradueng, Phu Ruea, and Chiang Khan. However, not all districts possessed comparable tourism potential. Wang Saphung was one such district—primarily a transit area, lacking major attractions that would draw tourists. Unsurprisingly, its tourism-related business sector was minimal; even hotels were almost nonexistent in the district center (Loei Provincial Administrative Organization, 1978 : 16–17).

Within this context, Wang Saphung’s economy remained predominantly agricultural. Some residents who had accumulated modest capital invested in small enterprises to meet the needs of a growing market economy—for example, grocery shops, prepared-food stalls, noodle shops, and hairdressing or beauty salons within villages. Others, who possessed wider social networks, transitioned into becoming middlemen purchasing agricultural products from farmers in their own or neighboring villages. However, for most people, prolonged participation in agriculture increasingly led to financial losses due to uncontrollable price fluctuations. Interviews with study participants consistently revealed that the prices of field crops varied unpredictably each year. In some years, farmers reported that their earnings from selling produce barely covered the cost of seeds. Thus, by the 1990s, farmers in Wang Saphung began adjusting their agricultural practices in order to “keep their heads above water” or improve their social standing in the midst of changing economic conditions—most notably by turning to perennial crops such as sweet tamarind and rubber.

In the case of sweet tamarind, although it had long been widely cultivated in neighboring Phetchabun province, the high cost of seedlings initially prevented farmers in Loei from adopting the crop, despite recognizing its potential. This changed when the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC) introduced a loan-support policy in 1987, enabling large-scale investment in sweet-tamarind cultivation. According to National Statistical Office surveys, Loei had 173,355 rai of tamarind orchards in 1993, expanding to 283,879 rai by 1998 (National Statistical Office, 1999). As a result, Loei’s sweet tamarind quickly became as widely recognized as that of Phetchabun (Maensiri, 2008).

Rubber, by contrast, was traditionally cultivated in southern Thailand. The catalyst for rubber cultivation in Isan and later in Loei was the “Green Isan Project” of 1987, through which the government sought to increase forest cover and generate income simultaneously. The project provided seedlings, fertilizer, and planting funds. Although farmers initially doubted whether rubber—a non-native species—would thrive, persistent state promotion and later increases in rubber prices gradually convinced many to adopt the crop (Thongpan, 2015). A 2019 survey by the Loei Office of Agriculture and Cooperatives reported 776,006 rai of rubber plantations in the province, the second largest area in the region after

Bueng Kan. Wang Saphung alone accounted for 118,571.32 rai, or 15.28 percent of Loei’s total rubber-growing area (Loei Provincial Office of Agriculture and Cooperatives, 2020 : 36).

The transformation extended beyond perennial crops. Among field crops, “industrial sugarcane,” which had not been ranked as economically significant in the early 1990s, rose sharply in importance by the late 1990s, becoming the second most cultivated field crop after maize (Rodruan, 2004 : 22). Unlike other field crops, sugarcane requires nearly two years before harvest but offers the advantage of yielding two to three harvest cycles from a single planting—typically over four to five years. It also requires relatively low maintenance once established. Moreover, sugarcane production is tightly linked to sugar mills, which work closely with farmers through contract-farming arrangements. Under these contracts, mills may lease farmland to manage sugarcane production directly, with farmers receiving rental income, or they may provide inputs—seedlings, fertilizers, chemicals, and cultivation knowledge—while farmers commit to selling their harvest back to the mill under agreed terms (Siamwalla, 2008 : 103–107). The spread of sugarcane in Loei corresponded closely with the establishment of sugar mills in neighboring Nong Bua Lamphu and Khon Kaen provinces. This led farmers in Wang Saphung, Phu Kradueng, Nong Hin, and Erawan—areas located near the mills—to adopt sugarcane in hopes of improving their livelihoods. According to the Office of the Cane and Sugar Board (2007), Loei had 88,546 rai of sugarcane cultivation, ranking ninth in the region, with Wang Saphung holding the largest sugarcane-producing area in the province at 31,672 rai (Office of the Cane and Sugar Board, 2008 : 35).

From all these agricultural shifts, one significant impact became visibly clear: the residents of Wang Saphung spent progressively less time in agricultural work. Much of their land was now dedicated to crops requiring long growth periods and minimal day-to-day labor, unlike traditional annual crops. Coupled with “development discourse” that had long portrayed Loei and Wang Saphung as remote and underdeveloped areas, this situation pushed increasing numbers of residents to seek work beyond their home communities. During the 1990s, out of 319,195 agricultural workers in Loei, 35,716—or 9.14 percent—migrated elsewhere for work, primarily to Bangkok (Rodruan, 2004 : 4). These jobs ranged from construction, factory work, retail employment, and security services to office work—and among them, lottery vending was one of the occupations they entered.

3. The Emergence of the “(Young) Men and Women of Wang Saphung”: The Formation of Lottery Entrepreneurs in Wang Saphung District, Loei Province

Given that the management of state lotteries in Thailand, overseen by the Government Lottery Office, has from the outset adopted a monopolistic production structure and a “wholesale” distribution model—allocating or granting “quotas” to private entities and state agencies selected to act as intermediaries in “retailing” lottery tickets to consumers (Trirat & Liamcharaskul, 2009). Lottery vendors have long constituted a crucial mechanism operating alongside this sole state-run gambling business. The question, then, is why lottery sellers in Wang Saphung, have come to play such a prominent role.

A number of studies on lottery vendors concur that the lottery-selling occupation in Wang Saphung emerged in the mid-1980s. According to these accounts, a villager from Sai Khao subdistrict, in the southern part of the district, initially migrated to Bangkok as a wage laborer and was later advised by a respected acquaintance to switch to lottery vending. He began by cycling from place-to-place selling tickets and soon discovered that his income surpassed that of his previous jobs, prompting him to make lottery vending his main occupation. After about three years, he had accumulated considerable wealth and returned to his home village, where he persuaded relatives to join him in the trade. Acting as investor and mentor, he provided the capital and taught them how to sell. Those relatives who joined him in lottery vending

likewise became better off. Over time, the occupation spread throughout Wang Saphung and nearby areas (Kitcharanu, 1998; Phakakrong, 2001; Thiemtan, 2002; Sirisak, 2003).

While these studies help identify the initial emergence of lottery selling among Wang Saphung residents, they focus primarily on individual aspirations for wealth and overlook broader structural transformations. When we situate the rise of lottery vending within the context of agricultural change in Wang Saphung during the same period, a more complex picture appears. The shift toward cultivating crops with longer growth cycles and reduced labor requirements—combined with the district’s lack of tourism potential, unlike other districts in Loei—meant that local employment and income opportunities dwindled. At the same time, national development policy increasingly prioritized industrial production and urban growth centered on Bangkok. Migration to Bangkok and other major urban centers thus came to represent opportunities and life chances that could not be found at home. It is therefore unsurprising that residents of Wang Saphung, like many rural people elsewhere, chose to leave their home communities and struggle by any means possible to improve their own and their families’ living conditions. In this light, the adoption of lottery vending by Wang Saphung residents is best understood as a manifestation of rural people’s struggle and adaptation to changing economic and social structures.

However, lottery vending was not initially the most popular non-agricultural occupation among Wang Saphung residents. Interviews with many lottery entrepreneurs revealed that, in the early phases of labor migration, most migrants from Wang Saphung worked primarily in construction, followed by factory work. Lottery vending remained a niche activity. This was partly because it required substantial capital: a single seller needed at least 60,000 baht per draw. In addition, new vendors needed access to networks and mentors who could teach them how to sell; without such guidance, they had no idea where or how to begin. As a result, not just anyone could simply decide to leave and sell lottery tickets. The work also involved considerable hardship, sometimes to the point of tears. One example is Aunt Song, who accompanied her husband to sell lottery tickets for the first time in 1997. She recalled walking such long distances that her feet became severely blistered. Lacking experience, she often failed to sell her tickets. Each evening she would cry—partly from the pain in her feet and partly from fear of returning home burdened with debt from unsold tickets (personal communication, 2024). Another example is Teerathon, who first sold lottery tickets at age 17, travelling with several villagers in a modified two-tier pickup truck: women sat tightly packed on the lower level, while men lay so close together on the upper level that they could barely move. Upon arrival, they shared cramped rented accommodation with insufficient bathrooms. Those who woke late missed their turn to wash because everyone had to rush out to sell from early morning. Faced with such hardship, he eventually quit lottery vending and took a job as a department-store salesperson, which offered a more comfortable lifestyle (personal communication, 2024). Given these conditions, it is not surprising that the Community Development Department’s development-zone surveys, conducted between 1977 and 1986, recorded no instances of Wang Saphung residents migrating to sell lottery tickets—not even in Sai Khao subdistrict, the first area in the district whose residents later engaged in lottery vending.

What, then, were the factors that propelled or “accelerated” the spread of lottery vending as a widely adopted occupation? To answer this question, we must look beyond internal developments within Wang Saphung to consider broader changes in state lottery management.

During the same period that agricultural production patterns in Wang Saphung and Loei were shifting—and lottery vending was emerging alongside other forms of labour migration—the state lottery system was undergoing its own transformations. One major reform involved changing the numbering and printing system: the previous format consisted of seven-digit tickets printed in four series—Kor, Khor, Kho, and Ngor—of seven million tickets each, totaling 28 million tickets per draw, or 56 million tickets per month, at 20 baht per ticket. This was replaced with a six-digit format printed in

14 series of one million tickets each, totaling 14 million tickets per draw, or 28 million tickets per month, sold at 40 baht per ticket. This change increased the chances of winning the first prize from four possibilities (Kor, Khor, Kho, and Ngor) to 14 (Series 1–14), thereby making the lottery more attractive to buyers. More crucial still was the introduction of “charity lotteries” in 1995. The Government Lottery Office began issuing charity and sports lotteries for various agencies, totaling 17 million tickets per draw—or 28 million tickets per month—in a format identical to regular tickets. These were wholesaled to three groups of distributors: 7 million tickets to general retail vendors, 5 million tickets through 17 associations of persons with disabilities, and 5 million tickets through five private companies (one million tickets each). It was at this point that the monopoly over charity and regular lotteries coalesced into what became known as the “five lottery tigers.” At the same time, the Government Lottery Office pursued a policy of introducing automated lottery sales using computerized vending systems at various locations nationwide (Setthakit Seri, 1997).

These operational changes had far-reaching implications for the lottery business. At first glance, the shift from seven-digit tickets totaling 28 million per draw to six-digit tickets totaling 14 million per draw might appear to be a reduction in printed volume. In reality, however, two previously separate 20-baht tickets were effectively combined into a single 40-baht ticket, maintaining the same total sales revenue of 560 million baht per draw. More importantly, when charity lotteries are taken into account, the total volume of tickets in circulation increased dramatically. Instead of only 14 million regular tickets plus 17 million charity tickets (31 million tickets per draw), when recalculated at the old 20-baht face value, the total is equivalent to 62 million tickets per draw. This means that, after the reforms of 1995, lottery entrepreneurs collectively needed to distribute far more tickets—from 28 million per draw (56 million per month) to the equivalent of 62 million per draw (124 million per month).

The Government Lottery Office did not shoulder this increased risk, since it did not sell directly to consumers. The burden fell instead on the “lottery tigers”—the monopolistic wholesalers—who now had to move significantly larger quantities of tickets more quickly than before. While the situation strengthened their control over market prices, it simultaneously heightened their risk if they failed to clear their allocation each draw. In addition, automated sales channels introduced by the Government Lottery Office competed for market share and further narrowed the space for traditional distribution. Under these circumstances, the “lottery tigers” urgently needed to expand their marketing mechanisms and networks.

Interviews with lottery entrepreneurs within these networks noted that the “lottery tigers” actively sought out distribution partners. They offered credit terms allowing small retailers to take tickets to sell first and pay later, provided incentives for recruiting new sellers into their networks, and encouraged team-building among vendors to widen marketing reach—much like multi-level marketing schemes (Personal communications, 2024).

As a consequence, pioneering vendors from Wang Saphung recognized new opportunities and shifted from being individual sellers to becoming team leaders. They organized local residents into groups to sell lottery tickets under their leadership, providing capital, transport, accommodation, and intensive sales training. One such example is Chitiphut, a lottery entrepreneur from Sai Khao subdistrict, who began selling lottery tickets in 1989 as part of another entrepreneur’s network. He later decided to recruit fellow villagers and lead them to sell as his own team, initially using bicycles to hawk tickets in the Bang Khunsri and Bangkok Noi areas of Bangkok. Although he lacked substantial capital, he described himself as “bold-hearted,” relying on credit from the entrepreneur he had previously worked under and repaying the debt once his team sold their tickets (Personal communication, 2024).

The profit motive also attracted small-scale rural business owners with prior trading experience. One example is Grandma Lom, a lottery entrepreneur from Khao Luang subdistrict who owned a large grocery shop and operated a shared taxi service between her village and the district center. In 1993, she was invited by a villager from a nearby

community—connected to one of the lottery tigers—to join a selling trip. Having already heard rumors that lottery vending yielded good income, she decided to try. Though she was illiterate, her trading experience enabled her to sell effectively by walking door to door, and she quickly discovered that sales were excellent. After just one draw, she returned home and recruited about 20 villagers as hired sellers under her business. With sufficient capital of her own, she did not need to rely on credit, but still had to purchase tickets from a lottery tiger because she did not have a direct quota. Initially, her workers repaid the tickets reliably and generated substantial profits, which she used not only for daily living expenses but also to buy land, particularly rubber plantations that were expanding during that period (Personal communication, 2024).

Another case is Uncle Soet, a former tractor driver and agricultural middleman, who also became a lottery entrepreneur during this time. He recalled that his first selling experience was on 16 May 1995, when he and six friends from his village travelled to sell in the Om Noi area of Bangkok. Their initial capital came from an uncle who traded agricultural products in Wang Saphung. Lacking experience, they were unable to sell out in that first draw. Nevertheless, he persevered, learning how to improve sales and recoup his investment and labour. Before long, he adapted successfully and, being socially well-connected, soon attracted more people who asked to join his selling trips. The number of sellers under his leadership grew from 6 to 10 and eventually to as many as 100. When his own capital became insufficient, he obtained ticket credit from one of the lottery tigers, who was keen to expand his network and therefore required no formal contract—only repayment after each selling period, with any surplus counted as profit. As his network rapidly expanded, he parted ways with his uncle in 1996. Although the broader economy was deteriorating at the time, income from lottery vending remained strong, prompting many villagers who had previously worked in construction to switch to lottery selling. His network eventually comprised more than one hundred sellers under his coordination (Personal communication, 2024).

The lure of lottery profits was not limited to market vendors and small traders; it also attracted salaried civil servants. One example is Teacher Suphap, a former primary-school principal in Nong Ngiew subdistrict who became a lottery entrepreneur while still in government service. He explained that teachers' salaries had once been very low, forcing him to seek additional income on weekends and holidays by driving villagers to construction sites in Bangkok and other cities, or transporting them to buy second-hand motorcycles in Chiang Mai. In 1996, while taking construction workers to Ao Phradu and stopping in Pattaya for a meal, he met acquaintances from Sai Khao subdistrict who were leading groups of sellers there. They told him that leading people to sell lottery tickets was far more profitable than running a transport service. After returning home, he decided to form a partnership with the school janitor, each investing 400,000 baht, and asked his Pattaya acquaintance to introduce him to one of the lottery tigers, who was seeking to expand his network. In their first selling trip, Teacher Suphap recruited 30 sellers and used two pickup trucks to travel and hawk tickets in the Khlong Tan area of Bangkok. Their initial capital still proved insufficient, so they obtained ticket credit from the lottery tiger, returning payment after sales. He charged his sellers a margin of 1.50 baht per ticket, calculated against the prevailing ticket price upon arrival at the selling site—a price that fluctuated from draw to draw, depending on the lottery tiger's assessment. To succeed, he needed to carefully gauge which draws would be “cheap” or “expensive” (Personal communication, 2024).

The increasing number of leaders investing in sending groups to sell lottery tickets aligned closely with the growing demand for off-farm work among Wang Saphung residents, whose agricultural labor time had diminished due to changes in cropping patterns. From the latter half of the 1990s onward, lottery vending thus spread rapidly among the people of Wang Saphung. This is evident in the 2010 survey of lottery vendors by the National Statistical Office—the only official survey of its kind—which found that 7,007 residents of Wang Saphung were engaged in lottery vending, accounting for 60.87 percent of all 11,511 lottery vendors in Loei (see Table 2).

Before Becoming the “Lottery Capital”, E5805 (1-18)

Table 2 Number and Percentage of Lottery Sellers in Loei Province, Classified by District and Age

District	Age							Total
	Less than 16 years old	16–22 years old	23–29 years old	30–39 years old	40–49 years old	50–59 years old	60 years and over	
1.Wang	12	293	588	1,884	2,660	1,212	358	7,007
Saphung	0.2%	4.2%	8.4%	26.9%	38.0%	17.3%	5.1%	100.0%
2. Phu Ruea	-	36	137	365	357	95	14	1,004
		3.6%	13.6%	36.4%	35.6%	9.5%	1.4%	100.0%
3.Phu Luang	-	28	90	328	395	136	27	1,004
		2.8%	9.0%	32.7%	39.3%	13.5%	2.7%	100.0%
4.Loei	1	27	56	172	236	97	15	604
	0.2%	4.5%	9.3%	28.5%	39.1%	16.1%	2.5%	100.0%
5.Nong Hin	-	14	58	155	149	39	7	422
		3.3%	13.7%	36.7%	35.3%	9.2%	1.7%	100.0%
6. Erawan	1	11	36	126	168	50	3	395
	0.3%	2.8%	9.1%	31.9%	42.5%	12.7%	0.8%	100.0%
7.Na Duang	1	12	17	98	143	41	9	321
	0.3%	3.7%	5.3%	30.5%	44.5%	12.8%	2.8%	100.0%
8. Dan Sai	-	12	52	144	84	27	3	322
		3.7%	16.1%	44.7%	26.1%	8.4%	0.9%	100.0%
9.Tha Li	-	5	18	59	40	9	3	134
		3.7%	13.4%	44.0%	29.9%	6.7%	2.2%	100.0%
10.Pak Chom	-	4	11	44	36	7	0	102
		3.9%	10.8%	43.1%	35.3%	6.9%	0.0%	100.0%
11.Chiang	1	2	13	26	35	13	3	93
Khan	1.1%	2.2%	14.0%	28.0%	37.6%	14.0%	3.2%	100.0%
12.Pha Khao	-	3	4	11	34	11	2	65
		4.6%	6.2%	16.9%	52.3%	16.9%	3.1%	100.0%
13.Phu	-	1	1	6	6	4	3	21
Kradueng		4.8%	4.8%	28.6%	28.6%	19.0%	14.3%	100.0%
14.Na Haeo	-	0	1	10	5	1	0	17
		0.0%	5.9%	58.8%	29.4%	5.9%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	16	448	1,082	3,428	4,348	1,742	447	11,511
	0.1%	3.9%	9.4%	29.8%	37.8%	15.1%	3.9%	100.0%

(Source: National Statistical Office, 2010)

The data presented in Table 2 also demonstrates that the proportion of lottery vendors in Wang Saphung differs markedly from those in other districts within the same province. For instance, the districts of Phu Luang and Phu Ruea, which follow Wang Saphung in ranking, each had 1,004 lottery sellers, accounting for 8.72 percent of all the lottery vendors in Loei. This disparity may be linked to the unique spatial context of Wang Saphung, which does not possess the same level of tourism potential found in other districts of Loei. These include Phu Ruea and Phu Kradueng—both renowned nationwide for their natural attractions—as well as Dan Sai, home to the iconic Phi Ta Khon festival, and Chiang Khan, known for its traditional wooden houses and scenic Mekong River views. Such circumstances may help explain why selling lottery tickets has become more popular among residents of Wang Saphung than in other districts. In addition,

if one calculates the average number of tickets sold by a single vendor—approximately 1,000 tickets per draw (Tiamtan, 2002)—and compares this with the total number of tickets produced by the Government Lottery Office at the time, which stood at 50 million per draw (Government Lottery Office, 2011 : 56), it can be estimated that vendors from Wang Saphung generated sales of roughly 7 million tickets per draw, while the entire province of Loei accounted for around 10 million per draw. If these figures are accurate, it would mean that one in every five lottery tickets sold in Thailand in each draw originated from the selling capacity of people in Wang Saphung.

Yet despite these large proportions, many observers believe that the official numbers remained lower than the real situation, as a substantial portion of Wang Saphung’s lottery sellers operated outside formal statistical records. This view is supported by the perspectives of the Wang Saphung District Chief and the President of the Loei Chamber of Commerce, both of whom estimated that the number of lottery vendors in Loei is no fewer than 40,000–60,000 people, more than half of whom resided in Wang Saphung (Naewna, 2020; Krungthep Turakij, 2022). Beyond numerical estimates, symbolic evidence also underscores the significant role played by Wang Saphung sellers in Thailand’s lottery trade. Academic interest in the community emerged as early as 1998 with Pisith Kitrenu’s study, *Economic Self-Reliance of Rural Northeastern Communities: A Case Study of Mobile Lottery Vendors in Ban Phonngam, Village No. 3, Sai Khao Subdistrict, Wang Saphung District, Loei* (1998). This was followed by three additional research works and theses from Loei Rajabhat University, including Anon Phakakrong’s research report *Business Operations (Lottery Sales) of People in Loei Province* (2001), and two theses advised by Anon: *The Lifestyles of Lottery Vendors: A Case Study of Wang Saphung District, Loei Province* (2002) by Wachirawan Tiamtan, and *An Economic Transition Study of Lottery Entrepreneurs: A Case Study of Wang Saphung District, Loei Province* (2003) by Wirachai Sirisak. Moreover, the role of Wang Saphung sellers reached wider cultural visibility through the creation of the song “Sao Wang Saphung,” written by celebrated Isan songwriter Sala Khunawut and performed by the legendary molam singer Siriporn Ampaipong, released in 2002. The song narrates the diligence of a young woman from Wang Saphung who travels from her rural home to the cities to “bring hope to others and help them dream of becoming rich” by selling lottery tickets, before returning home when “the fields fill with water,” signaling the rice-planting season (Ampaipong, 2002). In addition, the establishment of the Wang Saphung lottery wholesale market in 1999 further strengthened the district’s regional significance. This market later grew into a major trading hub comparable in volume to the nationwide centers at “Khok Wua Intersection” and “Sanambinnam,” generating monthly transactions of no less than 2 billion baht (MGR Online, 2011). The district even erected a monument dedicated to “ordinary lottery sellers” at the market grounds (Khaosod Online, 2022).

The distinctive style of Wang Saphung lottery sellers—particularly their itinerant sales method, which involved traveling across regions nationwide and responding quickly and widely to consumer demand—eventually became known as the “Wang Saphung Model,” a practice emulated by vendors in many other localities (Sornsuphap & Thitilak, 2011, : 71; Tansirimongkol, 2012 : 119). However, a closer examination of the initial formation of Wang Saphung’s lottery-selling community reveals two primary groups.

The first is “hired sellers,” individuals who primarily rely on their own labor, lack capital to purchase tickets upfront, and depend on credit from lottery entrepreneurs. They also often lack experience or social capital to form their own sales teams, thus relying on entrepreneurs for transportation, accommodation, and sales training—while bearing the final risk for unsold tickets. Examples include Pa Song and Theerathon.

The second group, “lottery entrepreneurs,” comprises individuals who recognized business opportunities within the state-run gambling system. They assembled groups of vendors, managed operations requiring complex planning, extended credit to hired sellers, oversaw travel logistics, and in many cases trained newcomers. Importantly, their role extended beyond the hired sellers; they also maintained relationships with large-scale wholesalers monopolizing the

national lottery distribution system—referred to as lottery tigers (suea kong salak). Examples include Yai Lom, Lung Soet, and Khru Supap.

However, this distinction between hired sellers and entrepreneurs should not be viewed as fixed. Many hired sellers, after gaining experience and accumulating capital, eventually transitioned into entrepreneurs themselves. One such example is Chitipat, who began as a hired seller in another entrepreneur’s network before establishing his own team. His willingness to take risks, ability to recognize opportunities, and capacity to navigate the structural conditions of Thailand’s lottery system allowed him to innovate new sales approaches and eventually accumulate wealth. Such characteristics align closely with the entrepreneurial qualities described by Hébert and Link (2009), who highlight risk-taking and boldness as core traits of early-stage entrepreneurs.

This raises a critical question: what enables these individuals to differ from ordinary lottery vendors and transition into “lottery entrepreneurs” earlier than others?

Evidence from the life histories of several entrepreneurs shows two common traits: leadership and risk tolerance. For instance, Chitipat—despite having limited capital—leveraged his big-hearted attitude to obtain lottery tickets on credit from his former network, repaying only after his sellers made sales. Similarly, Yai Lom—though illiterate—boldly shifted from being a small grocery vendor to selling lottery tickets in Bangkok, and after only one draw, returned home to recruit villagers into her sales team. Likewise, Lung Soet, known for his wide social network and leadership qualities, successfully mentored many new vendors and built a network of hundreds.

A further shared characteristic among these entrepreneurs is their status as part of the “local economic elite.” Though Khru Supap, for example, was only a junior local teacher with a modest salary, he still enjoyed relative economic security compared with typical villagers. Yai Lom, likewise, although a rural shopkeeper, was considered locally affluent. Their elite status stems from greater access to resources—especially capital and the capacity to bear commercial risks—giving them advantages not available to most villagers.

Discussion and Conclusion

The agricultural transformation driven by Thai state development policies under a capitalist economy since the 1980s integrated Wang Saphung’s rural landscape into this system through the promotion of commercial crops. This shift was closely linked to patterns of labor migration into urban settings, particularly into lottery selling, which became a major source of household income. The occupation emerged as people adapted to new economic realities: crops requiring long growth periods and minimal labor encouraged villagers to engage in non-agricultural work such as construction, factory employment, and retail. Initially, however, lottery selling remained limited due to high investment costs and the need for mentorship and networks. When the 1990s arrived, changes in government lottery management—combined with credit mechanisms offered by large-scale wholesalers (lottery tigers)—served as catalysts, enabling the rapid expansion of Wang Saphung’s lottery-selling occupation.

This phenomenon parallels Jonathan Rigg’s observation that farmers increasingly derive income from non-farm work, leading to a livelihood that is “more than rural,” with economic activities tied to urban settings despite rural origins. Simultaneously, Wang Saphung’s entrepreneurs who recognized opportunities within the state gambling system, assembled sales teams, and managed complex, risk-intensive operations exhibited traits associated with entrepreneurship. Their behavior reflects the entrepreneurial qualities described by Hébert and Link—especially risk-taking—as well as Attajak Satyanurak’s argument that rural entrepreneurship arises from both profit motivation and

pressure from agricultural constraints that limit economic mobility. For many entrepreneurs, the profits from lottery trading were enticing, while the hardship of agricultural production pushed them toward new economic paths.

Nevertheless, entrepreneurship is neither fixed nor static. It evolves dynamically as individuals confront new risks and uncertainties. Many former hired sellers eventually became entrepreneurs after gaining experience. Others, displaced from industrial-sector jobs by the economic crisis of 1997, transitioned into lottery entrepreneurship as a means of economic survival and upward mobility. These new entrants reinforced the existing network of Wang Saphung entrepreneurs. Ultimately, the prominence of Wang Saphung’s lottery sellers grew so widely recognized across Thailand that the district came to be known as the “Lottery Capital” of the country.

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