

Social choices for the next generation of elderly: The combination of resources allocation and the utilization of social conditions

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Abstract

With the advent of the aged society amidst capitalism development, the Next Generation of Elderly (NGE) has the chance to seek social choices. This research relied on the Resource Profile Framework to study the social choices of NGEs under the Capability Approach and the Structuration Approach. The qualitative research method was used with the research target group, or NGEs, who were Thai citizens aged 50 to 59 years residing in an urban and a rural areas of Kud Piang Khom Sub-District, the district of a complete aged society. The data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews from May to September, 2016 with 36 NGEs. Descriptive analysis was conducted to synthesize their social choices. The result showed 5 social choices used by the NGEs: (1) The choice that arises from the use of resource in one dimension for a return of resource in that dimension; (2) The choice that arises from the use of resource in one dimension for a return of resource in another dimension; (3) The choice that arises from the use of resources from many dimensions; (4) The choice that arises from facilitating social conditions; and (5) The choice that arises from integrating personal resources with utilization of facilitating social conditions. NGEs' social choices were found to vary according to the individuals and community context.

Keywords: Social Choice, Resource Profile Framework, Capability Approach, Structuration Approach, Supportive Social Conditions, Thai Aged Society

1. Introduction

Development towards capitalism results in people's giving importance on capital accumulation. Capital is the incentive behind the Next Generation of Elderly (NGE) who seek choices that will increase the existing capital. Capital in social science exists in many dimensions, such as human capital, physical capital, social capital, natural capital, and cultural capital [1]. These capitals are interchangeable and can be integrated as production inputs for investment that will continuously create returns in the cycle of capital accumulation [2]. Human therefore adheres to the duty and responsibility to accumulate capital until it is increased instead of seeking freedom to select an alternative that create true values of life [3]. NGEs should set the life target with values rather than accumulating more capital [4]. Thus, capital should be considered only as a socioeconomic resource, which comprises human resource, objective resource, social resource, natural resource, and cultural resource [5]. People should utilize these resources to achieve their life values, namely, happiness of living, quality of life, and freedom according to the development alternative [6]. NGEs should have social choices that promote the capabilities to achieve the target of life and step onward to valuable life during the elderly age [7].

The fact that NGEs need to step towards being the elderly brings about risks in building choices for themselves. This is because old ages compel NGEs to face adjustment of production styles and

living patterns according to the deteriorating conditions. In the next decade, Thailand will be an aged society [8]. This means NGEs will be confronted with risks in self-adjustment towards the social conditions that differ from the present [9]. In order to decrease risks, NGEs need to be supported in terms of their social choices of personal capabilities and efficient utilization of social conditions [10]. This article aimed at studying what attitudes NGEs have regarding the self-construction of social choices. The Resource Profile Framework, the Capability Approach, and the Structuration Approach were based on to explain the phenomena. The study results led to knowledge of the social structuration approach of NGEs in the aged society, which is the situation confronted by developing countries at present.

2. Materials and methods

This article is based on the Social Choice Concept according to the Capability Approach of Sen [3] in order to explain that NGEs need freedom to choose to do things that are valuable for themselves [4], and hence seek the choices to allocate resources, namely, human resources (which are further divided into health resource and intellectual resource), objective resources (divided into financial resource and physical resource), social resources, environmental resources, and cultural resources; all of which bring returns as expected [5]. However, the society is composed of a great number of people. Thus, social institutions have been established as an invisible hand that controls social order [11]. The institutions set social conditions in order to guard benefits for the

majority, making it difficult to respond to individual's needs [11]. These conditions leave NGEs with absolutely no freedom because they have to choose the choices offered to them by the society [12]. Good social choices must be based on different capabilities and needs for resources of an individual [13]. Each person should have freedom to choose a personal resource and allocate it with the resource supported by a social institution in order to construct a social choice [10]. Social institutions should take a role to promote NGEs to use their capabilities efficiently [6]. This article therefore brought the structuration of relationship of Giddens [14] expand the picture of the social choice construction with belief that NGEs are reasonable as the doers. Thus, they want to change the social conditions to be in consistent with their needs and to take advantages from their own resources as much as possible. The changed social condition will reproduce the norm and social value that return to dominate the utilization of personal resources of NGEs [15]. From this concept, this research believes that social choices are the outcomes of the interactions between personal resource allocation and utilization of benefits from social conditions, with the importance placed on the patterns of resource utilization.

The research applied the qualitative approach, with the data analysis at the individual level. The research site was Kud Piang Khom Sub-District, Chonnabot District, about 55 km far from Khon Kaen city. The sub-district is one of the famous place of *madmee* silk weaving and a strong group cluster in the community. The elderly population accounts for 20.28% in the sub-district [16]. This research purposively selected an urban community and a rural community. The urban community selected for the study of urban context is situated in the middle of civilization adjacent to the major road (Village 1 and Village 3 of the sub-district). The rural community selected for the study of rural community context is 3 km from the main road and growth has not reached this community (Village 2 and Village 4 of the sub-district). The target group was the NGEs comprising 36 males and females ages 50-59 years who were working and lived in the research sites for not less than 5 years. The data was collected by means of non-participatory observation and semi-structured interview based on the interview questions constructed that covered social choices of NGEs, social choices arising from allocation of personal resources, and social choices arising from utilization of social conditions. Data collection was carried out from May to September, 2016. The research result is presented by descriptive analysis.

3. Results

This research was based on the Resource Profile Framework of White & Ellison [5] which sees that the socio-economic resources of NGEs can be used to build social choices that lead to self-values according to the concept of Sen [3]. Parts of these resources are from an individual and other parts are from social conditions according to Giddens [14]. The research results covered the community contexts, characteristics of NGEs, and NGEs' construction of social choices, with the details discussed below:

3.1. Community contexts and characteristics of NGEs

Kud Piang Khom Sub-District, which is 55 km from Khon Kaen to the South was selected as the research site. The sub-district is at present an aged society. Its administration is divided into 7 villages. This research was conducted at the urban community (Village 1 and Village 3) and the rural community (Village 2 and Village 4). The following part presents the physical, demographical and socio-economic backgrounds of the research site for better understanding of the community contexts related to the NGEs' construction of social choices.

The urban community has the total population of 1,062, 530 being males and 532 being females. There are 148 aged people and 128 are NGEs. One main road passes the community to the province, making transportation convenient. Therefore, a number of sub-

district government offices and service centers are situated here, including the sub-district administrative organization, a police station, banks, a hospital, a school that opens up to the high school level. The school enables the villagers to complete their education at the high school level. The community is also a commercial center and the location of the sub-district fresh market. In the community, all kinds of public utilities are provided, including concrete roads, the irrigation system, electricity, tap water, telephone lines and public buses. Most of the people are farmers since the place is in an irrigation area. The next occupation mostly held is trading. *The target-group of NGEs in the urban community* comprises 10 men and 10 women equally. All of them were married and most live with their spouses and children. The average age of this group was 54 years on the interview date. Most completed the high school education since they live near the sub-district school that offers up to high-school education. Because of their education, many of the NGEs in this group work as a government official whereas some who live near the community market are merchants. The NGEs in this group earn an average of 12,000 THB per month (\$360), which is higher than the low wage rate [17]. The majority own a small piece of land suitable for living or trading. Nearly 50% of the NGEs have congenital diseases, which include diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension owing to irregular exercising and lack of nutritional control. Thus, they have to visit the hospital regularly and use the welfare money under the state's health insurance. Nearly all of the NGEs are members of at least two social groups: which may be: the official groups (the Official on Pension group and Teachers group), the funding groups (Village Fund group, BAAC group, Cremation group, Million Baht Fund group, and Faithful Savings group), social activity groups (including Women Silk group, Village Volunteer group, Housewife group). The main reason behind participation in the social groups is the benefits or social roles received.

The rural community is composed of 907 people, divided into 425 males and 482 females. The elderly population was 87 people, and the number of NGEs was 120 people. The community is situated 3 kilometers away from the main road. Some part of the road is still lateritic. If the villagers need to contact the district, they must travel by a private car or a hired car since there is no public transportation. There are not adequate public utilities and no water resource for producing tap water. The villagers have to use underground water and the small natural water source for consumption and drinking. The community is in the rain-fed agricultural area and in the drought-risk zone. *The target-group of NGEs in the rural community* consisted of 11 women and 5 men, all of whom were married, and live with their spouses, their fathers and mothers and children in an extended family. The children of NGEs are in the working age under the migration trend to work in the province or other industrial provinces. The chance for NGEs in this group to look after themselves is high, and some even have to look after the children of the working-age family members. The average age of the NGEs on the interview date was 55 years. Most completed elementary education because when they were children they had to help with the household chores. This confined them to education at the village primary school. Owing to the low level of education, the majority of the NGEs are farmers or laborers whose incomes are not regular; the average earning per month being only 8,000 THB (\$240), which is lower than the low wage rate [17]. Since the jobs they do are tough, some have developed chronic diseases that require them to receive treatment at the hospital. Most suffer from muscle tension and aches because of the hard work and lack of time to watch over their own health. Due to poverty, many NGEs in this group join a social group so that they are able to borrow money from a funding source. Only few join the farm occupation groups in order to increase their skills. Their participation in the community social groups, on the contrary, is from the traditional beliefs.

3.2 Constructing social choices

The transfer towards the aged society of Kud Piang Khom Sub-District began in 2013, which is early compared to the Thai society as a whole. This situation has brought impact on the lifestyles of the community people. For example, the missing of the working-age group has led to decreased productivity and purchasing power, the changing of goods and service demands, and time constraints among villagers to adjust themselves [18]. Well-prepared NGEs are able to allocate their resources efficiently and to rely on themselves. On the contrary, NGEs who have not prepared themselves in this regard need to depend on the social conditions to support themselves and survive [9]. NGEs build social choices in order to achieve their own values [3] by means of resource allocation and utilization of social conditions. The social choices could be classified into 5 patterns: *Pattern 1*) the choice of utilizing resources in one dimension for returns in the resources of the same dimension; *Pattern 2*) the choice of utilizing resources in one dimension for returns in the resources of a different dimension; *Pattern 3*) the choice of utilizing mixed resources from multiple dimensions; *Pattern 4*) the choice of utilizing supporting social conditions; and *Pattern 5*) the choice of integrating personal resources with utilization of supporting social conditions. This research aimed at analyzing the social choices of NGEs in the urban and rural communities based on the resources in different patterns as shown in Table 1 and the discussion below:

Achieving social choices related to human resources – The NGEs in the urban community as well as those in the rural community have expectation that they will live longer than the elderly in the past owing to today's higher standards of nursing and health care. However, this, in the opposite, makes the NGEs worry that they will be an elderly living alone or with the spouse who is also old. Most of the NGEs were found having congenital diseases, and hence they wished they would be in good health so that they would be able to physically look after themselves for as long as possible. Therefore, NGEs now are attentive to their health by sufficiently exercising and relaxing (*Pattern 1*). The NGEs in the urban community who completed high school have knowledge of health and hygiene and are able to watch over themselves in terms of hygiene and health. The urban NGEs are happy to spend their money for clean and nutritional foods. Their work place is safe with a governmental unit controlling according to the standard of public health law (*Pattern 5*). The NGEs in the rural community, on the contrary, have low income and completed only primary education. The rural NGEs do not really pay attention to their health and hygiene. They also have to work in unsuitable conditions. This is partly due to their viewpoint of relying on doctors rather than taking care of their own health. One NGE said, "...I am the labor, and because of hard work I have an energy drink so that I can work all day. When I'm sick I buy medicine on my own. But when it's serious, I'll see the doctor..." (KI 30, interviewed on September 8, 2016). The health and hygiene of this group of NGEs is the duty of a certain government organization to send public health volunteers or community development volunteers to visit them and provide knowledge of health and hygiene (*Pattern 4*). The human resource related to the intellect used for the living of the urban NGEs is the occupational skill for working and earning incomes. It is used with objective resources in the form of production inputs such as labor, raw materials, machinery for production. This group of NGEs requires a coordinating network for bringing in production inputs and for exchanging of goods and services (*Pattern 3*). The rural NGEs have similar pattern of resources usage as the urban NGEs. What they should receive in addition are access to the common areas in the community such as water resources and community forests in order to reach the production inputs that are available in the community, and governmental support in terms of network, funds, market, raw materials, seed varieties, fertilizers, cultivation techniques, and market control mechanism so that they can hold agricultural occupation (*Pattern 5*).

Achieving social choices related to objective resources – The NGEs in the urban community build the security life through accumulation of monetary resources, which can be in the form of non-movable properties, namely, land, building and house, rights to rent market stalls and machines; in the form of movable properties, namely, savings, life insurance money, pension, share in the stock exchange, vehicle, material and equipment, inventory awaiting sale; and in the form of credits including loan money from the community funding and bank. Some urban NGEs grew up in the commercial zone and have thus acquired asset management knowledge. Some are government officials entitled to special welfare such as medical service, pension and their organization's funding. When retired, the urban NGEs need the following government's supports: tax reduction, subsistence allowance, protection of assets and information and news of investment (*Pattern 5*). One NGE said, "...I work as a government officer, when I retire I am entitled to medical treatment and pension. Today, I try to save money and buy the land, which should be enough when added with the subsistence allowance and other welfare provided by the state..." (KI 22, interviewed on September 1, 2016). The rural NGEs attempt to build the security of life similar to the urban NGEs. However, their assets are not various since many live from hand to mouth, with the income and expenditure being nearly equal. The savings of most NGEs in the rural community is the amount set aside for daily circulation. Subsistent land and houses of most NGEs were inherited from the older generation. The majority of rural NGEs do not own any vehicle. Farming occupation and hiring labor do not bring regular wages to them; they have to borrow from the community fund for circulating in the households and therefore being in debt. When getting older, the rural NGEs expect to rely on the medical welfare, subsistence allowance, and supplementary money from the Government. Most of the rural NGEs do not have any investment plan to increase their income, but instead, attempt to reduce expenditure to balance with the earning (*Pattern 5*). The urban NGEs have access to daily facilities and all of the utilities such as electricity, tap water, telephone, high speed internet, and mass transportation. They also live close to the governmental service units clustered in the urban area such as hospital, police station and Sub-District Administrative Organization. Therefore, all NGEs have access to the government's welfare to decrease living expense, for example, free bus-ride (*Pattern 5*). This differs from the rural community where public utilities are much more inferior. In order to have more public utilities, the community only relies on the government's budget. The Sub-District Administrative Organization has a plan to construct some utilities, namely, a concrete road and a water well for making tap water. These two projects are awaiting budget allocation (*Pattern 4*). The urban NGEs are able to travel to the province easily and so they are able to buy things and services. Those who are well-educated know how to order things by means of the internet or the online network (*Pattern 3*). In contrast, the rural NGEs buy things and services available at community shops or through acquaintances in the community. In general, the rural NGEs have a group network from which they are introduced to new goods and services when the group activities are carried out (*Pattern 5*).

Achieving social choices related to social resources – The NGEs in the urban community have benefit-exchange relationships with the network. Therefore, they join a group in order to increase their negotiating power, which includes the social role in the activity they decided to join. It has often been found that the urban NGEs participate in traditional events such as the district merit making ceremony to meet patronizing authorities. The urban NGEs need supports for establishing an occupational group to increase negotiating power. For example, they formed a silk trading group in order to be a middleman who buys silk materials from villagers to sell in the district (*Pattern 5*). In contrast, the rural NGEs' relationship with their network is in a kinship pattern. They build their social resources by joining traditional events, because these have been inherited from generation to generation (*Pattern 2*). The urban NGEs' benefits are connected to their social network. Popu-

larity and many network connections arise from sharing of benefits through the objective resources owned and support to form groups (*Pattern 5*). The rural NGEs, on the contrary, expand their networks from joining traditional event and introduction by friends. The network expansion will extend from one to another through kinship relation. The government has the duty to promote group clustering and provides supports in terms of budget, methods, places, and personnel. The stability of the group formed this way is high because the members have been invited by another member in the community (*Pattern 5*). The urban community values people from education level, wealth and acquaintance with authorities. Therefore, the urban NGEs build their power and prestige from educational qualifications, high working positions, and financial status because these can raise respect towards themselves from villagers. When it is time for electing members of community committees or important positions, this group of people are usually selected (*Pattern 3*). The power and prestige of the rural community are built through group activities and cultural events. The rural NGEs who are the elderly and have participated in various activities are usually selected as the leader. In general an elderly is assigned to take responsibilities over maintaining of the common benefits and assets of the community since everyone trust his or her neutralism, and love and cherish of community resources from being with the community for a long time. (*Pattern 3*).

Achieving social choices related to environmental resources – The NGEs in the urban community are found utilizing environmental resources and the community's public utilities as their relaxing areas, for example, the public garden and the two ponds used for retaining water and as an exercise area (*Pattern 3*). The rural NGEs rely on the nature for their living, for example, farm products and forest items. Each year, the rural community faces drought and needs the government to support in terms of environmental resources and to control community forest utilization to prevent forest deterioration (*Pattern 5*). The present situation has changed tremendously from the past. It is very hot in the summer, and it rains hard during the rainy season. The number of trees in the community also decreases and at the same time, houses, buildings and roads have been built across the natural waterways, resulting in problems from swamp areas. The wealthy urban NGEs are able to install air-conditioners or buy electric fans so that they will be comfortable in the summer. The government also constructed a drainage system that helps in the time of floods; the drainage chute will drain water into a well for producing tap water (*Pattern 5*). On the contrary, the rice fields in the rural community are rain-fed. When there is flood, the farmers receive compensation from the government. At present, the government is organizing zoning for promotion of plant growing and campaign for forestation instead of cultivating cash crops that do not yield worthy productivity. It is expected that the rural farmer NGEs will have good productivity and receive less impact from natural disasters (*Pattern 5*). In terms of safety, the urban NGEs protect their lives and properties by clustering their houses close to one another, building iron fence, and installing window and door bars. The government sends officers to patrol the community, for example, policemen and civil security guard volunteers (*Pattern 5*). The rural NGEs in this regard, have to rely on neighbors that look after the houses on the mutual caring basis. However, the rural community also needs the government's support to send civil security volunteers to guard the community (*Pattern 5*).

Achieving social choices related to cultural resources – The NGEs in the urban and rural communities will be accepted in the society when their economic status is good enough, if they know the authorities or have a lot of social networks, and are leaders in traditional and cultural activities in the community. The key items enabling NGEs to be praised by the community people include the number of awarded prizes, certificates, and honorary announcements. This is because the community people evaluate their leaders-to-be from certification of honors or capabilities since the certificates are more tangible than skills or ability (*Pattern 5*).

Thai cultures hold prejudice against old ages. The elderly are not encouraged to work, for the children will be blamed for not being grateful, fear of dangers that can happen to the elderly, the view towards the elderly as being fragile. Therefore, the elderly should take the role of assistance receiver rather than creator of social benefits. The urban NGEs have competed against the prejudice by demonstrating their capacities, their social networks to contact the outside world, and by having socio-cultural capitals enabling them to act as a community leader (*Pattern 3*), which are similar to the rural NGEs. However, the rural NGEs have kinship social networks in which coordination does not lead to production, but on the other hand reproduces the prejudice. Thus, the community and the government should promote clustering of occupational groups with external networks to increase production in the rural community for NGEs (*Pattern 5*). Both the rural and urban NGEs have common needs at the end of their lives, i.e., to transfer valuable things to the next generation. NGEs must therefore accumulate knowledge and build their own cultural roles to propel them towards the role of the elderly. Thai society trust knowledgeable and experienced people and seek instructions from them to lead the life in society (*Pattern 3*).

4. Discussion

From the research findings, it could be said that NGEs have expectation to utilize socio-economic resources in order to achieve a valuable life when they become the elderly. This expectation leads to rationalization of action forcing NGEs to allocate resources to match the social conditions and enable them to receive the expected outcomes [14]. Socio-economic resources are therefore the medium that NGEs use as the means and ends in their construction of social choices [3] based on the resource profile framework of White & Ellison [5], which comprises 5 dimensions, namely: (1) Human resources including health resource associated with physical and mental capacity that enables NGEs to add to other resources [18] and intellectual resource which is the key towards allocation of resources in other dimensions with increased efficiency [19]. (2) Objective resources including financial resource which is the medium for exchange or for assimilation of capital to directly acquire goods and services needed or to indirectly invest with resources in other dimensions [20] and physical resource which facilitates daily conveniences that stipulate the community's living standards [1]. (3) Social resources that enable NGEs to attain opportunities, personnel, information and news that lead to allocation of resources in other dimensions [21]. (4) Environmental resources that enable NGEs to live more happily and work more efficiently [1]. (5) Cultural resources which are personal capitals for socializing and building opportunities to receive social supports and hence progress in work, business, and education [22]. The patterns of social choice construction from allocation of resources and utilization of social conditions are categorized into 5 types as the findings discussed.

The findings of this study led to our conclusion as follows: The urban community is in a modernized condition with high material advancement. The relationships of people are in the style of benefit exchange and individualism. The urban NGEs' social choices are therefore under the materialistic style that relies on objective resources as the key component. The rural community is not very advanced in terms of materials. Kinship system is commonly found among the community people. The community lifestyle depends on standards of traditions and customs, and hence collectivism is highly valued. Thus, the social choices of NGEs in the rural areas depend on social resources as the key factors. This article sees that the government's promotion of social choices for NGEs through the decentralization policy involving investment of objective resources will yield a lot of outcomes only in the urban community. A universal measure of the government does not respond to the different needs of the rural community areas. The government should promote investment in social resources in the rural community. The key to success of social choice construction

by means of capability approach is by encouraging NGEs the combination of resource allocation and utilization of social conditions in Pattern 5, which is the social choice that leads to success and covers most of the NGEs' needs.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to all key informants who sacrificed their time to give useful information and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Dusadee Ayuwat for her valuable suggestions. Thanks are also extended to Khon Kaen University on behalf of the Graduate School and the Research and Training Center for Enhancing Quality of Life of Working Age People (REQW) of the Faculty of Nursing for the scholarship support.

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