

The Role of the Ethnic Thai-Chinese in Economy in Khon Kaen Municipality

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Abstract: The present study as qualitative research sought to investigate the history of the ethnic Thai-Chinese in Khon Kaen municipality and their economic roles in such a municipal area from past to present. The data were collected from secondary sources through a review and study of related research as well as from primary sources as in the samples in this study through a field study in Khon Kaen municipality, Thailand. In collecting the data, research instruments employed in this study included the survey, observation, interviews and focus group discussions. The collected data were then analyzed on a basis of Karl Marx's theory of historical materialism and capitalism. The results demonstrated that the ethnic Thai Chinese in Khon Kaen municipality have had a long history of over at least 100 years. In fact, they had already immigrated to Khon Kaen prior to the railroad construction, they have been living in Khon Kaen, since, 1791 and this current period has become their fourth century. The ethnic Thai Chinese residing in Khon Kaen municipality are not only craftsmen but also merchants who have served as a laborer, a distributor, a producer, an importer and an exporter. Considering that, overall, the ethnic Thai Chinese served to build an economic connection among Khon Kaen, Bangkok and the world. Thus, they have become business owners and loaners, thereby playing an important role in propelling Thailand's economy towards a trading economy or capitalism. Based on Karl Marx's theory of economic development with social relations of production in Khon Kaen municipality, the ethnic Thai Chinese have evolved from laborers to business owners or investors as owners of factors of production which is viewed as ruling class. Such evolution has in turn elevated the ethnic Thai Chinese to the economic elite in Khon Kaen municipality, thereby being able to regulate the economy in the municipal area. As has been stated earlier, it has reflected the elevation and transformation of roles of the ethnic Thai Chinese in Khon Kaen municipality.

Key words: Thai-Chinese, economic role, Khon Kaen municipality, evolution, production, economy

INTRODUCTION

The ethnic Thai-Chinese population is Thai people descending from the overseas Chinese who have been living in and had relationship with Thai society from the past until now. Based on their economic activities operated in Thailand, the ethnic Thai Chinese have boasted a long history, dated back to Sukhothai period, the Chinese immigrated to Thailand for their survival to escape deprivation as well as difficulties in China. At the end of the 19th and 20th century having migrated to Thailand, the Chinese mainly worked as an operator, namely a distributor, a manufacture and an importer/exporter. Their movement has contributed to driving Thailand's subsistence economy towards the trading economy.

In accordance with Angkinan (1971), the ethnic Thai Chinese have had a long history of over 1,000 years. In fact, historical evidence suggests that Chinese merchants had established commercial sources and harbors in Gulf of Thailand prior to Thai's settlement around Chao Phraya

river and Malay Peninsula in the 14th century A.D. The Chinese have had a relationship with people in Thailand from the age of Tawaravadee in the period of Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Thonburi and Rattanakosin until the present. Skinner (1957) mentioned that for the relationship between China and Thailand, during the Sukhothai period, the Yuan dynasty of China sent its diplomats to Thailand while King Ram Khamhaeng the great sent Thai diplomats to China and Chinese celadon craftsmen were brought in Thailand in 1300. In the Ayutthaya period, the Ming dynasty of China and the king of Ayutthaya usually sent their diplomats to visit each other's country. Afterwards, communication and commerce between China and Thailand had increased, so, Chinese merchants settled in certain parts of Thailand such as Pattani in the Southern region, Ayutthaya in the Chao Phraya river and seashore provinces. Loha-unchit and Siriprachai's study of the Chinese history indicated that in the Thonburi period, the Chinese played an increasing role in Thai society, for there had been considerable casualties of Thais during the war between Thailand and Myanmar, the

Chinese in Thailand became important and variously contributed to Thailand. At the beginning of the Rattanakosin period, the Chinese conducted commercial operations in various aspects of the economy. Skinner (1957) pointed out that at the beginning and in the middle of the reign of the Chakri dynasty, there was an increasing number of the Chinese entering Thailand, since, exclusive privileges were bestowed on Chinese merchants-they were able to enter and leave Thailand freely. From the beginning of King Rama III to the period before World War I, the number of the Chinese in Thailand continuously increased. Burutphat (1974) mentioned that in the reign of King Rama V, the figure and growth rate of the Chinese population in Thailand were higher than those of Thais. In the meantime, Namfon's study on the assimilation of the Chinese into Thai society Namfon (1983) indicated that Chinese's immigration to Thailand was a means of survival from deprivation and difficulties in China at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Additionally, given the availability of a steamship in Southern China bound for Thailand, a substantial number of the Chinese came to work in Thailand and Southeastern countries of Asia. Once they settled in Thailand, their perseverance together with an opportunity offer in Thai society enabled them to live there peacefully.

Findings from studies on the history of the ethnic Thai-Chinese indicated that they have had a long history and played an important role in Thailand's economy. With Thailand's openness to European countries, the signing of Bowring Treaty in 1855 enabled the country to be part of new international division of labor as Thailand intended to produce primary products including rice, rubber, teak and tin for capitalist countries and import industrial goods from those countries. During that period, the Chinese had contributed to producing those primary goods. Specifically, as for rice, they were middlemen and rice mill owners and they were rubber plantation owners. For tin products, they were laborers in the European's mine until they could operate mining businesses by themselves. In addition, they have been involved in a sawmill (Loha-Unchit and Siriprachai, 1983). Albeit subordinate to the European in the 19th century, the Chinese had a strong relationship with Thais while the European had a lesser role over time. This is consistent with Skinner's study on the Chinese society in Thailand in that the overseas Chinese and the ethnic Thai Chinese played a prominent role in the economic development, civilization and politics in Thailand. Thus, neglecting or excluding the overseas Chinese will result in an inaccurate understanding of Thai history.

These days, cultural assimilation of the Chinese has existed for a long time, so, the ethnic Thai Chinese have become inseparably part of Thai society as they are the key factor in promoting developments in Thailand. Hence,

the study on the ethnic Thai Chinese's economic roles would not only provide insights into the history of Thailand from past to present but also reflect the development of economy, society and culture in each period. More importantly, it would help shed some light on their roles in the economic development in Thailand, particularly Khon Kaen municipality which serves as the hub of development in the Isan region, the largest region in which the Thai Chinese business operators are main investors and the key factor in economic development in Khon Kaen. What's more, the study could reflect the development of society, economy and politics in Khon Kaen municipality. Hence, the present study sought to investigate the following issues: the history of the ethnic Thai Chinese in Khon Kaen municipality, their roles in economic development in Khon Kaen municipality from past to present.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data were collected from secondary sources through a review and study of related research, in addition, they were obtained from primary sources as in the samples in this study, thirty informants including experts, practitioners and involved persons, through a field study in Khon Kaen municipality, Thailand. Research instruments employed in this study to obtain the data were the survey, observation, interviews and focus group discussions. The collected data were then analyzed and interpreted based on Karl Marx's theory of historical materialism and capitalism to address the focal issues on the ethnic Thai Chinese's economic roles in Khon Kaen municipality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

History of the ethnic Thai Chinese in Khon Kaen municipality: Khon Kaen municipality is situated in Khon Kaen district, Khon Kaen province at 46 km². It is the third largest city of the Northeastern region and the tenth of Thailand. In 2017, its population was 120, 143. It was founded by Chao Pia Mueang Pan in 1797 and later elevated to town municipality on the 20th of August, 1935. Afterwards, the city was determined as the hub of development in the Isan region, since, general Sarit Thanarat's time.

The Chinese entering the Isan region has had a long history. In fact, Chonglin (2010) showed that 2,000 years ago in the 13th and 14th century and the reign of Tang dynasty, a horse caravan traveled through the road Chamagudao, also referred to as the Tea and Horse Caravan road, to sell tea leaves and other Chinese goods every year in Luang Prabang, Lanna Kingdom, Kingdom of Vietnam and Cambodia, however, they did not settle in Khon Kaen yet, for commutation was inconvenient, not to

mention Khon Kaen's instability. In the meantime, Theerasasawat (2008) revealed that after 1855, King Rama IV signed the Bowring Treaty with England. That opened Thailand to free trade and enabled the economic growth in the country and Khon Kaen, so, the Chinese commuted to Khon Kaen to conduct businesses by a cart, an elephant, a ship or a raft. Despite that, the Isan region's economy did not improve because transportation between the Isan and central region was still inconvenient as evidenced in the time-consuming and hazardous means of transport, namely a cart an elephant, a ship or a raft. In 1981, King Rama V launched a railway construction project in the Isan region with the political crises in China which pressured the Chinese to seek fortune across countries, many of the Chinese became railway construction laborers and settled along the railways. In 1933 with the opening of Khon Kaen railway station, the commutation became more convenient, so an increasing number of the Chinese or the ethnic Thai Chinese settled in Khon Kaen.

A field study and interviews with the senior ethnic Thai Chinese and leaders of Chinese organizations showed that the Chinese immigrants to Khon Kaen had a long history of over 100 years at least. Prior to the availability of the first railway in the Isan region, the Chinese had already settled down in Khon Kaen. Moreover, the first-generation Chinese in Khon Kaen were the Tie Chiu-speaking Chinese who intended to expand their businesses which had already operated in Bangkok, they rode a cart to conduct businesses in Khon Kaen. To exemplify, the owner of Thawi Saeng Thai Rice Mill operated in Khon Kaen to deliver rice to central companies in Bangkok. What's more, the first-generation Chinese operated Hongsaeng Thai Rice Mill near the railway. This is akin to Theerasasawat (2008) in that the Chinese operated four rice mills near the railway, namely Khao Gao Rice Mill, Bangkok Rice Mill Company Limited, Klang Rice Mill and Hongsaeng Thai Rice Mill. Moreover, the first generation of the Chinese established businesses around Khon Kaen, e.g., Teo Hong grocery store at the corner or the intersection of Lang Chuan Road (currently referred to as Na Mueang Road), Tang Yee Lee grocery store around the corner of Sri Nuan Road (Lang Mueang Road), Lee Ting Hua grocery store adjacent to Wat Sri Chan the Buddhist temple and Guang Yu Tai hotel located on Na Chuang road (Klang Mueang Road).

When train services were available in Nakhon Ratchasima, the Isan region's economy changed radically. That is there were a substantial number of the Chinese coming to Nakhon Ratchasima and settling around the railway. Consequently, that led the province to become the distribution hub of the Isan region. From 1900-1933, the Thai government launched the Nakhon

Ratchasima-Khon Kaen railway project, thus, resulting in a rapid increase of the Chinese moving to Khon Kaen.

Interviews and historical information showed that between 1900 and 1933, the number of the Chinese arriving in Khon Kaen increased and they were Tie Chiu speakers, just as the first generation was. That phenomenon occurred because of convenient commutation and transportation, Chinese merchants in Bangkok, thus, expanded their business operations to Nakhon Ratchasima and Khon Kaen. The Chinese's stores sold a variety of products such as clothes, coal oil, beverages and miscellaneous appliances. After finishing the railway construction labor, the Chinese workers started agricultural businesses, so, a variety of products were offered in Khon Kaen. In the meantime, those stores purchased agricultural plants from villagers and distributed them to Bangkok, it helped expand Isan exports. During those periods, the Chinese railway construction workers had settled in Khon Kaen and started small businesses which in turn promoted commerce between cities and localities.

Interviews with Mr. Burapha Sereeyothin, Mr. Prayoon Angsan, Mr. Prakorn Leesirikul and Mr. Sanga Sriprasert revealed that between 1933 and 1961, there was an influx of the Chinese settling in Khon Kaen which was the important moment to establish the economic base of the Chinese in Khon Kaen. The Chinese in Khon Kaen during those periods can be classified into two groups, namely the Chinese merchants expanding their businesses to Khon Kaen and the Chinese immigrants reuniting with their families in Khon Kaen. Moreover, there were three routes they used to commute to Khon Kaen as follows:

- Commuting from Bangkok past Nakhon Ratchasima to Khon Kaen
- Emigrating from other cities and provinces to Khon Kaen
- Traveling to Khon Kaen from Shantou, Guangdong, past Guangxi, Vietnam, Lao, Surin and Ban Phai

Since, 1961, there has been an increase of the ethnic Thai Chinese as an operator and administrator arriving in Khon Kaen. The results demonstrated that those moving to Khon Kaen in this period were Chinese descendants or the second or third generation of their families. The commutation to Khon Kaen was more convenient because there were various means of transportation as in a train and vehicle, not to mention improved roads.

Based on the findings from a field study, most of the ethnic Thai Chinese in Khon Kaen emigrated from Shantou, Tie Chiu and Chenghai of Guangdong, China. In accordance with their dialects, there were five dialects spoken among the ethnic Thai Chinese: Tie Chiu, Hakka, Hainanese, Cantonese and Hokkien. Evidently, the Tie

Chiu speakers had the highest population in Khon Kaen accounting for 85%, followed by Hakka representing 10% and the rest were Hainanese, Cantonese and Hokkien, constituting 5%. Their ancestors constantly settled down in Khon Kaen. In fact, the ethnic Thai Chinese having immigrated to Khon Kaen can be categorized into four generations as follows: the first generation between 1797 and 1900, the second generation between 1900 and 1933, the third generation between 1933 and 1961, the fourth from 1933 to the present. The ethnic Thai Chinese in Khon Kaen municipality have adjusted their lives and assimilated with the Thai society, so, it is difficult to distinguish them from Thais. Simultaneously, the ethnic Thai Chinese in Khon Kaen have formed an association such as Khon Kaen Library Association (Chinese Culture) to contribute to the society. In the present, Chinese associations in Khon Kaen have 24 member organizations such as Huakhiew Wittayalai School, the Khon Kaen Chamber of Commerce, the Jit Kusol Foundation, Pueng Thao Kong Ma Shrine and the Federation of Thai Industries, Khon Kaen, to mention but a few.

The ethnic Thai Chinese's roles in economy of Khon Kaen municipality: In consideration of the interviews with the senior Thai Chinese and leaders of the Thai Chinese community in Khon Kaen municipality such as Mr. Supoj Khosawisut, Mrs. Niramol Sudsong, Mr. Yongyut Kongpatimakorn, Mr. Mit Udomwongkul, Burapha Sereeyothin and Mr. Sanga Sriprasert, the ethnic Thai Chinese served every role in the economy of Khon Kaen as a laborer, a middleman, a producer and an importer or exporter. All of their roles varied across periods and circumstances of the province. Initially, their role was to purchase forest products from villagers and distribute those to huge cities such as Nakhon Ratchasima or Bangkok and it also involved bringing in products from those cities into Khon Kaen, however, a choice of products was not various yet. After that period, their operation remained unchanged but they offered a variety of products, simply speaking, given the rising Chinese population in Khon Kaen, types of businesses became more varied and the Chinese served a role as a producer, apart from a middleman. In later periods, they would be a dealer selling products with high prices imported from other nations, i.e., a motorbike, a vehicle, appliances and electronic devices. Meanwhile, they produced and exported goods to other countries such as wholegrain rice, fishing nets, electronic appliances and industrial goods. Broadly speaking, businesses in Khon Kaen were in the form of barter and could be characterized as subsistent, however, the emergence of the ethnic Thai Chinese's economic roles in Khon Kaen enabled its economy to be transformed from self-reliance to capitalism.

The ethnic Thai Chinese in Khon Kaen's economic roles can be categorized based on events affecting the city's economy into four phases as follows:

The first phase between 1797 and 1900 involved Thailand's signing of the Bowring treaty, its openness to free trade, its Northeastern line railway construction and opening of a railway line from Bangkok to Nakhon Ratchasima.

The second phase between 1900 and 1933 related with the availability of the Bangkok-Nakhon Ratchasima railway service, the construction of Nakhon Ratchasima-Khon Kaen railway, the Chinese immigration's to Khon Kaen to reunite with the first generation owing to floods and drought in Shantou, China and the provision of the railway service to Nakhon Ratchasima.

The third phase between 1933 and 1961 involved the availability of Khon Kaen train station and the convenient commutation to Khon Kaen. The fourth phase between 1961 and the present involved the government of general Sarit Thanarat's implementation of National Economic Development Plan No. 1 which specified Khon Kaen as the hub of economy, politics and education of the Northeastern region.

The findings demonstrated that the Chinese's economic roles varied across circumstances. Between 1797 and 1900, the Chinese merchants operated miscellaneous stores and rice mills; those with influential roles as a distributor and producer in Khon Kaen during those years were, for example, the owners of Hongsaeng Thai rice, Thawi Saeng Thai Rice Mill and Teo Hong grocery store. Then, from 1900-1933, there were two groups of the Chinese influencing the economy, namely the Chinese merchants expanding their businesses and the Chinese railway construction laborers. During then, they immigrated to Khon Kaen because of political crises in China, the economic transformation of Thailand from subsistence to capitalism and Nakhon Ratchasima-Khon Kaen railway construction which resulted in a need for operators and railroad construction laborers, the persons with important roles as a distributor, a producer, an exporter and a laborer were Khosawisut the owner of Kosa and Yongyut the owner of Kim Hong. Between 1933 and 1961 as a consequence of World War II, there were considerable needs for certain types of merchandise, e.g., wholegrain rice, farm plants and clothes while inventory turnover and shipping were needed, so, the Chinese transformed themselves to be a capitalist, made various types of investments and promoted the production and export businesses, the examples of the influential persons were the owners of Khon Kaen Fishing Net, Kowyooah group, Charoen Thani Khon Kaen Hotel, V. Sriprasert Logistics Company, Fairy Plaza and Chai Mongkhon Rice Mill. Subsequently in 1961, General Sarit Thanarat implemented the development plan for the Isan region through road construction and any other types of construction which led to the development of automotive industries, automotive parts industries and construction businesses, simultaneously, the free trade policy was implemented while farm products were promoted to

economic field crops. That led to a variety of the Chinese investments, e.g., rotating savings businesses and manufacture of rice and farm exports, they also purchased and owned some properties which were instrumental to production. They were able to transform themselves from a laborer to an employer with a power to regulate Khon Kaen's economy. The persons with such influences were Khemchat Somjaiwong the owner of Rachawadee Resort and Hotel and Yongkiat Laovirojjanakul the owner of Fish Sauce Factory (Tip Brand) and Bualuang Restaurant.

Karl Marx's theory of historical materialism and capitalism derived from Hegel's concept of dialectics stated that "social existence determines consciousness"; that is how one acts is entirely dependent on positions, places and time or social existence is superior to one's original characters. Simply speaking, human nature is to adapt to environments or circumstances, so, one cannot work in the same state as the others do instead, one's work is entirely driven by his/her subjectivity. It can be seen that work is deemed as a social activity, so, its conditions are characterized by the society and change over time. As discussed above, this theory clearly defined the ethnic Thai Chinese's economic roles in Khon Kaen as not self-determined but rather directed by social contexts of Khon Kaen municipality to ensure compatibility with the society.

Through the lens of Karl Marx's theory of historical materialism and capitalism, it can be pointed out that both material such as a property, natural resources and technologies instrumental to object production and social relations of production in which individuals are engrossed are joined to form a type of production in one society. Hence, a type of production may vary throughout time. In looking into social relations of production, Marx not only took into account individual relationship but also a group's relation or the so-called class. He defined "the class" through not only using subjective explanations but also such objective material conditions as access to natural resources.

Karl Marx's theory of social relations of production clearly defined the ethnic Thai Chinese's roles in the economic development of Khon Kaen municipality. In fact, Marx viewed that labor was the fundamental human resource when labor is employed in production and the production ends, the ownership of the products falls into the hands of the capitalists. Thus, laborer's loss of ownership can cause alienation of labor and a great loss. This state would in turn lead to commodity fetishism, in this state, one views that what matters is the product he/she produces, so, materials or items become of paramount importance instead of human beings. As a result, people would recognize themselves only through their relation with properties or items in their possession. Marx further pointed that alienation of labor is the unique

trait of capitalism, thus, not mainly resulting from the market alone. Capitalist mode of production is developed when labor is transformed into commodities, simply speaking when farmers are free to their labor power or encounter a crisis state forcing such an action owing to unpossession of properties and production equipment, they are willing to sell that power. Once they accept remuneration for any work through sale of labor or skills not the products that remuneration can help improve their survival. Based on the discussion above, the individuals selling their labor power for survival are "proletariat" whereas those purchasing labor power are usually in possession of properties and technologies or simply "capitalists" or "bourgeois".

The study found that in capitalism, social relations of production consisted of properties, natural resources and technologies deemed vital to production of material goods. Therefore, the ethnic Thai Chinese served the role as a middleman and laborer that was considered as the labor power the most fundamental human resource.

The analysis of the ethnic Thai Chinese' economic roles in Khon Kaen was based on Karl Marx's theory of historical materialism and capitalism which viewed that one's work is not entirely governed by subjectivity but work is a social activity and its conditions are regulated by the society and change over periods and that alienation of labor is the unique attribute of capitalism, not solely caused by the market. As for Thailand or Khon Kaen in as much as the Thai government introduced capitalism, capitalist production emerged and was developed in the nation or city when labor was transformed into commodities. That is farmers with freedom to sell their labor power or in a crisis state such as a lack of properties and production tools were willing to sell that power. Once they accepted remuneration for any labor work sold that remuneration can help ensure their survival. On the other hand, those purchasing labor power who are usually in possession of properties and technologies were a governor or official. Notwithstanding that, Karl Marx's theory of historical materialism and capitalism viewed that human beings and social lives are a particular type of material, so, they can change. In fact, given that human beings in each period are engaged in production activities, social relations of production, thus, emerge as a basis of economy in the society which serves to determine the social state. With that in mind, the transformation of the ethnic Thai Chinese's roles according to circumstances of Khon Kaen can be seen as the change of social relations of production in the Thai society or Khon Kaen under capitalism. Simply put, the Chinese served the role as the promoter of capitalism in Khon Kaen and the Isan region.

On account of the phenomena of transformation of the ethnic Thai Chinese's economic roles in Khon Kaen, it can be pointed out that their emergent transformation referred to the change of ownership of factors of

production in Thai society where the relations of production between individuals in Thailand's economy are clear and systematic. In compliance with Karl Marx's theory of production forces and relations of production, the ethnic Thai Chinese's roles can be compartmentalized into four phases as follows:

The ethnic Thai Chinese's economic roles in Khon Kaen between 1797 and 1900: Khon Kaen adopted the traditional governing system Aryhasee in which the person with the most authority or power is a governor. Afterwards, its governing system was then changed to the Tesapibal system. Also, the city's economic state was subsistence economy or capitation tax collection, so, the localities were usually engaged in agriculture and collected forest goods for their survival and tax payment. In 1855, the Bowring Treaty affected Thailand's economy, given that it led to the growth and expansion of businesses, the structure of production was transformed from subsistence to trading economy. Apparently, the nation's economy entered into capitalism which allowed the production in the agricultural sector to expand, some of Thais conducted businesses, 2-3 months per year, during the seasonal break of agriculture but the sales volume was extremely small whereas the original inhabitants were a governor and engaged in agriculture. The Chinese immigrants were the first generation to enter the trading economy. It can be stated that during these years, the production sector was regulated by the localities while commerce propelled by the Thai government's policy was managed and burdened by the Chinese. In brief, the ethnic Thai Chinese's economic role was a middleman or a laborer.

The ethnic Thai Chinese's economic roles in Khon Kaen between 1900 and 1933: From 1900-1933, the Chinese in Khon Kaen operated a variety of businesses and were the railway construction workers and employees in stores. In the meantime, those with adequate budgets operated miscellaneous stores with a wide range of products, in addition, the Chinese merchants would purchase farm plants and forest goods from the villagers and distribute those to Bangkok. In respect of production, they became an operator or business owner. In addition, to inherit rice mill, sawmill and hotel businesses, the Chinese started to play an important role in food, beverage and public health services. As has been discussed, the Chinese clearly served the more prominent role in Khon Kaen's economy as a middleman and laborer.

The ethnic Thai Chinese's economic roles in Khon Kaen between 1933 and 1961: During 1933 and 1961 with the availability of the train services in Khon Kaen

and better commutation, the number of the Chinese or ethnic Thai Chinese settling in Khon Kaen rose rapidly, thereby promoting business growth in Khon Kaen. While the original inhabitants were a governor and worked in agriculture, a number of the Chinese served as a laborer, a construction worker and an employee for their own survival. Basically, speaking, the Chinese usually opened miscellaneous stores, collected and saved the budgets and then sought a window of opportunities to expand their businesses. Throughout years of their business and accumulation of wealth, the Chinese or the ethnic Thai Chinese operated rice mills and saw mills, purchased forest products, opened theatres, opium factories and hotels by renting or purchasing a property. In these periods, their roles changed as a result of economic and social states in Thailand and Khon Kaen that is they transformed the roles from a laborer to a governor of production factors including a property, so, they were able to regulate the economic system in Khon Kaen and the Isan region. Thus, it can be pointed that their roles were shifted to be a capitalist or owner of emerging production factors, thus, serving as the production power of Thai society.

The ethnic Thai Chinese's economic roles in Khon Kaen from 1961 to present: In 1961, the number of the Chinese operators remarkably grew due to General Sarit Thanarat's implementation of development plan for the Isan region by shifting the focus to infrastructure development such as road, electricity, waterworks and paved roads, together with road construction and any other types of construction. Farm products were also promoted to economic field crops for distribution and export while the free trade policy was endorsed. With those developments in Thai society, the Chinese operators attempted to adjust and expand their businesses in sync with the changes to support Thailand's economic policy. That led to the rapid growth of Khon Kaen's economy. The Chinese during these periods were well-educated and mostly the Chinese descendants or the second or third generation of their families. The ethnic Thai Chinese were engaged in a variety of economic activities or operations, e.g., sale of goods, production, export or import businesses which contributed to the economic development in the city. What's more, it was apparent that their business operation was changed from sale of miscellaneous goods to that of specific products. During these periods, the ethnic Thai Chinese transformed their roles from a middleman to a producer an exporter and an importer, so, their roles had an influence over Khon Kaen municipality's economy.

The ethnic Thai Chinese in Khon Kaen municipality's roles have been transformed from a laborer and a middleman to a property owner, a business operator

and even a capitalist which has enabled their ability to regulate the city's economy. Broadly speaking, they have become the promoter of capitalist economy in Khon Kaen. According to Karl Marx's view on capital accumulation, the establishment of capitalist mode of production in economics shall comply with two requirements as follows: there shall be a substantial number of laborers. They may have physical freedom; despite that, without factors of production and basic necessities of life, they have to sell their labor power for their own survival in the society, only a small number of those laborers are in possession of monetary wealth accumulation, once they have already seized or possessed a substantial amount of monetary wealth, they will serve as a capitalist and employ a number of laborers and operate capitalist production as well as their own businesses. These two conditions complement each other, so, both conditions are requisite.

Concerning capitalist production and the evolution of capitalism, two conditions mentioned earlier are primarily dependent on primitive accumulation and formed into achievement. On account of primitive accumulation periods, a small or high number of producers lose factors of production and become laborers, on the other hand, a handful of the minority class possesses factors of production and later transforms them into the capital. According to Karl Marx, these two periods in which a small number of producers are deprived of factors of production and the minority possess wealth and transform it into the budget are labeled as primitive accumulation, for the so-called primitive accumulation occurs before capitalist production is established. In addition, it is unlike any other types of capitalism accumulation, technically speaking, capitalism accumulation refers to the period in which economic relations of capitalism are formed and capitalists transform surplus values deprived from laborers to the capital. Thus, primitive accumulation is not a result of capitalist production but rather a starting point. Marx viewed that depriving farmers of a property is a fundamental element of the period in which producers lose factors of production while transformation into the minority or laborers is the basic of the primitive accumulation period.

In Khon Kaen, the ethnic Thai Chinese had performed primitive accumulation by means of labor, since, their arrival in Khon Kaen. Once they had the right to own the property, they purchased and accumulated the properties from Thai people. In particular, between 1933 and 1961, given the availability of the train services in Khon Kaen, the ethnic Thai Chinese had various roles as an operator and a laborer which allowed the city's economy to grow dramatically. Eventually, they accumulated a considerable amount of the capital-primitive capital, so, to speak.

Karl Marx's theory of production forces and relations of production provided clear insights into the history of

the ethnic Thai Chinese's economic roles in Khon Kaen municipality from past to present. At the beginning of their arrival in Khon Kaen, the Chinese had performed a variety of professions such as a construction laborer or a merchant with business expertise. Those with the business expertise and experience started purchasing farm products, local products and forest goods when sailing to other cities or regions, in the meantime, they would import goods from other nations such as China or European countries and sell them to farmers. The Chinese's hub of trade was established in Bangkok and cities of other provinces. Their roles in business evolved throughout time. In 1855, King Mongkut (Rama IV) signed the Bowring Treaty to open Thailand to free trade with West World, thus, enabling the nation to enter international trade. Nevertheless, the European nationalities were not familiar or widely aware of Thailand's existence in the business world. Thus, the Chinese served as a bridge to business between the European and the Kingdom of Thailand including conduct of business or trade with the senior nobility. With their extensive expertise and accumulated capital throughout time, the Chinese's roles were extended from an importer to a distributor, they also became the owners of rice mills, rubber plantation and sawmills. Apart from those merchants expanding businesses in Khon Kaen, most of the Chinese came to Khon Kaen empty-handed and worked as a railway or road construction laborer and a farmer which were regarded as laborers in production relations. Thus, the Chinese can be viewed as the promoter of trading economy in Thailand. Later having accumulated the capital, the Chinese made some investments by operating small businesses and expanding them later, moreover, they started to purchase properties, built a factory and supported their descendant's education. Finally, they have become the owner of factors of production, in other words, they are able to regulate the economy or the economic elite in Khon Kaen municipality.

CONCLUSION

As has been mentioned earlier, the ethnic Thai Chinese in Khon Kaen municipality have had a long history of over 100 years from 1791 to present. In actuality, the generations of the Chinese arriving in Khon Kaen can be divided into four generations as follows: the first generation (1797-1900), the second (1900-1933), the third generation (1933-1961) and the fourth generation (1961-present). The ethnic Thai Chinese immigrating to Khon Kaen were not only a laborer but also a merchant. In fact, the first generation in Khon Kaen was a merchant whose commercial sources were located in Bangkok, it can be implied that they were not ordinary persons but rather financially secure and invested that budget into operating businesses in Khon Kaen. The ethnic Thai

Chinese served the role as a laborer and an importer of industrial goods from other nations sold to farmers, they purchased local products, forest products and rice from the farmers as well. Hence, they served to bridge the economy among Khon Kaen, Bangkok and the globe. Since the opening of trade in 1855, their roles as a middleman became more outstanding that is they brought in other types of products to provide consumers with a wide range of products, purchased farm products as well as forest goods and distributed them to Bangkok and other nations. Through this type of commerce, the Chinese could generate massive profits. After a while having accumulated the budget, some of the Chinese merchants transformed themselves to a business owner and loaner. Consequently, they have gained power to propel Thailand's subsistence economy towards trading economy or capitalism. Through the lens of Karl Marx's theory of social relations of production, the ethnic Thai Chinese's roles have evolved from a laborer to a business owner or capitalist, briefly speaking, they have transformed themselves to the owner of factors of production which is deemed as the ruling class. Thus, it can be stated that the ethnic Thai Chinese are the economic elite in Khon Kaen municipality.

However, the ethnic Thai Chinese's economic roles in Thailand and Khon Kaen municipality have been assimilated and rooted in Thai society for a very long time, so, it can be difficult to portray and fit their roles in one piece of article in short. In brief, the ethnic Thai Chinese are a monopoly in Khon Kaen's economy. Their

roles have promoted the economic growth in the province for centuries. What's more, it is likely that their roles will become more paramount, given that the ethnic Thai Chinese operators in Khon Kaen are playing a crucial role in all sectors, e.g., industry, agriculture and services and are capable of regulating the economy in Khon Kaen.

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