

From Theory to Policy to Practice: Exploring Thailand's Current Self-Reliance Policy and Its Socioeconomic Implications

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Abstract

This article applies Dependency Theory to analyse Thailand's reliance on core countries in the capitalist system and its effects on national development policy as reflected in the National Economic and Social Development Plans (NESDPs). A qualitative approach was employed. The study analysed the 8th-13th NESDPs and the 20-Year National Strategy, and conducted fieldwork in the Kokmueng Community in Songkhla Province. Self-reliance policies have influenced this community since the 8th NESDP. Data were collected through participant and non-participant observations and semi-structured interviews with nine key informants selected through snowball and purposive sampling.

The findings show that after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the 8th and 9th NESDPs promoted self-reliance as a response to the crisis. The 10th to 12th NESDPs embedded self-reliance into national consciousness and community empowerment. The case of Kokmueng demonstrates the continuing influence of these earlier policies, with the community developing its own strategies to respond to national agendas, highlighting dynamic state-community relations. The 13th NESDP reframed self-reliance within

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an entrepreneurial framework, marking a shift from seeing it as an end to using it as a tool for building competitive grassroots economies. The study also traces the policy shifts that reflect the impact of global political-economic structures on domestic policy and identifies key turning points from self-reliance-focused frameworks to entrepreneurial-led development.

Keywords: Dependency Theory, Self-Reliance, Community Development, Entrepreneurship, National Economic and Social Development Plans, NESDPs

จากทฤษฎีสู่นโยบายและการปฏิบัติ: สำรวจนโยบาย การพัฒนาองค์กรประเทศไทยในปัจจุบัน และนัยทางเศรษฐกิจสังคม

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ใช้กรอบทฤษฎีการพึ่งพา (Dependency Theory) เพื่อวิเคราะห์การพึ่งพาของประเทศไทยต่อประเทศแคนadas ในระบบทุนนิยม และผลกระทบต่อการกำหนดนโยบายการพัฒนาประเทศในแผนพัฒนาเศรษฐกิจและสังคมแห่งชาติ งานวิจัยนี้ใช้ระเบียบวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ โดยผสานการวิเคราะห์แผนพัฒนาฯ ฉบับที่ 8 ถึง 13 และยุทธศาสตร์ชาติ 20 ปี ร่วมกับการทำางานภาคสนามในชุมชนโดยเมืองภายในจังหวัดสงขลา ซึ่งถือเป็นชุมชนหนึ่งในประเทศไทยที่ได้รับอิทธิพลจากแผนพัฒนาฯ ที่เน้นการพึ่งพาตนเอง ผู้วิจัยเก็บข้อมูลผ่านการสังเกตแบบมีส่วนร่วมและไม่มีส่วนร่วม และการสัมภาษณ์กับผู้ให้ข้อมูลสำคัญ 9 คนที่คัดเลือกด้วยวิธีอ้างอิงด้วยบคคลและการเลือกแบบเจาะจง

ผลการวิจัยชี้ว่า นับตั้งแต่ภายหลังวิกฤตเศรษฐกิจปี 2540 ปรากฏให้เห็นการเปลี่ยนแปลงนโยบายการพัฒนาประเทศที่สำคัญ แผนพัฒนาฯ ฉบับที่ 8 และ 9 ส่งเสริมการพัฒนาองค์กรผลกระทบจากวิกฤตเศรษฐกิจ 2540 เมื่อผ่านพ้นวิกฤตฯ แผนพัฒนาฯ ฉบับที่ 10 ถึง 12 เริ่มบ่มเพาะแนวคิดการพัฒนาองค์กร ในการดับจิตสำนึกและการเสริมพลังชุมชน กรณีชุมชนโภคเมืองแสดงให้เห็นถึงอิทธิพลที่ยังคงอยู่ของนโยบายพัฒนาองค์กร ซึ่งชุมชนสร้างกลยุทธ์ขึ้นมาเพื่อตอบสนองนโยบายระดับชาติ ตอกย้ำความสัมพันธ์เชิงพลวัตระหว่างรัฐกับชุมชน ปัจจุบัน แผนพัฒนาฯ ฉบับที่ 13 ปรับกรอบการพัฒนาองค์กร

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ให้อยู่ในวาระการพัฒนาผ่านผู้ประกอบการ สะท้อนการเปลี่ยนจากการมองการพัฒนาเป็นเป้าหมาย สู่การใช้เป็นเครื่องมือสร้างเศรษฐกิจฐานรากที่แข็งขันได้ งานวิจัยนี้ยังชี้ให้เห็นเส้นทางการเปลี่ยนแปลงนโยบายการพัฒนาที่สะท้อนอิทธิพลของโครงสร้างการเมืองเศรษฐกิจโลกต่อการกำหนดนโยบายฯ ภายใต้ในประเทศ และแสดงให้เห็นจุดเปลี่ยนสำคัญภายใต้แผนพัฒนาฯ จากกรอบการพัฒนาที่เน้นการพัฒนาเป้าหมายไปสู่การพัฒนาเชิงผู้ประกอบการ

คำสำคัญ : ทฤษฎีพัฒนา การพัฒนาชุมชน การเป็นผู้ประกอบการ แผนพัฒนาเศรษฐกิจ และสังคมแห่งชาติ

1. Introduction

As a scholar in Development Studies, it is imperative to understand the concept of self-reliance in global development strategies. In the context of this paper, self-reliance refers to a strategy that aims to reduce dependency on external resources by promoting the use of a country's resources. This strategy emerged as a significant approach during the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in developing and less-developed countries, and this era was marked by significant global political and economic shifts. Theorists such as Andre Gunder Frank (1967), Samir Amin (1976), and Quijano (2000) influenced self-reliance through their critiques of Dependency Theory. Their analyses of the state of dependency, wherein Latin American nations leaned towards core capitalist countries in terms of political economy, were instrumental in shaping the concept. Following Johan Galtung (1980), self-reliance extends to which developing and less-developed countries delink themselves from the centre-periphery formation. This self-reliance is deemed a tangible fight towards the framework of centre-periphery formation, which leads to long-term structural exploitations between the core capitalist and peripheral nations (Galtung, 1980).

The underdevelopment of certain nations results from asymmetric relations in terms of political economy. This situation often hinders less-developed countries from achieving wealth and stability. In response, scholars such as Samir Amin (1976) and Quijano (2000) have proposed strategies for less-developed countries. These strategies advocate for a delinking, a process of disengaging, or breaking away from established knowledge systems and ways of thinking and understanding the world that underpin capitalist-based development and colonial formations. Delinking, in this context, refers to a strategic shift away from the traditional systems of knowledge and power that serve to perpetuate the hegemony of core capitalist nations. It involves challenging the perceived dichotomy between developed and less-developed countries and redefining their relationships. In essence, delinking is about breaking free from the intellectual and economic control of core capitalist nations and redefining the development path on one's terms. This concept of delinking is crucial to understanding the shift towards self-reliance and the potential for developing countries to assert their independence within the global economy. Such knowledge systems have never successfully distributed equality of interest between these two types of nations. Thus, Mingolo (2007) suggests that we need to transform our development paradigm so that we do not need to depend upon the core capitalist nations.

Since 1970, the concept of delinking has transformed self-reliance into a new development paradigm in less-developed countries. This significant shift has not only moved self-reliance from the international level of nations to the consciousness level of individuals but also underscored the pivotal role of these individuals in driving the self-reliance paradigm. By “consciousness level of individuals,” we mean that individuals, and not solely governments or institutions, have become aware of and actively participate in the self-reliance paradigm through their actions and decisions, highlighting their importance and power in this global strategy. This shift empowers individuals, inspiring us with their ability to make a difference in the global development landscape.

Thailand’s NESDPs have served as a beacon of hope. After the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, in what amounted to a significant turning point in Thailand’s economic history, plans 8 to 13 shifted the focus towards self-reliance at a global level. Many local communities began to rely on themselves economically, leading to improved well-being based on their respective socioeconomic contexts. This story from Thailand is a testament to the potential of self-reliance in bringing about positive change. Seeing how this strategy can improve well-being inspires hope and optimism in continuing to explore this approach.

From global theory to the Thai State’s policies, Thailand has experienced dynamic changes at both policy and community practice levels. This research paper will discuss the classical critique of Dependency and World System Theories towards the capitalist-based development of liberalist nations and the potential for self-reliance to transform these dynamics. Additionally, this paper will preview delinking the level of economic structures and knowledge about liberalist development, resulting in an alternative approach towards self-reliance in constructing tangible self-reliance communities. The case of the Kokmueng Community in Thailand—a community that has successfully implemented self-reliance strategies and achieved significant economic and social progress—will be showcased as a fitting legacy of the Thai State’s self-reliance policies.

The Kokmueng Community, located in Songkhla Province, is a sufficiency and self-reliance community. It applied the knowledge and practice of the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy (PSE) to community development and thereby strengthened itself, leading to social reciprocity and community networks. The Kokmueng Community learned to differentiate between local wisdom and culture, on the one hand, and modern global forces on the other.

Ultimately, the Development Studies community has accepted it as one of the best examples of a PSE and self-reliance community, as evidenced by several awards, including those for being a provincial PSE model, a dream community, possessing an efficient Phuuyaibaan (village head) who effectively conserved natural resources, and the Green Glob Award. These awards were the tangible outcomes of putting PSE and self-reliance knowledge into practice. This community's success serves as a testament to the potential of self-reliance.

This paper will examine Thai terms like “puengpa,” which translates to “being dependent” in English, as espoused in the 8th-13th Thai NESDPs. The term “puengpa” is significant in the context of self-reliance, as it reflects the profound shift in Thailand's development paradigm towards independence and self-sufficiency, a journey that this paper aims to explore in depth.

Finally, this study contributes to development theory by contextualising classical Dependency and World System Theories within a contemporary Thai policy landscape. By tracing how self-reliance has evolved across NESDPs from 1997 to 2027, the study demonstrates the dynamic nature of these global theoretical frameworks. They are not static critiques, but living frameworks that help us understand policy adjustment, community resilience, and structural shifts in semi-peripheral states.

2. Research objectives

1. To discuss neo-Marxist theoretical critiques towards capital-oriented development and address delinking from core-periphery formation.
2. To point out the reason for the emergence of tangible self-reliance communities in Thailand where there is a legacy of delinking.
3. To observe the dynamic change of the value of self-reliance in Thailand's 8th-13th NESDPs.

3. Literature review

3.1 *Self-reliance in the global context as viewed through the lens of neo-Marxism*

Examining the value of self-reliance is impossible without a thorough understanding of Dependency Theory. This theory has critiqued capitalist-liberalist development and pointed out the asymmetric relationships arising between developed, developing, and

less-developed nations. Moreover, it presented that such development through a dependency upon Eurocentric knowledge and experiences of colonisation has adopted the disguise of colonial reinvigoration. These critiques have been important and opened opportunities for the debate of alternative approaches to development in developing and less-developing countries. Understanding these critiques is crucial for a well-informed perspective on self-reliance, making us feel knowledgeable and well-equipped to discuss this topic.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the 19th century philosopher, wrote a thesis on the philosophy of self-reliance. His writings addressed the freedom and responsibility of the individual, reflecting the indispensability of the individual's power in both thinking and acting. This idea was then developed, incarnating tangible self-reliance. O'Dwyer (2012) concluded that Emerson's notion of self-reliance is a sustainable, self-directing, independent-thinking, courageous, and enthusiastic vista through which to experience life's journey.

Andre Gunder Frank (1967) exemplified the growing dependency on core capitalist countries, noting that core capitalist countries pursued strong protectionist trade policies while developing themselves, while less-developed countries depended on their exports to those core countries. It was deemed unfair for the latter countries to develop their export-based industrialisation. Frank (1967) and Gardner & Lewis (1996) stated that these asymmetrical relations would never permit those countries to grow into developed countries.

Another theory, the World System, theorised by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), similarly depicts the unfair alignment of those countries. He segmented nations into three kinds, specifically: core capitalist countries, which are the economically and politically dominant nations; semi-peripheral countries, which are intermediate nations that exploit surplus from periphery countries and feed core capitalist countries various resources; and peripheral countries, which are those economically and politically subordinate nations that the other two categories exploit. These countries have connected obligations so that those latter countries would feed core capitalist countries various resources. The role of semi-peripheral countries was that of middle people, exploiting surplus from peripheral countries (Gardner & Lewis, 1996; Wallerstein, 1974).

All-in-all, these critiques of neo-Marxist theorists have led to the development of values of self-reliance. This knowledge has become an alternative perspective in Development Studies, particularly in Thailand, where it has been integrated into Development Studies programmes. As a result, it has prompted a re-evaluation of previously overlooked developmental approaches, including local community wisdom. The significant role of community initiatives in promoting self-reliance is not to be underestimated. Understanding these critiques is crucial for a well-informed perspective on self-reliance, making us feel knowledgeable and well-prepared to discuss this topic.

3.2 Self-Reliance from Thailand's Contextual View in Relation to the 8th-12th NESDPs

The term “puengpatonaeng” (self-reliance), which means self-reliance in English, has appeared frequently since the 8th NESDP (1997-2001). Although the 5th NESDP also used this concept to strengthen rural communities, it had different contexts and reasoning for this crisis-driven self-reliance. The 5th NESDP (1982-1986) aims explicitly to prioritise poverty and the well-being of the poor (Rigg, 2019). Emphasising concepts like decentralisation, self-help, participation, and self-reliance, it represents a shift in development thinking. Among these new approaches are the decentralisation of planning and the encouragement of local initiatives (Rigg, 1991). Notably, a primary objective of the plan is to steer the nation towards becoming a semi-industrialised country with fiscal and economic stability (Yothasmutr, 2008).

3.2.1 Era 1 (1997-2006): Crisis-Driven Self-Reliance - 8th and 9th NESDPs

The context for formulating the 8th NESDP (1997-2001) was the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis (AFC), which significantly impacted Thailand's socioeconomic landscape. The crisis, triggered by a series of currency devaluations in East Asia, led to a severe economic downturn in Thailand, causing widespread unemployment. One of the determinants that swept the mantra of self-reliance nationwide was pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The incumbent government needed to achieve a restructuring adjustment of its bureaucracy, as commanded by the IMF, in exchange for loans. Among the many key issues the IMF required were the privatisation of state-owned organisations, greater fiscal discipline, and more efficient administration (Bello, 2006; Bello, Cunningham, & Poh, 1998; Lindgren & Baliño, 1990).

In response, the 8th NESDP aimed to shift the focus of national development from purely economic growth to the well-being of the people, promoting self-reliance as a means through which to achieve this. It appeared within the topic of “Family and Community Strengthening,” decreeing support for all gatherings among community members to improve well-being through self-reliance (NESDB, 1997). The plan constituted a paradigm shift in national development from growing economic attainment to bringing people to the centre of development. The ultimate goal of this plan was to get people to achieve well-being through self-reliance (NESDB, 1997).

The 9th NESDP (2002-2006) explicitly aimed to alleviate poverty and increase the Thai people’s potential to achieve self-reliance. At the same time, the incumbent government took King Bhumibol’s PSE, which gained popularity to assist the nation in achieving well-being. PSE thus became another important state apparatus during the transition period from the 8th to 9th NESDPs.

3.2.2 Era 2 (2007-2016): Normative Self-Reliance in Policy and Mindset-10th and 12th NESDPs

From 2007 to 2016, self-reliance remained as the crux of the government’s agenda. At this time, governments could unburden some of their responsibilities to their societies, and individuals with self-reliance potential could take care of themselves (Srisan, 2014). The 10th and 11th NESDPs began to infuse the value of self-reliance within the mindset of individuals (NESDB, 2007; 2012). The 12th NESDP aimed to strengthen local communities and thereby achieve self-reliance. Since the 9th- 11th NESDPs, individuals became one of the entities upon whom the state would like to impose the values of self-reliance. The 11th NESDP explicitly stated that the state powerfully targeted individuals to keep them aware of their need for self-reliance by making consciousness a popular value (NESDB, 2012).

Government organisations working for community development invested in self-reliance projects at a local community level. Their hidden agenda was to instil self-reliance values as a social norm. As a consequence, “chuumchonkemkhaeng puengpatonaeng” (healthy, self-reliant communities) became viral and were more frequently stated in NESDPs. Some local communities posted awnings displaying such Thai terms within their learning centres or community halls. These awnings functioned as a socialising tool, shaping self-reliant personhood (Buamai & Sabaiying, 2018).

Educational institutions have emerged as a key platform for promoting self-reliance values among individuals. Thai universities have incorporated this concept into their curricula, often using global case studies to illustrate its applications. As a result, students who advocate for self-reliance as a solution to dependency issues perhaps received higher marks in their Development Studies examinations (Buamai, 2020). This emphasis on self-reliance within the education system equips students with the necessary knowledge and skills as it fosters a culture of self-reliance, thereby contributing to the broader societal acceptance of this value.

Moreover, alternative development theorists refuted the mantra of economic growth in isolation. They offered alternative development ideas to help the world achieve a balance in economic, cultural, environmental, and local progress, such as the case of the “Andes Paradigm of Buen Vivir” (Villalba, 2013); the case of “Maori Philosophy of Valuing Nature” (Watene, 2016); and even the case of the PSE of Thailand, given its standing within the Thai academic community (Buamai & Sabaiying, 2018; Buamai, 2024).

This section presents two opportunity gaps. First, no one has yet explored the term “puengpa” (i.e., dependency) or how to achieve well-being through self-reliance in the context of the 13th NESDP. The researcher will analyse the 13th NESDP further in detail in later sections. Second, through the inspiring case study of the Kokmueng Community, self-reliant communities in Thailand showcase their practical journey from theory to practice. The paper illustrates that this community is the legacy of the 8th to 10th NESDPs.

Table 1 : Eras of Self-Reliance as Analysed in Thailand's 10th-12th National Economic and Social Development Plans (NESDPs)

Eras	NESDP Focuses on Self-Reliance	Theoretical Links
Era 1 (1997-2006)	Crisis-driven self-reliance (NESDPs 8 th -9 th)	Classical dependency critique; delinking for survival
Era 2 (2007-2016)	Normative inculcation of self-reliance (NESDPs 10 th -12 th)	Development as consciousness; personhood in policy

4. Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative research approach that combines documentary research and fieldwork to collect data. The researcher undertook several key stages in this process.

To begin, the researcher conducted a thorough and rigorous review of the literature concerning self-reliance. This review encompassed relevant theories, national economic development plans (NESDPs) in Thailand, and pertinent case studies. On the NESDPs, the researcher searches for the official documents spanning the years 1997 to 2020. Specifically, the researcher reviewed all available NESDPs documents (8th to 13th) to identify shifts towards self-reliance, focusing on the terms “puengpatonaeng” through the 8th to 12th NESDPs and “puengpa” or “puengping” in the 13th NESDP.

Following the documentary research, the researcher immersed himself in fieldwork, closely observing the context of the Kokmueng Community and specifically its community development projects. This participant observation is deeply rooted in classic interpretive traditions, drawing on Geertz's concept of “thick description” to gain a deeper understanding of the local cultural dynamics (Geertz, 1973) and Bourdieu's notion of “habitus,” which provides insight into the interplay between individual practices and the community's social structure (Bourdieu, 1984). He participated in activities such as fishing, farming, and community events, including a potluck party (with hundreds of food and tiffin carriers). He was involved in the Baan Tuu Yen Project, a significant community development initiative aimed at supporting household livelihoods through local resource management.

The Baan Tuu Yen Project is a self-reliance initiative that provides households with the raw materials and resources essential for their livelihoods. Each project site features plots for growing local vegetables, catfish ponds, and small-scale chicken and cattle farming for domestic use. The designated area for producing cooking gas from animal dung, alongside the utilisation of rubber tree branches for producing charcoal, contributes to sustainability. The collected oil, with its diverse uses, not only minimises odours in catfish ponds but also serves as a pesticide for vegetable plots, a remedy for toothache, and a treatment for dandruff. The project's encouragement of bio-extracts production from fruit peels and other food waste is another step towards sustainability, effectively controlling odours at dump sites and serving as natural pesticides (Surimas & Buamai, 2017).

A combination of snowball and purposive sampling was employed (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Guarte & Barrios, 2006; Noy, 2008). Initial conversations with the Phuuyaibaan (village head) initiated the process, leading to the identification of additional participants through referrals. This strategy resulted in the selection of nine key informants, whose knowledge and experience in community development were deemed essential for the study. The researcher identified three groups of key informants: the Phuuyaibaan (village head) and his committee; community development practitioners; and members of community development organisations. These informants were selected for their significant roles in community development and diverse perspectives, which added a rich layer of data to the study. The researcher compiled demographic and role data for the nine key informants in a summary table (Table 2), including information on roles and community development experience, to enhance transparency and demonstrate the diversity of perspectives gathered.

Table 2 : Information on Roles and Community Development Experiences of the Key Informants

Names	Roles	CD Experiences
Mr. Udom Hinseng	Village Head, community leader	>30 years
Mr. Thanin Kaewrattana	Committee member, marine activities	>30 years
Mrs. Lamom Promsen	Committee member	>20 years
Mr. Chian Yangthong	Development practitioner	>15 years
Mrs. Yindee Hinseng	Women's training coordinator	>20 years
Mr. Wichit Intaro	PSE Learning Centre volunteer	>20 years
Miss Patcharaporn Paungkaew	Community development group member	>10 years
Mr. Somnuek	Tiffin carrier volunteer	>15 years
Mrs. Somjai	Organic farming volunteer	>10 years

Source: Researcher

For data collection, the study used semi-structured interviews to collect vital information from key informants (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The interviews systematically explored four main areas: fostering awareness about the benefits of joining self-reliance projects; enhancing project efficiency; deriving lessons on self-reliance; and establishing a learning centre. The key questions used to guide the semi-structured interviews are summarised in Table 3, reflecting the four thematic areas of inquiry.

Table 3 : The Key Questions Used to Guide the Semi-Structured Interviews are Summarised in Table 1, Reflecting the Four Thematic Areas of Inquiry.

Groups of Key Informants	Key Informants	Research Questions Asked
One - Phuuyaibaan and his committee members	1. Mr. Udom Hinseng 2. Mr. Thanin Kaewrattana 3. Mrs. Lamom Promsen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the leaders of the Kokmueng Community incorporate Sufficiency Economy Experiences into their everyday practices with people? • How important is it to build better human capital in the community?
Two - community development practitioners	1. Mr. Chian Yangthong 2. Mrs. Yindee Hinseng	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do community development practitioners work in their community? • How do they create a tool for development communication?
Three - members of community development groups	1. Mr. Wichit Intaro 2. Miss Patcharaporn Paungkaew 3. Mr. Somnuek 4. Mrs. Somjai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the members of community development groups work the hundreds of food and tiffin carriers event? • How do they work the Baan Tuu Yen Project?

Source: Researcher

To analyse the data, the researcher employed a rigorous inductive analysis guided by Braun and Clarke's framework for thematic analysis, allowing for the organisation of data into key themes while engaging in theoretical discussions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021). The findings are presented thematically, with a clear distinction between outcomes and discussions.

The researcher followed ethical considerations with care and accepted qualitative research practices. Informed consent was obtained from all participants through verbal agreement, which is common in ethnographic research (Dingwall, 1980). The researcher saw no foreseeable harm or risk to their participation. Therefore, pseudonyms were not used, and participants were informed of the study's aims. Transparency was maintained with due consideration to participants' roles and comfort. The researcher acted with integrity and consulted regularly with senior colleagues and the Research Committee of the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University, to ensure the research was carried out responsibly.

The researcher acknowledges several limitations. The sample size is relatively small. Nevertheless, the researcher realised he had deliberately selected key informants whose first-hand experiences were central to the research aims (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). The study is grounded in a specific local context the Kokmueng Community and therefore the researcher does not aim for broad generalisability. Instead, he seeks to generate insights that may be transferable to other communities in similar socio-political or developmental contexts (Drisko, 2025). While the researcher's subjective positioning in the field may have shaped the interpretation of community dynamics, this aligns with the interpretivist paradigm set out in the philosophical framework he intended. The framework values researcher reflexivity and recognises that knowledge is co-constructed through situated experience (Bevir & Rhodes, 2012; Garcia & Quek, 1997). Overall, the methodology demonstrates a commitment to scholarly rigour and transparency, strengthening the credibility of this study.

5. Findings

5.1 “Puengpa”, “Puengping”, and “Puengpatonaeng” as Defined within the 13th NESDP (2023-2027)

Before proceeding with the analysis, it is helpful to clarify three key Thai terms used in the 13th NESDP: “puengpa,” “puengping,” and “puengpatonaeng.” In this policy context, “puengpa” refers to being dependent, particularly on external resources; “puengping” denotes internal dependency, in which the workforce assists certain population groups; and “puengpatonaeng” signifies self-reliance. These definitions are drawn from how the terms are used in the policy. In this context, the choice of words creates deliberate conceptual

differences that are important for interpreting the plan's framing of dependency and self-reliance. In general Thai, the distinctions between these words may be narrower or broader depending on context, and in some cases, such as "puengping," the meaning may be very close to "puengpa."

Self-reliance becomes less frequently stated within the 13th NESDP as the plan is adept at pointing out how Thailand has long depended upon external resources. Through a detailed examination, we can categorise the use of each of the three Thai terms alternately, each giving us a sense of dependency. The first category addresses the use of the term "puengpa." The plan discusses Thailand's excessive dependence upon foreign capital, migrant workers and technology prior to 2022. This situation prevented Thailand from becoming a high-income country, culminating in its becoming enmeshed as a middle-income country. Next is the use of the term "puengping". The plan refers to the internal dependency in terms of some population groups (i.e., those senior citizens and children whom the workforce assists). The last term refers to the value of self-reliance that the plan requires local communities to achieve to increase their well-being.

The 13th NESDP presents a stark picture of Thailand's situation concerning its national economic development before 2022. The country was in a state of high economic dependence, urgently needing external investment, technology, and a stronger position in the global value chain. The urgency of this situation was evident in the country's rather unhealthy state of economic inefficiency, leading to difficulty in achieving a higher gross domestic product (GDP). This situation made Thailand particularly vulnerable to rapid global changes, a fact illustrated by the plight of the national electricity and electronic industries. Despite a long history spanning over 50 years, these industries were heavily reliant on direct foreign investment, with local businesses producing goods using foreign technology. The national production structure depended upon labour rather than proprietary technology and low-price investment, preventing these industries from leading the ASEAN market and increasing the economic value of Thailand in the value chain (NESDB, 2022).

The 13th NESDP also pointed out the weakness of Thailand's population structure and predicted that it would become an entirely aged society after 2022. This ageing society resulted from falling birth rates and led to a decline in the number of people of working age.

Thailand thus faced a worsening labour shortage and needed to turn to an influx of migrant workers from neighbouring countries. Additionally, national economic growth depended upon foreign tourists who comprised 63.7% of all tourism. Nevertheless, the global COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021) contributed to national economic regression. The government faced unstable financial liquidity and launched schemes of low-interest loans and suspended debt payments (NESDB, 2022).

The 13th NESDP tapped into the national medical sector which remained heavily dependent on importing medical products from external markets, stating that potential stemming from innovative medical research was insufficient to elevate its utilisation for commercial purposes. The pain point was that the national research ecology did not accommodate research. For example, the country lacked standard laboratory testing centres and researchers with deep expertise. This situation caused Thailand's medical industry to become dependent on external markets.

Second, the 13th NESDP uses the term “puengping”. This time, such a term describes the ageing population and declining birthrates that hollowed out the working-age population. Statistics from January 2022 indicate that some of the dependent ageing population could not access appropriate healthcare programmes, whereupon 45.8% of them appeared unlisted within the National Health Insurance system. Their living environment was thus unhealthy, making them more dependent upon others.

Furthermore, this plan analysed the characteristics of the transgenerational poverty situation in Thailand. At the level of households, the dependency ratio of ageing and children towards the working-age population was high at 90%. Children aged between 6 and 14 comprised 23.7% of the population (NESDB, 2022).

However, the plan referred to “puengping” in two more respects. The first contended that most Thais worked within the agricultural sector and were thus dependent upon the climate. Those in lowland locations faced severe natural disasters due to extreme climate change effects. Their production therefore became increasingly unstable. The second related to the economic expansion upon which the country depended for its supply of raw materials and intermediate goods. However, the ability to make full use of such materials through production and service was low. This phenomenon meant excessive exploitation of natural resources, even though they have not returned well (NESDB, 2022).

The 13th NESDP shows its development aim in alignment with the 20-Year Nation Strategic Plan (2018-2037). It states that Thailand has the potential for economic and social decentralisation and increasing opportunities for every development sector to collaborate towards national development. The plan suggests that it can succeed in this aim by using local wisdom and culture and adopting the idea of the circular economy. It will support the idea of optimising the use of resources at the local community level, and the plan accommodates the creation of local products using local wisdom. It suggests developing local goods and services as an innovation, infiltrating the body of knowledge so that community members realise the crucial importance of maintaining local wisdom and knowledge. Ultimately, the plan believes that, if local communities practice these suggestions, the country will have just and vibrant societies, with no inequality and quality local communities (NESDB, 2022; 2018).

We found that the 13th NESDP uses “puengpa,” “puengping,” and “puengpatonaeng” in different contexts. The plan uses “puengpatonaeng” less frequently than the 8th-10th NESDPs. At least this situation points out a policy shift from praising straightforward self-reliance. The 13th NESDP is prominent in contextualising Thailand’s dependency situations in terms of investment, technology, labour, and natural resources as the country’s population ages. The legacy originating from the 8th NESDP has left us to ponder the value of self-reliance at the level of consciousness, a departure from the meaning contended by the 13th NESDP. The Kokmueng Community serves as a tangible example of such a legacy.

Before proceeding to the next section, it is necessary to outline the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy (PSE), introduced during the 10th NESDP and strengthened in the 11th, as it plays a central role in Thailand’s framing of self-reliance. PSE emphasises moderation, reasonableness, and resilience in national development, integrating local resources, cultural wisdom, and environmental sustainability (Sub-Committee of NESDB, 2007; NESDB, 2007; 2012). The 11th NESDP reported that self-reliance at the community level had improved through participatory mechanisms that created social safety nets and reduced inequalities. PSE also informed sustainable agricultural initiatives, aiming to secure biodiversity, food security, and reduced chemical use. This historical commitment to PSE provides an essential conceptual bridge between the self-reliance idea in NESDPs and the lived realities of communities such as Kokmueng, which has engaged with PSE principles in building its own self-reliance project.

5.2 Kokmueng Community: A Legacy of Self-Reliance from the 8th-10th NESDPs

From 1997 to 2007, Thailand sought self-reliance at the local community level to survive the AFC. Thailand addressed the consumption of internal resources to reduce outside inputs. It took King Bhumibol's PSE as one of the frameworks to drive local communities towards achieving well-being through self-reliance. Since 1997, we have seen the rise of many self-reliant local communities in Thailand. The Kokmueng Community was one from which we can learn about self-reliant experiences at the practical level.

The researcher found that Kokmueng villagers strengthened their local community by building up group work based on the skills individual members possess. The group work increased a sense of responsibility and sacrifice in the villagers' mentality, making them enthusiastic about relying on themselves rather than waiting for assistance from the outside. From Table 4, the researcher segmented group work into four categories. The first quartile is the group for community administration; the second is the group for fundraising and social welfare; the third is the group for the conservation of the community's natural resources; and the fourth is for such ad-hoc projects as the Village Health Volunteers, PSE Learning Centre Volunteer, or Occupational Training Volunteers. These groups collaborated and caused the community households to reduce their expenses, increase their incomes, become parsimonious, become a learning society, and be more environmentally conscious (Buamai & Sabaiying, 2018).

Table 4 : Groups, Their Responsibilities and Leadership.

Groups	Responsibilities	Heads of the Groups
Community Administration		
Community committee	Overall administration of the community	Mr.Udom Hinseng
Senior consultant committee	Consultancy	No head
Fundraising and Social Welfare		
Social welfare fund	Financial and welfare assistance	Mr.Udom Hinseng
Community fund	Financial assistance	
Village fund	Financial assistance	Mr.Yutthapong Yangthong
Savings	Savings and financial assistance	Mr.Prateep Puangkaew

Table 4 : Groups, Their Responsibilities and Leadership. (Continued)

Groups	Responsibilities	Heads of the groups
Woman	Occupational training for woman	Mrs.Yindee Hinseng
Rubber-latex buying	Store local rubber farmers' latex for sale to the external rubber-latex industries.	Mr.Sayan Puangkaew
Fishing	Financial assistance to fisherman	Mr.Thanin Kaewrat
Marine farming	Allocation of marine farming plots to fishermen in need.	
Welfare centre for vulnerable people	Support vulnerable people as they need	Mr.Udom Hinseng
Conservation of the Community's Natural Resources		
Mangrove conservation	Prevention of the erosion of seawater in coastal areas	Mr.Thanin Kaewrat
Ad-Hoc Purposes of Projects		
Village Health Volunteer	Community Healthcare Programmes	Mr.Chirayut Phikhuwayo
Tom-tom	Recreational activities through tom-tom and the local dancing style	Mr.Wichit Intaro
Reserved volunteer fund	Financial assistance for reserved volunteer fund	Mr. Udom Hinseng
PSE Learning Centre volunteer	Creating a learning community	

Source: Researcher

These group works are the key to success and serve as the apparatus for community development. PSE Learning Centre Volunteers (PLCVs) are crucial in this endeavour. PLCVs learned lessons from their field trips in which the group's representatives visited best practice locations, bringing back a second experience to apply to their jobs. Also, the volunteers reflected on their first-hand experiences in the wake of an 'after-action review.' They incarnated the pieces of knowledge in the form of awnings posted on the learning centre's wall. At each Baan Tuu Yen, volunteers are ready to discuss their experiences. For example, Wichit Intaro stood by his house, sharing his experiences in producing cooking gas

from animal dung, charcoal and oil distilled from rubber tree branches, and bi-extract from fermented fruit peels and food waste. All volunteers worked on their projects and, ultimately, they lived their lives in this way moving forward (Surimas & Buamai, 2017).

The research found that Udom Hinseng, a village head, and his committee were key leaders in inspiring self-reliant individualism and socialising. Udom Hinseng was incredibly skilled at delivering self-reliance and PSE speeches, credibly drawing the attention of his audience. He had considerable skill in articulating development issues and knowledge (Buamai, 2024). The finding follows the work of Napattalung and Wuttimatee (2012). In Thailand's PSE context, efficient leaders are indispensable in community development. These leaders possess administrative skills, proper vision, ambition, serve as good role models, and have strong social skills. In this way, Udom Hinseng began with his self-ambition, then a selection of teamwork, the creation of self-reliant projects, support throughout, and finally, extraction of self-reliant lessons learned and dissemination (Buamai, 2024).

The findings of this research complement the work of Jitsanguan (2009) in studying local PSE communities in every dimension, analysing such communities throughout Thailand. There has, however, been an opportunity gap in the form of the incarnation of Indigenous knowledge regarding PSE and self-reliance. Villagers learned lessons systematically through after-action reviews and disseminated their lessons by giving good speeches and posting awnings in the PSE learning centre. All-in-all, this attempt to build a strong learning community is necessary.

6. Discussion

6.1 *Transformations in Thailand's NESDPs: From Liberal Influences to Self-Reliance through Dependency Theory*

Neo-Marxist critiques of capital-oriented development argue that reliance on external capital and market dynamics perpetuates socioeconomic inequalities within developing nations, including Thailand. This stance is closely linked to Dependency Theory, which holds that peripheral nations often remain trapped in a cycle of dependency because of their integration into global capitalist systems. Such integration frequently produces inequitable growth and concentrates wealth among a limited segment of the population (Asuquo et al., 2024). In Thailand, the early formulation of the National Economic and Social

Development Plans (NESDPs) reflected a commitment to an industrialisation strategy that heavily favoured urban centres. This approach significantly marginalised rural communities and yielded uneven economic benefits (Kelly et al., 2012; Smith, 2003).

The first NESDP, heavily influenced by liberal ideologies, highlighted the need for central planning and government investment in economic development. A 1959 World Bank report reinforced this view, calling for “a central agency to make a continuing study of the nation’s economy and to draw up plans for its development” (Kelly et al., 2012; World Bank, 1959, p. 29). This framework supported policies that promoted foreign investment while using agricultural outputs to fund industrial expansion. However, it often neglected rural living standards (Kelly et al., 2012; Smith, 2003). Over time, critiques of these liberal frameworks grew stronger, especially after the negative socio-economic impacts seen in rural areas during rapid industrialisation.

The notion of delinking, as articulated by scholars such as Samir Amin (1976) and Quijano (2000), introduces a crucial strategy: disengaging or breaking away from established knowledge systems tied to capitalist development and colonial legacies. In this context, delinking refers to a strategic shift away from traditional systems of knowledge and power that sustain the hegemony of core capitalist nations (Amin, 1976; Kelly et al., 2012; Marzin & Michaud, 2016; Quijano, 2000). It calls for challenging the perceived dichotomy between developed and less-developed countries, and for redefining their relationships. This framework argues that the underdevelopment of certain nations stems from asymmetric political and economic relations. Such asymmetries hinder their ability to achieve wealth and stability.

Mignolo (2007) argues for transforming development paradigms to assert independence from core capitalist influences, emphasising that delinking is essential for creating new knowledge systems (Mignolo, 2007; Ahiakpor, 1985). The concept of delinking has evolved into a transformative development paradigm, shifting self-reliance from the national to the individual consciousness level. This perspective emphasises that individuals, not just governments, play a pivotal role in driving the self-reliance paradigm in their communities, thus empowering grassroots movements that actively participate in redefining their paths towards social and economic autonomy (Ahiakpor, 1985; Amin, 1976; Marzin & Michaud, 2016; Mignolo, 2007).

The Kokmueng Community serves as a case study in this delinking process. It has sought to establish a self-reliant identity while recognising the constraints imposed by globalisation. Although its efforts to disengage from traditional core-periphery formations have not been entirely successful, the community's partial awareness of capitalist-imperialist knowledge frameworks is an important part of its journey towards greater autonomy. By consciously engaging with the realities of global interconnectedness, the community seeks alternatives to the dominant narratives that have historically shaped its development struggles (Kelly et al., 2012; Smith, 2003).

The emergence of self-reliance communities in Thailand is a direct response to the historical inadequacies of earlier dependency-driven policies. Grassroots movements, often supported by NGOs, have promoted localised development strategies that strengthen community autonomy and integrate traditional practices into economic planning (Kelly et al., 2012; Smith, 2003). One example is the “One Tambon One Product” (OTOP) programme, introduced under Thaksin’s government. It emphasised community-based enterprises designed to diversify rural incomes and foster local governance structures suited to each community’s needs (Marzin & Michaud, 2016).

This grassroots reclamation of agency marks a movement away from the traditional core-periphery dynamics emphasised by Dependency Theory. Communities are prioritising self-sufficiency and local resource management over reliance on external markets (Kelly et al., 2012; Smith, 2003). Successful case studies show that community engagement in policy formulation is crucial for building local economic resilience. Such engagement enables communities to negotiate better terms for their economic participation and to resist the overarching capitalist tendencies embedded in earlier development paradigms (Marzin & Michaud, 2016).

A notable evolution in the NESDPs shows a growing recognition of self-reliance and participatory governance as essential for sustainable development. Reforms introduced after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis catalysed a shift towards policies that emphasise local empowerment and sustainable practices. From the 8th to 13th NESDPs, this transition is evident in the prioritisation of community engagement and self-determined economic initiatives (Kelly et al., 2012; Smith, 2003).

The integration of self-reliance as a central tenet in Thailand's development policy marks a departure from earlier liberal frameworks. This is evident in the increasingly critical discourse questioning the effectiveness of external investments and global market influences. Dependency Theory provides important insights into the need to delink from liberal capitalist frameworks. Such a shift fosters a more equitable and sustainable development pathway, with these values now being woven into the NESDPs. As a result, empowered communities that employ localised solutions can address their unique challenges more effectively than under models historically rooted in liberalism (Asuquo et al., 2024; Marzin & Michaud, 2016).

In conclusion, the trajectory of Thailand's NESDPs reflects a complex interplay between historical dependencies, ideological frameworks, and the growing recognition of local empowerment strategies. The critiques advanced by Dependency Theory, together with the evolving ethos of delinking from hegemonic knowledge systems, are reshaping development discourse in Thailand. This transformation marks a shift towards valuing self-reliance and local agency, and away from the limitations of liberal, capital-driven paradigms. The liberal influences embedded in the early NESDPs highlight how policy-making has evolved to balance global economic pressures with local realities. This evolution is fostering a more just and equitable development landscape for Thailand's rural communities.

6.2 The situation of Thailand as viewed through the scholarly frameworks of Dependency and World System Theories

The scholarly frameworks of Dependency and World System Theories help us understand Thailand's culture of dependency and provide a robust analytical lens through which to examine the country's extant economic relationships.

The review of the uses of the three terms "puengpa," "puengping," and "puengpatonaeng" in the 13th NESDP, which refer to different aspects of dependency, contributes to our rationalisation of why Thailand has been unable to lift itself to the status of a high-income country. These terms, "puengpa," referring to its use in regards to economic dependency; "puengping" to its usage in explaining why vulnerable groups of people lean towards those who are stronger; and "puengpatonaeng" which refers to its use in the context of those individuals and local communities who rely upon themselves, highlight the country's dependency on external input and insidious national weaknesses. Thus, Thailand faces

challenges in climbing to become a developed country. However, as highlighted in the 13th NESDP, the potential for growth through entrepreneurship offers a ray of hope for Thailand's future, inspiring the audience with the possibilities. The frameworks of Dependency and World System Theories, at this time, remain important in explaining Thailand's current circumstances.

Thailand's strategic role in the global production chain cannot be overstated. As a country of the semi-periphery, it stands among the core capitalist, semi-peripheral, and peripheral countries, providing a crucial link between them. This function allows the core capital, technology, and innovation of capitalist countries to connect with cheap materials, resources, and labour, thereby significantly impacting the global economy. To core capitalist countries, Thailand is a contractor supplying to order. To peripheral countries surrounding Thailand, it is a middle-person who exploits surplus in every way possible. For instance, Thailand often benefits from its peripheral countries' surplus labour and resources, including cheaper migrant workers from Myanmar.

The situation aligns with the critiques of Andre Gunder Frank (1967) and Wallerstein (1974). Core capitalist countries often implement strict protectionist policies. One example is the U.S. government's tariff measures aimed at reducing the influx of cheap Chinese products, which have contributed to China's growing trade surplus with the United States. This situation may affect Thailand, which ranked 12th among countries with a greater trade surplus than the U.S.A. in 2023. The potential impact of U.S. tariffs on Chinese products, possibly increasing by as much as 60%, is a cause for concern. Such increases also apply to countries with outstanding trade balances with the U.S.A. of between 12% and 20% (Thai PBS, 2025).

Production in Thailand contributes to the profits of core capitalist countries. However, this production pattern exploits Thailand and its periphery in the long run, as semi-peripheral and peripheral countries are the only production locations for assembly, as seen in Thailand's auto part assembly industry, which is a significant sector. This industry, which started its economic contraction in 2023 (Chokwatpaisan, 2024), contributed 8.2% of the national GDP and 14.8% of the total value of exports in 2022 (Srichaiya & Srithanyapong, 2024). Some countries rely heavily upon this assembly industry and profit greatly from such export dependence. This phenomenon however traps such peripheral countries within the domain of middle-income economies.

According to the World System Theory of Wallerstein (1974), Thailand is a country of the semi-periphery. Core capitalist countries take their investment and technology to Thailand in order for Thailand to produce goods to order. Thailand, in turn, extracts its raw materials, resources, and cheap labour from local regions, often from neighbouring countries. Such neighbouring countries thus become peripheral states in Wallerstein's theory. This hierarchy of nations is inherently highly interdependent and iniquitous. The core capitalist countries negotiate with the countries of the semi-periphery to reduce their production costs. The semi-periphery countries, in turn, will exploit those inputs and profit from the surplus. The peripheral countries lose their natural resources and human capital in order to develop themselves. Within this value chain, the core capitalist countries achieve their optimal interests. Both theories are still helpful in explaining the status quo, even if they are somewhat dated.

6.3 Thailand's Self-Reliance Situation in the Post-10th NESDP Period

6.3.1 Period 1 (2007-2016): Normative Inculcation of Self-Reliance - 10th to 12th NESDPs

During the 10th NESDP, the Thai government adopted the PSE, emphasising the importance of local communities relying on resources and capabilities to run self-reliance nationwide so that the people and their local communities could increase their self-reliance (NESDB, 2007). The 11th NESDP reports that self-reliance at the local community level had since improved. Local communities were mechanistic in driving community participation to achieve well-being and worked together to create social safety nets. The plan also illustrates that local communities are the most important element of the country as they primarily lean towards natural resources. Strong local communities meant their members could rely upon themselves at the individual, family and societal levels. The power of self-reliance is one of the key determinants that encourage Thailand's stability. Self-reliant communities efficiently reduce socioeconomic, social, natural resource, and environmental mysteries at the grassroots level. This local mechanism makes local sustainable (NESDB, 2012).

However, the 11th NESDP also reported that Thailand's capacity for self-reliance had been an issue. For instance, Thailand still imported high-price energy and technology rather than utilising those derived from the domestic economy. The 11th NESDP marked its ultimate goal in the form of the 20-Year National Strategic Plan (2018-2037)

which serves as a comprehensive roadmap for Thailand's ongoing economic and social development. The Philosophy of Sufficient Economy, a key component of this plan, advocates for a balanced and sustainable approach to economic development, emphasising the importance of self-reliance and community empowerment.

“The sufficiency economy stresses the middle path as an overriding principle for appropriate conduct by Thai people at all levels, from family to community to country. It calls for national development and administration to modernise in line with the forces of globalisation. Sufficiency means moderation, reasonableness, and the need for self-immunity for sufficient protection from impact arising from internal and external changes. To achieve this, applying knowledge with due consideration and prudence is essential. In particular, every step needs great care in utilising theories and methodologies for planning and implementation. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the nation's moral fibre so that everyone, particularly public officials, academics, and business people, adhere first and foremost to the principles of honesty and integrity. In addition, a way of life based on patience, perseverance, diligence, wisdom and prudence is indispensable in creating balance and being able to cope appropriately with critical challenges arising from extensive and rapid socioeconomic, environmental, and cultural changes in the world” (Sub-Committee of NESDB, 2007, pp. 7-8).

This quote implies that the PSE emphasises the importance of moderation, self-reliance, and resilience in dealing with economic challenges. The monarchy is a national pillar, one that consolidates the Thai people. Families strive to become strong and supportive to make good Thai citizens. Local communities would become intense and take on a developmental role and there would be economic stability and competition. Healthcare programmes would become efficient, law and order would be just, and the country would be well-integrated with ASEAN and stay united to develop the region sustainably. This united region would bring its members' strengths, including capital, science and technology, creativity and wisdom, to help advance the region through reciprocity. Thailand would restructure trading and investment in line with market needs at both the domestic and international levels, while production would focus on being eco-friendly (NESDB, 2012).

At the local level, the 11th NESDP supported local people in initiating their community development through self-reliance. This approach addressed their potential, lifestyles, cultures, wisdom, and environment. The plan encouraged local communities' knowledge management and respected and valued the lessons learned from their contexts. These events included the dissemination of occupational training. Farmers would be encouraged to engage in their agricultural activities using sustainable agricultural frameworks and PSE, including organic farming, integrated farming systems, a new theory of agriculture, and agroforestry. These schemes would help small farmers to become more secure in terms of biodiversity, self-reliance, food security, quantity and quality, and safety from chemical substances. This agricultural productivity would spread through the networks of local wisdom keepers, prosperous farmers, and learning centres (NESDB, 2012).

The vision of the 12th NESDP was to build socioeconomic stability for the Thai people. The plan demonstrated a concerted effort to distribute justice by accessing quality resources and social services. To this end, it would strengthen the potential of vulnerable groups of people, including bolstering local communities to rely upon themselves. This approach constituted working at the family level by encouraging them to foster their children to realise the importance of self-reliance from the time they were young. Families must individualise children to become honest, disciplined, moral, ethical, and responsible. Parents would become their best role models (NESDB, 2016).

The 12th NESDP also aimed to increase the capabilities of local communities and the grassroots economy, acquiring more interest from market shares. Based on PSE, local communities are encouraged to strengthen their financial stability. The plan attempted to create change agents at the local level, believing that these key people would inspire their members to have faith, a standpoint, and good governance in community development. More significantly, it discussed entrepreneurship in relation to creating entrepreneurs with a strong awareness of marketing. Entrepreneurs should realise the use of technology and innovation in production and marketing, while being innovative small-to-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The plan would support local communities in setting up community enterprises to meet their readiness and contexts. Further, it would also create an entrepreneurial curriculum at all levels of national education to understand business, particularly 'green' business. All of these were necessary for local communities to be able to rely upon themselves (NESDB, 2016).

According to the National Poverty Situation Survey, Northeastern and Southern Thailand ranked first and second, respectively. The 12th NESDP thus invested in the former region to extricate it from poverty and gain self-reliance. The approach was that the plan would accommodate farmers and their institutions to become independent and be able to help themselves in the long run, especially within the Amnatcharoen, Kanlasin, and Khonkaen provinces, the pilot locations for this developmental programme. These projects included farmers' groups and developing local enterprise networks, thereby encouraging local goods production, and savings programmes, making it possible to access loans more efficiently, and training the new generation of farmers to be more professional. These activities would successfully get through PSE-oriented agriculture, i.e., the New Theory of Agriculture and the Project known as "One Rai, Ten Thousand". Ultimately, they would create learning societies, having the learning model in the form of prosperous farmers (NESDB, 2016).

In relation to Southern Thailand, the 12th NESDP made considerable effort to restore the region's established rubber production and oil palm industries by bringing in improved production technologies. Moreover, research and processes to enrich the values of rubber and oil palm were also indispensable. Last, but not least, the 12th NESDP would support small farmers in improving their production, diversity and efficiency to become self-reliant through integrated agriculture and the New Theory of Agriculture. The 12th NESDP hoped that the rubber and oil palm industries in Southern Thailand would produce the best quality rubber-oil palm products in the country, thereby ameliorating any economic shocks caused by fluctuations in global prices (NESDB, 2016).

6.3.2 Period 2 (2017-2027): Entrepreneurial Communities - 13th NESDP

The 13th NESDP may be yet another turning point in the national development paradigm. It must extricate the country from being trapped as a middle-income nation and turn towards national innovation. Economic development is everywhere in this plan and at all country levels. Even though the 13th NESDP taps into the notion of community self-reliance, this is less frequently repeated and less straightforward than in the previous plans. When Thailand does not encounter an economic crisis, its government may focus more on economic development.

Since 2017, local communities have aimed at developing their grassroots economy through entrepreneurship. Frequently, these local communities must find their potential to run their projects, produce and sell their local products, run their local enterprises, and be professional entrepreneurs with the support of local governments. From this decade onward, we have often heard the terms “entrepreneur” and “entrepreneurship”. The rationale was that entrepreneurship had been an agenda that community development organisations had aimed to cultivate at individual and societal levels (NESDB, 2022).

The evolution of self-reliance in Thailand’s development planning can be broadly understood across two conceptual periods:

Table 5 : Conceptual Periods of Self-Reliance in Thailand’s Post-10th National Economic and Social Development Plans (NESDPs)

Periods	NESDP Focuses on Self-Reliance	Theoretical Links
Period 1 (2007-2016)	Normative inculcation of self-reliance (NESDPs 10 th -12 th)	Development as consciousness; personhood in policy
Period 2 (2017-2027)	Entrepreneurial communities (NESDP 13 th)	Post-dependency hybrid; neoliberal-local synthesis

Source: Researcher

The researcher urges audiences to think that the 13th NESDP may take the same pathway as the 10th-12th NESDPs with respect to self-reliance, as the 13th NESDP discursively constructs entrepreneurship at the level of individual consciousness. Entrepreneurship lectures have now permeated colleges and universities as the concept of entrepreneurship is propagated horizontally. Shortly, we may see local communities discuss the concept more frequently and become increasingly proactive. Indeed, we may see the advent of many more “entrepreneurial local communities” and “local entrepreneurs”. The researcher considers that such entrepreneurial local communities will be the legacy of the 13th NESDP.

From a policy perspective, the paper traces how “self-reliance” in Thailand has transitioned from a crisis-driven developmental ideal to a more entrepreneurial agenda embedded within the 13th NESDP. This shift signals a reframing of local development, where state policy no longer promotes self-reliance as an end in itself, but rather as a means to produce competitive grassroots economies.

7. Conclusion

This paper has situated the findings and discussion in an academic context with regard to two aspects. First, it is a closely monitored policy of NESDPs regarding the goal of self-reliance. Thus, the researcher focuses on self-reliance as per the current plan. Second, the paper shows that such self-reliance communities from 1997-2007 are the legacy of Latin theories in an underdeveloped structure and also of Thai policies. These two things have shaped local communities over time. This implication causes us to understand that local communities change dynamically. They need to be sufficiently resilient to move along the evolving themes of each policy and period.

The trajectory of self-reliance in Thailand's development policy can be understood in three chronological phases. Phase 1 (1997-2006) was marked by crisis-driven self-reliance, emerging in response to the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. Rooted in classical dependency critiques, this period emphasised delinking for survival, with NESDPs 8th and 9th encouraging local communities to reduce reliance on external inputs and strengthen internal capacity. Phase 2 (2007-2016) shifted towards the normative inculcation of self-reliance as part of personhood through policy. NESDPs 10th to 12th embedded self-reliance in national consciousness, promoting it as a social value while fostering community capacity and participatory governance, often through the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy. Phase 3 (2017-2027) represents the rise of the entrepreneurial community under the 13th NESDP. In this context, self-reliance is less directly stated and reframed within a post-dependency hybrid, blending neoliberal economic goals with localised development strategies centred on entrepreneurship.

The 13th NESDP represents a significant shift from previous strategies. It focuses on grassroots economic development and entrepreneurship, moving away from the direct emphasis on self-reliance that was more explicit in earlier plans. Its role is to provide a platform for local communities to develop their economic initiatives, thereby reducing reliance on external factors. The 13th NESDP discusses self-reliance less often but highlights Thailand's dependence on external input. To reduce this dependency, the country must develop production technology and innovation capacities an aspect that cannot be overlooked.

The Kokmueng Community stands as a powerful testament to the potential of self-reliance and a tangible legacy of the 8th-10th NESDPs. The community-centred approach, rooted in reciprocity, participation, collaboration, and consolidation under the PSE framework, has led to notable improvements in well-being. This example illustrates the concept of delinking from core capitalist countries, as suggested by neo-Marxist theorists. It shows how a country can reduce its reliance on liberal development knowledge and lessen dependence on capitalist countries. Local communities can instead draw on their wisdom and culture to develop approaches suited to their own progress.

Moreover, applying the analytical framework of Dependency and World System Theories to Thailand's current dependency situation shows that these theories remain helpful in understanding the phenomenon. However, the research also points to the need for more complex and detailed theories to explain Thailand's dependency in greater depth.

8. Recommendations

Future studies could investigate the specific mechanisms through which self-reliance contributes to community resilience and sustainable development. This may involve comparative analyses between communities that have adopted self-reliance strategies and those that have not, examining economic, social, and environmental outcomes over time. Research could also explore the interplay between self-reliance and other development approaches, identifying potential synergies or trade-offs. Additionally, it is important to examine how local development policies transferred from the NESDPs are interpreted and implemented by regional or provincial organisations, and how these policies translate into community practices. Such inquiries could provide deeper insight into the pathways from theory to national plans, to regional policy frameworks, and ultimately to the lived realities of communities.

Policymakers should critically assess the place of self-reliance within broader development strategies. Policies are dynamic and shift over time, often shaped by global political-economic forces. Any promotion of community self-reliance should be balanced against the inevitability that communities must respond to evolving national policy agendas. This calls for long-term thinking about the future of communities, ensuring they can remain resilient while adapting to policy shifts. Self-reliance should be considered as one element

within a broader policy mix, rather than as a fixed end goal. Policy frameworks should anticipate future changes in national priorities and economic conditions, while maintaining flexibility in support mechanisms, knowledge resources, and governance structures.

9. Conflicts of Interest Statement

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