

## **Delta Development and Rice Export in Siam in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century: The Case of the Chaophraya River**

Toshiyuki MIYATA, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

Siam (Thailand) developed rice production, especially in the Chaophraya delta of the central region, and increasingly exported rice in response to the rapid expansion of rice demand in Southeast Asia and Southern China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. During this period, although land values in Siam might have risen due to the boom in rice production and rice export, land laws to issue title deeds securitizing property rights in land were enacted very late. The first land law was enacted in 1901, about 50 years after the Bowring Treaty had been concluded between Britain and Siam in 1855. Following the 1901 land law, six amended land laws were enacted from 1909 to 1936. But even after the new land laws had been issued, these laws were poorly implemented.

Why were the land laws in Siam enacted so late? It has been argued that Siamese government revenue and expenditure were too low to enact the land laws and implement them, even though the drafts of land laws were discussed by the government in the late nineteenth century. Besides, the lines of authority in regard to the issuance of land “documents,” not title deeds, were muddled. Several temporary land documents or land tax receipts could be issued. These were not suitable to mortgage lands. As a result, no system of large land owners was developed in Siam, because of a lack of sophisticated land laws required to secure property rights in land.

Larsson, however, offers a more positive explanation for the backwardness of the land laws in Siam (Larsson 2012). King Rama V was opposed to enacting land laws for several reasons. The Bowring Treaty and other treaties prescribed (a) extraterritoriality for the British, French and others, and (b) the British, French, and others could hold some lands in Siam. Therefore, if land laws would grant property rights in land to the holders of title deeds, and if some British and French could have title deeds, they could be land owners under the extraterritoriality system. In these diplomatic and socio-political circumstances, King Rama V was reluctant to enact the land laws and unwilling to grant property rights in land to the foreigners who were protected under the extraterritoriality system.

This study aims to re-examine the historical changes of property rights in land in Siam by using the statistical data of land taxes, title deeds and mortgages.

Reference: Larsson, Thomas, *Land and Loyalty*, Cornell University Press, 2012.