

A Tale of Two Samut Cities: Different Paths to Development and People's Wellbeing in Samut Sakorn and Samut Songkram Provinces

Decharut Sukkumnoed and Wipawa Chuenchit***

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse how different development paths lead to different development outcome by comparing the development paths and outcomes of two Samut provinces, Samut Sakorn and Samut Songkram. Previously, both provinces shared the same ecosystem and cultural background. 30 years ago, they took different economic development paths, resulting in a totally different economic and social structure today. Unlike modernisation theory, the richer economy does not gain a better quality of life in this case. While Samut Sakorn has much higher economic growth, Samut Songkram shows more balanced development approach and, consequently much better wellbeing outcomes. Moreover, in present day, Samut Songkram has become one of the most well-known provinces for Thai exotic products and life-styles. This may lead Thai society to reconsider their development paths, especially during the quest for sufficiency economy.

Introduction

The analysis of the relations between a wellbeing index and social determinants of health at the macro level by Decharut and Rungthip Sukkumnoed (2006) has conducted a comparative study on wellbeing and social determinants at the country and provincial levels. Part of the conclusion is that Gross Provincial Product per capita is not a necessary and sufficient condition for good health and wellbeing. A province with high GPP per capita may have unsatisfactory health and wellbeing outcomes while another province with low GPP per capita may have better outcomes.

Apart from the problem of the redistribution of economic resources, some provinces of which economic growth relies on

*Faculty of Economics, Kasetsart University, Thailand

** Healthy Public Policy Foundation, Thailand

large-scale industrial development, such as Rayong and Lamphun, have encountered the problem of 'development diseases' i.e., risky health behaviours and a high rate of new HIV/AIDS patients. Consequently, these provinces have difficulty improving their health outcomes and wellbeing.

Accordingly, to explain the relationship between overall development direction and wellbeing impact requires the consideration of many factors as well as of the context in different areas. This study has compared two provinces with similar eco-cultural background but totally different economic development process afterwards, which caused different social, environment, and health outcome and impacts. The two case studies were conducted in Samut Sakorn and Samut Songkram provinces.

The study will depict the different economic development processes with different development outcomes and the relevant factors in order to promote learning among various sectors in society for public policy process which is supportive to significant improvement of health and wellbeing of people in this country.

Historical contexts of two Samut cities

Looking back in history, the two Samut provinces shared quite similar characteristics, particularly in terms of their eco-cultural backgrounds. As neighbours to each other, Samut Sakorn and Samut Songkram are located almost on the same terrain and influenced by the same climate of tropical rain, which previously led to similar ways of life and occupations closely bound with the natural resources in the areas. These similarities were clearly witnessed prior to the introduction of the first National Economic and Social Development Plan.

The ecosystems of three waters and the upper part of the Gulf of Thailand

Both Samut cities are situated on the upper part of the Gulf of Thailand. The terrain, composed of plain, lowland, and delta, is very fertile thanks to the unique combination of three types of water namely, freshwater, brackish water, and brine. With a web of river and canals, each province naturally functions as a wetland to absorb water during high tide and seasonal flooding.

The two provinces are even alike in that each has a separate river running through its land. Tha Chin River in Samut Sakorn and Mae Klong River in Samut Songkram are linked to each other by canals and were once major routes for local transportation and goods transfer between inland and offshore.

Apart from this, the ecosystem in the upper part of the Gulf of Thailand during August to November usually benefits from the annual Southwestern Monsoon, in which large amounts of rainfall brings silt down to the estuaries, creating an enriched pool of food for marine animals and migrant birds.

Ways of life and occupations

Before the economy expanded rapidly following the implementation of a series of national economic and social development plans, which first began in B.E.2504 (A.D.1961), the local ways of life and even the economic activities with the outside world in the two Samut cities were still thoroughly attached to the eco-cultural contexts of the areas. For example, people who live on the coastal plain earned their life from salt farming, charcoal making from mangrove woods, fishery, and fishing boat building while those who lived in the lowlands would take advantage of the extraordinary nature of the three waters to grow plants like coconut palms, lychees, and pomelos, which were widely recognised for their good taste; they would even grow rice in ditches. Besides, vegetable plantations were common in Samut Sakorn.

Several production sectors have also arisen from the above-mentioned activities. Wholesale and retail trade by water transportation prospered, and simple agricultural processing with products such as shrimp paste and coconut-palm sugar earned a nation-wide reputation. By these economic activities, Gross Provincial Product (GPP) of Samut Songkram used to be on the top rank of the country.

In terms of arts and crafts, the two provinces have been famous for their *benjarong* ceramic manufacture. Samut Songkram, as a producer of coconut palms, has keen knowledge and skill in Thai fiddle making, due to the fact that the coconut shell is usually used to make the sound box of a fiddle. Samut

Sakorn, however, has been well-known for a number of good bands playing *gamelan* and other Thai musical instruments.

Accordingly, Samut Sakorn and Samut Songkram were regarded as sister cities due to their geographical and cultural linkages. However, as they have grown up, these two sisters have embedded totally different sets of thoughts and visions, which seem to promise very different futures.

Different development paths of two Samut cities

Thirty years ago, these two Samut cities took different development paths. It was obviously shown through their urban zoning. Samut Sakorn turned opened their land zoning to welcome industrial development, while Samut Sakorn remains agricultural land. Since 1981, the growth of industrial sector in Samut Sakorn has rapidly increased, leading to the dramatic change in economic structure of Samut Sakorn province.

The share of agricultural sector in total Gross Provincial Product (GPP) was rapidly declined from around 50% in 1981 to around 20% in 1991. Oppositely, the share of industrial sector in Samut Sakorn province was dramatically increased. In 2005, the share of industrial section in GPP was more than 80% of total GPP in Samut Sakorn. The share of agricultural sector in Samut Sakorn is now reduced to only 4% (see Figure 1).

In Samut Songkram, the main economic sector in 1981 was service and agricultural sectors. From 1981 to 1991, the share of industrial sector increased only gradually. At the same time, the share of the agricultural sector in Samut Songkram was also reduced slowly. Up to 2005, the share of industrial sector in total Samut Songkram's GPP is only around 23%. However, the share of agricultural sector has been reduced from around 30% in 1981 down to 7% in 2005 (see Figure 2).

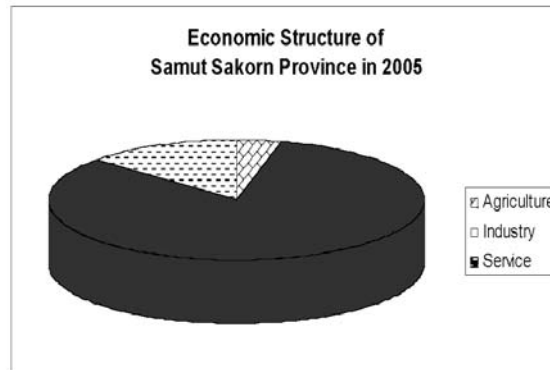
Different economic development paths result in extremely different economic growth patterns between these two Samut provinces. Figure 3 shows the GPP of these two Samut provinces in the real term (GPP at 1988 constant price). Obviously, the growth of GPP in Samut Sakorn has increased very rapidly, while the GPP growth in Samut Songkram has been relatively slow. The end result in 2005 is that the GPP of Samut Songkram province is

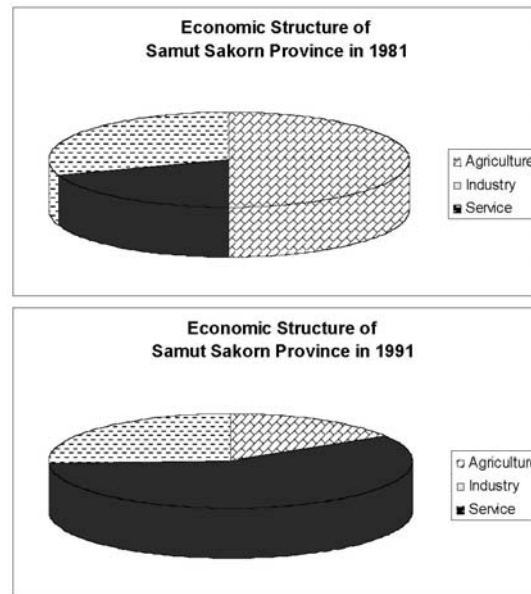
22 times higher than Samut Songkram. In GPP per capita term, Samut Sakorn has nearly 500,000 Thai Baht/capita/year in 2005, the second highest province in Thailand after Rayong, while in 2005, the GPP per capita of Samut Songkram is only around 60,000 Thai Baht/capita/year (Figure 4).

Through these different economic different paths, these two Samut provinces are also different in their economic strengths. By applying the location quotient analysis, Table 1 shows that the economic strength of Samut Sakorn province lies on the manufacturing sector, like textile and garment industries, rubber and food industries, while Samut Songkram still keeps their strengths in several traditional productions, like fruits, salt, marine fishery, etc. Surprisingly, in Samut Songkram, health and social works can be one of the strong economic sectors in the province. This may also be one of the factors that lead to different development outcomes, discussed in the next part.

One of the main consequences of the rapid economic growth in Samut Sakorn is the rapid increase in total population (as shown in Figure 5) due to the higher needs of labour for the industrial sector. Inevitably, as seen in several cases, the increase in total population reduces social cohesion within the community and, at the same time, results in higher environmental quality and in more requisites for several social services.

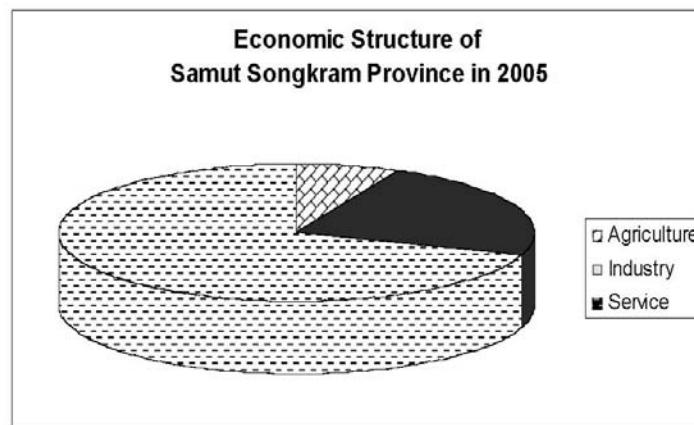
Figure 1: Changes in economic structure of Samut Sakorn Province

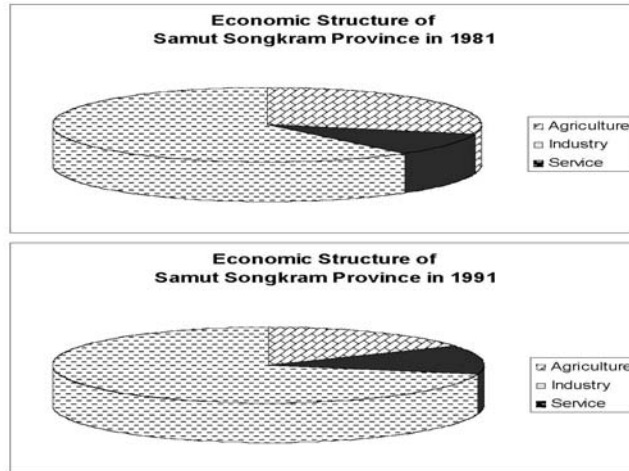




Source: Calculated from the GPP and GRP data by National Economic and Social Development Board.

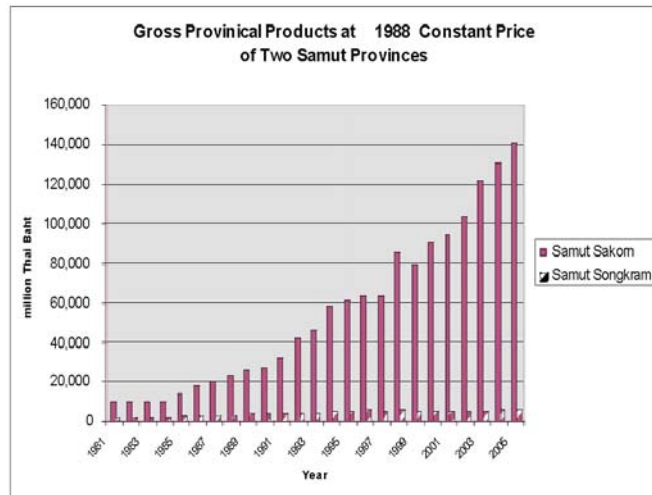
Figure 2: Changes in economic structure of Samut Songkram Province





Source: Calculated from the GPP and GRP data by National Economic and Social Development Board.

Figure 3: Gross Provincial Products at 1988 constant price of two Samut Provinces



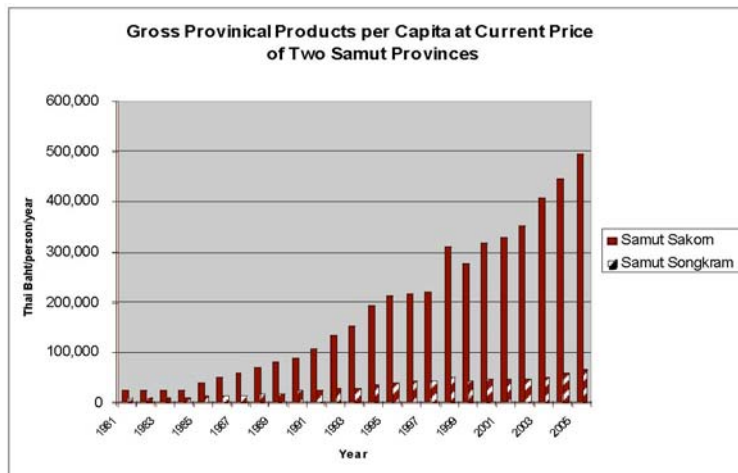
Source: Calculated from the GPP and GRP data by National Economic and Social Development Board.

Table 1: Ten leading economic sectors in two Samut Provinces analysed by location Quotient Analysis

Sector	Samut Sakorn		Sector	Samut Songkram	
	2001	2006		2001	2006
Textile industry	4.03	4.27	Salt mining	28.06	39.64
Marine fishery	1.94	3.79	Tobacco industry	15.14	7.80
Office equipment	3.02	3.55	Vegetables	4.29	6.06
Garment industry	3.32	2.90	Fruits	3.85	5.64
Salt mining	5.21	2.73	Health and social welfare	3.93	4.78
Rubber industry	2.84	2.61	Education	4.13	4.49
House-ware industry	1.99	2.00	Insurance and pension	3.30	4.30
Paper industry	1.38	1.96	Financial support service	2.94	3.56
Food industry	1.66	1.72	Forestry products (Charcoal)	1.95	3.52
Metal works industry	1.66	1.54	Wholesale and retail	3.39	3.50

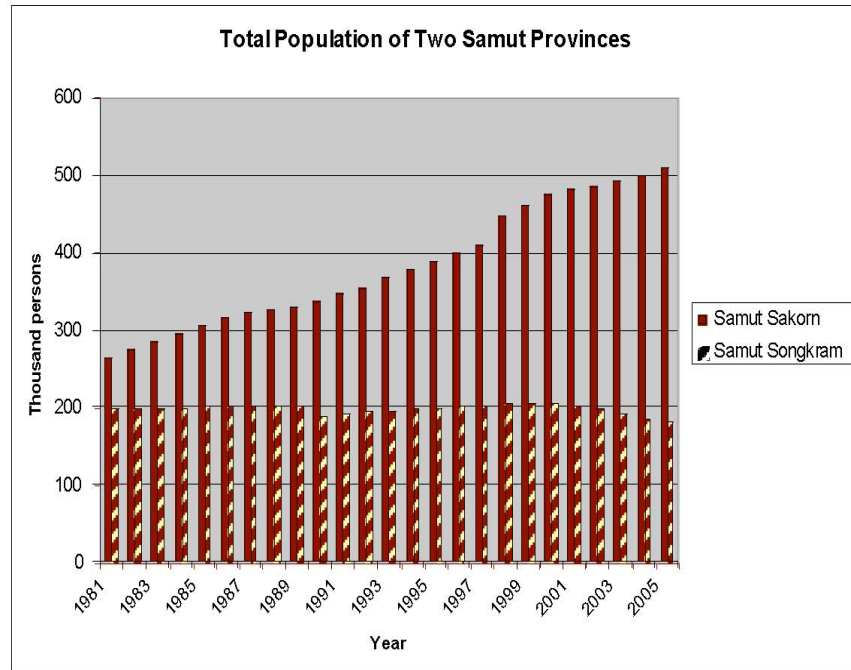
Source: Calculated from the GPP and GRP data by National Economic and Social Development Board.

Figure 4: Gross Provincial Products per capita of two Samut Provinces



Source: Calculated from the GPP and GRP data by National Economic and Social Development Board.

Figure 5: Comparison of total population in two Samut Provinces



Source: GPP and GRP data by National Economic and Social Development Board. Development Outcomes of Two Samut Cities

In modernisation theory, it is implied that the richer the economy, the greater the wellbeing of society. However, in reality, this is not always true. Table 2 presents different development indicators of these two Samut provinces. Although, in terms of GPP per capita, Samut Sakorn has 8 times higher income than Samut Songkram, Samut Sakorn still faces more serious problems in several aspects. Samut Sakorn province has a rate of new HIV/AIDS patients almost 9 times higher than Samut Songkram. The percentage of households affected by pollution of Samut Sakorn is 20 times higher than Samut Songkram. At the same time, Samut Sakorn also has a higher rate in risky health behaviour, crimes, and surprisingly, unemployment. Last, but not least, the percentage of households participating in community activities is also much lower in Samut Sakorn.

Table 2: Some selected development indicators of Samut Sakorn and Samut Songkram provinces

Development Indicators	Samut Sakorn	Samut Songkram
Gross provincial product per capita (Baht/capita/year)	449,780	61,311
Rate of new HIV/AIDS patients (per 100,000 population)	8.8	1.0
Rate of infants with low birth weight (%)	9.3	7.7
Rate of unemployment (%)	1.1	0.4
Rate of households with poverty (percent)	1.68	4.86
Rate of households affected by pollution (%)	12.5	0.6
Number of crimes per 100,000 population	41	32
Rate of households participated in community activities (%)	73.6	93.1
Rate of population with risky health behaviours (%)	34.0	26.2

Source: Thailand Human Development Report 2007.

However, Table 2 still presents only some pictures of the development outcomes of these two provinces. To present the development outcomes in overall picture, this study applies the Human Achievement Index (HAI), developed by UNDP Thailand. In HAI, the overall human development outcome comprises of 8 aspects as presented in Table 3. The index in each aspects presents in term of rank (1 = the best and 76 = the worst performance) and levels (5 levels from very low to very high).

The result from the Table 3 shows that, with the strong economic growth, Samut Sakorn is very strong in income and employment aspects (no. 3 in the country), as well as in health, transportation and communication. Although, in these aspects, Samut Songkram ranks lower than Samut Sakorn, Samut Songkram is still in the 'very high' and 'high' position. On the contrary, Samut Sakorn registers 'very low' performance situation in several categories including: education, housing and living environment, and participation (no.76 in the country) aspects, as well as 'low' performance in family and community life. Samut Songkram is only registers 'very low' performance in family and community life. This leads to the overall result that Samut Songkram province has a better human achievement index ranking than Samut Sakorn (no. 11 compared to no. 24 in the country), though Samut Songkram has a much lower GPP per

capita, as earlier discussed in this paper. This result confirms that, unlike in modernisation theory, the richer economy does not always yield the better quality of life and wellbeing. In this case, it is obvious that Samut Sakorn is now facing the tension between high economic growth and severe social problems, while human development in Samut Songkram is more balanced and, therefore, higher in wellbeing outcomes.

Recently, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security announced that Samut Songkram is the best province in the country in the 2006 human security index (Social Warning Centre, 2007). This also stresses the good performance of more balanced development in Samut Songkram province.

Table 3: The ranks of the Human Achievement Index in two Samut provinces

Aspects in Human Achievement Index	Samut Sakorn		Samut Songkram	
	Rank	Level	Rank	Level
GPP per Capita	2	Very high	33	Medium
Health index	9	Very high	14	Very high
Education index	67	Very low	43	Medium
Employment index	3	Very high	35	High
Income index	3	Very high	10	Very high
Housing and living environment index	72	Very low	20	High
Family and community life	56	Low	65	Very low
Transportation and communication	20	Very high	11	Very high
Participation	76	Very low	22	High
Overall Human Achievement Index	24	High	11	Very High

Note: Rank 1 is the best performing province in the country in each aspect. Rank 76 is the worst performing province in the country in each aspect.

The home of exotic Thai products and lifestyles

It has been manifest that Samut Songkram, despite its generally assumed slower pace along the development track, is able to preserve its ecological and cultural assets much better than Samut Sakorn. Nowadays, Samut Songkram is renowned as one of the cultural oases which are still alive in modern Thai society. Each year it has welcomed more than 400,000 visitors who are inspired by the nostalgic atmosphere of the city.

Samut Sakorn, to some extent, has struggled very hard to rescue some of the last vestiges of its eco-cultural identities. Although the result now is still far from satisfactory, some efforts

have been recognised. Table 4 below shows some records of their achievements as well as those of Samut Songkram.

Table 4: The exotic Thai products and lifestyles in Samut Sakorn and Samut Songkram

Item	Samut Sakorn	Samut Songkram
Exotic Thai products	-shrimp paste -sea mussel	-worm shell at Don Hoy Lord - charcoal making from mangrove
	-‘Phetsakorn’ longan -Salt farming	wood at Baan Yisarn -coconut-palm sugar at Tao Tan
		-‘Ampawa’ lychees at Bang Khonthee district
		-stake-trapped mackerels from Mae Klong River
		-shrimp paste at Klong Khone - products from nipa palms
		-fiddle making at Baan Phaya Sor -rolling cigarettes at Bang Khonthee district
Exotic Thai lifestyles	-local fishery village, fishery canals -Seafood market at Mahachai	-Tha Kha floating market - Ampawa floating market -Folk museum, Baan Yisarn
	-Bird-watching at Kok Kham Mangrove Forest	-Firefly watching boat trip -Home stay at Bang Pongpang and other communities
		-plank propelling on a mud bank for mussel picking at Don Hoy Lord

In Samut Songkram, the preservation of these exotic Thai products and lifestyles has been overwhelmingly supported by local government as well as local civil society, with the belief that it can promote community economy and local employment. In other words, it is hoped that this development track will nurture social relationship among community and family members. Social capitals are thus intensively emphasised within this development path, as Surachit Chiravet, former president of Samut Songkram’s Chamber of Commerce stated

We, the people of Mae Klong must not be hopeless. We are not hopeless because we have social capitals, which are the wisdom of our predecessors and our tradition. This set of knowledge from the past can be applied to serve our problem solving at present (Surachit Chiravet, 2004).

On the contrary, in Samut Sakorn social capital is not a prominent public agenda. And the call for the mobilisation of it is still too quiet to be heard.

Future challenges of the two Samut cities

Obviously, the future challenges of these two Samut cities are different. For Samut Sakorn, the key questions are how to turn their high income into better quality of life. As shown in Table 5, social investments in Samut Sakorn are relatively low compared to Samut Songkram, both in terms of percentage in total GPP and social investment per capita. This possibly links to lower scores in educational, environmental and participation indices. The future challenge here is to stimulate social investment in Samut Sakorn.

Table 5: Social investment in GPP of two Samut provinces (millions of baht)

	Samut Sakorn		Samut Songkram	
	2001	2005	2001	2005
Education	1,011	1468	760	969
Health and social work	892	1,347	485	648
Other community, social, and personal service activities	675	774	688	841
Total Social Investment	2,578	3,589	1,933	2,458
Gross Provincial Product (GPP)	159,304	252,264	9,856	12,084
Percentage in GPP	1.618	1.423	19.612	20.341
Population	482,000	510,000	203,000	198,000
Social Investment per Capita (Baht)	5,348.5	7,037.3	9,522.2	12,414.1

Source: Calculated from the GPP and GRP data by National Economic and Social Development Board.

At the same time, the recovery and conservation of natural resources and environmental quality, like water quality or air quality, in Samut Sakorn are far below environmental standards. However, natural conservation and recovery are must take place within the context of strong community participation. This leads to the conclusion that the future challenge in Samut Sakorn lies in the possibility of building strong community in a very diverse society.

For Samut Songkram, although their quality of life is higher than Samut Sakorn, they also face several challenges. First of all,

the reductions in total population and agricultural production (in constant price GPP) lead to the serious question on the sustainability of their ways of life. Samut Songkram must try harder to translate their impressive social investment into better economic performances, especially in the agricultural sector, otherwise their several present exotic productions will sooner or later become historical tales.

Second, Samut Songkarm is now facing the threats of mega-projects. Three years ago, the Thai government planned to build a highway crossing the Gulf of Thailand and the mouth of the Mae Klong River. This highway may cause several negative impacts on natural environmental, local economy, and local culture. Fortunately, a local civil group in Samut Songkram actively protested against this highway until the government decided to stop this project. However, now the new project, 800-1,000 MW coal-fired power plant, is coming to knock at their door. Although, as shown in Table 6, this coal-fired power plant is more likely to serve the 850 MW peak demand of Samut Sakorn rather than a tiny 40 MW demand of Samut Songkram, this power plant is planned to be located on Samut Songkram and may cause severe environmental and health impacts on the Samut Songkram side. It is very challenging for Samut Songkram to keep their province away from the negative impacts of mega-projects.

Table 6: Comparison of installed capacity and energy consumption

	Installed capacity (Megawatts)	Electricity generation (million units)
Coal-fired power plant	800	5,967
	Peak demand (Megawatts)	Electricity consumption (million units)
Samut Sakorn province	850	5,610
Samut Songkram province	40	226

Source: Own calculation

Conclusion

The different development paths lead these two Samut provinces into different directions and, therefore, different development outcomes. From an agricultural base growing from the three water

ecosystems, Samut Sakorn has now become the industrial hub with the second highest GPP per capita in the country. However, Samut Sakorn cannot turn its higher economic performance into satisfactory human and social development outcomes. On the contrary, although Samut Songkram has been much slower in terms of industrial development and economic growth, they can keep their traditional production strengths and, at the same time, provide better human development and wellbeing outcomes. This certainly can be one of the good examples that, unlike modernisation theory, the richer economies do not necessary to end up with a better quality of life.

The future challenges are waiting for these two Samut cities. For Samut Sakorn, higher and better social investments are needed. Samut Songkram will be more sustainable if they can turn their strong social capital into better economic performance. It will also be interesting to see what lessons are taken from these two Samut sisters and how they will inform and urge Thai society to rethink their development path and direction, especially in the quest for sufficiency economy.

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