Self-Transformation of the Elderly People in a Peri-Urban Area in Chiang Mai

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Abstract

This research study aims to understand and account for the elderly people's adaptation to the changes as a result of their re-engagement and, later, their self-transformation occurring in the process. The qualitative approach is used, and the relevant data were collected by means of in-depth interviews, participation, observation, and casual conversations. The unit of analysis is the changing characteristics of the elderly people through the lens of 'emergence.' Twelve informants participated in the study. It was found that, in the current of the on-going urbanization process in a peri-urban area in Chiang Mai, the local elderly people had to adjust themselves in the wake of the rapid disappearance of the farming career and the occurrence of several social changes, all of which were adversely affecting the maintaining of their normal life in old age. Formerly, they were seen to have comported themselves in line with the traditional way of being senior citizens: 'relaxed farmers.' Then interrupted by the advent of urbanization, they were socially re-engaging themselves in an attempt to adjust themselves to the situation through adopting different strategies as opportunities permitted in order to carry on as normal members of society in their urbanizing community. In so doing, they were seen to have emerged as 'actively connective citizens.' They were thus seen to have undergone self-transformation from 'relaxed farmers' to 'actively connective citizens.'

Keywords: urbanization, peri-urban, elderly people, re-engagement, self-transformation

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การเปลี่ยนแปลงตัวตนของผู้สูงอายุในพื้นที่กึ่งเมืองกึ่งชนบทในจังหวัดเชียงใหม่

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บทคัดย่อ

    งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อที่จะทำความเข้าใจและอธิบายถึงเหตุผลของการปรับตัวของผู้สูงอายุที่มีต่อการเปลี่ยนแปลงที่เกิดขึ้นเนื่องมาจากการหวนพัวพันและการเปลี่ยนแปลงตัวตนของผู้สูงอายุที่เกิดขึ้นตามมา โดยใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ เก็บข้อมูลโดยการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก การมีส่วนร่วม การสังเกตุ และการพูดคุยโดยทั่วไป โดยมีผู้สูงวัยที่จำนวน 13 ท่านเป็นผู้ให้ข้อมูล การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลได้พิจารณาถึงลักษณะที่เปลี่ยนไปของผู้สูงอายุผ่านแนวคิด การปรากฏออกมา การวิจัยพบว่าในกระแสของกระบวนการการกลายเป็นเมืองที่กำลังดำเนินไปอย่างต่อเนื่องในพื้นที่กึ่งเมืองกึ่งชนบทในจังหวัดเชียงใหม่ผู้สูงอายุที่อาศัยอยู่ในพื้นที่จำต้องมีการปรับตัวเมื่อต้องเผชิญกับการหายไปอย่างรวดเร็วต่อการเกิดขึ้นของความเปลี่ยนแปลงทางสังคมต่างๆซึ่งล้วนแต่มีผลกระทบต่อการดำเนินชีวิตตามปกติของผู้สูงอายุ แต่เดิมที่ผู้สูงอายุได้ดำเนินชีวิตตามแบบดั้งเดิมที่สืบทอดกันมาในฐานะผู้สูงอายุที่มีลักษณะเป็นแบบเกษตรกรตามอัธยาศัย ต่อมาการกลายเป็นเมืองได้เข้าสู่พื้นที่ ผู้สูงอายุจึงได้เกิดการหวนพัวพันทางสังคมในความพยายามที่จะปรับตัวเองให้เข้ากับสถานการณ์โดยกลยุทธ์ที่แตกต่างกันออกไปตามโอกาสในอันที่จะดำเนินชีวิตต่อไปตามปกติเช่นเดียวกับสมาชิกอื่นๆในสังคมในพื้นที่ที่กำลังผ่านขบวนการการกลายเป็นเมืองแห่งนี้ ในการดังกล่าวผู้สูงอายุจึงถูกมองว่าผ่านการเปลี่ยนแปลงตัวตนจากเกษตรกรตามอัธยาศัยสู่ผู้สร้างความเชื่อมโยงเชิงรุก

คำสำคัญ: การกลายเป็นเมือง กึ่งเมืองกึ่งชนบท ผู้สูงอายุ การหวนพัวพัน การเปลี่ยนแปลงตัวตน

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Introduction

The advent of urbanization at a particular rural area sooner or later turns the place into an urbanizing or peri-urban area. Tubtim (2012) refers to the rural areas adjacent to the town areas as peri-urban areas in which they are laden with complex and dynamic in-bound migratory movement thanks to improved infrastructure. Such a circumstance unveils the in-migration of urban middle-class settlers moving into the area with their values and imaginations of the countryside. Therefore, peri-urban areas may be said to be blessed with a great deal of attraction and much sought after by the middle-class people from downtown who wish to have a residence in the rural areas, yet within the reach of all the amenities of the urban areas. This phenomenon, according to Tubtim (2012, 2014), is called 'reverse migration or counter-urbanization of the city.' Those who moved to the Chiang Mai peri-urban areas, such as businesspeople, academics, artists, NGO people, middle-class people from Bangkok wishing to have a second house, foreigners having a Thai wife or working in Chiang Mai, and, increasingly, foreign retirees who could live comfortably with otherwise mush higher living costs back home, were mostly those having a job downtown or working from home. Tubtim (2012, 2014) further states that the increasing outbound re-settlement in peri-urban Chiang Mai of such people means the expansion of the urban areas into the rural areas where the new settlers lived in close proximity with the local people. Tubtim (2012, 2014) therefore characterizes a peri-urban area as an area of "class encounters between post-productivist villagers and middle-class migrants." The encounters, class-based as such, according to Tubtim (2012, 2014), did not happen as a result of the difference between the representation of the imagined countryside and the actual state, but as an outcome of the situation where the new settlers and the local people lived in proximity and interacted with each other as neighbors while having different values based on their classes, which, in turn, inevitably brought about such encounters. In addition, there are some relevant studies accounting for the lives of elderly Thai people both in urban and rural areas. Bunyanuphong and Bunyanuphong (1993) studied the potential of elderly people aged 60 and over for in both urban and rural areas of Chiang Mai working for the benefit of society. They found that the elderly people had the potential to serve such a purpose provided that relevant requirements were adjusted to suit their conditions. Penpeng (2004) conducted research on adjustment of poor elderly people regarding finance, physical health, psychological, and social factors in Phetchabun Province in 2003. He found that the level of overall adjustment of most of the elderly people was on the positive side, measuring 56.76%. This means that most of the elderly people adjusted themselves relatively well. However, according to the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2017), it was found that the old-age dependency ratio had increased steadily in Thailand since 1990. This means that there would be fewer younger people to support their elderly adults. It was also found that the potential support ratio in Thailand had also

decreased steadily, which means that elderly people would have less support from their economically productive children. In addition, the information available from TDRI (2019) shows that the majority of older people do not have enough savings, and that would likely cause them to face possible financial difficulties in future. Furthermore, Rigg et al. (2020) state that Thailand can be categorized as a society transforming quickly from that of ageing to that of becoming aged with the population aged 65 exceeding 14 percent, and may shortly turn into a super-aged society with the population aged 65 exceeding 21 percent. Rigg et al. (2020) also explain that families become smaller and the number of young people in rural households is declining; a large number of young people also find work in non-farming fields of work, or they may find work elsewhere, leaving elderly people behind on the farm. As urbanization is an on-going process, a peri-urban area thus abounds with changes. Such a fact situates the local people in a rural-urban blend. The study site of this study, Rim Wiang, then began with the progression of urban sprawl into the area. Several real estate developers came in and started amassing land for their housing projects. The target land had been, for certain, the farmland of the community because it was many small plots adjoining each other which formed big plots of land. As a result, the farming career was rapidly disappearing. Then, new housing projects were seen to take the place of the once-bountiful rice fields. Furthermore, many outsiders also moved in after they bought land and built their houses in the community. Migrant workers also came in to rent houses which were scattered all over the community. Outsiders from other places not only came into the area for resettlement, they also inevitably contested resources primarily intended for the local people. The local people's normal way of life was disrupted. It can be said that the environment, including the built environment, the natural environment, and the social environment, was changing. These changes sent their repercussions across the whole area. Ones among those directly affected were the local elderly people. Instead of growing old in their idyllic place, they had to live in a changing environment where they would soon find themselves strangers in their own land. The impact of such changes practically subjected them to privations and disruptions in their old age, the time which would otherwise have been well spent in a serene, pastoral atmosphere. Previously, the people of Rim Wiang had lived in a rather well-consolidated community through the strength of their social support mechanisms. They also traditionally identified with one another in such a way that their fellow villagers were one's significant others. Occasional dependence on one another was commonplace. However, once urbanization set in, the onset of changes began. As already mentioned above, the changes posed a threat of life's insecurity among the elderly people. Such a threat then led them to their adaptation, or also known here as their re-engagement, by means of various strategies, ranging from situating themselves in a household context to situating themselves in such contexts that they had to become more attached to the outside of their community. While the above-mentioned works generally

focus on the nature of class encounters in a Chiang Mai peri-urban area, the lives of elderly people in Chiang Mai and Thailand, and the ageing of Thai farmers respectively, this research study seeks to fill a gap in literature on urbanization by examining the self–transformation of the elderly people, which is rarely found in previous studies.

Research Objectives.

The aim of this study is to understand and account for the elderly people's adaptation to the changes as a result of their re-engagement and to analyze the self-transformation that occurs in the process.

Research Methodology

The outline of this study involved fieldsite selection, data collection, ethical consideration, and data analysis. Rim Wiang, a sub-district situated about nine or ten kilometers from downtown Chiang Mai, was selected as the fieldsite. The area was selected because it was an urbanizing area and it had been a rural area before. In such an urbanizing area, there were a lot of changes to be found almost everywhere in the community. Therefore, it offered a particular rural-urban context. With regard to data collection, it involved in-depth interviews, direct observation, casual conversations, and participation. On selecting informants, thirteen informants, aged 60-75, were chosen through the channel of personal connection. All the informants were local elderly people who witnessed Rim Wiang's changing states from its rural state to its peri-urban state. They were both males and females aged 60 and over. Their situation was multi-faceted. First, they were either providers or co-providers of the family. Until they had had to sell their farmland, they contributed financially to the family in the same way as the other younger family members did. Second, they were the owners of the family farmland. They had either inherited farmland from their parents or bought it long before. Third, they were the first and last batch of the community's elderly people to witness the rapid disappearance of the farming career owing to the massive loss of the community's farmland. Fourth, they were the first batch of the community's elderly people at the time to first feel the tangible presence of urbanization. The collected data were verified through casual conversations with other local residents. Before the data were analyzed, fictitious names were used in place of all the names concerned to preserve their anonymity. Then, the data were analyzed through the lens of 'emergence.'

The concept of emergence was first explicitly used by George Henry Lewes in 1987 (Sawyer, 2001). His classic example of the concept was the combination of hydrogen and oxygen that ultimately gave water. Water was explained to be emerging from such combination, and the emergent properties of water were not reducible to either those of hydrogen or those of oxygen alone. Simply put, Watson (2013) states that an emerging macro

property is the kind of property that is not identical with a micro property. However, according to Goldspink and Kay (2007), the concept has been widely applied in many disciplines while it is matter-of-factly unclearly defined. Kim (2006) therefore suggests that, even though the concept may be used in such a way that it may be taken to mean whatever one wants it to mean, one should be logical enough to practically make it theoretically functional. The concept of emergence has been applied in many different fields. It is interdisciplinarily applied in Trosper's work (2005) to his social-ecological analysis, accounting for cultural emergent structures through the explanation of many differences in assumptions in the fields of ecology, sociology, political science, economics, and ecological economics. DellaCava et al. (2004) demonstrated the adoption movement to be fully developed into a state of being an emergent institution according to its properties of being a proactive, reformative social movement seen through the activities supported by government, voluntary agencies, organizations, and other systems in society, toward adoption to the extent where adoption has now been merged into the American way of life. In a public communication research study on media technology, Hermida (2010) explored the effects of awareness systems on journalism norms and practices through the emergence of new social media technologies, such as Twitter, that enable the instant, online dissemination of short fragments of information from a variety of official and unofficial sources, leading to awareness systems that can be described as ambient journalism. The emerging ambient journalism attributed to the use of these new digital technologies has become a new area for research in journalism.

This study mainly draws from the concept of emergence proposed by Peter McHugh (1968, as cited in Kapferer, 1976) because it is stated clearly and practical in the sense of operationalization. Emergence, according to McHugh, is referred to as "the definition, and transformations in definition, of an event over time." This concept draws a line between an existing state of affairs, which can be defined as one situation, and a new one, which comes into being out of the existing situation and develops into another state of affairs, which can be defined as another situation. Emergence is thus deemed as a tipping point whereby one situation has transformed into another. To operationalize this concept, there are two things that need to be taken into consideration. The first one is that change in an event that leads to the characteristics or features of a new, or emerging, event must be seen to have existed in one's environs. The other thing is that such characteristics or features must endure over time.

Results

From Re-engagement to Self-Transformation

Rim Wiang is a particular case where rural-urban interpenetration is an on-going process. Such a situation brings both challenges and opportunities. The findings in Rim Wiang

show that the changing situation affected the elderly people's family contexts which in turn played an important role in shaping the elderly people's self-transformation. This was manifest by such a fact that they simply could not afford to be as not so active as they used to be anymore because of the fact that several important local cooperative mechanisms were disabled in the urbanization process. That is to say, the context in which they found themselves did not favor them anymore. In such a situation, they had to re-engage themselves through different ways according to their own means and available opportunities. This reveals that their former practices changed over to new practices. In effect, there was a shift of orientation among them in the changing environment.

The case of Grandpa Em, 70 years old, may be used to illustrate this. Grandpa Em lives with his wife and the family of one of his daughters. His daughter basically cares for them. Grandpa Em was a rice farmer when he sold his rice fields. In fact, he did not want to sell his land, but he had to because it was surrounded by the farmland which had already been sold earlier. If he had not sold it, he would not be able to get to it anyway. The sale of his rice fields, for the family, came as a bolt from the blue because he and his wife became workless immediately after that. He said,

> I didn't know what to do for a living when my only expertise is farming. I am fortunate that my children are all dependable. My other children were all
> self-supporting, except for my youngest daughter who did not have a proper job to do. She was a temporary employee at the day care center of the municipality. (personal communication, July 11, 2015)

Grandpa Em was able to identify an opportunity of a new venture, seeing that his daughter was an employee at the SAO (Sub-district Administration Office) day care center and had a rough idea of how to run it.

> So when I lost my farming job, I discussed with my daughter and we came up with an idea of opening a day care center because the SAO day care center does not take alien children. It's their policy. That was our opportunity. (personal communication, July 11, 2015)

So, he encouraged his daughter to go into this daycare business. Yet, he was aware that his daughter would not be able to handle it alone as it would be too much work for them to deal with several small children at the same time. So, he asked his daughter to quit the SAO job in order to run her own daycare center full time with his assistance.

Early on, it seemed to me to be the time for a real rest because we had no land to farm anyway. Since my daughter was just a temporary employee and the money she made was not very much. A few thousand Baht a month and it took her the whole day. I said to her that she might as well quit the job and do the same thing at home. So we had the first floor of our house adapted so as to take a few children. Now she has eight children in her care. (personal communication, July 11, 2015)

With the new daycare center, he has taken the opportunity of "caring for those small children" in the sense of fitting himself in with an old-age tradition of "staying home helping care for small children." He also automatically considers himself to be a dependent on the family and puts himself in the position of being provided for. Additionally, he also helps with other household chores. Therefore, he and his wife are now basically responsible for home-making in support of their daughter. From this case, we may be able to see that Grandpa Em did not have the resources to carry on with making a living because he had had to sell his rice fields. The context changed from his "being a co-provider" to "being a dependent." Therefore, he decided to define himself as one whose time to be provided for by his children has arrived, though earlier than expected owing to the changing context.

The findings also show that some elderly people's re-engagement might be characterized by the desire for upward mobility as available opportunities opened up new routes for them. As already mentioned above, opportunities also come with urbanization processes. In this case, the context favored them because the opportunities were on their side. They then came to define themselves differently from the conventional way of thinking by the old folks in general. They have defined themselves as those who are ready for change and step toward the opportunities, resulting in their re-engagement in a different manner. In so doing, they not only did that for themselves, they also did that for the good of their family. Thus this may be viewed as their desire for upward mobility. In the case of Grandpa Put, 65 years old, he lives with his wife, 63, his daughter, and his nephew. His daughter, also as his dependent, was divorced from her husband years ago. After the divorce, she came back to Grandpa Put with her 3-year-old son to live with him. She graduated from a vocational school in Chiang Mai. She is not working because she has to care for her son. Besides, it was hard for her to find a job. So, Grandpa Put has to provide for the whole family. Grandpa Put sold his rice fields to the nearby real estate development project and made a big fortune. He made over a million Baht from that sale. He used part of his money for starting a homestay business, which was encouraged by the village head who had created this project as part of the nationwide community-based tourism (CBT) network. Grandpa Put decided to join the village head's CBT homestay project last two years because he was convinced that it would be a

successful project in future. Simultaneously, as construction work is abundant in the area, backfilling and leveling have become necessary work in construction. As one of Grandpa Put's friends is a backfilling contractor, Grandpa Put saw the opportunity of getting into this business. He consulted his friend about becoming his business affiliate. His friend agreed and suggested that Grandpa Put buy a small truck for hauling soil to backfill areas that needed filling up, and he would support him with orders. Grandpa Put then followed his advice and bought a truck for the purpose. He is now like part of the backup team for his contractor friend, with continual work to do. In his case, if Grandpa had defined himself as a disengaging man, he would have been one eating away his savings until all the savings were used up. But he did it differently. He has defined himself as a man with high potential to accomplish things, and he made it as he wished.

Self-transformation: from relaxed to actively connective

The elderly people's changing hometown brought about both threats and opportunities that led to their adaptation to the changes. In so doing, they finally emerged altered, which could be couched as their self-transformation, where they were seen to have transformed, or emerged, from relaxed countryfolk to actively connective folk**.**

Elderly people as relaxed countryfolk

Rim Wiang was a rural area before, just as other villages were, beyond the suburbs of Chiang Mai. From what I was told by the people there, Rim Wiang could be called an idyllic place where the villagers lived a very quiet and simple life. All the villagers knew each other quite well because they were related somehow. They could be either relatives or just fellow villagers. Life was generally at a slow pace. When occasions arose, they got together so as to help one another, especially during the planting or harvest seasons. For example, one fellow villager would help another fellow villager do the planting of young seedlings in return for similar assistance for the same number of days that the latter did for him. This is called 'long khaek.' Furthermore, there was not much contestation for work or food supply in the community. One was hired to help with odd jobs in the fields, in somebody's orchard or backyard from time to time. As for food supply, one freely picked edible climbing plants on one's neighbor's fence or vegetables planted in the neighbor's backyard for the asking as 'urban farming' had not arrived just yet. Contesting food supply from new settlers from outside was a rare case as the number of new settlers was minimal. The living costs were not very high and the local people hardly complained. Farming was still absolutely a sustainably viable career. From what I heard from the local people there, the local elderly people were once seen to have been characterized by the following traits. First of all, they were fairly satisfied with the status quo as their living costs were comparatively at an acceptable level.

For example, vegetables could be readily available at cheap prices in the neighborhood even though they might have had to buy meat, which was not produced locally. That was because there was still not much contestation of resources or supplies from outsiders or new settlers. Therefore, they were able to survive on quite a low budget. This was evidenced by Grandpa Sit's remarks.

> I've been living in this community all along, and I notice that life is not as easy as it used to be. Seven years back when I still owned some farmland, I feel that earning just enough to live comfortably was not that hard. My income was enough and to spare. Now, in order to live as I used to is a struggle. (personal communication, April 22, 2015)

From this remarks, Grandpa Sit compared the two situations: Rim Wiang in the past and Rim Wiang at present. He expressed his opinion that making a living in Rim Wiang used to be something like plain sailing. To make ends meet for him was not that difficult, and that was an entirely different story for the present situation. His remarks show that he was considerably satisfied with such a life. On the contrary, he is relatively unhappy about the way it is at the present time when he sees it as a struggle. Another case of dissatisfaction may be observed from Grandma Pong's words.

> Under the present circumstances where everything's so expensive, it's not quite possible for one to help another. One has to take care of oneself and family first, which is very difficult already. Passing each day is not easy. (personal communication, July 21, 2015)

Here, Grandma Pong expressed some dissatisfaction with the current situation which shows that life is not as easy as it used to be. The difficulty, if not hardship, makes her think that getting by from day to day already takes a lot of doing, which is comparatively hard for her. Secondly, the elderly people were relatively unhurried toward life as life moved on at quite a comfortably slow pace from day to day, and that was their perception. The dynamics of life in the fast lane were still far away in those days. Grandma Da recalled such a leisurely lifestyle in the following words of hers.

> Life in our community used to be very easy some ten or fifteen years back. We had a kind of life that one might call a leisurely lifestyle. We hardly struggled to live, and we were never rushed to do anything. We did things at our own pace, which befits old people. Though it was kind of slow, we had no need to rush. (personal communication, June 9, 2015)

Grandma Da was very clear in her way of thinking that life in the past was characterized by unhurriedness. They did not have the need to hurry because they did not have to struggle to live. That was also probably because they had never been through the economic harshness of making a living. The atmosphere was thus conducive to unhurriedness, which she thought befitted old people. Thirdly, they were very well related to one another within their close-knit networks. They practically depended on one another in the community where they were all familiar with one another and hardly ever depended on the outside world in their day-to-day life, except when they had to be hospitalized for serious illnesses or buy some things which were not available in their community, such as electrical household appliances. It was as if they were living in a self-contained community with all the conveniences they would ever want, and this was likely cause them to be rather socially inward-looking. Grandma Na had something to say about this. "We used to get some fish from the fields over there. We salted them and dried them in the sun" (personal communication, May 9, 2015). Her remarks were a piece of evidence that indicate that their community was once, to a great extent, in the way of being self-contained. As Pramaha Wunsa put it, "Besides cultivation, rice fields also provide people with food" (personal communication, March 12, 2015). With the ready availability of food, they really had little need to rely on the outside world. Further to that, Grandpa In made similar remarks.

> This place used to be a very quiet place. And it used to give us a feeling that we were in the world of our own. If a stranger stepped in, we would know instantly that he was not one of us here. (personal communication, May 26, 2015)

Grandpa In, as could be seen from his facial expression, sensed that he was genuinely home when he said that he and his fellow villagers were in the world of their own. When anyone from elsewhere set foot in their community, they would be able to immediately identify the person as a stranger.

Elderly people with new characteristics

The fact that Rim Wiang was undergoing urbanization processes brought about a lot of change such that the elderly people had to adapt themselves accordingly. The following traits emerged out of the change and their adaptation.

Becoming more open-minded elderly people

While the change was continually progressing, they seemed to be willing to accept the change as they were aware that it was inevitable. In the process, the elderly people then

became more open-minded than before in terms of accepting new ideas. Grandpa Put revealed this in his remarks.

> The world is changing fast. And we have to be able to catch up with the changes in no time. Or we may lag behind and get pushed back where we once were. (personal communication, May 20, 2015)

He seemed to be aware of the fact that his community had to inevitably undergo change as this was the sign of the times. Furthermore, he thought it necessary to get adapted to the change or one might fall behind and got nowhere. This shows his willingness to move with the times with an open mind. Another piece of evidence to affirm this was his other comments on the situation.

> It's good to be a bit conservative like those old folks. But I think I may not be that conservative any more. I'm a type of person who's always ready to accept new things. (Grandpa Put, personal communication, May 20, 2015)

In his comments, he did not dislike being conservative, but being conservative should not impede one's insights into the ever-changing future. He further made comments as follows

> Changes are out there. What can we do? If we don't accept the changes, how can we carry on? All we have to do is adapt ourselves to them. (Grandpa Put, personal communication, May 20, 2015)

By all his comments, it was evident that he became more open-minded as a result of the fact that he had to adapt himself to the changing environment.

Turning dynamism-wise

With the new settlers and a lot of commercial activities going on in the area, the pace of life was faster than it used to be. This was caused by the creation and introduction of many new opportunities, commercial or entrepreneurial in nature, in the area and in the adjacent areas. The elderly people, caught in such dynamism, were pulled into active participation in it. That is to say, they woke up to such dynamism and participated in it through seizing new opportunities that came their way. A case in point was Grandpa Em becoming more entrepreneurial in response to his awareness of the dynamism going on around him.

> I've a new undertaking helping my daughter look after some children. They're very small children and my daughter alone can't cope. I have to lend a helping hand. Now my friends jokingly call me 'Headmaster'. (personal communication, July 11, 2015)

As he was helping his daughter take care of some children at his house where the first floor was made into a small kindergarten, he himself joined in seizing the entrepreneurial opportunity that came along, and this was in response to the dynamism in the community. Another example is the case of Grandpa Put.

> The world is changing fast. And we have to be able to catch up with the changes in no time. Or we may lag behind and get pushed back where we once were. (personal communication, May 20, 2015)

His remarks show that he was relatively responsive to the dynamism that was going on in the community. Grandpa Put's remarks below also showed that he kept himself updated on the on-going dynamism and was looking for opportunities when the ball was in his court which he could use to his advantage.

> The opportunities are out there. If you don't do anything and let them go out of hands, it would be a pity. They come and go, and they may never come back. It's now or never. (Grandpa Put, personal communication, May 20, 2015)

Becoming more reliant on the outside world

With rising living costs, many elderly people found it more difficult to carry on. That was due to the limited resources of the community to share among all the community members, old and new. For example, bananas used to be very cheap – so cheap that they could be given for free for the asking, as in the case of Grandma Da who pointed that out as follows.

> At one time, almost every household used to have banana trees. And later on, a lot of them were cut down because bananas were very cheap, and there were too many of them. They used to be given for free for the asking. Very often, we could see them left ripening on the trees and rotting away. Now they're very expensive because they're in great demand. So, it's usual to see people buy them from their neighbors. (personal communication, June 9, 2015)

The nature of exchange was changing, poising the elderly people to view things in a profit-or-loss relationship rather than in terms of mutual reciprocation. By my own observation, the elderly people turned more individualistic as the relationship in the close-knit network was changing, and this was likely to push the elderly people away from the spirit of their close-knit networks as shown by Grandpa In's remarks.

> We used to be very united in the past. That was because we cooperated a lot in several collective activities. We worked and became tired together. Then, we ate and drank together. Now no more. I wonder if the collectivity spirit is still there. (personal communication, May 26, 2015)

Pramaha Wunsa was also able to notice that the close-knit network was losing its strength because many of the elderly people became more individualistic and less dependent on one another.

> The collapse of the long-standing cooperative activities of our community has brought a kind of separation among us. Though such separation is not manifest, it's there. We used to do things collectively, and now we have to do things in a more individualistic manner. We cooperate and rely on each other less and less. This is dangerous because the situation tends to make us lose the spirit of the community. (Pramaha Wunsa, personal communication, March 12, 2015)

Grandma Pong was of similar opinion to that of Pramaha Wunsa in saying that one had to take care of oneself first without really being able to pay attention to others because of the difficult situation they had to go through.

> Under the present circumstances where everything's so expensive, it's not quite possible for one to help another. One has to take care of oneself and family first, which is very difficult already. Passing each day is not easy. (Grandma Pong, personal communication, July 21, 2015)

Grandma Pong's statements reveal that people became more self-interested and the existing close-knit network was losing its strength. Grandma Khao's remarks below also point to the same direction that their relationships were not the same as they used to be. They inadvertently became more selfish than before.

> Nowadays, I hardly see one give away things to another. In the past, you'd see a person give her neighbor a bowl of spiced soup or some food stuffs. And they regularly did that. It was a wonderful way of life. Now, it may be because we have to face a lot of hardships, so much so that we have to take care of ourselves first. (Grandma Khao, personal communication, April 8, 2015)

Under the circumstances, it clearly shows that individualism became obvious in the dynamism of the changing context, and this shaped up their lifeway in such a way that they

were likely to expose themselves to more of the outside world to alternatively explore and seek reliable sources of support.

Becoming more outwardly interactive

As the elderly people re-engaged themselves in the community by means of many activities as already mentioned previously, it was unavoidable for them to be pulled to more outward interaction with outsiders. They got to know more people while maintaining relationships with them so that they have become part of their loose-knit networks. Therefore, the elderly have eventually ended up being more outwardness-conscious and found themselves more outwardly interactive with the people of their loose-knit networks. Grandma Na, a case in point, explained how she became more outwardly oriented

> A friend of mine usually tells me about work in another village because she has a friend in that village. Her friend has now become my friend, too. We're now like a team. We often work together when we have work to do elsewhere. (Grandma Na, personal communication, May 9, 2015)

Grandma Na is evidence of the fact that leaning towards outside yielded good results. In her case, she made friends through a friend. Having a friend outside seemed to please her a great deal because it answered her needs perfectly. Therefore, she could be said to be oriented towards the outside for support.

Emerging actively connective people

It may be noticed that the local elderly people have undergone several processes that shaped them into a new group of people with different characteristics. And that in turn signifies self-transformation. As already expounded above, all such characteristics point to the state of their generally being actively connective elderly residents through the lens of emergence as follows.

First of all, being socially active is a way of being actively connected. According to the context, it is understandable that the fact that they have to get more socially connected can help them be relieved of their anxiety of being spatially threatened. To be as passive as they used to be would lead them nowhere and simply worsen the situation of their being a minority of people. That may be seen in Grandpa In's statements, "Becoming a minority of people, we just can't afford to be indifferent as we used to be (Grandpa In, personal communication, May 26, 2015). Grandpa In's actual meaning here is his suggestion for his fellow elderly people to become more exposed and connected to the people who were living around them both in their close-knit and loose-knit networks to stay up-to-date with the changing situation.

Furthermore, being open-minded is an aspect of being actively associated. The elderly have become more accepting of the changes going on around them. To refuse those changes would cause themselves to lag behind, and to accept them, or to embrace them, may help the carry on as normal members of society. This may be achieved through expressing themselves more positively in public toward outsiders or new settlers, which is reflected in Grandpa In's remarks.

> I think that we should communicate more among ourselves while also reaching out to both the new settlers and the people outside our community, or we wouldn't be able to keep abreast of the times. (Grandpa In, personal communication, May 26, 2015)

Additionally, by turning dynamism-wise through participation, the elderly people have become more outwardly connective. The elderly people become very much conscious of the dynamism they unintentionally found themselves in and act expediently to benefit from the situation. In the process, they have become more actively connective as a result of getting involved in such dynamism. Grandpa Put reflected this in his remarks.

> I've so many friends, and I enjoy their company. Besides the fellow community members here, I've many other friends and acquaintances outside as well. It's sort of having a finger in every pie. The good thing about it is that I usually learn a lot of things from them. I know all the movements outside and feel that I'm updated all the time. The downside of it is that I often have to appear at every event where my friends and acquaintances want my presence. Sometimes it's very tiring, sometimes it's expensive. But it's worth it. (Grandpa Put, personal communication, May 20, 2015)

Grandpa Put showed that he actively participated in most of the activities both in and out of the community. In so participating, he inadvertently got himself into the dynamism of what was going on around him, and he, as could be evidently seen, turned more actively connective.

Discussion

The fact of being threatened with life's insecurity was the main reason that led the elderly people to re-engage themselves in order to mitigate such insecurity according to their own means and available opportunities. The meaning of re-engagement is used in a fairly broad sense here. It can be generally referred to the elderly people's coming back active in society again. It can assume any form of activity which an elderly person begins to do or resume after

a pause or break. It also includes any action by which an activity is reinforced or further strengthened. Finding themselves locked up with such a threat, they went on to manage it by re-engaging themselves through the consideration of several factors, which included health, social upward mobility, fear of becoming companionless, gender, and network mix.

Health was one factor in that the elderly people were afraid for their uncertain future in their old age. Health, as a result, drove them to re-engagement either out of a perspective of doing something (re-engagement) while the going was good as contribution to the family or out of another perspective of expecting the result in the future. Health was not considered to be a relevant factor in the sense that one with good health was likely to re-engage while one with less good health or poor health was not likely to re-engage. That was because most of the elderly people were already not in perfect health. One might have high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, or bone deformation, but at the level that one's routine would not be affected. Another factor was social upward mobility. New settlers in the area brought with them their wealth and luxurious lifestyles, which were observed by the local people, including the elderly people. The elderly people then appreciated such lifestyles and aspired to them in the belief that they would one day have such a good life. Such a belief encouraged them to move on (re-engage themselves) in that direction. The next factor was their fear of becoming companionless. Owing to the fact that several important local support mechanisms disappeared from the community, that meant the opportunity of seeing one another of the community members went down. Coupled with the fact that many could be busier elsewhere, several found that they were likely to be alienated from one another even more. Thus, they sought some compensatory affairs to take up, or in other words, re-engage themselves so that they would not have become lonely. Another relevant factor was gender. Gender was found to be applicable to only the female elderly people. The fact that they were women caused them to worry about their status quo. Being a woman caused them to believe that they could not have been able to help provide for the family sufficiently, and that they were afraid for their children or grandchildren could meet with hardships in the future, they therefore re-engaged themselves in some activities to mitigate their anxiety. However, this was not the case among male elderly people. Last but not least, it was one's network mix that was of primary importance. One's network mix consists of both expressive ties and instrumental ties. A different mix of networks influence the elderly people's re-engagement differently.

Furthermore, in an urbanizing context, the elderly people had to adjust themselves through different re-engagement strategies to the urbanization-induced changes. In the process, the elderly people were seen to have transformed from 'relaxed countryfolk' to 'actively connective folk.' The new characteristics of the elderly people as already described above came into being during the time of a coalescence between rurality and urbanicity that took place in their community. The elderly people, with such characteristics, may be couched

as being 'actively connective.' Such self-transformation was largely dictated by both the changing environment and the elderly people's own choice. Additionally, while Yuji (2006) described the self-transformation of the Thai Lue people in Nan province in her work: *Changing Meaning of the Elderly in Nan Province, Northern Thailand : From "Khon Thao Khon Kae" to "Phu Sung Ayu"* as being a result of their changing role from that of Khon Thao Khon Kae or 'older people with traditional knowledge' to 'welfare-receiving people aged over 60' and, according to the 2016 report of the National Statistical Office (2016), elderly Thai people generally re-engaged themselves because they were still healthy and able to be productive, had the need to make a living, or desired to help their families financially. However, in this study, the elderly people underwent self-transformation in the aspect of their changing characteristics as a result of having to adjust themselves to the changes occurring in their urbanizing environment. Furthermore, Sasiwongsaroj and Burasit (2019) reported that elderly Thai people were likely to face more social risks in the future. Kranrattanasuit and Sumarlan (2017) held that elderly Thai people were facing economic insecurity. Rojananan (2018) maintained that about 90% of the elderly people in informal sectors did not have financial security. Also, Weiangkham et al. pointed out that most elderly people in a district in Payao greatly needed financial support. All of the results of these studies pointed in the same direction as the result of this study in that those elderly people concerned had to adapt themselves.

Conclusion

The Rim Wiang elderly people were just like other rural elderly people elsewhere in Chiang Mai in that they started out bonded together in a peaceful community because of their relationships and traditions. They were long related to one another because they were relatives, neighbors, or fellow community members. In such complicated relations, they depended on one another through local support mechanisms and traditions whereby they were able to live as normal members of society. As the Rim Wiang elderly people mostly worked in the agricultural sector, their daily life thus centered on relevant agricultural activities which frequently entailed coordination and cooperation with one another. These common activities ultimately helped bring them together both interpersonally and spiritually. Therefore, it can be seen that they were closely related to and very much dependent on one another such that they hardly had to turn to assistance from outside. In such a situation, they may in the first place be fairly viewed as fairly "inward-looking." Besides that, they were generally relaxed living in such an undisturbed community where mutual coordination and cooperation through local support mechanisms prevailed, and life moved on at quite a slow pace. All in all, they could be justly described as 'relaxed countryfolk.' Later on, with the on-going social changes after the advent of urbanization whereby their local support mechanisms

became disabled and their relationships changed, their lifeways were affected accordingly. Furthermore, their changing lifeways so reshaped their selfness that they became more assertive in order to become better connected to other people for the benefit of their living. In consequence, such a quality of their being actively connective, in essence, ultimately mediated the on-going adverse effects of urbanization on them. Furthermore, such a quality very much remained permanent and became endurable, and this emerged as their new character. Accordingly, it can be said that the elderly people saw their selfhood change from one state to another in this process of self-transformation which symbolized an incident of mediation of the urbanization-induced effects on them while they were seen to have emerged with the new characteristics of being 'actively connective folk.'

From this study, the elderly people's self-transformation may be viewed in two aspects with suggestions made accordingly. The first aspect may be looked at in a sense that their self-transformation may have resulted from a disruption in life as a result of urbanization. Urbanization seemed to be beneficial to most stakeholders in general, but not the elderly people who had to bear the brunt of the resultant unintended consequences. In line with this aspect, support of some kinds should necessarily be made available to elderly people living in peri-urban areas to help offset such unintended consequences not a result of their own making. As for the second aspect, their self-transformation may inform us that the elderly people with the new characteristics were likely to be more independent and able to contribute to their families and community as a whole. However, the availability of certain local resources within the community was problematic for such a purpose. What actually happened was the elderly had to rely a great deal on external resources because the resources available in the community were so limited. Therefore, availability of the local resources within the community should be treated as an important factor when an intervention program in support of elderly people is to be put in place.

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