

An Investigation of Gambling Activities and the Factors Influencing Choices Of Gambling Activities in the Communities within Thailand's Southernmost Provinces

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to survey activities and to investigate influential factors of gambling in the communities within southernmost provinces in Thailand. Data were collected through gamblers, their family members, and croupiers. Research instruments were comprised of questionnaires and interview and subsequently analysed by implementing percentage and content analysis. It was found that gambling business especially in Songkhla in which the economy was prosperous was luring different types of upscale investment. The important thing was that there were activities associated with gambling occurring at Thailand-Malaysia border. It could be identified specialties of local gambling such as illegal lottery in Thailand and Malaysian illegal lottery in Malaysia. Additional to mentioned lottery, there were other types of gambling such as football betting pool, online gambling, cow fighting, and animal lottery. According to the present study, accompanying with gamblers is the most influential factor to sway gamblers' behaviour.

Keywords: Gambling, Influential factors towards gambling behavior, Southern Provinces of Thailand

Introduction

There are a lot of gambings in Thailand. An estimated 70 percent of adults gamble regularly, and the total value added involved is huge-possibly over 200 billion baht a year (Phongpaichit, 1999) The discussion on casino politics and economic agendas is another vein to persuasive illegal and underground Thai gambling which entails most forms of betting (in particular football betting), illegal dens, cock-fighting, and underground lottery. Horse-racing, however, is the only legal form of gambling in Thailand, whereas the casinos are of course scattered on the borders in Laos, Cambodia, and Burma (Phongpaichit,1999 second cited in You, 2004) Southernmost areas especially

Songkhla is an economic zone which is famous for a centre of trading, tourism, and its border with Malaysia. The gambling types vary in accordant with the existence of gambling in both Thailand and Malaysia. The popularity has been widely and rapidly spread through local gamblers. Gambling phenomenon underwent changes due to political society. Some gambling activities have been evolved from cultural root or new development while other activities were derived from the interrelationship with other political societies. In addition, some gambling activities have been developed through connection or relationship owing to the dependability between economies and societies.

Southernmost areas are intriguing to study betting businesses. As per the report of the government committee who was studying problems at the border areas, there were over 22 gambling dens along Thailand's border and the majority of gamblers were Thai people. (Krisanawanit, 2002) Gambling occurring at Thailand's border is an enormous profitable business, aiming to gain exceeding profit from a little amount of investment. Revenue on gambling was flowing out to Malaysia and Singapore at four casinos, approximating to 40,000 million baht a year. (Pringthong, n.d.) Highly demanded to grant the need of gamblers who want to be wealthy, this is appeared to be because casinos in neighbouring countries of Thailand are open to foreigners. The local communities in southernmost provinces have an affinity between beliefs and gambling which has been passed through from generation to generation. All gambling activities have been perceived through medias, talking, and persuading, altering people behaviours to be swayed by rewarding from gambling in order to blend in with the group. Gambling is viewed as an entertaining activity for talking and sharing ideas together in a group. It is questionable what the gambling activities and factor influencing on gamblers are to obtain the data leading to propose appropriate policies of managing gambling business in southernmost provinces.

Objectives

1. To survey gambling activities in communities within southernmost provinces in Thailand.
2. To study factors influencing on gambling behaviour in the communities within southernmost provinces in Thailand.

Literature Review

Conceptual framework of gambling is defined that gambling is forbidden in both terms of legal and religious framework. Legally, gambling is not allowed because it brings disastrous result to the gamblers. It is also unacceptable in both of civil laws and criminal laws because it hinders the peace. Most of religions completely forbid gambling

because it is considered as a vice. (Piriyarangsarn 1996) Free gambling is taken in an account of a serious and sensitive public issue for Thai societies. Whenever, the government initiated to impose the policy to administrate gambling dens for own benefits or control them to decrease the negative perspective of the society, social reaction for both supportive and appositive stances expose themselves to public immediately. Both raise the arguments to endorse their diverse opinions but it never reaches a practical consensus. Although there were a number and a broad range of researches pertaining to gambling in Thailand conducted over a decade ago. Academically, gambling was commonly conceptualized into three frameworks which are: (1) Social concept analysis focuses on gambling in terms of behaviour, implementing framework of sociology and psychology to explain causes and effects of gambling, (2) Economic concept pays attention to economic framework; for instance, indicators and statistical data of economy to analyse with the policies. They tend to consider the government authority when they deal with pertinent issues, and (3) Legal concept emphasizes on the perspective of gambling on theories of laws and criminology to obtain the result whether the action is right or wrong. On the condition that it was considered to be wrong; what laws and measures can be adopted to ensure the fairness. (Thananithichot, 2011) Gambling is an activity of Thai people especially southern people whose lifestyle are involved with gambling. Due to a research on project of cow fighting in political economy conducted by Boonsuaykhwan (2017), it was revealed that they designated the gambling den owners and the cow owners as the masters (นายหัว, Nai hua) who have an authority to govern their own territories which are independent under the rules set by the masters. It is a symbolic expression of power, probably expanding to even larger scale.

Procedures

1. Quantitative research: The sampling groups were comprised of local gamblers and their families in Hatyai and Sadao, Songhla. Purposive Sampling was utilized to select the sampling groups. The respondents must be the gamblers who are gambling on the regular basis and be able to be available as an informant. The data were collected through 100 people by using questionnaires and subsequently analyzed with statistic tools such as frequency, percentage,

2. Qualitative Research: The key informants were gamblers and their family members and croupiers, using Chain or Snowball sampling methods to select 20 key informants. There were two groups of 20 people (10 each) residing in Hatyai and Sadao in which the economies are prosperous. Semi-structure interview was a research tool and the contents were analyzed by experts. To maintain the privacy and confidentiality,

the key informants remained anonymous for the merit of research.

3. Findings

1. The survey of gambling activities existing in Hatyai and Sadao, Songkhla pointed out that gambling in Songkhla, one of southernmost provinces, is hazardous because of the instability. For instance, a wide variety of businesses at the Thailand-Malaysia border especially gambling in Hatyai and Dannok in Sadao, Thailand contributes to danger in the areas. These areas interest gamblers who are converging from border areas and Malaysia. The areas are designated as the tourist and gambling attractions which interest well-known gamblers from the border and Malaysia. Hatyai is recognized as a tourist destination where tourist spent an enormous amount of money and it is a centre to lead people to other tourist destinations especially Sadao. Singaporean, Malaysian, and Indonesian tourists converge to Hatyai tourist attractions. The name of “Hatyai” was derived from the combination between Ban Kok Samedchun (บ้านโคกเสม็ดชุน) and Ban Hatyai (บ้านหาดใหญ่). In the past, Hatyai was very undulating and the commuting system was inconvenient so that people lived sparsely. It used to have a forest of Eugenia. Therefore, it was called as “Ban Kok Samedchun”. When the railway had been built in the community, people migrated to work here. Soon after, the population was increasing. Another reason is that Hatyai is a centre of transportation to other destinations, contributing to be an upscale business centre. People think of Hatyai as a centre of transporting to Malaysia. There is an association between Thailand and Malaysia to depend on each other for cross-border business which is the result of the route of an immense amount of money. The places in which tourist attractions or cross-border business exist increase the chance of running businesses on the border; that is to say- gambling business or a so-called “Gambling businesses in Southernmost areas” is taken place. From Songkhla, people converge to Sumnakkham (สำนักขาม), Sadao which is located on the south of Songkhla. There is a massive amount of money circulated because it attracts people from Malaysia to gamble, facilitated and managed by administrators for arranging the gambling dens. It’s a win-win situation because gamblers think that they also increase revenue to the communities. That constitutes the gambling still exist in the societies, distorting reasons to gain benefits.

In terms of quantitative research, it was found that types of gambling differ corresponding to the specific period of time existing in the societies. In other words, the concurrence of gambling types and activities in the specific time are correlated. Then, the current study was carried out in a specific period of time. The following results will be identified in the table 1 below.

Table 1 Number and Percentage of Gambling Types in Southernmost Areas

Types of Gambling	Hatyai		Sadao	
	Number of people	Percentage	Number of people	Percentage
Lottery	31	62.0	31	62.0
Malaysian Lottery	18	36.0	20	40.0
Football betting pool	13	26.0	16	32.0
Cow fighting	9	6.4	11	22.0
Popun	6	12.0	7	14.0
Online gambling	5	10.0	5	10.0
Animal lottery	4	8.0	5	10.0
Cockfight	4	8.0	6	12.0

Table 1 gives a summary of types of gambling preferred by gamblers.

People who lived in Prug Grim (ปรั๊กกริม) community, Hatyai, Songkhla preferred lottery, accounted for 31 people (62.0%). It was followed by Malaysian lottery at 36.0%, having an aggregate of 18 people. The third highest number of gamblers' preference was football betting pool, with 13 people (26.0%). Regarding the data obtained by people living in Sadao, Songkhla, it showed that lottery predominated other types of gambling, with 31 people (62.0%). Malaysian lottery was the second favourite gambling for 20 people (40.0%). The third preference contributed to football betting pool consisted of 16 people at 32%.

Besides, interview would be carried out after obtaining quantitative data at the preliminary step. The collected data were used to obtain in-depth data. The consequences are identified as follows:

1) Lottery

Huay (หวย) is defined as illegal lottery in Thailand's societies. It is a common activity of Thai people in communities, encompassing both employed and jobless people. Buying illegal lottery is omnipresent as buying Malaysian lottery. The availability of illegal lottery is widely accessible in Thai societies. Today, easily accessible online lottery existing in Hatyai and Danok, Sadao is ascribed to the advancement of technology. This gambling business has been taken place in all families and communities. Gamblers expect to be wealthy by gambling and tend to bet on a higher rate if they lose. Some people have higher chance of losing rather than gaining profit. They discuss about the lottery in a group within a community and persuade others to buy lotter corresponding to the number they obtained. They may have a specific place to gather their group for discussion pertaining to lottery.

“I have been betting on particularly illegal lottery for 7-8 years. I, then, started studying from different information namely mapping number of lottery shops. I have a group of people who keens on betting on lottery for sharing experience of each round.”

(Salin (pseudonym), Interviewer, 1 February 2015)

2) Malaysian Lottery

The name of Malaysian lottery is clearly associate with southern areas. It is generally recognized by most of southern people residing in both of Hatyai and Sadao, proximity to Malaysia. It is legal which is officially issued by Malaysian government. It was found that the gamblers studied on gambling for a long time and gambled for the whole life. An amount of money for betting depends on their solvency. A majority of gamblers in such areas pay attention to the lottery because they live in the communities. Local people have close relationship and often have chitchatting. More specifically, they have a better chance to communicate if they work within the communities which will inevitably result in a high chance of joining the gambling.

“I have been betting on Thai and Malaysian lotteries for 7 and 20 years. I studied by myself and read from book of mapping number to buy lottery. I gambled because of the word of mouth from my friends.”

(Salin (pseudonym), Interviewer, 1 February 2015, and Ubon, Interview ,
15 February 2015)

3) Football Betting Pool

The study indicated that football betting is one of the popular gambling in southernmost areas. It is a consequence of betting on illegal Thai and Malaysia lotteries. The causes of betting football are because of persuasion during a discussion in football seasons, and temptation of a minimal investment for gaining a high profit. This results in different types of gambling due to suitability. It was estimated that football betting pool first appeared in Hatyai in 1993, starting from a small group of people and subsequently expanding to larger groups including students, undergraduates, and working people, ranging from young people to adults.

“Football betting easily and rapidly spread in Thai societies. It is problematic because students and undergraduates also gamble and persuade their friends and become online bookies which is fast, convenient, and exciting. It entertains gamblers who loves being risky especially men.”

(Pat (pseudonym), interviewer, 11 July 2015)

4) Cow Fighting

It was found that southern cultures and lifestyle have been linked with traditions. They associated animals especially cows with various traditions i.e. cow fighting which is extensively known at the present. Particularly, it was very famous and interesting in Songkhla which considered as a local sport. It now becomes a betting business which draws a massive amount of income. It brings amusement and excitement to the communities and it also amazingly spices up the betting.

“To enter in the gambling dens, you have to pay an expensive ticket so most of them are the professional gamblers not the amateur ones. They are knowledgeable to trick and evaluate fighting history of each cow and feeding the cows, etc. In the battle field, they will negotiate the price which is very fluctuated due to the cow conditions. If the cows lose, gamblers will make up the new price to bargain.”

(Pradub (pseudonym), interviewer, 5 February 2015)

4) Animal Lottery

Consequently, animal lottery is one of lotteries specifically found in southern region. Animal lottery is known as a part of people’s lifestyle and it is specific in some areas. Betting method is to guess from the riddles or hints pertaining to animals commonly seen in Sadao or a so-called “domestic animal lottery at Wang Pring” (Huaysut Wang Pring), widely expanding to nearby areas namely Ban Tung Ree, Ban Tung Lung, Hatyai District, etc. The popularity of animal lottery because it requires a minimal budget and bets within a community.

“We don’t’ gain and lose much from animal lottery. It’s no need to bet with a lot of money, but high frequency. It is popular among female gamblers because they don’t want to lose much money. I don’t often bet on animal lottery. I prefer illegal lottery.”

(Ubon (pseudonym), an Interviewer, 1 February 2015)

As per the study, it is more specific to study at Hatyai and Sadao. The results are illustrated in the table below:

Table2 Number and percentage of factors influencing towards gambling within the communities in Hatyai and Sadao, Songkhla

Details	Hatyai				Sadao			
	Yes (people)	Percentage	No (people)	Percentage	Yes (people)	Percentage	No (people)	Percentage
Accompany with gamblers	42	84.0	6	12.0	43	86.0	7	14.0
Receive gambling news	40	80.0	8	16.0	42	84.0	8	16.0
Do activities with friends who gamble on a regular basis	30	60.0	18	36.0	30	60.0	20	40.0
Gamble with groups of friends	27	54.0	19	38.0	31	62.0	19	38.0
Friends recommend to gamble	18	36.0	29	58.0	20	40.0	30	60.0

Due to table 2, gambling behaviour in Hatyai and Sadao, Songkhla was highly attributed to the factor of accompanying with gamblers. It was found that the first three highest dominant factors were accompanying with gamblers, receiving gambling news, and gambling with groups of friends, accounting for 42 gamblers (84%), 40 gamblers (80%), and 31 gamblers (62%) respectively.

In addition, regarding the information from the interview, it depicted that friend was an influential factor on gambling within communities in southernmost provinces: Hatyai and Sadao, Songkhla. Characteristics of gambling behaviour influenced by friends were categorised in different types. Moreover, the proliferation of digital era, receiving information is fast and repetitive which results in drawing attention, piquing interest, and convincing people with possession, wealth, excitement, and dating to take chances. The main reason was that people aimed to be effortlessly rich and kept gambling even if they lost today.

Discussion

1. Gambling activities within communities in southernmost provinces

The consequences revealed that the gambling in Thailand's southernmost provinces contributed to illegal lottery. According to Phongpaichit, Piriyarangan, and Treerat (2000), illegal lottery's name and format were changed into a new type of gambling in Thailand. It is widely accepted and rapidly gained popularity. It was reported that the government lost their revenue to illegal lottery, constituting to 320,000 million baht. Due to the study in 1995, it found that revolving money had an aggregate of

320,000 million baht a year. 25-30 percent of income per year of croupiers and bookies had accumulated 81,000 million baht. In addition to illegal lottery, the gambling which is closely associated with Thailand's southern culture, reflecting southern people lifestyle, is cow fighting. According to Samosorn and Boonprakarn (2011), illegal lottery was viewed for entertaining and tightening relationship of people in the communities. Gambling pertaining to local tradition and culture is often used domesticated animals. People gambled when people had free time and subsequently became betting business. The statement has an alignment with Stanislaus Jude Chan (2010) that problems and social affects are the result of gambling. It was found that Chinese and other races excluding Malaysians are dying for being rich and they also think that gambling is a leisure activity, leading to excessive insolvency and addicting to gambling. Abbott, Stone, Billi & Yeung (2016) mentioned that activities included informal private betting (e.g. playing cards at home for money), gambling on electronic gaming machines (EGM), betting on table games (e.g. blackjack, roulette, poker), horse or harness racing or greyhounds betting (racing), sports and event betting, Lotto, Powerball or the Pools, Keno, scratch tickets, bingo and raffles, sweeps and other competitions, event wagering (e.g. wagering on the outcomes of TV shows), participation in SMS or phone-in competitions and participation in speculative stock investments (such as day-trading in stocks and shares)

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2. Factor of gambling within the communities in southernmost provinces is mainly attributed to companions whom the gamblers receive the information from.

Hence, social factor is the result of gambling at a very high level; for example, accompanying by gamblers increase the chance to gamble. The most influential factor contributes to receiving information of gambling content and methods of gambling endorsed by Lexsreenak, Ploydanai, and Sukchotrat (2013). Atkin (1973) indicated that attitude can shift behaviour. Knowledge and understanding are taken place when an individual receives more information. Lapawattanaphun (2013) identified that there were three main factors highly correlated with gambling behaviours: positive attitude towards

gambling, receiving gambling news from friends, TV and websites. Regarding demographic data, gamblers were categorised by genders, universities they graduated, and an amount of income.

Suggestions for further research.

1. Study should be predominantly focused on high-risk areas of gambling in attempt to prevent and avert the expansion of new types of gambling which contribute to more frequency of gambling and higher bet on it.

2. Empirical data should be more insightful regarding advanced quantitative analysis as to factors influencing towards gambling behaviours, obtaining the solutions to reduce and stop illegal gambling in Thai societies.

3. Factors of gambling should be investigated further into the similarities and differences between gamblers in Thai and international societies.

4. It should be studied on behaviour trends of gamblers residing on the border areas such as north, north-east, and south of Thailand and emphasized on the comparison of gambling behaviours in relation to effects on national development of qualified and potential citizens.

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