

# FROM THE STATE'S DEVELOPMENT PROMISE TO THE UNCERTAIN LIVES OF FARMERS IN EASTERN THAILAND

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## ABSTRACT

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This research paper aims to examine the state's development promise in relation to the Eastern Economic Corridor development (EEC) project and its impact on people's livelihoods. The study utilized a qualitative approach and ethnographic research to collect data on the operation of the EEC project and its impact on people's livelihoods. The key informants, who were actively involved in the movement for farm safety, were 25 farmers from a farmers network in Kabinburi district, Prachinburi province, and Phanom Sarakham district, Chachoengsao province. The study found that the EEC project has been a crucial development undertaking in Thailand since 2017. The Thai state has promised that the EEC project will provide a better future for the people, stating that the operation of the project will focus on investing in infrastructure, providing investment privileges, eliminating investment barriers, and establishing a centralized authority. However, the local people's experiences with the EEC project demonstrate the formation of unequal power relations that have led to an uneven distribution of the project's benefits. Although local communities are hopeful that the EEC project will provide access to new markets, they still fear the uncertainty of their lives due to various state mechanisms established in the project, which prevent them from participating in the local decision-making process. Some local farmers have experienced an expansion of factories and waste disposal plants, causing fear of pollution on farms, and other non-agricultural land use activities in the EEC backyard, or peripheral areas of the EEC project.

**Keywords:** Eastern Economic Corridor; promises; uncertainty; EEC Backyard; Thailand

## 1. INTRODUCTION

...I have an important mission to establish the foundations for the country's development for the next 10 years. The implementation of the Eastern Special Development Zone Project, or the EEC project, is related to the future development of our children. ... Although the EEC project is located in the eastern region, I would like to inform the Thai people that the benefits will certainly be distributed to the Thai people all over the country. At a macro level, the economic stimulus, the huge influx of investment capital, the emergence of businesses, and an increase in employment. At a regional level, tourists and business people travel to the country to invest and spend, and the expansion of large companies' branches into regional centers... (Chan-o-cha, 2022)

The Eastern Economic Corridor development (EEC) project is an area-based development project that was approved by the military junta on June 28, 2016. The objective of this project was to revitalize the Eastern Seaboard Development Project (ESB), an industrial development project in the eastern region that was initiated more than 30 years ago. The state promotes the development of and investment into the first S-curve industries and new S-curve industries due to their significance as the main engines of economic development, or to the government's desire to become an emerging economic powerhouse (Niyomsilp et al., 2020) that can attract investments in the future (EEC TVET Career Center, n.d.; Bangkok Post, 2020; Salika, 2021). When former Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha was still in power and had full authority to promote the implementation of the EEC project, he posted on his official Facebook account (2022) that the benefits of the EEC project will certainly be distributed to the Thai people throughout the country. Similarly, the EEC Office's website referred to its mission of generating increased per capita income and promoting a better quality of life for the Thai people. On the whole, the state's objective with the EEC project is not only short-term industrial development and the implementation of an economic stimulus project, but rather is a project akin to a promise to the Thai people in the present and into the distant future.

The essence of this promise can be regarded as a benefit that will result from the project. These benefits are expected to be realized at three levels: at the national level, it will serve as the main economic base of the country in order to distribute income; at the area level, it will be used to upgrade old industries to new targeted industries; and at the provincial level, it will be used to develop areas to initiate urban and industrial expansion and improve Thai people's quality of life.

However, not everyone has benefited from the EEC project's implementation over the past five years. For example, a large amount of the local people's agricultural land has been appropriated by the state in order to support industrial and infrastructure development within the EEC project area. This includes the subdistricts of Nong Tin Nok (Land Watch Thai, 2019), Khao Din (Prachatai, 2022a), and Yothaka (Prachatai, 2022b). It has also affected the living conditions of local farmers, who have been affected by pollution problems from various factories and waste disposal plants established near their farmlands. This has occurred in the sub-districts of Nong Nae (Saetang & Thassanaphak, 2017; Thai PBS, 2019a), Bang Buth (Thai PBS, 2022a), and Krok Somboon (Prachatai, 2022c). This work will focus on the lives of farmers who have experienced the results of state development projects that have brought solid and hazardous waste disposal plants closer to their lives and farms in Kabinburi district, Prachinburi province, and Phanom Sarakham district, Chachoengsao province.

These positive and negative experiences of the surrounding communities exemplify the diverse aspects of the state's development promise which have been operated through different forms of state mechanisms. In order to illustrate the impact of the EEC project operations and processes, it is important to question and reflect on these state mechanisms which have been operating through different state agencies. Past studies on developmental and infrastructural violence (Rodgers & O'Neill, 2012; Mitchell, 2014; Anand, 2017; Appel et al., 2018) have revealed that the state uses development and infrastructure projects as a technical apparatus to control people and resources. On the one hand, the state presents different development and infrastructure projects as a matter of opportunities, such as access to employment, the market, capital, improved well-being, and security in order to legitimize control over people and allocate resources towards achieving economic and political goals. On the other hand, the state also uses these projects to form unequal power relationships or maintain a dominant position. These state operations often lead to conflict or resistance because local people are ignored by the state and are thus dissatisfied with the problems of neglect, violence, and inequitable access to public goods (Mitchell, 2014). For example, Manrom (2021) pointed out that the Thai central government has invested in many irrigation projects in the Northeast, claiming to solve drought problems and eliminate poverty, but water management policies have focused on providing water for large-scale industrial activities instead of supporting farmer production. This has led to local dissatisfaction over the unequal distribution of water.

Recent studies examining the impact of the EEC project reveal the multifaceted entities and mechanisms of the state. On one hand, some studies point to the role of the state and the EEC project in improving the area and creating economic changes in the Eastern region, especially the transformation of its current industries to more modern industries as a future development goal (Niyomsilp et al., 2020; Wannathong, 2020; Kiatnakin Phatra, 2022). On the other hand, recent partial studies have revealed numerous challenges that need to be addressed and improved upon. This includes land and urban management (Benjanavee, 2020; Tontisirin & Anantsuksomsri, 2021; Kuaycharoen et al., 2021), policy that supports foreign investment that affect the rights of local people (Ayuttacorn, 2021), and the distribution of benefits and resources in the development process to local stakeholders (Krunnung & Snitwong Na Ayudhya, 2021). However, simply detailing regulatory and administrative issues is inadequate to understand the root impacts of the EEC project. This work argues that the emergence of violence and unintended consequences among local

communities is the result of the establishment of a centralized mechanism under the EEC project, which has led to the formation of distinct power relations and an unequal distribution of resources. The author agrees with the anthropological notion that development and infrastructure projects are ideal spaces or sites that reflect how the state attempts to control and govern society (Rodgers & O'Neill, 2012). They have variable functions, which include both social inclusion and exclusion depending on who is involved. In order to understand these situations, the author focused on questioning local people's experiences, hopes, and fears with EEC projects and the state's various promises, especially as it pertains to those communities who are the most marginalized or face violence from the EEC project's form of power relations and unequal distribution practices.

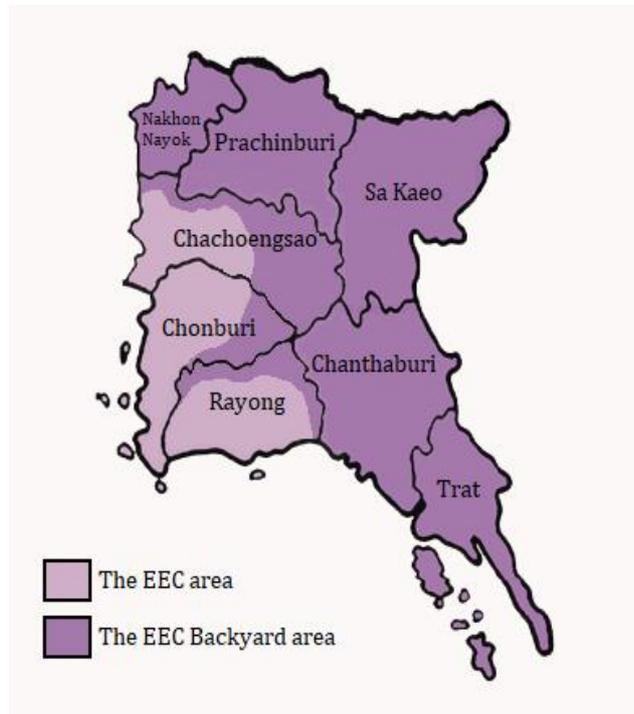
Consequently, the context of the state's promise of development, especially in regards to the EEC project, is that the state is presenting the project as an expansion of economic opportunities while ignoring the real impacts it has had on surrounding communities. The study findings in this paper are divided into four sections: the first section will examine the operations of the EEC project as a technical apparatus used to control people and resources; the second section will focus on farmers' experiences with violence and uncertainty as a consequence of the state's promise of development; the next section will examine the hopes and fears of young farmers in relation to the EEC project; and the final section will answer the question of whether the EEC project is a binding promise.

## 2. METHODS

The methods used in this study consist of a qualitative approach alongside ethnographic research to examine the operation of the EEC project. In particular, it focused on the state's development promise and its impact on local people's livelihoods, experience, and production strategies over the past five years. The political economy framework enabled this paper to focus on the analysis of state operations at two levels: the abstract level via analysis of the development promise's operation, and the concrete level via analysis of the established mechanism's operation. What makes this paper distinct from previous EEC studies is its focus on the project's impact on local people's everyday lives, whereas previous studies have tended to focus more on regulatory and management issues rather than the actual experiences of the local people. The author employed ethnographic methods to collect data. This includes conducting interviews with key informants, and using the local Thai language for all conversations during the period of 2018–2022. The snowballing technique was applied to reach key informants by beginning with two local farmers networks, followed by ten people affected by the development project. The key informants were 25 farmers from the farmers network in Kabinburi district, Prachinburi province, and Phanom Sarakham district, Chachoengsao province, who were actively involved in the movement for farm safety. Some key informants also experienced violence and unintended consequences due to the EEC project's operations and the state's development promise. In order to reflect on livelihood strategies and how the community has dealt with uncertainties under this development project, interviews with local farmers emphasize their experiences, hopes, and fears in relation to the project.

The implementation of the EEC project reflects two distinct contexts. The EEC front yard context encompasses urban areas and new target industries that the state wants to develop and present as new economic opportunities for the country. The EEC backyard context encompasses partial agricultural areas in the eastern hinterland, which is being transformed into non-agricultural land use areas. The focus on the EEC backyard will emphasize the relationship between the EEC project and the local people who live in the peripheral areas of the project region. Most of them are farmers in Chonburi, Rayong and Chachoengsao, as well as other provinces in the eastern region who are experiencing an expansion of factories and non-agricultural land use infrastructure that is different from what is found in the EEC zone. This includes raw materials production, primary production plants, agro-industries, warehouses, logistics, and waste disposal plants. This expansion is a result of the EEC project's decision to establish an area-based development zone in the provinces of Chonburi, Rayong and Chachoengsao, whereas industrial development zones and infrastructure development projects are only concentrated in the eastern seaboard area (see Figure 1).

This work is focused on the case of the local people in Phanom Sarakham district, Chachoengsao province, and Kabinburi district, Prachinburi province. These are the areas most threatened by EEC development and both face a situation where land use change from agriculture to industry is likely to increase. They are also under threat from pollution resulting from the expansion of factories, which is detrimental to the livelihoods of those that live in these areas (Saetang & Thassanaphak, 2017; International Pollutants Elimination Network [IPEN], 2022).



**Figure 1:** The EEC and EEC backyard areas

### 3. NOT ONLY AN AREA-BASED DEVELOPMENT MATTER: CENTRALIZATION AND THE TECHNICAL APPARATUS

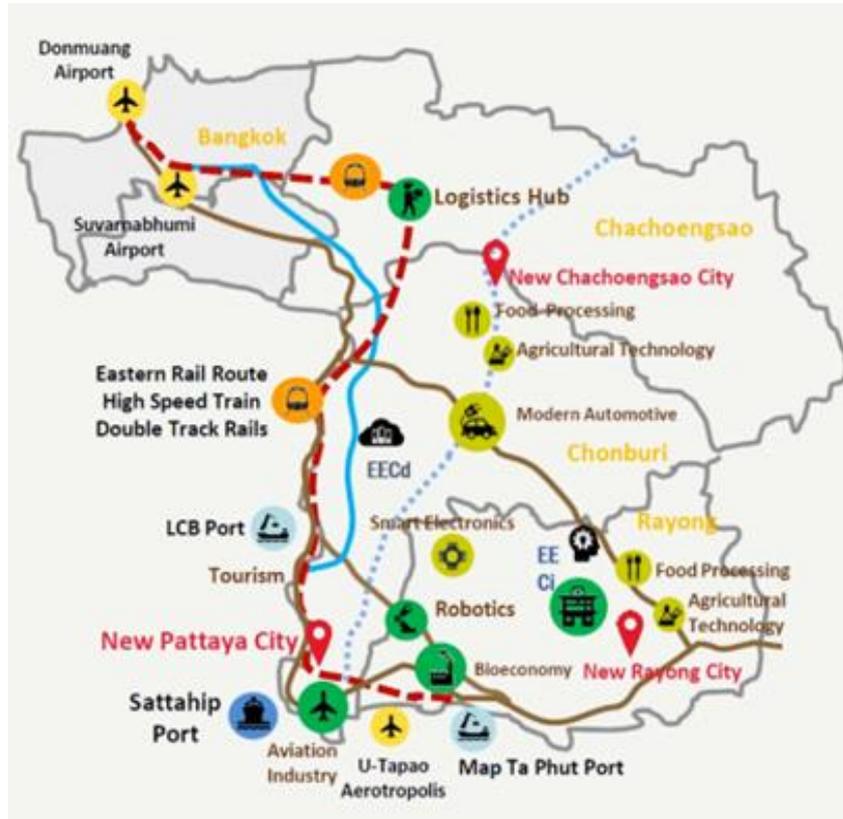
The Thai state has established the goal that the EEC project will be ‘an example for Thailand’s future area-based development’ and ‘the prime gateway to Asia’ (The Eastern Economic Corridor Office of Thailand, n.d.) through specific area-based development strategies. Some areas of Chachoengsao province are designated as residential areas, government administration zones, and models of a smart city; some areas of Rayong province are designated as education cities, national training centers, the Eastern Economic Corridor of Innovation (EECi), and areas for modern agricultural industries; while some areas of Chonburi province are designated as zones for holding conventions, health and/or tourist centers, as well as for the Eastern Economic Corridor of Digital (EECd) (Ayuttacorn, 2021).

The foundation of this area-based development strategy rests on investments into infrastructure development, in particular transportation networks such as a high-speed rail linking the three airports of U-Tapao, Don Muang and Suvarnabhumi; the seaports of Map Ta Phut, Laem Chabang, and Sattahip; and motorway expansion (see Figure 2). The Thai state expects this developed transportation network to be linked to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an important strategy for the Chinese government to expand its role and seek benefits through its connections with various regions around the world. This will benefit Thailand in various aspects, such as trade, investment, and industrial upgrading (Phanishsarn, 2018). Several transportation infrastructure development projects have been executed through joint investment agreements between Thai and Chinese investor groups, including the high-speed rail linking the three aforementioned airports (Ayuttacorn, 2021; Bangkok Biz News, 2022).

In order to attract investments into the EEC project, the state provides tax and non-tax incentives. These include land leases of up to 99 years for commercial and industrial areas, corporate income tax exemption of up to 15 years, and permission to employ foreign workers. Additionally, the state offers the issuance of work permits and visas, a one-stop service to facilitate investment into the area, and fast-track environmental impact assessments (EIA) services (Rattanakhamfu, 2017; Rastogi, 2018; Theparat, 2021). The state’s main role is to act as a provider of these special incentives to EEC investors. Ayuttacorn (2021) and Krunnung and Snitwong Na Ayudhya (2021) have pointed out that the state operates on neoliberal principles and reproduces a capitalist ideology through privatization and deregulation in order to establish a network with transnational capital.

The Eastern Economic Corridor Office’s (EECO) website advertises a promising future for investors. This refers to its clear regulatory and governance structure, a policy committee chaired by ministers and

specialists, an EEC Office that receives full support from the government, the development of integrated infrastructure with the main purpose of making the EEC project as the prime gateway to Asia, and the generation of increased income and promotion of a better quality of life for the Thai people (The Eastern Economic Corridor Office of Thailand, n.d.).



**Figure 2:** An area-based development and transportation network in the EEC project area (Royal Thai Embassy, Washington D.C., 2017)

However, the EEC project is not only an area-based development or investment privilege matter but also concerns the establishment of particular power relations that result in the state obtaining increased control over people and resources located within and around the territory (Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995; Scott, 1998; Bassett & Gautier, 2014). This network of power relations involves different actors: state agencies, who possess the legal power to regulate and allocate resources to support development projects; industrial capital, which is the main target group for development projects as they are investors and use local resources to stimulate national economic growth; local politicians and influencers as intermediaries in coordinating development projects of central state agencies with local people's needs and problems; and the local people who are directly affected by the development projects. Despite the fact that power relations are contingent and variable over space and time, their significance in the context of EEC project implementation and industrial development in the EEC backyard highlights the significance of relations between state agencies, industrial capital, and local influencers known as 'the tri-alliance' in driving and supporting the EEC project in various areas (Krunnung et al., 2016). The goal of the tri-alliance is to use their power to control and allocate local resources, especially land, water, and human labor, in order to stimulate the industrial development process. However, there are multiple instances in which local people have initiated movements in order to demand solutions to development problems. This has created friction within the network of power relations, particularly in terms of influencing state officials and local politicians to listen to and seek solutions to local problems.

In order to achieve their goal, the tri-alliance has relied on two important apparatuses: centralization mechanisms under the EEC project and the technical apparatus. The centralization mechanism was developed by the post-coup military government to allow central state agencies to exercise power and make decisions more quickly and easily. After the 2014 coup, Section 44 of the Interim Constitution was put into effect. This granted the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), the military junta that ruled Thailand between its 2014 Thai coup d'état and July 2019, the authority to push policy forward and override regulations that hindered the progress of development projects. This resulted in the NCPO issuing various orders that

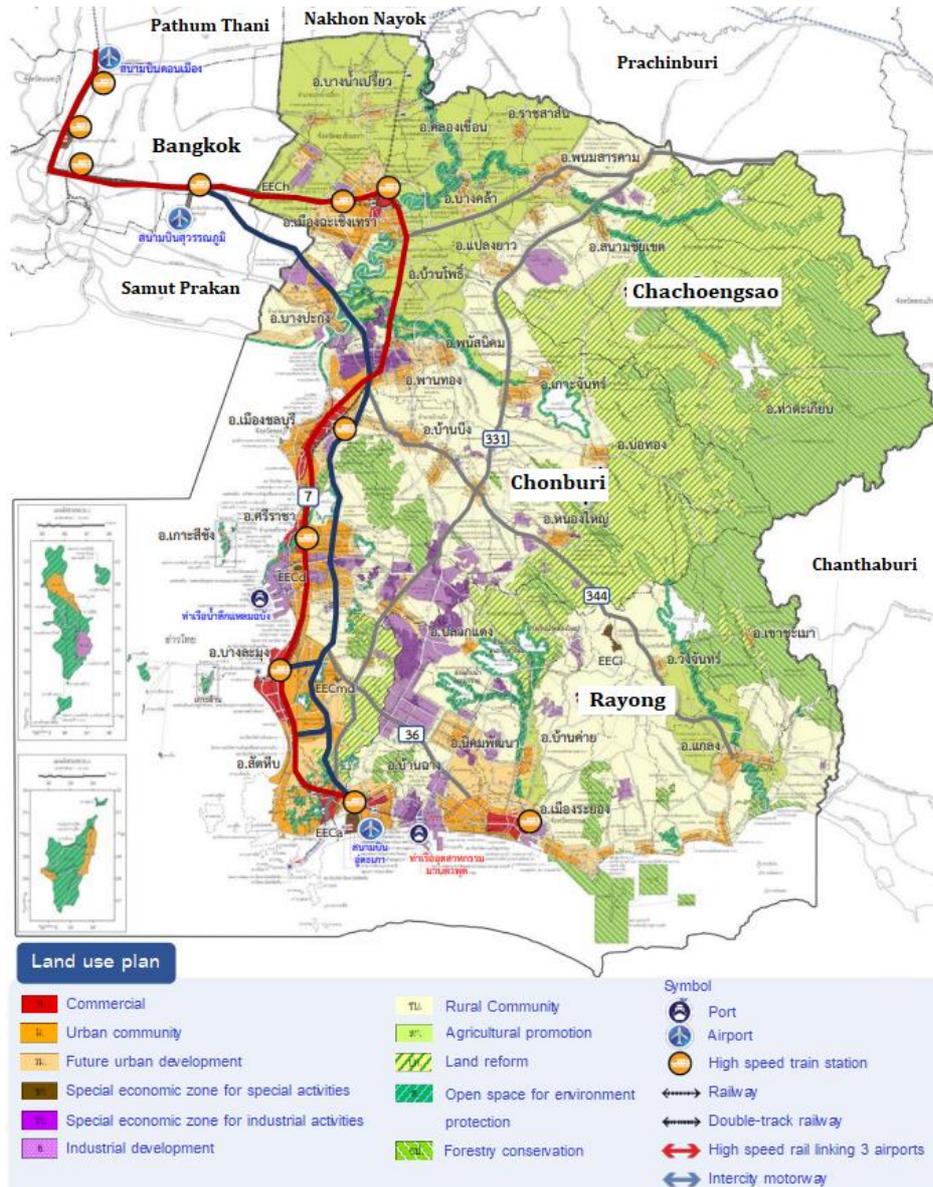
established a centralized authority and accelerated the process of the 2018 Eastern Economic Corridor Act (the EEC Act); NCPO's Order 72/2557 on the appointment of the National Committee of the Special Economic Zones (2014); NCPO's Order 3/2559 and Order 4/2559 on the legal exemption of the urban planning law and the building control law in special economic zones (2016); NCPO's Order 2/2560 on the development of the EEC (2017); and NCPO's Order 47/2560 on Land Use Regulations in the EEC (2017). A provision in the 2018 EEC Act requires that the Eastern Economic Corridor Policy Committee and the EECO have the authority to manage land use and urban planning, provide investment privileges, and propose law amendments to the cabinet (Subpawanthanakun, 2020). Additionally, the various Orders from the NCPO and the EEC Act affect the exemption clauses for the enforcement of certain laws within the EEC zone (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** Exempted laws from the NCPO's Orders and the EEC Act (Krunnung & Snitwong Na Ayudhya, 2021)

The NCPO's Orders and the Act in the EEC	The laws are exempted
The NCPO's Order 28/2560 on Procedures to Enhance the Development of the Eastern Economic Corridor (2017)	(1) Section 19 paragraph 2 of the Enhancement and Conservation of National Environmental Quality Act B.E. 2535 (1992) (2) Section 41/23, Section 41/33, and Section 41/95 of the Air Navigation Act B.E. 2497 (1954)
The NCPO's Order 47/2560 on Land Use Regulations in the EEC (2017)	(1) The Town Planning Act B.E. 2518 (1975)
The Eastern Special Development Zone Act B.E. 2561 (2018)	(1) Section 5 of the Lease of Immovable Property for Commercial and Industrial Purposes Act B.E. 2542 (1999) (2) Section 540 of the Civil and Commercial Code (3) Section 97 and 98 of the Land Code Act (4) Section 19 of the Condominium Act B.E. 2522 (1979) (5) Section 34 (6) in conjunction with Section 35 (4) of the Immigration Act 2522 (1979) (6) The Customs Act B.E. 2560 (2017) (7) The Exchange Control Act B.E. 2485 (1942)

The establishment of the EEC Policy Committee and the EECO reflects a form of unequal power relations over territory. On the one hand, the NCPO's Orders and the EEC Act legitimize the role of the EEC Policy Committee. The EEC Policy Committee becomes a centralized mechanism and a technical apparatus that the state uses to control resources and facilitate investments (Yanyongkasemsuk, 2017; Kiatnakin Phatra, 2022). The goals of resource control and investor support are reflected in the EEC land use plan (see Figure 3), while the number of personnel requirements is estimated by the EEC Policy Committee (see Table 2) and is stipulated in the infrastructure development plan (see Figure 2). In addition, the EEC Policy Committee has established the EEC's One-Stop Service (EEC-OSS), which holds power and authority to approve, permit, grant rights and concessions under eight related laws: the land allocation law, land excavation and compaction law, building control law, machine registration law, public health law, immigration law, commercial registration law, and factory law (The Eastern Economic Corridor Office of Thailand, n.d.). Therefore, the EEC Committee possesses the authority to establish a state of exemptions from regulations that pose obstacles for investor groups. For example, the EEC Committee has issued exemptions from tax regulations in order to attract direct foreign investment in various economic forums, as well as exemptions from the enforcement of land use planning and factory laws, which have led to an increase in the number of waste recycling plants over the past years (Benjanavee, 2023a).

On the other hand, these organizations and mechanisms established by the state have become barriers to the participation of local people in the decision-making and assessment processes (Bangkok Post, 2017; The Nation, 2017). Many public hearing forums under the management structure of the NCPO and the EEC Policy Committee are more akin to procedural ceremonies rather than actual hearings or listening to proposals from the public. Activists and local people who have proposed to implement a public participation process under the EEC project have been stigmatized as impediments to development (Achavanuntakul, 2019; Krunnung & Snitwong Na Ayudhya, 2021). Local participation in the decision-making and assessment processes will tend to be positive in the post-election government. However, these communities still feel that their participation is limited due to those key players who pushed the EEC project during the NCPO remaining in the newly elected government, along with the NCPO's special orders still being used in the case of the EEC project. Some local people do not remain silent on this case and continuously try to move against the NCPO's special orders through statements expressing their objections while also calling on the government to ensure more local participation in the EEC project.



**Figure 3:** The EEC land use plan (adapted from the Eastern Economic Corridor Office of Thailand & Department of Public Works and Town and Country Planning, n.d.)

**Table 2:** Personnel requirements estimated by the EEC Policy Committee (The Eastern Economic Corridor Office of Thailand, n.d.)

Personnel requirements	Number			
	Vocational degree	Bachelor degree	Master-doctoral degree	Total
High-values and medical tourism	15,179	1,741	-	16,920
Automation and robotics	21,885	14,277	1,364	37,526
Digital	49,156	67,066	-	116,222
Intelligent electronics	23,500	29,028	5,700	58,228
Medical and comprehensive healthcare	5,080	5,430	1,028	11,538
Merchant shipping	3,580	11,050	-	14,630
Next-generation automotive	44,492	9,155	91	53,738
Rail system	20,589	3,230	427	24,246
Logistics	65,940	43,970	-	109,910
Aviation	3,713	29,123	-	32,836

The second apparatus for achieving the tri-alliance goal is the establishment of the technical apparatus. State agencies, expert institutions, and local politicians play an important role in the development of technical tools. Expert institutions use their expertise and techniques in statistics, geoinformatics, urban planning, and civil engineering to legitimize their own views and claims concerning development projects (Li, 2014; Pritchard et al., 2016). Land use plans are a state agency's apparatus that is often used to determine the guidelines for development and land use change (see Figures 2–3). Key players in drafting the land use plans are experts from the EEC Policy Committee authority, state agencies, and outsourcing companies hired by government agencies to design the land use plans and conduct public hearings. They frequently hold meetings and listen to the opinions of local politicians, business people, and industrial capital to look at trends and determine appropriate areas for joint industrial development. Moreover, statistics on economic growth, land prices, labor, location potential for industrial development, logistics potential, and the level of opposition from local citizens are used to demonstrate that the periphery of the EEC zone is suitable to support industrial development. The purpose of using these statistics and information is twofold: on the one hand, they are used to attract international investments from around the world; on the other hand, they make local people accept the development plans that the state and their partners have planned for the area.

...Prachinburi province has become a peripheral province of the Eastern Economic Corridor project, which is prepared to support the growth of green agricultural cities, alternative health cities, tourism and service cities, as well as large industrial cities that are ready to be centers of logistics. This is because the location of the province is appropriate, the distance is not far from the administrative center of the country, and the transportation of goods to various countries is convenient. Therefore, the development of Prachinburi province that is appropriate for the current situation should take into consideration the policy of developing the Eastern Economic Corridor project. (Wannathong, 2020)

The above statement is from an educational institution that refers to information on the suitability of locations in regards to linking the development of marginal provinces with the EEC project. It is an example of a technical tool in the form of statistical citations and information. Likewise, Table 3 contains examples of statistics and information cited by different agencies and institutions to support industrial development in the EEC project area.

**Table 3:** Statistics/information cited to support industrial development (Benjanavee, 2023b)

Agency/Institution	Statistics/Information Cited						
	Factory expansion	Economic situation	Infrastructure	Location	Political situation	Development plan	Land price
Local politician	X	-	X	-	X	-	-
Industrial Estate Authority of Thailand	X	-	-	X	-	X	-
Eastern Economic Corridor Office	X	X	X	X	X	X	-
The Federation of Provincial Industrial Chapter	X	X	X	X	-	X	-
Real estate company	X	X	X	X	-	-	X
Factory company	X	X	X	X	X	X	-
Research institute	X	X	X	X	X	X	-

The current stance on the EEC project of the Srettha Thavisin government, which assumed power over the administration after the military junta, is crucial in considering the trend of the EEC project for the next few years. The current government is also keen to continue the implementation of the EEC project, especially by overseeing its investment plans and inviting foreign investors to the EEC zone. Simultaneously, the government is also advancing the proposal for “the Land Bridge project,” and the construction of deep-sea ports in Chumphon and Ranong to create a new link between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. They intend the Land Bridge project to play a key role in creating a comparative advantage for investors who manufacture products in the EEC zone (Bangkok Post, 2024). The government intends to push forward the EEC project in five ways: promote

investment into the target industries and services of the future, increase the efficiency and utilization of infrastructure and public utilities, increase the skills of workers in order to be prepared for changes in technology and innovation, develop the city into a more modern and suitable area for occupation, and link the benefits to the sustainability of the community (Thansettakij, 2023). The slight difference between this government and the previous military junta is the linking of the EEC project with the Land Bridge project in order to create economic opportunities from the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and the seriousness of inviting foreign investors from diverse nations, rather than solely from China, as the previous government did. Although this government's stance on the EEC project has not changed, the conditions regarding electoral votes may be what makes them more willing to listen to the voices of local people than the former military junta, the NCPO, which only used its extraordinary powers and centralized mechanism to deal with the complaints and problems of local people.

Although both the state development project and the tri-alliance's main goal are within the EEC zone, they plan to expand these development projects to peripheral areas, which can be referred to as *'the EEC backyard.'* Industrial development in the EEC zone requires land and resources from peripheral areas. Investors require low-cost, large-scale land areas to develop factories or businesses that are related to industrial development within the EEC zone. These include the development of raw materials production, primary production plants, agro-industry facilities, warehouses, logistics, and waste disposal plants. The extraction of resources from the peripheral areas is required in order to support industrial development within the EEC zone; such raw materials include agricultural products, labor, and water. The resources drawn into the EEC project and the weak enforcement of resource use regulations have led to conflicts over access to resources between the industrial and agricultural sectors, especially in the current situation in which various actors are scrambling to obtain water rights in the eastern region. The expansion of the industrial sector has increased the demand for water in the region, while agricultural production continues to necessitate access to water rights and quality water. The EEC water management plan, however, contains a guideline to develop reservoirs in Chachoengsao, Prachinburi, Chanthaburi, and Sa Kaeo provinces, which would act as important water resource bases for the various industrial production processes within the EEC zone (Wipatayotin & Kongrut, 2020; Jongmeewasin, 2019). The state has also provided guidelines for developing water pipelines to distribute water to various factories, while the private sector has been granted concessions for water management rights for this project (Apisitniran, 2022).

Accordingly, it's not sufficient to simply understand the EEC project as a state's typical development project. This is because it is both a technical apparatus and it spreads its influence outside of the EEC zone. Thus, in order to further understand the EEC project's impact, it is necessary to not simply understand it as an area-based development project or an investment privilege matter, but rather as a particular formation of power relations in which the state is able to control people and resources located within and around the territory. Previous EEC studies simply detailing the plan, and its regulatory and administrative issues are inadequate to understand this formation of unequal power relations.

#### **4. UNCERTAIN LIVES: UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES AND VIOLENCE IN THE EASTERN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR'S BACKYARD**

When the formation of power relations in the EEC project is unequal, it is not surprising that there will be people who are partially included and others who are partially excluded from the project. The EEC project and its mechanisms have variable functions, which can be social inclusion or exclusion, depending on who is involved. The state's main objective is to position the EEC project as one of the major vectors for social organization and as a site where state practices converge with the global economy (Scott, 1998; Rodgers & O'Neill, 2012). On the one hand, investor activities are supported and facilitated by the EEC project. On the other hand, its operations have not been able to meet the demands of some of the local communities and have even led to incidents of violence, particularly against farmers residing in the EEC backyard. Nevertheless, the general understanding of the uncertainty of farmers' lives is based on the individualist idea that farmers' failures are caused by individual farmers' misbehavior and poor decision-making. This individualist ideal focuses on improving farmers' production without considering how they deal with uncertainty. In previous decades, the question of coping with uncertainty may have been about improving agricultural production processes in order to maintain expected profits (Cancian, 1980; Ortiz, 1980, 2004). However, today it is clearly about how to adapt agricultural livelihood strategies and production processes to the path of industrial development. Consequently, this section of the paper focuses on understanding the experiences of some farmers in the EEC backyard, a sample group of those who want to return to farming and whom are members of a network of farmers actively involved in the movement for farm safety. Although there are other farmers, such as those who become brokers or agricultural business owners who benefit from the EEC project, they are

only a minority. The experiences of this sample group will reflect that their partial uncertainty does not arise only from poor decision-making, but also from the unintended consequences of the EEC project (Benjanavee, 2022).

The cases of Prachinburi and Chachoengsao provinces are of particular interest. These provinces are well-known for their ornamental plants, rice, and fruit cultivation. Even though this region was previously included in the second phase of the Eastern Seaboard Development Program (ESB) in 1996, in which large industrial estates were established in two districts, the area has yet to become designated as part of the EEC zone (Yanyongkasemsuk, 2017). According to interviews with key informants, some of whom are local farmers, the fact that these two provinces are located in the EEC backyard attracts immense interest from investors seeking inexpensive lands and resources for industrial development and speculation (Prachachat, 2020). Their investments are backed by state agencies and local politicians, especially when it comes to searching for large-scale lands and coordinating with landowners. Certain local politicians also play the role of land speculators by acquiring large plots of land for the purpose of reselling or leasing it out to factory owners. For example, Kamnan Athit (pseudonym), a local politician in Prachinburi, said that he supports the establishment of a factory because it will provide a source of income for the local community. He also played a role in developing his land in order to sell it to the factory owners.

However, ever since the expansion of industry into agrarian societies, farmers have had to face violence and unintended consequences such as competition for access to resources and land, higher local production costs, wastewater and air pollution, poor soil quality around farmlands, and illnesses caused by improper industrial waste disposal practices. As with other farmers in the EEC backyard, Prachinburi and Chachoengsao farmers have also experienced the impacts of industrial waste disposal plants and illegal industrial waste dumping, which have contradicted the promises of the state (see Table 4). According to the 2015–2019 industrial waste management plan conducted by the Ministry of Industry of Thailand and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan (METI), it is required that an area be set aside in order to construct a comprehensive hazardous industrial waste management estate. These two provinces have been selected as location sites to establish the comprehensive hazardous industrial waste management estates along with six other provinces: Nakhon Ratchasima, Lamphun, Rayong, Pathum Thani, Ayutthaya, and Ang Thong (InfoQuest, 2015; Vareerampuengploon, 2016; Isariyanon, 2017). According to interviews with the key informants, there has been an increase in movement among investors in the business of large-scale land purchases in Prachinburi and Chachoengsao since 2015, in order to establish industrial waste disposal plants, recycling facilities and landfills. Two landfills located in Phanom Sarakham, Chachoengsao, serve as an illustration of this type of business during that period (see Figure 4). Both landfills are located adjacent to local agricultural land. The farmer who owns the land next to the landfill and who resides in Bangkok said that shortly after the landfills began operating, they found that their rubber trees were starting to decrease in production and were slowly dying.

**Table 4:** Illegal industrial waste dumping and pollution from recycling and waste disposal plants in the EEC backyard (Thai PBS, 2019a, 2019b, 2020b, 2021, 2022a, 2022b; Ch7HD News, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b; Thairath, 2022; Prachatai, 2022c)

	Case
Illegal industrial waste dumping	Hat Nang Keo, Kabinburi, Prachinburi province Non Hom, Mueang Prachinburi province Ta Lang Nai, Wang Nam Yen, Sa Kaeo province Thung Phraya, Sanam Chaikhet, Chachoengsao province Tha Kradan, Sanam Chaikhet, Chachoengsao province Khao Hin Sorn, Phanom Sarakham, Chachoengsao province
Pollution form recycling plant and waste disposal plant	Krok Somboon, Si Maha Phot, Prachinburi province Mai Khet, Mueang, Prachinburi province Khao Mai Kaew, Kabinburi, Prachinburi province Wang Takhian, Kabinburi, Prachinburi province Non Mak Kheng, Watthana Nakhon, Sa Kaeo province Nong Nae, Phanom Sarakham, Chachoengsao province Tha Than, Phanom Sarakham, Chachoengsao province Bangbut, Ban Khai, Rayong province



**Figure 4:** The landfill that receives waste from Bangkok (left) and the landfill that receives waste from factories (right)

The more elderly farmers in Phanom Sarakham can be considered a group of people who are highly vulnerable to the negative effects of waste recycling and disposal plants. They have limited options to deal with the impacts of waste plants near their farmlands because of their limited capital and age-related incapacity to relocate to alternative production sectors or new areas. Such is the case for Som (pseudonym) and Sak (pseudonym), both of whom are elderly farmers who have been affected by a waste disposal plant on their rubber plantation. Many of their rubber trees were damaged due to the operations of the plant, which has forced them to sue the operators for compensation, which they seek to recondition their rubber plantations in order to be able to cultivate them again. They expressed their apprehension regarding the insufficient capital available to relocate to a different area and establish a plantation.

If they dump garbage near the rubber plantation, the rubber trees in that zone will be damaged. My previous set of rubber trees was also damaged. There were between 500 and 600 rubber trees that died. ... They only compensated me for two hundred trees out of a total of six hundred that were damaged. They did not compensate me for the damaged rubber trees that still had leaves. (Som [pseudonym], personal communication, 2023)

This waste landfill was ordered to be closed, but it was opened again during the military junta. It was closed two more times for renovations and then opened again. ... Its impact depends on the wind's direction. If the wind comes this way, the rubber plantations on this side will be damaged. If the wind blows towards that side, the rubber plantation on that side will be damaged. The rubber plantation that was affected hasn't died yet, but there's nothing that can be done. If you try to cut it, it will be like cutting a stick that won't work. (Sak [pseudonym], personal communication, 2023)

Many farmers in the districts of Si Maha Phot and Kabinburi, Prachinburi province, have had to face pollution and environmental problems from waste recycling and industrial waste disposal plants located near their farmlands (Prachatai, 2022c; Thai PBS, 2022a). These waste plants directly affect the ecosystem in the agricultural fields of the farmers, as well as their livelihoods. Both organic and non-organic farmers are faced with these problems, but organic farmers are increasingly concerned about chemical control regulations. The Organic Thailand certification requires that farmers must have chemical-free production processes in their farms and maintain 2-meter buffer zones to control pollution from outside from entering the cultivation areas (Wyatt, 2010). There have been concerns among farmers about problems they have not created and that are out of their control, such as wastewater, air pollution, and a decrease in soil quality around their farmlands. Chemicals from these waste facilities may spread to the fields of these farmers, resulting in them being unable to adhere to chemical control regulations, control the quality and quantity of production, and avoid rejection by potential buyers. For example, Yai (pseudonym), a farmer in Prachinburi province, reflected on what happened to his community and blames the government's exemption of the land use planning law and other land use regulations in the EEC zone for opening up the opportunity for these factories to be established in agricultural areas.

Prachinburi is considered an extension of the EEC project, or EEC Phase II, where waste from Rayong and Chachoengsao is thrown into a landfill that also takes in household waste. These waste plants have

a chance to emerge because of weak regulatory enforcement and the neglect of state agencies' duties. (Yai [pseudonym], personal communication, 2020)

Furthermore, the use of violence, threats, and strategic lawsuits against farmers and local people who oppose these waste plants have become increasingly common. For example, a village leader who fought against illegal industrial waste and toxic waste dump firms in Nong Nae village was shot dead in 2013 (The Nation, 2013; Thai PBS, 2019a). In Prachinburi province, local farmers were threatened on the phone and with weapons in both public and private places in order to stop protesting against a waste disposal plant (Dot Easterners, 2022; Prachatai, 2022c); and a local leader was confronted with lawsuits for defamation and asked for compensation totaling 50 million baht from a waste plant firm after he filed a complaint with the provincial governor about toxic smells (Protection International, 2020; Thai PBS, 2020a, 2020b).

The experiences of the local people and farmers in the EEC backyard reflects how industrial development and state controls are constructed with violence and uncertainty (Giddens, 1994; Beck, 1999). These experiences are a visible consequence of the state's promise of development. Local communities have been forced to adapt to the capital system and have had to face various unintended consequences. In many cases, protests have led to violence, threats, and lawsuits. Some farmers have decided to continue their current occupation with hope, while others have decided to give up farming in order to work in factories. The following section will elaborate on why some farmers decide to continue agriculture, in particular young farmers who may continue to face many uncertainties and unintended consequences for many years to come.

## 5. THE FUTURE OF THAI YOUNG FARMERS: HOPE AND FEAR

Both development and infrastructure projects have caused friction between past decisions regarding resource allocation and the present needs and future aspirations of local people (Graham & Marvin, 2001; Rodgers & O'Neill, 2012). On the one hand, the EEC project can be seen as a source of hope for Thai people looking for access to new markets or livelihoods, especially those labor markets in new industries. The state's promises and operations regarding the EEC project show that it is responding to new forms of capital accumulation based on a single development path planned by the state (Wolf-Meyer, 2019). Many young people are moving into factories in hope of improving the quality of life for themselves and their families. On the other hand, the EEC project can cause difficulties for some local people who want to design their own livelihood strategies. This is partly due to past state decisions that went against their aspirations, especially some young people who have decided to take up farming and have fewer resources than previous generations

Meanwhile, the trend among the new generation in rural areas often involves choosing to migrate to the city and/or industrial areas in seek of jobs with regular salaries (Rigg, 2019; Baird et al., 2022). They partially become remitters for their elders, which appears to be more stable than producing in the agricultural sector. Conversely, some young people in the EEC backyard have chosen to return to farming, especially organic farming. In this section, the researcher is interested in understanding what young farmers think about their future, and especially why they decide to become farmers, what their hopes and fears are, and how their farming paths relate to industrial development in the areas where they are located. Although these groups of young people are not representative of all young people and are only a small portion of the youth population in the area, they reflect the trends of friction against mainstream development in recent years. Furthermore, their experiences with the adverse impacts of industry may reflect that their return to agriculture is not a return to the past or tradition, but rather a response to their direct experiences with the impacts of the EEC project.

### 5.1 *Desired future*: Future livelihood strategies

According to the Thai government, the age range for young farmers is between 17 and 45 years old (Jansuwan & Zander, 2021). This age range includes those people who have started to farm for the first time and those who return to farming again. In the context of the EEC backyard, young farmers have experience working both inside and outside of agricultural occupations. Many of them were former company employees or factory workers before they decided to become farmers. They desired to return to agriculture with their families, but have had limited land, capital, and other necessary resources compared to the previous generations of farmers (Faysse, 2019; Filloux et al., 2019; Salvago et al., 2019). Their decision to return to farming was based on a multitude of factors beyond solely economic considerations. This includes the opportunity to care for the elderly at home, uphold family land ownership, and be free from factory and employer regulations. They have overcome these limitations by learning new skills and building networks to increase their bargaining power in the market (Faysse et al., 2019).

One informant, Nueng (pseudonym), a 35-year-old farmer, decided to leave his government job and return to farming on the few remaining plots of his aging parents. He decided to be a farmer because his parents were aging, and he believed that he could shape his future in his own way. He has overcome capital and land constraints by seeking new knowledge and tools to improve his farming. He has also gained knowledge from other members of the Young Smart Farmer project, a cooperative project between young farmers that provides education on new cultivation and marketing techniques. According to his future livelihood strategy, he intends to develop mushroom cultivation and processing with the new tools that he has learned from the internet and the Young Smart Farmer project. His views on the EEC project suggest that it holds the potential to facilitate his entrance into new markets, particularly in terms of vending personally cultivated commodities to company employees and factory workers.

The knowledge of planting trees, mushrooms, and marketing has been gained by engaging in networks that teach techniques, especially calculating the profit costs. I use this knowledge to develop new tools for mushroom cultivation and processing. (Nueng [pseudonym], personal communication, 2021)

Similarly, there is the case of Tao (pseudonym), a 45-year-old young farmer who returned to agriculture on her parents' land after being a city worker for her whole life. She decided to return home as a farmer to take care of her parents, manage their farm, and continue her mother's work in a local farmers' network. Although she lacked agricultural production skills and had limited funds, she was able to combine the knowledge she had learned from her mother and her organic farming network with her experience working in the city. Her future livelihood strategy intends to establish a network of young and old farmers in her community in order to facilitate the exchange of resources and strengthen their bargaining power with buyers. Her views on the EEC project are that local farmers will not directly benefit from this project, but will only benefit from the new buyers who are moving into the factories.

Problems from the past must be solved by giving local people a career and income. Every member must have duties, such as planting, processing, making fertilizer, raising chickens, and raising earthworms. Everyone must work together as friends who understand each other. I hope that within 10 years, the elderly members will be able to earn income equal to or more than the elderly allowance. They should not only be dependent on the elderly allowance. (Tao [pseudonym], personal communication, 2022)

The rationale for the decisions of these young farmers does not only rely on economic or profit-seeking reasons (Ortiz, 1980; Baird et al., 2021), but also on social reasons such as caring for their parents, caring for and maintaining family land, health, freedom, and preserving local relations. Although they have limited access to resources and capital, they hope that their knowledge and potential will be able to somewhat make up for these constraints. However, the future of Nueng, Tao, and many other young farmers in the EEC backyard is facing uncertainty due to the violence and unintended consequences of the development projects. Their experience with the EEC project and having to deal with the impacts of non-agricultural land use expansion and polluting factories has led to an undesirable future for them because their circumstances have increasingly become further out of their control.

### **5.2 Unwanted future: Uncontrollable risks**

Apart from a general understanding of the risks and uncertainties in agriculture, such as a volatile agricultural market, plant diseases and pests, and climate-induced ecosystem variability (The World Bank, 2007), young farmers in the EEC backyard are also concerned about their well-being, illness and health problems, social conflicts, and pollution and other environmental problems because they find themselves in an increasingly powerless position and do not have the resources to negotiate with the state or capital to ensure that development and industrial expansion can be suitable for them as well.

Another informant named Mew (pseudonym), a 23-year-old young farmer, desires to practice mixed agriculture on his parents' land. Despite wanting to get into agriculture, he knows that there are a variety of uncontrollable conditions, especially the emergence of land speculators and land developers who intend to turn the surrounding areas of his agricultural land into factories, housing for factory workers, or dumping sites. His fears are rooted in his experience witnessing the problems of other farmers in nearby areas; for example, people in his community faced problems with wastewater discharge from factories that damaged their crops. He is concerned that capital and resource constraints may make it difficult to adapt to the new environment and deal with unintended consequences when the factories begin production.

Mew's opinion of the agricultural sector and the EEC project is that he is concerned that the state is facilitating investments from large corporations rather than supporting small-scale local farmers' production practices. Evidence of his opinion is supported by the EEC's Agricultural and Biotechnology Industry Development Plan, which stipulates that the state prioritize the production and development of agricultural

technology on an industrial scale. These large companies are already monopolizing the agricultural market for raw materials and produce. He believes that if this trend continues, smallholder farmers will face higher costs and lower returns.

It is difficult for small farmers to succeed because the market and its factors are monopolized by large corporations. These large corporations are supported and facilitated by the state. Young farmers are forced to have limited options. (Mew [pseudonym], personal communication, 2021)

Ree (pseudonym), a middle-aged farmer, is concerned about the future of the younger generations in the community. Her fear is related to the instability of industrial development. As she has experience as both a farmer and a former doctor, she is concerned about the health, and working and living conditions of those people who hold precarious occupations: many contracts between employers and employees are part-time and do not provide adequate benefits, while some factory work environments are without standards and pose extreme health risks and hazards to the workers. Young workers face a difficult decision when returning to agriculture due to the limited resources and agricultural skills available. Her view of the EEC project is characterized by uncertainty due to concerns that the state's industrial development approach will be inconsistent with the local livelihood and production foundations of the surrounding communities. She does not oppose industrial development, but instead emphasizes the importance of local decision-making and oversight in order to ensure coexistence between industrial and agricultural development.

Most of the workers in Prachinburi province came to work with the hope of a better future, but the employment conditions were not stable. Some people are not provided with good welfare. If they get sick, they could be terminated by the company. When they decide to leave the factory and go back to do agriculture at home, they can't do it anymore because they have been in the factory since they were teenagers. Some workers have been able to start a career but it is not secure because they have to spend money on everything, even if it is produced by themselves. (Ree [pseudonym], personal communication, 2017)

Ultimately, these young farmers in the EEC Backyard expect that if they are able to establish a cooperative network to strengthen their bargaining power with the state and capital, they will be able to contribute to the local development planning process, access the local resources necessary for their production and livelihood, and monitor the operations of factories that may affect them and the environment. In understanding the hopes and fears contained in this section of the paper, it is possible to critique both the perception that young people do not want to be farmers, as well as the particular industrialization path of the EEC project that overlooks other means of production. On the one hand, young farmers are hopeful that the agricultural sector will be able to develop parallel to industrial development. On the other hand, young farmers also fear that forms of unequal power relations will hinder them from making decisions about their own future strategies.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The Thai state presents the EEC project, an area-based development strategy, as a matter of opportunities, consisting of access to occupations, markets, capital, improved well-being, and security. In this sense, the EEC project is therefore comparable to a state's promise to the people. However, the mechanisms and apparatus jointly established by the state agencies, industrial capitalists, and local politicians, collectively known as the tri-alliance, aim to facilitate the implementation of the EEC project. On the one hand, the process of planning and decision-making of the EEC and other development projects under the NCPO's Orders is centralized in the state and the EEC Policy Committee to promote industrial development through accelerating investments in infrastructure, providing investment privileges, and eliminating investment barriers and environmental regulations. This mechanism of the tri-alliance has a direct impact on unequal power relations, especially as it pertains to limiting the participation of local people in their own development, decision-making, and monitoring processes. On the other hand, the technical apparatus utilized by the tri-alliance, such as the land use plan and reports on statistics/information indicating the suitability of land for industrial development, aims to attract investors from around the world, and force the local people to accept the development plans for this area.

The EEC project has various consequences for local people. On the one hand, the project creates new economic opportunities, especially in the investment and labor markets in the industrial sector. On the other hand, some local people who are still in the agricultural sector or some young people who are starting their lives in the agricultural sector may be affected in some way by the expansion of factories. The formation of

unequal power relations is also a major contributor to violence and unintended consequences for some local people. This is especially the case for some farmers who have to deal with pollution from illegal industrial waste dumping and waste recycling plants located near their farmlands. They have often been threatened or sued when attempting to investigate or contest any actions. The uncertainty of their lives is reflected in their hopes and fears regarding the EEC project. Although they hope that the EEC project may bring about positive changes such as opening access to new markets, they believe it must be based on the participation of local people in the decision-making and monitoring processes. This participation is crucial in preventing the EEC or other development projects from becoming non-binding promises from the state.

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