

TRANSFORMING ASIA



Edited by Eric C. Thompson, Jonathan Rigg, and Jamie Gillen

Asian Smallholders in Comparative Perspective

Amsterdam
University
Press

FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE
AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

Asian Smallholders in Comparative Perspective

Transforming Asia

Asia is often viewed through a fog of superlatives: the most populous countries, lowest fertility rates, fastest growing economies, greatest number of billionaires, most avid consumers, and greatest threat to the world's environment. This recounting of superlatives obscures Asia's sheer diversity, uneven experience, and mixed inheritance.

Amsterdam University Press's Transforming Asia series publishes books that explore, describe, interpret, understand and, where appropriate, problematize and critique contemporary processes of transformation and their outcomes. The core aim of the series is to finesse 'Asia', both as a geographical category and to ask what Asia's 'rise' means globally and regionally, from conceptual models to policy lessons.

Series Editor

Jonathan Rigg, University of Bristol

Editorial Board

Jonathan Rigg, University of Bristol

Colin McFarlane, Durham University

Dilip Menon, University of the Witwatersrand

Soo Yeon Kim, National University of Singapore

Katherine Brickell, Department of Geography, Royal Holloway

Itty Abraham, National University of Singapore

Asian Smallholders in Comparative Perspective

*Edited by
Eric Thompson, Jonathan Rigg, and Jamie Gillen*

Amsterdam University Press

FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE
AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cover Illustration: Farmer ploughing his land in northern Laos

Source: Jonathan Rigg

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 94 6298 817 0

e-ISBN 978 90 4854 020 4 (pdf)

DOI 10.5117/9789462988170

NUR 740

© Eric Thompson, Jonathan Rigg & Jamie Gillen / Amsterdam University Press B.V.,
Amsterdam 2019

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.

Every effort has been made to obtain permission to use all copyrighted illustrations reproduced in this book. Nonetheless, whosoever believes to have rights to this material is advised to contact the publisher.

FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE
AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

Table of Contents

Preface	9
Introduction: Asian Smallholders in Comparative Perspective <i>Eric C. Thompson, Jonathan Rigg, and Jamie Gillen</i>	13
1 Cambodia: Political Strife and Problematic Land Tenure <i>Chivoin Peou and Sokphea Young</i>	39
2 Indonesia: Whither Involution, Demographics, and Development? <i>Holi Bina Wijaya</i>	57
3 Japan: Government Interventions and Part-time Family Farming <i>Gen Shoji, Kunimitsu Yoshida, and Satoshi Yokoyama</i>	81
4 Laos: Responding to Pressures and Opportunities <i>Outhai Soukkhy and Robert Cole</i>	109
5 Malaysia: The State of/in Village Agriculture <i>Ibrahim Ngah and Khairul Hisyam Kamarudin</i>	145
6 The Philippines: Fragmented Agriculture, Aquaculture, and Vulnerable Livelihoods <i>Edo Andriesse</i>	181
7 Singapore: Making Space for Farming <i>Sakunika Wewalaarachchi and Eric C. Thompson</i>	213
8 Taiwan: Toward the Revitalization of Smallholder Agriculture <i>Po-Yi Hung</i>	239
9 Thailand: The Political Economy of Post-Peasant Agriculture <i>Tubtim Tubtim</i>	271
10 Vietnam: From Socialist Transformation to Reform <i>Nguyen Tuan Anh</i>	307
Index	345

List of Maps, Figures and Tables

Maps

Map 1.1	Areas of rice cultivation in Cambodia Source: International Rice Research Institute, 2016	43
Map 6.1	Regional Distribution of Number and Average Size of Landholdings Source: Map by author, based on information from PSA, 2015a	189
Map 6.2	Regional distribution of four important crops: palay (rice), corn, banana, and coconut Source: Map by author, based on information from PSA, 2015b	190
Map 8.1	Distribution of Farmland in Taiwan Source: National Land Resource Conservation Society, 2015	246

Figures

Figure 2.1	Percentage comparison of agriculture landholding in 2013 Source: Calculation from BPS – Statistics Indonesia, 2013	61
Figure 2.2	Comparison of smallholders between Java and other islands 2013 Source: Calculation from BPS – Statistics Indonesia, 2013	62
Figure 2.3	The Percentages Landholding Sizes Changes in Java Source: Calculation from Booth, 1989; BPS – Statistics Indonesia, 2013	63
Figure 2.4	Agriculture land in Indonesia 1961-2013 Source: Calculation from FAO, 2016	64
Figure 4.1	Tending food crops for a nearby urban market Source: Photo, Rob Cole	110
Figure 4.2	Teak planted on degraded upland Source: Photo, Jonathan Rigg	116
Figure 4.3	Women gather wood on former village land , which has been developed as a Chinese-owned cement factory Source: Photo, Rob Cole	124
Figure 4.4	Students of Laos' Northern Agriculture and Forestry College threshing rice Source: Photo, Outhai Soukkhy	129

Figure 9.1	Proportion of land holdings wholly owned by size of farm between years 1963 and 2013 Source: Created by author from the National Statistical Office (Thailand) website, http://www.nso.go.th/sites/2014en	278
Figure 9.2	Number of holding for five main crops 2013 Source: Created by author from the National Statistical Office (Thailand) website, http://www.nso.go.th/sites/2014en	287
Figure 9.3	Planted area of five main crops 2013 Source: Created by author from the National Statistical Office (Thailand) website, http://www.nso.go.th/sites/2014en	287
Figure 9.4	Farm value of five main crops gained by farmers 2013 Source: Created by author, based on Office of Agricultural Economics (2016)	287
Figure 9.5	Value of the five main crops in baht per rai calculated from harvested area 2013 Source: Created by author, based Office of Agricultural Economics (2016)	288

Tables

Table 2.1	Public Funding Transfer to Village in Medium Term	75
Table 3.1	Working hours of the rice smallholder	88
Table 3.2	Composition of income according to area of paddy field	99
Table 4.1	Comparison of 1998/99 and 2010/11 Agricultural Census Results	113
Table 4.2	Number of farm households by province, 1998/99 and 2010/11	119
Table 4.3	Rice area, yield, and output in Laos by season and region, 2015	120
Table 5.1	Planted areas of main crops in Malaysia according to types of holding 2006-2012	151
Table 5.2	Number and size of Smallholder's Land Parcel, 2002	153
Table 5.3	Smallholders Development Programme of RISDA/ BRI 1952-2010	161
Table 5.4	Types of Subsidy Schemes for Rice Cultivation	167
Table 6.1	Acreage and Value of Major Crops in the Philippines	188
Table 6.2	Value of animal production and seaweeds	191
Table 6.3	Trade in agriculture, fisheries, and aquaculture	192

Table 6.4	Tenure security in Lantapan	196
Table 6.5	Evolution of household types, East Laguna Village	197
Table 6.6	Growing seaweeds in Guimaras province	202
Table 7.1	Manpower data by farm employee type from 1970 to 2004	218
Table 7.2	Singapore's Food Production in 1982 and 2017	227
Table 8.1	Number of Smallholders in Taiwan	244
Table 9.1	Definitions of the smallholder	274
Table 9.2	Number and area of agricultural landholdings by region, 2013 (NSO)	277
Table 9.3	Number of holdings reporting owned land, area of owned land, and type of land document and region, 2013	279
Table 9.4	Number of holdings by land tenure and total area of holding, 2013	280
Table 9.5	Population size and number of farmers in 1993, 2003, and 2013	282
Table 9.6	Number of smallholder household members by sex and age group from 1993-2013	283
Table 9.7	Area of holding by land use (2003-2013)	286
Table 10.1	Agricultural land as of 31 December 2015	315
Table 10.2	Agricultural, forestry, and fishery households in 2011 and 2016	316
Table 10.3	Average land area per person in rural northern Vietnam before and after land reform	322
Table 10.4	Agricultural yield and food per person from 1976 to 1980	328

Preface

This book owes its origins to conversations at a small *roti prata*-cum-coffee shop in Singapore, where two of the editors (Rigg and Thompson) discussed ways in which we could extend our prior research endeavours in rural Southeast Asia. There we conceived a project in which we would leverage the resources afforded us by the National University of Singapore and Singapore's Ministry of Education to draw on the expertise of colleagues across East and Southeast Asia. We were fortunate to have Jamie Gillen join early in the conceptualization period of the project as well.

Our goal has been to inspire comparative analysis of the conditions that have led smallholder agriculture to change and transform, but also to persist, over the past century. This has been an era in which Asian societies have shifted from overwhelmingly rural and agrarian to urban and industrial. A key question for us has been: why is it that small-scale or smallholder agriculture appears to have persisted in Asia to a greater degree than is apparent in places such as the Americas or Europe, even while much of Asia has become as affluent and urbanized as those other regions of the world?

All three of us are grounded in traditions of primarily qualitative, ethnographic research in anthropology and human geography. Such research allows, at its best, for nuanced insights into the lives and experience of peoples and places. But it is also constrained in its comparative capacity, particularly when carried out by single researchers or small teams examining singular sites. In this project, we have sought to draw on a larger team of experienced researchers, whose expertise crosses ten countries in Southeast and East Asia. Indeed, we feel this is a particularly novel component of the project: our collaborations involve academics and researchers from across the countries in our study. The current volume is the first, comparative product of this project.

Smallholders in Asia examines the national-level histories and policies that have shaped the fate of small-scale agriculturalists. The contributors to this book, along with a large team of research assistants, provide here a broad-brush background, explaining the situation of small-scale agriculturalists in each of the ten countries covered in these pages. Our findings have

Thompson, Eric, Jonathan Rigg, and Jamie Gillen (eds), *Asian Smallholders in Comparative Perspective*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press 2019

DOI: 10.5117/9789462988170/PREF

FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE
AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

been developed over a number of workshops held in Singapore. The project, which was officially launched in October 2015, began with a conference in January 2016, followed by a second in January 2017. These gatherings provided the opportunity to reflect on preliminary, national-level findings in a comparative perspective. This book presents the findings of that first phase of the project. Subsequent publications, some now appearing in journals, will present findings from the second phase of the project, in which our research teams conducted on-the-ground fieldwork in rural sites across the countries covered in the project.

Considerable discussion went into determining which countries we could reasonably cover within the framework of this project. Funding as well as logistics constrained our ability to cover “Asia” in a comprehensive fashion. Our work focuses on East and Southeast, but not South, Central, or West Asia. And even within East and Southeast Asia, we are not able to comprehensively cover all nations – from the largest, such as China to the smallest such as Brunei. Moreover, many if not all of the countries discussed here are large and complex, so we cannot cover and discuss everything to do with small-scale agriculture in every country. We have, however, sought to include a selection of countries that represent the wide diversity of Asia. The chapters of this volume cover the histories and policies of nations from relatively small Singapore to vast and complex Indonesia, and from early modernizing and urbanizing nations such as Japan to those that remain primarily agrarian such as the Lao PDR – to name just two of the many dimensions of Asia’s complexity. While we do not claim the contents of this volume to be comprehensive, we hope and expect that experts and others interested in agrarian transitions and smallholder agriculture will find value in the broad comparative chapters and framework employed here. The chapters provide insights into the key forces that have sustained and changed small-scale agriculture in the various places and times across the region. As readers will see, we find that there is not one singular answer to why small-scale agriculture has persisted in Asia, nor a singular path through which it has transformed. At the same time, it is no pure accident of geography that this singular fact stays generally true across so many different places.

It has been a great pleasure to work with the many colleagues and contributors to this book and the project. We have learned a great deal in the process. The opportunity to collaborate with these colleagues from across Asia would not have been possible without the substantial funding provided by Singapore’s Ministry of Education (MOE2015-T2-1-014) and the National University of Singapore (Grant R-111-000-147-112 and an earlier pilot Grant

R-111-000-143-112). In addition to the contributors to this volume, a small army of research assistants and colleagues have been indispensable to the completion of this book and the broader work of the project: in Cambodia, Rosa Yi, Socheata Vinh, Sokkea Hoy, and Sophannak Chhorn; in Indonesia, M. Indra Hadi Wijaya, Herlina Kurniawati, Surya Tri Esti Wira Hutama, and Putri Prasetyan; in Japan Seishiro Sakita; in Laos, Nou Yang, and Dalaphet Soukkhy; in Malaysia, Mohamad Fadhli Rashid, Noor Aimran Samsudin, Nur Zainol Arifin Norizan, and Mohamad Hanif Hamsah; in the Philippines, Stephanie Grace Dela Cruz and Zack Lee; in Singapore, Hanan Alsagoff and Koh Ren Jie; in Thailand, Soimart Rungmanee and Monchai Phongsiri; and in Vietnam, Nghiem Thi Thuy, Vo Thi Cam Ly, Nguyen Thi Minh Thuy, Vu Yen Ha, Nguyen Thi Xuan, and Dang Thuy Linh. We are indebted to Philip Hirsch and Andrew Walker, who attended one or more of our project workshops and provided valuable feedback on the works in progress. Several doctoral candidates at the National University of Singapore have been involved with and contributed to the development of this project in conjunction with their own PhD projects, including Jessica Clendenning, Rob Cole, Do Quy Duong, Veronica Gregorio, and Carlo Gutierrez. The editors also want to give special thanks to Sakunika Wewalaarichchi, who in addition to co-authoring the chapter on Singapore was a research assistant on the project since its beginning and without whose consistent diligence the project could not have succeeded.

Eric C. Thompson, Jonathan Rigg, and Jamie Gillen
Singapore & Bristol
February 2019

Introduction: Asian Smallholders in Comparative Perspective

Eric C. Thompson, Jonathan Rigg, and Jamie Gillen

Asia's trope is one of modernization. Economic growth and structural change are transforming the region, with implications for the balance of global production and trade. In light of this, it is easy to forget that the most numerous economic and social unit across Asia is the "smallholder" or small-scale agriculturalist. Globally there are estimated to be 570 million such rural producers, and of these some three-quarters or 420 million are to be found in Asia (Hazell et al. 2010; Lowder et al. 2014, 2016; Fan and Kang-Chan 2005:135; Samberg et al. 2016).

The expectation from the early twentieth century onward, not least on the part of agricultural economists, was that small-scale agriculture would rapidly give way to land consolidation and large-scale farming, with a shift of populations into the urban and industrial sectors (Banaji 1990; Birner and Resnick 2010; Kautsky 1988). Engel's Law (Bezemer and Hazell 2006: 2) and the "natural" process of the farm-size transition (Hazell and Rahman, 2014: 3) predicted as much. More than a century on, while this has largely happened in places like Europe and North America – the historical experience of which underpinned such assumptions – smallholder and small-scale agriculture have apparently persisted in other places, and not least in Asia (Drahmoune 2013; Rigg et al. 2016). Village-based and family farming continue to be the image of farming in Asia, often shored up by an enduring stereotype of the Asian countryside as a haven of peace and a redoubt of tradition. Realities on the ground, of course, are far more complex. On the one hand, preindustrial, subsistence-oriented "peasant" agriculture is by and large a thing of the past (Elson 1997), and in any case was likely never as peaceful, moral or egalitarian as accounts often present (see Rigg 2019). At the same time, there are many places where small-scale and smallholder agriculture continues to predominate, apparently viable even when crowded out or marginalized by consolidated plantation-type agricultural ventures.

Thompson, Eric, Jonathan Rigg, and Jamie Gillen (eds), *Asian Smallholders in Comparative Perspective*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press 2019

DOI: 10.5117/9789462988170/INTRO

FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE
AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

This book takes stock of the situation of small-scale and smallholder agriculture across East and Southeast Asia. It takes as its geographical “field”, ten countries: Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. These countries are, self-evidently, a varied group ranging from low to high-income, from putatively communist to democratizing, and from land-short to land-abundant. The number of smallholders in each country also varies from a handful in the city state of Singapore to tens of millions in Indonesia. Table 1.1 sets out, in aggregate terms, some defining characteristics of these ten countries. The table emphasizes that the smallholder exists in very different national Asian contexts.

Where small-scale agriculture and large rural populations persist, such persistence is often cast as being connected to rural poverty, so that the concentration of poverty in the countryside is associated with the persistence of the smallholder. Some scholars (Fan and Chan-Kang 2005; Otsuka 2012, 2013, Otsuka et al. 2016), policymakers (Government of Malaysia 2010), and development advisors (World Bank 2007) have suggested that if only more smallholders could be encouraged to “exit” their smallholdings and engage with more remunerative and productive endeavours in urban areas and non-farm sectors, then farms could be amalgamated into larger and tacitly more efficient units of production, and rural poverty reduced. Consolidated and corporatized landholdings are often expected to be more economically efficient and productive.

Even where poverty is not a central issue, rural life itself is often taken to be inherently “backwards” and conceptualized in terms of “lack” – with the urbanization and deagrarianization of society assumed to be progressive, cosmopolitan, and in other ways desirable (Gillen 2016; Nguyen et al. 2012; Thompson 2007). In general, the presence of poverty and lack of prosperity have more often than not been taken as inherent characteristics of rural agrarian society (see Hirsch 2012). And the gulf between the agrarian rural and industrial urban societies, both between and within nations, is regularly taken to be vast. And yet, small-scale agriculture has persisted across much of Asia into our current century.

This book takes stock of the persistence as well as the transformation of agrarian smallholders in Asia. Our approach to compiling this volume has been to collaborate across the area and country fields of expertise of the contributors. All of the contributors to the volume have long-standing involvement in research on rural and agrarian issues in their respective countries and in many cases comparatively as well. While our disciplinary backgrounds range across several social-science disciplines – especially

geography, anthropology, and sociology, in this endeavour we seek to provide a comparative national-level overview of the status and processes of transformation and persistence for smallholders across Asia.

We have drawn on locally available government, non-governmental data, published works and a variety of “grey literature” to present an overview of the situation of smallholders in each country, primarily over the past century. In addition, the research teams that have joined together to produce this volume are conducting specific case studies at multiple field sites in each country, and where applicable insights are drawn from this ongoing research as well. In order to assure comparability across the contributions, each chapter is organized around a parallel set of topics and headings – how smallholders are defined in each case (i.e. what is a smallholder?), the situation of smallholders today, processes of transformation and persistence, issues facing smallholders, and the future of smallholders.

There are a number of trenchant questions to consider when it comes to unpicking the “problem” of the smallholder (Rigg et al. 2016). The first is a matter of definition. What is a “smallholder”? How is small-scale farming defined both in varied social and cultural contexts and within varied policy regimes? How do societies and states conceptualize and categorize the landholdings and people involved in small-scale agriculture? What are the implications of these definitions and categories? From the outset of this project, we have found that while “the smallholder” may be apparent across national landscapes, defining who and what we mean by “smallholders” or “small-scale farmers” yields neither simple nor singular answers (Calcaterra 2013; Samberg et al. 2018). At best, we are able to see how smallholders are defined across different national contexts and the points at which such definitions do and do not intersect.

The second set of questions in this volume explore in greater depth the status of smallholder and small-scale agriculturalists across Asia. Notwithstanding the many tensions and contradictions that have accompanied Asia’s rapid economic growth, there is little doubt that rural populations have become markedly better off in material terms. Rural poverty may remain higher than urban poverty but, even so, rural living conditions have improved significantly for most people, in most countries (Warr 2015). We also know, however, that on paper rural landholdings are often insufficient to meet household needs. How have smallholders, then, managed to improve their material living conditions on the basis of holdings which are sub-livelihood in extent? How is small-scale agriculture organized, both economically and socially? What are the relationships between rural and urban economic endeavours?

Our third set of questions concern the historical processes, particularly over the past century and in recent decades, through which smallholders have persisted and transformed in different national contexts. What are the ways in which smallholders, delineated according to size of holding (whatever that size may be), have endured against a backdrop of rapid economic growth and structural change? The experience of the countries of the global north is that as countries “modernize” the so-called “farm-size transition” takes hold. The number of farms declines and their size increases. This has not happened in Asia. Indeed, often the reverse appears to be occurring: the number of farms is increasing, and their size is falling (Hazell and Rahman 2014: 3). What explains this counter-trend to the experience elsewhere, what does it mean for theorizations of agrarian transition, and will it continue?

We then turn, fourth, both here and in each of the subsequent chapters, to issues facing small-scale agriculturalists today. In some cases, these have to do with demographics – of an excessively old or young population – or with labour and land shortages or surpluses. In most places, issues have to do with the commodification of agriculture. Even a short foray into rural Asia demonstrates the enthusiasm and alacrity with which consumerism and commercial relations have been embraced. This commodification of life and living has not, for the most part in most places, extinguished subsistence production. While farming for cash is important, many smallholders also continue to follow subsistence (or semi-subsistence) modes of own-account production. Smallholders have not become, in the main, solely profit-oriented entrepreneurs; farming has not neatly made the transition from a way of life, to a business (cf. Fan et al. 2013). How is it – and why is it – that populations which are commercially minded in so many other aspects of their lives, still adhere to an approach to farming which seems to be rooted in the past, sometimes seemingly immune to the laws of commodity production?

Yet another common issue is the puzzle of how village absence generates – or permits – village presence. There is widespread concern that villages are being “hollowed out” socially, with large numbers of left-behind children and abandoned elderly (Thompson 2004, 2007). But it is because of some leaving their rural homes that others can stay. Absence and presence, it seems, are co-produced in the Asian countryside and “left-behind” and “abandoned” assume a degree of disconnection which may not be warranted.

Finally, we conclude our introductory overview and each individual chapter by addressing the future prospects of smallholder and small-scale agriculture in Asia. Based on the histories and present status of smallholders, what might we predict about the status of smallholders over the coming

century – and again, is this something we might expect to be similar or widely varied across different national contexts? All of the preceding queries are high-level questions and puzzles, and their resolution will be different across localities and countries – and this is made clear in the chapters that follow. Nonetheless, the fact that at some level they have some resonance across all countries in the Asian region is, itself, a surprise and worthy of comparative consideration.

What Is a Smallholder in Asia?

From the outset of the current project, we have struggled to clarify and delineate the object of our interest; and to do so without precluding or obscuring the diversity of situations found among Asian nations. Farming across Asia is often imagined through a prototypical idea of small family farms or of small-scale, community-based village agriculture. Studies of rural society in Asia, at least through much of the twentieth century, centred on understanding “peasant” agriculture (e.g. the debate on the moral versus the rational peasant between James Scott [1976] and Samuel Popkin [1979]). Throughout the project of which this book is a product, we have been challenged by the problem that there is no good, straightforward term to adequately describe the sort of farming and associated social and economic relationships we are seeking to study. The term “smallholder” draws attention to the amount of land owned or cultivated by the farmers in question. An alternative, but less commonly used term, might be small-scale farmers and small-scale farming (cf. Lowder et al. 2016). As the chapters of this book demonstrate, small-scale farming remains a vital part of the agricultural sector everywhere in Asia, despite its great diversity.

Across Asia, there are important local cultural notions and terms for small-scale agriculture. In Thailand the popular term for farmer *chaao-rai chaao-naa* (ชาวนาไร่ ชาวนา) is often used as a form of self-identification, even by some long-term migrants to urban Bangkok. In Laos, a variety of local terms for small-scale farmers make distinctions between lowland and highland cultivation. The Chinese phrase “*xiaonong*” (small farmer) in Taiwan has connotations not only of farming but also of lower education. Similarly, in Malaysia, the common term “*orang kampung*” (village person) has come to imply a degree of backwardness (Thompson 2013). Moreover, its use to cover agricultural work (*kerja kampung*, lit. village work) implies a relationship between rural residence and agricultural work that is increasingly tenuous (Thompson 2004, 2007). These and other cultural notions and terms have

important effects on how small-scale agriculture is understood in local and national contexts. In many cases, these can obscure social and economic processes in agriculture, particularly as they change over time. In this book, we have focused more on these – the social and economic conditions of small-scale agriculture – rather than the varied local, cultural notions of agriculture held in Asian societies. Nonetheless, the act of labelling is far from innocent and the words that describe small-scale farming in different national contexts carry with them a weight of signification.

The two main elements of the sorts of agricultural conditions discussed in this book are, first, the size and scale of farming practices; and second, the socio-economic organization of land tenure and cultivation. The size of landholdings, for individuals and families, is shaped by a combination of “bottom-up” activities of farmers themselves and “top-down” policies implemented by governments. The organization of farming is even more diverse, to the point that cross-national trends can only be observed at a most general level, with most important elements being very specific to particular countries or particular locales within countries.

In the academic and policy literature on smallholder agriculture, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) criteria of 2 hectares (ha) or less is commonly used and cited (e.g. Fan et al. 2013). (fn: 1 hectare = 10,000² meters [100m x 100m area]) But the difficulty of assigning any simple criterion to what counts as “small” is widely acknowledged (e.g. Samberg et al. 2016). Across the ten national case studies here, we find a wide variety of legal definitions of smallholder farming. Most of these tend to limit the smallholding, for policy purposes, to something less than about 3 hectares. The most expansive definition of “smallholdings” we have come across in any country is that found in the Malaysian Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (RISDA) Act of 1972, which defines a “smallholder” as any lawful occupier or owner of less than 100 acres (40.5 ha). In effect, the RISDA Act includes as smallholders all but larger, corporate agricultural enterprises and applies to rubber cultivation, a purely commercial crop.

Other cases where official definitions of smallholding within government policy sometimes go beyond 3 hectares include Japan, the Philippines, and Thailand. In Japan, government and policy documents set “smallholder” limits at 10 hectares for the Hokkaido region (which has traditionally had larger, expansive farms as compared to the rest of the country) and 3 hectares for all areas outside Hokkaido. In the Philippines, the Carabao (Water Buffalo) Act of 1992 and the Rubber Research Institute Act of 2010 follow a maximal limit of 5 hectares. In Thailand, the Office of the National

Economic and Social Advisory Council (ONESAC) defines smallholders as those cultivating not more than 50 rai (8 ha) of field crops or 15 rai (2.4 ha) of fruit orchards.

Elsewhere, legal, policy-driven definitions of smallholders generally range between 1 and 3 hectares. In Cambodia, where international NGO activity is extensive, the United Nations FAO definition of smallholders as owning and cultivating less than 2 hectares operates alongside that of the AgriFood Consulting International (ACI) of under 3 hectares and the World Bank, which identifies three categories of smallholder: small (1 ha or less), medium (1 ha to 3 ha), and large (3 ha to 4 ha). Vietnamese government policies set a limit of smallholdings to 3 hectares in the Mekong Delta and 2 hectares elsewhere in the country. Similarly in Laos, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry defines smallholders as those owning 2 hectares or less. The lowest maximal limit for defining “smallholders” we have found is that of the Indonesian government’s statistics bureau (*Badan Pusat Statistik* or BPS), which defines smallholders as those owning 0.5 hectare or less on Java, but 2 to 3 hectares outside Java. Indonesia’s 2013 Law of Farmers’ Empowerment and Protection, provides specific benefits to smallholders defined as owning less than 2 hectares, without respect to region. The contributors to this volume also note that in some countries or in certain instances of agrarian policymaking, “smallholders” go undefined, for instance in Singapore and Taiwan.

Apart from the varying definitions in terms of size of holdings, another problem with the term “smallholder” itself is that it denotes landholding (ownership) as opposed to land use (cultivation). The owner-operator model implied by “smallholder agriculture” excludes or obfuscates a great deal of small-scale agriculture. In Indonesia and elsewhere, for example, many small-scale farmers are landless sharecroppers who work on land owned by others. In other cases, agriculture and land tenure have been organized collectively. Wet-rice paddy cultivation systems often rely on collective maintenance of irrigation works. Many of Asia’s hundreds of diverse ethnic groups have traditional systems of organizing collective agriculture, ranging from sharing labour to communally held land.

Focus on the land (holdings) also may draw attention away from rather more vital issues of how farming is socially and economically organized (Cramb and Newby 2015). These may be changing even when farm size remains the same. Individual chapters in this book describe important configurations of small-scale farming across various national contexts. For example, in post-War Japan, rapid economic growth and industrialization led to the development of a “san-chan” system in which farming activities

were taken over by wives and elder parents (the three “chans”), while male heads-of-household took up off-farm employment. In Thailand, extended family-farming households have become the norm, relying on remittances from urban employment of family members and occasional, seasonal labour of migrant returnees. Malaysian, Singaporean, and more recently Thai smallholders have increasingly turned to migrant foreign labour to make up for local labour shortages. Since the 1980s, Vietnam and Cambodia have undergone varying degrees of de-collectivization. Even though the general trend of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century has been toward individual land ownership, in almost all national and local contexts, smallholders rely on various sorts of agricultural cooperatives for everything from planting and harvesting to marketing.

The ten national case studies in this book demonstrate that smallholders remain a vital part of agriculture and, even more so, rural society in Asia. Yet beyond this it is also evident that formal, policy-defined and informal, socially and economically organized aspects of such small-scale agriculture are extremely varied, not only from country to country but also within countries. Understanding the dynamics of small-scale agriculture must largely be done on a case-by-case analytical basis, within and between national contexts. There is no simple or even useful basis on which to singularly define the “Asian smallholder” or small-scale farmer. The FAO criteria of 2 hectares or less is at best a rough metric providing a crude cross-national estimation of the size of different country’s smallholder sector (cf. Samberg et al. 2016). It provides a starting point, but certainly not an end point, for examining Asia’s small-farm sector.

In terms of smallholder organization and processes of transformation and persistence, there are some general trends that can be observed and compared across countries; but only with caution and often more qualitatively than quantitatively. That said, from a normative, prescriptive and policy setting point-of-view, this great diversity might usefully be approached comparatively as a vast laboratory of experiments in how small-scale farming is organized and undertaken, and how the more successful variants might be fostered.

Smallholders in Asia Today

As alluded to in the previous section, a prevailing theme in this collection is the sheer heterogeneity of the smallholder in Asia. We mean this in three ways. In the first place, smallholders are heterogeneous in their

profile. Along with the figure of ageing parents presiding over their land in Japan and Thailand, we also find younger smallholders, as in the case of the “re-ruralization” phenomenon occurring in Taiwan. The smallholder is also heterogeneous in his or her activities. A smallholder’s traditional way of life has moved past singular cultivation of a small rice paddy to a bevy of on-farm and off-farm activities. In the Philippines, for example, Andriesse notes the “diversified, pluri-active nature of many households” and in Laos smallholders have different “logics” depending on the lands they own and have access to (which are not always the same). The authors of the chapters imply that it is more important to think of the relationship among varied smallholder activities than to consider farm work in isolation. Lastly, Asian smallholders face a heterogeneity of challenges, some of which are longstanding and others unique to national contexts or shifting political winds. The “problems” of the ageing smallholder and market integration struggles are well-known and occupy prominent positions in the stories in this collection (cf. Montague and Kealy 2000). On the other hand, some issues have emerged rather more recently and singularly, such as the difficulties surrounding contract farming in Cambodia.

A fundamental story of the smallholder in Asia today is one of progressive and deepening commercialization (Fan et al. 2013; Dawe et al. 2014). Technologies ranging from machinery to chemical inputs are components of production in most places, and dependencies on agribusiness, various commercial actors and intermediaries and, more widely, “markets” characterize the sector. The evidence in the book shows that subsistence farming can continue in lockstep with (not in opposition to) commercial farming; the two should be seen as co-dependent aspects of contemporary smallholder lives in Asia. Tubtim describes a range of land use and land ownership valuations in Thailand, complicating the distinctions between public and private land. For example, those smallholders in northern Thailand holding a “public-land use pass” are in the precarious position of cultivating public land and thus in danger of losing their use rights if the government reclaims land for conservation or sale (or both). In northern Vietnam, contract farming with large agribusiness corporations is largely perceived as a positive development for smallholders because the company provides all of the livestock, infrastructure, materials, feed, medicine, and logistical support and the smallholder provides the land and everyday upkeep.

What we find when looking into the details of the many national development policies in our case study countries is that the logics of “improvement” and “development” run closer to market growth aspirations than any comprehensive advancement plans for the smallholder. Indeed, market

growth policies pose problems for an ageing smallholder workforce like that in Japan, although the entire Asian region may see a drop in productivity as the smallholder ages (see Li and Sicular 2013). In Taiwan, however, ageing smallholders are understood to hold “authentic” traditional knowledge that is to be tapped by younger farmers in a calculated manner to “integrate their idealist visions of agriculture with their parallel pursuit of stronger market connections”. This recalibration of the smallholder market brings established agricultural knowledge into conversation with present-day market complexities, an intriguing idea signalling the interplay between persistence and transformation that marks this volume.

The various legal, policy-based definitions of smallholdings and smallholders in some instances reflect historical, organic conditions under which farmers came to develop landholdings of particular sizes. There was a certain inevitability to smallholdings, and particularly wet-rice-based smallholdings, being around 2 hectares in extent: peasant production relied on household labour and, in the absence of mechanization, anything more was almost impossible to farm. In other instances, there are clear indications that policy definitions themselves have influenced the common sizes of holdings in various countries. With regard to historical circumstances for instance, much of Malaysian “*kampung*” (village) agriculture dates to a history of peasant pioneer farmers clearing forest and staking out claims along rivers and later roads which tended, again, to be about one or two hectares in size.

In many other instances, we find cases where government orchestrated land reform efforts have played a major role in defining – and particularly in limiting – the size of smallholdings across different countries. In Japan, land reform initiatives of the American post-War authorities sought to break up large landholdings and redistribute them to previously landless or land-poor farmers. In so doing, they set a limit of redistribution at no more than 3 hectares, which in part accounts for there being few farms of greater than 3 hectares (outside Hokkaido). A similar 3-hectare limit was set in the Philippines during post-1987 EDSA Revolution land reforms. Under resettlement schemes in Indonesia (*transmigrasi*) and Malaysia (FELDA), farmers or families were given lots of 2 to 4 hectares. In these and other cases, the current configuration and size of many smallholdings can be traced to such government interventions.

While smallholders almost everywhere in Asia today – apart from the most remote upland or island locales – are integrated into market economies, there remains in most places an association with land that maintains at least a sensibility of subsistence agriculture. That is to say, a sense that at the very least, under conditions of economic downturn or individual

family tragedies, agrarian smallholders can return to the land as a source of minimal economic maintenance and subsistence. But in general, almost everywhere, small-scale agriculture and agrarian smallholders operate in conjunction with the urban and industrial economy. In most cases, this involves family and extended kin relationships. In Thailand, for example, the “extended family household” is common, where adult children work in urban areas, remit money to parents and occasionally return home to assist with harvests and other agricultural activities. In Malaysia, it is common for men and sometimes women, to have industrial or urban-based jobs while also tending sporadically to orchards (*kebun*) with each form of activity supplementing the other to provide a living or family wage. All of these various arrangements exemplify the “pluri-active” nature of smallholder and small-scale farmer economies in Asia today, which more often than not involve a mix rather than separation of rural agrarian and urban endeavours. The ability to move strategically between rural and urban economies, either as individuals or as family- or kin-units, is one important factor in the persistence of smallholder and small-scale agriculture in Asia. At the same time, it is clearly a situation far different from the past, when Asian societies were overwhelmingly agrarian rather than urban, and “peasant” agriculture was more thoroughly subsistence rather than market oriented.

Processes of Transformation and Persistence

The countries of East and Southeast Asia have undergone a variety of experiences over the past century, which have shaped the transformation and persistence of small-scale agriculture throughout these regions. Reading across these cases, we do not find one singular path that small-scale agriculture has taken. At the same time, a number of key dynamics influencing small-scale agriculture have surfaced in the national cases in this book. First, specific histories of colonialism, national-oriented development, war, and peace have shaped the history of agriculture in a variety of ways. Second, Asia has broadly, though unevenly, experienced urbanization and industrialization. To varying degrees, these societies have shifted away from a primary agrarian base. They have also experienced integration into transnational regional and global markets. Such economic changes have been paired with important demographic trends as well. But as much or more than any of these trends of the past century, politics and policies have played important roles in the extent to which smallholder agriculture has continued to be an important social and economic role in various countries.

Both colonial and post-colonial national governments have taken it upon themselves to intervene in shaping practices of agriculture. Arguably, following Scott (2017), governing agriculture has been central to statecraft since the birth of the state itself (cf. Walker 2015). That said, with respect to small-scale and smallholder agriculture, states – certainly in the past century or two – have undertaken policies that vary widely in terms of consolidation and redistribution of land. Colonial governments, in general, pursued policies aimed at extracting natural resources for the benefit of the colonial metropole. In many colonial regimes, this involved large land concessions and significant land consolidation under a variety of plantation schemes – such as haciendas in the Philippines and estates in Malaysia. But even under colonial conditions, agricultural policies often formed in ways to protect or reinforce aspects of small-scale, smallholder farming. Dutch policy in Indonesia, for example, tended to favour operating through local feudal relations, maintaining a peasantry even while the world in general was modernizing. British authorities in Malaysia, similarly established a dual economic policy, which while promoting large-scale, cash-crop plantation “estate” agriculture utilizing foreign (mostly Indian) labour, also “protected” Malay smallholder agriculture as a source of subsistence and surplus food production. Spanish colonial authorities in the Philippines may have been the most thoroughly committed to land consolidation; but the complex geography of the archipelago meant that many smallholding and small-scale enterprises persisted into the American and national periods.

Historically, collective or community-based organization of agriculture has been an important part of many farming systems, such as the *bawon* system for sharing labour in Java (Indonesia). But from the nineteenth century onward, community-based agriculture has given way to individualized land ownership and the commodification of land. Adoption of European and colonial legal systems, such as Torrens title land registration implemented in Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Laos have played a key role in this process. In Cambodia and Vietnam, collectivization of land was undertaken under Communist governments, but shifted back towards *de facto* individualization from the late 1980s onward. Individual land ownership and the commodification of land – making it property that can be bought and sold – provide a framework for the possibility of land consolidation. And there has been a significant amount of land consolidation in particular areas. Much of Malaysia, many outer islands of Indonesia and large areas of the Philippines are dominated by large-scale plantation agriculture, though usually with important pockets of small-scale agriculture

existing side-by-side the plantations. In the past couple of decades, land grabbing has been a notable phenomenon in Cambodia (Schoenberger and Beban 2018; Kent 2016), though it has not erased smallholdings in the country (Parsons, Lawreniuk, and Pilgrim 2014). But other forces have militated against large-scale agriculture becoming the norm in much of Asia. Many Asian cultures maintain an attachment to landholdings and are reluctant to sell off family land, even when it is not economically viable. In Malaysia, for example, while village land is commonly bought and sold, this is done more often than not through extended family networks, rather than to outsiders let alone corporate interests.

In addition to cultural norms around maintaining agricultural land, the political position of small-scale farmers has been of particular significance to the fate of smallholder agriculture in specific countries. In the post-colonial period (including for countries like Japan and Thailand, which successfully avoided direct colonial rule), national governments have tended to see agrarian smallholders as a backbone to emergent national economies and important political constituencies. In Malaysia, with the establishment of democratic governance after independence, rural Malay agriculturalists became a site of contest between Malay-based political parties even though, from at least the 1970s, the government sought to draw Malays off the land and into the urban, industrial economy.

Such mixed signals and conflicting impulses have been quite common in various national contexts. There are often cross-currents of national policy that seek to fundamentally reform the economy toward a more market- and profit-oriented one, especially and more universally since the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At the same time, governments from Japan to Indonesia have seen the importance of maintaining the social and economic viability of their rural populations. In Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, long periods of war and civil strife held these nations back from full participation in the economic development, industrialization and urbanization that happened through much of the rest of Asia in the mid- to late twentieth century. They have, however, been more rapidly developing in the past two or three decades.

Along with urbanization and industrialization, the more affluent nations, such as Japan and Singapore have “passed through” the demographic transition to smaller families and low birth rates. One of the demographic surprises of Southeast and East Asia, however, is the degree to which even those countries that are less urbanized and industrialized have seen quite dramatic declines in fertility. Total fertility rates in Malaysia and Thailand are below replacement levels, while in Cambodia and

Indonesia they have fallen sharply from 5.9 and 4.4 in 1980 to 2.6 and 2.4 in 2015, respectively. The ageing of the farm labour force is a feature across the region, driven partly by these demographic trends but also by a generational shift from farm to non-farm work, as the young move out of agriculture. The result is that the average age of farmers in Japan and Taiwan is 70 and 62 years respectively, but it also exceeds 50 years of age in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand. Farmers in countries which would seem on paper to face labour surpluses and land shortages, such as Thailand and Malaysia, sometimes struggle to source workers and resort either to employing migrant workers, or mechanizing or dis-intensifying production.

A final key to the processes of transformation and persistence of small-scale agriculture in Asia, have been the varied policy regimes of national governments over the past century. While each of the chapters of this volume devotes some time to the effects of national agricultural policies on smallholder production, the chapters on Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Taiwan, Singapore, and the Philippines emphasize the intersections between national policies and smallholder lives over time. For Nguyen writing about Vietnam, the New Rural Development programme established by the Vietnamese government in 2010 has achieved much of its stated goals of land consolidation, poverty alleviation, skills training, and infrastructure improvements. In the Philippines the story differs: Andriess describes the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) of 1988 as not “reaching its intended objectives” of alleviating rural poverty because of mismanagement, red tape, and population growth.

In Singapore, Wewalaarachchi and Thompson show how state policies toward agricultural land and labour have contributed to a certain stigma attached to smallholder work. The authors trace agricultural policies in the 1980s to broader efforts to “modernize”, with “family farms (...) seen as backward impediments” to the state’s development plans. For those engaged in agricultural work, the Singapore state now supports smallholders by permitting the employment of inexpensive temporary foreign labour and pushes “edu-tourism” endeavours in communities to supplement on-farm work.

Smallholders in Laos find their room to manoeuvre limited by policies that shape and sometimes control access to land and by the state’s active encouragement of foreign investment in the agricultural sector. Despite this, the number of smallholders is increasing in every area but Vientiane city, as households search for alternative working opportunities but continue to retain a foothold in rural areas.

Issues Facing Asian Smallholders

Land and labour are two of the key issues or constraints affecting the viability of ongoing small-scale farming across most of Asia. Land – whether in terms of use value, exchange value, or symbolic value – continues to be an important facet of smallholder lives, even as already smallholdings become smaller still. Growing numbers of farming households do not have access to sufficient land to meet their needs – holdings are therefore “sub-livelihood” – driving the pluri-active nature of livelihoods noted earlier. Countries like Taiwan, Cambodia, and Laos have dramatic topographical range which lends them a variety of landholding possibilities and crops. In Malaysia the opposite has occurred: with agriculture driven by plantation monocropping, dominated by rubber and oil palm and with struggles centring on labour shortages.

Declining farm size means that land use is changing as well. The region is famously marked by its rice paddy cultivation and this continues across the region. A few countries, such as Thailand and Vietnam, have developed a significant rice export economy. But for many others, rice farming is primarily for household consumption rather than for sale. Seasonal intercropping features in a few case study sites and upland areas are regularly cultivated with cash crops such as maize or cassava. Many Southeast Asian rural communities keep household “rice land” (farm land) separate from their residences, and household farmlands are sometimes fragmented too.

People’s relationship to their land is also undergoing significant modification. What is called “spatial reorganization” in many of the chapters can be quite pronounced, as in the Laos case with forced resettlement of farmers, and it can be voluntary as in the case of Taiwanese young people returning to the countryside. With the exception of Singapore, in all of the countries examined it is the urban, and more particularly non-farm manufacturing, construction, and service jobs that lie within these areas, that are redrawing the rural in dramatic ways. High levels of mechanization are common across Asia because of the ageing workforce, labour shortages, and the availability of relatively low-cost agricultural machinery geared to small farms, which is sometimes termed micro-mechanization or scale-appropriate mechanization. The notion that the singular Asian smallholder works by hand and with oxen to cultivate land is broadly obsolete due to these developments.

In Taiwan, Japan, and to a certain extent Singapore, there are active rural revitalization movements that are leading to a reclamation of the countryside for activities like local food movements. The fact that these three countries are the wealthiest and most “developed” among the ten

covered in this book is a contributory explanatory factor. In these highly industrialized and urbanized nations, newer generations experience a sense of loss vis-à-vis rural, agrarian pasts. Attempts to reclaim the perceived social benefits and social values of rural ways of life have been varyingly successful across these three affluent nations.

At the same time, nearly everywhere, a pressing issue for smallholders is market viability (Hall 2004). We mean this in terms of the extent to which smallholders have commodified their crops and agricultural products for sale as well as their relationship to buyers and inputs. Additionally, their labour and outputs are affected by weather-related fluctuations, global market forces, and governmental interventions over which they largely have no control. In some of our case studies there is not a problem of labour shortage generally, but rather specific sorts of labour shortages within the family or with regard to physical ability, particularly with ageing farmers. In places like Vietnam and Thailand, smallholders who cannot rely on their kinship networks employ low-skill contract farmers on a seasonal or crop-specific basis. In Japan, Malaysia, Vietnam, and elsewhere, even parts of Indonesia, some agricultural land lies fallow because there is not enough labour to cultivate it. In Eastern Indonesia it is said to be *tidur*, or “sleeping”. Themes like these run throughout the country chapters and the economic conditions of the smallholder in many cases can be characterized as uncertain and precarious.

A substantive dimension of the economic uncertainty is a lack of communication between smallholders and other decision-makers who are involved in their livelihoods; there is also a general lack of understanding about who wields real power over their land and labour (Glassman 2006). In Cambodia, for example, the widespread availability of microfinance organizations offering “payday loans” often do much more harm than good because loan recipients have little understanding of the conditions of the loan or what they have to pay back. This problem often results in having to surrender agricultural property and farming resources to pay the loans back, quickening a cycle of poverty and indebtedness. Agricultural collectives do something to alleviate these issues by providing a political mouthpiece for smallholders, but many government officials and moneylenders live among smallholders and are members of the collectives themselves, which complicates communication channels.

The most critical geographical issue facing smallholders in Asia today is the transforming relationship between the countryside and the city. An ageing workforce in rural Asia, improved technologies, more productive inputs, and higher-quality infrastructure have made it possible for people

to leave the countryside to work in industry, construction, and other labour activities and maintain their agricultural land. This is a pluri-active approach to keeping smallholdings viable; it is also a poorly understood dimension of the smallholder experience. Chapters throughout this book address the enhanced ability of smallholders to mobilize family members to leave their holdings for urban work while also maintaining a foothold on their family's land. This is not to say that pluri-activity always results in a net positive for smallholders. For example, in some cases wages from this urban-based work keeps smallholdings viable while in other cases a lack of opportunities for industrial work nearby encourages smallholders to cultivate someone else's land as seasonal or crop-based contract farmers. What is clear in the pages that follow is that smallholder land is here to stay, at least in the medium term and albeit in ways that differ from country to country and village to village.

As a final point to this subsection, we can also see how aspirations for smallholders place a great deal of emphasis on wanting something better for their children, in terms of an improved quality of life, more financial capital, and (most importantly) a good education. Education is seen as a clear pathway to more options, including as a way out of the countryside and, perhaps paradoxically, to also be able to have the financial resources to hold on to family holdings. The future is a frequent topic in the chapters that follow because the issues that face smallholders today are not ones that smallholders wish for their children to have to grapple with down the road. There is a belief that education advances the capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2013), creates the conditions to innovate and be creative, and encourages risk-taking. Smallholders rationalize the preservation of their landholdings by explaining that they serve as a hedge for their offspring in case of failure and are also a ready-made form of capital, through mortgage or sale, to help pay for schooling, weddings and funerals, and motorbikes and other big ticket purchases.

The Future of Asian Smallholders

The chapters in this book demonstrate that while smallholders, small-scale farmers, or family farmers, may be continuing, even prevailing, features of the Asian rural landscape, they are so having “followed” different paths of transformation and currently occupy different positions whether viewed in terms of livelihoods, politics, or economy. There is ample reason, then, to be cautious of mapping out any singular rural future for “the” Asian

smallholder. What the discussions do permit, however, is an opportunity to reflect on rural possibilities. We need to be careful to resist the temptation of taking the experiences of countries like Japan, Singapore and Taiwan as offering insights into other countries' rural futures, but the country cases do provide an empirical sounding board to think about a range of rural futures for nations aspiring to greater affluence through urbanization and industrialization. Likewise, Cambodia, Laos, and other cases of "Later Developing Countries" (LDCs) highlight the ways in which everywhere smallholder agriculture is diminishingly own-account or subsistence farming and instead has become or is becoming thoroughly integrated with and subject to regional and global market forces.

Cambodia is faced with the dual "problem" of low productivity and rising costs, set against a burgeoning of alternative activities in other sectors and spaces. With the advent of aggressive agribusiness practices, there are fears that small family farms might simply "evaporate". However, based on the many national case studies in this book, it is far from certain that land consolidation and marginalization of small-scale farmers and farming is a necessary future for Cambodia or any other of the lower income countries of Asia.

Small farmers in Indonesia face similar conditions to those in Cambodia, but the country demonstrates how state rural development policies offer prospects for village revitalization as substantial funds are channelled to village projects, providing the means to revivify community economies and create a space for smallholders to persist even while farm production and profitability are squeezed. Whether quite marked improvements in rural infrastructure will persuade villagers to remain in rural areas or entice them to leave is one of the questions that will be worked out in differentiated ways, over time. Certainly, urbanization and industrialization were key themes of social change in the twentieth century and they will likely remain dominant trends through the twenty-first century.

Japan, famously, has the oldest farmers of all. Small, family farms have persisted against a backdrop of significant subsidy, both agricultural and social (pensions and other transfers and investments). The expectation is that rather than generational renewal, Japan will see generational replacement. A population of super-aged farmers will be replaced by an aged generation. This will see farming becoming an occupation structurally, and permanently, linked to workers entering agriculture after "retirement". What might work against this rural future is if those "younger" generations close to retirement in other sectors of the economy are not inclined to enter farming; if this occurs, then the area of idle or unused land will likely expand and there might be opportunities – and pressure – to consolidate holdings.

Laos' rural future is, perhaps more than other countries in the region, in the hands of external forces, whether "natural" (e.g., climate change), regional (the influence of Chinese, Vietnamese, and Thai economic interests), or coming from the Lao state's policy decisions. With regard to the challenge of climate change, adaptive capacity is said to be "weak". At the same time Laos' geographical position sandwiched between Thailand, Vietnam, and China will mean that its agrarian transition and, therefore, the future of smallholders and agriculture in general will be significantly contingent on developments in those countries. The balancing of own-account farming with commodity production, and rural interests with national development, will be a delicate one, and whether the voice and concerns of the rural population will be mainly ignored or significantly valued will be key.

The Malaysian government is intent on modernizing the smallholder sector, preferably through land consolidation, but faces a smallholder population reluctant to permit this to happen; farms are cherished and retained, and transferred within families rather than sold. Some land is left idle and unworked. Broadly, the government has attempted consolidation without dispossession through major government bodies that oversee rubber and oil palm enterprises that consolidate smallholdings through leasing and management agreements. Because Malay smallholders are a critical political force, subsidies and other forms of central government support have been generous. But while Malay-Malaysian rural poverty may be a thing of the past, rural poverty is not. A new class of rural poor, mainly non-Malaysian workers from neighbouring countries, constitute an uncounted, precarious, and marginal population who play a large role in keeping Malaysian smallholdings productive (a phenomenon seen on a smaller scale elsewhere, particularly Thailand). There is also evidence of a weakening in the flow of the young out of farming and rural areas, and the return of Malay civil servants, on generous pensions, to their rural homes. Retiring into farming in a similar fashion to that seen in Japan.

In the Philippines, it is in rural areas and, in particular, among smallholders in rural areas, where poverty is concentrated. There is little evidence of sustained improvements in rural livelihoods, and long years of policy failures, state incompetence and political cronyism have done little substantially to improve rural conditions. Climate change and weather extremes add further pressures. Many of the other chapters in this book identify elements of positive change in smallholder livelihoods; in the Philippines these have been few and this can be laid squarely at the door of political elites in Manila who have consistently failed to see beyond their own, narrow self-interests.

The Singapore government's approach to the country's smallholders is singularly different from that pursued by the other countries included in this book: smallholders are neither numerous nor important, and the focus is on the farm sector rather than smallholders. Thus the future of smallholders will depend on how they fit within the state's vision for the small areas of land available for farming. For the present this seems to be high-tech farming on the one hand, in line with the state's vision for the city state in general, and post-productivist on the other, with rural production being shaped to wider social interests, whether for education, tourism, or therapy. If small farmers no longer serve any national purpose, the expectation is that they will be managed into oblivion. That said, in recent decades, interest has grown in small or even micro-scale urban farming, which here and elsewhere may become a trend to watch beyond mere "gardening", and toward a new, more substantive trend in small-scale agriculture. Such farming may be small-scale, but it is a world away from the peasant smallholder that has such a grip on the regional imagination.

Like Japan, Taiwan faces the challenge of ageing smallholders and youth emigration from rural areas. But more than any country considered in this volume, we also see a rural revitalization process driven by younger people. Some of these are the children of smallholders returning "home" from urban areas, but there is also an important group of "new" farmers who have had no prior connection to agriculture. They bring with them ideals of sustainability and land justice, a preference for organic methods and food safety, a motivation to promote local food movements, and a desire to establish networks and collaborations, sometimes international. In these ways Taiwan's experience chimes with trends in some areas of the global North, and provides a contrast with Japan's, where efforts to entice younger generations to return to or enter farming have proved relatively unsuccessful to date.

The distinctiveness of the direction that Thailand's smallholder sector has taken, at least to date, is in terms of the complexity of the interplay of work, space, and livelihoods. Smallholdings may persist on paper, but how they persist and what form this persistence takes is rather harder to ascertain, such is the degree to which household livelihoods are stretched across space, and between sectors and activities. A second feature of the Thai case is the way in which agribusiness has intruded into and "captured" smallholder value in terms of land and labour.

Finally in Vietnam, the role of communes, notwithstanding *doi moi* and the partial individualization of farming from the mid-1980s onwards, has been to create opportunities for areas of individually allocated land to be

amalgamated into larger units of production, driven by the state's "new countryside" movement. In the government's rhetoric this is a form of (re-) collectivization, but in reality rewards wealthy and more entrepreneurially minded smallholders under a commercial aegis.

These national cases emphasize how distinctive each country's rural present is, and therefore rural future is likely to be. But beyond these important detailed differences, are four axes around which we think most issues revolve. First, the significance of smallholders as an interest group with the power, whether political, moral, or popular, to change and shape things to their benefit. On one side, are countries such as Japan, Malaysia, and to some extent Indonesia and Thailand, where the rural "lobby" has significant sway; and on the other, Singapore, Laos, and the Philippines where it is negligible, or distinctly limited. The question remains as to the extent to which smallholders, and rural populations more widely, will be able to shape and direct policies and policymaking to their collective interests. But so far, and in aggregate terms, the divide between rural and urban, and farm and non-farm, has widened rather than narrowed.

Second is the generational angle in shaping rural futures. The chapters that follow show that in some countries younger farmers are coming to play a key role in shaping rural futures; in others, they have either distanced themselves from farming, spatially, occupationally, and aspirationally, or they have been actively excluded by an entrenched older cohort of farmers. A youthful revivification of farming could do much to bring new approaches to agriculture and also to quash entrenched views in many countries that farmers and farming are unsophisticated and backward looking.

The third element is the role of agribusiness and commercial relations more generally. How is agribusiness capturing smallholder value, whether through various forms of contract farming or more extended production networks, sometimes across national borders? As periods of economic stagnation or contraction have shown, the rural often provides a social and livelihood safety net, a place of return and of succour. Even when land stands idle and the young profess not to be interested in farming, the smallholding remains a quiet sentinel in the rural landscape.

Fourthly, and perhaps even more importantly, how do rural futures link to wider development futures? The term "the Asian Century" (Mahbubhani 2008) is often bandied around by public intellectuals to signal an Asian-led twenty-first century, a transformation led by rapid urbanization and widespread rural-to-urban migration. Is there a corresponding "ruralization" (Krause 2013) in play as well, and what role might it play in future growth, aspirations, and challenges in the region?

As a ten-country survey of the transformation and persistence of smallholder and small-scale agriculture in Asia, this book aims to be a valuable resource for both scholars and policymakers concerned with the present state and future prospects of farming in Asia. We have organized the chapters in parallel fashion so that each addresses in turn the ways in which “smallholders” are defined socially and through policy documents in each country, the status of smallholders today, forces shaping their persistence and transformation over roughly the past century, issues currently faced by smallholders, and finally their future prospects. While the histories, current situation and problems facing smallholders vary widely, the national case studies here provide insights into the factors that have led to more or less favourable outcomes. Against all expectations of agrarian smallholder disappearance, current from the early twentieth century onward, smallholder agriculture has persisted – albeit often in very different forms and socio-economic contexts – into our present century. The mere fact that there continue to be well over 400 million small-scale farmers in Asia is reason enough to take them seriously.

References

- Appadurai, A. (2013) *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition*. London, Verso.
- Banaji, J. (1990) “Illusions about the peasantry: Karl Kautsky and the agrarian question”, *Journal of Peasant Studies* 17(2): 288-307.
- Birner, R. and D. Resnick (2010) “The political economy of policies for smallholder agriculture”, *World Development* 38(10): 1442-1452.
- Brennan, T. (2017) “On the image of the country and the city”, *Antipode* 49(S1): 34-51.
- Calcaterra, E. (2013) *Defining Smallholders: Suggestions for a RSB Smallholder Definitions*. https://energycenter.epfl.ch/files/content/sites/energy-center/files/projets/Bioenergy%20Team/Defining%20smallholders_v30102013.pdf Accessed on?
- Cramb, R.A. and J.C. Newby (2015) “Trajectories of rice-farming households in mainland Southeast Asia”. In: *Trajectories of Rice-Based Farming Systems in Mainland Southeast Asia*, R.A. Cramb, ed. pp. 35-72. Canberra: Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research.
- Dawe, D., S. Jaffee, and N. Santos, eds. (2014) *Rice in the Shadow of Skyscrapers: Policy Choices in a Dynamic East and Southeast Asian Setting*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

- Drahmoune, F. (2013) "Agrarian transitions, rural resistance and peasant politics in Southeast Asia", *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 32(1): 111-139.
- Elson, R.E. (1997) *The End of the Peasantry in Southeast Asia: A Social and Economic History of Peasant Livelihood, 1800-1990s*. London: Palgrave.
- Fan, S. and C. Chan-Kang (2005) "Is small beautiful: Farm size, productivity and poverty in Asian agriculture", *Agricultural Economics* 32(1): 135-146.
- Fan, S., J. Brzeska, M. Keyzer, and A. Halsema (2013) *From Subsistence to Profit: Transforming Smallholder Farms*. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute.
- Gillen, J. (2016) "Bringing the countryside to the city: Practices and imaginations of the rural in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam", *Urban Studies* 53(2): 324-337.
- Glassman, J. (2006) "Primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession, accumulation by 'extra-economic' means", *Progress in Human Geography* 30(5): 608-625.
- Government of Malaysia (2010) *Tenth Malaysia Plan 2011-2015*. Kuala Lumpur: Unit Perancang Ekonomi.
- Hall, D. (2004) "Smallholders and the spread of capitalism in rural Southeast Asia", *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 45: 401-414.
- Hazell, P. and A. Rahman, eds. (2014) *New Directions for Smallholder Agriculture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hirsch, P. (2012) "Reviving agrarian studies in South-East Asia: Geography on the ascendancy", *Geographical Research* 50(4): 393-403.
- Li, M. and T. Sicular (2013) "Aging of the labor force and technical efficiency in crop production: Evidence from Liaoning province, China", *China Agricultural Economic Review* 5(3): 342-359.
- Kautsky, K. (1988) [1899] *The Agrarian Question*. London: Swan Books.
- Kent, A. (2016) "Conflict continues: Transitioning into a battle for property in Cambodia today", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 47(1): 3-23.
- Krause, M. (2013) "The ruralization of the world", *Public Culture* 25(2): 233-248.
- Lowder, S.K., J. Scoet and T. Raney (2016) "The number, size, and distribution of farms, smallholder farms, and family farms worldwide", *World Development* 87: 16-29.
- Mahbubhani, K. (2008) *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Montague, Y. and L.J.M. Kealy (2000) "The graying of farmers", *Population Today* 28(4): 6.
- Nguyen T.A., J.R., Luong T.T.H., and Dinh T.D. (2012) "Becoming and being urban in Hanoi: Rural-urban migration and relations in Vietnam", *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39(5): 1103-1131.

- Otsuka, K. (2012) "Food insecurity, income inequality, and the changing comparative advantage in world agriculture". In: *Presidential Address at the 27th International Conference of Agricultural Economists*. Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil.
- Otsuka, K. (2013) "Food insecurity, income inequality, and the changing comparative advantage in world agriculture", *Agricultural Economics* 44: 7-18.
- Otsuka, K., Liu, Y., and Yamauchi, F. (2016) "The future of small farms in Asia", *Development Policy Review* 34(3): 441-461.
- Parsons, L., S. Lawreniuk, and J. Pilgrim (2014) "Wheels within wheels: Poverty, power, and patronage in the Cambodian migration system", *The Journal of Development Studies* 50(10): 1362-1379.
- Popkin, S.L. (1979) *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam*. Berkeley/ Los Angeles/ London: University of California Press.
- Rigg, J., A. Salamanca, and E.C. Thompson (2016) "The puzzle of East and Southeast Asia's persistent smallholder", *Journal of Rural Studies* 43: 118-133.
- Rigg, J. (2019) *More than Rural: Textures of Thailand's Agrarian Transformation*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Samberg, L.H., J.S. Gerber, N. Ramankutty, M. Herrero, and P.C. West (2016) "Subnational distribution of average farm size and smallholder contributions to global food production", *Environmental Research Letters* 11(124010): 1-12.
- Schoenberger, L., and A. Beban (2018) "They turn us into criminals: Embodiments of fear in Cambodian land grabbing", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 108(5): 1338-1353.
- Scott, J.C. (1976) *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*. New Haven/ London: Yale University Press.
- Scott, J.C. (2017) *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*. New Haven/ London: Yale University Press.
- Thompson, E.C. (2004) "Rural villages as socially urban spaces in Malaysia", *Urban Studies* 41(12): 2358-2376.
- Thompson, E.C. (2007) *Unsettling Absences: Urbanism in Rural Malaysia*. Singapore: NUS Press.
- Thompson, E.C. (2013) "Urban cosmopolitan chauvinism and the politics of rural identity". In: Bunnell, T., D. Parthasarathy and E.C. Thompson, eds., *Cleavage, Connection and Conflict in Rural, Urban and Contemporary Asia*, pp. 161-179. Dordrecht: Springer Publishing.
- Walker, A. (2015) "From legibility to eligibility: politics, subsidy and productivity in rural Asia", *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 3(1): 45-71.
- Warr, P. (2015) "Agricultural growth and rural poverty reduction in mainland Southeast Asia". In: *Trajectories of Rice-Based Farming Systems in Mainland Southeast Asia*, R.A. Cramb, ed. pp. 17-34. Canberra: Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research.

- White, B. (2012) "Agriculture and the generation problem: rural youth, employment and the future of farming", *IDS Bulletin* 43(6): 9-19.
- World Bank. (2007) *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development*. Washington DC: The World Bank.