



Happiness Elements of Elders in Rural Northeast, Thailand: Dynamic of Social Change in Globalization Era

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This study aims to study elements for the elder's happiness in rural area of the north-eastern region, under the dynamic of social changes in the globalization. The study is a qualitative research having the unit of analysis both of individual and community levels. Data is collected from the in-depth interview with 18 elders, covering all age ranges, living in rural areas. The studied area is named O-lo village in PhuKiew district, Chaiyaphum province where contains high rates of the elders in the northeast. The data was collected during June to October 2017 using interview guide as a tool, and is analyzed with content analysis. The result reveals that the elders in O-lo community are happy with their family conditions. Their happiness consists of 4 elements as the followings. The first element is family meaning there are families or relatives to take care of. The elder always ask in order to follow up for their offspring's well-being and give moral support to them. The second element is regarding their health. The elders are in good health and able to take care of themselves. They can also help out their families with housework. This is also the result of their convenient accessibility to medical treatment. The third element is economic aspect. The elders have their occupations and incomes from various sources including their work, money given from their children, and the welfare elder allowances. The last element is social aspect. They feel safety in their lifes and properties. Moreover, they join social activities organized by the community in order to relieve themselves from stress, make merit in temples, and participate in any activities enhancing value of the elders.

Keywords: Elder, Elements of Happiness, Globalizatio, Rural Areas

INTRODUCTION

Changes in the age structure of Thailand's population in the 21st Century has caused the country to have an aging population or aged society since 2005. In 2030, Thailand is expected to be "a complete aged society," as the proportion of the elderly will increase to 22.7% of the total population of 68.3 million persons Yimrattanaboworn (2015) . This demographic will result from an increase in the aging population, a decrease in the mortality rate, and a drastic decrease in the birth rate and fertility rate. These trends are significant and a reflection of the Thai government's overall effective operation – the increase in the aging population can be accounted for by successful development, as people live longer, nutritional status is improved due to increased access to qualified health services, and medical technology, education, and economic status is improved.

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Nonetheless, in terms of practice and policy, studies show that in Thailand, attention has always been placed more on children and the working population than the aging population. This is because it is believed that the elderly are faced with regression in both their mental and physical conditions, and rather than the elderly working hard, their children or grandchildren should take care of them. Consequently, the elderly are expected to become more dependable. In addition, a lack of well-thought-out planning greatly affects all facets of socio-economic change, for example, decreases in labor, a higher budget for elderly welfare services, and more need for community and social development that facilitates living for elders. There could also be challenges and ongoing effects in the long run, such as discrimination, unemployment, lack of access to medical services, harassment, the denial of the right to possess or inherit an asset or property, or lack of income and social security (UNFPA).

Government sectors and other related departments must cope with an aged society by formulating policy recommendations, development projects, and appropriate solutions to problems of the elderly, a group with a diversity of demographic characteristics, including age, sex, education, income, health, and place of accommodation. Among the elderly, needs and resources for attaining well-being can vary, especially among elders in Northeast Thailand (Isan). This group of elders is worth studying for many reasons. The region's physical geography does not facilitate agriculture, leading to overall poor economic conditions, and working age family members migrate to other cities for work, leaving the elders with their grandchildren (resulting in a higher number of skipped generation families). These situations affect happiness levels of the elderly despite being in a social context of kinship. Therefore, establishing happiness in elders who live in such conditions is unique.

A review of previous studies and concepts of happiness shows that most scholars define "happiness" as a feeling or emotion ranging from contentment and pleasure to intense joy. Department of Mental Health (2007) defines "happiness" as a state of well-being resulting from an ability to solve problems in one's livelihood, raising potential for personal development and for a better quality of life. Happiness also refers to being a good and kind-hearted person in society and surrounded by an environment that is always changing. "Happy" means contentment, without distress. The term usually collocates with "well-being" (Office of Royal Institute, 2003). In fact, in the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan, the term "well-being" was used in place of "happiness," as happiness is considered a part of well-being. Happiness is also used as a social indicator Sakdaweekisorn (2001).

Hence, this paper focuses on elements of happiness among elders in the rural area of Northeast Thailand, and analyzes these elements in association with their social context, or the socio-cultural structure within which the elders exist. This context covers different aspects related to the elderly, including economic, social, and political aspects, values, rule sets, and sets of practices (Richard, 1997; Giddens, 1979). It also covers changes elders may experience in different areas, such as status, family or social roles, and society's expectations of the elder's roles and responsibilities. These changes play a role in achieving life satisfaction and happiness in the elderly and relate to the individual's physical, mental, and social changes. The results of this study could provide basic data useful for a development process aimed at facilitating the elderly in establishing a livelihood with honor, pride, and stability, and allowing the elderly to live happily in society in the context of globalization.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed qualitative research methods for this study in order to gain insightful information on elements of happiness for the elderly in rural areas of Northeast Thailand. Individuals and the community were used as units of analysis. Data on elders' experiences were collected from in-depth interviews with 18 elders living in a rural area. The participants were selected with the following criteria: age groups ranging from elderly (60-69), old (70-79), to very old (more than 80) (Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, 2003); and types of family structures, including extended family, nuclear family, skipped generation family, and independent living. The study area was O-Lo Village, Phu Khieo District in Chaiyaphum

Province, as it is located in a rural area and is top-ranked in the Northeast for its high proportion of elderly residents. The data was collected by interview from June-October 2017 and was analyzed using content analysis methodology.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Northeast Thailand (ISAN) Rural Area : Social Dynamics in the Context of Globalization

The following is a history of the development of O-Lo Village, presented as a reflection of the social dynamics in communities in rural Isan areas, which affect elements of happiness among the elderly. The history can be divided into four periods, as follows:

Period of Deforestation for Building Houses (1801- 1957)

This period started in 1801. As the area now known as O-Lo Village was fertile, villagers in the neighboring villages moved in and settled down by a swamp. The population increased over time. The main career of the villagers at that time was agriculture, for example, glutinous rice farming, growing vegetables for household consumption between paddy fields, and cotton farming for textiles. Later in 1947, Neramitsuksa School was the first school established in the village and promoted education in the community. Regarding the kinship of the community, it was found that clan culture was adopted, where community members lived closely in a family-like environment, exchanging foods, vegetables, or fruits collected from the wild, and sharing tools and other items. In the context of these family-like relationships, the elderly residing in O-Lo Village gained respect and care from their offspring, and neighbors or relatives could help each other take care of elders in their own community.

Period of Running Water, Electricity, and Roads (1958-1986)

The community was developed, especially after the year 1977 as indicated in the National Economic and Social Development Plan. Although agriculture remained the primary career, there were changes in the infrastructure of the community. Consequently, there were more developments, including the establishment of a health center (Sub-District Health Promoting Hospital), improvement of electrical and water supply systems, and asphalt roads connecting the village to the province's main city. With more convenient transportation routes, more services became available in the village, more shops were opened for agricultural supplies and other miscellaneous items, and a flea market was organized monthly to sell foods and other goods.

The changes in infrastructure also had a direct effect on the quality of life of the elders in O-Lo Village, as they were able to access goods and services within and outside the village more easily. The prices of goods and products were inexpensive. The products that they most commonly purchased were household products, as well as betel nuts, leaves, and tobacco for those who enjoyed. For health care, when the elderly had common illnesses, i.e., a cold or a small wound, or an underlying disease, i.e., diabetes, a problem with blood pressure, or a heart problem, they would visit a health center. If they could not commute by themselves, they would have their child or grandchild take them to the health center. However, most of them could visit the health center by themselves, as the transportation route was convenient, and riding a bike or a motorbike was also safe. Some elders could be responsible for taking their child or grandchild to and from the school, as it was located in the village. This is how the elderly shared in the workload of the family while allowing the working age family members to work away from the village, building up their self-worth.

Period of Industrial Crop Farming, Better Quality of Life, More Variety in Career Opportunities (1987-2006)

In the past, the villagers of O-Lo mainly depended on rice and vegetable farming, but later they began integrating jute and rice farming. This reflected an increase in cultivation for sale. In

1987, the Mitr Phol Sugar Plant was built in Phu Khiew District; as a result, many agriculturists in the village turned to sugar cane farming. As the buyer was located nearby and the production price was good, sugar cane farms were continuously expanded (sugar cane farms currently cover more area than rice farms). Additionally, some agriculturists were consistently able to adjust themselves to the dynamics of agricultural production. In other words, when there was a high demand and price on a certain product, i.e. rubber from rubber trees, and the area was suitable for that particular plant, more investment would be placed on the cultivation of that plant. Another example is cattle farming to collect semen for sale, a business for which this village became well-known throughout the country. As this illustrates, most families in the village were agricultural households, with the majority taking part in industrial sugar cane farming and rice farming mainly for household consumption. Also, as the village remained in an agricultural context, agricultural products and tools, fertilizers, and other farm chemicals were available in local stores.

The changes in the agricultural production process impacted peoples' lifestyle in the community by making a variety of new professions available, despite agricultural careers remaining the majority. Interestingly, the elderly aging 60 to 70 years old stayed in good health, as they were active members of the family working in the rice and sugar cane fields. It was mentioned in an interview that, "... the main profession of the family was agriculture. Everybody who could still work worked to help each other."

The second most common profession among the people in the community was commerce in and outside the village. With their experience in jute and textile farming, many families started a business in textiles; selling cloth, curtains, and bed sheets. Originally, some families mainly sold their textile products in a flea market in the city and other provinces, which sometimes required taking a month away from the village and returning home after their products sold out. This cycle would continue all year outside of rice farming season. Additionally, selling curtains has been considered one of the main sources of income for the villagers, with curtains becoming the signature product of the area (under the so-called OTOP campaign). There are other career choices in the community as well: some families have opened textile stores, working age community members have become employees of Mitr Phol Sugar Plant, and some have worked for the government in different sectors, i.e., Phu Khiew District, Chum Pae District, the Local Administrative Office, or at schools or hospitals. Some community members have also worked freelance in agriculture, i.e., harvesting sugar cane, weeding sugar cane fields, or fertilizing rice fields, while others have worked in the service sector, i.e., working at a shop, a restaurant, or a department store such as Tesco Lostus in Phu Khiew or Chum Pae District. A relatively high number of villagers worked in these sectors outside of agriculture.

Period of Change Surrounding Elders (2007- present)

O-Lo Village has developed over time in accordance with social and national changes. Its communication systems. Most of the villagers still work in the agricultural sector, with more intense focus currently on commercial agriculture than subsistence agriculture, a change resulting from the close location of the sugar plant as buyer and from the price of sugar being higher than that of rice. Some families have even completely transformed their land into sugar cane fields, and now spend the money gained from selling sugar cane on rice for household consumption. Meanwhile, working in commerce, providing services, working freelance, or working in public or private sectors are careers that can still be found among the villagers.

Regarding socio-cultural changes, it was found that changes in the economic structure of the community have changed the lifestyle of the villagers. There is more rush in everyday life, as many people must commute to work in the city, and there is more use of technology, as all families now have a cellphone, a vehicle, including a car and a motorbike, and more electrical appliances for the family's convenience. However, family-like relations still remain among the community members. They continue to treat and take care of each other as family members. Although there are more shops in the village, people still exchange food and share tools and other items without involving money. Moreover, people in the village maintain traditions related to agriculture, i.e., worshipping of the Rice Goddess during the Koon Lan Festival, praying for

rain during the Rocket Festival, and organizing a local Buddhist festival called “Heet Sib Song” which is held annually for successful cultivation.

Elements of happiness among the elders : How to Live Happily

Within the context of social dynamics in and outside the community, the wellbeing of elders in O-Lo village as they live within their families’ conditions can be observed, and they seem happy with their livelihood. In this study, factors affecting the happiness of the elders in this rural area are divided into four categories, as follows.

Good Family

The family element of happiness refers to living in a family with a healthy relationship, where family members care for and support each other, help each other in both household and field chores, and are concerned about the living conditions of the family members. Ideally, elders are worried about the wellbeing of their children and grandchildren, as this generation is the main source of family income, and therefore, elders will provide support whenever it is needed. Moreover, in this kind of family, all opinions from family members are heard. An elder in the family is not ignored, and all family members respect and listen to his/her advice. For example, when any family member makes a mistake, an elder advises or warns them. Being able to do this creates happiness among the elderly, as can be seen in the interview excerpt below:

“When anyone in the family has a problem or a conflict, for example, your daughter and son-in-law has an argument, we will deal with the conflict instantly by talking openly. We will not let a problem or a conflict go to the next day. If children become estranged, parents are also in sorrow. If they are happy, parents are also happy.” (Mr. Pad, age 79)

The above quote shows that the family communicates to solve problems when they occur. This creates happiness among the elderly. For a family where family members are living in a different place due to their workplace, telephone communication should occur from those who are working away from home to elders who are staying at home. Most of the contact is initiated by the children. The conversation is on general topics, such as asking about the elder’s wellbeing or health problems, and the elders giving encouragement to their children. Every time the elders talk to their children, they are happy and their worries are eased, because they know that their children still care for and miss them, and that they will not be neglected. If their children are happy, they are also happy. Moreover, even if a child or grandchild works or lives away from the village, the elders can achieve happiness when they have a visit from their child or grandchild, even a short one during a holiday.

Despite their old age, elders continue to take on certain roles and responsibilities in and outside of the house. For household responsibilities, they are responsible for some easy chores, i.e., sweeping and mopping the floor, washing dishes, and preparing agricultural tools or other items for work, especially in the rice farming season. Their roles and responsibilities are not rigid, but can be adjusted according to their health condition. Also, their family members do not expect them to work hard. This situation reflects the wellbeing which occurs for elders as a result of doing household chores and other activities as their physical condition allows them, as described in the interview excerpt below.

“Being able to do household chores and other tasks to help the children makes me feel worthy. The children are exhausted from working outside the house, so I do whatever I can to help them. I’m proud and happy to do housework for them. So as my children, they can be proud of me. This makes me very happy and delighted. I’m glad that I’m able to help them with the household chores.” (Mrs. Buawaan, age 89)

Even though some elders cannot help with household chores due to health limitations, they are still respected by family members, as the younger generation does not expect anything in return from their elders besides acting as their guardian.

As for roles and responsibilities outside the house, some elders continue their work, both in and outside the agricultural sector, to gain income for their family. For work in the agricultural sector, most elders who are healthy continue working in the fields doing rice or sugar cane farming with their family members. One of the interviewed elders mentioned, *“Helping my kids*

in the rice field is fun. It makes me happy, and I get to exercise. Most importantly, I get to help and reduce their workload.” (Mrs. Tongpan, age 63).

Elders who are not able to help in the fields due to an underlying disease seem to lack self-pride and worry that they are a burden on the family. When an interviewee was asked about self-pride they answered, “... [happy] not much, or I may not have self-pride at all because I can't do anything to help my kids, while they're the ones who take care of me. I want to be healthy so that I can help to reduce their workload; be able to do household chores at the very least.” (Mrs. Kam, age 86) Another interviewee said:

“Living alone, we need to be able to help and take care of ourselves. We must be careful not to get ourselves hurt or it will cause trouble for other people...to be happy with who we are. Now I can live well and happily. My life is not difficult, no hard work, only doing small household chores and cooking. I don't have to cook for others, but if there is plenty of food, I will share it with my neighbors.” (Miss Riab, age 78)

Good Health

Good health refers to the component of happiness where elders do not have any illnesses or underlying diseases but rather, have good health and an ability to help themselves and others, i.e., by doing household chores. It also implies taking good care of one's health, having healthy eating habits, and getting sufficient sleep and adequate exercise. These are essential elements of happiness for the elderly. Some elders added that they needed to take good care of themselves even if they had an underlying disease, especially by developing healthy eating habits, and regular check-ups and following doctors' instructions were also important. Having an underlying disease is not treated as an obstacle in life. For example, elders with diabetes can still help with household chores. Some elders are still earning their own living. Being able to take care of themselves and help their family makes the elders feel fulfilled and very proud of themselves because they do not feel they are a burden on their family or making others worry about them. This sentiment can be illustrated in the following statement by an elder living with her extended family:

“Working makes you happy, as you're not a burden on your children. Living in this age without any underlying diseases – only common illnesses that are not serious – I'm very lucky and thankful.” (Mrs. Yee, age 83)

Generally, the elderly in rural areas know to some extent about caring for their own health. It has become easier for them to deal with health problems, as there are more choices in medical care and treatment. For instance, for minor health problems, i.e., gastrointestinal tract diseases or respiratory tract disease resulting from environmental changes, elders are treated at the Sub-District Health Promoting Hospital, where they can access the national health insurance service (30 Baht Health Care program) without any additional fees. This hospital also offers them high quality care and close attention from health care officers. In case of an emergency or severe illness, treatment at a private hospital in the community or district hospital is another option, as illustrated in the following statement by one of the elders:

“When sick or when I have a cold, I often visit the sub-district hospital and sometimes a clinic. I don't take medicine without a prescription. My daughter who is living in another house will take me to the doctor by motorbike. At the sub-district hospital, I don't have to pay, but if I visit a clinic, it costs about 100-150 baht per visit.” (Mr. Pad, age 79)

Furthermore, elders should feel relaxed, and when dealing with stress, they should employ stress management techniques. For example, Mr. Prommala employs creative techniques for stress relief, as he explained, “...[if I have stress] I will try to talk to someone in my family, my neighbor (for some topics), or other elders in the village. Sometimes I watch TV or a soap opera with my grandchild.” (Mr. Prommala, age 68) The way he approaches stress is similar to many other elders, who use creative and fun techniques to release stress and loneliness. Mrs. Bualai (age 89) mentioned in her interview, “...I like to listen to Thai folk music on the radio. When I'm free, I listen to those songs. It's fun and entertaining.” Mrs. Home (age 69) said, “TV is like a friend to me. There're many channels and interesting things. Sometimes I keep it on when I go to bed. Watching TV reduces my stress and makes me feel relaxed.” From interviewing family

members, it was found that in most families, the younger generation doesn't usually share their problems to family members or acknowledge to elders that they are having a problem, because they are afraid that it will affect the elders' emotions and feelings. This is especially true in a family with an elder who has a problem with blood pressure, as stress can have an effect on the elder's mental and physical health conditions. When asked about health problems, sicknesses, and underlying diseases, most elders said that knowing how to reduce stress and how to relax benefits their mental health. For example, one elder explained how he encourages himself: "...we must encourage ourselves. Just think that these problems are universal. Aging, sickness, and death are universal. All we need to do is to face it and be prepared." (Mr. Prommala, age 68)

The mental health of the elderly in rural areas is generally good. This could be a result of religious beliefs, as it is believed that you harvest what you plough and sow, so making lot of merit in this life will bring happiness and better living conditions to the next life. This is the reason why rural elderly like to make merit and give donations. Making merit is mostly done by giving alms to monks in the morning, visiting a temple to chant and pray on a Buddhist holy day, and helping neighbors, friends, and community members with matters related to their religion.

Doing good deeds can make an elder person's body and soul healthy and bring untold amounts of happiness, as illustrated in one of the interviews when the interviewee said, "When I know that I'm going to the temple, I'm very excited and happy. I will wake up early to cook some rice and food to bring to the temple. Cooking food for merit makes me happy and calms my soul. Going to the temple is also a chance for me to meet and talk to other people in the village." (Mrs. Suppee, age 67)

Good Economy

A good economy is another element of happiness that also plays a great role for elders, as it affects their ability to have a job or receive an income. Income of the elderly, in this case, includes wages, money given by children, and money from Elderly Welfare Benefits program. One of the interviewees from an extended family mentioned that she is still working and earning money and added that she is very proud of herself for being able to work, make money, and take care of herself, and she is proud of being healthy in her old age. She is also proud that she is neither in debt, nor does she ask her children for money.

"I don't ask for money from my son or my daughter-in-law because I can make money for myself. I never ask him for money, and he has never offered me any either. He never asks whether I have enough money to spend, never. Still, I don't mind that because I'm living with him, with food and drink that he provides, so it's alright if he doesn't give me money. What he is doing for me is enough. I can manage my personal expenses. I'm never short of money, but my grandchildren sometimes ask me for money. The house is equipped with everything, all kinds of facilities, which is enough for me." (Mrs. Yee, age 83)

The family's effective financial management is also an element of happiness for elders. Elders are happy when they can plan out and manage the family's money, or be a primary source of household income in order to take care of the whole family. Below are examples from interviews with elders from skipped generation families in which the children work away from home, leaving the elders with a grandchild who is a dependent. As a result, the elders are in charge of household matters, including finances.

"Taking care of my grandson means that I need to take care of everything, including all expenses and his wellbeing. We don't really talk to each other, maybe because he is still young and quite an introvert." (Mr. Oud, age 76)

"Money for household expenses comes from my son and daughter. They give me 500-1000 baht a month, and I need to take care of everything because my granddaughter is still very young and my son is not living with us." (Mr. Chun, age 71)

Apart from working and making money, the elderly must economize so that they have enough money to spend throughout the month. In doing so, they will not need to ask their children for money or borrow it from someone. It also proves that they can depend on themselves and manage finances effectively. Consequently, elders will have more self-pride and self-esteem, which helps to bring them more happiness in the form of dignity. Family members will be happy

and proud of them as well. As a single elder living independently, Miss Riab is a great example of this. Although she gets money from her grandchild, who gives her 2,000 to 3000 baht a year, she can manage her money effectively. She mentioned in the interview, “...*I manage the money by myself to cover all expenses, such as food, electricity, and water bills, and money for making merit. I never ask for additional money from my grandchild and try to spend only what I have.*” (Miss Riab, age 78).

While the elderly are offered a monthly allowance from the Elderly Welfare Benefits program, they need to economize, spending only what is necessary. Fortunately, in the rural context cost of living is not high, so elders may have some money left for their savings. Methods of saving can be different among elders; for example, saving some cash at home, saving in a bank account, investing in gold jewelry, buying life insurance, or saving through a local Funeral Cremation Welfare Activity. Having some savings also brings happiness to elders. Two elders gave the following responses in their interviews:

“I don’t spend much money. When I want some snacks, I go to the store. Sometimes I give some money to my grandchild, 5 to 10 baht at a time. I can live with 500 a month because my kid takes care of everything at the house. Since I don’t need to use the money from the Elderly Welfare program, I can save it for emergencies like sickness or put it toward the village’s Funeral Cremation Fund. For each time someone dies, members of the fund pay 20 baht. I spend my own money on this so that when I die, my kid won’t need to worry about my cremation.” (Mrs. Yee, age 83)

“I don’t have a full-time job, only some money from the Elderly Welfare program and the welfare program for disabled persons, with a total of 1,800 baht a month. When I have time, I help make hats for some money, for which I get 12 baht a day on average. Money from the welfare program is spent during months where the family income is not sufficient, but not every month. I have some savings in my bank account for future use, for my cremation. I want all the guests at my cremation to be fully fed. I also spend some money on merit making for myself.” (Mrs. Lee, age 87)

Good Social Context

This element of happiness relates to having a good social network, including security of life and property, healthy relationships with others, and participation in community activities. It also involves being in a community that acknowledges the importance of elderly persons and their role in the community. Most of the elders in O-Lo Village are local people, with only a few who moved into the village after marrying locals, and this small number of elders has been in the village long enough to be familiar with the people in the community. In this community, the lives and property of the elderly are safe, and the relationships among the villagers are also healthy, as it’s very common for the villagers to talk and ask about each other’s wellbeing. Additionally, the elders fully participate in community services or activities organized for various occasions, i.e., New Year’s and Songkran. For important occasions or festivals, elders are usually invited to participate, as they are respected seniors in the community. Participating in these activities and getting attention from people in their community makes elders happy and pleased, as they can feel that they are a part of the community. Many elders explained that there are not many activities for the elderly, so they feel very excited when there is one and are very pleased to take part in the activity. Generally, activities specifically for the elderly are organized through the elderly care program for both healthy and unhealthy elders. These programs involve officers distributing household items, making house visits, and giving advice related to daily life. After participating in such programs and putting what they have learned into practice, many elders are healthier and can take care of themselves correctly. As explained by one of the elders,

“... I went to a training on diabetes because I have diabetes. Sometimes a group of VHV [Village Health Volunteers] visits me at my house and gives me things like soap, toothpaste, and washing powder. We have a small talk. They also do health check-ups at the house. I’m happy and glad when they come. Having visitors at my house makes me less lonely.” (Mr. Prommala, age 68)

Moreover, some elders help their neighbors in ceremonies, such as marriages, ordinations, giving alms to monks, *Khuan Ban Mai* ceremonies (to bless new houses), and funerals. Being in a rural area where people tend to be interdependent, when there is an event or an activity in their

community, the villagers are willing to participate. The elders described that joining friends' ceremonies makes them happy because they get to meet other people during the banquet. One of the interviewees, Mrs. Supee (age 67), said, *"I often participate in ceremonies. If I get invited, I always go. I don't usually refuse the invitation, unless I have something come up. Going to a ceremony allows me to meet friends and have fun. I like that."* Unhealthy elders who are unable to participate in activities will ask a child or grandchild to participate in order to represent them. Elders always care and will provide encouragement and support, even financially, toward activities organized by their neighbors and community.

CONCLUSION

The context surrounding rural communities has changed in many ways: including the physical geography; infrastructure, which has developed to facilitate economic growth; and agricultural production processes. These changes affect populations of all ages, as people must adjust their livelihood to correspond to these developments in order to achieve their wellbeing goals in life. As Thailand is becoming an aged society, the elderly are the target group for well-being development. The elders residing in O-Lo Village defined happiness as living as well as possible according to the means of one's family and living life without sorrow. They described four elements of happiness, as summarized below.

First, a good family means a family in which children and relatives surround the elderly to take care of them, all family members are concerned about each other's wellbeing, and the elders in the family always support and encourage their family members. This concept is relevant to the second element in the 8 Happy Concepts proposed by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (2008), called Happy Heart. Generosity establishes kindheartedness, which leads to harmony, unity, and love in a family. The concept is also consistent with the seventh element, called Happy Family. Having good relationships and security in one's family helps to establish love, build family bonds, and lead healthy family relationships.

Secondly, good health implies elders are physically healthy and are able to take care of themselves, manage stress, and help with household chores. It also implies easy access to medical care. This component is similar to the definition of "Health," one of the dimensions of happiness for elders proposed by Department of Mental Health and Bureau of Mental Health Promotion and Development, Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health (2012): the ability to take care of one's own health, to physically respond (react), and to have a fun and relaxing lifestyle by means of participating in entertaining activities. Good health also implies having a good quality of life and having stress and anxiety management skills.

Thirdly, a good economy entails elders' ability to work and earn a living. Income of the elderly also includes money sent from their children and from the Elderly Welfare Benefits program. A good economy also entails having some savings to spend in the future. This idea is consistent with "Health," the dimension of elderly happiness that refers to one's ability to respond physically (react) and live with the family resources necessary to meet basic needs. Another dimension of elderly happiness that corresponds to a good economy is "Cognition," which refers to the ability to manage effectively Department of Mental Health and Bureau of Mental Health Promotion and Development, Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health (2012). Additionally, a good economy is consistent with another of the 8 Happy Concepts proposed by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (2008), called "Happy Money," which refers to having some money and knowing how to spend it wisely and economically in order to have some savings for emergencies or to avoid being in debt.

The last element of happiness identified was related to having a good social context, which refers to elders' sense of security as related to their life and property, as well as participation in community activities, including going to the temple or other activities normally conducted by elders in order to relax and reduce stress. This component is relevant to one of the 8 Happy Concepts proposed by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (2008), called "Happy Society," which relates to living in a good social environment where community members are united and where generosity is promoted in the workplace and household. It also implies a society where

neighbors care for and look after each other. Surrounded by a good social context, families in the community will be happy. This component is also similar to a dimension of elderly happiness called “Integrity” Department of Mental Health and Bureau of Mental Health Promotion and Development, Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health (2012) , which refers to one’s satisfaction with life, as well as one’s self-pride, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-respect, and self-support. Integrity also implies having sympathy and providing help and support to others in the community.

The identified four elements of happiness, including good family, good health, good economy, and good social context, show that social dynamics in the era of globalization result in more complex lifestyles and needs for elders residing in the Northeast. Apart from having a healthy body and mind, other factors, including personal factors, contribute toward happiness. Hence, policy making should include the adjustment of socio-economic structures to respond to elders’ needs. Also, future research studies should focus on all dimensions of an aging society and aim to create a body of knowledge regarding psychological and sociological aspects of aging, for example, community participation, local health care centers, creating positive social attitudes toward elderly persons, and city and environmental development plans that respond to an aging society. This will help prepare the country for a good quality of life in the context of an aging society.

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