

Research about the role of the urban informal sector

-A survey of street vendors in Bangkok-

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Background and objectives of my research

The “informal sector” generally refers to economic activities conducted outside the formal framework of the economy. In other words, these activities largely escape recognition, classification, regulation, and protection by the government. In the context of the Third World, this term was initially used in a study on Ghana [Hart 1973]. Familiar examples of the informal



Picture 1; Street stalls in front of local houses (Bangkok, Khet Din Daeng)

sector in developing countries include street vendors, tricycle drivers, junk dealers, housemaids, and so on.

However, researchers have not reached a consensus with regard to the definition of this term. Economists have assumed that this sector functions to absorb the surplus labor that is excluded from the formal framework of the economy, the “formal sector.” It has also been assumed that this sector diminishes as the economy grows, which is a frequent concomitant of progress in the formal sector. However, in actuality, the informal sector has not only



Picture 2; A moving stall. He sells boiled fish ball (Tamnjaya Village, Indonesia)

survived but has even expanded in countries considered to be developed. Moreover, the informal sector has been viewed as expanding in developed countries during recent years, therefore ILO made this situation an issue and called ‘the expansion of the informal economy’ [ILO 2002].

I am planning to conduct my research in Bangkok taking up the street vendors as one of the typical examples of the informal worker. This is because some researchers claim that some of them are classified the middle-class rather than the poor.

I will reveal the current situations and functions there with the view of pointing out that ‘the expansion of the informal economy’ is not so much a problem.

Picture 3; Street vendors selling stuffed dolls (near Thammasat University, Bangkok)



[References]

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