

Minimum Wage and Country's Economic Competitiveness: An Empirical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract: This research has an objective to empirically analyze the discourse on the correlations between minimum wage and the country's economic competitiveness which has been severely criticized by authoritative individuals from both public and private sectors, especially after the Thai party announced the 300 Baht guaranteed minimum daily wage policy. The research employs an advanced quantitative methodology; analyzing time-series data of minimum wage, foreign direct investment in the industrial sector, import of capital goods, domestic machinery sales and export by advanced statistical methods, regression analysis, Johansen's cointegration test and Pairwise Granger's causality test. The regression analysis has revealed that minimum wage is positively correlated with all 4 concerning variables, foreign direct investment in the industrial sector, import of capital goods, domestic machinery sales and export. Whereas, the Johansen's cointegration test has contrarily indicated that only export has a long run relationship with minimum wage. Moreover, minimum wage has a causal relationship with export, according to the Pairwise Granger's causality test. This indicates that under the superior status of the authorities who dominate the process of building a body of knowledge, as well as distort the truth, so as to seize control over the society, the claim that the minimum wage increase will affect the country's economic competitiveness with regard to the investment and export sector is not a good-faith mistake but an effort of discourse fight on the economic unfairness and social-class discrimination which is still the root of Thailand's critical structural problems.

Key words: Minimum wage, country's economic competitiveness, empirical discourse analysis, discrimination, Thailand

INTRODUCTION

On discourse and discourse analysis: Watakarma is a terminology in social sciences and humanities which professor Somkiat Wanthana of the Social Sciences Faculty of Kasetsart University translated into Thai from the discourse in concepts which scattered among the works of Michel Foucault, an important poststructuralist French philosopher >20 years ago.

In the same way that Foucault defined discourse different from people's perception in everyday life that is verbal communication, speech or conversation (Heywood, 2000), Wanthana formulates discourse similar to the original term in English, as well as offers the meaning beyond simply combining the words speech (in Thai, wata) and action (in Thai, karma) (Jernsittiparsert, 2010).

More than a decade later, the understandings on social text and social reality constructed and maintained through languages (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000) have finally been seriously processed and extensively published among Thai academics. Such process has been conducted through the writings and studies by Charoensinolarn (2006) of the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasart University, as the system and process of creating/producing identities and meanings for various objects in the society which encapsulates us, covering knowledge, truth, power or the identity of the own, as well as things we have created, maintained and are accepted by society at large and finally turned into dominant discourse.

The process of turning something into dominant discourse involved the use of power over

refining/cleaning in the form of specialized knowledge/expertise through the traditional rules and practices of the experts/authorities into the academic discourse on the specific matter. This seems like a process that is natural, neutral, universal, objective and harmless to any person (Charoensinolarn, 2008). It is similar to labeling the complex strategic situation in a particular society (Charoensinolarn, 2006) in order to impose/turning, something which is not true, into the stage of knowledge and truth eventually.

As a critical analysis method, discourse has become a very popular topic and expanded to cover various academic fields within a short time after Foucault (Vighi and Feldner, 2007). It appears in both textbooks and science-oriented discussion forums in different and various meanings (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). However, the process is often without establishing a definition but only an assumption, resembling the discourse analysis (Cheek, 2004) which in gist is the study and research on the process, steps, sequence of events and different details in order to establish an identity and meaning to things that encapsulate us in the society in the form of a discourse including the practices and impacts of a discourse on the specific matter in the nature of relationships (Charoensinolarn, 2006).

From the development of linguistics in early age to anthropology in the 1960's and psychology from in the early 1970's (Van, 2007) or even the present interdisciplinary (Schiffrin *et al.*, 2001), the discourse analysis of >40 approaches has been associated with the study and analysis of the language (Crichton, 2010) with qualitative methodology (Hodge *et al.*, 2008). Such methodology extensively brought about questions on the negligence on scientific reasonableness (Freshwater *et al.*, 2010) in describing the linguistic structure, the duty of the texts and revealing the relationship between the text and social context (Stillar, 1998). Such, methodology has been more emphasized than proving the truth of the context (Charoensinolarn, 2006) with empirical data, statistics or quantitative methodology which is driven to become only a way of (flawed) thinking of scientific social sciences or the school of logical positivism (Charoensinolarn, 2008).

Discourse on relationship between minimum wage and country's economic competitiveness: After the announcement of the 300 bath guaranteed minimum wage policy by Phue Thai party during the general election campaign on Sunday 3rd July, 2011, before being included in the Policy Statement of the Council of Ministers of Miss Yingluck Shinawatra made to the Parliament on Tuesday 23rd August, 2011 within the category of urgent policies that would be implemented in the 1st year.

Minimum wage was brought up as a topic of dispute between opposing party, comprised of authorities from different sections of both the public and private sectors, that it would negatively affect the country's economic competitiveness, particularly in terms of investment from both domestic and foreign origins.

From Arthit Wuthikaro, director-general of Department of Industrial Works, Nuntawan Sakuntanaga, director-general of the Department of Export Promotion, Dusit Nontanakorn, former chairman of the Thai Chamber of Commerce to Tanit Sorat, Vice President of the Federation of Thai Industries.

All pointed out in the same fashion that Thailand would lose its competitiveness in terms of foreign investments, the investments would slow down and may become so severe as businesses shutting down and investors, especially the Japanese, might relocate their production bases to neighboring countries, estimated damage of up to 100,000 million baht per annum, corresponding to a media report which referred to the information from a source in the Ministry of Industry, saying that in July, 2011, there were only 4 factories having been granted to operate from the Department of Industrial Works, total investment of 209 million baht, shrunk from the same period of the previous year by 1.476% or about 14-fold which was the lowest in history, even lower than the period of May, 2009 global economic crisis which still had a total net worth of 4.000 million bath.

Similar to export, the say that Department of Export Promotion, as well as Tanit Sorat, also pointed that the policy would become an obstacle to export in the fourth quarter and would decrease the competitiveness of the country's export in the long run by citing a research report from the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce which states that altering the minimum wage might escalate the labor expenses in exporting Thai goods up to an average of 28%.

Whereas, the supporting party, e.g., Chalee Loysung, president of Thai Labour Solidarity Committee, Sakdina Chatrakul Na Ayudhya, a labor specialist, Yongyuth Chalamwong, research director of labor development, Thailand Development Research Institute and Narong Phetprasert, an associate professor of Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, highlighted the gap of the rises of cumulative inflation and cumulative minimum wage in 10 years time at about 1.9% had influenced the current minimum wage to be lower than a wage rate that could keep up with the cost of living.

Lae Dilokvidhayarat, a distinguished scholar of the same institute as Narong Phetprasert's, as well as Direk Patmasiriwat, a professor of the School of Development Economics, National Institute of Development Administration, also established an observation that in

reality, costs of production typically originated from minimum wage for not >10%, the other 90% was entirely from costs of other parts. Hence, the overreactions that currently occur these days are just a mere bargaining game.

Objective of research: While the discourse on minimum wage which was produced by authoritative individuals of the opposing side to defy the policy of change has been established on the hypothesis that the country's economic competitiveness would fall the experts from the supporting side, however tend to avoid any contest to debunk that statement which in turn would only led to economic inequality and injustice, along with grievance towards livelihood of labors.

Therefore, this research on minimum wage and country's economic competitiveness, an empirical discourse analysis has been compiled, so as to verify the aforementioned correlation which would lead to an understanding before hand of whether the discourse produced by the authoritative individuals from both public and private sectors is absolute and reliable or just a distrustful notion full of hidden agendas only endeavoring to inculcate high statuses that is knowledge and fact.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data and variables: The researchers use time series data which have been continuously and systematically collected, publicly available, reliable and generally referred by authorities and agencies, covering the period of 136 months from January, 2000 to April, 2011. The variables covered are as follows:

- Minimum wage (wage), minimum wage of Bangkok from Ministry of Labour (2011), herein defined as independent variable
- Foreign direct investment in industry sector (industry) from Bank of Thailand, herein defined as an indicator of foreign investment, herein defined as a dependent variable
- Import of capital goods (Capital Import) at the constant price of year 2000 from Bank of Thailand, herein defined as an indicator of private domestic investment. Consists of domestic cement sales volume, domestic commercial vehicle sales volume, import of capital goods, value of domestic machinery sales, construction area permitted in municipal zone, factory granted an allowance to build from Ministry of Industry, capital investment of business registered at Ministry of Commerce, promotion of investment from board of investment herein defined, as a dependent variable
- Domestic machinery sales (equipment) at the constant price of year 2000 from Bank of Thailand, herein defined as another indicator of private domestic investment, herein defined a dependent variable
- Export (export) from Bank of Thailand, herein defined, as a dependent variable

Data analysis: The mainstream of discourse analysis has specifically focused on the consideration of structure, strategy and process (Van Dijk, 2007) and the reproduction of discourses, covering every social activities (Gadavani, 2006). Foucault (1994) accepted that it was complicated and cumbersome, not easily to explain with clarity. Also, it has been with the invention of technical terms of specific meanings, far from the definition which is understandable, appears in the dictionary or publicly used on a daily basis. This makes it more a process of searching for an expertise in encryption than in academic language in old paradigm, a fight that language is a form of power and the origin of knowledge and the truth (Charoensinolarn, 2008).

The purpose of analysis moved from concreteness of what is true or false (Heywood, 2000), to abstraction that is the rules govern the texts and degrade the value of human beings to a skeleton only following/reinforcing/reproducing such rules (Charoensinolarn, 2006). However, eventually virtually all of the research which is based on the assumptions of denying the existence of an objective reality is left with only the fact that was constructed (Moreland, 2005) that is an amusing game with emptiness, caught in the turmoil of subjectivity. It is a prediction of rules that even self could not conclude that they are correct.

Furthermore, there was a drive away from/protest against verification by assuming that it is just the narrow-minded essence of the school of logical positivism, instead of borrowing such idea to support the explanation to make it more efficient and to convince the masses to be enlightened and aware of the inconsistency of the logic/crevice of discourse, as well as the lack of natural course (Charoensinolarn, 2006).

The Empirical Discourse Analysis or EDA has thus been developed in order to return to Foucault (1980), similar to what he did with Friedrich Nietzsche, the existentialist German philosopher. It is the transformation of his new examination by borrowing the principle of empiricism so as to falsify the core of the texts which are made up of variables, connecting with the statistic language and continuously and extensively reproduced without any doubt from members of the society from the beginning using the data set, logics and methodology similar to that established.

This research employs the advanced quantitative methodologies, regression analysis so as to test the relationships between variables and the johansen cointegration test (Johansen, 1988, 1991) to double-check such relationships whether they have any cointegration. Later, the pairwise Granger's causality test is employed to test a causal relationship with each other, using built-in computer software, instead of simply discussing it as a discourse or discursivity (Charoensinolarn, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Minimum wage: Preliminarily, the analysis of time-series data of minimum wage shows that the minimum wage in January, 2000 was at THB162 per day and gradually rose at an average of THB0.40 per month until reaching its peak at THB215 per day from January, 2011 onwards (Fig. 1).

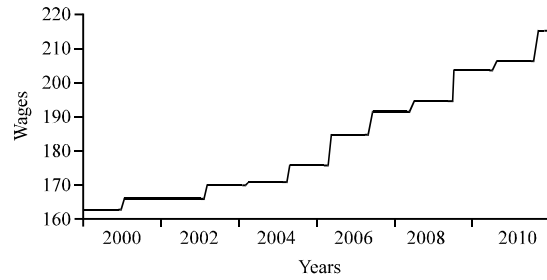


Fig. 1: Minimum wage

Foreign direct investment in industry sector: The analysis of time-series data of foreign direct investment in the industry sector shows that in January, 2000, the foreign direct investment in the industry sector valued at USD32.79M and gradually swung over time. But when considered as a whole, it could be observed that the foreign direct investment in the industry sector, also reflected an increasing trend at an average of USD1.53M per month with the lowest value at -USD21.45M in December, 2002 and the highest at USD1,003.57M in February, 2008 (Fig. 2).

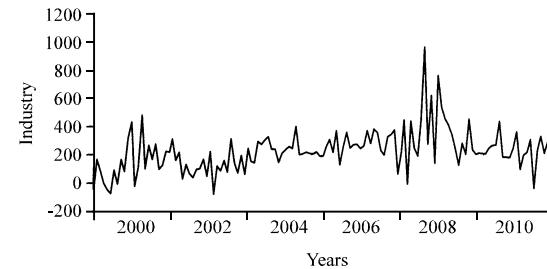


Fig. 2: Foreign direct investment in industry sector

Import of capital goods: The analysis of time-series data of import of capital goods shows that in January, 2000, the import valued at THB41, 844.34M and gradually swung over time. But when considered as a whole, it could be observed that the import of capital goods reflected an increasing trend at an average of THB604.94M per month with the highest value at THB165,391.17M in March, 2011 (Fig. 3).

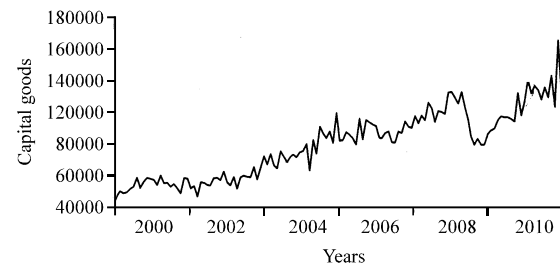


Fig. 3: Import of capital goods

Domestic machinery sales: The analysis of time-series data of domestic machinery sales shows that in January, 2000, the sales valued at THB24,689.62M and gradually swung over time. But when considered as a whole, it could be observed that it reflected an increasing trend at an average of THB200.64M per month with the lowest value at THB24,019.98M in April, 2000 and the highest value at THB71,485.62M in March, 2011 (Fig. 4).

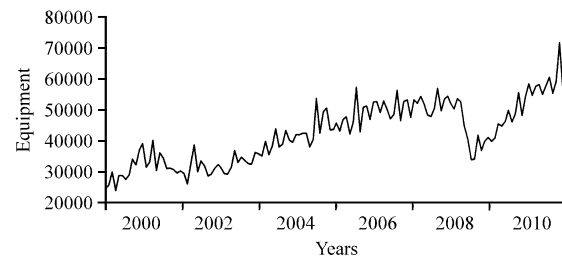


Fig. 4: Domestic machinery sales

Export: The analysis of time-series data of export shows that in January, 2000, the export valued at USD5,390M and gradually swung over time. But when considered as a

whole, it could be observed that the export also reflected an increasing trend at an average of USD97.38M with the lowest value at USD4,856.7M in March, 2002 and the highest at USD21,260.61M in March, 2011 (Fig. 5).

Relationship between minimum wage and foreign direct investment in industry sector: In the next stage, the analysis by regression analysis shows that minimum wage

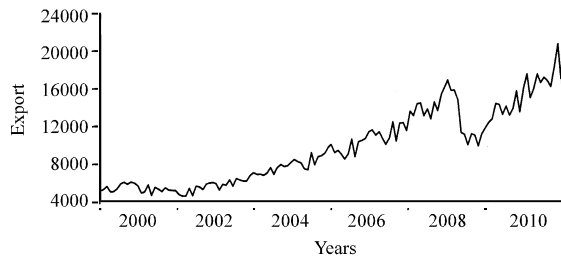


Fig. 5: Export

Table 1: Regression analysis of minimum wage and foreign direct investment in the industry sector

Variables	Coefficient	SE	t-statistic	Prob.
C	-321.207800	181.493700	-1.769802	0.079000
Wage	3.323242	1.021535	3.253185	0.001400
R ²	0.134931	Prob (F-statistic)		0.000011

Table 2: Regression analysis of minimum wage and import of capital goods

Variables	Coefficient	SE	t-statistic	Prob.
C	-168990.300000	21425.23	-7.887444	0.0
Wage	1411.116000	121.6400	11.600760	0.0
R ²	0.785103	Prob (F-statistic)		0.0

Table 3: Regression analysis of minimum wage and domestic sales volume of machinery and equipment

Variables	Coefficient	SE	t-statistic	Prob.
C	-40618.3700	11691.450000	-3.474193	0.0007
Wage	457.4104	66.691780	6.858572	0.0000
R ²		0.581420	Prob (F-statistic) 0.0000	

Table 4: Regression analysis of minimum wage and export

Variable	Coefficient	SE	t-statistic	Prob.
C	-32673.770000	2785.051000	-11.73184	0.0
Wage	235.842800	16.284720	14.48246	0.0
R ²	0.866543	Prob (F-statistic)		0.0

Newey-West HAC standard errors and covariance (Lag truncation = 4)

and foreign direct investment in the industry sector are significantly related at 0.01 level of statistical significance in the same direction for every THB1 change in the minimum wage, the foreign direct investment in the industry sector would shift in the same direction by USD3.32M. Although, the minimum wage is a variable that can explain the foreign direct investment in the industry sector for just a mere 13.49% (Table 1).

Relationship between minimum wage and import of capital goods: Table 2 also illustrates that minimum wage has a statistically significant relationship at 0.01 level in the same direction with import of capital goods for every THB1 change in the minimum wage, the import would shift in the same direction by THB1,411.12M. In addition, the minimum wage is a variable that can explain the capital import for as high as 78.51%.

Relationship between minimum wage and domestic machinery sales: Table 3 also illustrates that minimum wage has a statistically significant relationship with

Table 5: Johansen's cointegration test on minimum wage and foreign direct investment in the industry sector

Hypothesized No. of CE (s)	Eigen value	Trace statistic	Critical value (5%)	Critical value (1%)
None	0.083483	11.419900	14.07	18.63
At most 1	0.009018	1.186730	3.76	6.65

Table 6: Johansen's cointegration test on minimum wage and import of capital goods

Hypothesized No. of CE (s)	Eigen value	Trace statistic	Critical value (5%)	Critical value (1%)
None	0.088687	12.165870	14.07	18.63
At most 1	0.021600	2.860673	3.76	6.65

*, **denotes rejection of the hypothesis at the 5 and 1% level; Trace test indicates no cointegration at both 5 and 1% levels

domestic machinery sales at 0.01 level in the same direction for every THB1 change in the minimum wage, the domestic machinery sales would shift in the same direction by THB457.41M. In addition, the minimum wage is a variable that can explain the domestic machinery sales for 58.14%.

Relationship between minimum wage and export: Table 4 illustrates that minimum wage has a statistically significant relationship with export at 0.01 level in the same direction for every THB1 change in the minimum wage, the export would shift in the same direction by USD235.84M. In addition, the minimum wage is a variable that can explain the export for as high as 86.65%.

Concluding in this stage, the discourse on the relationship between minimum wage and the country's economic competitiveness, regarding both domestic and foreign investments, as well as export which has been produced by authoritative individuals is likely to be true in fact. That is to say, implementing the 300 baht guaranteed minimum wage policy of phue thai party would inevitably affect the country's economic competitiveness one way or another.

However, the relationship found at this point with intentional use of the non-stationary series data in employing the regression analysis, may be only falsified relationships (Box and Jenkins, 1976) which requires a double check by the Johansen cointegration test.

Cointegration between minimum wage and foreign direct investment in industry sector: Subsequently with Johansen's cointegration test, it has been pointed out that the minimum wage and foreign direct investment in the industry sector do not have any cointegrating relationship with each other at 0.05 level of statistical significance. That is, the relationship discovered in previous regression analysis of the 2 variables is actually a false relationship (Table 5).

Cointegration between minimum wage and import of capital goods: Table 6 indicates that similarly to the

Table 7: Johansen's cointegration test on minimum wage and domestic machinery sales

Hypothesized No. of CE (s)	Eigen value	Trace statistic	Critical value (5%)	Critical value (1%)
None	0.058845	7.944835	14.07	18.63
At most 1	0.009453	1.244179	3.76	6.65

*, **denotes rejection of the hypothesis at the 5 and 1% level; Trace test indicates no cointegration at both 5 and 1% levels

Table 8: Johansen's cointegration test on minimum wage and export

Hypothesized No. of CE (s)	Eigen-value	Trace statistic	Critical value (5%)	Critical value (1%)
None**	0.145827	20.648470	14.07	18.63
At most 1*	0.043004	5.758184	3.76	6.65

*, **denotes rejection of the hypothesis at the 5% (1%) level; Max-eigen value test indicates 2 and 1 cointegrating equation (s) at the 5 and 1% level, respectively

minimum wage and foreign direct investment in the industry sector, import of capital goods also has no cointegrating relationship with minimum wage at 0.05 level of statistical significance. That is, the relationship discovered in previous regression analysis is actually a false relationship.

Cointegration between minimum wage and domestic machinery sales: Table 7 indicates likewise that the domestic machinery sales also has no cointegrating relationship with minimum wage at 0.05 level of statistical significance. That is, the relationship discovered in previous regression analysis is actually a false relationship.

Cointegration between minimum wage and export: Contrariwise, Table 8 indicates that minimum wage and export has a cointegrating relationship with each other at 0.01 level of statistical significance. That is, the relationship discovered in previous regression analysis of the 2 variables has been proven to be a true relationship.

Although, the tests in this stage have invalidated the relationship between minimum wage and foreign direct investment in the industry sector, import of capital goods and domestic machinery sales and validated only the positive correlation of minimum wage and export at a ratio of change of THB1 to USD235.84M. Still, it only holds true in the matter of statistics which resulted from calculations by regression equations.

Whereas in reality, there is a large number of concerning factors that render the immediate THB215 to THB300 minimum wage raise incapable of pushing the export value to rise by USD20,046.4M in an instant.

Causality between minimum wage and export: For all that, the result of pairwise Granger's causality test has revealed

Table 9: Pairwise Granger's causality test on minimum wage and export

Lags: 12 (Null hypothesis)	Obs	F-statistic	Probability
Wage does not granger cause Export	124	7.52553	1.1E-09
Export does not granger cause Wage		5.98015	9.6E-08

the nature of the relationship between minimum wage and export that the two have a causal relationship with each other that is positively correlated not negatively.

That means, even though the immediate rise in minimum wage of THB85 might not be able to upsurge the export value by exactly USD20.046.4M, it is enough to establish fundamentally here that the aforesaid increase of minimum wage is improbable to bring the export value down, so to speak (Table 9).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion by means of advanced quantitative methodology, it is possible to disprove the discourse or opinion on minimum wage which has been produced and associated with the country's economic competitiveness in terms of investment and export, so as to highlight the negative causality in an empirical fashion which does not only brings to light the shallow matters, such as the lack of any validation by empirical data from academicians, the total failure to check upon of authoritative individuals in the public sector, as well as the concoction made to get ahold of personal gains of the private sector; under the basis of the school of thought of structuralism which states that each person is speaking with a purpose (Chaika, 2007), this may not be deemed a failure in good faith but also depicts the efforts of establishing and growing a belief through the legitimacy of the authorities (Weber, 1977) through the use of language. Discourse, including a reproduction of it, is such a powerful and efficient tool (Van Leeuwen, 2008) to dominate and economically take advantage of and discriminate against people of different social classes all of which are the root of Thailand's important structural problems.

By exploiting authoritative power to conceal/render one's opinion into knowledge or fact which any other member dare not to even question or argue to sustain the process that Lae Dilokvidhayarat once referred to a lecture 60 years ago of Supa Sirimanon at the 20th Dissert of Supa Sirimanon on 23 July, 2008 at the Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, at the end that in the course of development of capitalism, the production capacity would expand and widely expand unstopably. But, circumstances have revealed that what most of labors and mass get for their livelihood is of a lesser amount and continue to lessen further in a totally contradictory fashion with the production power which is growing and will continue to grow.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although, the answer found in the empirical analysis of discourse is not what the discourse analyzers in the current paradigm is interested in but the application of this new type of examination can fill the holes in the critic and empirically reveal the inconsistency of logic, as well as the split of the discourse by falsifying the first hypotheses. Such, a way is the clear beginning of the critical investigation of the texts that have been (repeatedly) produced by the authorities, until they become the familiar, often overlooked in society and socially accept without questions or examinations. It is completely different from the process that is vague, challenging people to raise questions if such concepts are based on people's own interpretation.

The application of such methodology as a tool for monitoring and preventing the reproduction of the discourse will not only create hopes that the public can access the clarification further and more easily but also provokes a wave of criticism which is the condition for developing the methodology later.

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