

recognize cyber threats are essential skills that enable young people to navigate the internet safely and securely.

4. Promoting Creativity in the Digital Age encourages youth to harness technology for innovation and societal benefit. By providing platforms for creative expression and problem-solving, digital tools allow young people to develop solutions for real-world challenges, contributing to both economic growth and social development.

5. Cultivating Ethical Awareness in Technology Use is vital for building a responsible digital society. Youth must learn to use technology in ways that respect privacy, avoid misinformation, and contribute positively to the community. Ethical technology use fosters a safer, more inclusive digital environment where all individuals can engage constructively.

Together, these five pillars form a holistic framework for nurturing Thai youth into responsible, creative, and ethical digital citizens. By addressing each of these areas, society can equip the next generation to not only succeed in the digital world but also to contribute positively to the broader global community.

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Household Debt Crisis in Thailand

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Abstract

The household debt crisis in Thailand has emerged as a pressing economic challenge, reaching alarming levels of 91.3% of GDP in 2023. This surge in debt primarily stems from increased consumer loans, particularly credit cards and personal loans, as well as real estate financing. While the Debt-Service Coverage Ratio indicates some improvement since the pre-COVID era, low-income groups struggle with repayment, highlighting a growing financial divide.

The quality of debt has also deteriorated, with non-performing loans (NPLs) among commercial banks increasing to 2.66% of total loans. This trend poses a significant risk to financial stability, particularly for vulnerable populations with monthly incomes below THB 10,000. The government's response has included targeted strategies to alleviate household debt, such as engaging commercial banks to address housing debts, collaborating with credit card companies, and supporting educational loans.

Moreover, policies aimed at strengthening the agricultural sector and regulating imports are being implemented to enhance economic resilience. The Thai government emphasizes a clear regulatory framework and equitable policies protecting borrowers and lenders. As Thailand navigates this crisis, addressing household debt effectively is crucial for promoting sustainable economic growth and improving its citizens' overall quality of life. This abstract underscores the urgency of coordinated efforts across various sectors to mitigate the impacts of household debt and foster a more resilient economy.

Keywords: Household Debt, Economic Stability, Financial Resilience

Introduction

In the past decade, Thailand has faced a worsening household debt crisis that has significantly impacted its people's overall economy and living conditions, particularly those in low- and middle-income groups who often rely on debt to sustain their livelihoods. Factors contributing to the rise in household debt include excessive spending, easy access to loans, and economic uncertainty, such as declining incomes from the agricultural sector, rising prices of goods, and the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, there is a lack of financial literacy among the populace, leading to poor debt management (Wang & Chen, 2021).

The increase in household debt also reflects the vulnerabilities within the Thai economy, which still heavily relies on the agricultural sector and exports. The lack of economic diversification and innovation exposes people to unforeseen risks, particularly during global crises (Bank of Thailand, 2022).

Moreover, the careless use of consumer credit has trapped many individuals in a cycle of unmanageable debt, resulting in severe social issues, such as rising bankruptcy rates and household stress, adversely affecting family relationships (Asian Development Bank, 2023).

Therefore, studying the household debt crisis is crucial for developing effective public policies that enable citizens to manage their debt sustainably and reduce the risk of future crises. Enhancing understanding of personal finance and promoting access to safe funding sources will be key strategies in alleviating this problem and helping Thailand stabilize its economy in the future.

Meaning of Household Debt

Household debt is all liabilities (including non-profit institutions serving households) that require households to pay interest or principal to creditors at fixed future dates. It is calculated as the sum of the following liability categories: loans (primarily mortgage loans and consumer credit) and other accounts payable. The indicator is measured as a percentage of net household disposable income. (Mian, A., & Sufi, A.,2018)

Household debt is the combined debt of all households, including consumer debt and mortgage loans. Historically, A significant rise in this debt level coincides with many severe economic crises. (Shiller, R. J.,2015)

Household debt can be defined in several ways based on the types included. Common debt types include home mortgages, home equity loans, auto loans, student loans, and credit cards. Household debt can also be measured across an economy to assess how indebted households are relative to various measures of income (e.g., pre-tax and disposable income) or the size of the economy (GDP). (Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2021)

Current Situation of Thailand's Household Debt

Thai households' debt surged to 91.3% of GDP in 2023, with credit quality and debt repayment ability decreasing. By the end of 2023, Thailand's household debt increased to 91.3%, mainly driven by an increase in consumer loans, particularly from credit cards and personal loans, which saw a 9.5% year-over-year increase, as well as real estate loans (up 4.3% year-over-year). However, auto loans dropped by -0.6% year-over-year. While the Debt-Service Coverage Ratio (DSCR) suggests improvement from the pre-COVID period, low-income groups struggle to pay off debts, particularly those with monthly incomes below THB 10,000. (Bank of Thailand,2023)

Regarding debt quality, Thai commercial banks' non-performing loans (NPLs) stood at THB 492.8 billion in Q4 2023, accounting for 2.66% of total loans, compared to 2.9% at the end of 2019. NPLs of consumer loans, particularly auto loans, increased from 1.86% in Q4 2019 to 2.13% in Q4 2023. This trend will likely continue, considering the surge in Stage 2 loans or particularly mentioned loans (SM) for auto loans, which increased from 7.4% in the pre-COVID period to 14.3% of total loans by 2023.

According to data from the central bank, total household debt amounted to 16.3 trillion baht as of the second quarter of 2024, representing 89.8% of GDP. This marks a decrease from 16.4 trillion baht, or 90.8% of GDP, in the first quarter. Thailand's average household debt has reached a record high due to slow economic growth, lower incomes, and high living costs. A survey by the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce revealed that the average debt per household was 606,378 baht (\$17,908), up 8.4% from the previous year. This is the highest average debt level since the survey began in 2009. (Kwan, A. C. (2022).

The debt burden has weighed heavily on Southeast Asia's second-largest economy, lagging behind regional peers. It also faces decade-high borrowing costs and weak exports amid a slow recovery in its top trading partner, China. The government and central bank have expressed concerns over the country's household debt of 16.4 trillion baht (\$484 billion), or 90.8% of GDP, at the end of March 2024, making it among the highest in Asia. (Rojas, C.,2023).

Thailand's household debt compared to the world

Globally, Thailand's household debt-to-GDP ratios and DSCRs remain among the highest.

Although Thailand's household debt to GDP increased significantly from the pre-COVID period, in line with other countries, the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) identifies Thailand as the country with the highest household debt-to-GDP ratio globally.

Journey of Bank of Thailand 9: Due to Allianz Global Wealth Report 2023 (Trading Economics) found that the highest household debt, mainly developed countries and highest

quality countries of life in 2022 (Thailand was number 7 in the world rank, but Thailand was a developing country) were as follows: 1. Switzerland (128%) 2. Australia (111%) 3. Canada (103%) 4. South Korea (102%) 5. Hong Kong (96%) 6. New Zealand (93%) 7. Netherlands (91%) and Thailand (91%) 8. Sweden (85%) and 9. Denmark (84%)

As of June 2023, Thailand's household debt-to-GDP ratio is second only to South Korea (101.7%) and Hong Kong (95.9%) in the Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, Thailand's DSCR stands at 22.3%, significantly exceeding the average level for significant countries of 9.85%. The policy interest rate, kept at a 10-year high of 2.50%, coupled with the persistently high level of debt and DSCR, could potentially lead to more fragile financial stability and economy. This is especially concerning as most household debt is nonproductive loans^{6/} that do not directly increase people's income, such as personal loans and credit card loans, unlike other countries, especially developed countries, where real estate loans account for a large proportion of household debt.

In 2023, Thai household debt rose to 91.3% of GDP, led by expanding consumer loans and housing debt. Meanwhile, non-performing loans or bad debts (NPLs) in consumer loans and real estate purchases have increased significantly since before the COVID-19 outbreak. Moreover, Thailand has the world's highest household debt to GDP level, corresponding to a debt-service coverage ratio (DSCR) of 22.3%, significantly exceeding the average level for significant countries of 9.8%. The policy interest rate, kept at a 10-year high of 2.50%, coupled with the persistently high level of debt and DSCR, could potentially lead to more fragile financial stability and economy. This is especially concerning as most household debt is nonproductive, and loans such as personal and credit card loans do not directly increase people's income.¹⁰

Of the average debt, 30% was informal loans, up from about 20% in 2023 as banks have tightened credit, university president Thanavath Phonvichai said. It found that 69.9% of the debt is from formal lending, down from 80.2% last year, while 30% is from informal borrowing. The proportion of informal lending increased because more people reached their credit limits for formal lending, causing them to turn to loan sharks. The use of illegal loan sharks is rife among lower-income families who are unable to get bank loans, with many people trapped by debt with high interest rates.

According to the Bank of Thailand, household debt is expected to continue declining in this year's third and fourth quarters, driven by economic growth. The central bank projects a GDP growth rate of 2.6% in 2024, with quarter-on-quarter increases of 1%, 2%, 3% and 4% in the first, second, third and fourth quarters, respectively.

The regulator predicts a GDP growth of 3% in 2025.

Overall loan growth in the banking system, which includes licensed banks and their subsidiaries, slowed to 0.3% year-on-year in the second quarter of 2024 from a 0.7% gain in the first quarter, reported the central bank.

Business loans remained relatively stable, while loans to small and medium-sized enterprises declined. Consumer loans also expanded at a slower pace because of increasing credit risks.

Solutions for Household Debt by the Government of Thailand

Former Prime Minister Settha Taweessin has ordered government sectors to address household debt issues through several initiatives, including:

1. Debt for Housing: Engaging commercial banks to develop solutions for housing-related debts (Ministry of Finance, 2023).
2. Credit Card Debt: Collaborating with credit card companies to mitigate consumer debt problems (Bank of Thailand, 2023).
3. Educational Loans: Encouraging borrowers to repay educational loans actively and providing necessary guidance (National et al. Council, 2024).

4. Support for Farmers: Tasking the Agriculture and Cooperatives Bank with addressing farmers' financial challenges.

5. Import Regulations: Implementing stricter controls on imported products to support local industries.

6. Investment Promotion: Accelerating investment processes through the Board of Investment (BOI) to bolster the economy.

Furthermore, the Thai government recognizes the household debt crisis and has established national strategies and particular policies aimed at addressing this issue:

1. Targeted Policies: Developing specific measures focused on particular demographic groups most affected by household debt.

2. Clear Regulatory Framework: Establishing a coherent strategy to tackle household debt across various sectors.

3. Equitable Policies: Policies must be fair and just for borrowers and lenders (Asian Development Bank, 2023).

4. Macro-Level Cooperation: Fostering collaboration among all relevant sectors, including government agencies, financial institutions, and borrowers.

Buddhist Principles for Household Debt Solutions

Thailand's ongoing household debt crisis highlights the need for sustainable solutions that address underlying issues rather than merely alleviating symptoms. Current approaches have often proven ineffective due to various factors, including financial literacy, insufficient financial discipline, high interest rates, and reliance on informal loans. Many individuals also need higher incomes and more self-discipline in managing their finances.

Integrating Buddhist principles can offer profound insights into creating sustainable and effective strategies for resolving household debt. The teachings of the Buddha emphasize mindfulness, moderation, and ethical conduct, which can be applied to financial management. For instance, promoting the *Self-Sufficiency Economy*, advocated by King Rama IX, aligns with Buddhist teachings on living within one's means and prioritizing sustainable practices (Koh, 2019).

Fostering financial literacy through community education initiatives can help individuals understand the importance of prudent economic management and decision-making (Ratanabhand & Chanthapong, 2020). Emphasizing the practice of generosity (*dāna*) can also encourage a culture of sharing and support within communities, reducing the stigma associated with debt (Phra et al., 2021).

By applying these Buddhist principles, both the government and citizens can work towards resolving household debt in a manner that promotes economic stability and holistic well-being.

Bhogavibhāga: The Fourfold Division of Money

The Buddha's teachings on financial management are encapsulated in the principle of Bhogavibhāga, which emphasizes efficient spending and prudent financial practices. In the scripture *Tipitaka of Mahachulalongkornrajavidaya*, specifically "Topic 265, Page 211," Lord Buddha instructs Singhamanop (Young Man) on allocating funds wisely. The fourfold division of money includes:

1. Ekena Phoke Puncheryya: One part should be used for living expenses and fulfilling obligations to others.
2. Taweehang Kammang Payochaye: Two parts should be invested to expand one's business.
3. Jatutanyaja Nithaperyya: The fourth part should be saved for emergencies or future needs (P.A. Payutto, 2015).

Additionally, the Buddha guided earning and retaining wealth through the Dhamma principle known as *Titthadhammikattasangwattanikadhamma* (or Principles of Millionaires). This

principle emphasizes virtues conducive to both present benefits and long-term welfare, which include:

1. Utthanasampada: Cultivating diligence and perseverance.
2. Arukkkhasampada: Exercising watchfulness and protection over one's resources.
3. Kalyanamittata: Surrounding oneself with good company and positive influences.
4. Samajivita: Maintaining a balanced and economically viable lifestyle (Sangha, 2021).

By integrating these principles into daily life, individuals can foster a more sustainable approach to financial management that mitigates debt and promotes overall well-being.

Conclusion

The household debt crisis in Thailand is a complex issue that impacts society in many ways. Finding sustainable solutions requires economic principles and consideration of approaches rooted in Buddhist teachings, which emphasize self-understanding and mindful living.

Living Sufficiency: As advocated by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the principle of a sufficiency economy is essential for reducing reliance on debt. It promotes efficient resource management and encourages citizens to minimize unnecessary spending.

Promoting Education and Financial Literacy: Enhancing understanding of personal finance will empower individuals to manage their debts effectively. Organizing training and disseminating knowledge through communities can be a beneficial approach.

Developing Mindfulness: Practicing mindfulness can help individuals make better spending decisions, recognize real problems, and be aware of the consequences of their actions.

Community Support: Building supportive networks within communities can facilitate mutual assistance in debt management and foster strong relationships among members.

Giving Back to Society: Engaging in charitable activities or helping those in need can cultivate a spirit of sharing and reduce selfishness, ultimately strengthening society. Applying Buddhist principles to address the household debt crisis can lead to changes in spending behavior and sustainable debt management, allowing Thai society to navigate this crisis toward a better quality of life.

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Enhancing the Operational Efficiency of Administrative Court Personnel

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Contents

2024 ICSD-Executive Committee	1
2024 ICSD-Conference Session Committee	1
2024 ICSD-Conference Organizing Committee.....	1
About Host.....	5
National University of Laos	5
About Co-Organizer	7
Mahidol University.....	7
Dhonburi Rajabhat University.....	10
Faculty of Management Science, Silpakorn University	14
Science Technology and Innovation Policy Institute (STIPI)	15
Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University.....	16
2024 ICSD-Conference Program.....	32
2024 ICSD-Conference Kenote Speaker	40
2024 ICSD-Conference Venue and Map	44
2024 ICSD-Call for Papers.....	45
2024 ICSD-Travel Information	46
2024 Conference Receptions	50
City Tour.....	51
Concurrent Session Presentation Full Papper	56
Co-production of environmental and waste management in local administrative organizations.....	56
Analysis of the development plan for Sam Phran, a sustainable smart city of Sam Phran Town Municipality to assess the results towards the development of a smart city (Smart City) by comparing with Maehia Town Municipality	70
Comparative study of the organizational establishment of quality-of-life development for elderly in Thailand's local communities	83
Willingness to enroll in community-based health insurance among households of the informal sector in Vientiane capital, Lao PDR	90

Development of the quality of life for people with disabilities in local administrative organizations: A Comparative Case Study of Bangkok and Pak Kret City Municipality, Nonthaburi Province.....	103
Mechanisms to drive the development of resilience to enhance life skills Buddhist Psychology for Youth	121
The Comparison of Phitsanulok Provincial Administrative Organization and Hua Hin Town Municipality, Prachuap Khiri Khan Province about Factors and Solutions of Local Financial Management.....	132
Comparative study of local administrative organizations in waste management using local smart city innovation: A Case Study of Saensuk Municipality and Hat Yai Municipality	149
Community-Based Waste Management at the Source through the Power of the 'BOVORN' Model.....	165
Cultural Heritage of Phuket Province as Soft Power to Promote Tourism: A Phenomenological Study	173
A Study of Homestay Management Models for Sustainable Tourism in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province, Thailand.....	181
Efficient Human Resource Management in the Administrative Court	187
Psychology: The Science of Behavior for Life Development in the Age of Artificial Intelligence	196
Learning Management Based on the Seven Factors of Enlightenment to Improve the Academic Achievement of Grade 5 Students in Udon Thani Province	207
The dynamic effects of oil price and exchange rate on inflation in Laos	218
Human Quality in the Age of AI: A Mindfulness-Based Buddhist Psycholinguistic Approach to Developing Attitude Intelligence.....	248
AI Usage in Daily Life of Thais Across Age Groups: Social Evolution and Development in the Digital Era	256
The Application of Buddhist Psychology to Enhance an Effective Work Environment.....	266
The Effect of ICT and HDI on Economic Growth in Laos: ARDL Model.....	276
Reiki Meditation Therapy in the Age of AI.....	290
Mini Computer Numerical Control (CNC) for Printed Circuit Boards.....	302

BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY IN THE DIGITAL AGE.....	311
Management of Dhamma Study Training in the Digital Age: For Moral Teaching Monks..	318
Curriculum Integrated Classroom Management Guidelines for Teachers	329
Buddha’s Teaching Techniques and Dhamma Propagation.....	338
Character of Specifics Knowledge for Teaching Social Studies	348
Clean Energy Management According to Buddhist Principles of Thai University.....	359
The Development of Learning Achievements of Thai Language for Occupation using Classpoint Learning Management of 1st Year Vocational Certificate Students.....	369
Communication Techniques for Social Studies Teachers.....	374
Daily Samadhi: A Contemporary Approach to Mindfulness in Modern Life.....	382
Coping with the Suffering of Loss Based on Buddhist Psychology	390
Buddhism and the development of a new way of life (new normal)	402
Buddhism and Values in Thai Society	412
Acariya’s Characters according to Buddha Dhammas’ Principles.....	419
The Buddha's One-Meal Practice a Prototype of Intermittent Fasting for Holistic Health in the Modern Era.....	430
Enhancing Leadership Qualities through Buddhist Principles: Integrating the Four Adhipati with Contemporary Leadership Concepts	439
Laos: Buddhism, the ancient culture of Luang Prabang.....	447
Online Buddhist Counseling for Volunteer Counselors.....	458
Promoting Sustainable Living Through Mindfulness a Pathway to Peaceful Co-habitation	466
Guidelines for Developing a Peaceful Society through Youth Participation.....	482
Guidelines for Developing Thai Youth into Digital Citizens	493
Household Debt Crisis in Thailand	502
Enhancing the Operational Efficiency of Administrative Court Personnel.....	508
Action Research for Innovation of Enhancing Community Vaccines in Center for Quality-of- Life Development and Occupational Promotion for the Elderly through the Community Participation process.....	519

The Influencing of Human Resource Management in the Digital Era, and Competitive Advantage on Business Growth in Savannakhet and Champasak Provinces, Lao PDR: Structural Equation Modeling	529
Disaster Management Guidelines Repeated Floods in the Yom River Basin Area through the Network Partners Cooperation Mechanism: A Case study of Mueang District, Sukhothai Province.....	541
Disease-Inducing Behaviors of the Elderly in Remote Areas of Chiang Mai Province, Thailand	550
An Effect of Museum Visitors' Experience on Electronic Word-of-Mouth towards Museum Tourism in Thailand.....	560

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