



**The Formation of a Social Class Structure: Urbanization, Bureaucratization and Social Mobility in Thailand**

Hans-Dieter Evers

*American Sociological Review*, Volume 31, Issue 4 (Aug., 1966), 480-488.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-1224%28196608%2931%3A4%3C480%3ATFOASC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-S>

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

*American Sociological Review* is published by American Sociological Association. Please contact the publisher for further permissions regarding the use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/asa.html>.

---

*American Sociological Review*  
©1966 American Sociological Association

JSTOR and the JSTOR logo are trademarks of JSTOR, and are Registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. For more information on JSTOR contact [jstor-info@umich.edu](mailto:jstor-info@umich.edu).

©2003 JSTOR

<http://www.jstor.org/>  
Tue Mar 25 01:40:06 2003

# THE FORMATION OF A SOCIAL CLASS STRUCTURE: URBANIZATION, BUREAUCRATIZATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY IN THAILAND

HANS-DIETER EVERS

*Northern Illinois University*

*Urbanization and bureaucratization are usually connected with a high rate of social mobility in western industrialized societies. In Thailand, however, mobility has declined between at least certain strata of Thai society following the consolidation of a bureaucratic elite in the expanding urban centre of Bangkok. The growing size, the monopolization of certain status symbols, the development of a distinct subculture, and the concentration of economic and political power are indications that the bureaucratic elite is developing into a social class. It is therefore concluded that urbanization and bureaucratization in formerly loosely structured societies may lead to the formation of a class system and to a temporary decline of social mobility.*

IN their well-known study on "Social Mobility in Industrial Society" Lipset and Bendix have pointed out "that social mobility is an integral and continuing aspect of the process of urbanization, industrialization and bureaucratization."<sup>1</sup> Each of these processes, even if occurring separately, is connected with a high degree of social mobility. Four main factors are suggested to account for the increased rate of mobility in cities as compared to rural areas:<sup>2</sup>

(1) Occupational specialization: The greater the number of positions in a city, due to a more complex division of labour and a greater degree of specialization, the better the chance to change occupations and to rise (or fall) in status.

(2) Bureaucratization: Because of the concentration of administrative agencies and large scale organizations in urban areas, the number of nonmanual positions of the labour force increases with the growth of a city; this improves the opportunity to move into a nonmanual position.

(3) Migration: As rural-urban migrants tend to occupy the lower-status positions, native urbanites from a similar class background may move up into the expanding number of higher positions, created in the process of bureaucratization and economic development.

(4) Differential fertility: A lower birth-rate among the urban population in general, and among the higher strata of urban society in

particular, tends to create a favourable climate for high social mobility, because higher positions must continually be filled by persons from lower-status or rural families.

These four factors connected with the process of urbanization, *viz.*, occupational specialization, bureaucratization, migration, and differential fertility, also operate in non-industrialized, transitional societies. Some of these factors might, however, turn out to be quite different from those in European and American industrialized societies and, reinforced by other intervening variables, produce different results. Although these factors are indeed connected with urbanization and the rate of mobility, it is by no means sure that they will produce the result predicted by Lipset and Bendix, namely increased mobility. This will be demonstrated by data collected during a pilot-study on elites in Thailand.<sup>3</sup>

I hope to show that, in the course of urbanization, social mobility into at least one specific stratum of Thai society has declined,

<sup>3</sup> This study was carried out in 1963 as part of a comparative study of elites in Thailand, Taiwan, and Indonesia under the auspices of the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute for Sociopolitical Research, Freiburg, Germany, by D. Bernstorff, Z. A. Hanfi, G. K. Kindermann, and H. D. Evers. In working out this paper I have made extensive use of the field notes and suggestions of my co-workers. The assistance of UNESCO, Paris, and the Volkswagen Foundation, Hanover, is gratefully acknowledged. The research could not have been carried out without the co-operation of the Thai National Commission for Unesco, the Thai Ministry of Education, the Unesco Regional Office in Bangkok, and various other institutions in Thailand.

<sup>1</sup> S. M. Lipset, and R. Bendix, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959, p. 280.

<sup>2</sup> Lipset and Bendix, *op. cit.*, pp. 59, 216-218; and S. M. Lipset, "Social Mobility and Urbanization," *Rural Sociology*, 20 (1955), pp. 220-228.

and that this is due to a large extent to exactly the same factors Lipset and Bendix hold to be responsible for the *increase* of social mobility in the course of urbanization, namely, occupational specialization, bureaucratization, migration, and differential fertility.

I do not want to overstate my case. My data pertain only to movement into one specific stratum in a particular period and are of limited reliability. Even if I should be able to prove that the rate of mobility in one section of a society has declined, the mobility of the whole society might nevertheless be fairly high. I should like, however, to qualify the hypothesis that urbanization is connected with an increasing rate of mobility by pointing out that urbanization may also at some stage lead to the formation of new social strata or classes. But a new class can only be consolidated if entrance into it is restricted to a certain extent, or, to put it in different words, if the initial high mobility rate (during the formation of a new class) declines.

#### STRATIFICATION AND MOBILITY IN THAI SOCIETY

Most authorities assure us that social mobility is and always has been very high in Thai society,<sup>4</sup> although no special study on this subject has been published so far, and relevant field studies do not indicate an exceptionally high rate of status mobility.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> W. Blanchard *et al.*, *Thailand: its People, its Society, its Culture*, New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1958, pp. 50, 411; John F. Embree, "Thailand—a loosely structured Social System," *American Anthropologist*, 52 (1950), p. 185; Ludwig Hamburger, "Fragmentierte Gesellschaft, die Struktur der Thai-Familie," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 17 (1965), pp. 49-72; Lucien M. Hanks, Jr., "Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order," *American Anthropologist*, 64 (1962), p. 1257; Lucien M. Hanks, Jr. and Jane R. Hanks, "Siamese Thai," in Frank M. Lebar, Gerald C. Hickey and John K. Musgrave, *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia*, New Haven: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1964, p. 203; James N. Mosel, "Thai Administrative Behavior," in William J. Siffin, ed., *Toward the Comparative Study of Public Administration*, Bloomington: Department of Government, Indiana University, 1957; David A. Wilson, *Politics in Thailand*, Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1962, pp. 48, 52.

<sup>5</sup> Ernst E. Boesch, "Autoritaet und Leistungsverhalten in Thailand," in *Thailand Studien*, Vol. XV

Why, then, is such emphasis placed on a high rate of mobility in Thai society? The argument usually runs as follows: Thai society is loosely structured, which means that "considerable variation of individual behaviour is sanctioned."<sup>6</sup> Despite a very elaborate system of fixed occupational ranks,<sup>7</sup> movement from occupation to occupation up and down the hierarchy was not and is not restricted by birth or other factors.<sup>8</sup> Mobility is sanctioned in the Thai Buddhist value system, according to which a person's status derives from religious merit acquired in previous lives.<sup>9</sup> Since everybody may do good, acquire merit, and rise to a higher social position, social status is not fixed by birth, and social mobility is thought to be quite natural. Hanks therefore speaks of a "built-in social mobility of Siamese society";<sup>10</sup> but this confuses ideology and social reality.<sup>11</sup> The social

der Schriften des Institutes für Asienkunde in Hamburg, Frankfurt and Berlin: Alfred Metzner Verlag, 1962; Konrad Kingshill, *Ku Daeng-the Red Tomb, a Village Study in Northern Thailand*, Chiangmai: The Prince Royal's College, and Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1960; Howard Keva Kaufman, *Bangkuaad, a Community Study in Thailand*, Locust Valley, N. Y.: J. J. Augustin, 1960; G. William Skinner, *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand*, Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1958; Robert B. Textor, *From Peasant to Pedicab Driver*, New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1961; Lauriston Sharp, Hazel M. Hauck, Kamol Janlekha, and Robert B. Textor, *Siamese Rice Village: a Preliminary Study of Bang Chan 1948-1949*, Bangkok: Cornell Research Center, 1953.

<sup>6</sup> Embree, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

<sup>7</sup> This system of fixed occupational ranks has its roots in the traditional *sakti na* system, which will be discussed below. For a description of the *sakti na* system see H. G. Quaritch Wales, *Ancient Siamese Government and Administration*, New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1965, pp. 49-51. (Reprint of the 1934 edition)

<sup>8</sup> Hanks, *op. cit.*, p. 1252.

<sup>9</sup> Boesch, *op. cit.*, p. 34; Hanks, *op. cit.*; Textor, *op. cit.*, p. 44. The idea that the social status of a person is connected with religious merit was frequently expressed by Thai civil servants and military leaders during interviews in Bangkok in 1963. See Hans-Dieter Evers, *Higher Civil Servants in Thailand: Social Mobility, Overseas Education, and Attitudes towards Their Own Cultural Tradition*, Freiburg: Arnold Bergstrasser Institut, 1964, ms. in the Library of Congress.

<sup>10</sup> Hanks, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

<sup>11</sup> The "declining descent rule for rank" of Thai royalty, which is sometimes used to exemplify the principles and norms governing mobility, is not quite applicable, as it is in fact a system of kinship

situation seems to be as follows: As social-psychological studies of Boesch and Phillips have shown, motivation to rise is low and weakened by Thai education.<sup>12</sup> Self-constraint and self-limitation ("I know my place: not too high and not too low") are emphasized in literature and in verbal statements. On the other hand, barriers to social mobility are very weak in rural Thailand and can in no way be compared with the limitation put on mobility in the Indian caste system. It is therefore very difficult to ascertain the actual situation without having appropriate data.

There is similar uncertainty, attributable to the lack of data, when we ask whether there is a class structure in Thai society. Developing his argument from the Thai value system, Hanks emphatically denies the existence of a class system in Thai society, but fails to differentiate between rural and urban society: "Efforts to depict social classes in Thai society founder because of misconstruing the nature of this social order, which resembles a military organization more than an Occidental class-type society."<sup>13</sup> This is contradicted by Skinner, whose description of the Bangkok class system is based on observation and data derived from an extensive field study of the Chinese community in Thailand. But he also emphasizes that the stratification system is not very rigid.<sup>14</sup>

It is difficult to decide between Hanks and Skinner. Perhaps efforts to depict social classes in Thai urban society have failed not so much because of misconstruing the nature of the Thai social order, as because a class system is in the process of evolving, and rapid social change makes it difficult to utilize a static model of Thai society.

---

terminology. Rank or status is determined by blood-relationship to the King. For a brief discussion of this system and the (quite different) system of conferred ranks see Mary R. Haas, "The Declining Descent Rule for Rank in Thailand: A Correction," *American Anthropologist*, 53 (1951), pp. 585-587.

<sup>12</sup> Boesch, *op. cit.*; Herbert P. Phillips, *Thai Peasant Personality, the Patterning of Interpersonal Behavior in the Village of Bang Chan*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965. See also L. M. Hanks, Jr., "Indifference to Modern Education in a Thai Farming Community," *Human Organization*, 17 (1958), pp. 9-14.

<sup>13</sup> Hanks, *op. cit.*, p. 1252.

<sup>14</sup> Skinner, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

#### THE GROWTH OF A BUREAUCRATIC ELITE

Bangkok became the capital of Thailand after 1767, but extensive urbanization and bureaucratization was only initiated by the reforms of King Mongkut (1851-1868) and, to a greater extent, by King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910). After his death in 1910, Thailand had a working ministerial bureaucracy, whose higher civil servants, although still recruited largely from among the princes and members of the nobility, received fixed salaries and had regulated working hours.<sup>15</sup> Civil servants were trained at the Royal Page School, the forerunner of Chulalongkorn University, and were sent abroad in increasing numbers. Because the reforms had to overcome opposition from conservative noblemen, mainly in the provinces, the administration was centralized and all power and authority was concentrated in Bangkok. The population of the capital increased at a higher rate than the rest of the country, mostly through immigration of rural Thai and Chinese.<sup>16</sup>

The most conspicuous event connected with urbanization and bureaucratization was, however, the revolution of 1932. The large number of officials, civil as well as military, necessary to run a modernized administration, were debarred from the highest ranks by members of the royal family. This restriction on mobility created a great deal of dissatisfaction, which eventually led to the coup and the end of the absolute monarchy.<sup>17</sup>

*Social mobility before and after the revolution of 1932.* Although the highest and politically most important positions in the period before 1932 were held by royal nobility, recruitment for the lower ranks of the civil service provided opportunities for many ambitious young men from Bangkok and the provinces to move up the social ladder. Interviews with higher Thai civil servants and

<sup>15</sup> Mosel, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> 37.6 per cent in the decade 1919-1929, and 25.0 per cent in the decade 1937-1947. See Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 48 and Blanchard *et al.*, *op. cit.* p. 50.

<sup>17</sup> For the background of the 1932 revolution see Thawatt Mokarapong, *The June Revolution of 1932 in Thailand, a Study in Political Behavior*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Indiana University, 1962; Walter F. Vella, *The Impact of the West on Government in Thailand*, Berkeley: University of California Publications in Political Science, Vol. 4, 1955; and Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-16.

examination of their life histories showed, however, that competition for civil service positions became more intense after the revolution, and people from rural areas and low family background found it extremely difficult to get a civil service appointment. To test this supposition a survey on the social background of high-ranking Thai civil servants was conducted in Bangkok in 1963.

The group on which our study was concentrated consisted of the civil servants in leading positions in the Thai ministries. It was made up of the Under-Secretaries of State, Directors-General, Directors, and Chiefs of Division; they exercise a considerable amount of influence on the general policies of the country, perhaps because the actual power elite is fairly small. The power elite consists of a number of clique leaders, many of them with a military background, who seem to have most of their followers in the higher ranks of the civil service. "... The constituencies of the members of the clique are the bureaucracy itself."<sup>18</sup> This also applies to the military officers who very often hold high positions in the administration (or high military rank is often given to high-ranking civil servants). "The fact that the ruling class is small and largely overlaps the bureaucracy is basic in this situation. . . . The group of military officers in modern Thailand has its roots in the traditional bureaucracy, where a formal distinction was maintained between civil and military officials, but this distinction seems scarcely to have extended to function, training, or general outlook."<sup>19</sup> The bureaucratic elite, therefore, consists of persons who—because of their high-ranking positions in the Thai Civil Service—exert considerable influence on the general political process by administrative means. A large number of these higher civil servants were interviewed by members of our team. The interviews lasted between thirty minutes and three hours; most of our conclusions are based on these free and rather intensive interviews. The tables in this paper, however are based on a small sample survey.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 161. For a general discussion of Thai elites see H. D. Evers and T. H. Silcock, "Elites and Selection," in T. H. Silcock (ed.), *Development in Thailand: Social and Economic Studies*, in press.

<sup>19</sup> Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 164–165.

To obtain data on social mobility and the effect and extent of overseas education on the Thai Civil Service, a sample of 64 persons was drawn out of a total of approximately 950 civil servants in leading positions in the Prime Minister's Office and all ministries. Since this sample was designed for a pilot study, two ministries were selected. From one ministry all civil servants in leading positions were interviewed and in another ministry all leading officers in one division only. Since there are significant differences between the ministries, the sample is not strictly random.

Accordingly the results of this survey are only to a limited extent applicable to the total bureaucratic elite. Despite difficulties in interpreting the results of this survey, the data are consistent with the results of the interviews referred to above. This is shown by comparing the social background and inter-generational mobility of Thai civil servants who entered the civil service before 1932 with those who became civil servants after the revolution (See Table 1). These data warrant the conclusion that social mobility *declined* after 1932 despite continuing urbanization and bureaucratization, even if we take the problematic nature of the sample into account.

A sample of higher Thai civil servants who were in office in 1963 certainly constitutes no random sample of all the officials who entered government service before 1933 or any date thereafter. Yet it is very unlikely that those who eventually rose to top positions in the bureaucracy were of lower social origin than those who remained in lower positions (and therefore did not get into

TABLE 1. PER CENT DISTRIBUTION BY FATHER'S OCCUPATION OF THAI CIVIL SERVANTS, BY YEAR ENTERED GOVERNMENT SERVICE, 1963

Father's Occupation	Year Entered Government Service	
	Before 1933	After 1933
Government service	19	51
Professional	5	8
Business	33	31
Farmer	43	10
Total	100	100
Number of cases	21	39

our 1963 sample). My argument that social mobility was higher before 1932 is therefore not affected. One might suspect that civil servants who reached top positions only a few years after their entry into the civil service must have had advantages over the others. This would further support my hypothesis that accession to top positions became more restricted. In fact, the bureaucratic elite has become more self-sufficient as new members are recruited from its own ranks. This tendency towards self-recruitment is apparent in Table 2. The data in

recruiting field for higher Civil Service positions, far less important than the bureaucratic elite itself, is families with a business background. Since most businessmen are Chinese or part-Chinese, the vast majority of Thai people, except those few whose family heads are already in government employment, have practically no chance to move into a higher social position. The situation today apparently differs greatly from the time before 1932, when a considerable proportion of government officials was still recruited from rural areas. We are therefore confronted with the paradoxical situation that the revolution of 1932, continued urbanization, and an expanding bureaucracy have produced a relative if not an absolute decline in the rate of social mobility (at least into the bureaucratic upper class) and a more rigid system of social stratification.

TABLE 2. DISTRIBUTION OF THAI CIVIL SERVANTS BY FATHER'S OCCUPATION AND YEAR ENTERED CIVIL SERVICE, 1963

Father's Occupation	Year Entered Civil Service		Total
	1920-1932	1933-1963	
Civil servant	4	17	21
Other	19	24	43
Total	23	41	64

Note:  $\chi^2$  significant at the .05 level.

Tables 1 and 2 are of even greater significance if we consider the occupational structure of Thai society as a whole. Civil servants account for less than one-half of one percent of the total population, whereas the farming population constitutes about 85 per cent. For greater Bangkok itself an estimate based on the census of 1960 gives the following percentages:<sup>20</sup>

Government officials (administration)	0.5
Professions (incl. teachers)	3.5
Traders and businessmen	17.5
Clerical occupations	9.2
Others	69.3
	100.0

Thus about 60 per cent of the higher Civil Servants have been recruited from occupational groups which constitute less than 4 per cent of the total population. Another

#### CLASS FORMATION: THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE BUREAUCRATIC ELITE

What factors enabled the consolidation and closing of this new class which I have termed "bureaucratic elite"?

*Differential fertility.* There are no figures available on the expansion of the Thai Civil Service from the late 19th century onwards, but the increase in numbers must have been considerable and must have eventually—our data suggests in the 1930s—reached a stage where applicants for newly created or vacated positions could be recruited from the families of civil servants themselves.

It is perhaps significant that the revolution of 1932 took place just at this crucial period, when appointments to civil service positions were becoming increasingly confined to the sons of civil servants, among whom competition was also intensifying due to their larger numbers. Increasing competitiveness among civil servants may also have induced some to aspire to the highest positions, previously reserved for members of the nobility.

But the greater number of civil servants was only one aspect of the demographic process connected with bureaucratization and urbanization. Self-recruitment of new members from their own group, *i.e.*, the gradual closing of the bureaucratic elite, may have continued to be possible from a purely numerical point of view, because "differen-

<sup>20</sup> *Thailand Population Census, 1960, Changwad Series*, Bangkok: Central Statistical Office, National Economic Development Board, 1963. The above estimate is condensed from the regrouped Table 16. It is, however, very doubtful whether the statistical data in Table 16 "Economically Active Population 11 Years of Age and Over, by Work Status, by Occupation, and by Sex" are reliable.

tial fertility" as described by Lipset and Bendix has not yet become significant enough to cut down the supply of new civil servants from among their own class. Whereas the birth rate of the upper strata of industrial societies is usually so low that these classes cannot reproduce themselves and a certain "natural" or "demographic" mobility has to take place to fill the vacant positions, this most probably has not yet happened to the newly-formed bureaucratic class in Thailand. It is likely that the birth rate of this class has not fallen much below the national average and that the number of children reaching adult age is still fairly large. This is in part because of the better medical facilities available to upper class families and their higher standard of living. Although no data are available to prove this point, the *hypothesis* seems tenable that demographic mobility into a newly-formed upper class is negligible.

*Differential acculturation.* It seems most probable that a consolidation of the bureaucratic elite was not hampered by demographic factors. I turn next to the examination of those factors which give the bureaucratic elite certain class characteristics or—as I suggest—develop the bureaucratic elite into a distinct social class and into the nucleus of an overall social-class system in urban Thailand. In Thailand, which has never been directly influenced by any colonial power, acculturation to Western values and behaviour patterns has been highly selective and limited to certain sections of the population. One of the major avenues of acculturation has been overseas education, implying the semi-socialization of selected members of Thai society into another culture.

Contracts between Thailand and the West go back to the 16th century<sup>21</sup> but up to the nineteen-thirties intensive contacts were more or less confined to the small ruling class. It was only after the reforms of King Mongkut (1851–1868) that a number of Thais went abroad. By the time of Chulalongkorn (1868–1910) it had become customary to send the royal princes and other members of the nobility abroad to be edu-

<sup>21</sup> Prince Damrong, "The Introduction of Western Culture in Siam," selected articles from the *Siam Society Journal*, 7 (1959), Bangkok, pp. 1–12.

TABLE 3. NUMBER OF THAI STUDENTS STUDYING ABROAD, 1951–1963

Year	Number of Students
1951	748
1955	1,969
1960	2,077
1963	2,795

Source: Compiled from unpublished records of the Thai Civil Service Commission, Bangkok.

cated, mainly in the European monarchies. In the years following the first World War, an increasing number of Thai students went overseas.<sup>22</sup> The number of Thais studying abroad, especially of non-nobility origin, was still low until the revolution of 1932,<sup>23</sup> but the number must have gone up considerably in the years following. In 1963 almost 3,000 Thai students were studying in Europe, Australia, the U.S.A., and some Asian countries under the supervision of the Thai Civil Service Commission (Table 3).

Two aspects are significant for our problem of foreign education: first, the increasing proportion of higher civil servants educated abroad; and second, the monopolization of the ways and means of obtaining a foreign academic degree by members of the bureaucratic elite itself. Table 4 shows that only 26 per cent of those civil servants who entered government service before 1933 had

<sup>22</sup> In 1898 a centralized educational system was established. Before that date all basic education took place either in the royal palace in Bangkok or in Buddhist temple schools. In 1921 a primary school law introduced compulsory education, but this law has not been completely enforced up to now.

<sup>23</sup> Informants have claimed that before 1932 only about ten students of non-nobility origin have been sent abroad per year by the government.

TABLE 4. PER CENT DISTRIBUTION OF THAI CIVIL SERVANTS BY EDUCATION ABROAD AND YEAR ENTERED CIVIL SERVICE

Education Abroad	Year Entered Civil Service		
	1920–32	1933–45	1946–63
Studied abroad	26 ( 6)	63 (17)	93 (13)
Did not study abroad	74 (17)	37 (10)	7 ( 1)
Total	100 (23)	100 (27)	100 (14)

Note: Number of cases is shown in parentheses.

received a university education abroad, as against 93 per cent of those who joined the civil service after World War II. Since education in a foreign country is necessarily connected with some degree of acculturation, the bureaucratic elite is likely to develop a distinctive subculture. One aspect of this subculture is the change of values and attitudes, e.g. the reinterpretation of Buddhist values.<sup>24</sup>

*Control over distribution of status symbols.* A further important aspect of the differential acculturation of the bureaucratic elite has been the control and monopolization of access to foreign education by the bureaucratic elite itself. This has effectively closed the bureaucratic elite or at least limited access to it by diminishing the chance of persons with a different social background to advance into a higher civil service position. The following explanation is offered: Up to the reign of Chulalongkorn the Thai Civil Service was regulated by the *sakti na* system (system of dignity marks). These "dignity marks" attached to officials "ranged from 10,000 in the case of ministers in charge of the most important departments down to 400, at which the real official class appointed by the King may be said to have begun. Of *sakti na* grade below 400 but above 25 were a host of petty functionaries who were not appointed directly by the King, but by the ministers or other high officials."<sup>25</sup> These dignity marks were furthermore correlated with titles; thus a very precise and highly-graded rank hierarchy developed which regulated the rights, obligations, and duties of officials. In the Bangkok period the highest officials had to have a further qualification, namely, royal blood.<sup>26</sup> In this way the higher ranks were virtually closed to other officials. This restriction caused dissatisfaction and was one of the causes for the 1932 revolution. The *sakti na* system as part of the administrative regulation was abolished by a civil service law in 1928 and replaced by civil service ranks.<sup>27</sup> Today these ranks (first-class official, upper-second-class, lower-second-

class, etc.), which are not to be confused with the designations of the various positions like "chief of division" or "director-general," do in fact serve the same function as the former dignity marks.

Another development, which apparently took place after World War II, has brought the administrative practice even closer to the traditional model. Whereas a close relationship to the King was formerly a qualification for a high administrative position, today a degree from a foreign university serves more or less the same purpose. This custom has been institutionalized by regulations of the central agency, the Civil Service Commission, for all ministerial appointments (which under the traditional system were centralized in the hands of the king); it forms a division in the Prime Minister's office.<sup>28</sup> According to these regulations the holder of foreign academic degrees is entitled to specific and fixed civil service grades according to the type of academic degree, and the country where the degree was obtained. But further, a foreign degree has nowadays become almost a prerequisite for a higher civil service position or, in terms of our analysis, a qualifying status symbol for membership of the bureaucratic elite. In fact 73 per cent of all the higher civil servants in our sample who entered the Civil Service since 1932 have studied in a foreign university and most have received some sort of academic degree. If we consider only those who entered the Civil Service since World War II, the pattern is even more evident: 95 per cent have studied abroad.

A foreign education is very expensive. The costs incurred for two years study in the United States toward a master's degree will be close to \$10,000, a sum even the upper-class Thai finds extremely high. Furthermore, scholarships, the main avenue to foreign degrees, are mostly controlled by the Civil Service Commission. Those best placed to receive a scholarship are either government employees themselves—one-third of Thai students studying abroad in 1963 were in fact government officials taking leave of absence<sup>29</sup>—or sons or daughters of civil

<sup>24</sup> The reinterpretation of Buddhist values was one major subject of the fieldwork in Thailand. Some findings have been reported in Hans-Dieter Evers, *op. cit.*, chapter IV.

<sup>25</sup> Quaritch Wales, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>26</sup> Quaritch Wales, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>27</sup> Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>28</sup> *Organizational Directory of the Government of Thailand 1963/2506*, Bangkok: United States Operations Mission, 1963.

<sup>29</sup> For full data see Evers, *op. cit.*, Table 10. Only

servants. This is not necessarily connected with nepotism or any kind of irregular administrative procedure, but the fact that knowledge of a western language, usually English, is decisive in the competitive examination, and gives members of the westernized bureaucratic elite a far better chance than those who have not been socialized into a family where a knowledge of English and western behaviour patterns were common. The growing importance of foreign academic degrees, on the one hand, and the tendency towards monopolization of the ways to obtain them, on the other, provide further evidence for my thesis that the bureaucratic elite develops into a relatively closed group with class characteristics.

*Control over wealth.* My last point is concerned with another important aspect of elite of class formation, namely control over wealth and political power.

In his two studies on the Chinese community in Thailand, G. W. Skinner<sup>30</sup> has shown how the Chinese business elite and the Thai political and bureaucratic elites embarked on a long and enduring cooperation. Thai political leaders and officials provide protection and the many favours businessmen urgently need to be able to carry on their activities successfully in an underdeveloped economy, and the Chinese back the political and administrative power of the Thais by providing them with a share of their acquired wealth. This process was legally sanctioned in terms of the "Thai-ification" program, which debarred Chinese from certain sections of the economy and required Thai participation in others. The program was started by Phibun in 1948-49 and accelerated in 1951. "By the end of 1952 tens of Chinese leaders were managing Thai or genuinely Sino-Thai enterprises, and hundreds of government officials and other members of the Thai elite were either fully 'cut in' on Chinese business or serving on the boards of Chinese firms in a 'protective' capacity."<sup>31</sup> In 1955 most of the influen-

tial Chinese business leaders had formed business alliances with members of the Thai elite and the cooperation has increased rather than declined up to now.<sup>32</sup> This can be seen from the following table, which shows

TABLE 5. PER CENT DISTRIBUTION OF CHINESE LEADERS IN BANGKOK BY EXTENT OF RELATIONS WITH THAI ELITE AND GENERATION

Relations with Thai Elite	Generation		
	First	Second	Third
Extensive	18 (14)	27 (12)	45 (22)
Moderate	18 (14)	16 (7)	22 (11)
Little, none	64 (49)	57 (26)	33 (16)
Total	100 (77)	100 (45)	100 (49)

Note:  $\chi^2$  significant at .01 level. Number of cases is shown in parentheses. The data are based on 171 chosen leaders in 1955. For further detail see Skinner, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

the relationship between period of residence in Thailand and social contacts with the Thai elite.

The chance to acquire wealth in Thai society is therefore intimately connected with membership in either the political or the bureaucratic elite. This circumstance has certainly contributed largely to a further consolidation of the bureaucratic elite.<sup>33</sup>

*Double Identity, the Chinese in Modern Thailand*, Hong Kong University Press, 1960, p. 193.

<sup>32</sup> Skinner, *op. cit.*, p. 305. Similar alliances between the upper classes or elites have been noted for other multi-racial societies, e.g., Ceylon or Mauritius. R. Benedict writes: "Where the political climate permitted there arose a number of parallel economic classes and the vertical barriers between sections tended to diminish notably at the top, though in the positions just below the top competition may be increased." R. Benedict, "Stratification in Plural Societies", *American Anthropologist* 64 (1962), pp. 1233-1246. For the case of Ceylon see Hans-Dieter Evers, *Kulturwandel in Ceylon, eine Untersuchung über die Entstehung einer Industrie-Unternehmerschicht*, Baden-Baden, Germany: Verlag August Lutzeyer, 1964, pp. 71-81, 167.

<sup>33</sup> Another aspect of class formation and social mobility connected with the Chinese in Bangkok might be of some importance: those Thai migrating to Bangkok tend to occupy the lower strata of Bangkok society, while the Chinese or part of them are pushed up into the middle ranges due to their business cash income. It might therefore happen that the two sections of the Thai population—"workers" and "bureaucratic elite"—are separated by a strong Chinese middle class. Upward social mobility might then be further complicated for Thais. The 1960 Census data on migration have recently

students under the supervision of the Thai Civil Service Commission have been taken into account.

<sup>30</sup> G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: an Analytical History*, Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1957; and *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand*, Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1958.

<sup>31</sup> Skinner, *op. cit.*, p. 187 and R. J. Coughlin,

## SUMMARY

It is generally assumed that one of the effects of urbanization is a high rate of social mobility. Though very few studies on mobility in transitional societies have been published, most observers agree that increasing vertical as well as horizontal mobility is one of the striking features of westernization and urbanization in developing countries. That this generalization requires modification under certain circumstances has been shown by considering the case of Thai society.

Data collected on Thai elites in 1963 suggest that urbanization under western influences may lead to the formation of a new social class. Since social mobility was probably fairly high in the initial stages of urbanization and bureaucratization, the rate of mobility has apparently *declined* in some sections of Thai society since the 1930's. This is partly due to the formation, consolidation, and gradual closing of the bureaucratic elite, which has grown in size and

---

been analysed by E. C. Chapman and A. C. B. Allen, "Internal Migration in Thailand," paper read at the 38th Congress of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, Hobart, 1965.

developed class characteristics. It is suggested that the consolidation of the bureaucratic elite has been determined by three interrelated processes:

(1) Differential fertility between social strata: The reproductivity of the bureaucratic elite is still high enough to permit recruitment of new members from its own class.

(2) Differential acculturation and monopolization of status symbols: The traditional *sakti na* status system has been replaced by civil service ranks and academic degrees from foreign universities. Scholarships for overseas education are controlled by the civil service itself. Overseas education has thus worked as a mechanism to close entry into the bureaucratic elite and to give it a distinctive subculture.

(3) Bureaucratic control of wealth: The program for "Thai-ification" of the economy since 1948 has given a share of the income from the largely Chinese-owned industry to members of the administrative elite.

The conclusion is that urbanization in loosely-structured societies may lead to the formation of a more rigid class system and to a temporary decline in social mobility.