Nations in the agrarian state of development confront important challenges in developing rural areas. These include the creation of effective policy-making and administrative institutions, adjustment to mass participation, and developing the capacity to respond to the needs for improved literacy, public health, and incomes of rural residents. Yet many of these needs are often neglected. This article examines Thailand, a nation in the agrarian state. It will investigate the elite's role in and response to changing socio-economic and political forces in the development of rural change policies. Thailand is not atypical of nations in the agrarian state. Since 1932 it has had a military regime more often than intermittent periods of parliamentary rule. Its population of approximately 40 million persons has remained about 85% rural, with close to 80% of the total working force engaged in agriculture. Agriculture, the largest sectoral contributor to the gross national product (31% in 1973), has consistently received little more than token political elite attention. This article seeks to probe the factors underlying this phenomenon as well as those policy changes that have occurred. To do this, we will examine some propositions on the factors of policy change, then review the evolution of rural policies in Thailand and analyze these changes.

Propositions on Policy Change

Policy change, an important element of political change, is often
overlooked in the literature.\textsuperscript{2} Much of the political change scholarship focuses on deterministic factors of change, a thrust which is hardly conducive to entertaining actor-involved policy change. The interaction between elite, i.e., political and bureaucratic decision-making authorities, and deterministic or evolutionary (as we will call them) factors will become evident as our discussion ensues.

The key elements of policy change, i.e., authoritative public decisions, acts, and outcomes, are a set of dimensions: scope, rate, and ideology. The scope itself has two characteristics: function and space. Policy choices and changes can vary between integrated and discrete. The broader scope (functional) would be used to characterize integrated changes, e.g., changes encompassing a set, such as land tenure, input technology, delivery system structures, and marketing systems. Those rural policy changes on the narrow side of the spectrum would be limited merely to elements of the above set. The space characteristic of scope refers to the comprehensiveness of the agricultural sector to be covered by the policy, or the percentage of land area to be included. Figure 1 depicts these dimensions.

FIGURE 1: The Scope of Policy Change

The rate of change refers to the time period within which policy changes are planned or actually occur. This variable can range from rapid to gradual. When policy changes occur at the low ends of the rate and scope dimensions, the policies are characterized as incremental; those at the higher levels, revolutionary. The third dimension of policy change is the elite perspective or ideology. Here we are referring to a set of values which guide the development of policy choices. This dimension also has two characteristics—the degree of government intervention to stimulate change and the proportions of public and private ownership.

In examining rural change\textsuperscript{3} it becomes apparent that most changes are incremental. But rather than exploring the problem of why certain policy change types occur, we are exploring the reason for elite-initiated policy changes. Again based on the impression of afore-noted

\textsuperscript{2} For examples of these works, see Karl Deutsch, \textit{Nationalism and Social Communication} (New York: Wiley, 1953); Daniel Lerner, \textit{The Passing of Traditional Society} (New York: The Free Press, 1958); and Seymour M. Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy," \textit{American Political Science Review} (September 1959).

\textsuperscript{3} David F. Roth, "Towards a Multi-Dimensional Approach to Rural Policy Optimalization: The Case of Rural Change Strategies in Asia," \textit{Journal of Southeast Asian Studies} (March 1972), pp. 129-141.
case studies, it will be proposed that in non-revolutionary societies, such as Thailand, significant—i.e., program and/or substantial allocation—rural policy changes tend to occur only when the political elite's principal objective, power maintenance, is threatened. This condition can be triggered by some combination of the following factors: (1) threats to national or elite security by foreign or domestic sources, including foreign policy intervention; (2) major food shortages; and (3) short, intermediate and long-term socio-economic shifts. These include awareness-politicization, demographic shifts, and economic system shifts. Changes in awareness are often prompted by the extension of literacy and exposure to the mass media. The impact of this awareness can be noted in politicization, which can include citizen cognition and involvement in the political processes, e.g., protests and/or voting.4

Demographic shifts can also be a factor in policy change. These include movements of population from rural to urban areas or increases in the total population and/or population-land ratio (density). Changes in demographic patterns may affect performance objectives in such areas as food supply, health, housing, or education needs and thereby elite power maintenance and stability. If this occurs, then adaptive policy changes can and often do occur.

Shifts in the economic system can be seen when industrial contributions to the gross domestic product surpass that of agriculture, or when the labor force moves from predominantly agriculturally based to blue collar-industrial or white collar-service. Changes in economic performance, including recession, inflation, or policy failure, are also indicative of this category. Variations in the economic system can also lead to policy changes through shifts in the composition of the political elite or through the performance-power maintenance-policy adaptation process.

We will examine the proposition that policy changes primarily occur in response to political elite power maintenance needs. That is, there is little expectation in a political system whose ideology places a high value on individual economic freedom and superficially accepts the notions of political freedom to develop and implement policies aimed at “major” public-directed economic and social changes. Yet, the elite of the political system do seek to maintain political power, which may require adaptations to accommodate those sectors or groups which might withdraw their support for the regime. Policy changes for power maintenance assume conscious decisions for change. These often follow the impact of deterministic factors which focus on economic changes and which result in changes in the elite structure (rural elite v. urban elite dominance), and/or in the type of governance, e.g., from competitive-parliamentary to military regime. This process is depicted in Figure 2.

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**Thailand: Policy Change and Performance**

Any account of rural policy change in Thailand should commence with the political context, for it is from this that the existing structure takes its meaning. Thailand's political development can be traced to the modernizing influence of King Chulalongkorn who instituted Thailand's bureaucratic state with his 1892 reforms. Another major alteration came with the 1932 coups, which substantially altered the center of power—from the monarchy with its limited concerns for the socio-economic developments of the masses to a military-bureaucratic elite.

The Thai polity has been called a bureaucratic polity because the basis of its power has been an elite from the key sectors of this structure, the military and the civil service. An important characteristic of this political system type is that policy often flows from each ministry and from within its departments, rather than from a controlling party or military elite. Even during experiments with "democratic" institutions, such power remained with these groups and never shifted to the masses (the peasants or their representatives). In observing the dynamics of bureaucratic behavior, one notes the tension between the political officials, such as the governors or district officers, and the functional specialists, the representatives of various segments of the bureaucracy. Often in Thai governmental history, the politicians have lacked the capacity to exercise control over local representatives of the central bureaucracy. Further, it has also been characterized by inter-bureaucratic rivalry, including the intra-ministry rivalries. Thus Fred Riggs points to a situation in which the Irrigation and Rice Departments, both within the Agricultural Ministry, were carrying out competing extension programs within the same areas. The Irrigation Department sought to disseminate a short-term rice with the hope of developing multiple crops, while the Rice Department was distributing a new high-yielding longer-maturing seed which they had developed.

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The Thai bureaucratic structure has further been characterized as hierarchical and uninnovative. That is, changes tend to occur from elite decisions which are made through the hierarchy of the Ministry. This hierarchy includes political divisions at the regional (park) level, at the provincial (changwat) level (the Governor and his Board), at the District level (amphoe), the commune level, and ultimately at the village (headman and the local elite) level. It is argued that this bureaucratic structure is being increasingly coordinated by a developmentally-oriented political elite with greater attention devoted to the coordinating and planning efforts of the National Development Board. Further, while penetration of the bureaucracy and control are limited, in terms of personnel and resources, change is also beginning to originate at the lowest levels as the result of technological and social evolutions permeating the lowest rungs of village society. Clearly, Thailand's bureaucratic polity has not yet reached the state where central political control, the military, or a single party dominates the myriad of specialized governmental agencies involved in serving the society.

Thai rural policy can be characterized as incremental. The primary concern of governmental policies has been improved rice production towards increased government revenues. This has changed little since the rule of the monarchy. Changes are designed to occur “gradually,” an important value to the Thai elite. Until recently they have often not been planned or systematic, but discrete. The hope has been that these discrete decisions, which are made commensurate to existing resources, will have a cumulative impact on socio-economic change.

As this initial discussion of structural and policy types implies, rural policy changes have occurred in Thailand. Let us examine these, and how they are linked to performance needs and to factors associated with these changes.

**Rural Policy Changes:** Political elite objectives (power maintenance and elite welfare maximization) were realized until 1932 and between 1946 and the mid-1960s when adaptations were again required. Initial adaptations, altering production factors and later the configuration of production, were adequate until the 1960s. Then, alternative configurations became necessary due to the need for greater governmental capacity (revenues) and the affects of changing technology, urban problems, and population affects on the labor force structure.

With the abolition of slavery in the 1850s, another major governmental policy change occurred, the 1855 edict of King Mongkut allowing for expanded rice exports. With the growth of demand and the attraction of foreign goods—in particular textiles—the incentive for in-

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creased production presented itself to both government and farmer-producer. The government realized that exports could be taxed and produce revenues conducive to their first objective of maximizing elite wealth. They also realized that through popular satisfaction the power maintenance objective could be realized.

To promote production, a series of incentives including tax holidays and land exploitation decrees occurred. The King assured peasants they could farm around 25 rai (10 acres) each. Three types of landholdings evolved from these early Royal concessions. The first type, the "Reserve License," is issued for three years. There is no security of tenure, although the tenants are usually allowed to remain. The second type, the "exploitation testimonial" is issued to those in the first category after they have brought 75% of the land under cultivation. These rights are permanent and inheritable; transferability is difficult. The most secure land holding is the "title deed," which is given once the holding is cadastrally surveyed. This title includes unlimited transfer rights. Today these first two are granted by the District Officer, an important political resource and source of leverage for this official. The current cultivated lands amount to about 27 million acres. Title deeds have been issued for only 6 million of these, while "exploitation testimonials" have been issued to another 5 million and no deed has been issued to the farmers on the remaining 16 million acres.8

There is a marked link between land expansion and the value of exports (correlation coefficient = .80), in particular in the 1850-1930 period. But these economic changes were accompanied by major social and political changes as well. Farmers who were once slaves, living in an economy characterized by self-subsistence, found themselves having to pay taxes, not in kind but in money. They were also receiving money for their product. A monetized economy was replacing a barter economy. Producers were becoming consumers, creating demands for imported goods and potentially new Thai enterprises. Property rights replaced personal servitude, and freedom became a principal value and an indelible feature of contemporary Thai political and social orientations. Political changes occurred as well, and government intervention increased as the result of the emergence of a modernizing bureaucracy. In 1902, the Ministry of Agriculture grew to include the departments of canals, silk production, and land registration. Each of these new functional units was part of this intervention responding to international markets and the aforementioned Royal objectives. By 1890 the growth of rice production in the Central Plains around Bangkok was characterized by water communications accessible to Bangkok, which in turn provided a route to world markets. At first the Department of Irrigation failed to heed the advice of one foreign "expert, Van der

Heide, who in 1903 had advocated the merits of an extensive irrigating system for the Central Plain.\textsuperscript{9} Floods and drought affecting production later convinced the King that such adjuncts would be important to meet the people's concerns. This led to the South Prasak Canal project of 1922, the first major government project. Between 1930 and 1950 more irrigation works were completed, mostly in the Central Plains region. Government-sponsored construction of railways beginning in 1891 also facilitated the growth of rice production and marketing. A major expansion occurred between 1910 and 1920, when railroad kilometers doubled from 932 to over 2200. Following the Second World War, Thailand's government altered its laissez faire policy by intervening in the marketing process. It set up a monopoly on rice trade, the Government Rice Office, which required all millers to sell their surplus rice to it at a fixed price. This enabled it to buy at considerably below the world market price and make a handsome profit. In addition the government also received an export duty from the miller and made further gains from currency exchanges in the international trading. In 1951, following numerous complaints, special permits were issued by the Ministry of Commerce. These still required the exporter to purchase rice from the government at the fixed price, but he could now sell his rice for the prevailing world market price. He then had to surrender the export earnings to the Bank of Thailand at its official rate. Thus the government's exchange margin was still preserved.

Clearly to this point government intervention had been limited, yet with increased land inputs and irrigation improvements in a defined area, the Central Plains, production increased steadily until World War II; it then declined but recovered by the 1950s. Yet something was different. Yields were decreasing or stagnant, and so were government export revenues.\textsuperscript{10} This presented a clear warning signal to a government heavily dependent upon the export profits earned from this commodity. Some argue that population pressures were siphoning off rice production for domestic demand (Table 1) which could have contributed to foreign earnings.

Thus in 1950 one of two major policy changes in agricultural economics occurred—a shift towards diversification. This was followed in the 1960s by the expansion of production through increased technological adaptation and by a change in the economic configuration. Diversification involved the reduction of the rice area from about 87% of all crop areas in 1950 to 66% in 1970. In terms of change, the area in other crops increased 400% against only 15% for increases in rice acreage.\textsuperscript{11} Further, exports of these new cash crops are now equaling

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{9} J. H. Van der Heide, \textit{General Report on Irrigation and Drainage in the Lower Menam Valley} (Bangkok, 1903).
  \item \textsuperscript{10} Government of Thailand, \textit{Agricultural Census}, 1963 and 1970.
\end{itemize}
TABLE 1: Rice Exports and Domestic Consumption* (percentage of total production)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>% of Rice Exported</th>
<th>% of Rice for Domestic Consumption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1907/8-1909/10</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910/11-1914/15</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915/16-1919/20</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920/21-1924/25</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925/26-1929/30</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930/31-1934/35</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935/36-1939/40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-1944</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945-1947</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948-1950</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>13.56</td>
<td>86.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>19.01</td>
<td>80.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>19.46</td>
<td>80.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>12.32</td>
<td>87.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>13.40</td>
<td>86.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>9.17</td>
<td>90.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>13.42</td>
<td>86.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>99.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* Percentage for consumption also includes amounts stored for consumption the following years and amounts spoiled.

or exceeding rice in value. Maize alone may exceed the value of rice exports.

A second thrust at increasing agricultural production has been the adaptation and dissemination of scientific and technological breakthroughs. Biological research has produced new high yielding varieties, which can increase output from two to five fold. Yet Thailand has lagged considerably behind other Asian countries, in particular the Philippines (50% v. 8% in Thailand), in the adaptation of new high yielding varieties. This is partially due to the high productivity of native varieties. However, irrigation (in 1973 about 3% of all planted area) and use of fertilizer have become an ever apparent aspect of the productive processes.

Fertilizer imports are approximately half of what Thailand could economically utilize. Thus its usage on non-rice crops is but 10% of the amounts used in Japan and it is hardly used at all in rice cultura-

12 For a discussion of high yielding varieties, see particularly Ragavan Nair, "Agricultural and Price Policy Needs in High Yielding Rice Varieties," (Madison Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin, 1971).

13 Royal Irrigation Department, 1952; Thailand Department of Commerce and Statistics, Statistical Yearbook of Thailand; and Ministry of Agriculture, Agricultural Statistics of Thailand, 1969.
This may well be because of the limited amounts of income, credit, and land available to Thai padi farmers. In some areas, such as the Northeast, low income, distribution problems, and uncertain rainfall contribute to low usage.

The result of these increases in inputs can be seen, in particular with rice, by moderate increases in yield. In a study of scientific methods and technological adaptations, Greene found that water (e.g., irrigation) was the key input factor vis-a-vis labor, fertilizer, and pesticides in determining the marginal increment in rice yields. In studying the factors of adoption among his sample of Central Plains farmers, Greene also found (in 1967–68) that improved fertilizers “did not float away,” and that learning—the belief that fertilizers would increase yield—was most important. Price turned out not to be a factor, since farmers were willing to pay higher prices for fertilizer if they were confident that the performance would meet their expectations. Size did not seem to be a factor with regard to fertilizer adoption; small farmers seemed as disposed as large ones to adopt. Water availability, however, was a key factor in determining whether or not the farmer adopted fertilizer. It was further found that water availability not only helped in terms of double cropping, but also increased yields by a factor of two or three, even with the use of local varieties.

In his study, the author found that there was a relatively high rate of adoption—more than 50% with the exception of water pump ownership or rental, which in two villages was below 30%. The rate of adoption that occurred in the Central Plains is not the case throughout Thailand however. In fact, regional disparities in income (Table 2), production, yields, and unemployment prompted major changes in the Second Five Year Plan, specifically an emphasis on regional development. It was not, however, merely the ineffectiveness of the extension program in disseminating knowledge and technology. There was also a model of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2: Regional Disparities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Households with Radio, 1969 (percentage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Plains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Kingdom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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15 Brook A. Greene, "Rate of Adoption of New Farm Practices in the Central Plains, Thailand" (Thesis, Cornell University, 1971).
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., p. 33.
violent dissent in Vietnam, a growing tenancy problem within Thailand itself, violent protests in three parts of the nation, one of the lowest per capita incomes ($180 per capita) in Southeast Asia (which itself reflected the regional disparities), a gradual decrease in the possibilities for land expansion, and growing urban problems compounded by the pressure on the land (Table 3), which has led to increased urban

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population (in thousands)</th>
<th>Area Under Production (in thousands of rai)</th>
<th>Farm Density (rai per person)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>In Agriculture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>8,266</td>
<td>6,612</td>
<td>13,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>9,207</td>
<td>7,366</td>
<td>16,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>11,506</td>
<td>9,204</td>
<td>20,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>14,464</td>
<td>11,571</td>
<td>23,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>17,317</td>
<td>13,853</td>
<td>30,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>15,600</td>
<td>34,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>26,257</td>
<td>20,480</td>
<td>46,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>34,152</td>
<td>25,955</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

migration. Industrial job formation, which increased only .4% between 1960–1970, was not able to match this rise in the urban labor supply. Sixty per cent of the urban labor force is now male, and with more women seeking work there will be even more pressure to provide jobs. With American expenditures during the late 1960s and early 1970s, inflation and boom for some compounded the poverty of the masses. Rice shortages appeared in 1972 (production was down 13% from 1971) following drought, and the government had to use the rice premium (its export tax) to augment the domestic supply. It did this by increasing the rice premium, thus discouraging exports. But inflation still prompted political dissent. Newly mobilized students, bureaucrats, and labor became ever more vociferous in the early 1970s. This dissent clearly threatened political stability throughout the 1972–75 era and in October 1973, with military acquiescence, led to the overthrow of the Thanom-Prapas regime.

A statement on regional development also came in the 1967–1971 Five Year Economic and Social Development Plan. It called for the creation of Regional Development Committees—Provincial Administrative Organs, Municipalities and Districts—to administer the Plan’s policies that sought to enhance infrastructure, feeder roads, irrigation, electricity, water supply, and “to organize farmer associations at village levels to promote farmer’s interests.” The armed forces carried out a project utilizing Mobile Development Units under the Ministry of Defense which primarily provided medical assistance to remote hill tribes and border populaces. Agricultural extension services were also to be strengthened to augment the number of demonstration plots of selected high yield varieties of rice, promote use of fertilizers, expand
The initial governmental response to regional disparities occurred in the early 1960s under Prime Minister Sarit, who noted the increased insurgency in the Northeast region and the instability in Laos. In an initial attempt to deal with this, U.S. aid programs helped to develop the multi-purpose approach to regional development with pilot programs in the Northeast region. In 1961 the Northeast Development Committee under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister was established to study the region's problems and to formulate responses to these problems. In 1962 Sarit created the National Security Command which developed programs of its own. Its core was the Mobile Development Unit (MDU), which became engaged in multi-purpose programs (intended to reduce insurgency) including highways, community development, irrigation, cooperatives and health. In 1963 the Thai government created the Rural Development Operational Planning Subcommittee under the Northeast Committee for Economic Development. The chairman was provided by the Bureau of the Budget.\(^{18}\)

Among the key innovations to occur from these administrative innovations were the emphasis on road building (overemphasized at the cost of other important needs) and the creation of regional development centers. Changwad officials, however, preferred to deal directly with the ministries and felt the regional centers were a nuisance.\(^{19}\) Initially the regional centers were under the Community Development Department, while the Changwads were directly under the Ministry of Interior. In 1964 the Thai government commenced an American financed Accelerated Rural Development program (ARD). Its main


\(^{19}\) Ibid.
thrust was to be “Road Building and Coordination,” which commenced in the fall of 1964. It was assigned to the director general of local administration in the Ministry of Interior. In early 1965 Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn called for acceleration of rural development in areas threatened by infiltrations. In December 1965 the Thai government reorganized the ARD Program. The Committee for Coordination and Operational Planning was replaced with a larger and higher level Central Committee for Accelerated Rural Development in the Office of the Prime Minister. By 1973 ARD Programs were being provided to 27 Changwads in the Northeast, North and Central-South portions of Thailand.

It is clear that the governmental adaptations have shown continuity and a recognition of the basic problems of rural stagnation (including declining rice production per capita); the government has seen the importance of improved social welfare distribution in the rural areas, and the strategic adaptation to accomplish this, regional development. This is again present in the Third Five Year Plan, which stresses the need “to reduce interregional disparities and to promote social justice.” Yet, in spite of this recognition, something is clearly going awry.

Policy changes have been predominantly narrow in scope, responding initially to the export needs in agriculture and later to the economic concerns of a limited population in the Northeast and in Southern Thailand. The basic objective has been the creation of an effective marketing infrastructure. Multi-purpose programs were later spoken of as inter-sectoral developments, yet neither was fully realized in the implementation of these policy goals. Thus policy goals have become broad in scope, but not the programs or the outcomes. The rate of change has been incremental, and there is no intent to alter the existing rural system at an accelerated pace, even if words to this effect have been uttered by recent heads of government. Governmental penetration has also varied; communications between the center and local governments have been noticeably extended, yet there is little evidence of improved coordination, an important aspect of penetration. Nor is there evidence of development-oriented party or military control over the bureaucracy. Scoville and Dalton’s comments on Thai rural development efforts, which existed prior to American aid commitments, might yet serve to depict this undertaking:

Early rural development activities of the Thai government were characterized by a dispersal of efforts over many fields. Little intensive effort was exerted in any field and coordination was almost non-existent. Agriculture and community development ... did not focus their efforts on common target areas ... No effective mechanisms existed for coordinating development either horizontally among specified fields or vertically from Bangkok down through the layers of administration to the villagers.
Efforts were also dispersed throughout the country, although priority regions with economic communications, administrative and security needs were sharply discernible.\(^{20}\)

Thus, in terms of policy the main changes are noted in policy goals and only on a limited basis in terms of policy outcomes. The construction of roads, an important infrastructure, and crop diversification provide the two most outstanding outcome changes. But why policy goal change? Let us examine the propositions presented in the introduction, namely, that determinist ( politicization, economic change, and national security threats) and elite innovation factors prompt policy changes.

**Policy Goal Changes: Factors**

**Politicization:** With limited experiences in electoral politics (seven elections between 1945–1975), there had been little encouragement until 1974–75 for public involvement in political affairs. Neher suggests that participation at the local level is greater than might be expected, given the limited participation opportunities for affecting national policy decisions.\(^ {21}\) However, he did observe the existence of a high degree of apathy, commonly found among persons with low incomes and educational attainments.

The three groups of villagers in Northern Thailand—the apoliticals, the politicals and the village elites—are clearly distinguishable on the basis of four criteria: contact with officials, membership in groups, participation in the planning of development projects, and knowledge of the political process. The apoliticals have no substantive contacts with district officials and they are not members of organized groups. They have not participated directly in project planning and are generally inarticulate in describing how projects are planned and implemented. The politicals include villagers who have a high degree of contact with officials and who are members of structured groups such as commune councils, farmers' groups, irrigation associations, village temple committees and cooperatives. The politicals participate in various village and commune projects and have a rather clear understanding of how such projects are planned and implemented.\(^ {22}\)

If this implies that status involves cooperation among those likely to participate and absence of participation and cooperation for those of lower status this would be misleading. For in one illustration he notes that cooperation may well be a function of village or district leadership. Thus, if a leader is able to mobilize people by offering them something in return, he may even co-opt those who fear losing their


\(^{21}\) Neher, "The Politics of Change in Rural Thailand."

status by the change. Thus one district officer seeking to set up an irrigation association found leaders of two lesser political units (communes) unwilling to join because they were canal chiefs and feared losing their status and income as the result of the more modern, larger irrigation project. But when they were offered the opportunity to manage the dams for a salary under the new association, they conceded and joined. Neher also presents cases of villages with access to the district officer being far more vocal in communicating their demands than those without access (roads or effective leadership intermediaries).23

But this participation is limited to local decision-making and is circumscribed by the constraint of access to the policy-involved political elite. This participation is also limited to affecting outputs or the distribution of goods, not the determination of policy goals. Another factor inhibiting effective participation is individualism which tends to inhibit the formation of both large-scale political and economic organizations. Phillips commented on this, observing:

I am referring . . . to the Buddhist emphasis on the primacy of individual action and individual responsibility . . . it is imperative to point out that the principal tenet of Hinayana Buddhism is the complete psychological freedom, isolation and responsibility of every person. This is . . . the notion that every person is a free agent responsible only to and for himself and that he inevitably reaps the fruits of his own conduct.24

This individualism has often led to the downfall of non-military parliamentary experiments. While there have been more than a dozen elections since 1933, most have been cancelled by coups or merely used to legitimize coups. Thus whereas elections often act as a catalyst for political awareness and participation, in Thailand the opposite seems to have been the case. Another important ingredient conducive to participation is awareness as measured by literacy and mass media exposure. Literacy has increased by some 18% to 70% between 1947 and 1970, and media exposure has done the same.25 Yet awareness without political participatory opportunities is hardly conducive to influencing policy change. Demonstrations and direct political access have been limited for most small farmers—at least until the 1970s. Major jumps in literacy and in newspaper circulation (in particular 1953–1955) are associated with the period in which a major policy change did occur, the diversification movement. But as we shall see, there are alternative explanations for this change which we will also be examining.

Access and media exposure are often heightened by the processes

23 Ibid., p. 54.
of demographic shifts and the tensions resulting from such changes as alterations in the man to land ratio. Urbanization (15% in 1975) has been a very slow process but has provided the basis for other factors affecting political participation, urban unemployment, the industrial setting within which new economic groups emerge, and the haven for the increasingly vocal university and secondary students and public bureaucrats. While students within both Bangkok and provincial university settings have served as articulators and mobilizers of tenant and subsistence small holding farmers, little has yet been gained by them in terms of policy actions even though goals were altered following the 1973 student-led overthrow of the Thanom-Prapas military regime to include alleviation of the tenancy dilemma.

In March 1974 the first farmer demonstration was organized by students on a variety of grievances. The farmer-student coalition won. This positive feedback to political novices encouraged further activity and it came. In June and July of 1974 protesting farmers organized by students returned and this time gained a written agreement from the Deputy Premier, Dr. Prakurb, which promised the farmers: (1) government appropriation of lands for troubled farmers, including either their own lost lands or newly opened government lands; (2) strict action by the Prime Minister against "cheating capitalist farmers"; (3) the return of exorbitant interest or lands lost to capitalists; (4) government restrictions against capitalists' attempts to transfer rights of seized lands; and (5) government-provided lands to farmers on a cooperative basis.

As this was not implemented, they returned in November for a 17-day demonstration involving more than 20,000 persons, including dissident monks who led the march. The government then agreed to fulfill their commitments. By the end of 1974 the government priorities had noticeably shifted from industry to agriculture, a clear effect of growing peasant awareness and participation. This same factor may also be responsible for the growth in rural insurgency, which increased from 3500 in 1972 to 5000 in 1973 to more than 8000 in 1974.26

But this goal change has not yet been meaningfully translated into policy acts. Urbanization has proceeded at a very slow rate, less than 3% for each of the past three decades, but the balance of political forces has shifted to the urban forces in the capital. It can also be seen that man-to-land ratios are a significant factor affecting the policy course. This process is reflected in production changes, which have expanded for many years as the direct result of increased area planted.27 However, the correlation between these variables for the years 1906–1971 (.16) suggests a very weak link at best. The decrease in production per capita is a direct reflection of both governmental ineffectiveness

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and a rapid rate of population growth. During the decade between 1946 and 1956 population growth exceeded 21%. This increased to 49% growth for the ensuing decade and in the eight years between 1967 and 1975, growth has surpassed 31%. These have in turn affected gross national product per capita, which has also shown only marginal per annum increments.\textsuperscript{28}

It was earlier posited that shifts in the economic system might be associated with rural development policy changes. Yet one indicator, the percentage contribution of agriculture to the gross national product, has declined from 45\% in 1950 to less than 30\% in 1975. While this is occurring, the rural (primarily agricultural) labor force is remaining nearly constant.\textsuperscript{29} Thus there is little shift that can be associated with policy change. Perhaps because of this virtual stagnation in terms of the evolution of the economic system from an agrarian to an industrialized economy, policy adaptations have been minimal. In terms of deterministic factors, this has been more directly related to the demographic change of man to land ratio and the failure of the economic system to substantially increase productivity.

\textit{Economic changes:} Other factors that have affected political changes and thereby impinge on the need for policy changes have been both inflation and recession. The rate of inflation has been particularly marked during the past four years. The consumer price index shows advances of more than 10\% per annum. Inflation was clearly a factor affecting the discontent of the urban forces and thereby contributing to the massive public frustration with the Thanom-Prapas military regime in 1973. It was also a factor (in particular the high rice prices) prompting a further reexamination of agricultural conditions and performance. Countering this pattern, with possible salutary effects for urban residents, were 1975 American exports of rice. This had the impact of lowering international rice prices by half—with possible detrimental consequences for Thai farmers.

In terms of economic performance, with little movement in the composition of the GNP or labor force, an association between these forces and policy change cannot be argued. However, the impact of their growth rates in terms of the creation of new political forces and new needs for governmental priorities is possibly far more significant than one might realize merely by viewing these variables. Most noteworthy of these is American investment, which triggered a rapid increase in GNP between 1969 and 1974.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{28} Ingram, \textit{Economic Change in Thailand}, p. 222.
\textsuperscript{29} Ministry of Agriculture, \textit{Agricultural Statistics of Thailand}, 1974. Also see Gille et al., \textit{Demographic Outlook of Thailand and Some Implications} (National Research Council of Thailand), p. 30.
\textsuperscript{30} Ingram, \textit{Economic Change in Thailand}, p. 223.
National Security: But perhaps the most appealing proposition for non-elite forces prompting policy change—at least as gathered from the literature and personal field research—is the threat to national security and foreign intervention. In 1960, the Thai military, noting increasing insurgency in the Northeast and across the borders in Laos, realized that rural areas, in particular those in the Northeast, were not secure. In January 1961 the government established the Northeast Development Committee and later in 1962 Sarit created the National Security Command. These were preludes to an ever increasing effort which involved the creation of multi-purpose programs, primarily designed to improve agricultural production, income, health and education among the residents of the Northeast. During the period between 1962 and 1968 a noticeable budget shift occurred. In 1962 only 28% of the Central government's budget was being allocated to the Northeast; by 1968 this increased to 36%, while the budget for the Central Plains declined from 36% in 1962 to 30% by 1968. It should be noted, though, that the main thrust for rural development, the accelerated rural development program, received only 2% of the total budget for the Northeast. Also between 1964 and 1971 almost all of the ARD funds were used for road building. While some 3700 kilometers of all-weather roads were built by 1971, the need to link all villages with these simple roads would require the construction of an additional 16,000 kilometers. At the 1973 pace of 1000 kilometers per year, another 16 years would be required to complete them.

Clearly the recognition of development's link to security, as noted in Prime Minister Sarit and Thanom Kittikachorn's statements on accelerated rural development, highlights the association between the national security need and policy change. As the result of this program, policy changes included goals, budget allocations, administrative infrastructure relations and minimal changes in outcomes.

Rather than the previous priorities to the Central Plains, where irrigation and diversification were advanced and supported by access to urban markets, rural development policies shifted to infrastructure development in the Northeast and South. While budget allocations (as already noted) shifted slightly, more notably major administrative changes occurred. An extensive rural development structure was created in the Prime Minister's office and later shifted in 1973 to the Ministry of Interior. Regional centers were created and links between ministries were altered, first through the regional centers, then directly to the Changwad administrations. Feedback from the local villages to the provincial governments and planning coordination between the

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31 Scoville and Dalton, "Rural Development in Thailand"; also Siffin, The Thai Bureaucracy.
32 Ibid., pp. 65–66.
Prime Minister's Planning and Research Bureau of the Office of the Under-Secretary to the Prime Minister and the National Economic Development Board and Budget Bureau improved. Yet planning and implementation suffered from frequent conflicts or poor communications between ministries, the budget bureau, and local governmental bodies.

Policy outcomes, perhaps the most significant indicator of rural policy change, is still less than impressive. The income gap remains nearly two to one between the Central Plains and the Northeast. While the government's Third Development Plan has recognized the need for cooperation and land consolidation, poorer farmers, often tenants with little tenure security and limited land size (less than 10 hectares on the average), cannot alone afford the inputs necessary to increase their production and well-being. Thus, cooperative movements have been encouraged. Yet, tenancy is increasing—e.g., in the Central Plains in 1965, only 41% of the peasants were owner farmers while 56% were tenant farmers. The tenancy legislation of 1960 providing for low rental rates and the security of five year lease periods has often been ignored. Nor have the cooperative movements taken hold. Only 8% of all farmers are able to utilize the credit cooperatives with their low rates of interest. This has been largely due to limited financial resources allocated by the government for this end. Land cooperatives have been encouraged in selected experimental areas, with little success so far. In 1973 the Cooperative Act was amended and the Farmers Association Act was merged with it. The objective was to form farmers associations and, ultimately from these, cooperatives at the District (Amphoe) level.

Elite Intervention and Policy Change: The two most prominent conditions of elite intervention apply when a new set of policy-making elite come to power and when these elite are oriented towards some ideological or other social-economic objectives. Most political elite in Thailand have been primarily concerned with maintaining their own power for the prestige and wealth creating opportunities associated with the office.

In reviewing the major policy changes we note that these also coincide with increased tensions in the society and threats to national security when public dissent became increasingly more apparent and threatening. Diversification came in the 1950s when population pressure had markedly cut the potential supply of rice for domestic needs. Technological adaptations also occurred because of the need to increase food production to meet the growing demands of the rapidly increasing population. And moves to improve the rural living and economic conditions of the people in the Northeast only occurred following the perception of threats to the political stability of the Thanom government. Finally, government attempts to alter the ten-
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ancy situation, a major policy shift, appeared possible only after the overthrow of the Thanom-Prapas-Pote clique and the threat to the political viability of Dr. Sanya's ensuing interim regime.

Prior to these crises, government intervention had primarily been limited to manipulation of the rice premium. In the 1960s, the price has been raised to assure adequate food stocks to meet the growing population, but more recently (1973–74) it was lowered to encourage sagging exports. Clearly the reliance on this form of intervention as opposed to more essential alternatives reflects the lack of awareness and concern for the major problems of rural Thailand. This policy mode has been primarily a palliative rather than a cure. With growing peasant, student and urban mobilization, the conflict between these forces will rapidly alter the viability of this policy option and prompt a deeper look into Thailand's rural ills. These deterministic factors are clearly bringing closer the day when elite intervention will encompass broader goals than adaptive-power maintenance.

Reflections

Up until the 1950s, the beginning of Thailand's transition from an agrarian to a pre-industrial society, the predominant explanation of policy change was the "elite learning model." This occurred within a bureaucratic structure characterized by limited penetration, internal conflict rather than coordination, inadequate resources and restrained commitment. Both the pre-1932 monarchy and the post-1932 military-bureaucratic elites sought to maximize their own welfare while maintaining political control. To accomplish these objectives, rice production and agricultural export increases were an essential aspect. This was readily achieved through expansion of cultivable land use and limited technological adaptation, e.g., irrigation. Later in the 1950s diversification was sought. Yet population pressures, noted in man-to-land ratios, kept expanding with the result that rural poverty remained even though yields and exports (at higher prices) increased. Thus by the 1950s the elite's adaptive capacity or will to make major reforms had failed, leading to a shift in planning priorities and ultimately to a change in the political elites themselves. Clearly, deterministic forces have prevailed since the late 1950s: increased population limited land expansion potential, while other resource constraints limited scientific and technological adaptations.

Elite attempts to gain control have been made difficult by the transition of Thai society, which is now underway. This fundamental change from rural to urban dominance is evident in the role of recently mobilized but potent new forces—students, labor and bureaucrats. Their frustration over the effects of inflation, first prompted by the heavy inflow of American investment in the late 1960s and later compounded by the energy-price crisis with its accompanying world
inflation, has been another deterministic factor prompting these political changes. There have been incidents of students mobilizing peasants and bringing them to the capital to protest price and tenancy problems. Even the government recognizes the problems and the need to organize peasants. Some conscientious public servants, including a high Ministry of Agriculture official have expressed concern:

We cannot rejoice merely over the improvement of rice production. We can only be happy if our farmers come into their own and play their rightful role in the development of Thai society. . . . the land problem is the most serious in Thai agriculture. Not every landlord is bad, but most extort high rents from their tenants. The middlemen are the biggest exploiters of the farmers.

What the government must carry out is land reform. . . There must be a fair distribution of land resources for farming. We won’t shoot landlords, but we will set up optimum limits for ownership of land, these will not be the same throughout the whole country. Farmers will then be given the land and instructions on how to plant it. Cattle ranching and rearing of water buffaloes must be promoted.33

While these objectives have been stated by one of the highest officials in the Ministry of Agriculture, actual policy is one of increasing productivity as opposed to general welfare. Not only is income distribution failing to ameliorate the existing maldistribution, but in fact the gap is likely to increase. Existing policies favor rich farmers. With credit and capital they can afford larger lands to work in cooperatives, using machinery, water pumps, and high yielding varieties. They also have access to world market outlets and are increasing their incomes, while the mass of poor farmers, confronting inflation and subsistence production, remain behind.

Low mobilization of the peasants is in fact a desired end for harried urban politicians. The quieter the peasant, the better their chances for dealing with the increasing demands and mobilization of the new urban forces. This they feel is particularly necessary given the limited governmental capacity and resources. Evidence of this is further noted in the new Constitution, which was passed by the National Assembly in October 1974. This document and the accompanying election system do little to transfer power from the existing elite to the rural masses. The appointed Senate and election districting will ensure the perpetuation of the existing ruling classes. Given the existing value system with the preference for social freedom and the economic equivalent, the private enterprise-free market system, the role of demand becomes a key factor in the allocation of public and private (scarce) resources. Given the low mobilization of the rural poor majority and the increasing mobilization and demand articulation of the urban

groups, there is little hope for a major change in the status of Thailand's majority short of a violent confrontation. This could happen if student mobilization of the peasants occurs or if the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives' succeeds in organizing widespread farmers associations and cooperatives, which in turn could lead to increased productivity and income per capita for the rural masses. Even with mobilization of the masses and government policy commitment to social justice in terms of widespread "welfare or well-being" of the masses (which is unlikely at this juncture), major improvements in administration and program coordination would also be needed.

In attempting to explain policy change, we noted that the most salient apparent factors were deterministic pressures: from social change (in particular population pressures on land and food supplies), growing awareness and politicization, and internal threats to political stability. It was elite adaptation, rather than elite-initiated social change objectives, that resulted in the rural policy changes. It is posited that this case is not unique, that the same factors are important ingredients of rural change policy in other non-ideological systems. Where cultural factors (such as status concerns) often inhibit upward communications and political preoccupations of power maintenance tend to result in the political elite's filtering out of policy change suggestions (especially when there is no minimal threat to their position), then little policy change can be expected. Thailand is not unusual, government priorities have long favored the needs of the ruling classes as opposed to the majority of subsistence farmers. For this group, minimal resources (monies, supplies, and administrative services) have been allocated. Policy changes which result in sustained and effective efforts to bring about rural development for the majority of the population may only come as the result of a major threat to the political elite's power.

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