Department of History, National University of Singapore

THE FORMATION OF A SOCIAL CLASS STRUCTURE:

Urbanization, Bureaucratization and Social Mobility in Thailand.

HANS-DIETER EVERS

ABSTRACT

Urbanization and bureaucratization are usually connected with a high rate of social mobility in western industrialized societies. In Thailand, however, mobility has declined at least between 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.

I INTRODUCTION

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."[1] 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:[2]

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

(2) Due to the concentration of administrative agencies and large scale organizations in urban areas, that is bureaucratization, the number of nonmanual positions of the labour force increases

---

1. Lipset, S.M. and R. Bendix, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), p. 280.
2. Lipset and Bendix (1959), pp. 216-218, 59 and S.M. Lipset, "Social Mobility and Urbanization", *Rural Sociology,* XX (1955), 220-228.

100

with the growth of a city and therefore also the opportunity to move into a nonmanual position.

(3) Population growth and economic development is faster in cities than in other communities, so that there are also more new positions to be filled. As 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.

These four factors connected with the process of urbanization, namely occupational specialization, bureaucratization, migration and differential fertility also operate in non-industrialized, transitional societies. Some of these factors might, however, turn out to be of a quite different nature from that in European and American industrialized societies and, reinforced by other intervening variables, produce different results. Though it can still be said, that these factors are connected with urbanization and influence the rate of mobility it is by no means sure that they will also produce the same result as predicted by Lipset and Bendix, namely increased mobility. This will be demonstrated by data collected during a pilot-study on elites in Thailand.[3]

I hope to show that in the course of urbanization social mobility into at least one specific stratum of Thai society has declined, and that this is due to a large extent to exactly the same factors that Lipset and Bendix hold to be responsible for the increase of social mobility in the course of urbanization. These factors are those already mentioned, 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. (For an account of how the data were gathered see Appendix). 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 is also at some stage connected with 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.

II STRATIFICATION AND MOBILITY OF THAI SOCIETY

Most authorities assure us that social mobility is and always has been very high in Thai society,[4] though no special study on this subject has been published so far, and relevant field studies, do not indicate any exceptionally high rate of status mobility.[5] 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."[6] There is nevertheless a very elaborate system of fixed ranks which has its roots in the traditional *sakdi na* system, whereby Thais were assigned a numerical status index according to their position or occupation.[7] But movement from occupation to occupation up and down the hierarchy was not and is not restricted by birth or other factors.[8] Mobility is sanctioned in the Thai Buddhist value system, by which a person's

---

4. 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), 185; Ludwig Hamburger, "Fragmentierte Gesellschaft, die Struktur der Thai-Familie", *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 17 (1965), 49-72; Lucien M. Hanks, Jr., "Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order", *American Anthropologist*, 64 (1962), 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.

5. Ernest E. Boesch, "Autoritaet und Leistungsverhalten in Thailand", in *Thailand Studien*, Vol. XV der Schriften des Instituts für Asienkunde in Hamburg, (Frankfurt a.M. und 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, *Bangkuad, 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, a Social Study of Northeastern Thai Farmers who periodically migrated to Bangkok and became Pedicab Drivers* (New Haven, Conn.: 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).

6. Embree 1960, p. 182.

7. 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),

8. Hanks 1962, p. 1252.

status derives from religious merit, acquired in previous lives.[9] As everybody may do good and acquire merit and thus 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",[10] thus, however, confusing ideology and social reality.[11] The social 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.[12] 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.

A similar uncertainty due to the lack of data arises when we consider whether there is a class structure in Thai Society. Hanks developing his argument from the Thai value system, emphatically denies the existence of a class system in Thai society, without however differentiating 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."[13] 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.[14]

It is not hard to decide between Hanks and Skinner. Efforts to depict social classes in Thai urban society have failed not because

9. Boesch 1962, p. 34; Hanks 1962; Textor 1961, 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 i. Br./Germany: Arnold Bergstraesser Institut, 1964) MS.

10. Hanks 1964, p. 203.

11. 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 terminology. Rank or status is determined by bloodrelationship 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), 585-587.

12. Bosech 1962; 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), 9-14.

13. Hanks 1962, p. 1252.

14. Skinner 1958, pp. 18-19.

of misconstruing the nature of the Thai social order, but because a class system is just in the process of evolving, and rapid social change makes it difficult to construct a static model of Thai society.

III URBANIZATION AND BUREAUCRATIZATION: 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 civil servants though still recruited largely from among the princes and members of the nobility, received fixed salaries and had regulated working hours.[15] Civil servants were trained at the Royal Page School, the forerunner of Chulalongkorn University, and sent abroad in increasing numbers. As 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 in the rest of the country, mostly due to immigration of rural Thai and Chinese.[16]

The most conspicuous event, connected with urbanization and bureaucratization was, however, the revolution of 1932. The growing number of officials, civil as well as military, necessary to run a modernized administration, was 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.[17]

Social mobility before and after the revolution of 1932.

Though the highest and politically most important positions were held by royal nobility before 1932, recruitment for the lower ranks of the civil service provided opportunities for many ambitious young men from Bangkok and from the provinces to move up the social ladder. Interviews with higher Thai civil servants and the examination of their life histories showed, however, that after the revolution competition for civil service positions became

---

15. Mosel 1957.
16. 37.6% in the decade 1919-1929, and 25.0% in the decade 1937-1947. See Wilson 1962, p. 48 and Blanchard et al., 1958 p. 50.
17. 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 1962, pp. 11-16.

more intense 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. Though there are some difficulties in interpreting the results of this study as I have pointed out in the appendix, the data are still very much in line 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 whose who became civil servants after the revolution:

TABLE 1
THAI CIVIL SERVANTS 1963
INTER-GENERATIONAL MOBILITY
N = 60

Father's occupation of civil servants,
who entered government service:

	in and before 1932	after 1932
	%	%
Government service	19	51
Professional	5	8
Business	33	31
Farmer	43	10
	100	100
	N = 21	N = 39

These data warrant the conclusion that social mobility has *declined* after 1932 despite continuing urbanization and bureaucratization. In fact the bureaucratic elite has become more self-sufficient as new members have tended to be recruited from its own ranks. This tendency towards self-recruitment becomes apparent in the following table:

TABLE 2
THAI CIVIL SERVANTS 1963
INTER-GENERATIONAL MOBILITY

	Entered civil service		
	1920—1932	1933—1963	
Father was civil servant	4	17	21
Father was no civil servant	19	24	43
	23	41	64

Chi-square: significant at .05 level.

105

The figures in table 1 and 2 are of even greater significance if we consider the occupational structure of Thai society as a whole. The civil servants certainly account for less than 0.5 p.c. of the total population whereas the farming population constitutes about 85 p.c. For greater Bangkok itself an estimate based on the census of 1960 gives the following percentages[18]:

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

These figures show that about 60 p.c. of the Higher Civil Servants have been recruited from occupational groups which constitute less than 4 p.c. of the total population. Another recruiting field, for higher Civil Service positions, though far less important than the bureaucratic elite itself are families with a business background. As 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, where 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 (though perhaps no absolute) decline in the rate of social mobility (at least into the bureaucratic upper class) and a more rigid system of social stratification.

IV CLASS FORMATION: THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE BUREAUCRATIC ELITE

I shall now turn to an examination of some factors which 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 —

---

18. *Thailand Population Census, 1960, Changwad Series* (Bangkok: Central Statistical Office, National Economic Development Board, 1963). The above estimate is condensed from the re-grouped 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.

106

our data suggest 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. That self-recruitment of new members from their own group, that is the gradual closing of the bureaucratic elite was and remained possible from a purely numerical or demographic point of view may be due to the fact that the "differential fertility" as decribed 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 usally 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 very likely that the birth rate of this class has not fallen very much under the national average and that the number of children reaching the adult age is still fairly large. This may partly be due to the better medical facilities available to upper class families and their higher standard of living. Though no data are available to prove this point I nonetheless put forward the *hypothesis* that demographic mobility into a newly formed upper class is negligible.

Differential acculturation.

Since it seems that a consolidation of the bureaucratic elite was most probably not hampered by demographic factors, I can now turn to the examination of those factors which give the bureaucratic elite certain class characteristics or — as I suggest — develop the bureaucratic elite into 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 educa-

107

tion, that means the part-socialization of selected members of Thai society into another culture.

Contacts between Thailand and the West go back to the 16th century[19] but up to the thirties of the present century intensive contacts have been 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. In the time of Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) it had become customary to send the royal princes and other members of the nobility abroad to be educated, mainly in the European monarchies. In the years following the first World War after basic education had been broadened,[8] an increasing number of Thai students went overseas.[20] The number of Thais studying abroad, especially of non-nobility origin, was still low before the revolution of 1932,[21] but the number must have gone up considerably in the years following. In 1963 almost three thousand 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

NUMBER OF THAI STUDENTS STUDYING ABROAD 1951-1963
(under supervision of the Thai Civil Service Commission)

Year	No. 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

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.

19. Prince Damrong, "The Introduction of Western Culture in Siam", Selected Articles from the Siam Society Journal Vol. VII, Bangkok (1959), pp. 1-12.
20. 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.
21. 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
THAI CIVIL SERVANTS: EDUCATION ABROAD
(by date of entering the Civil Service)

Entered Civil Service	Studied abroad		Not studied abroad		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
1920-1932	6	(26)	17	(74)	23
1933-1945	17	(63)	10	(37)	27
1946-1963	13	(93)	1	(7)	14
	36		28		64

Table 4 shows that only 26 p.c. of those civil servants who entered government service before 1932 had received a university education abroad, as against the 93 p.c. who joined the civil service after World War II. As education in a foreign country is necessarily connected with some degree of acculturation, the bureaucratic elite is bound to develop a distinct subculture. An aspect of this subculture is the change of values and attitudes, e.g. the re-interpretation of Buddhist values which has been discussed elsewhere.[22]

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. And this has effectively closed the bureauratic 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), which I have already mentioned briefly. 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

---

22. The re-interpretation of Buddhist values was one major subject of the field-work in Thailand. Some findings have been reported in Hans-Dieter Evers, *Higher Civil Servants in Thailand: Social Mobility, Overseas Education, and Attitudes Towards Their Own Cultural Tradition* (Freiburg: Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, 1964) MS. Chapter IV.

109

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. ."[23] These dignity marks were furthermore correlated with titles so that 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,[24] whereby the higher ranks were virtually closed to other officials. This restriction caused dissatisfaction and was one of the causes for the 1932 revolution. The *sakdi na* system as part of the administrative regulation was abolished by a civil service law in 1928 and replaced by civil service ranks.[25] Today these ranks (first class official, upper second class or lower second class official 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 relation-ship 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 for all ministerial appointments (which under the traditional system were centralized in the hands of the King) namely the Civil Service Commission, which forms a division in the Prime Minister's office.[26] According to these regulations the holder of foreign academic degrees are 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 p.c. of all the higher civil servants in our sample who have entered the Civil Service after 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 after World War II, the pattern is even more evident: 95 p.c. have studied abroad.

A foreign education, however, is very expensive. The costs incurred for two years study in the United States to receive a mas-

---

23. Quaritch Wales 1965, p. 35,
24. Quaritch Wales 1965, p. 74.
25. Wilson 1962, p. 52.
26. *Organizational Directory of the Government of Thailand 1963/2506* (Bangkok: United States Operations Mission, 1963).

ter's degree will be close to US $10,000, a sum even the upper class Thai finds extremely high. Scholarships, the main avenue to foreign degrees are, however, 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[27] — or sons or daughters of civil 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, gives members of the westernized bureaucratic elite a far better chance than others who have not been socialized into a family where a knowledge of English and western behaviour patterns were common. I therefore suggest that 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.

The last point I wish to make is concerned with another important aspect of elite or class formation, namely control over wealth and political power.

In his two studies on the Chinese Community in Thailand G. W. Skinner[28] has shown, how the Chinese business elite and the Thai political and bureaucratic elites embarked on a long and enduring co-operation. The Thai political leaders and officials provide protection and the many favours businessmen need urgently to be able to carry on their activities successfully in an undeveloped economy, whereas 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 sanctified in terms of the "Thai-ification" programme, which debarred Chinese from certain sections of the economy and required Thai participation in others. The programme 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

27. For full data see Evers 1964, table 10. Only students under the supervision of the Thai Civil Service Commission have been taken into account,
28. G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: an Analytical History* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1957) and G. William Skinner, *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1958).

boards of Chinese firms in a 'protective' capacity."[29]   In 1955 most
of the influential Chinese business leaders had formed business al-
liances with members of the Thai elite and the co-operation has
rather increased than declined up to now.[30]   This can be seen from
the following table:

TABLE 5
CHINESE LEADERS IN BANGKOK:
GENERATION AND RELATION WITH THE THAI ELITE
171 chosen leaders 1955

Generation	Relations with the Thai elite					
	Extensive		Moderate		Minimal and none	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Completely 1st	14	(29)	14	(44)	49	(54)
Virtually 2nd	12	(25)	7	(22)	26	(28)
Virtually 3rd completely 2nd — 3rd	22	(46)	11	(34)	16	(18)
Total	48	(100)	32	(100)	91	(100)

Chi-square: significant at .01 level
Source: Skinner 1958, p. 330.

The chance to acquire wealth in Thai society is therefore inti-
mately 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.

V   SUMMARY

   It is generally assumed that one of the effects of urbanization
is a high rate of social mobility.   Though very few studies on

29. Skinner 1958, p. 187,
30. Skinner 1958, p. 305. Similar alliances between the upper classes or elites
    have been noted for other multi-racial societies, e.g. Ceylon or Mauritius. B.
    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), 1233-1246. For the case of
    Ceylon see Hans-Dieter Evers.   Kulturwandel in Ceylon, eine Untersuchung
    über die Entstehung einer Industrie-Unternehmerschicht (Cultural Change in
    Ceylon, a Study on the Emergence of a Group of Industrial Entrepreneurs),
    Baden-Baden, Germany: Verlag August Lutzeyer, 1964), pp. 71-81, 167.

112

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 during a study on Thai elites in 1963 suggest that urbanization under western influences has led to the formation of a new social class. As social mobility has most probably been fairly high in the initial stages of urbanization and bureaucratization, the rate of mobility has in fact *declined* in some sections of Thai society after the 1930's. This is partly due to the formation, consolidation and gradually closing of the bureaucratic elite, which has grown in size and 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 reproduction rate of the bureaucratic elite is still high enough to allow for recruitment of members from their own class.

    (2)   Differential acculturation and monopolization of status symbols: The traditional *sakdi na* status system has been replaced by civil service ranks and academic degrees from foreign universities. Scholarships for overseas education are, however, 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 distinct sub-culture.

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

CONCLUSION: Urbanization in loosely structured societies might lead to the formation of a more rigid class system and to a temporary decline of social mobility.

---

31. 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 namely "workers" and "bureauratic 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 be 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

APPENDIX:

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, who exert a considerable amount of influence on the general policies of the country though or perhaps because the actual power elite is fairly. 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. As Wilson puts it: ".... The constituencies of the members of the clique are of the bureaucracy itself."[32] This does also apply to the military officers who very often hold high positions in the administration, or high military rank is 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."[33] The bureaucratic elite, therefore, consists of persons who exert—due to their high-ranking positions in the Thai Civil Service — considerable influence on the general political process by administrative means. A great number of these higher civil servants were interviewed by members of our team. The interviews lasted between thirty minutes and three hours and most of our conclusions are based on these free but rather intensive interviews. The tables in this paper are, however, based on a small sample survey.

To obtain some 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 ca. 950 civil servants in leading positions in the Prime Minister's Office and all ministries. As this sample was designed for a pilot study, only two ministries were selected. From one ministry all civil servants in leading positions have been interviewed and in another ministry all leading officers in one division only. The sample is no strict random sample if one assumes that there are significant differences between the ministries.

The results of this survey are, therefore, representative only to a limited extent for the total bureaucratic elite.

Only some of the data obtained have been used for this paper.

---

32. Wilson 1962, p. 161.
33. Wilson 1962, p. 164-165.

Those on inter-generational mobility (tables 1 and 2) are certainly the most problematic.

A sample of higher Thai civil servants who were in office in 1963 constitute certainly no random sample of all the officials who entered government service before 1932 or any other date thereafter. But 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 did therefore not get into our 1963 sample. My argument that social mobility was high before 1932 is therefore not affected. But one could, of course, suspect that civil servants who have reached top positions only a few years after their entry into the civil service must have had advantages over the others, which are reflected in the data. This again would only back my hypothesis that top positions are mainly occupied by persons who had access to an overseas' education. But we nevertheless collected some data from a limited number[12] of lower ranking officials (2nd grade), who had entered the civil service between 1959 and 1963. Half of them had fathers who were civil servants themselves, no one could claim a farmer as his father.

The main function of the data presented in this paper is not to prove a thesis but to show that my hypothesis is worthwhile considering and that research along these lines might provide some insight into changing Thai society.

115