THE ALLIANCE OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS AND METHODOLOGIES IN FIELD RESEARCH IN THAILAND

by

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This paper is an answer, albeit a partial one, to the question that deals with the compatibilities between the two disciplines, anthropology and sociology. My view is that the two fields are so closely related that the future growth of both depends upon their cooperation and willingness to understand one another.

Let me put forth my position plainly. It seems to me that the orthodox anthropological field techniques are well suited to the study of small societies. Where the problem of research lies imbedded in large urban areas, sizable rural areas, or even in nations, then I doubt that our type of intimate research . . . participation-observation, interviewing informants, obtaining life histories, giving psychological tests to small numbers, are adequate to the task. The opportunities for field research these days take the researcher into developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America as well as into new concerns in our own society. We must be quite aware that we are dealing with countries of some millions of inhabitants and with the problems of such countries. Under these circumstances, a new perspective is required; this new perspective calls for the alliance of our two fields and militates against isolationism.

Calling for the collaboration of these two disciplines shows my bias. The major problems of city decay, poverty, and a polluted environment in the industrial world as well as the multitude of problems in the Third World require the concerted efforts of the entire family of physical scientists, engineers, humanists, and social scientists.

I would suggest, as a beginning, that the anthropologist and the sociologist must work hand in hand in order to begin to achieve the significant research required by these times of ferment and explosions. To demonstrate this hand in hand approach, I would like to discuss field

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work that I conducted in Thailand in 1961-62.[1] Simply stated, I utilized as the major framework of the study design the folk-urban continuum of Redfield (1960). As is known, Redfield arrived at his concept through classical anthropological research in Central America. In a sense then, I viewed the Redfield concept as a hypothesis which I attempted to test and amplify by using the more sociologically accepted techniques of systematic sampling of urban and rural areas, interviewing with structured questionnaires, quantifying the responses to questions, setting up specific cross tabulations, and applying statistical tests of significance to the tables. In this fashion, we do not generalize on the basis of a handful of village studies but rather make the generalizations after we have tested the hypotheses derived from village level research. I am suggesting that anthropologists will undertake the hypothesizing role and the sociologists will undertake the verifying role. Both roles are after all components of the scientific method. This paper is a demonstration of such a cooperative enterprise.

1) A short note on the research design :

(a) The study represented an attempt to gather empirical information concerning communications behavior. A large number of persons were asked to describe their own recent behavior. In order that findings might apply to many parts of Thailand, seven locations were selected to include Bangkok, three provincial capitals, and three villages. In these selected locations, area probability sampling was employed to select the respondents for interviews.

(b) The questionnaire was designed generally to obtain descriptions of a number of different social and geographical conditions. The data allowed the partial completion of the well-known formula of communication :— source (who says ?), content (what ?), audience (to whom ?) media (how ?), and effect (with what effect ?). It should be noted that the "with what effect" component of the formula was not studied. Specifically, the questionnaire contained questions dealing with (i) exposure to the mass media; (ii) word-of-mouth behavior with respect to passing political and personal information and to receiving or giving advice; (iii) word-of-mouth behavior in different social contexts and in spatial contexts (travel, migration); and (iv) the respondents' background.

(c) The interviewers asked the questions as written in the Thai-language versions of the questionnaire and either recorded the spontaneous responses verbatim or fitted the responses into precoded categories for certain items. If the respondent failed to understand a question, the interviewer was instructed to rephrase it slightly to obtain a response. The sequential arrangement of the questions was such that in some cases all questions were not asked of all respondents. Whether or not certain questions were asked depended upon the response or lack of response to the preceding ones.

The above sequence can be reversed. There are examples where sociological research, theory, and hypotheses operate within a particular cultural context. It is then good practice to replicate the study or to attempt to test the hypothesis in other cultural contexts thus moving toward greater generality. Of course, this is what sociologists are now calling comparative sociology.

Admittedly then, this complementing of anthropology and sociology should be a two-way street, but I would argue that in the developing countries the small scale anthropological studies based on a number of villages, for example, should occur first and should provide for the initial hypothesizing. The sociological concern for quantification and sampling should follow to test out the anthropological hypotheses. There are a number of reasons why this seems preferable : (1) it allows for more flexibility; (2) it allows for more depth research although admittedly on a small scale; (3) lastly, it is more practical, easily managed, and less costly.

The example of testing anthropological hypotheses or concepts by sociological methods which I want to present in brief form is as follows : Following Redfield's folk-urban (traditional-modern) continuum, how can we define or better delineate the traditional, transitional, and modern Thai on the basis of sociological characteristics like spatial mobility, social isolation, exposure to the mass media, and communication behavior ?

I am aware of the controversy (Foster : 1967 : 2-4) over the folk-urban continuum and admit the confusion that Redfield (1953 : 7, 22, 31, 33) created by using "folk" and "peasant" interchangeably. However, I am convinced that it is a useful typology and can serve with some adjustment in the analysis of Thai society. For example, I find more similarity than difference in Miner's (1967 : 3) descriptions of Redfield's folk-urban typology and the rural-urban continuum. In a sense, the rural-urban continuum fits within the larger continuum called the folk-urban.

The adjustment that I referred to above is the creation of the continuum— (1) village, (2) town, and (3) city. Since we are dealing with a nation having political, cultural, and economic extensions, I include the peasant village within the continuum but exclude the "primitive" village of the hills tribesmen (Service : 1971 : 390). But I must first admit the resemblances between the folk and the peasant village. Perhaps, a tabular presentation of data can best point out these similarities as well as the differences and can indicate the characteristics of the village-town-city continuum :

FOLK[1]		URBAN
"PRIMITIVES"	PEASANTS[2]	
VILLAGE ← ──────── →		TOWN ← ──────── → CITY
"Precivilized" Characteristics:[3]		"Civilized" Characteristics:[8]
Smallness		Not small
Isolated[4]		Not isolated
Homogeneous		Heterogeneous
Self-sufficient		Not self-sufficient
Personal relationships emphasized		Impersonal relationships emphasized
Simple division of labor		Complex division of labor
Nonliterate	Somewhat literate	Literate
Sacred or moral order	([5])	Secular order
	Connected to city through markets[6]	Market-focused economy[9]
	Politically controlled by city[7]	Political complexity and control

1) The concepts "folk" and "little community" are used synonomously by Redfield (1955 : 3, 4, 144).
2) Peasants are referred to as rural natives whose life style take account of the city (Redfield : 1953 : 31).
3) Redfield : 1953 : 7-13, 22.
4) "Isolated" refers to the infrequent contacts between urban peoples and village people (Halpern : 1967 : 38), and to the lack of literacy of the folk culture (Redfield : 1941 : 16, 17).
5) Peasants are said to possess the "traditional moral solidarity found in any isolated folk society." (Redfied : 1953 : 39).
6) Service : 1971 : 441; Redfield : 1953 : 33.
7) Service : 1971 : 457; Redfield : 1953 : 53.
8) Redfield : 1953 : 22.
9) Halpern : 1967 : 38.

Most of the "precivilized characteristics" of the folk culture or "little community" are opposites of the "civilized characteristics" of the urban culture. The peasant village and the primitive village share many of these precivilized characteristics except that they may appear to a somewhat lesser degree in the peasant village. The main difference between the two types of villages is that there is some presence of literacy in the peasant village and none in the primitive village. At the same time the important connections between the city and the peasant village must be stated : (1) the peasant village is linked to the city through the market economy and (2) the peasant village is controlled politically by the city.

Rather than putting forth a typology or a continuum as has been illustrated above, Hauser (1965:8, 9) prefers to use the term urbanization as a social process which has brought about changes in life style. As if influenced by Hauser's viewpoint, I choose to examine social interactions as examples or segments of life style : everyday (personal topics) word-of-mouth behavior, political discussions[2], advice-giving and advice-seeking in the study in Thailand. In all cases, I was interested in determining the sociological characteristics of both parties in these interactions. In addition, it was possible to look for differences among these social interactions as we compared them in (1) the city (Bangkok), (2) the towns (the provincial capitals), and (3) the villages. Thus, I combined the continuum concept with Hauser's emphasis on social process.

My examination of the practices of passing personal information showed that there is a greater similarity of male and female behavior in Bangkok (city) than in the provincial capitals (town) and villages where males are generally more active than females (Table IA-1).

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2) If a respondent reported to the interviewer that he had recently discussed a political topic, the interviewer would ask him to describe the nature of the topic. In this way we were able to verify that the topic was truly political. The interviewers were native Thai speakers. Those who coded the questionnaires were also native Thai speakers.

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Table I. The Passing of Information by Word-of-Mouth

		A-1 The % passing per- sonal information	A-2 The % passing poli- tical information	B The % who gave personal advice
Bangkok: (city)	Sex M F	50 (113)* 39 (92)	61 (166) 44 (98)	26 (451) 17 (395)
	Occupational Levels** I II III	64 (28) 54 (34) 62 (26)	59 (90) 30 (33) 57 (34)	36 (184) 26 (109) 18 (125)
3 Provincial Capitals (Town)	Sex M F	75 (76) 44 (54)	58 (84) 48 (63)	18 (278) 18 (272)
	Occupational Levels I II III	50 (24) 78 (22) 48 (31)	65 (42) 42 (19) 54 (15)	18 (89) 10 (86) 16 (77)
3 Villages (Village)	Sex M F	70 (32) 54 (13)	46 (19) 33 (9)	

* The number without parentheses is the percentage; the one within the paren-
theses refers to the number of cases involved.

** The Occupational Levels subsume specific occupations and are generally
correlated with power, prestige, and education. Some students of Thailand
argue that attempting to construct a class system for Thailand is meaningless
but insist that occupation is a highly significant social differentiating variable.
Level I includes the following occupations which are government or large-or-
ganization oriented and require certain kinds of formal training or education:
government officials, military-police, teachers, professionals, white collar
workers, and students. Level II is made up mainly of persons in the commercial
field who own business: merchants. Level III includes occupations requiring
few complicated skills and therefore little in the way of formal training or
education: transport workers, waiters, gas station attendants, store clerks,
laborers (skilled and unskilled), farmers, and fishermen.

If the information being passed is political, then males are even more involved generally than females but are again somewhat more active in Bangkok than elsewhere (Table IA-2).

There are more advice-giving interactions in Bangkok than in the provincial capitals. Provincial females are just as likely to give advice as their male counterparts. In Bangkok, more males than females give advice. Similar behavior seems exemplified by the women while the urban-rural dichotomy is more striking among males (Table I B).

The less urban (or more rural) Thai males are more socially restricted than the urban males in that the former (39%; N=130) are less likely to cross occupational lines in their social interactions than the latter (48%; N=243).

What about social interactions that involve connecting distant points ... or carrying information from one point to another ? Which Thai are involved in such interactions ?

Urban Thai (27%; N=546) are more likely to become involved in long distance interactions than rural Thai (9%; N=102); the urban Thai (36%; N=126) are also more spatially mobile than the urban Chinese (14%; N=40). Similarly, travel beyond the limits of their home city is practiced by the urban Thai (32%) to a greater extent than the rural Thai (15%). Further, those urban Thai who are involved in long distance social interactions and in travel are characterized as more modern than traditional by virtue of their occupations (Level I=46%) and education of western orientation. In another study limited to urban Thai males, we discovered that monks, professionals and the military were vitally involved in word-of-mouth communication as sources and discussants of political information and as advice-givers (Jacobs et al : Social Forces, 1966). This is corroboration to some extent of the previous statement about prestigeful western-oriented occupations being more involved in significant social interactions than non-prestigeful professions.

Political conversations or discussions[2] in the work and friendship contexts occur more frequently in urban areas than in rural areas (See Table II).

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Table II.   Percentage of Conversations Reported by Male Respondents as Having Political Content

Type of Network	Bangkok	3 Provincal Capital	3 Villages
	%	%	%
	31	23	12
	(281)	(163)	(50)
At Work			
	26	18	9
	(266)	(162)	(50)
Friends			

In a number of different contexts we find that the more modern segment of the social structure—the professionals of western orientation— exhibits greater involvement in political discussions than the more traditional segments (peasants, farmers, fishermen, laborers).

An examination of the status relationships in the work context, between male respondents and their reliable sources of news indicates that respondents in the villages (42%; N=35) and provincial cities (29%; N=121) tend to seek out their superiors for this function to a greater extent than Bangkok respondents (11%; N=177).   In other words, the provincials and villagers behave more traditionally in following the usual Thai superordinate-subordinate pattern of behavior.   Examining word-of-mouth networks along the village-town-city continuum (my modification of Redfield's folk-urban continuum) casts additional light on the Thai society.   The data presented so far also helps us define more precisely the homogeneity of the village culture and the heterogeneity of the urban culture :[3]

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3) My statement is reminiscent of Redfield's stated objective of his Yucatan study, that is to investigate the differences between "isolated homogeneous society" and "mobile heterogeneous society" (Redfield : 1941 : 17).

	Homogeneity (Village)	Heterogeneity (Urban)
Social Interactions	Highly restricted by sex and occupation	Less restricted by sex and occupation
Subject Matter of Interactions	Small percentage of political content	Greater percentage of political content
Spatial Movement	Mainly within resident town or village (short communication chain) Little travel outside resident region	Significantly extended outside limits of resident city (long communication chain) Significant travel outside resident region
Traditional Behavior	More likely maintained	Significantly breached
Mass Media Exposure	Insignificant exposure	Significant exposure

So far, we have restricted ourselves to a study of social interactions as a means of possibly bringing different ideas to people in Thailand. The mass media can also bring new ideas (common to the urban culture) to the rural or village culture. The data on the mass media are presented in Table III.

Table III. Exposure of Male Respondents to the Mass Media (1961-62)

	Bangkok (City)	3 Provincial (Capitals Town)	3 Villages (Village)
	%	%	%
Frequent Radio Listening	87 (451)	81 (278)	48 (90)
Frequent Newspaper Reading	78 (451)	65 (278)	17 (90)

Most of the conclusions reached in this study have been reached on the basis of dyads in the word-of-mouth process such as A passes everyday information to B, A gives advice to B, or A discusses politics with B : (1) Level I respondents interact with only Level I persons on all three kinds of word-of-mouth networks.   (2) Level II respondents are apparently most frequently in word-of-mouth contact with Level I persons and secondly with their own kind except in political discussions where they prefer Level I and III persons.   (3) Level III respondents discuss personal information mostly with Level I persons, somewhat with Level II persons, and least with Level III persons like themselves; in the other two networks they interact with Level I and their own kind. Thus, we see that although the respondents' own occupational group is always present, as would be expected, the high prestige occupations definitely and significantly belong to most of the triads.   Thus, all occupational levels seem to gravitate toward more prestigeful occupations as reliable sources of news and as political discussants.   (See Table IV).

Table IV.   Word-of-Mouth Dyads : Thai Respondents and (a) Their Reliable Sources of News, (b) Discussants of Personal and (c) Political Information; by Occupational Levels

	Occupational Levels of :		
Occupational Levels Respondents	(a) Their Reliable Sources of News	(b) Their Discussants of Personal Information	(c) Their Discussants of Political Information
I	I*	I	I
II	I II	I II	I III
III	I III	I II III	I III

*The roman numerals in the cells (a) through (c) refer to the individuals, identified by occupational levels, with whom the Thai respondents interact for different communication purposes.   The roman numerals are arranged according to magnitude.

It would seem that such empirical findings need explanation or refinement.   Such explanation or refinement is found in Lucien Hanks' anthropological work in Thailand (AA : 1962).   Hanks' article, "Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order" is not concerned with communications in Thailand but is an attempt to explain the Thai social order. Hanks (p. 1247) makes the point that the Thai hierarchy depends on a composite quality called "merit" and explains (p. 1248) that a man's merit may be lost or it may be gained.   The man with merit-based effectiveness becomes the nucleus of a group to which he distributes resources and benefits (p. 1249).   Such groups, he describes, as tiny hierarchies with the superior... or the man with merit... showering benefits on his nearest inferior, who then relays some portion to someone beneath him.   The ideal example—where persons interact with others immediately adjacent to their station (status)—is found in the large Thai government bureaus, but Hanks feels that this hierarchical structure is also significantly present throughout Thai society.

Hanks' work helps us to interpret word-of-mouth flow of information through the Thai social structure.   His use of the concept "merit" explains to some extent why and how certain Thai, particularly government officials, teachers, military officers, and monks, function effectively as key word-of-mouth communicators and advice-givers (influentials). The relationship between word-of-mouth communications and the hierarchical structure of the Thai social order is reflected again and again. When asked to describe that person who is most reliable as a source of political news, the Thai respondents used such words as "respectability," "being learned," and "being informed" which are applicable to those who occupy the upper end of the social hierarchy or who possess "merit".

As part of the fieldwork, I used a projective picture displaying two Thai men (attired simply and similarly) sitting on a porch.   The respondents were told that the man on the left (the advice-seeker) in the picture had come to ask advice from the man on the right and then were asked to describe the man on the right (the advice-giver).   In this indirect way the Thai respondents were given an opportunity to describe the kind of person they sought out for important personal advice.   The descriptive

terms consisted of (1) personal characteristics such as experienced, old, religious, rich, and powerful, which are clearly merit-related and (2) direct references to high status indicating that merit is automatically present. The data from the projective picture corroborated the hierarchical character of word-of-mouth networks and, therefore, its relationship to the Thai social structure.

In summary, the study utilized two kinds of information : (1) the skeletal word-of-mouth networks based on survey data and (2) the material obtained mainly from an analysis of Thai Buddhism. By correlating the two kinds of data, I believe that we have demonstrated how anthropology and sociology are complementing disciplines. I have given two examples of this position as initially stated in this paper : (1) how an anthropological concept is amplified by sociological methodology and data and (2) how sociological findings—the arrangements of word-of-mouth dyads—are explained by the anthropological analysis of merit. I believe that such complementary works add richness and sharper definition to the principles and concepts in both fields. Finally, the study of word-of-mouth behavior along the village-town-city continuum has shed some additional light on the folk-urban controversy.

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