

# **SOCIAL PROCESSES AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN CHONBURI, THAILAND**

by

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## **Abstract**

In this study I will attempt to trace the change in the pattern of Thai social structure from its traditional state to its present day industrializing and urbanizing state by identifying the social processes involved and the paths of mobility which have been available. Pattern of occupational shift from generation +2 to generation +1 to generation 0 indicates how industrialization has led to the availability of new occupations not in existence previously. The availability of new occupations, in turn, results in a more complex occupational and social stratification.

In addition to indicating that industrialization and urbanization are important factors leading to changes in the social structure of Thai society, I have further suggested that political and legal changes occurring within Thai society, i.e. the impact of the Revolution of 1932, have also affected the social structure of Thai society simultaneously.

## **Introduction**

Chonburi Town which is defined as the functional area of Muang Chonburi Municipality, Chonburi Province, Thailand is a medium size urban center with a population in 1970 of about 45,000 composed of Thai and Chinese ethnic groups. It is 80 kilometers southeast of Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, and has developed from the small town it was in the 19th Century into an industrializing town of Thailand's eastern region, where many occupational opportunities are available. During the early 19th Century, it has been recorded that some of the inhabitants were engaged in small scale fishing, and in work at small sugar cane presses or on plantations in addition to others engaged in irrigated rice farming. After World War II, motor powered trawl boats were intro-

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duced along with new large scale fishing techniques, cassava roots became important as a new cash crop, and sugar industries expanded both physically and financially. Simultaneously, service industries—recreational, personal, and repair services—gradually developed in the town of Chonburi. In the 1970's Chonburi Province is being industrialized and Chonburi Town is being urbanized. Paddy fields are seen in the lowland areas of the province while sugar cane fields and cassava fields are seen on hillsides, and commercial fishing is practiced along the sea shore.

The young unmarried labor force ages 11-25 in the town of Chonburi is the focus for this study of industrialization and social change because it is assumed that this is the group which is the most mobile and most susceptible to change. It contains the people who are in the process of seeking new jobs and new modes of living. In the course of this study, about 1400 young employees were interviewed from locations within the town, including the provincial hospital, government offices, banks, private offices, schools, stores, markets, restaurants, hotels, theatres, repair factories, boats, fish docks, home factories, and commercial factories.

The research team, consisting of myself and two research assistants, visited all work sites in the town. Permission was requested from the factory managers and employers, school teachers, bank and private enterprise managers, government officers, boat owners, etc. to interview the unmarried employees aged 11-25. Most employers complied with the request except in the case of a few small old-fashioned enterprises whose managers claimed that they did not have any employees who met these specifications.

Monks and military men are not considered part of the labor force because they are not free to be employed and therefore are not included in this study. The unemployed and the unschooled are not included because it was not possible to interview them. These young people were very suspicious of government employees and research teams and are besides very mobile and difficult to locate. The research team did however become acquainted with one small group of the unemployed

and interviewed these individuals for general information about their ways of life. We did not try to conduct formal interviews since we felt that to do this would destroy our easy relationship with them. Furthermore, the unemployed youth move individually and interprovincially at frequent intervals. They do not belong or regard themselves as belonging exclusively to the town of Chonburi.

Young people in jail were interviewed and separated out since these people were arrested at different places in the province and were transported to the provincial jail located in the town. They similarly were not members of the Chonburi Town community although physically located there.

The relationship between the industrialization and urbanization processes and social mobility has been analyzed by Lipset and Bendix. They claim that social mobility is an integral and continuing aspect of the processes of urbanization and industrialization (Lipset and Bendix, 1959: 280). This study supports their thesis.

Social processes which take place as an outgrowth of industrialization and which appear to influence the basic pattern of social structure of rural and urban Thailand are: 1) occupational availability, 2) education, 3) migration, 4) assimilation, 5) social mobility through occupation, education, migration, and assimilation. These social processes have influenced the development of social structure of Thailand from a traditional two-class system\* to a multi-class system, by creating the intervening classes between the lower and the upper classes, and by allowing increased movement between rural and urban communities, between the classes, and between ethnic groups.

### **Social Structure of Thai Society**

Early Thai society has been viewed as a two-class society (Akin, 1969). A society with social classes is divided into hierarchically

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\* Many Thai specialists prefer to view traditional Thai social structure as a 3 class system by separating the king and the princes and princesses from the nobles. In this paper I have followed Akin's analysis of the traditional Thai social structure and view the king, the princes and the princesses (*chao*) as belonging to the same class as the nobles, i.e. the upper class.

ranked socio-economic strata within which there is relatively easy and frequent mobility, but between which mobility is relatively difficult and infrequent. In the early Bangkok Period (1782-1873),

There were clearly two main classes in Thai society. The upper class, *nai* consisted of the nobles and the princes whose roles were mainly governing roles. The lower class consisted of the *phrai* and the *that* who tilled the land, giving gifts to and supporting the upper class by offering services (Akin, 1969: 179).

There were four social groups in these two social classes. The relatively small upper class consisted of nobles and princes. There were hierarchies within both groups. When the ranking within the two upper class groups are compared under the *sakdina* system, a Thai ranking system based on land ownership and labor control, a noble may have the same *sakdina* or rank as a prince. Most of the people belonged to the lower class. In the lower class, there were commoners (or freemen) and slaves. Akin states that social mobility from the lower class to the upper class was not as easy as has been commonly believed. In order to be recognized as a member of the upper class, a person had to go through a ritual of presenting himself to the king (*thawai tua*). The offspring of the nobles and the offspring of the princes were legally allowed to go through the ritual, but there were laws against commoners and slaves going through the ritual. Only in exceptional cases would the king give permission and allow a non-upper class offspring to go through the *thawai tua* ritual. The high rank positions apparently circulated among a small, closed group, into which people born in the lower class could not enter (Akin, 1969: 155). Therefore it appears that the social structure of Thai society prior to 1873 contained little opportunity for upward social mobility.

Chinese people were not included in this Thai system and were subjected to head taxes if they preferred to keep their Chinese identity, as signified by their wearing Chinese clothing and hair-style. Chinese who chose to adopt Thai way of life and dress were easily assimilated into the Thai social system,

The majority of Chinese immigrants became wage laborers or entrepreneurs and formed an entrepreneurial class of Chinese traders. The Chinese wage earners had great potential to become members of the entrepreneurial class since they were frugal and hard workers. This class of Chinese people when placed next to the Thai social structure, belonged in the middle, between upper and lower classes (Diagram I). Akin explains that wealthy Chinese merchants could enter the noble class of Thai social system by bidding to become tax-farmers. As tax-farmers they had ranks and titles similar to noblemen who were ethnically Thai. Skinner states that Chinese immigrants had been ennobled and given official positions as early as 1480 (Skinner, 1957a : 241). The reason for creating this opportunity was that Thai kings wanted to bind the Chinese to the Thai nobility and so ensure their loyalty to the Crown. Those who were successful in bidding to become tax-farmers were automatically ennobled.

In other words, offspring of Thai princes and nobles had the chance of belonging to the upper class through birth and the *thawai tua* ritual but the Chinese could join the upper class through acquiring the status of tax-farmer, thereafter being automatically ennobled, or could acquire other official positions granted by the kings.

Downward mobility from the upper class to a lower class group occurred when the offspring of the nobles or the princes did not go through the *thawai tua* ritual. Without going through this ritual a person could not officially belong to the upper class.

The social structure of Thailand at the turn of the 20th Century may be presented diagrammatically as follows:

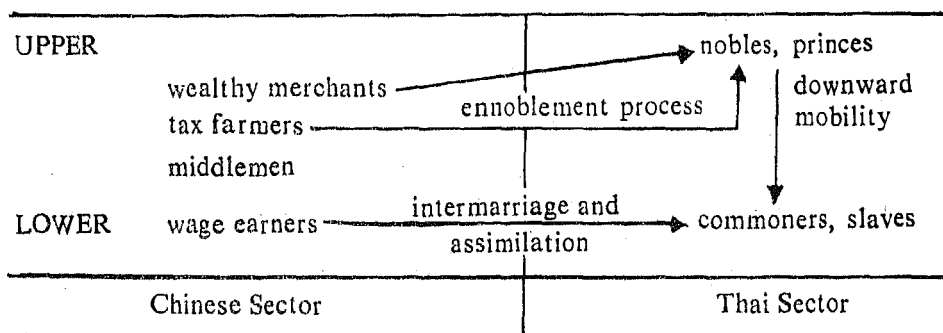


Diagram I: The Social Structure of Thailand during the 19th Century (including the Thai and Chinese sectors).

A further discussion of Chinese people within the social structure of Thailand is necessary since the presence of the Chinese in Chonburi has had major effect on the pattern of economic development and urbanization in Chonburi. Literature on Chinese society in Thailand has been produced by many writers (Landon, 1941; Skinner, 1957b; Coughlin, 1960; Purcell, 1965; Boonsanong, 1971). The existence of Sino-Thai diplomatic relations has been recorded since the 13th Century. Chinese merchants came to Thailand and many established residence in southern and central Thailand. The Chinese who immigrated to Chonburi were the Ch'ao-chou (Teochius) who came after the Manchu conquest of south China in 1645.

In the earlier phases of migration, Chinese men immigrated to Thailand from China, found jobs in Thailand, and married Thai women. The degree of assimilation was quite high. Within three generations many of the Chinese descendants of the early Chinese migrants were completely absorbed into Thai society at the lower class level. Those who did not become assimilated to the Thai lower class, remained Chinese and were either wage laborers or traders. A few exceptional wealthy Chinese traders applied to become tax-farmers. Others were ennobled and acquired official positions. These Chinese were given titles and ranks and were treated as upper class Thai.

However, in 1909, the Chinese nationality law adopting *jus sanguinis* was introduced, making all people of Chinese descent into citizens of China. The Department of Overseas Chinese located in Mainland China attempted to strengthen Chinese nationalism among Overseas Chinese. In the early 1920's, Chinese women also immigrated to Thailand, and many Chinese men preferred to marry Chinese women instead of Thai women. This may have retarded assimilation for the immigrants and for their children reared in fully Chinese households. Thereafter, the degree of assimilation of Chinese into Thai society has been influenced by many factors. Skinner (1957a) suggests intermarriage, education, and nationalism as the most important factors. Intermarriage and Thai education are pro-assimilation factors while Chinese nationalism as an anti-assimilation factor. The Thai nationalistic movement in the 1930's resulted in the promulgation of anti-Chinese laws on occupation and

property ownership. Some Chinese responded by joining ethnically-based associations for mutual protection and economic benefit and the opportunity for Thai assimilation was thus decreased. The large number of Chinese in the early part of the 20th Century also made assimilation of the entire group more difficult and maintenance of Chinese identity easier.

Skinner describes the mid-1950 Chinese and Thai urban social structure using occupations as the main criteria for class division (1957b: 322). The social structures of Chinese and Thai ethnic groups in urban Thailand based on Skinner's model is summarized in diagram II. This diagram only shows the social position of the people, there is no attempt in this diagram to show how people move into a certain position.

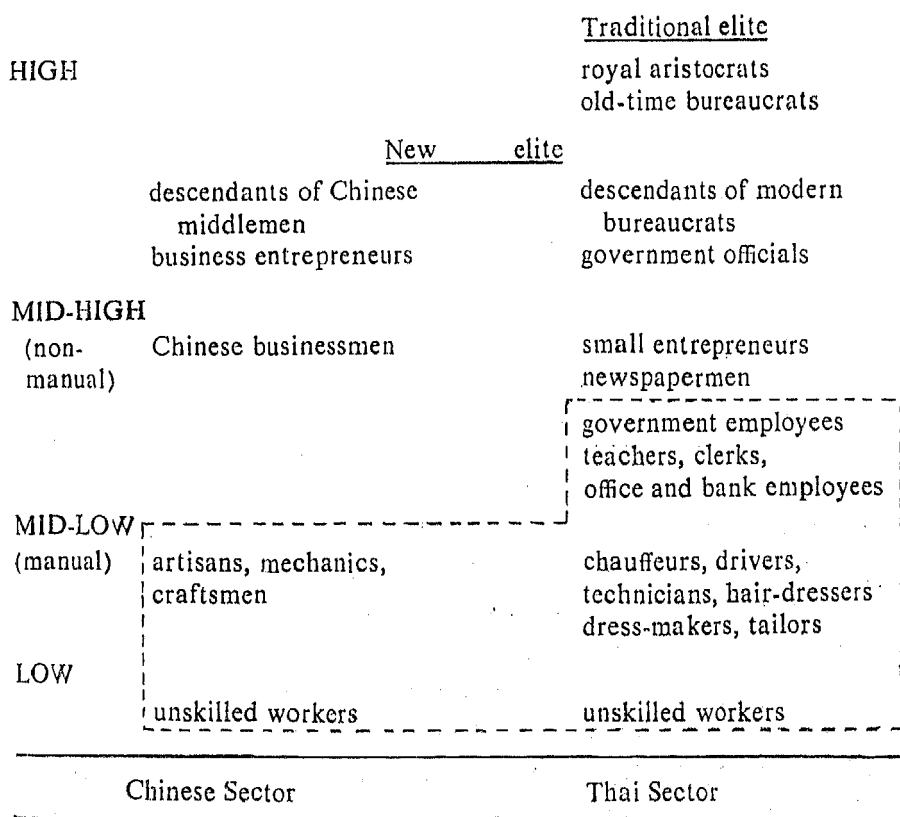


Diagram II: Static Model of Thai Social Structure Showing Positional Relationship Between Chinese and Thai Sectors in Urban Thailand in the Mid-1950's

In contrast with Akin's and Skinner's pictures of the social structure of Thailand, many anthropologists have followed Embree (1950) in discussing Thailand as a loosely structured society. In 1966, deYoung described the lack of rigidly defined social status systems within rural Thai villages.

The Thai cultural pattern, especially in the Thai village, is noteworthy for its absence of status anxiety. In the old days the peasant accepted the dominant position of the noble or prince of his area without question, today, he accepts the central government representative (the district officer), who has taken over this role. Within his own village the Thai peasant is self-reliant and rarely in sharp competition for status with his fellow villagers. (deYoung, 1966:28).

In constructing the social structure of the rural sector of Thailand, deYoung agrees with the description of structure presented by Akin of "the old days" where nobles and princes dominated the upper class.

Though government representatives now are regarded as the upper class, the rural setting is still predominantly populated with freeman who are more or less equal. The government representatives in rural areas follow the rules and regulations set up by the central government. They belong socially to the hierarchy and social stratification systems of the upper class while living physically among the lower class members.

In viewing the structure at the lower class level, one may mistake the lack of rigidity in rural villages for the appearance of "loose structure" of the whole society. The application of "rigid" or "loose" structure depends on the section of the social structure under investigation and on the definitions of "rigid" or "loose". In a rural context, in contrast to an urban context, rules and regulations regarding social stratification are few, but nevertheless definitely exist. In the past the people in the rural lower class had almost no chance to become members of the upper class. Now paths of mobility for rural people are available if rural people move to urban areas to be educated and trained. Discus-



sions on path of mobility are presented in later pages. In general, in rural areas, people are regarded as living a simple life both physically and socially.

### Socio-economic background of the informants

The informants interviewed came from different parts of the country. This is evident when place of residence of grandfathers and parents are tabulated (see table 1). Not only that there are informants whose grandfathers are from China but there are informants whose grandfathers are living in the Northeast and the Central Regions of the country. These are the areas where rice farming has traditionally been the only mode of livelihood. In Chachoengsao, a neighboring province of Chonburi, rice cultivation is also very important. In addition to the grandfathers living in Chonburi, the data show that many informants have grandfathers living in rice farming areas. The informants or their parents probably moved to Chonburi where job opportunities are available. It is less likely that the grandfathers are the ones who moved from Chonburi to other areas.

*Table 1 : Residence of Informants' Parents and Grandfathers*

	father	mother	FaFa	MoFa
In Chonburi	948	988	604	635
Chachoengsao	93	84	119	123
Eastern Region	48	43	50	48
Northeastern Region	113	109	105	105
Northern Region	16	19	19	22
Central Region	102	95	115	139
Southern Region	24	21	24	18
Bangkok	48	45	47	44
China			130	81
Don't know	30	18	209	207
Total	1422	1422	1422	1422

The above assumption is further supported by the data in table 2 which shows that a high percentage of informants have grandfathers and parents who are agriculturalists. Though it is possible that people living in Chonburi may be agriculturalists, however, it is more likely that it is the people living in Central and Northeast Regions who are agriculturalists since these are the rice farming areas.

*Table 2 : Occupation of Informants' Parents and Grandfathers*

	father	mother	FaFa	MoFa
Fishing	88	68	54	67
Agricultural	405	411	555	614
Livestock	20	17	17	10
Trading	253	402	125	137
Unskilled laborers	228	79	30	19
Skilled laborers	114	39	18	17
White collar workers	143	24	34	31
Do not work	31	325	5	9
Other	22	4	6	15
Don't know	118	53	578	503
Total	1422	1422	1422	1422

Therefore, the informants in this study consist of young people whose families originate (2 generations ago) in Chonburi or in other parts of the country where rice farming has always been important. In the next section, discussion on changes in occupational pattern will be presented,

### Occupation, education, and ethnicity of the young labor force in Chonburi Town

Among the jobs available in Chonburi Town, only white-collar (prestigious) jobs\* require secondary education. Other vocations require only vocational training. Unskilled jobs require neither formal education nor training. In this study occupations have been classified according to the formal education and training required. Consequently though the degree of occupational availability is high, not everyone has equal opportunity to join an occupational group. The amount of education one acquires naturally limits the range of occupational opportunities available. Acquisition of formal education is a means to move to a higher level in the occupational and the social strata.

The following table shows the amount of education acquired by informants in each occupational category. Formal education is not important among informants in the unskilled and semi-skilled and skilled categories.

*Table 3: Occupation and Education of the Young Labor Force*

	prathom 4 (grade 4)	prathom 7 (grade 7)	m.s. 3 (grade 10)	m.s. 3+ (grade 10+)	Total
unskilled	481 80.7%	79 13.3%	33 5.5%	3 0.5%	596
semi-skilled and skilled	103 21.5%	251 52.5%	113 23.6%	11 2.3%	478
white-collar (prestigious)	6 2.5%	5 2.1%	105 43.2%	127 52.3%	243
student		1 1.0%	43 41.0%	61 58.1%	105
Total	590 41.5%	336 23.6%	294 20.7%	202 14.2%	1422

\* In this study white-collar jobs include jobs which people viewed as prestigious jobs which also include nurses. Since nurses may also be classified as blue-collar jobs, this distinction should be clarified here.

Ethnicity is also an important characteristic of the young labor force in this study. Certain occupations in the skilled/semi-skilled category are still predominantly either Thai or Chinese within the FaFa's generation, the Fa's generation, and the informants' generation. This is indicated in table 4 where informants in skilled/semi-skilled occupational category identified themselves and their ancestors as Chinese at a higher percentage than informants in other occupational categories.

*Table 4: Intergenerational changes in ethnicity\* of informants in different occupational groups*

Occupation of informants	FaFa		Fa		Ego		Total
	Thai	Chi.	Thai	Chi.	Thai	Chi.	
unskilled	399 66.9%	144 24.2%	478 80.2%	100 16.8%	544 91.3%	46 7.7%	596
skilled/semi-skilled	208 43.5%	260 54.4%	239 50.0%	237 49.6%	328 68.6%	147 30.8%	478
white-collar (prestigious)	140 57.6%	98 40.3%	180 74.1%	62 25.5%	228 93.8%	13 5.3%	243
student	47 44.8%	51 48.6%	74 70.5%	31 29.5%	95 90.8%	10 9.5%	105
Total	794 55.8%	553 38.9%	971 68.3%	430 30.2%	1195 84.0%	216 15.2%	1422

In the social structure of Chonburi, the young labor force may be identified in the dotted area of diagram II. Non-manual workers are regarded by the general public as having more prestige than manual workers. The Thai government during the Phibun regime (1950's)

\* See page 219 for explanation of this usage.

reserved many manual jobs for Thai people only. Chauffeurs, drivers, barbers, dress-makers, and hair-dressers are some of the occupations which were reserved for Thai people. Thus people in these occupations are classified as Thai and not Chinese. Individuals of Chinese descent who are in these occupational groups usually have Thai names and identify themselves as Thai when asked by the authorities.

Legally, these Chinese descendants are Thai because they were born in Thailand. In this study all of the young labor force should legally have Thai citizenship. They report themselves as having Thai nationality. Genetically they are descendants of Chinese ancestors. Culturally they speak Chinese, have Chinese names and follow Chinese customs. Socially, they associate themselves almost entirely with Chinese people. Therefore, in this study "nationality" is used for legal citizenship, and "ethnicity" is used for genetic, cultural, and social identification.

### **Industrialization and change in occupational pattern**

The change in occupational pattern of individuals from their ancestors has depended on the change in occupational opportunities available in Chonburi. Previously, agricultural work, fishing, and trade were the primary occupations. Industrialization and urbanization in Chonburi did not become apparent until World War II, though fishing and sugar cane industries had already been developed to some extent. Cassava became important as a cash crop after World War II. Craft industries were supported by the Private Industry Service Act in 1954 which actually became effective during the 1960's when the Small Industries Service Institute was organized by the government. Similarly, service industries did not develop until other aspects of industrialization were well under way. Education became a necessity for the urban population and the Compulsory Education Act was also enforced. As a result more

white collar experience is being acquired. Teaching, government work, employment in banks, and so on are now desirable occupations for many people.

During the last few generations, the town of Chonburi has had ample job opportunities of the kind listed above when compared to other towns in the provinces where rice farming predominates. Table 5 shows occupational shifts over three generations. The first is the shift from agricultural to non-agricultural occupations. In the urban setting of Chonburi Town, agricultural work is naturally not available, but some residents are engaged in fishing. Many farm workers moved to the town and became cash laborers. Industrial laborers and service laborers comprise new categories which did not exist two generations ago. Farm workers have moved into these new occupations for economic reasons. Education, training, and experience are not important for these unskilled occupations. They are willing to work hard and for long hours. In most cases work conditions in the town are better than those in the agricultural sector from which they have come. On the rice farms the yields are low and the incomes are not high enough to feed the whole family for the whole year. In addition, young people in general have little or no control over the family income. Thus, they prefer to leave the rice fields for any work which is available for the sake of their economic independence. This group of workers who have changed from being farm laborers to become factory laborers and service laborers represent a common shift in occupational choice. Unless these workers acquire more education and/or training experience, their work conditions will remain at this very low level. If they change jobs they can move only into another unskilled labor job and therefore have not moved themselves into another occupational category, or improved their occupational status.

Table 5 : Intergenerational changes in occupational patterns

	generation + 2	generation + 1	generation 0
<i>UNSKILLED</i>			
<i>non-service</i>			
agriculturalists	FaFa 574 (40.4%) MoFa 625 (44.0%) FaMo 594 (41.8%) MoMo 635 (44.7%)	Fa 405 (28.5%) Mo 434 (30.5%)	
fishing	FaFa 55 ( 3.9%) MoFa 69 ( 4.9%) FaMo 32 ( 2.3%) MoMo 51 ( 3.6%)	Fa 88 ( 6.2%) Mo 68 ( 4.8%)	male 31 ( 4.3%) female 11 ( 1.6%)
labor		Fa 205 (14.4%) Mo 77 ( 5.4%)	male 87 (12.2%) female 79 (11.2%)
<i>service</i>			
vendors, traders	FaFa 117 ( 8.2%) MoFa 141 ( 9.9%) FaMo 141 ( 9.9%) MoMo 176 (12.4%)	Fa 253 (17.8%) Mo 401 (28.2%)	male 31 ( 4.3%) female 79 (11.2%)
<i>SEMI-SKILLED/SKILLED</i>			
craftsmen		Fa 100 ( 7.0%) Mo 28 ( 2.0%)	male 238 (33.3%) female 240 (34.0%)
WHITE-COLLAR (PRESTIGIOUS)		Fa 143 (10.1%) Mo 24 ( 1.7%)	male 73 (10.2%) female 169 (24.0%)
STUDENTS			male 45 ( 6.3%) female 60 ( 8.5%)
	TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL
	FaFa 1422	Fa 1422	male 712
	MoFa 1422	Mo 1422	female 705
	FaMo 1422		
	MoMo 1422		

Percentages are computed by using the total indicated in the bottom rows. "Don't know's" are not included and therefore the total percentages are less than 100% in this table.

Another possible occupational move is between semi-skilled and skilled industries. Many of these workers who transfer in this way are of Chinese descent whose grandparents were farmers of one kind or another. The shift to semi-skilled and skilled industries started in generation +1. A small percentage of the informants report that their fathers were craftsmen and their mothers were dress-makers (crafts). None of the informants reported any of their grandparents working in either of these industries. An occupational change from unskilled farm labor to semi-skilled or skilled labor shows a shift in occupational scale. These people have been trained in their present occupation and are quite satisfied with their jobs. Most of them do not wish for more education and/or training.

The third type of occupational shift evident from our study is the shift of female workers into the prestigious category. Twenty-four percent of the female informants occupy this occupational stratum. However, only 10.1% of all the informants reported that their fathers were prestigious workers and only 1.7% of the informants reported that their mothers were prestigious workers.

### **Industrialization and Social Mobility**

#### *Social mobility and migration*

People who would have belonged to the rural lower class if occupational choice were not available may migrate to town where occupational opportunities are diverse and not limited to agricultural labor. Textor (1961) and Meinkoth (1962) have studied migrants who moved to Bangkok from the Northeast. From this study it can be seen that young migrants from Northeast Thailand tend to be less educated and belong to the unskilled group. Young people from Central Thailand tend to be better educated and many of them belong to the white collar group, though some migrants belong to the unskilled group. Many of the semi-skilled/skilled workers have migrated from other districts in Chonburi Province. Many of them are young people of Chinese descent, who moved into town to be trained in skilled occupations. Most of them preferred to be apprentices instead of working as unskilled labor



for the same amount of pay. This supports the general observation that Chinese people tend to be more future-oriented with higher aspirations for upward occupational mobility than Thai people.

Migration data show that migrants from different areas of the country tend to have different characteristics and belong to separate occupational categories. Furthermore the data support a hypothesis proposed by Lipset and Bendix that first generation migrants usually belong to the lower social strata of the community and second or third generation migrants have a better opportunity to move up the social scale. In this case the migrants to Chonburi Town are from within Chonburi Province, other provinces in the eastern region, and from the Northeast and Central Regions of the country show that Chonburi Town attracts people from the nearby regions to a much greater extent than from the farther away regions. Conversely, if the distance which the town attracts migrants may be correlated with the size or importance of the town, then Chonburi is a medium size town which attracts people from the near-by regions as compared to Bangkok-Thonburi, a large city which attracts people from all different regions of the country.

The relationship of migration to occupational shift and social mobility occurring from generation +1 to generation 0 is detected by tabulating father's occupation with informant's occupation and birth-place. Table 6 shows the pattern of occupational change from father to children of three groups of informants: those born within the town, those born in Chonburi Province outside of the town, and those born outside of Chonburi Province. Table 6 shows that chances for the informants to belong to the occupational categories which are higher in occupational level than the occupational categories of the fathers are better if the informants were born in town. In contrast, among informants who are in the same occupational category or in the occupational level lower than their fathers, about the same percentage were born in town as were born in other provinces. In other words, cross-generation social mobility is seen among people who were born in the town more than among people who were born in the province or in other provinces,

Table 6: Social Mobility and Place of Birth

children's occupation	children's place of birth			Total
	Chonburi Town	Chonburi Province	Other Province	
<b>Fathers in unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled occupational categories</b>				
a. children in same occupa- tional level as fathers	245 (44.3%) [50.4%]	65 (11.8%) [28.6%]	243 (43.9%) [60.2%]	553 (100.0%)
b. children in higher occupa- tional level than fathers	241 (42.7%) [49.6%]	162 (28.7%) [71.4%]	161 (28.6%) [39.9%]	564 (100.0%)
SUB TOTAL	486 (43.5%) [100.0%]	227 (20.3%) [100.0%]	404 (36.2%) [100.0%]	1117
<b>Fathers in white collar occupational categories</b>				
a. children in same occupa- tional level as fathers	23 (38.3%) [44.2%]	15 (25.0%) [45.4%]	22 (36.7%) [36.7%]	60 (100.0%)
b. children in higher occupa- tional level than fathers	29 (34.9%) [55.8%]	16 (19.3%) [51.6%]	38 (45.8%) [63.3%]	83 (100.0%)
SUB TOTAL	52 (37.1%) [100.0%]	31 (21.7%) [100.0%]	60 (42.0%) [100.0%]	143

In general, it is undeniable that chances for people born in Chonburi to find a better job, i.e. semi-skilled or skilled, are higher than chances for people born in other provinces. The data presented here seems to support the theory that first generation migrants generally occupy the lower strata of the community while second generation migrants find the opportunity to move up the social scale (Lipset and Bendix, 1959). The prestigious group have already moved out of the lower unskilled strata and their further mobility depends on further education or experience, as well as on the increasing opportunities for upward occupational mobility associated with further economic development of the community.

*Social mobility and assimilation*

The process of social assimilation forms part of the overall pattern of social mobility. In societies where ethnic differences are no longer easily visible because of physical and social similarities between the ethnic groups, the assimilation process may be said to have been completed. In effect, many individuals have moved from being members of a minority group to become members of the prestigious ethnic group. In this study the fact of assimilation of many Chinese into the Thai ethnic group is recorded by comparing the informant's identification of ethnicity of their FaFa, Fa, and the self. There is no agreement in the literature on Thailand of the best measure of degree of assimilation and rate of assimilation, but it has been observed that education provides a very effective means whereby people of Chinese descent can become assimilated into Thai society. Boonsanong (1971) in his study on assimilation-differentiation of Chinese in Bangkok-Thonburi areas, shows that the more educated Chinese have a higher tendency to become assimilated and to accept Thai ways of life. In this study, it is also seen that education and assimilation processes complement each other. Table 7 shows that rate of assimilation from generation +2 to generation 0 is the change in percentages of Chinese in the respective generations. In generation +2, 38.9% of the FaFa are Chinese; in generation +1, 30.2% of Fa are Chinese and in generation 0, 15.2% of the informants are Chinese.

*Table 7 : Intergenerational changes in ethnicity*

	Generation	Thai	Chinese	Other
FaFa	+2	794 (55.8%)	553 (38.9%)	75 (5.3%)
FaMo	+2	938 (66.0%)	421 (29.6%)	63 (4.5%)
MoFa	+2	910 (64.0%)	442 (31.1%)	70 (4.9%)
MoMo	+2	1014 (71.3%)	349 (24.5%)	59 (4.1%)
Fa	+1	971 (68.3%)	430 (30.2%)	21 (1.5%)
Mo	+1	1062 (74.7%)	341 (24.0%)	19 (1.4%)
Informants	0	1195 (84.0%)	216 (15.2%)	11 (0.8%)

The following discussion concentrates on shift of occupational status and not mere change of occupation. Since Chonburi is a town with a high percentage of Chinese residents, it is worthwhile to compare the change in occupational status with ethnicity. Skinner states that upward mobility in the Chinese society in Thailand was especially high during the period 1880-1910 (Skinner, 1957b:136). The following data show that social mobility among Chinese descendants has also been high for 1910-1970.

Ethnicity of FaFa has been used to determine whether the individual is a Thai descendant or a Chinese descendant. In an attempt to determine social mobility, occupations of fathers and occupations of the informants are compared. Since many females of generation +2 and generation +1 do no work outside of the household and their occupational and social stratification positions cannot be identified independently from that of their husbands, the occupations of mothers and grandmothers have not been used as a criterion or comparison. It must be noted (see table 5), however, that the females entered the out-of-household labor force formally in generation +1, and in generation 0 almost all of the females have a wage paying job. The following tables represent comparison of occupations of the informants and their fathers. Chinese descendants and Thai descendants are separated.

Table 8 shows that among Thai descendants, at generation +1, 12.3% are white-collar (prestigious) workers and 7.2% are semi-skilled or skilled workers. On the other hand, in table 9 among Chinese descendants at generation +1, 5.2% are white-collar (prestigious) and 9.4% are semi-skilled and skilled workers. At this generation there are also higher percentages of unskilled workers who are of Chinese descent than unskilled workers who are of Thai descent (5.0 percentage points more). But at generation 0 the percentages of unskilled workers for people of Chinese and Thai descent are in reverse order. Here 53.6% of ethnic Thai workers and 28.7% of ethnic Chinese workers are at the unskilled level. From generation +1 to generation 0 many people whose fathers are unskilled workers have become semi-skilled and/or skilled and white collar workers. Higher percentages of people of Chinese descent have moved up the social scale than people of Thai descent.

Table 8 : Social Mobility of Informants of Thai Descent

Generation +1	Generation 0			Generation +1 /Total
	unskilled	semi-skilled skilled	white-collar (prestigious)	
unskilled	340	173	256 (35.1%)	600
semi-skilled		36	16	54
skilled			2	7.2%
white-collar (prestigious)		23	18	92
		77 (10.3%)	51	12.3%
Generation 0 Total	399 (53.6%)	207 (27.8%)	140 (18.8%)	746

Table 9 : Social Mobility of Informants of Chinese Descent

Generation +1	Generation 0			Generation +1 Total
	unskilled	semi-skilled skilled	white-collar (prestigious)	
unskilled	128	221	308 (61.4%)	429
semi-skilled		11	29	47
skilled			7	9.4%
white-collar (prestigious)		5	10	26
		26 (5.2%)	11	5.2%
Generation 0 Total	144 (28.7%)	260 (51.8%)	98 (19.5%)	502

In tables 8 and 9 the upper triangles represent the people who have moved up the social scale and the lower triangles represent the people who have moved down the social scale. The percentages may be compared as follows:

	<i>Ethnic Thai</i>	<i>Ethnic Chinese</i>
Moved up	35.1%	61.4%
Moved down	10.3%	5.2%
Remained the same	54.6%	33.5%
	100.0%	100.0%

It is evident that more people of Chinese descent moved up the social scale than people of Thai descent. One explanation is that there are more people of Thai descent at the white-collar (prestigious) level in generation +1 than people of Chinese descent. Therefore the chances for offspring of white-collar (prestigious) workers to remain at the same social level is higher among people of Thai descent than among people of Chinese descent. At the same time people of Chinese descent moved into white-collar (prestigious) occupational level from lower occupational levels resulting in a higher percentages of people who moved up the social scale. It has already been mentioned that in this study there are many white-collar (prestigious) workers who are of Chinese descent but identify themselves as Thai. One reason for this is that many people of Chinese descent become white-collar (prestigious) workers in order to be assimilated into Thai society. Another possibility is that people of Chinese descent become assimilated in order to be upwardly mobile and join the white-collar (prestigious) occupational group. This is not to say that people in other vocations have no chance for upward mobility or assimilation. Different paths of upward mobility are seen to be effected by education and assimilation processes.

### Paths of Mobility and Changes in the Social Structure

The following discussion attempts to enumerate the different paths of mobility detected in this study. Since the data are gathered from the study of the young labor force who belong to the lower and middle social class only, the processes occurring among people older than 25 have not been emphasized.

#### Horizontal movements

1. rural —————→ urban  
migration
2. urban —————→ urban  
occupational choice
3. urban —————→ urban  
assimilation

#### Vertical movements

1. unskilled —————→ semi-skilled/skilled (vocational/manual)  
training
2. unskilled —————→ white-collar (professional/non-manual)  
education
3. unskilled —————→ white-collar  
education+assimilation
4. skilled —————→ white-collar  
education+assimilation
5. white-collar —————→ skilled  
training, no education
6. white-collar —————→ unskilled  
no training, no education

Many different combinations of these paths may be followed. The diagram for rural Thai people may be presented as follows. For Thai people, assimilation is not involved. Not all of the steps need to have occurred.

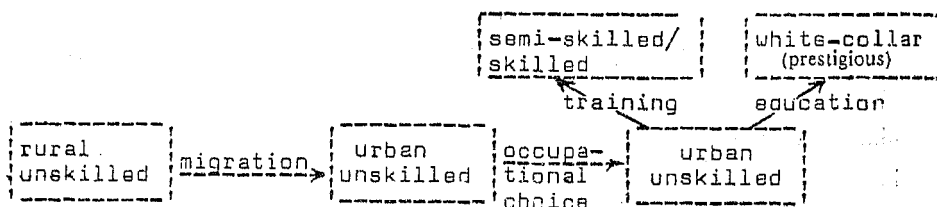


Diagram III. Paths of Mobility for Rural Thai People.

For people of Chinese descent, the path is more complex. Without assimilation these young people remain on the Chinese side of the diagram (see diagram IV). Assimilation may take place before, during, or after education. In Thai society, for a Chinese to be treated and accepted as a Thai is considered an accomplishment by him since theoretically and traditionally, a Chinese has no opportunity, as a Chinese, to belong to the upper class. It has been shown earlier that a Chinese may become a Thai and then belong to the upper class. Therefore, assimilation is a social process which is important for social mobility in the social structure of Thailand.

Diagram IV shows how individuals from the unskilled lower class may acquire education and training and move out of that level. It also shows how Chinese people may be assimilated and move across the ethnic line to the comparable level in the Thai society. This intermediate level which was not in existence during the early Bangkok Period (pre 20th Century) has become more and more distinct. Many jobs have been created as a result of industrialization and urbanization. Opportunities for training and education have also increased. The compulsory education system gives everyone equal opportunity to be educated. Those who acquire education (formal and informal) beyond the compulsory (4th grade) level are the ones who will be upwardly mobile.



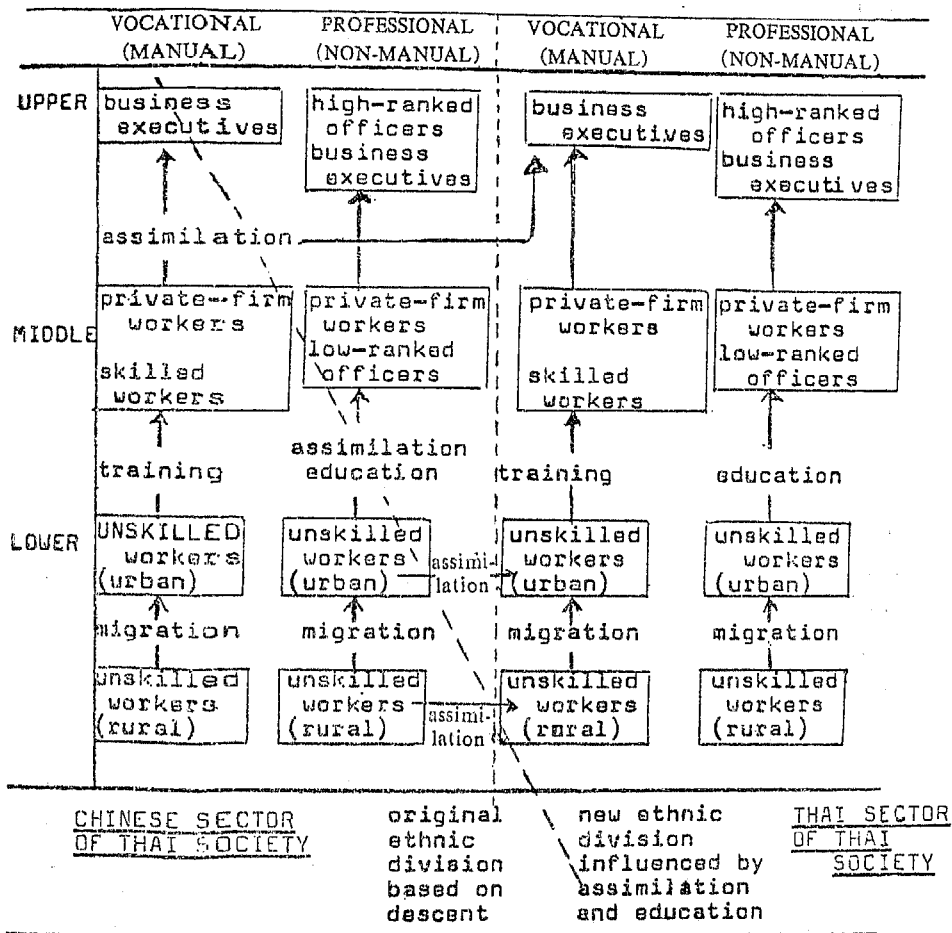


Diagram IV: Social processes and the social structure of Thailand in the 1970's.

In this study of Chonburi, the rate of mobility is compared between the present and the pre-20th Century mobility pattern documented by Akin (1969). Akin states that for a member of the Thai lower class movement into the upper class was relatively difficult, and that although Chinese merchants might be ennobled the number of Chinese who moved into the upperclass was not very high. When compared to the pre-20th Century situation, the rate of mobility out of the lower class is relatively high at the present time. People may move out of the unskilled lower class through vocational training and education. Most of these choices did not exist before the 20th Century. At the present time relatively easy acquisition of education and training makes paths of mobility increasingly accessible to many people, and the rate of mobility has increased considerably when compared to the rate during the early-Bangkok Period. Thus this study tends to support the findings of Lipset and Bendix that within a society, the rate of social mobility becomes relatively high once industrialization reaches a certain level.

Evers, on the other hand, in his study of the high-ranking civil servants who belonged to higher socio-economic strata of Bangkok finds that the rate of mobility has decreased since the Revolution of 1932. He admits that his sample is small and it is concerned with one subgroup only. He gives the following explanation as to why the rate of mobility seems to have decreased:

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

The conclusion is that urbanization in loosely structured societies may lead to the formation of a more rigid class system and to a temporary decline in social mobility (Evers, 1966:488).

Evers claims that many of the present high-ranked civil servants (those he interviewed in 1963) are descendants of white-collar workers and therefore, they cannot be considered to have moved up socially; they remained approximately at the same social level. By contrast, our data collected from Chonburi shows that there is an increasing influx into the lower ranks of the civil service of people whose parents were not civil servants. There is substantial mobility and assimilation of Chinese descendants into the Thai civil service, and substantial mobility of rural people who have migrated to urban areas to acquire education and enter into the white-collar class. The mobility of these different groups of people is possible because of the increase in the number of the civil service positions and other prestigious jobs available within the total bureaucratic system of Thailand as a result of growing industrialization and urbanization.

Evers' statement concerning "loosely-structured societies" was written in 1966. In 1969, however, he proposed that anthropologists should make the distinction between folk models and statistical models. The "loosely-structured" concept may have been formulated by writers who accepted folk models without attempting to verify them statistically. People (the informants) may claim to have no rules in the society but statistically their behavior may show a consistent pattern. In this study, I have investigated the behavioral pattern of the informants by inquiring about their past action and their family background. The pattern of the different social processes becomes apparent after the data are analyzed statistically. This is one of the first attempts to construct a statistical model of certain aspects of Thai social behavior along the lines suggested by Evers.

Evers stated that the theory that high rate of social mobility is an indicator of the "loose structure" of Thai society has been formulated from the folk model presented by the informants without the support of statistical behavioral models (Evers, 1969: 121). He believes a decrease in social mobility rate has been due to the formation of a more rigid class system within what was a loosely structured society (Evers, 1966: 488). However, as indicated earlier, I do not agree with other writers

(Embree, 1950; Phillips, 1966; etc.) who claim that Thai society as a whole is "loosely-structured". Data presented in this study as well as historical studies (Akin, 1969) clearly show that social classes in Thai society have existed for a long time, and have been associated with definite patterns of stability and mobility. The statistical behavioral model presented here, supports the idea that the label "loosely-structured" should not be applied to Thai society as a whole.

This is not to abandon Evers' suggestion that changes in the Thai class system are taking place. I would like to rephrase Evers' conclusion in 1966 quoted above and propose that industrialization and urbanization lead to formation of a new social class. Data from Chonburi support the proposition that the middle class is formed by people who moved out of the Chinese entrepreneurial class via assimilation process. In some cases, members of the upper class (noblemen) have moved downward socially and are now considered to belong to the middle class.

The changes in political structure of Thailand from an absolute monarchy to a democracy have also made the distinction between the upper and the lower class less clear. Under the monarchy, the king was the absolute authority and had control over everyone in the country. Members of the upper class were noblemen and descendants of the king and the previous kings. Other people belonged to the lower class. The Revolution of 1932 resulted in reduction in the power of the king from that of an absolute to a constitutional monarch, subject to the democratic ruling cabinet. Noble titles, *phan*, *muen*, *khun*, *luang*, *phra*, *phraya*, *chao phraya*, and *somdet chao phraya*, which designated the degree of nobility of the individuals, were abolished, but royal titles which designated the genealogical relationship of the individuals and the king (or the previous kings) were retained. The distinction by titles between the noble class and the commoners is not seen anymore even though government officers still belong to a hierarchical system depending on their work positions. The abolition of the noble titles (though not the royal titles) has had the effect of making the upper class less distinct from the rest of Thai society.

While the change in political structure resulted in the change in the social structure from a distinct two class system to a system with less clearly separated classes, industrialization and urbanization have been associated with job opportunities and other social processes which moved people into the intermediate level of Thai society between the upper and the lower classes. The unskilled workers acquire training and education as a means to move out of the unskilled lower class. Rural people have to migrate to urban areas to acquire skills and education, and descendants of unskilled Chinese move out of that class level by acquiring education and training similar to the Thai ethnic group. But descendants of Chinese people who were born into the Chinese entrepreneurial class must become assimilated to Thai society. Assimilation is accomplished by education and by close association with Thai people. In this way, descendants of the Chinese entrepreneurial class become Thai. They belong to the class higher than the unskilled lower class and lower than the upper class. The formation of the middle class was made easier when social lines between upper and lower classes were blurred with the discontinuation of the noble titles after the Revolution of 1932.

### **Conclusion**

Traditionally in Thailand, with very few exceptions, people of lower class had no opportunity to become members of the upper class. This study shows how industrialization and urbanization have created job opportunities and avenues for mobility, so that people who would have belonged to a lower class now may use one of several possible channels of mobility paths to become members of middle or upper classes. Descendants of the Chinese entrepreneurial class acquired Thai citizenship by being born in Thailand and became assimilated by being associated with Thai people at the middle class level. The middle strata which had not been recognized as part of the traditional social structure of Thai society are now recognized as forming a "middle class" where people in many occupational groups belong.

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