

SOCIO-ECONOMIC VARIATION, EXPENDITURE PATTERNS, AND ECONOMIC STRATEGIES IN A NORTHERN THAI VILLAGE¹

by

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Both scholars and residents of Thailand's agricultural villages have been inclined to stress the essential socio-economic *uniformity* of the rural population. At any rate, there has been little emphasis on intra-village differences in wealth, education, expenditure patterns, and power. In the face of obvious differences between rural residents and the urban officials, tradesmen, and professional people with whom they deal, this emphasis on rural uniformity has a certain validity. In conformity with this view, ethnographic monographs describing Thai village life seldom emphasize, or even directly examine, socio-economic differences within villages². Villagers manifest a similar view in their occasional reliance on a dichotomy between "us" (village residents, farmers) and "them" (government officials, professional people, wealthy businessmen, city people in general) which seems to hold greater significance than any intravillage distinction.

While justifiable in some ways, this "uniformitarian" approach to study and description of Thai village life ignores significant theoretical and practical questions. Thus a different approach has been adopted in this paper. Data from the Chiang Mai village of Sansai have been analyzed with the specific intention of exposing the socio-economic *variation* that characterizes village life. This is not done simply to point

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- 1) Research funds for predoctoral research, from which this paper is derived, were provided by the Midwestern Universities Consortium for International Activities.
- 2) For instance, see Konrad Kingshill, *Ku Daeng: The Red Tomb* (Bangkok, 1965); Michael Moerman, *Agricultural Change and Peasant Choice in a Thai Village* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968); John E. deYoung, *Village Life in Modern Thailand* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966).

out errors in earlier analyses (rather a matter of emphasis than error), but to raise significant questions about village life, and about administrative practices and policies, and policies that affect it. A series of explicit questions is raised in the final section of the paper.

The data examined here were collected during 1969-1970 field research in the Northern Thai-speaking, rice-growing village of Sansai³. Sansai lies about 22 kilometres southwest of Chiang Mai in a densely settled region of the Chiang Mai plain. As part of a broader study of "agricultural decision-making" it was necessary to marshal data on socio-economic variation within the local population⁴. The data are re-examined here for the important insights they provide into the socio-economic heterogeneity that characterizes at least one, and probably many, Thai villages.

Socio-economic variation at Sansai

Research was carried out at Sansai from July 1969 to August 1970. During October 1969 the survey schedule *Socio-economic Profile Schedule*⁵ was administered in each of the 186 village households with the assistance of students from Chiang Mai University. Information was requested on household composition, occupations, employment, landholding, farming, capital equipment, financial arrangements, and related topics. Data in the *Profile Schedule* provide a broad and useful base for analysis of socio-economic differences which exist within the village.

- 3) Although research took place in 1969-1970, data from the village are presented in the "ethnographic present".
- 4) The broader study is also available. See the author's Ph.D. dissertation, "Decisions against nature: Crop choice in a northern Thai village", Department of Anthropology, University of Illinois (University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1974).
- 5) The *Socio-Economic Profile Schedule* was developed by the staff of the Chulalongkorn University Social Science Research Institute as part of a study carried out for the National Economic Development Board of Thailand. The *Profile Schedule* was administered concurrently in more than 3,000 rural households in the northern, central, and northeastern regions of Thailand.

For purposes of analysis, the village was divided into subgroups through application of a socio-economic rating system. The rating system was applied to the data of the *Profile Schedule*, and is similar to that used by Lewis in Tepoztlan in the 1940s⁶. In general, each point on the scale corresponds to 500 to 600 baht⁷ of annual income. A few items were included--i.e. schooling, size of labour force--for which it is difficult to assign a cash value, because it is felt that they are useful in differentiating socio-economic groups. Table 1 is a reproduction of the scale used. Socio-economic ratings for village households ranged from a minimum of zero to a maximum 179 points. The village was divided into three socio-economic groups, of equal size, by assigning the 62 households with highest scores to group I, the next 62 households to group II, and the remaining 62 households to group III. This simple division has limited relationship to a more complex reality, but useful insights are nevertheless provided. Differences between groups are numerous, and statistically significant. They vary in economic strategies and life-style.

Financially, households in group I vary from moderately well-to-do to rich (by local standards). All trucks, hand tractors, motorcycles, and rice mills are owned by members of this group. Only these households are able to provide their children with advanced schooling outside the village. The few permanent, full-time landlords of Sansai belong to this group. They control an inordinate proportion of both house and field land. Only individual members of this group have been able to purchase land in Sansai in recent years. Several households own large, profitable longan orchards within the village. In addition to land, these households possess an inordinate share of locally significant occupational skills. The most successful middlemen, seamstresses, shopowners, and market women belong to this group. Both local "injection doctors" belong to group I. It is from such households that leaders of local government, the irrigation societies, and the temple congregation are ordinarily chosen. Households in this group are more likely than those in the other groups to maintain savings accounts, to make small loans to

6) See Oscar Lewis, *Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlan Restudied* (Urbana, Illinois; 1963).

7) The current exchange rate is approximately 20 baht per one U.S. dollar.

Table 1
SOCIO-ECONOMIC SCALE FOR SANSAI HOUSEHOLDS

Item	Points assigned
For each <i>rai</i> of house land	1
For each longan tree	0.1
For each <i>rai</i> of field land owned, and used during a given season for rice, garlic, or watermelons	2
For each <i>rai</i> of field land owned, and used during a given season for peanuts or soybeans	1
For each <i>rai</i> of field land rented out, and used for rice, watermelons, or garlic	1
For each <i>rai</i> of field land rented out, and used for peanuts or soybeans	$\frac{1}{2}$
For each <i>rai</i> of field land rented in, and used for rice, watermelons, or garlic	1
For each <i>rai</i> of field land rented in, and used for peanuts or soybeans	$\frac{1}{2}$
For each member of the household labour force	1
For each year of schooling of a household member beyond grade 4	$\frac{1}{4}$
For each 100 baht of monthly income from a salaried job	2
For each 100 baht of monthly gross income from market vending or a small business	1
For each 100 baht of monthly gross income from a shop	$\frac{1}{4}$
For maintaining a savings account	1
For borrowing money from a credit co-operative or financial institution	2
For a buffalo	2
For an adult pig, two small pigs, 20 ducks, or 50 chickens	1
For a rice mill, large truck, or tractor	10
For a small truck	5
For an oxcart	1
For a motorcycle	1

friends, relatives, and neighbours, and to receive low-interest loans (12 per cent per annum) from government or private sources. Members of group I own and sell more livestock than members of other groups.

The bulk of group II households are heavily involved in agriculture. Most operate small, self-owned plots, or larger, rented plots. Members of many group II households work at agricultural labour, but this constitutes a secondary source of income. Children in such households stand to inherit very small amounts of land, if any. There are few signs of upward mobility. Children in this group are unable to attend school beyond the fourth grade (cl. 4), and households are unable to purchase new land. Members of the group work at occupations that require traditional, rather than 'modern', white-collar skills. They work as carpenters, sawyers, basket-makers, mat-weavers, etc. The skill involved may be substantial, but financial rewards are consistently low. Nevertheless, these households are relatively well off by comparison with those in group III.

In an agricultural area where ownership of land is the most obvious manifestation of wealth, most households in group III own *no* land. Self-employed, farming households work rented plots on a half-share basis. Many households receive the bulk of their income from agricultural employment. This is true even though agricultural labourers are ordinarily hired on a day-to-day basis, and the wages received are four to seven baht per day. Several households in the group consist of elderly widows living alone, subsisting on donations provided by relatives and neighbours. Children in this group do not remain in school past the fourth grade. No member of this group has been chosen a leader of a *wat* ("temple") congregation, irrigation society, village, or subdistrict in recent memory. Such leaders are almost always chosen from group I, and only occasionally from group II. Group III households do not maintain savings accounts, nor receive low-interest loans from government or private sources. Their only potential sources of productive capital are a co-operative landlord (who may be willing to pay full price for fertilizer, seed, and insecticide at the beginning of the season in exchange for

a half share of a garlic or melon crop, and repayment of half his capital expenditure after the crop is sold), and local moneylenders who extract interest payments of 3 to 5 per cent a month, and require title to land as security.

Household expenditures at Sansai

The validity of dividing Sansai residents into three socio-economic groups was explicitly tested through a study of household expenditure patterns⁸. Data on household expenditures were gathered in a separate survey. A total of 31 households were surveyed—10 each from groups I and II, and 11 from group III. Table 2 is a reproduction of the survey form. Table 3 summarizes data collected in the survey.

The survey was made in one round only, and the respondent for each household was asked to remember purchases for the entire previous year. Therefore, it is essential to remember that the data used here are estimates, subject to the personal quirks of respondents. Nevertheless, the aggregated data demonstrate consistent differences between the groups in the direction expected. Group I households spend more on nearly all items. Each of the expenditure items included in table 3 will be considered in turn.

Housekeeping necessities. This category includes such items as pots and pans, flatware, dishes, glasses, furniture, bedding, lamp fuel, batteries, mats, and washing powder. The survey shows precise ordering of such factors as *per capita* values, household averages, and median household values. On an individual basis, members of group I households spent an average 51 per cent more on these items than households in group III.

Medicine and medical treatment. The variety of medicines included here is potentially wide. The category encompasses native herb medicine, Chinese medicines, various patent medicines, and Western medicines. Medical treatment is provided by physicians at government and

8) For a separate study which reveals significant intergroup differences in food consumption patterns, see the author's "Cultural, environmental, and socio-economic factors in food use: The Sansai case", SEADAG Paper (New York, The Asia Society, 1973).

Table 2
SANSAI HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURES, 1969

House # _____	Water pump _____
Village # _____	Draft animals _____
I. Agriculture and food production	Land (garden crop) _____
A. Did you buy any of the following ?	Spraying equipment _____
Seeds or seedlings _____	Other items _____
Fertilizer _____	SUBTOTAL B _____
Insecticide _____	C.
Insecticide sprayer _____	Repair of tools or equipment _____
Water pump _____	Medicines for livestock _____
Agricultural land _____	<i>Kaakaan</i> (owned or rented land) _____
Oxen _____	Well-digging _____
Buffalo _____	Other services _____
Pigs _____	SUBTOTAL C _____
Poultry _____	TOTAL _____
Rice straw (for garlic) _____	
Animal feed (all types) _____	II. Household necessities
Plastic bags (for melons) _____	A. Did you buy any of the following ?
Hoes _____	Flashlight _____
Knives _____	Pressure lamp _____
Oxcart _____	Other lamp _____
Ax or hatchet _____	Candles _____
Harvest basket _____	Lamp fuel _____
Plow _____	Alcohol _____
Harrow _____	Batteries _____
Watering cans _____	Mats (all types) _____
Fishing equipment _____	Baskets (all types) _____
Other items useful in farming _____	Clock _____
SUBTOTAL A _____	Water pots _____
B. Did you pay rent for any of the following ?	Cooking pots _____
Tractor _____	Dishes and glasses _____
Hand tractor _____	Knives, spoons, forks _____

Chairs	_____	Labour to repair any structure	_____
Tables	_____	SUBTOTAL B	_____
Mattresses	_____	C. Did you purchase any of the	_____
Sheets and blankets	_____	following?	_____
Cabinets	_____	House land	_____
Washing powder	_____	Other land (not for farming)	_____
Photos, illustrations	_____	SUBTOTAL C	_____
Stamps, stationery	_____	TOTAL	_____
Pens, pencils	_____	IV. Transportation	_____
Buckets	_____	A. Did you purchase any of the	_____
Dippers	_____	following?	_____
Other items	_____	Bicycle	_____
SUBTOTAL A	_____	Motorcycle	_____
B. Did you spend money on any of the	_____	Truck	_____
following?	_____	Automobile	_____
Repair of clock, lamp,	_____	Gasoline and oil	_____
pots, etc.	_____	Tires	_____
Servant's wages	_____	SUBTOTAL A	_____
SUBTOTAL B	_____	B. Did you pay for any of the following?	_____
TOTAL	_____	Repairs for bicycle	_____
III. Housing and other structures	_____	Repairs for motorcycle	_____
A. Did you build or have built any of	_____	Repairs for truck	_____
the following?	_____	Repairs for automobile	_____
House	_____	SUBTOTAL B	_____
Bath house or privy	_____	C. Did you spend money on the	_____
Grain storage bin	_____	following?	_____
Pigpen	_____	Riding buses, taxis, etc.	_____
Fence	_____	Transporting goods in buses, taxis,	_____
Shop or business	_____	etc.	_____
Other structure	_____	SUBTOTAL C	_____
SUBTOTAL A	_____	TOTAL	_____
B. Did you spend money on any of the	_____	V. Business expenses	_____
following?	_____	A. Did you buy any of the following?	_____
Material to repair any	_____	Rice mill	_____
structure	_____	Tractor	_____

Hand tractor	_____	VII. Education	
Gasoline and oil for rice mill, tractor, etc.	_____	Did you spend money for the following?	
Tools of trade	_____	Tuition and fees	_____
Other equipment	_____	Books	_____
Supplies	_____	School supplies	_____
SUBTOTAL A		Room and board	_____
B. Did you spend money on any of the following?		Transportation (home to school)	_____
Repairs to tools and equipment	_____	TOTAL	_____
Workers' wages	_____	IX. Religion and merit-making	
SUBTOTAL B	_____	Did you make merit in any of the following ways?	
VI. Finances		Feeding monks on ordinary days	_____
Did you pay out money for any of the following?		<i>Tham bun on waansiin</i>	_____
Land taxes	_____	Gifts for weddings	_____
Business taxes	_____	Gifts for funerals	_____
Loan payments	_____	Gifts for religious construction	_____
Life insurance payments	_____	TOTAL	_____
Lending out money	_____	X. Entertainment	
Assessments for local improvements	_____	Did you spend money on any of the following?	
Legal fines	_____	Radio	_____
TOTAL	_____	Tape recorder	_____
VII. Medical expenses		Tapes	_____
Did you spend money for any of the following?		Record player	_____
Medicines	_____	Repair of radio, record player, recorder	_____
Injections	_____	Newspapers, magazines	_____
Consultations, house calls	_____	Gambling losses	_____
Hospital care	_____	Children's toys	_____
TOTAL	_____	Cigarettes and makings	_____

Gun	_____	Meat	_____
Ammunition	_____	Fish	_____
Repair of gun	_____	Eggs	_____
Liquor	_____	<i>Naampaa</i>	_____
Tickets for movies, shows, temple festivals	_____	Salt	_____
TOTAL	_____	<i>Naamphik</i>	_____
		Sugar	_____
XI. Clothing and personal grooming		Cooking oil	_____
Did you spend money on the following?		<i>Paahaa, kapii</i>	_____
Watch	_____	<i>Khanom</i>	_____
Jewelry	_____	<i>Kaeng</i> (prepared)	_____
Cosmetics	_____	Restaurant meals	_____
Toothpaste, toothbrush, soap, combs, etc.	_____	Rice milling	_____
Clothing, shoes (adult males)	_____	Other food items	_____
Clothing, shoes (adult females)	_____	(Amount of homegrown rice used, at 1 baht per litre)	_____
Clothing, shoes (boys')	_____	TOTAL	_____
Clothing, shoes (girls')	_____		
Haircuts for males	_____	XIII. Double-check	
Hairdressing for females	_____	How much rice do you use?	
TOTAL	_____	Per day	_____
		Per week	_____
XII. Food		How much <i>kab khaaw</i> ("with rice", or food) do you use?	
Did you buy the following items?		Per day	_____
Milled rice	_____	Per week	_____
Unmilled rice	_____	TOTAL	_____
Vegetables	_____	GRAND TOTAL	_____
Fruits	_____	Percentage spent on food	_____

Table 3
ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURES AT SANSAI⁹

Expenditure	Group I			Group II			Group III		
	<i>Per capita average</i>	<i>Household average</i>	<i>Median household value</i>	<i>Per capita average</i>	<i>Household average</i>	<i>Median household value</i>	<i>Per capita average</i>	<i>Household average</i>	<i>Median household value</i>
1. Housekeeping necessities	94	550	620	78	380	410	62	280	220
2. Medicine and medical treatment	44	260	200	44	210	140	110	490	210
3. Merit-making	68	400	340	39	190	140	73	320	190
4. Entertainment	200	1,160	990	120	580	630	81	360	360
5. Clothing and personal grooming	250	1,480	1,380	74	360	120	76	340	260
6. Food ¹⁰	830	4,880	4,310	640	3,090	3,200	590	2,620	2,800
7. Total basic necessities	1,530	9,040	7,870	980	4,710	4,580	910	4,070	3,990
8. Total expenditures (including unusual expenses and capital expenditures)	3,440	20,400	17,000	1,450	6,940	6,080	1,290	5,770	6,280

9) Items 1 to 6 cannot be summed to yield the total under item 7. Several expenditure categories—transportation, education, housing, farming expenses, and business expenses—are not included here in detail. Transportation and education are included under item 7, and *all* expenditures are included under item 8.

10) Homegrown rice, consumed in most households for at least part of each year, was assigned the prevailing retail value of one baht per litre.

private hospitals, by "injection doctors", and by a variety of traditional practitioners. If we consider *per capita* figures, household averages, and median household values, the rank ordering is not perfect in this case. In fact, there are indications that, among the households surveyed, the poorest spend most on medicines and medical treatment. Several explanations are possible. The poor may indeed be ill more often, owing to poor nutrition and other factors. Some families undoubtedly *become* poor because they have one or more sickly members. Or, the poor may adopt a unique life-style which involves few trips to Chiang Mai or Lamphun cities (where most physicians are located), and great dependence on traditional medical practitioners and "injection doctors". Medical treatment of the latter type turns out to be very expensive in individual cases. In cases of chronic disease, the "injection doctor" gives an injection every day or two for weeks or months at a time. There are cases at Sansai where patients of one particular injection doctor have lost their land as a result of an extended illness.

Merit-making. In Sansai, merit-making activities centre around feeding the monks, giving them gifts, and construction of religious buildings. For purposes of this survey, donations for school construction, and gifts made at weddings and funerals, were included in the same category. Once again, the data do not conform to the group ordering expected. The appropriate explanation here is that one household in group III gave an unusually large amount (1,125 baht), and that three households in group II gave unusually small amounts (less than 100 baht). In a larger sample, we can expect the usual group ordering to prevail.

Clothing and personal grooming. Items included under personal grooming are watches and jewelry, cosmetics, combs, brushes, soaps, toothpaste, haircuts, hairdressing, and related items. Group I households

spend substantially the most. The figures for group II and III households are virtually the same. Household figures for group II show particularly wide variation. Two households spend only 40 and 50 baht, respectively, while two other households spent 947 and 1,147 baht. These latter figures raise the household *average*, while the median value is quite low.

Entertainment. Expenses included under this heading are purchase of radios and similar appliances, repair of the same items, newspapers and magazines, gambling losses, toys, tickets for movies, traditional plays and temple festivals, liquor, and tobacco products. For most village households, the last item is the major expense under "entertainment". Some readymade cigarettes are purchased, but most adult villagers smoke the traditional *bulii khijoo*. Banana-leaf wrappers, bulk tobacco, and *khijoo* (an aromatic ingredient made from tamarind bark) are purchased every few days. In some households, this single item represents more than 10 per cent of annual "basic" expenditures. Surprising insight into village life is gained through a comparison of spending patterns for tobacco products and merit-making. Considering these two items only, we learn that 27 households spent more on tobacco products in 1969, and only four spent more on merit-making. Among villagers who consider themselves devout Buddhists, and for whom merit-making is the most obvious path to improved future lives, 87.1 per cent of households surveyed spent more on tobacco products. Expenditures on "entertainment" follow the usual group ordering.

Food. The dietary patterns of village households are, in broad outline, much the same. Rice provides the majority of the food energy, and of a number of other nutrients. Substantial quantities of vegetables are combined with very small amounts of fish and meat products. Nevertheless, the data indicate that group I households are able to spend

more on food. On the average, group I households spend 41 per cent more on food for each member than group III households¹¹.

Total basic necessities. Included under this category are expenses that all households can expect to have every year. Items excluded are : business expenses, loan payments, and purchase of such items as tractors, hand tractors, trucks, land, houses, and other buildings, which are acquired occasionally or once in a lifetime. Farming expenses are also excluded, although most families have them. They fill the needs of household members only indirectly. Once again, the data are in the expected group order. Group I households spend 68 per cent more on ordinary consumer goods and services than group III households.

Total expenditures. This category includes all items on which Sansai households spend money, including major capital expenditures and land. It is in these figures that we see the greatest differences between groups. Wealthy households have a substantially higher living standard than poor ones, but it is in major expenditures—on houses, land, farming, and businesses—where differences are greatest. For instance, four households in group I spent 3,200-13,000 baht on building new houses or improving old ones. No household in group II or III spent more than 800 baht for the same purpose.

Two other indicators, not included in table 3, also separate the wealthy households from the poor. Under present conditions, only well-to-do Sansai households are able to provide their children with education beyond the four years offered at the village school. Higher education requires that children be sent to stay either in Chiang Mai or Lamphun, and the expense involved is substantial. As a result, only one of the households included in the survey—a group I household—had a child

11) As a result of their greater expenditures, group I households enjoyed diets that were more varied, less dependent on rice, richer in protein and fats, and generally superior to those in groups II and III. See Calavan, *op.cit.*, 1973.

attending school outside the village. The cost of supporting that child in school for a year was 2,700 baht. No household in group II or III spent more than 90 baht on a child attending the local school.

An indicator of living standard often applied in underdeveloped countries is the ratio of household food expenditures to total "ordinary" expenditures. In Sansai, food represents 54 per cent of expenditures on basic necessities in group I, and 66 and 64 per cent in groups II and III, respectively. This is yet another indicator that group I households are accustomed to a higher living standard.

Economic strategies at Sansai

Although brief and sketchy, the data presented above strongly support the notion that Sansai residents are socio-economically a heterogeneous group. It seems likely that close examination would reveal a similar degree of heterogeneity in many, perhaps most, Thai villages. However, identifying socio-economic heterogeneity is not a final goal, but merely a tentative step toward understanding village life. Further understanding would be gained through appraisal of the expenditure data in relationship to locally available economic strategies. The present case simply reflects the aphorism that, on the average, "those who have more spend more". This leads to the (not unimportant) conclusion that some village households are more "comfortable" (and perhaps happier and healthier) than others. More important, however, are those expenditures not devoted to present comfort, but to investment for the future. Funds available for household investment represent an important part of the *framework* within which decisions governing future economic success are made. Table 4 emphasizes this point by presenting some data from table 3 in a new light.

Although group I household members clearly live more comfortably, they differ most significantly from other groups in the proportion and absolute size of annual expenditures devoted to non-subsistence

Table 4
SANSI HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURES (RE-EXAMINED)

Expenditure	Group I			Group II			Group III		
	<i>Per capita average</i>	<i>Household average</i>	<i>Median household value</i>	<i>Per capita average</i>	<i>Household average</i>	<i>Median household value</i>	<i>Per capita average</i>	<i>Household average</i>	<i>Median household value</i>
1. Total expenditures (item 8 in table 3)	3,440	20,400	17,000	1,450	6,940	6,080	1,290	5,770	6,280
2. Total basic necessities (item 7 in table 3)	1,530	9,040	7,870	980	4,710	4,580	910	4,070	3,990
3. Investment surplus (item 1—item 2)	1,910	11,360	9,130	470	2,230	1,500	380	1,700	2,290
4. Investment surplus as percentage of total expenditures	—55.5—		53.7	—32.4—		24.7	—29.5—		36.5

items. Although some expenditures of the latter type also enhance the "comfort" of group I households—e.g. construction of substantial wooden houses--nearly all have the effect of increasing the net worth and probable future economic success of those households. Through careful (and lucky) manipulation of their substantial non-subsistence expenditures, households in group I have a fair chance of "moving ahead" economically, and a good chance of at least "staying even". In groups II and III investment resources fall off dramatically and the probability of "falling behind" economically is greatly increased.

Possible investments at Sansai constitute a list of moderate length. They would include: (a) purchase of land; (b) improvement of land already owned; (c) establishment of a retail business; (d) establishment in business as a commodity middleman; (e) purchase of major agricultural equipment--tractor, hand tractor, water pump; (f) purchase of a gasoline-operated rice mill; (g) purchase of a truck; (h) moneylending; (i) education of the new generation (beyond grade four); (j) establishment in business as a livestock middleman; (k) special occupational training dressmaking, hairdressing, watch repair, etc.; (l) purchase of tools or equipment to practise an occupation; and (m) establishment as a market seller. All of these strategies are most readily available to households in group I. Items (a) to (i) are virtually restricted to that group, and *all* strategies except item (m) are effectively beyond the economic reach of households in group III.

The single most important factor in the current distribution of wealth at Sansai is ownership of and access to land. Generally, households are "well off" because they own land. Three households are "well off" because members have sufficient education to work as school teachers, and thus to earn a monthly salary. In two of these cases, however, household land holdings substantially exceed the local average. Only a handful of present residents have sufficient wealth to buy land, and since World War II land has changed hands within the village largely through inheritance. In addition, a few plots have been sold to urban

residents. The scarcity of land at Sansai is indicated by its high price (6,000 to 8,000 baht per *rai* which is a rate equivalent to US\$ 1,875 to \$2,500 per hectare), the eagerness with which potential sharecroppers seek tenure arrangements, and the stability of sharecropping arrangements. In one case a sharecropper has worked the same land for 35 years; in others the sharecropping tenancy has been passed down from father to son¹².

In recent years Sansai residents with surplus funds have typically invested in improving land they already own¹³, establishing businesses¹⁴, or for education of the younger generation. The great majority who lack surplus funds have undoubtedly found themselves staying even (if lucky), or falling behind in the economic game.

- 12) Readers who remain convinced that "a landless but hard-working individual can always get land", should consider the following facts: (a) land at Sansai costs 6,000 to 8,000 baht per *rai* (see above), when available; (b) minimum land area required for the subsistence needs of a small family is 2.0 to 2.5 *rai*; (c) agricultural labourers earn four to seven baht per day, and cannot expect to work more than 100 to 150 days per year; (d) sharecroppers take only half of any crop produced, and seldom have access to more than five *rai*. Apart from inheritance, winning a lottery, or other exceptional good fortune, movement from a landless to a landed state at Sansai seems unimaginable!
- 13) At Sansai this is usually accomplished by converting croplands to longan orchards. While these are likely to be highly profitable in the distant future, the short term finds the land largely nonproductive. The trees will produce their first "real" crop only after six to ten years. Only a handful of Sansai residents can afford to hold land out of production for an extended period. Others, even in group I, are limited to planting a few trees in their house compounds.
- 14) Middlemen typically deal in garlic, peanuts, and longan. Shopkeepers establish small "general" shops. There are also seamstresses, hairdressers, rice mill operators, a barber, a hog butcher, a truck owner/driver, and a watch and bicycle repairman. Virtually all of them belong to group I; none belongs to group III.

Discussion

The above "strategic" view of socio-economic heterogeneity at Sansai raises a number of interesting policy questions for Thai administrators and planners, and a number of equally interesting theoretical questions for social scientists. Policy questions with which administrators and planners might concern themselves include the following :

1. Are government services—e.g. education, agricultural extension, credit facilities, health care—being distributed in a manner which is likely to increase or decrease existing socio-economic differences?
2. If present practice tends to increase differences, what are the economic, political, and moral implications?
3. Setting aside vague references to "democratic process", is there a mechanism by which the poorest sectors of the rural population can make their views known to administrators and planners?
4. Available data on gross national product and *per capita* income provide little information on *distribution* of income. Is it possible, using available techniques of survey research and sampling, to measure the effect of government programmes on all sectors of the population, and to do so quickly and cheaply?
5. If such data are made available, can they be used for regular re-assessment of administrative and planning procedures?

Questions of theoretical interest to social scientists include the following:

1. If there are economic barriers to socio-economic mobility (encountered most often by those born to landless, uneducated parents), do they ever give rise to open hostility "across" the barriers? If not, why not?
2. Are village socio-economic differences ever manifested in the political arena? For instance, how often do rich and poor residents support different candidates and parties?

3. Is it appropriate to construct a "model" of socio-economic structure which incorporates "luck" as a major causal factor? If so, how would that be done?

4. If luck is admitted as a causal factor, what is its relative importance in relationship to the "intelligence", "hard work", and "strength of character" to which wealthy people ordinarily attribute their success?