

# PLANNED SOCIAL CHANGE : A CASE OF THAILAND

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## I

This paper aims to investigate into the general problems of "planned social change." It seems to be acceptable at the present time that planned social change is a significant concept in the realm of social sciences. Nevertheless, there seem to be some sort of confusion and miscommunication as regard to the definition and utilization of this conceptual tool. It is my intention in this paper to try to answer the three basic questions about the concept of planned social change. These three questions are: What is "planned social change"? Why is "planned social change" needed? And how to implement the concept of "planned social change" effectively?

In doing this, the review of some historical concepts about planned social change will be briefly presented in this paper. In addition, my view-point of the concept and method of planned social change will also be presented. The case of implementation of planned social change in Thailand will be cited as a concrete example supporting the points of discussion about this matter. In the final part of this paper, I shall try to point out some problems involving the application of the concept of planned social change in developing societies. This will include roles of the powerful elite and the change agents toward the ordinary citizen of a nation. The integration of "modern" and "traditional" values will also be discussed and analysed within this framework.

## II

The words "planned social change" have not appeared very often in the literature of the social sciences in the English language. Though planning as a word and concept is very familiar and perfectly acceptable to the way of life of the English speaking people, the words "planned social change" seem to designate some strange quality of different type of social system: the communist world. To the layman of the Western world with democratic type of government, social planning seems to be dangerous in the sense that it implies the control over human freedom of choice in his social mobility and political activities. This fear may be traced back to the deep root of Adam Smith's concept of free (economic) system (Adam Smith 1937). Western industrialization has developed and grown out from the operation of the economic system under the assumption of balanced adjustment of demand and supply. The belief in man's capability of making a wise choice in doing his business with other men is one of the basic concepts of the democratic type of government. Democratic government which ideally does not suppose to interfere with citizen's freedom of choice and decision except for the matters that are considered to be necessary for maintaining peace and order and justice within the society. With this type of assumption, any kind of planned social change seems to be undesirable because it will endanger the freedom of choice of ordinary citizen who do not want to be restricted by the control of their government without absolute necessity.

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Since the end of the Second World War, mankind has experienced new kinds of living together in a more complex and closely integrative environment. Social problems seem to increase even more in economically prosperous societies such as the United States. Problems such as crime, juvenile delinquency, mental disorder, drug addiction, suicide, prostitution, and ethnic relations, seem to be more prevalent in modern-advanced societies than in traditional-underdeveloped world (see Merton & Nisbet, eds., 1961, for more detail). Why do these social problems increase? Social scientists seem to have different answers depending on their particular background of training. An economist may tend to explain causes of these problems in terms of economic dissatisfaction. A psychologist may rely on psychological explanation while sociologists and anthropologists are likely to look for sociological and cultural causality. All in all, this only means one thing that social scientists still need comprehensive understanding of all of these social problems. Further research and rigorous development of theory about human behavior in the future may help explain these social problems meaningfully.

Of all social problems, one of which is very important in our time is that of population explosion (see Kingsley Davis 1961, for example). Population explosion is very important because, among other things, it means that all kinds of problem tend to increase when there are more people living in and using the same environment and resources. Population explosion is a world-wide phenomenon but more alarming in the underdeveloped world of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The need for a realistic population policy seems to be very urgent and significant in countries (like India and China) which have experienced the situation of over-population for a long time. In these countries, planned social change is not only appropriate but it is absolute necessity. Otherwise the future of mankind seems to be very dangerous in the sense that man has to fight other men just for his sheer existence.

Man's hope for betterment of his future seems to rest mostly on technological development and the cooperation from other men in the use and development of resources. The fact that every-man has to consume for a long time (about 15-20 years in modern world) before he can produce makes social planning unavoidable. Whether we like it or not, planned social change is necessary especially in underdeveloped world. But this does not mean that it is not important in economically advanced countries. The countries, such as Great Britain, which have adopted the policy of "welfare state" mean that the policy-makers of these countries fully realized the importance of planned social change.

Probably it is a good point to define the term "planned social change" before we go deeper into discussion about it. Planned social change as used here refers to the process of change in social life of a population within a single nation-state with the guidance of a comprehensive network of plan which aims to develop to full capacity the use of resources including human resource. Contradictory to layman's belief, planned social change if improvised correctly and administered accordingly would provide more opportunity for people to mobilize and this would automatically increase people's choice and chance to live the way they want within their cultural context. In other words, we have a planned social change program because we believe that it will direct our society to fully serve citizen both on material and non-material things for modern living. Ideally, planned social change will bring about in the long run equality in opportunity and social justice. And this will reduce conflicts between individuals and groups to a considerable degree. In addition, many social problems may be reduced by themselves. This, however, is still questionable because as mentioned before we still do not know enough about the nature of human behavior either in group or as individuals.

Social change as used here is meant in the broader perspective more or less along sociological line of thinking. Social change therefore embraces the process of change in economic, technological, political, ethical and any other way of life of a people within a national boundary. National boundary is emphasized here because it is my belief that at the present time it is more realistic to use national boundary as a unit of study and analysis for the process of social change. International system may be important and cannot be neglected in the study of social change because cooperation between advanced and developing countries seems to be unavoidable if we want rapid change. But international system whether considering at the regional base or on a broader one is still very loosely defined and it needs time to develop this concept before it can really function as a significantly political (including sociological and cultural) unit that has real identity as the nationstate has at the present time (see Nettl & Robertson, 1968).

Within a national boundary, a planned social change program can be carried out effectively if the policy-makers and social scientists work together with the realization that the goal of change is for the benefit of the mass or the majority citizen. In modern-industrialized nations, a planned social change program may be directed to reduce the cost of social problems which are acute at the time being. For example, in present day United States, problems of ethnic relations, especially between the so-called "black" American and "white" American, drug addiction, and organized violence among youth, seem to be acute and serious. These problems can be reduced to the minimum by the cooperation of social scientists and policy-makers of the nation through a process of planned social change program. On the other hand, a planned social change program of an underdeveloped nation should be directed to increase economic capacity, to better health and education of its people. At the same time, it should provide ways to avoid repeating the undesirable social problems which are the products of western industrialized system. It is a false assumption, I believe, to think that in modernizing a nation, an underdeveloped country has to take all the patterns of behavior and social relations which are prevailing in the Western world at the time being. I think that effective modernization of a nation is to achieve greater mobility with less pain. And this I mean essentially that underdeveloped nations do not have to take all the social problems the Western world has in order to be developed. This certainly has to be carefully planned and worked out with the full cooperation between social scientists and the policy-makers of a nation.

In many underdeveloped countries, planned social change programs of different emphasis have been carried out with some degree of success depending on many factors. But the major factors seem to be the lack of understanding the nature of social change and the lack of cooperation between the policy-makers of the nation and the social scientists. I emphasize the full cooperation between the policy-makers of the nation and the social scientists because without this kind of cooperation, any planned social change program will either fail or waste unnecessary resources because of the unrealistic planning and implementation of the program. Underdeveloped countries need rapid development and at the same time cannot afford to have many mistakes during the course of development. Otherwise they may not have a chance to develop at all. A realistic social change program therefore must provide means for overall development and at the same time must set a limitation on the undesirable growth which may retard development rate. For example, if a planned social change program of an underdeveloped nation did not set a realistic population policy, and it happened that in this country the growth rate of its population was high at 3 per cent per annum, and if this country had already had problems of unemployment, uneducated mass and

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full of unskilled labor, then any kind of development which was the result of the plan might be easily offset by this factor of population growth alone. In this sense, any realistic planned social change program must cover all aspects of major factors of development within the nation. And this should include economic, administrative, health, education, and population policy. The knowledge of the social scientist of their own country is pertinent and important because without this kind of knowledge (which is usually derived from social research) any program of planned social change is unrealistic. When it is implemented, it will cause problems which result in unnecessary loss of limited resources which underdeveloped countries normally have. Social scientists in underdeveloped countries cannot afford to play only a "passive" role of observing social phenomena. They should take part in development program as much as the opportunity opening to them. At least their research should answer some important problems of social change and the development of their nation.

The case of national development of Thailand which is one of the underdeveloped countries in Southeast Asia will be presented in the next section as an illustrating point of an imperfect planning of social change.

### III

Thailand is an essentially agricultural country with the population of approximately 35 million. The vast majority of the total population still live in various villages throughout the country. The population is increasing at a very high rate of over 3 per cent per annum. But per capita income is very low of only about \$120 per year in 1966 (National Economic Development Board of Thailand 1966 a : 3). According to the 1960 Census, the total population of Thailand was 27.09 million. In 1963 the population was estimated to be 29.95 and at the end of 1965 was about 32.02 million. Approximately 91 per cent of the population live in the rural areas. The rest are urban dwellers of which about three-fourths live in Bangkok-Dhomburi metropolitan area. At this rate of growth, the population of Thailand will double itself within 20 years. The population growth is a "real" problem in Thailand at the present time.

Another aspect of population of Thailand, according to the 1960 Census, is that the total number of employed persons, 11 years of age and over, was 13.7 million. The majority of employed persons, or at least 82 per cent, were rural agricultural producers. About 11 per cent were engaged in trade and services. Only 4 per cent worked for manufacture and mining.

Though literacy rate in Thailand is relatively high (over 60 per cent), the vast majority of these are only able to read and write and not being completed more than 4 years of schooling. In rural area, especially in the northeastern region about 24.1 per cent of the commune (a group of villages) have no health office at all (Yingvorapunt 1966:7). Generally speaking, the majority of those who live in rural area are economically poor, culturally traditional, and lack of modern health services. In this sense, major basic social problems in Thailand are similar to those of other underdeveloped countries. They are : (1) poverty; (2) low education; and (3) low health.

Politically speaking, Thailand had a long tradition of absolute monarchy until 1932. "Since the Constitution Revolution of 1932, political power in Thailand has been the preserve of a small but distinct coterie. All but a tiny percentage of these have been either senior military commanders or senior bureaucrats" (Nairn 1966 : 95). It is true that even at the present time

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political power in Thailand still belongs to these groups of minority elite with strong emphasis on central control. In fact, the practice of a centralized bureaucracy, dependent upon the central authority for appointment, tenure, and reward, is very old in Thailand dating at least as far back as the Ayudhayan period about the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. And this practice is not easy to change even if some one wanted to. Concentration of power and decision-making in Thailand can be summarized as follows:

*The post of prime minister carries with it extraordinary executive powers, including wide control over finance. The prime minister normally has also held a top military appointment. The late Field Marshal Sarit was Supreme Commander, a post that gave him control of all policy facets of Thailand's military forces. The minister of defense is also a key person and usually holds command of the army in addition to his cabinet post, making him a central figure in deterring or promoting a coup d' etat. Inside Thailand, the minister of interior holds vast powers: all provincial administration, including the control of the police force, is in his hands. Outside of these three posts and the immediate staff working close to these ministers (such as the chief of staff, Supreme Command, for example, who works very closely with the prime minister), many other ministerial appointments have been assigned only partially on the basis of competence as opposed to political or military affiliations, and especially personal loyalties (Nairn 1966:97).*

Outside Bangkok, there is a small and unorganized group of provincial elite consisting mainly of provincial governors and their staffs. These people are widely dispersed, and usually do not communicate with one another in the sense that can bring about any common interest for their group, but almost all of them are Bangkok-oriented-directed themselves to the wish of the cabinet in pursuing their career.

The emerging of a new kind of elite, i.e., scholars and scientists is gaining acceptance from these "traditional" elite but very slowly and reluctantly. The new elite composed of university instructors, educators, and social scientists serve under the traditional elite by various forms of counselling and advices in matters of their own specialization. The new elite have influenced originating new programs of change and development in many forms, such as economic development, community development, rural accelerated development programs. These will be treated in more detail later.

Another distinctive feature about the characteristics of population of Thailand is that most of them (93.5 per cent in 1960) are Buddhists. Islam that is the religion which holds second largest adherents in Thailand commands only 3.9 per cent of the population (Kunstadter 1967:370). Buddhism in Thailand is of Hinayana sect, and it is still a practical custom in Thailand that every young man goes into the monkhood for a period of time in his life. Ideally this should be 3 months during one of the Buddhist Lent period. Most of rural Thai are rice farmers. Though agriculture has been diversified considerably recently, rice farmers are by far the greatest number of all other agricultural workers.

As regard to significantly planned social change, in 1956 a national program for community development was initiated, but there was no action until the early 1960s. In 1959, however, a National Community Development Plan was drawn up and endorsed by the cabinet. This plan was detailed and comprehensive. A new Department of Community Development was

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empowered to administer the Plan. In addition, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) which has its headquarter in Bangkok also announced its intention of embarking on community development operations, and appropriate action started in 1963. A further development program was that of the Ministry of Defense. It established a number of Mobile Development Units (MDU) whose task was to initiate a short-range "crash" program of community development to precede the longer term national program (see Huff 1967 - for further detail about MDU). The national plan and the army plan were both concentrated in two geographical areas: the northeastern and southern regions.

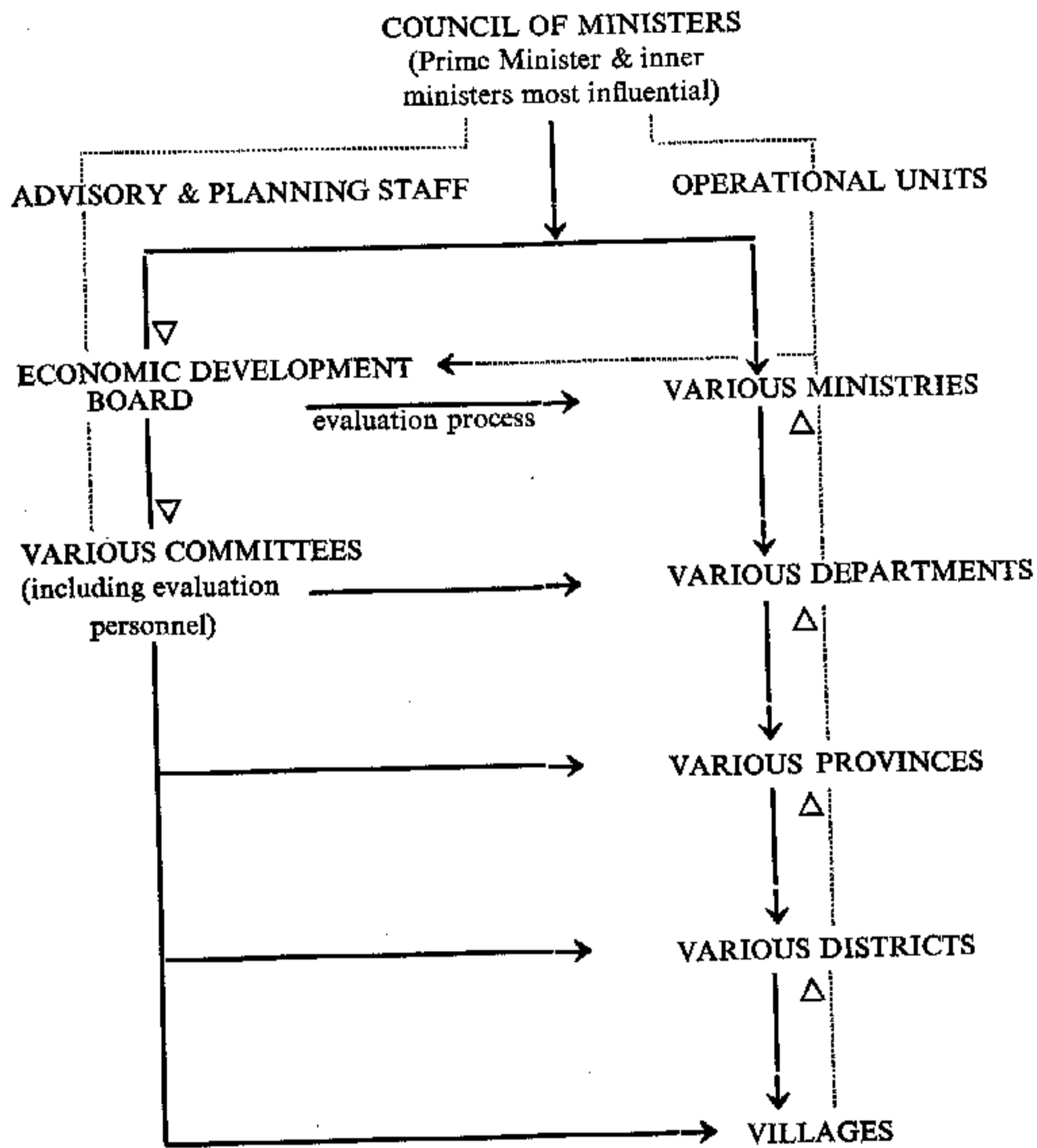
The reason for community development boom in Thailand is mainly political in the sense that it aims to deter the flood of communist activities which have been going on in these two regions for quite some time. In the northeastern region, people are the poorest. They live in isolated villages, and generally have a feeling that the central government has neglected them for a long time. Therefore these people are vulnerable to communist infiltration. In the south, the minority Thai Islam feel that the central government treats them unfairly because they speak Malay and have cultural similarity to the Malasian. The threat of separation from Thailand and combining themselves with Malasia, whether real or just a phantasy, always bothers Thai officials for a long time. In addition, the communist terrorists have been active in the border area between Thailand and Malasia since the end of World War II, and the communist activities in the south seem to increase considerably in recent years. Thus the long-standing Islamic problem is now complicated by the communist problem. "It is from the threat of its security that Thailand sees that the community development boom derives its real impetus" (Nairn 1966:107).

To intensify the pace of development of the nation, the Thai government in 1963 established a new Ministry of National Development composed of 13 different Departments which deal directly or indirectly with development activities of the country. In 1964, the program of accelerated rural development (ARD) was adopted by the cabinet. This program aimed directly to improve economic condition of the people in 6 northeastern provinces which were in danger of communist threat (Yingvorapunt 1966 : 38-39).

To add to the more complex scene of development, Thailand First Six-Year National Economic Development Plan (1961-1966) was promulgated. The Plan was to raise the "standard of living of the people through maximum utilization of economic resources in order to increase the national output and the income of the people" (National Economic Development Board 1966 a. :3). Within this plan, development of various sectors of economy and social welfare were laid down. These were: population and man-power development, development of agriculture and cooperatives, industrial and mineral development, development of transportation and communications, development of community facilities and social welfare, development of public health, and development of education. The First Six-Year National Economic Development Plan actually is not only an economic development plan but it is a planned social change according to our definition at the beginning of this paper. Under the broad scope of this plan, all kinds of development projects including community development were integrated into a single network of plan. The Economic Development Board which composes mostly of economists and high ranking government officials is responsible for drawing up the plan. The council of the ministers have to approve the plan before it can be put into operation. Various ministries and departments of the government are responsible to carry out the plan effectively. This can be shown in the diagram below:

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**PATTERNS OF DECISION-MAKING CONCERNING  
PLANNED SOCIAL CHANGE IN THAILAND.**



..... feedback process through evaluation  
Adjustment and a new plan may follow after evaluation.

Economically speaking, during the years 1961–1966, gross domestic product of the nation increased at an annual average rate of about 10.1 per cent. Taking account of the estimated 3.3 per cent per year rate of population growth, per capita income rose by over 7 per cent a year (Thailand Facts and Figures 1966 : 50). This is one of the highest rate of economic growth in underdeveloped countries. The relatively successful operation of the first economic development plan has resulted in launching the second five year plan from 1967–1971. The new plan is significantly more comprehensive than the first and embraces broader social aspects than the first plan. Even the name of the plan shows this trend: The Second Five-Year National Economic and Social Development Plan.

The Second Five-Year Plan states its principal policy guidelines as follows:

“(1) To strive towards further accelerating the economic growth rate, with emphasis on more equitable distribution of income and social benefits.

(2) To reduce the degree of income inequality and geographical imbalance, emphasis will be put on rural development as a measure to increase income of the rural population in remote areas.

(3) To expand employment opportunities and improve the quality of human resources, the Plan will emphasize the elevation of workers’ skills to meet the economic and social demands of the society.

(4) To accelerate private industrial investment, private economic activities will be strongly promoted and stimulated by the provision of necessary economic infrastructures and healthy environment within which private enterprise can prosper. The Government’s role will be to assist but not to interfere or compete with private business activities.

(5) The primary emphasis will be put on the development of intensive agriculture, raising productivity by greater use of capital and improved techniques, as a means to provide food and employment for a growing population, to provide basic materials for an expanding industry and to provide foreign exchange for the payment of imports.

(6) To accentuate the role of science and technology, particularly in the adaptation and application of modern knowledge to the special needs of the country.

(7) Economic and social development must be geared to the necessity to strengthen the national security.

(8) Financial stability must be maintained as a means of assuring healthy economic growth without disturbing the balance of the economy and of inspiring international confidence.

(9) Development projects will be implemented in accord with their priority and will be designed to yield the greatest benefit at the least possible cost” (National Economic Development Board 1966 b. :3–4).

If we look at the policy of the second 5 year plan carefully, we shall notice that the more important objectives for “economic and social development” are to strengthen *national security*, to inspire *international confidence*, and to yield the *greatest benefit at the least cost* (Nos. 7,8,9). No doubt Thailand is in the process of nation-building. New social problems have appeared resulting from rapid social change during the operation of the first development plan. These problems are similar to those of industrialized countries but different in degree. Problems such as prostitution, mental disorder resulting from changing of status quo and economic frustration, juvenile delinquency and youth violence seem to increase considerably. Besides old and basic problems are still clinging on to the scene. Problems, such as poverty of the mass, traditional



ways of health practices and malnutrition including the lag in higher education, seem to be more acute and serious than before. This is because, among other things, the Plans for development of Thailand did not include a realistic population policy. No body seems to concern much about the high rate of population growth at this time. The "inner" circle of the council of ministers seems to enjoy the traditional view of population growth. They want the greater number of population to build a "powerful" nation - in the military sense. But socially and economically, the sheer number of population alone causes more problems than benefits. The new elite, on the other hand, want to have a family planning program and limit the growth rate of population not to exceed 2.5 per cent per annum. The problem of quality vs. quantity of population has been the topic of debate for quite some time. Unfortunately, no responsible government officials took this issue seriously until very recently when the traditional elite seemed to give up their view reluctantly.

To sum up, the case of Thailand's planned social change program which was discussed briefly above showed that even it was an imperfect planning and the plan seemed to stem out from outside political threat rather than the "real" need for the plan by the powerful elite. The plan still yielded great benefit for the people. Thailand had never experienced rapid social change before until the plan was operated. Planned social change, even imperfectly operated, is far better than having no plan at all. This is particularly true for underdeveloped countries which need rapid change with less cost.

#### IV

In order to implement a planned social change program effectively, those who are responsible for this work should realize that social change is a complicated process. It embraces and affects psychological aspect of human being as an individual as well as cultural aspect of a group. Change means giving up old habits and practices and adopting new modes of behavior. This requires energy and many people do not wish to allocate to such undertaking. The familiar is accepted and psychologically secured. Change may involve risk and uncertainty. Therefore, psychologically and culturally, if people have to face a change from the familiar patterns of behavior to the very strange and completely new ways of life, the chance that they are going to resist to this kind of change is great. To "borrow" new cultural patterns which are totally different from the existing cultural patterns of the country may cause the same rejection or reinterpretation to fit the existing cultural context (see Smuckarn 1965 for detail). It is the responsibility of policy-makers of a nation to exercise a wise choice and decision of which to add to their existing resources in order to guide their nation for the full benefit of their citizen. Without thorough understanding of their own people culturally and psychologically, it is difficult to implement a planned social change program successfully.

It is logical to consider a modern nation-state as a functional system which composes of many subsystems. The major subsystems are: family and kinship, economic, education, health, political, belief and value. These subsystems are intertwined and cannot be practically separated from each other. Therefore, a major change in one subsystem will eventually bring about a change in other subsystems also. Admittedly, underdeveloped countries emphasize a change in the economic system but want to maintain beliefs and values of their own. This may be impractical in many aspects. Political system is also closely related to types of economic operation. The traditional practice of small group holding all kinds of decision-making (like in the case of ai-hT

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land) seems to be inefficient in modern economic system of a nation-state. Public interests have been wasted considerably because of waiting for a decision from the cabinet in many important and urgent issues. To create a "responsible" citizen means that the traditional elite have to loose their control over other people's choice and decision. To build the unity within a nation is not to control the decision of the majority citizen but to let them think and behave the way they consider to be best benefit for themselves and their nation. If we agree that a nation exists for the benefits of its citizen, the majority citizen then should be free enough to pursue their own way of life. The elite have only a right and duty to guide them through a realistically planned social change program. The time has come for scientists whether social or natural to cooperate fully with the policy-makers of a nation for the benefit of the ordinary citizen. And at the same time we should not forget that the future of mankind rests entirely on the cooperation among nations. International cooperation can be achieved significantly only when most nations are relatively developed and have something to be proud of in the international scene. International development through the process of planned social change may be a significant problem for social scientists to tackle in the future. But at the time being the development of a nation seems to be crucial and unavoidable if mankind is going to perpetuate his kind successfully.

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