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**The Role of Farmers Groups in Thai Politics:
A Case Study of Domestic and Global Pressure
on Rice, Sugarcane, and Potato Farmers**

By

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
International Political Economy**

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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFTA	ASEAN Free Trade Area
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASPL	Agricultural Sector Programme Loan
BAAC	Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (in Thailand)
BOT	Bank of Thailand
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy (of the European Union)
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CPT	Communist Part of Thailand
EU	European Union
FFT	Farmers' Federation of Thailand (<i>Sahaphan Chaona Chaorai Haeng Prathet Thai</i>)
FPO	Fiscal Policy Office (in Thailand)
GATT	General Agreement on Tariff and Trade
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IMF	International Monetary Found
IMPCT	Inter Mountain People Education and Culture in Thailand Association
JPPCC	Joint Public-Private Consultative Committee (in Thailand)
Kor Nor Khor	<i>Khana Kummakarn Nayobai Khao</i> (Rice Committee)
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party (in Japan)
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (in the United Kingdom)
MNCs	Multinational Corporations
MOAC	Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (in Thailand)
MP	Member of Parliament
NCCC	National Counter Corruption Commission
NEC	National Economic Council (in Thailand)
NESD	National Economic and Social Development (in Thailand)
NESDB	National Economic and Social Development Board (in Thailand)
NGO	Nongovernmental Organisation
NFU	National Farmers' Union (in the United Kingdom)
NPKC	National Peace-Keeping Council (in Thailand)
NRGMR	Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River (<i>Krueakhai khon ploog khao lum maenam khong</i>)
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

PSE	Producer Support Estimate
RAPS	Restructuring Agricultural Production Systems
R&D	Research and Development
SCPA	Sugar Cane Planters Association for Zone 7
Sor Kor Nor	<i>Sahaphan Kasettakorn Pak Neua</i> (Northern Farmers Association)
SPWMP	Samut Prakarn Wastewater Management Project
TAO	Tambon Administrative Organisation (<i>Ongkan borihan suan tambon: Or Bor Tor</i>) or Sub-district Administrative Organisation
TDRI	Thailand Development Research Institute Foundation
TRC	Thai Rice Co.,Ltd.
TRT	Thai Rak Thai Party (Thai Loves Thai Party)
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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Glossary for Thai Terms

<i>bab</i>	an act of demerit
<i>bunkhun</i>	a deep sense of obligation based on the Buddhist belief system
<i>hua khanaen</i>	heads of voters or vote bank
<i>Isan</i>	north-east region of Thailand
<i>itthiphon</i>	influence
<i>jao pho</i>	god father (some authors write <i>chao pho</i>)
<i>kamnan</i>	sub-district chief
<i>kha nam ron nam cha</i>	tea money or bribe
<i>Khana Rasadorn or Khana Rat</i>	People's Party
<i>khao</i>	rice
<i>klum itthiphon</i>	pressure group
<i>klum pholprayoch</i>	interest group
<i>klum plugdun</i>	pressure group
<i>krengchai</i>	mindfulness and reserve
<i>kreung sangkatan</i>	packaged Buddhist temple offerings
<i>Paitong</i>	Bamboo
<i>phu mi itthiphon</i>	men of influence
<i>phumpanya thongthin</i>	local wisdom
<i>phuyaiban</i>	village headman
<i>prachasangkom</i>	civil society
<i>sakdina</i>	status hierarchy under the traditional monarchy, feudalism
<i>sapha tambon</i>	sub-district council
<i>sin nam jai</i>	gift of good will
<i>Somburanayasithirath</i>	absolute monarchy
<i>rai</i>	unit of land; 1 <i>rai</i> = 0.16 hector = 0.4 acre
<i>tambon</i>	sub-district
<i>watthanatham chumchon</i>	local culture

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Abstract

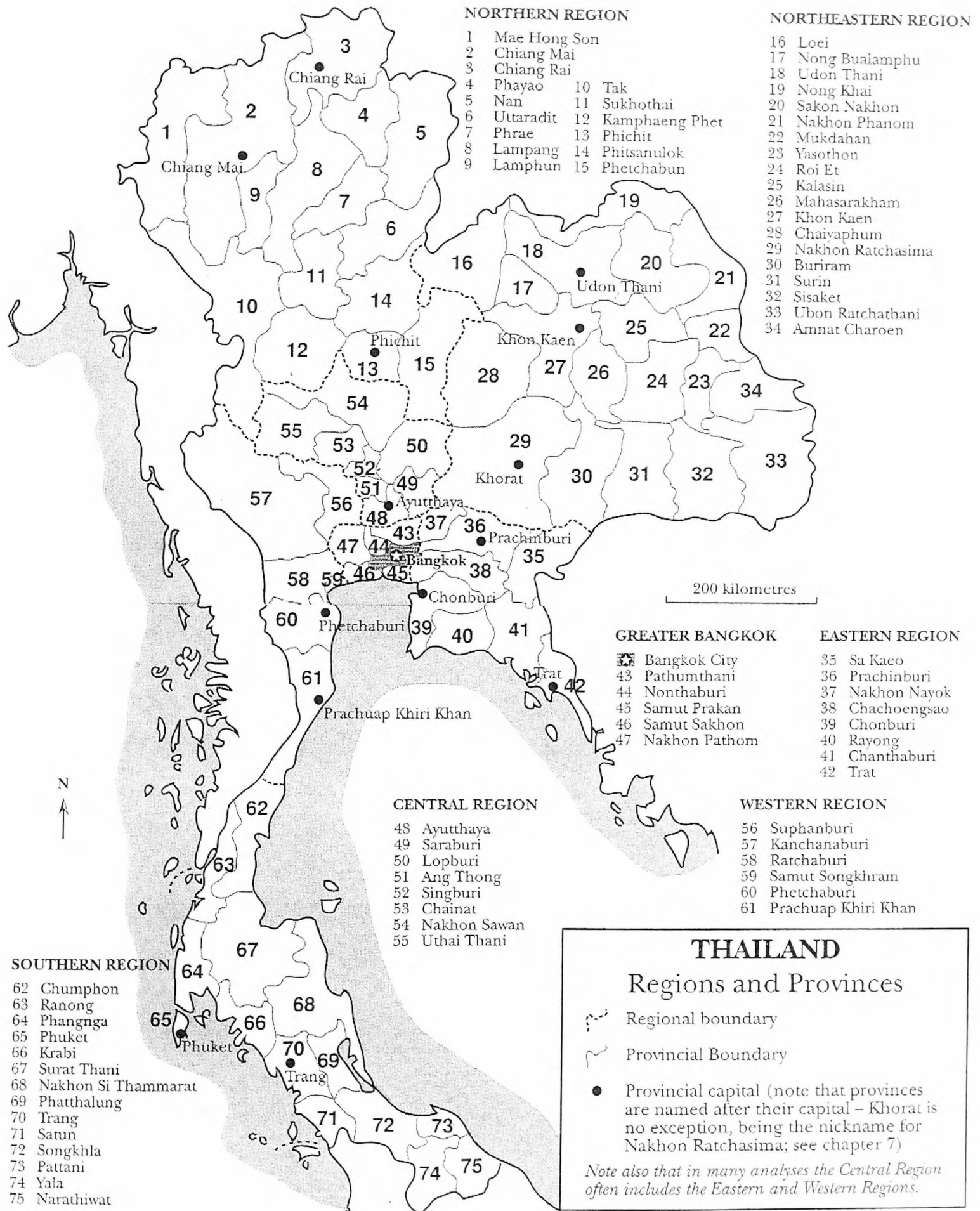
The thesis studies the political participation of Thai farmers and focuses on two main factors, namely the domestic and the external impacts, which inform the case studies of rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups. Overall, the research has established that farmers groups have felt the impacts of domestic factors far more strongly than external factors. Furthermore, through comparative studies in relation to the case studies of rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups in Thailand, differences emerged between these three Thai farmers groups, in terms of the degree to which domestic factors impacted on their political participation.

The theories of Western interest groups are reviewed, in order to examine their applicability to explaining farmers groups formation in Thailand. The concepts of 'collective benefits' and 'selective incentives', which were used by Mancur Olson have been adopted as the main theoretical framework. With reference to this, the research has established that selective incentives have played a highly significant role in Thai farmers groups formation, and concludes that the problems of mobilisation, which relate to rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups, have been solved primarily through the provision of a range of selective incentives by the farmers groups themselves.

In order to classify the differing levels of political participation of Thai farmers groups, the analytical framework provided by Grant Jordan, Darren Halpin, and William Maloney has been utilised. Accordingly, the rice and potato farmers groups are classified as 'potential pressure participants', whilst the sugarcane farmers group is classified as an 'interest group', which has enabled an examination of their political participation through the Western concept of the policy network/community framework. In order to make the Western policy network/community framework more applicable to the policy-making process in Thailand, the specific, dominant characteristics of the Thai political culture, namely the patronage system and the operation of both vote-buying and corruption are included in the analysis. This conceptual stretching does not significantly affect the original concept of the framework and the way in which it was intended to be applicable, because it already includes informal relationships such as those, which exist within the policy network/community framework. This understanding is an important aspect, which forms a part of the theoretical contribution to the discipline of international political economy and to the arena of Thai political studies. The policy network/community framework provides a new conceptual lens in the study of the political participation of Thai farmers groups. Accordingly, these arguments promote the opportunity to consider alternative frameworks in the analysis of the political participation of Thai farmers groups, and group participation across civil society more generally.

The study of the political participation of Thai farmers has utilised empirical evidence, which illustrates the successes of farmers' interest groups in both Japan and the United Kingdom, in order to explain the relative successes and failures of Thai farmers. In contrast to the experiences of Western and notably Japanese farmers groups, in many respects Thai farmers are largely excluded from the policy-making process, with the only exception in Thailand being certain sugarcane farmers groups. The thesis concludes that the political participation of farmers groups in Thailand has generally been affected by domestic impacts rather than by external impacts, and that their influence in domestic policy-making has been, and is likely to remain for the foreseeable future at least, somewhat limited.

Map of Thailand



Source: McVey, R. (ed) (2000) *Money & Power in Provincial Thailand*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies [ISEAS] and Silksworm Books

Chapter 1 Introduction

Background to the Study

Thailand's economy is primarily agricultural, but despite this, the driving force behind its economic development has been through the transfer of resources from the agricultural sector to the industrial sector, in order to support the country's policy of industrialisation. The period between 1958 and 1973 was described as a 'golden age' of agriculture-driven growth.¹ However, Chatthip argues that this transfer of resources has been at the expense of rural farmers by the state. Moreover, he believes that the 'State and capitalism did not come to develop the village, only to extract benefit from the villagers.'²

The state had come into existence, and had its centre outside the village. The important relationship then was between the village and the state, between the class of farmers and the class of government officials... Under this direct relationship between the sakdina state and the village, the state claimed to protect the village from the attack by other states, to provide public services such as communications (digging canals), and to promote Buddhism. But in reality, the state exploited the village. The state was alienated from the village rather than being at one with the village.³

A policy of intensive industrialisation, which was introduced in the late 1970s had produced a significant improvement in the Thai economy by the mid 1980s, and was seen as an 'economic miracle' in the period between 1986 and 1995.⁴ Between 1986 and 1990 the Thai economy emerged as the world's fastest growing economy.⁵ This impressive economic performance was illustrated through the high growth rates of 9.5 per cent of GDP in 1987, 13.2 per cent of GDP in 1988 and 12 per cent of GDP in 1989.⁶ This high growth rate in the Thai economy was mostly achieved through the development of the industrial sector.

¹ Ammar Siamwalla (1997b) 'The Thai Economy: Fifty Years of Expansion', in Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI](ed) *Thailand's Boom and Bust*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.14

² Chatthip Nartsupha (1999) *The Thai Village Economy in the Past*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, translated by Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker (originally published 1984), p.74

³ Ibid., p.31

⁴ Ammar Siamwalla (1997b), p.15

⁵ Warr, P.G. and Bhanuphong Nidhiprabha (1996) *Thailand's Macroeconomic Miracle: Stable Adjustment and Sustained Growth*, Kuala Lumpur: World Bank/ Oxford University Press, p.2

Between 1981 and 2000, the industrial sector expanded significantly, and its contribution to GDP of 172.14 billion baht in 1981 had increased to 594 billion baht in 1990 and 1,637.63 billion baht in 2000.⁷ Interestingly, the industrial sector has more than maintained its relative share of GDP, regardless of the contraction to the economy as a whole, in the wake of the Thai economic crisis of 1997.

The impressive performance of the Thai industrial sector strengthened the relationship between government and business groups, whereas the relationship between government and the agricultural sector, and, correspondingly, the Thai farmers groups were weakened. This dislocation adversely affected the government's level of appreciation with regard to issues of agricultural development. Indeed, Dixon has argued that 'successive Thai governments have explicitly promoted industry while implicitly discouraging agriculture...'⁸

During the period of Prime Minister Prem Tinasulanonda from March 1980–April 1988⁹, the government and businessmen established various patronage networks. These relationships developed in the 1980s because the government required policy-relevant information and resources supplied by businessmen, in order to develop its policy of industrialisation. This relationship continues to the present day; however it has evolved into a reciprocal relationship, which has strengthened the patronage system within Thai society. The channels of political access have been almost completely closed for Thai farmers groups. As a result, 'agriculture has been in serious trouble from the 1980s onwards. Various observations and pieces of data can be deployed as evidence; the increase in poverty and the massive out-migration from rural areas are two that come readily to mind.'¹⁰

⁶ Christensen, S.R., Ammar Siamwalla and Pakorn Vichyanond (1997) 'Institutional and Political Bases of Growth-Inducing Policies in Thailand', in Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI](ed) *Thailand's Boom and Bust*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.37

⁷ Asian Development Bank (1999c) *Key Indicators of Developing Asian and Pacific Countries 1999 Volume XXX*, Oxford University Press, p.333

⁸ Dixon, C. (1999a) *The Thai Economy: Uneven Development and Industrialisation*, London: Routledge, p.140

⁹ Thai Government Official Website, at www.thaigov.go.th/general/prime/preprime_e.html Retrieved on 23 October 2001

¹⁰ Ammar Siamwalla (1996) 'Thai Agriculture: From Engine of Growth to Sunset Status', *TDRI Quarterly Review*, Vol.11 No.4, 4 December 1996, at www.info.tdri.or.th/library/quarterly/text/d96_1.htm Retrieved on 12 February 2001

However, the May Unrest of 1992 and the economic crisis of 1997 have brought about both economic and political change in Thailand. Shigetomi argues that the May Unrest of 1992 ‘was followed by the invigoration of a movement for democratization and reform in the Thai political system.’¹¹ Academics, businessmen, the urban middle class, and NGOs called for political reforms, in order to increase popular participation in the democratic process. In rural areas people became more aware of their rights. This was mainly the result of the failures of the policy of agricultural development, and of problems caused to farmers as a result of the government’s dam building project. These problems, in addition to problems resulting from the economic crisis of 1997, were a catalyst for rural people becoming more assertive within the Thai political arena. Specifically, this occurred when rural farmers became aware that the government had agreed to accept the International Monetary Found (IMF) bailout programme of US\$17.2 billion, soon after the baht was floated onto the world currency market in July 1997, and in addition, private debts were nationalised, in order to rescue the Thai financial sector.

The governments’ response to the crisis largely ignored the plight of rural farmers. The government was heavily criticised for only helping the rich, without regard to the poor, by academics, NGOs and locally based political activists in rural villages. During the crisis, Thai people considered this behaviour to be *rath um khonrouy tor dtung khonchon*, meaning that the government only helps the rich and disregards the poor. It was argued that if the government were able to borrow this amount of money in order to rescue the rich, why was the government not able to do the same for indebted farmers, or in any case to increase expenditure with regard to agricultural development. This sense of injustice helped to accelerate the development of the political movement in the rural areas. With reference to this, Pasuk and Baker argue that ‘The crisis changed the context of rural politics in several ways. It demystified the supposed superiority of the urban economy, and emboldened groups which promote rural self-reliance and groups which demand greater government attention to agricultural development.’¹²

¹¹ Shigetomi, S. (2002) ‘Thailand: A Crossing of Critical Parallel Relationships’ in Shigetomi, S. (ed) *The State and NGOs: Perspective From Asia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies [ISEAS], p.29

The increase in the potential political influence of the Thai farmers groups is not only related to domestic issues however, since Thai agricultural trade is heavily reliant on the world market. Therefore, the impact of the changing rules of international trade on the incomes of Thai farmers groups cannot be disregarded. With respect to international agricultural trade, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is the most significant institution. Thailand was expecting to benefit from agricultural trade liberalisation, particularly when Japan and Korea were forced to open their rice markets after the conclusion of the Uruguay Round of the international trade negotiations of the GATT, in 1994. The Thai government has been over optimistic, with regard to the positive impact of agricultural trade liberalisation over the long term. The Thai government believed that it could balance the country's exports between industrial products and agricultural products. Furthermore, the government believed that as a consequence, it could bring about an improvement in the standard of living for farmers, and reduce the income gap between the rural and the urban areas.¹³ Therefore, it is important to discuss the impacts of the WTO on Thai agricultural policy, in order to assess its effect on the political participation of Thai farmers groups.

1.1 Contribution and Analytical Framework

The nature of the structure of power in Thailand has been assumed to be the main cause for the political weakness of the rural population. The political implication of this situation is a weak relationship between government and Thai farmers groups. However, the research has been informed by case studies on rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups, which indicate that the various farmers groups display different levels of political influence within the Thai political arena. Therefore, the overall objective of the study on the political participation of Thai farmers groups is to examine both the process of group formation and the political influence of these groups at the present time. With reference to this, the Western concept of interest groups will be employed, in order to help examine the process of group formation, and in addition, contributing factors to their sustainability.

¹² Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (2000) *Thailand's Crisis*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, p.233

¹³ Saridet Marukatat and Somporn Thapanachai (1996) 'Farming Nations Bid For More Free Trade', *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 10 December 1996, at www.bkkpost.samart.co.th/news/Bparchive/BP961210/BP961210/1012_busi09.html Retrieved on 14 June 2000

A further objective of the study will be to analyse the relationship between government and Thai farmers groups. In this respect, the inequalities of government action, with regard to development policies, will be taken into account. However, with regard to the process of group formation and farmers political actions, the study will not focus on how the government's development policies have affected Thai farmers. This is because the impact of development policies, for the most part affect economic, rather than political factors. So instead, the thesis will consider the relationship between government and interest groups, within the process of policy development. The role of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' within the network of the policy-making process will be illustrated, through the Western concept of policy network/community.

'The basic question raised here is whether measures that are constructed for the use of one political setting, and that are based upon the experience of one society or culture, are necessarily meaningful or useful in another setting.'¹⁴ There are problems, which occur when the Western concepts of interest group and policy network/community are applied to Thai case studies. This is a result of the differences between the Thai and Western societies, and can reduce the utility of the Western frameworks and make them less applicable in the Thai political context. Research in political science is by its very nature dynamic, and therefore the established framework, with regard to any particular aspect within the political arena, cannot necessarily perfectly explain another. Therefore, specific cultural factors will be considered, in order to accommodate explanations provided by the Western frameworks. This will enhance the utility of the Western frameworks, with regard to the study of the political participation of Thai farmers groups.

The contributions made by the Western frameworks will help to provide more systematic explanations, with regard to the case studies on rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups in Thailand, and in addition will help facilitate an interesting comparative study between these three groups. This study will in turn be used to examine their potential future roles, in investigating whether the farmers groups can further develop their political influence within the Thai political arena.

¹⁴ Peters, B.G. (1998) *Comparative Politics: Theory and Method*, London: Macmillan, p.87

The way in which the thesis contributes to the arena of international political economy is to link theoretical frameworks to case study examples, with new conceptual lenses providing a novel insight and perspective through the study of the political participation of Thai farmers, namely with the previously untried application of the interest group and the policy network/community frameworks in such a context. With reference to the concept of the interest group, Olson's arguments regarding collective and selective incentives provide a particularly useful analytical framework in relation to the study of Thai farmers groups formations. Accordingly, the research has concluded that it is selective incentives specifically, which have been of a significant benefit for Thai farmers groups in solving the problem of mobilisation.

In examining the degree to which political influence affects rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups, through the utilisation of the adapted policy network/community framework, the thesis has made significant contributions in furthering the understanding of how the notion of conceptual stretching can be applied in the arena of comparative politics. Through successfully integrating an analysis of the patronage system within the Thai political arena into the policy network/community framework, whilst implying the importance of the analysis at the micro level, the thesis both contributes to the original framework, and in addition, conceptualises a contemporary analytical framework applicable within the arena of Thai political studies.

Whilst the original framework emphasises meso-level analysis, in order to maintain compatibility with the case studies of the rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups in Thailand, consideration of the micro-level is intended to contribute towards a broader, more comprehensive analysis. At the micro-level, particular consideration will be given to the interaction between the various actors within the network of the policy-making process. This consideration is particularly applicable to the Thai case, because the existence of the patronage system helps to explain why certain interest groups are excluded from the network of the policy-making process by the dominant actors within the network. Accordingly, a more comprehensive analysis will benefit the study of the network of the policy-making process and the political influence of the involved actors.

1.2 Hypothesis and Main Arguments

In the wake of the need for political reforms in Thailand in the 1990s, the main focus reflected the increasing role of the Thai people and civil society. It is widely believed that if the Thai people and organisations within civil society have a greater say in the Thai political arena, this in turn will balance the political power of the government. This belief has led to changes in the structure of power in the rural areas, and in the political behaviour and expression of rural people. Thai farmers groups have become more aware of their own rights and are now more able to express their own demands. However, their political expression today is not as powerful as that of business groups. Almond, Powell, Strøm and Dalton argue that, 'To be effective, interest groups must be able to reach key policymakers through **channels of political access**. Groups may express the interests of their members and yet fail to have an impact on policymakers.'¹⁵ Accordingly, whether channels of political access are available to Thai farmers groups requires investigation. In this regard, the thesis will look at how domestic economic and political factors have impacted on Thai farmers groups. Societal structure, political culture and education will also be taken into account, with regard to this discussion.

The discussion will not only be limited to the domestic impact on the political participation of Thai farmers groups however, as in addition, the thesis will also examine the global impact in this regard. The impacts of the WTO will be taken into account. The WTO is recognised as a major organisation at the global level, intended to help to develop the free trade system internationally. The WTO rules are decided through the agreement of its members in the multilateral trade negotiations. These rules will affect member countries directly, once they are applied. This process will lead the discussions, with regard to the impact of the WTO on Thai agriculture, and specifically the political participation of Thai farmers groups. Therefore, it is important to establish with regard to the discussions in relation to the thesis, the global impact on Thai farmers groups, and as to whether they are being properly informed about both the existence and roles of the WTO.

¹⁵ Almond, G.A., Powell, G.B., Strøm, K. and Dalton, R.J. (2000, Third Edition) *Comparative Politics: A Theoretical Framework*, New York: Longman, p.90

1.3 Research Techniques

In obtaining accurate information about the formation of farmers groups and their political participation, face to face interviews are the most useful and practical methodological approach. However in addition, documentary data was widely consulted as a secondary source with which to complement the data from the interviews. All interviews with rice farmers, sugarcane farmers and potato farmers were conducted in Thailand during the periods of March and April 2000, and April and May 2001. Additional field research was conducted between March and April 2001, which involved collecting documentary data in Thailand, including interviews with academics and bureaucrats. The documentary research was successful at providing crucial evidence with respect to farmers and government, information unavailable in the United Kingdom. In addition, a whole variety of evidence was provided through periodicals, newspapers, and information available through the Internet.

Difficulties experienced during the field research, mostly occurred during the second visit to Thailand, and involved interviews with farmers, academics, government officials, and NGOs. Most interviewees had inconvenient timetables and lived across widely spread regions of the country. In addition, varying local dialects also led to problems with respect to fully understanding interviews with farmers, particularly with regard to the northern and northeastern dialects. Helpfully, other members of the farmers groups spoke the central Thai dialect, which is the formal dialect of Thailand, in addition to the local dialect, which completely solved this problem.

Because of both time constraints and the difficulty in travelling to reach the farmers in remote rural areas, the interviews were limited to 10 members of the rice farmers group, 10 members of the sugarcane farmers group and representatives from the sugarcane mill, 8 members of the potato farmers group, 4 academics, 5 politicians and bureaucrats, and 3 representatives of NGOs, totalling 40 in all. During the process of data analysis, and after the formal interviews had been completed, it was evident that some additional data would be required. In addition, there was a lack of consistency in relation to both terminology and statistical data, which was provided by a range of government agencies. Accordingly,

telephone interviews and electronic mails were used, in order to both update and corroborate the data.

As a proportion of the total number of farmers in Thailand, the number of farmers in the study may seem to be low. However, as the farmers from the case studies are largely the active members within their groups, they are able to effectively represent the opinions of the wider groups. The data, which they provided during the interviews, was remarkably consistent, and this was important in establishing the reliability of the data. Significantly, through having similar experiences in relation to both their productivity and political participation, there was a high level of agreement between the farmers who were interviewed. Accordingly, in relation to the farmers, the data from the field research can be considered to be reliable. By way of contrast, the interviews with the academics produced a broader spectrum of opinion, which evidences their varying perspectives, and furthermore, highlights the areas in which academics are able to contribute, with regard to the political participation of Thai farmers.

The interpretation of the data may, on occasion, require use of the Thai language, in order to avoid what would otherwise be lost in translation. Translation from the Thai, into English is not always reasonably possible, as the authentic subtlety of the meaning will be lost. Meaning may only have local relevance, whether written in Thai or English, with respect to the group or groups involved. English will be used whenever possible, however on occasion it may be more appropriate to retain the original Thai. The thesis will endeavour to provide the closest possible translations, and to maintain consistency with regard to the academic arena on Thai studies, and will, wherever possible, utilise the work of experts on Thai studies. The main texts utilised, with reference to both translations and Thai history, are Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1999) *Thailand: Economy and Politics*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, and Pasuk Phongpaichit and Sungsidh Piriyaarangsarn (1994) *Corruption & Democracy in Thailand*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

1.4 Research Method

In this thesis, the ‘comparative’ method is to be utilised as the methodological tool of choice when testing the main hypothesis, in considering whether it is either domestic or global factors, which impact most greatly on the level of political participation of Thai farmers. The research has established that there are many factors, which affect the level of political participation of Thai farmers groups, and rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups in particular. Accordingly, ‘a comparative research design can test hypotheses through isolating the effect of one variable on another.’¹⁶ By comparing these three groups, it is intended that an understanding of the different levels of political participation of Thai farmers groups more generally can be revealed. Furthermore, in addition to domestic comparisons, the thesis will also consider international comparisons, by examining the level of political influence experienced by farmers groups in Western societies such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and in addition, in Japan. The achievements of farmers groups in Western societies and in Japan have resulted from a number of contributing factors, and therefore, international comparisons will assist in predictions relating to the future political participation of Thai farmers groups.

However, the notion of comparative politics has been criticised by academics such as Sartori¹⁷, specifically, with regard to the use of conceptual stretching, in order to solve the ‘travelling problem’. Sartori notes that conceptual stretching portrays a deliberate attempt to make conceptualisation value liberated and more applicable to the cases in comparison. ‘It appears that we can cover more—in travelling terms—only by saying less, and by saying less in a far less precise manner.’¹⁸ Sartori¹⁹ has concluded that conceptual stretching provides extensional coverage of the explanation power, but the benefits from extensional coverage may result in losses in terms of the preciseness of the connotation. The result of this outcome can lead to major problems in relation to comparative methods, as this scenario tends towards

¹⁶ Burnham, P., Gillard, K., Grant, W. and Layton-Henry, Z. (2004) *Research Methods in Politics*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, p.69

¹⁷ Sartori, G. (1970) ‘Concept Misinformation in Comparative Politics’, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol.64 No. 4, December 1970, 1033-1053, p.1036

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.1035

¹⁹ Sartori, G. (1970)

vague and undefined conceptualisations. Nevertheless, comparative methods help researchers to improve both the classification and the conceptualisation of political theories, because ‘the research process is a dynamic between theoretical level (that is, the classification) and the empirical level (the measurement we use), the comparison will then feed back into the classification and it by refining it on the basis of additional information.’²⁰ Accordingly, ‘it can also suggest how the hypothesis might be usefully refined or reformulated.’²¹

Sartori has introduced the term ‘ladder of abstraction’, in order to illustrate the problem of the requirement for analysis at a number of levels, which can result from the differences associated with the various elements in comparison. He classifies three main levels of abstraction: high, medium and low. ‘High level categorizations obtain universal conceptualizations: whatever connotation is sacrificed to the requirement of global denotation — either in space, time, or even in both. Descending a step, medium level categorizations fall short of universality and thus can be said to obtain general classes: at this level not all differentiae are sacrificed to extensional requirements.... Finally, low level categorizations obtain specific, indeed configurative conceptualizations: here denotation is sacrificed to accuracy of connotation.’²² Accordingly, when ‘ladder climbing’ becomes a requirement, researchers tend to diminish the properties or attributions of a concept, in order to make it both more abstract and more general. Moreover, comparative politics can lead towards biased analysis, because individuals tend to make perceptions in congruence with their own perspectives. ‘This problem of bias and competing values is particularly acute in comparative politics, where we are often seeking to understand governments and cultures with different values from our owns.’²³

Indeed, ‘if we do not stretch some then concepts may remain too parochial, and the possibility of any genuine comparison is reduced or even eliminated.’²⁴ However, this thesis will not argue that conceptual stretching can completely solve the travelling problem in

²⁰ Burnham, P., Gillard, K., Grant, W. and Layton-Henry, Z. (2004), p.68

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.69

²² Sartori, G. (1970), 1041

²³ Hague, R., Harrop, M. and Breslin, S. (1992, Third Edition) *Comparative Government and Politics: An Introduction*, London: Macmillan, pp.29-30

²⁴ Peters, B.G. (1998) *Comparative Politics: Theory and Method*, London: Macmillan, p.105

comparative politics. Nevertheless, conceptual stretching can help to inform a more systematic analysis with reference to the study of the political participation of Thai farmers groups by using the Western analytical frameworks as a main research tool. The thesis will incorporate Sartori's solutions in relation to conceptual stretching, adapting the Western analytical frameworks, in order to make them more applicable to the Thai political studies. '(1) to develop the discipline along a medium level of abstraction with better intermediate categories, and (2) to manoeuvre, both upwards and downwards, along a ladder of abstraction in such a way as to bring together assimilation and differentiation, a relatively high explanatory power and a relatively precise descriptive content, macro-theory and empirical testing.'²⁵ With reference to this argument, the consideration of the patronage system when applying the policy network/community framework to the Thai case studies, does not distort the original concept of the policy network/community. This is because the manifestation of a patronage system implies informal relationships between actors, whereas the study of relationships between actors within the policy network/community already considers the notion of informal relationships and the role of dominant actors.

1.5 Case Study Arguments

Thailand's economy is primarily based on agriculture, and almost two-thirds of the country's population are farmers who live in rural areas.²⁶ These rural farmers are very fragmented in terms of organisation, and as a result, well-organised farmers representative groups are rarely observed at the national level in Thailand. The study on the political participation of Thai farmers groups considers three of these groups, namely rice, sugarcane and potato farmers, because they represent a catholic range of farmers groups more generally.

In terms of cultivable land, these three groups operate on very different scales of production. According to the report of the Office of Agricultural Economics, rice cultivation occupied 57.02 million *rai* (9.12 million hectares), while sugarcane cultivation occupied just

²⁵ Sartori, G. (1970), 1053

²⁶ Rural Development and Natural Resource Sector Unit of the World Bank (2000) *Beyond the Crisis: A Strategy for Renewing Rural Development in Thailand*, Bangkok: World Bank, p.xi

5.77 million *rai* (0.92 million hectares) in the year 2000.²⁷ In another report of the Office of Agricultural Economics, potato cultivation occupied only 0.06 million *rai* (0.01 million hectares) for 2000/2001.²⁸ Indeed, rice and sugarcane are leading agricultural products for Thailand, whereas potato cultivation is only locally important. Whilst these three sectors are not comparable economically, this is not the main concern of the thesis. This is because the study of the political participation of Thai farmers, by definition implies that political issues are more relevant. The three farmers groups have different characteristics, with regard to their political participation, and as a result they provide an interesting comparison. In addition they are rurally based groups, which have many shared elements, with respect to rural values and culture.

Coincidentally, the local rice and potato farmers groups examined in the case studies have been developing over the same period of time, as they both formed in the mid-1990s. This shared element between these two groups, suggests that a comparative study can potentially bring about an interesting comparison in terms of their group formation and development. The case study of the sugarcane farmers group is of a distinct case, when compared to the case studies of the rice and potato farmers groups. This is because of its long period of development, which began with its formation in the mid 1960s. Whether this factor is one of the main factors with regard to the accumulation of political power of interest groups in general, is to be examined in the thesis.

1.5.1 Rice Farmers

In the world agricultural market, Thailand is best known as a major exporter of rice. Rice is cultivated in every region of the country, and therefore rice farmers are geographically dispersed. A distinctive and influential representative of rice farmers, like the *Nokyo* in Japan is not yet observed at the national level in Thailand. For this reason, the thesis

²⁷ Centre for Agricultural Statistic (2000) *Warasan Payakorn Pholphalit kankaset (Agricultural Production Forecast Journal)*, Office of Agricultural Economics, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, [in Thai] p.2 and p.7

²⁸ Department of Agriculture (2001) *Kanphalit Munfarang Lea Houphan Munfarang (The Production of Potato and Potato Seedlings)*, Department of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, paper for conference on The Production of Potato and Potato Seedlings [in Thai], p.4

has chosen a rice farmers group at the local level, namely the *Krueakhai khon ploog khao lum maenam kong*, or the 'Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River' (NRGMR), in the district of Khemmarat, in the province of Ubon Ratchathani. This is in order to help to illustrate the level of political participation of Thai rice farmers groups. However, this is not to argue that this group can be fully representative of rice farmers at the national level, because there are significant variations in respect of culture, the level of development, societal structure and the level of political awareness across rice farmers groups in different regions of Thailand.

Nevertheless, many of the problems confronting the NRGMR are typical of the problems, which confront rice farmers throughout Thailand. According to Ngampit's study²⁹, most rice farmers live in poverty, and as Buddhist adherents, are unlikely to actively challenge figures of authority. The main problems for rice farmers are related to land ownership, which necessitates renting cultivable land, and to debt, which exacerbates any other problems. Similarly, Sanan highlights that 'a significant number of Thai rice farmers do not have enough rice to eat...many families are burdened by massive debts.... Unpredictable weather, droughts and floods, epidemics and pest infestations are all risks farmers must face.... Each year, the government spends millions of baht to shore up rice prices, but it is the rice millers receiving low-interest government loans who benefit from these price supports.... Rallies and marches by farmers demanding higher rice prices have had only limited effect.... Some farmers have come to conclusion that their efforts to obtain some influence over rice price policies are virtually useless. Some farmers in the Northeast, therefore, have begun to seek an alternative which will give them greater security and allow them to continue farming.'³⁰

Accordingly, the NRGMR has been chosen as a case study, because of its good reputation within the Thai political arena. It is an example of a group that emerged, in order

²⁹ Ngampit Satsaguan (1998) 'Watthanatham khao nai sangkom Thai: Sugsakoranee Banna chungwat Pranakorn Sri Ayutthaya (The Rice Culture in Thai Society: The Case Study of Banna, the Province of Ayutthaya', in Ngampit Satsaguan (ed) *Watthanatham khao nai sangkom Thai lae nana chat (The Rice Culture in Thai Society and Other Countries)*, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 6-39 [in Thai]

³⁰ Sanan Chusakul (1996) 'Rice Trading: New Alternatives for Farmers', *Thai Development Newsletter*, No.30, 1996, 37-39, p.37

to promote its self-reliant status in the wake of the country's economic crisis of 1997. The NRGMR intended to isolate itself from the market system, because they perceived that the capitalist economy was a threat to their way of life. Under the advice from local activists, consisting of local schoolteachers in the district of Khemmarat, the NRGMR was formed in 1997, and is one of the most accepted of farmers groups among Thai academics. The rice farmers group was invited to appear on the *Laan Baan Laan Maung* Programme in 2001, one of the most highly regarded programmes of political criticism television in Thailand.³¹

1.5.2 Sugarcane Farmers

The production of sugarcane originated in the western region of Thailand before expanding into the *Isan* region of Thailand. There are two main organisations that represent the interests of sugarcane farmers groups at the level of government, namely the Thailand Sugarcane Planters Federation and the United Association of Thai Sugarcane Planters. The thesis has chosen to study the Sugar Cane Planters Association of Zone 7 (SCPA), which is a member of the Thailand Sugarcane Planters Federation, in order to represent sugarcane farmers groups. This is because this group was the first sugarcane farmers group, established in 1964, and has subsequently been the most politically active of the sugarcane farmers groups. The SCPA represents sugarcane farmers in 4 provinces, namely, Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Suphan Buri, and Nakhon Pathom, the country's largest area of sugarcane cultivation. In the crop year of 1994/1995, the provinces of Kanchanaburi, Suphanburi and Ratchaburi were ranked 1, 2 and 8 respectively in terms of the production of sugarcane, which were specifically 6,682,538 tonnes, 5,383,354 tons and 2,428,068 tonnes. From its inception, the SCPA successfully negotiated with sugarcane mills over the price of sugarcane. This allowed the SCPA to gain a core status within the Thailand Sugarcane Planters Federation.³²

³¹ The *Laan Baan Laan Maung* Program (2001), VDO provided by the *Krueakhai khon ploog khao lum maenam khong* (the Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River). The programme is presented by Dr Chirmsak Pinthong, a reputable economist from Thammasat University who is now a senator.

³² Office of Cane and Sugar Board (1999b), *Cane and Sugar Directory 1998-99*, Bangkok: Office of Cane and Sugar Board, Ministry of Industry, pp.38-39

Previously, the bargaining power of sugarcane farmers had been most important in relation to negotiations with the sugarcane mills. However, after the introduction of the 70:30 revenue-sharing system in 1982, and of the Sugarcane and Sugar Act B.E. 2527 (1987), bargaining power became more important in relation to negotiations with the government. This is because the level of government intervention significantly increased, in accordance with these changes to the law. Each of the processes involved in the production of sugarcane and sugarcane products are strictly controlled by the government, in order to protect against the problems of excess supply of sugarcane and excess demand for sugar in Thailand. Whether the control of the production of the sugarcane and sugar affects the political participation of sugarcane farmers is to be examined.

1.5.3 Potato Farmers

The production of potatoes has been concentrated within the northern region of Thailand, particularly in the province of Chiang Mai. From the 1960s to the mid-1980s the potato had been a minor cash crop in Thailand, and since the late 1970s, the production of potatoes was intended to substitute for hill tribe opium poppy crops.³³ In 1978, Thailand produced only 6,000 tonnes of potato for domestic consumption. During the 1970s, potato chips and in addition, U.S. fast food franchises such as McDonalds and KFC were not very popular in Thailand, and therefore most potatoes were produced, in order to supply hotels and restaurants, as a result of the expansion of tourism. In the late 1980s, the significant growth to the potato chip industry in Thailand emerged as a main contributing factor, in relation to the expansion of potato production in Thailand.³⁴

In 1980, due to the excess supply of potatoes, the government applied the policy of import restrictions on potato seedlings in April 1980. Thereafter, the import of potato seedlings was strictly controlled by the Public Warehouse Organisation.³⁵ This led to the

³³ www.cipotato.org/data/potato_atlas/asia/thailand.htm#Contributors Retrieved on 6 April 1999

³⁴ Thongchai Thonguthai (1997) *Prawati Munfarang Pun Spunta (History of Spunta Potato)*, Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd [Unpublished document in Thai], p.4

³⁵ Thongchai Thonguthaisri (1993) *Sahakorn phuplug munfarang Chiang Mai jumkad (Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd)*, paper presented at the 12th National Vegetable Conference, 31 March – 3 April 1993, Prince of Songkhla University, the province of Songkhla [in Thai], p.3

problem of excess demand for potato seedlings amongst potato farmers. In 1981, as a direct consequence, potato farmers in the district of Sansai, in the province of Chiang Mai, formed together as a group, which was legally registered as a co-operative in 1987. This action was taken, in order to improve their negotiating power in relation to the government, with reference to the problem of the inadequate supply of potato seedlings. In April 1997, this co-operative was divided into two co-operatives, namely the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd in the district of Sansai and the Chaiprakarn-Fang Co-operative in the district of Fang. With reference to this, the thesis has chosen to focus the study of political participation of potato farmers groups on the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, because of their inception, experience and expertise in the production of potatoes.

In the 1990s, multinational corporations (MNCs), namely the Frito-Lay Thailand Co., a snack-food division of Pepsi-Cola (Thailand) Trading Co., became more involved and influential within the local economy of potato production. This resulted in a farming contract system between potato farmers in the district of Sansai and the Frito-Lay Thailand Co. Accordingly, the way in which the farming contract has affected the political participation of potato farmers groups in the district of Sansai will be investigated and examined.

1.6 Plan of the Thesis

This thesis is comprised of seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction and background, with regard to the overall study. This begins with the discussion of the theoretical framework, and the contribution this thesis makes within the arena of political studies. An outline of the main arguments is provided in this chapter, and in addition, a brief consideration of research techniques is useful, in order to help to illustrate how the research was carried out. Furthermore, the case study argument, with reference to the rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups, provides a background, with regard to the subsequent discussions in the thesis.

Chapter 2 provides the main theoretical review of the relevant theoretical approaches, with regard to the study of the political participation of Thai farmers. The chapter begins with

a discussion in respect of the terminological difficulties in defining the term ‘interest group’, which is used as a main framework in the study. The focus then moves onto a discussion of the different literature, with regard to group formation and popular participation, specifically pressure groups, social movements, NGOs and civil society. This will lead onto a discussion, with regard to the various actors involved in the policymaking process. A review and examination, with reference to the literature on the concept of policy network/community, will contribute to this argument. The theoretical discussion of this chapter will move onto the debate over the Olsonian model, a model that has undermined the traditional pluralist accounts. The following section is a critical review of corporatism, which emerged as a variant of pluralism. Finally, this chapter will analyse the applicability of the suggested western frameworks. A useful reference point to be considered, is that of the Japanese case, since there are both similarities and differences with respect to the Western case. With regard to this matter, an analysis of state intervention is included, because it is one major area of distinction between the Thai and western theories, regarding pressure groups.

The Thai political culture is the main focus in Chapter 3, because this is a key element in understanding the effects of policy in terms of economic and social development, with reference to Thai farmers by the state. This has had a direct effect in respect of their attitude and enthusiasm with regard to politics, and would help to explain the impact on farmers’ political participation. The chapter begins with a debate on the concentration of power, and then moves into a debate regarding the contemporary political issue of ‘money politics’, which can help to explain the phenomenon of both vote-buying and corruption. The next section discusses the concepts of social hierarchy and the patronage system, which will help to further develop an understanding of the Thai political culture. These are the domestic factors, which have a profound impact on the development of farmers’ political participation. The chapter also establishes who the important political actors are within the Thai political arena.

Chapter 4 considers which are the relevant factors, with respect to the group formation of Thai farmers and their sustainability, and this consideration will include a comparative analysis of interest groups, with reference to Thailand and Japan. The societal

structures of both countries will be examined, and this will help to explain how the existence of hierarchical structure can affect the nature of farmer's group formation in different societies. In addition, this will help to explain the response of Thai farmers groups, with respect to the domestic impacts considered in Chapter 5, and the global impacts of the involvement of the WTO, which are considered in Chapter 6. In addition, Chapter 4 will enquire into the political status of rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups.

Chapters 5 and 6 analyse the case studies of the three farmers groups, and this is accompanied by the adopted theoretical approaches. The analysis in Chapter 5 assesses domestic impacts on the political participation of Thai farmers. Chapter 6 considers the global impact on the political participation of Thai farmers. As indicated earlier, global institutions have less direct impact on the political participation of Thai farmers than domestic considerations.

Chapter 7 is the conclusion to this thesis, and the successes and failures of rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups will be analysed in accordance with the evidence provided from the research. This analysis will predict a trend, with regard to the political participation of Thai farmers groups.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Review

Introduction

The main focus of the study on the political participation of Thai farmers in this thesis is to analyse the internal dynamics of the various farmers groups, and the external dynamics between these very same farmers groups and government, civil society, and international institutions. In order to portray a clear picture of Thai farmers and their political identity, this chapter will provide the theoretical framework for the thesis. Because of the differences among the three groups of farmers in this thesis: rice farmers, sugarcane farmers, and potato farmers, the research is informed by a number of relevant theoretical frameworks. The comparative study is between farmers groups, and not between individual farmers from the three products under study. Therefore, the thesis will consult the group theories as the main theoretical framework in order to explain their political and non-political functions.

However, library research suggests that there are not many studies of interest groups, either in Thai politics specifically or in Asian politics generally. The lack of literature on interest groups could be a result of their weak position within the political system, where democratisation has always been disrupted by the military. Accordingly, interest groups have not been able to advance their political development in this region of the world, to the extent more commonly found in the West. Wilson¹ argues that the Western model of democracy has offered more political space for interest groups to play their part in the formation of government policy. Indeed, there is a rich Western literature on interest groups, and in fact particularly on farmers groups.

Studies on interest groups in the West have shown some theoretical relevance to the study of Thai farmers groups. However, the research has found that the Western concept of interest groups cannot provide a comprehensive explanation in relation to the Thai case, which is due to Thailand having such a different political culture, in addition to very different social and economic conditions. According to Prudhisan², personalities,

¹ Wilson, G. K. (1981) *Interest Groups in the United States*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. viii

² Prudhisan Jumbala (1974) 'Towards a Theory Of Group Formation in Thai Society and Pressure Groups in Thailand After the October 1973 Uprising', *Asian Survey*, Vol. XIV, June 1974, p.540

friendship networks, and a dependence upon personal contacts between active members within interest groups and bureaucrats, are still crucial elements for interest groups as a result of the embedded patronage system in Thai society. These elements negatively impact on the ability of interest groups to become involved in a democratic process by definition which is already at variance with the Western democratic model. He argues that the patronage system in Thai society is a kind of anti-hypothesis to the concept of Western interest groups in which personal contacts and any other forms of patronage are not commonly found.

Notwithstanding these differences, the Western concept of interest groups can be adopted to test the argument on the formation of Thai farmers groups and their involvement in the Thai political arena. Olson's theories of 'collective benefit', 'selective incentive', 'by-product' and 'intermediate group' provide extra theoretical relevance, and will be examined in this chapter. The discussion regarding the study of interest groups in the Western literature begins with a terminological debate, since there is still some ambiguity in the labelling of groups trying to influence government policy. This ambiguity applies in the Thai case also and requires discussion. That the Thai case still requires some discussion, helps to explain why there is still a lack of literature on farmers groups study in Thai political studies.

Another hypothesis in this thesis will be to investigate whether domestic and global factors have any impact on Thai farmers' political participation. Kamtorn's study on Thai agricultural policy claims that, 'in Thailand, a cabinet government under a parliamentary system, is responsible for deciding agricultural policies of the country. Several integrative systems offer the means for transition to more autonomous decision making. One of these is neocorporatism, in which the government might designate a national farm organization to represent agriculture...' ³ Indeed the research has found a form of policy community, which is active within the relationships between government and sugarcane farmers groups. Following Smith's study in relation to the agricultural policy community in Britain ⁴, the Western concept of 'policy community' helps to explain the Thai sugarcane farmer case. Thus, this chapter will provide a discussion on

³ Kamtorn Sheepchaisara (2002) 'Thailand Agricultural Policy: Where can we go from now?', at www.thinkcentreasia.org/kamtorn/Thailand%20Agricultural%20Policy.doc Retrieved on 5 July 2002, p.15

the policy network/community framework in order to analyse its application to the case studies in the thesis.

Thai farmer groups have so far been unable to affect government policy-making. Government intervention in the Thai agricultural sector is not as intense as in the Western society. A relationship pattern between government and farmers groups, like the British government and the National Farmers' Union (NFU) is not a common concept in the Thai agricultural arena. This chapter will study the progress of the political participation of the NFU in order to use it as a model to help to explain the case in the Thai political arena. However, it is argued that Western models of group participation cannot provide a comprehensive framework for understanding Thai farmers groups formation and their political activities. One way of resolving this problem is to look to the Japanese model. *Nokyo* is the largest farmers group in Japan, and represents rice farmers, with a similar level of influence as the NFU in the United Kingdom. The study of the similarities and differences between the NFU and *Nokyo*, which represent a long history of strong farmer representation, can offer a more applicable, if not perfect model, in order to explain the case of Thai farmers in the thesis.

2.1 Pressure Group

The study in relation to both 'pressure groups' and 'interest groups' is one of the more prominent areas for political study. This area of study helps to illustrate the imbalance of the distribution of political resources for different members across society. This can be the case in either a country with a democratic system, or a non-democratic country. According to the 'Pluralist' school of thought, Schwarzmantel argues that 'there is no concentration of power either at the level of the state or at the societal level. There are a number of centres of power...'⁵ This polyarchy of power offers a political opportunity for all members of society to secure and then to advance their interests.

'Representative democracy is achieved through the network of political parties and interest groups which are seen as legitimate contenders for political power (parties),

⁴ Smith, M.J. (1992) 'The Agricultural Policy Community: Maintaining a Closed Relationship', in Marsh, D. and Rhodes, R.A.W. (eds) *Policy Networks in British Government*, New York: Oxford University Press

or for influence (pressure groups).'⁶ However, it has been observed that a country with representative democracy can not always distribute political resources effectively. This implies a failure of the legitimate contenders for political power (parties, politicians and other political actors), which generates a will amongst the population and results in the formation of pressure groups. Harrison asserts that the interest groups are “specialised consensual mechanisms’ shifting some of the burden of consensus formation from elected legislative assemblies.’⁷ The establishment of interest groups is more common in Western society than in Thailand due to the more democratic political environment.

2.1.1 Study of Pressure Groups in the Western Political Context

For decades, political scientists have been studying the phenomenon of ‘pressure groups’ or ‘interest groups’. However, clearly defining these terms still remains a fundamental problem for political scientists conducting research in this field of study. Numerous writers in this area have suggested a variety of definitions. Baggott⁸ summarises the terminological preferences of many writers in the study of this area. For instance, in “Government and Pressure Groups in Britain”, by Jordan and Richardson, the term ‘group’ is used instead of the term ‘pressure group’, which is suggested by the title. Marsh, the author of “Pressure Politics: Interest Groups in Britain”, Norton, the author of “The British Polity”, and Wilson, the author of “Interest Group”, all use the term ‘Interest Group’.

For Greenwald⁹, the term ‘interest group’ denotes a combination of individuals who seek to pursue shared interests through a framework of agreed actions. Pross¹⁰, defines pressure groups as organisations whose members act together to influence public policy in order to promote their common interest. The chief function of the pressure group

⁵ Schwarzmantel, J. (1994) *The State in Contemporary Society: An Introduction*, London: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, p.54

⁶ Ibid., pp.54-55

⁷ Harrison, R.J. (1980) *Pluralism and Corporatism: The Political Evolution of Modern Democracies*, London: George Allen & Unwin, p.68

⁸ Baggott, R. (1995) *Pressure Groups Today*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.9

⁹ Greenwald, C. S. (1977) *Group Power: Lobbying & Public Policy*, New York: Praeger Publishers, pp.14-15

¹⁰ Pross, A. P. (1992, Second Edition) *Group Politics and Public Policy*, Toronto: Oxford University Press, p.3

is to persuade governments to pursue the policies it advocates. Ball and Millard¹¹ also give a similar definition to the term pressure group. In general terms, pressure groups are collective social groups, whose members share aims in an attempt to influence policy-makers and the policy-making process. Grant suggests that, 'The term 'pressure' group has always implied the use of some kind of improper sanctioning power, while the term 'interest' group carries the implication of a narrow sectional group seeking to defend its own particular position.'¹²

Whilst endeavouring to obtain a clear distinction between 'interest group' and 'pressure group', in this area of study, a true and concise definition is not easily found. Jordan, Halpin and Maloney argue 'that the real confusion is not caused by assuming that almost any kind of organisation will attempt to exert influence, but in *labelling* every organisation engaging in pressure politics as a pressure group.'¹³ Indeed, there are a number of other definitions, which have been introduced into the study of groups, for instance, 'organised interests', 'the lobby', 'public interest groups', and 'vested interests'.¹⁴ Jordan, Halpin and Maloney¹⁵, have suggested the terms 'pressure participant' and 'policy participant', in order to remedy this labelling confusion. The term 'pressure participant' is offered as a generic term, intended to describe any organisation, which attempts to influence outcomes within the 'pressure system'. They believe that not every group can be identified as an interest group, since the difference between 'pressure participant', 'policy participant' and 'interest group' phenomena 'are too great to sensibly combine. The costs of failing to make distinctions are too great to ignore.'¹⁶ Preferably, they reserve the term 'interest group' in relation to those groups and organisations with members or supporters, which are both politically relevant and dedicated, with regard to their key objectives. The term 'policy participant' is used in relation to those groups and

¹¹ Ball, A. and Millard, F. A. (1986) *Pressure Politics in Industrial Societies: A Comparative Introduction*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp.33-34

¹² Grant, W. (2002) 'Civil Society and the Internal Democracy of Interest Groups', paper prepared for the Annual Conference of the Political Science Association of the UK at the University of Aberdeen, April 2002, p.1

¹³ Jordan, G., Halpin, D., and Maloney, W.A. (2004) 'Defining Interests: Disambiguation and the Need for New Distinctions?', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Volume 6 Number 2, May 2004, 195-212,p.205

¹⁴ Petracca, M.P. (1992) 'The Rediscovery of Interest Group Politics', in Petracca, M.P. (ed) *The Politics of Interests: Interest Groups Transformed*, Boulder: Westview Press, p.5

¹⁵ Jordan, G., Halpin, D., and Maloney, W.A. (2004),p.205

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.209

organisations, which are not dedicated towards political activity.¹⁷ In precise terms, the policy participants ‘are not interest groups, but adopting a role acting as if they are... Such interventions can be politically significant, but not interest group phenomena.’¹⁸

With reference to this discussion, the concept of policy participant implies a direct terminological relevance, both in terms of political opportunity and in political access. Grant argues that ‘pressure groups offer what may be seen as one of the more accessible means of influencing decision-makers.... Pressure groups exert influence on the policy process in Britain and at the EU level in a wide variety of ways from direct action protests to discussions with ministers.’¹⁹ Whilst in the United States, interest groups utilise a broad spectrum of approaches, both in their lobbying strategies and in the undertaking of their research, in order to affect policy outcomes.²⁰ Baumgartner and Leech assert that ‘lobbyists are active in an extremely broad range of circumstances.’²¹

In relation to the United States, the consideration of the lobbying system within the study of interest groups could perhaps imply a milder and less direct, yet euphemistic variant of the form of patronage existing in Thailand, which is less sophisticated, less formalised, and cruder in its manifestation. Indeed: ‘The 1995 Lobbying Disclosure Act significantly expanded the reporting requirements for organisations active in Washington D.C. For the first time, it required semi-annual reports from each firm or organizations active in Washington lobbying activities.’²² However, the lobbying system in the United States does not demand a high level of commitment between lobbyist and client as suggested in the relationship, which tends to manifest between patron and client in the patronage system in Thailand. In addition, as Hansen argues: ‘Close consultation with interest groups—granting access—is a congressional strategy for dealing with uncertainty. It is a policy of reliance on interest groups for advice and assistance.’²³ Indeed, this aspect in relation to the study of interest groups in the United States is similar

¹⁷ Ibid., p.205

¹⁸ Ibid., p.208

¹⁹ Grant, W. (2000) *Pressure Groups and British Politics*, London: Macmillan Press, p.5

²⁰ Baumgartner, F. R. and Leech, B.L. (1998) *Basic Interest: The Importance of Groups in Politics and in Political Science*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press

²¹ Baumgartner, F. R. and Leech, B.L. (2000) ‘Lobbying Alone or in the Crowd: The Distribution of Lobbying in a Sample of Issues, paper prepared for delivery at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 27-29, 2000, p.4

²² Ibid., p.5

to the British case. According to Smith, ‘through agenda control not all interests have access to the state and certain issues are excluded so that decision-making is biased in favour of certain interests.’²⁴ Accordingly, with regard to the consideration of privileged access to policy-makers within the context of Western interest groups, both the United States and the United Kingdom cases can inform the conceptualisation of the interest group framework in terms of the study of rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups in Thailand. This nexus can provide a solution to the travelling problem that has resulted from the application of the framework, which was developed in the Western context.

2.1.2 Study of Interest Groups in the Thai Political Context

The translation of the term ‘interest group’ in Thai is *klum pholprayoch*, whilst ‘pressure group’ in Thai is *klum plugdun* or *klum itthiphon*. In general these terms convey a similar meaning regarding interest group studies in the West. The connotations of *klum plugdun* and *klum itthiphon* also represent a more assertive use of the noun than *klum pholprayoch*, which makes the term more applicable to define the politically active groups. The word *klum* means group and the word *itthiphon* means influence. Therefore, the term *klum itthiphon* translates closest as ‘group influence’. Pasuk²⁵ summarises Nidhi’s definition of *itthiphon* as ‘the locally-based extra-legal power of village bosses, gangsters, godfathers and businessmen, and their modern incarnations as local councillors and MPs.’²⁶ This is because it is used in Thai society and by Thai academics in a negative context. To clarify the negative implication of the word *itthiphon*, the work of Pasuk and Sungsidh²⁷ in “Corruption and Democracy in Thailand”, states that *phu mi itthiphon* (men of influence) is a formal description for the term *jao pho* (godfather). They argue that *itthiphon* may allow *jao pho* to flaunt the law or protect others from it. Aware of this terminological implication, the term *klum itthiphon* conveys the idea of an influential group with both legal and illegal power. Another important fact is that *klum itthiphon* has

²³ Hansen, J.M. (1991) *Gaining Access: Congress and the Farm Lobby, 1919 – 1981*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.12

²⁴ Smith, M.J. (1990) *The Politics of Agricultural Support in Britain: The Development of Agricultural Policy Community*, Aldershot: Dartmouth, p.40

²⁵ Pasuk Phongpaichit (1999) *Civilising the State: State, Civil Society, and Politics in Thailand*, Amsterdam: Centre for Asian Studies Amsterdam, p.6

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Sungsidh Piriyanangsan (1994) *Corruption & Democracy in Thailand*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, pp.59-61

been widely used by Thai journalists describing influential groups under *jao pho* patronage.

By contrast, the term *klum pholprayoch* has more positive connotations than the term *klum itthiphon*. Both of them represent groups that attempt to secure their interests, but *klum pholprayoch* are unlikely to employ either illegal action or illegal power. Normally, the term *klum pholprayoch* is reserved for the study of Thai business groups, for instance in Anek's work.²⁸ The implications of these two terms in the Thai language does not harmonise with the nature of Thai farmers in general due to their political weakness, having little influence on government policy-making and the lack of influential patrons. Thai people do not describe farmer groups as *klum itthiphon*, or *klum pholprayoch*. This argument is supported by the absence of evidence from Thai academics in conceptualising interest group frameworks to study Thai farmer groups as interest groups in the Western context.

This may lead to the question about how appropriate the interest group framework is in conducting a research on Thai farmers' political participation. Clearly, it would be a misleading study if the research relied only on a particular framework, while the nature of groups is dynamic. Moreover, there are still some strong farmers groups existing in the Thai political arena, even though the majority of them are politically weak. The research has found that sugarcane farmers groups are politically strong. Ramsay²⁹, affirms that Thai sugarcane farmers are the exceptional case in the established pattern of rural political weakness.

However sugarcane farmers are not able to be politically assertive all of the time, although it has been found that they are an active group in the Thai political arena. They have learnt to adopt some diplomatic approaches to their political participation. More non-diplomatic approaches become their option when they find that their diplomatic approaches fail to achieve their objectives. Therefore, the term 'pressure group', which illustrates a kind of group with proactive and affirmative assertive strategies being more

²⁸ Anek Laothamatas (1992) *Business Associations and the New Political Economy of Thailand From Bureaucratic Polity to Liberal Corporatism*, Boulder: Westview Press, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies [ISEAS]

²⁹ Ramsay, A. (1987) 'The Political Economy of Sugar in Thailand', *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.60, No.2, 1987, p.248

radical and striking, may not be the best description for the sugarcane farmers groups. Thus the thesis will study sugarcane farmers groups as an 'interest group'.

Rice and potato farmers on the other hand, represent the majority of Thai rural farmers, whose political influence is rarely evident. Even though rice farmers make up the majority of the population of Thailand, they have not been a dominant group in the Thai political arena. They have been prevented from converting their numbers into effective political influence. The research has found that these two groups are only partly as politically active and effective as sugarcane farmers. They are not 'multi-member, politically oriented bodies of individuals.'³⁰ Political assertiveness is rarely seen in their strategies. The main aim of their group formations is to take care of their interests and improve their self-reliant status. There are few tendencies for these two groups to adopt proactive and affirmative assertive strategies to influence policy or pursue government assistance, in order to achieve their goal. Accordingly, rice farmers and potato farmers are to be studied as 'potential pressure participants'.

2.1.3 Politics of Insider and Outsider Groups

The classification of groups into 'insiders' and 'outsiders' is 'to differentiate interest group strategies and status in policy development.'³¹ This distinguishes the level of accessibility, which the involved actors have achieved to the necessary information within the policy network. The maximising of knowledge regarding the nature of the network and other actors within, would allow the actors to function effectively. However, access to political power and information 'is one of the advantages unequally distributed... some groups have better and more varied opportunities to influence key points of decision than do others.'³²

Grant³³, classifies groups with privileged access to information as a result of their consultative role to government on a regular basis, as insider groups. Thus, they are unlikely to adopt assertive political actions against government such as campaigning

³⁰ Jordan, G. and Halpin, D. (2002), p.21

³¹ Maloney, W.A., Jordan, G. and McLaughlin, A.M. (1994) 'Interest Groups and Public Policy: The Insider/Outsider Model Revisited', *Journal of Public Policy*, 14, 1994: 17-38, p.17

³² Truman, D.B. (1960) *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, p.322

protests, since they can already negotiate influentially with government officials. The existence of insider groups within government is acknowledged as legitimate. In contrast, outsider groups are not able to gain any access to information within the policy-making process network at any level. Therefore, their main political strategy has tended to evolve towards adopting increased forcefulness, as evidenced by strategies, which involve campaigning protests or partisan activities. Accordingly, outsider groups are ‘protest groups which have objectives that are outside the mainstream of political opinion. They then have to adopt campaigning methods designed to demonstrate that they have a solid basis of popular support...’³⁴

The notion of insider groups and outsider groups is adopted in this thesis, in order to investigate the degree of access to power of Thai farmers. This further explanation will help to enhance the classification of the various farmers groups into ‘interest group’ and ‘potential pressure participants’. Moreover the insider-outsider typology is employed, in order to enhance the assessment of the successes and failures of rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups.

In the classification of group strategies, Grant does not only divide interest groups into insider groups and outsider groups. In addition, he classifies subdivisions within insider groups and outsider groups into three categories. This begins with subdivision within insider groups:

First there is a category of ‘prisoner groups’ who find it difficult to break away from an insider relationship with government, either because they are dependent on government for assistance of various kinds..., or because they represent parts of the public sector... The other two sub-types of insider group, ‘low profile’ and ‘high profile’... ‘low profile’ strategy would involve concentrating entirely on behind-the-scenes contacts with government and not making even routine statements to the mass media...A ‘high profile’ strategy involves a considerable emphasis on cultivating public opinion to reinforce contacts with government.³⁵

Similarly, Grant classifies subdivisions within outsider groups into three categories: potential insider groups, outsider groups by necessity and ideological outsider groups.

³³ Grant, W. (2000), p.19

³⁴ Ibid., p.19

³⁵ Grant, W. (1989) *Pressure Groups, Politics and Democracy in Britain*, London: Philip Allan, p. 16

Potential insider groups are those outsider groups which would like to become insider groups but have yet to win government acceptance... Outsider groups by necessity may also wish to become insider groups, but they are less politically sophisticated than potential insider groups in term of knowledge of how the political system works...³⁶ Ideological outsider groups do not accept the possibility of achieving change through the existing political system. They adopt tactics which place them outside what is regarded as the normal spectrum of political activity.³⁷

Grant³⁸ argues that there are tendencies for groups to advance their status as their political skills improve, from potential outsider groups into becoming insider groups, and from outsider groups by necessity to be potential insider groups. However, groups are not always able to advance favourable access to policy-makers by themselves, since the 'state sets the rules of the game for pressure group activity.'³⁹ In many cases, 'access is created by the legislator-politician's need of information and the ability of a group to supply it.'⁴⁰ This is infrequently the case in Thailand, since the relationships between government and interest groups are established on the basis of a patronage system. That politicians rely on information from groups implies the form of a reciprocal relationship, and is one characteristic of the patronage system. The patronage system itself is not a main factor in the Western model of group participation.

For this reason, the typology of insider/outsider in the Western context does not provide a sufficient explanation for the study of Thai farmers groups. The advancement of their status and the improvement in their political skills within the outsider groups is not enough for Thai farmers to achieve insider status. This is because the operation of the patronage system effectively prevents groups outside patronage networks from sharing and gaining in the benefits of political power. This helps illustrate how Thai farmers groups have experienced difficulty in choosing their strategy. 'So it is the nature of their demands on the political system that determines their strategy: they do not have a realistic choice between inside and outside strategies.'⁴¹ Accordingly, the classification of groups into insiders and outsiders will consider the contribution of the patronage system in the Thai political arena, since political information is not only what politicians needed to know in order to gain votes. Moreover, Thai politicians perceive extending their

³⁶ Ibid., pp.17

³⁷ Ibid., p.18

³⁸ Ibid., p.21

³⁹ Grant, W. (2000), p.20

⁴⁰ Truman, D.B. (1960), p.333

⁴¹ Maloney, W.A., Jordan, G. and McLaughlin, A.M. (1994), p.34

patronage network as the real method for gaining votes, as it effectively allows them to vote-buy their way to power.

2.2 Civil Society

Scholte⁴² highlights how the term ‘civil society’ has developed in English political thought. In the sixteenth-century, ‘civil society’ referred to the state, whereas its contemporary application tends to contrast civil society and the state. In the nineteenth-century, Hegel included the notion of the market under the term ‘civil society’, while the contemporary use of the term ‘civil society’ tends to refer only to the non-profit sector. This suggests that through different times and places, definitions of the term ‘civil society’ have varied enormously. This variation points to the contribution of local culture, historical background, and social structure in the development of the term.

In Thai political study, the nature of the development of the term ‘civil society’ has led to some difficulty in making a clear distinction between ‘civil society’ and ‘interest group’. There is evidence that these two terms have been used interchangeably by Thai academics. Prior to the introduction of the term ‘civil society’ into Thai political study, the term ‘interest group’ was employed as the main theoretical framework in studies on student uprisings. This is evidenced by the studies of Prudhisan.⁴³ Ratana⁴⁴ claims the student uprising of October 1973 to be the origin of the civil society movement in Thailand. Ji⁴⁵ suggests the notion of ‘civil society’ as a main theoretical framework for the political confrontations between the civilian population and the military government in the 1970s, and subsequently, the political turmoil and civil unrest of May 1992. These events became a catalyst for contemporary studies on the term ‘civil society’ in the arena of Thai political study. This has subsequently helped to explain the social movements, which aimed towards challenging the systematic breakdown of Thailand’s democratic framework, and aimed towards promoting the Western democratic framework.

⁴² Scholte, J. A. (2001) ‘Civil Society and Democracy in Global Governance’, CSGR Working Paper No. 65/01, Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation, University of Warwick, p.4

⁴³ Prudhisan Jumbala (1974), and Prudhisan Jumbala (1987) ‘Interest and Pressure Groups’, in Somsakdi Xuto (ed.) *Government and Politics in Thailand*, Singapore: Oxford University Press

⁴⁴ Ratana Tosakul Boonmathya (1999) ‘Prachakhom: Civil Society in Thailand’, paper presented to the 7th International Conference on Thai Studies (4-8 July 1999), University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, p.98

⁴⁵ Ji Ungpakorn (2001) ‘October 1976 Massacre Led to Post-May 1992 Reform’, *The Nation* (Internet Edition), 6 October 2001 at

<http://nationmultimedia.com/page.arcview.php3?clid=11&id=49382&usrs..> Retrieved on 16 April 2002

This terminological challenge to the conceptualisation of the framework, which helps to explain the student uprising of October 1973, by both academics of the time and contemporary academics, illustrates the dynamics of political study. To a great extent, academics have failed to supply concise definitions of the terms ‘civil society’ and ‘interest group’ which can provide a clear distinction between them. Thus, ‘Anyone is always free to stipulate a definition he/she likes for any term he/she chooses. It is up to the rest of us to decide whether or not that definition is helpful.’⁴⁶

Prudhisana⁴⁷ argues that he does not disagree with the use of the term ‘civil society’ in contemporary Thai political study, since there is no clear distinction between ‘civil society’ and ‘interest group’. This is a problem with regard to definitional boundaries. This implies that sometimes these terms are used interchangeably, in which Ammar⁴⁸ also agrees. Nevertheless, Prudhisana adds that the study of ‘civil society’ in Thailand in the 1990s could be a trend that has already been set by academics, because use of the term attracts financial support for their research proposals.⁴⁹

Anek⁵⁰ too has attempted to distinguish the terms ‘interest group’ from ‘civil society’. He notes that the study of ‘interest groups’ is more concerned about the use of conflicts and struggles as methods of securing groups’ interests, while the study of ‘civil society’ is not only concerned about groups’ interests, but it is also concerned about the degree of co-operation needed, in order to balance the state power. Accepting this definition, the ‘civil society’ framework can not provide an adequate explanatory framework in relation to the study of Thai farmers groups, as it is too broad and encompassing. Nevertheless, ‘civil society’ is still a worthwhile aspect to the study, since it can provide explanations with regard to the roles of farmer related promotional groups, such as the Assembly of the Poor and groups of local schoolteachers.

⁴⁶ Wilson, G. K. (1990) *Interest Groups*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp.6-7

⁴⁷ Interview with Professor Prudhisana Jumbala

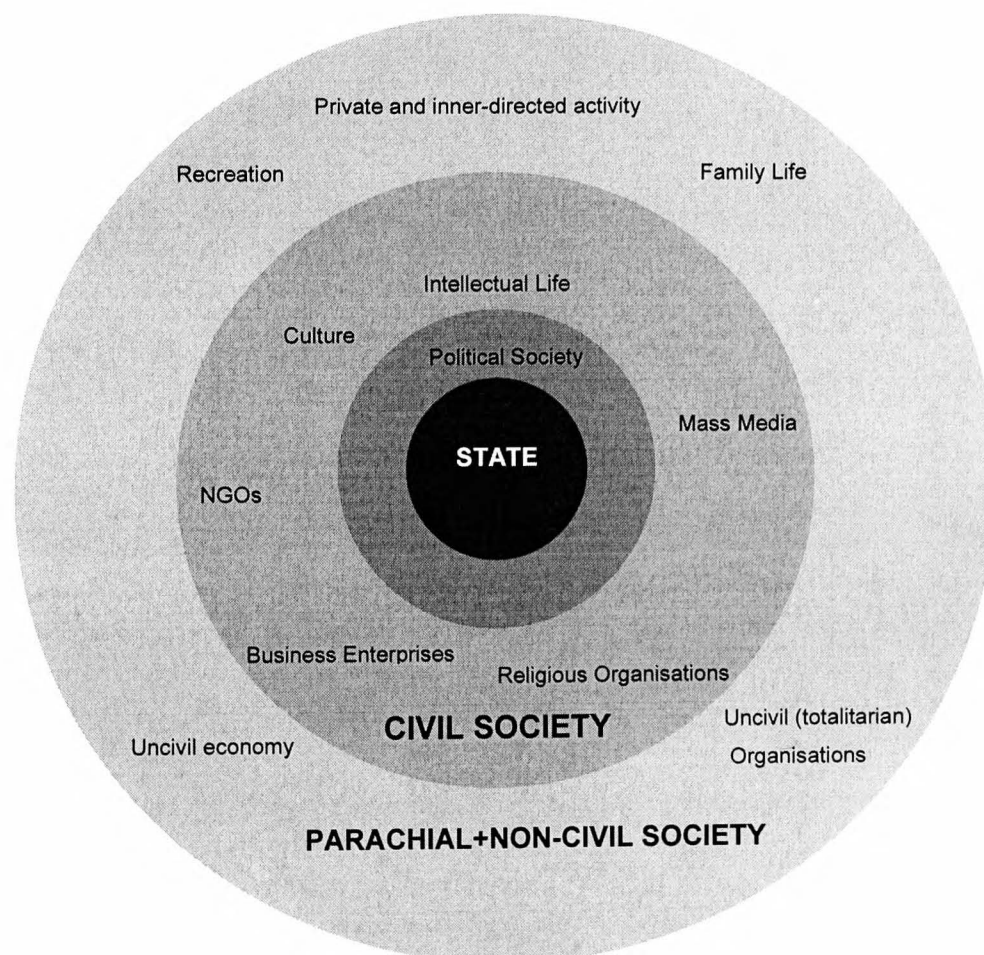
⁴⁸ Interview with Professor Ammar Siamwalla

⁴⁹ Interview with Professor Prudhisana Jumbala

⁵⁰ Anek Laothamatas (2000) *Civiness and Self-Government*, Bangkok: Kobfai Publishing Project [in Thai], p.22

The Thai word *Prachasangkom* is the best equivalent for the term 'civil society'. Pei-Hsiu Chen⁵¹ claims that civil society can help provide the fundamental means for the development of democracy. By definition, there is a structural tendency within civil society to enhance a greater level of democracy. Therefore, organisations within civil society are a mechanism for extending opportunities for participation, where citizens may develop the skills and effective processes, which help consolidate democracy. A similar definition to 'civil society' is offered by Diamond. He defines 'civil society' as 'the sphere of voluntary organised social life outside the state and the political arena, where many actors are involved in order to protect and enhance their interests.'⁵² This is illustrated in figure 2-1.

Figure 2-1 A Democratic System



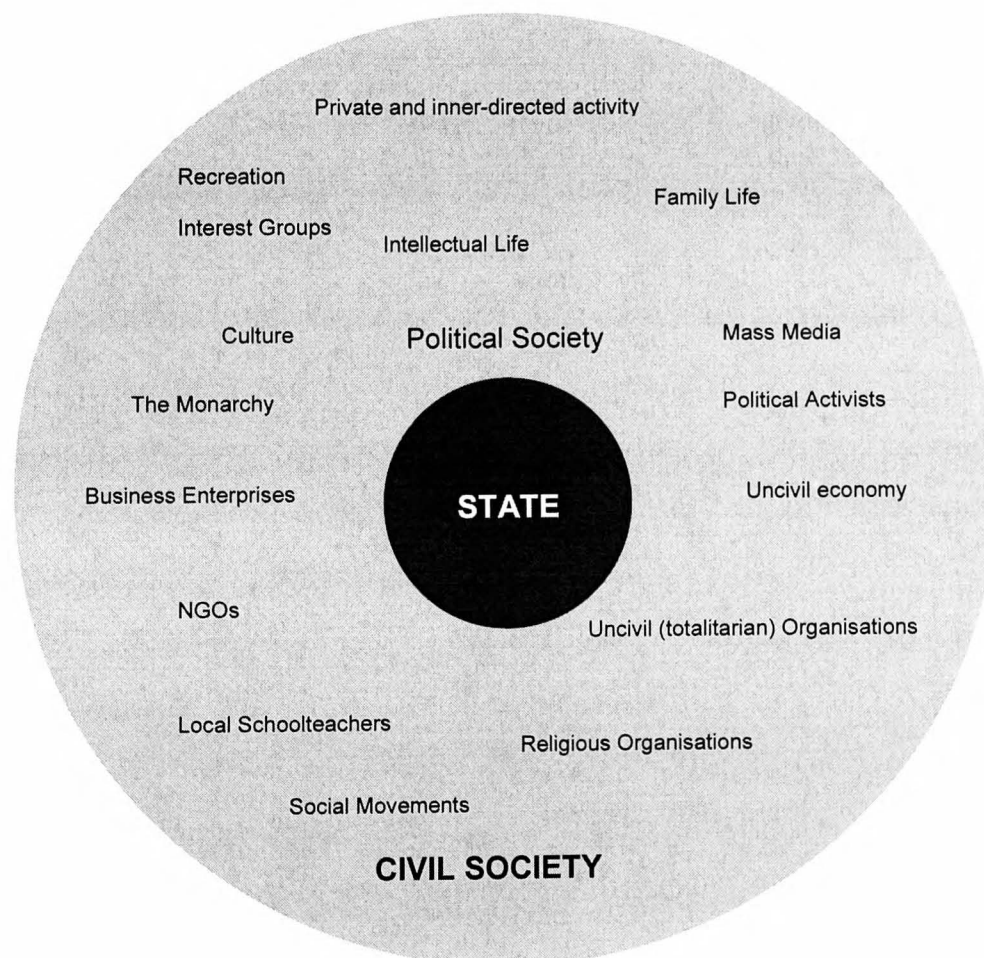
Source: Diamond, L. (1992), p.7

⁵¹ Pei-Hsiu Chen (1999) 'Non-Government Organizations and Democratization in Thailand: A Civil Society Approach', paper presented to the 7th International Conference on Thai Studies (4-8 July 1999), University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, p.3

⁵² Diamond, L. (1992) 'Civil Society and Democracy', *Journal of Social Science* 29,1, Chulalongkorn University [in Thai], p.5

In the 1980s, the expansion of civil society was accommodated by the emergence of NGOs and grassroots organisations.⁵³ Since then ‘civil society encompasses many sorts of actors... In particular, this conception of civil society stretches much wider than formally organised, officially registered and professionally administered ‘NGOs’. Civil society exists whenever and wherever voluntary associations – of whatever kind – try deliberately to mould the governing rules of society... ‘civil society’ today circulates all over the world and is sometimes applied to political practices (like so-called Civic Forums at village and district level in Thailand) that derive largely from non-western tradition.’⁵⁴ Accordingly, interest groups should be included in civil society as is illustrated in the adapted model, which is portrayed in figure 2-2.

Figure 2-2 Thai Civil Society



Source: Developed from figure 2-1, in order to illustrate Thai civil society

In the 1990s, civil society played a substantial role within the Thai political arena. The rise of civil society is perceived to be largely a result of government policies and

⁵³ Ratana Tosakul Boonmathya (1999), pp.2-4

actions, which have discriminated against the population generally and rural farmers in particular. However, government discrimination alone cannot adequately explain the rise of civil society in the Thai rural context, particularly after the country's financial collapse in the 1997. This rising 'localism' is one of the main contributing factors in relation to the development of Thai civil society. Pasuk and Baker argue that the importance of locality was introduced in the 1980s, but 'This "localism discourse" has largely been ignored by mainstream economists and social scientists.'⁵⁵ The rural community is regarded as the main element, both as a source of value and as a political construct, of the localism discourse. 'The discourse made *culture* (rather than economics, politics, or whatever) the area of contestation between the community and outside forces (state, capitalism).'⁵⁶

Hewison⁵⁷ summarises that localism is characterised by its interest in the following issues: self-sufficiency; self-reliance; the rejection of consumerism and industrialism; culture and community; power; rural primacy; and nationalism. However, the research has found that the notion of self-sufficiency, self-reliance and culture and community demonstrate a strong impact on the development of the strategy of rural civil society groups, which are significant promotional groups in farmers' group formation. For instance, the research includes findings on a group of local schoolteachers in the district of Khemmarat, in the province of Ubon Ratchathani, who perceive the improvement of farmers' self-sufficiency and self-reliance as a means for farmers groups to develop economically and politically. Thus, the impact of civil society and localism on Thai farmers groups will be developed in the thesis.

2.3 Social Movements

During the 1990s, the study of 'social movements' began in Thailand, in parallel with contemporary studies of 'civil society', which resulted directly from the increasing number of political demonstrations and protests beginning in the early 1990s. A range of recently established groups in the emerging social movement of Thailand have been studied by Thai academics, and have been summarised by Pasuk. These include for

⁵⁴ Scholte, J. A. (2001), pp.5-6

⁵⁵ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (2000) *Thailand's Crisis*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, p.193

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.195

⁵⁷ Hewison, K. (2000) 'Resisting Globalization: A Study of Localism in Thailand', *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 13 No. 2 2000:279-296, p.285

instance, the slum dwellers' movement for housing rights and participation in urban development, and the small-scale fishermen in southern Thailand to protect the coastal environment.⁵⁸ Studies of both 'social movement' and 'civil society' aim to inform an understanding of the political participation of people within the society.

As argued in section 2.2, civil society is primarily concerned with promoting co-operation between its members, in order to balance the state power, although this could imply that civil society tends to consider that actions taken by its members are of secondary importance. Conversely, social movements tend to be more focused on the understanding of the actions, which are taken by their members, and it is in this regard that Pasuk argues that the social movement 'is a collective form of action to contest the abuses of political and economic power, and to change the political and market institutions in order to produce a better society.'⁵⁹ With reference to this, social movements tend to give less attention to group organisational structures, and instead, focus on promoting group mobilisation. Jordan and Maloney argue that the emphasis of social movements has resulted in a perspective, which has 'a lack of hierarchy and formal organisation.'⁶⁰

At this stage, it is useful to highlight that the notion of a social movement generally combines a number of important elements. To begin with, social movements tend to be formed when a group of individuals make a conscious attempt to effect a paradigm shift in the social order. In addition, social movements often encompass people from a range of social backgrounds who, regardless of their background, would be considered to be outside of the network of the policy-making process. These individuals have limited political influence, social prestige or personal wealth, and in addition, their interests are not normally represented within the political system. Academics who are interested in the study of social movements, believe that activists are generally aware that they are outsiders in relation to the network of the policy-making process. Accordingly, social movements tend to employ highly assertive political strategies such as the commandeering of either publicly or privately owned buildings, or the organising of street

⁵⁸ Pasuk Phongpaichit (2002) 'Social Movements in Thailand', paper presented at International Conference on Thai Studies, Nakhon Phanom, January 2002, p.1

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.4

⁶⁰ Jordan, G. and Maloney, W.A. (1997) *The Protest Business? Mobilizing campaign Groups*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.46

blockades, in order to attempt to influence government. These strategies are employed in preference to attempts to utilise rather less assertive political strategies, such as those, which depend on consultation and negotiation through the lobbying process. The strategically divergent approaches that are employed by social movements and interest groups, suggests the radically different styles, which can be employed in relation to political action.⁶¹

With reference to this, the general approach of social movements cannot be fully applied to the studies of rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups in Thailand. The empirical evidence of the research as outlined in Chapter 4 reveals that these farmers groups only tend to adopt the more assertive political strategies associated with social movements, if their attempts at consultation and negotiation with the policy-makers are frustrated. The research in relation to farmers groups investigates the process of group mobilisation and the associated problems, which are often encountered. Interest group theory provides a more applicable analytical framework than social movement theory, since it considers the roles of both insider and outsider in relation to the involved actors within the network of the policy-making process. Furthermore, although interest group theory is a more concise framework, it can regardless, be applied more effectively to the study of Thai farmers groups, since it focuses on both group formation and group action.

2.4 Pluralism and Corporatism

Pluralism can be defined as a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized into an unspecified number of multiple, voluntary, competitive, nonhierarchically ordered, and self-determined (as to type or scope of interest) categories which are not specifically licensed, recognized, subsidized, created or otherwise controlled in leadership selection on interest articulation by the state and which do not exercise a monopoly of representational activity within their respective categories.⁶²

This suggests that in the pluralistic political arena, a large number of competing groups exist with different interests. Actors or groups are not hierarchically different. They operate on the assumption of equality between them. None of the groups have privileged access to state information, under the notion of free competition between

⁶¹ Zirakzadeh, C. E. (1997) *Social Movement in Politics: A Comparative Study*, London: Longman, pp.4-5

⁶² Schmitter, P.C. (1979) 'Still the Century of Corporatism?', in Schmitter, P.C. and Lehmbruch, G. (eds) *Trends Toward Corporatist Intermediation*, London: SAGE Publications, p.15

competing interests. Parsons summarises the concept of pluralism as ‘participation in the great game of politics was open to all.’⁶³

Within the pluralistic political arena, groups are a crucial element. According to Cawson, ‘Underlying most pluralist conceptions is a view of politics as a system, with government at its centre. Groups are part of the political system, but not part of governmental system.’⁶⁴ For pluralists, being a member of any group is an individual’s choice. ‘If members are dissatisfied, it is easy for them to ‘exit’ – leaving the interests group to join another organization, switching their interests into a completely different arena, or simply lapsing into inactivity.’⁶⁵ Academics on the study of pressure groups and interest groups accept that pluralism is the best framework to use in the study of pressure groups, as the pluralistic framework has established itself over time. As Grant highlights ‘Pluralism offers the most influential and resilient account of the role of pressure groups in a democratic society.’⁶⁶ However, he points out that the British literature has contributed less than the American literature on the study of interest groups under the pluralist framework, since ‘pluralist theory often seem to reflect a more open, fragmented political system than applies in the case of Britain.’⁶⁷

It has been questioned whether an equal distribution of power can exist in any democratic society. In many democratic countries, the abuse of state power can still be observed which brings about a biased resource allocation, due to a limited number of actors within country’s economic development policy network. Mills uses the term ‘power elite’ to explain this type of political arena. He notes that ‘...the conception of the power elite and of its unity rests upon the corresponding developments and coincidence of interests among economic, political, and military organizations.’⁶⁸ The confrontation between the power elite and the pluralistic framework in the American literature in the research on the relationships between pressure groups and governments is explicit in the

⁶³ Parsons, W. (1995) *Public Policy: An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Policy Analysis*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, p.134

⁶⁴ Cawson, A. (1986) *Corporatism and Political Theory*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p.8

⁶⁵ Dunleavy, P. and O’Leary, B. (1987) *Theories of the State: The Politics of Liberal Democracy*, London: Macmillan Press, p.33

⁶⁶ Grant, W. (2000), p.41

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Mills, C.W. (1956) *The Power Elite*, New York: Oxford University Press, p.292

1950s and early 1960s, before the introduction of the concept of ‘sub-systems’ and ‘sub-governments’⁶⁹

In Europe, including the United Kingdom, corporatism emerged in the analytical debate in the mid-1970s, contending with the notion of pluralism.⁷⁰ The corporatist theory argued that ‘the modern state plays a highly active part in the formation of both the groups and their interests, through its ability to license their existence and either include them in the policy-making process or exclude them from it.’⁷¹ Accordingly, ‘the political processes were not open but relatively closed.’⁷² Then Schmitter defines corporatism as:

a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized into a limited number of singular, compulsory, noncompetitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognized and licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports.⁷³

This definition suggests that corporatism emphasises the role of the state. Cawson highlights that ‘Corporatism presupposes that state agencies are capable of making and delivering bargaining policies....’⁷⁴ Cox⁷⁵ comments that Schmitter defines corporatism as being fundamentally concerned about the political framework of the state, however corporatism neglects fundamental concerns regarding the policy-making process, including which groups benefit and how policy is implemented. ‘It was a statement about how interests were represented politically rather than a statement about policy making.’⁷⁶ Accordingly, corporatism cannot provide an adequate explanation for the relationships between interest groups and government.

⁶⁹ Klijn, E.-H. (1999) ‘Policy Networks: An Overview’, in Kickert, W.J.M., Klijn, E.-H. and Koppenjan, J.F.M. (eds) *Managing Complex Networks: Strategies for the Public Sector*, London: SAGE, pp.24-25

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.24

⁷¹ O’Sullivan, N. (1988) ‘The Political Theory of Neo-Corporatism’, in Cox, A. and O’Sullivan, N. (eds) *The Corporate State: Corporatism and the State Tradition in Western Europe*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar, p.5

⁷² Klijn, E.-H. (1999), p.24

⁷³ Schmitter, P.C. (1979) ‘Still the Century of Corporatism?’, in Schmitter, P.C. and Lehmbruch, G. (eds) *Trends Toward Corporatist Intermediation*, London: SAGE Publications, p.13

⁷⁴ Cawson, A. (1985) ‘Corporatism and Local Politics’, in Grant, W. (ed) *The Political Economy of Corporatism*, London: Macmillan, p.146

⁷⁵ Cox, A. (1988) ‘Neo-Corporatism Versus the Corporate State’, in Cox, A. and O’Sullivan, N. *The Corporate State: Corporatism and the State Tradition in Western Europe*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar, p.33

⁷⁶ Ibid.

There have been many problems regarding the development of the corporatist framework. In relation to defining corporatism, there has been little accord amongst academics, as Grant argues that ‘there was little agreement about what the term meant.’⁷⁷ Groth argues that studies on corporatism have tended towards the tentative and fragmented resulting from the emphasis, which was placed on the examination of specific empirical studies. Accordingly, ‘critical analysis of corporatism appears confined at a low level and fails to sketch the broader outlines of corporatism in paradigmatic terms or notice similarities between corporatism and other intellectual traditions and constructs that inhabit the general field of comparative politics.’⁷⁸ Furthermore, the corporatist theory itself has yet to develop a sufficient degree of autonomy from pluralism, a theory with which it shared many assumptions.

For Rhodes, ‘corporatism provides a rigid metaphor of government-interest group relations and that it cannot be extended to sub-central government. The characteristics of corporatism such as the aggregation of interests, licensing of groups, monopoly of representation and regulation of members, are rarely found in unsullied form.’⁷⁹ This failure of corporatism to sufficiently explain the relationships between interest groups and government has brought about a paradigm shift in the study of relationships between interest groups and government through the development of the ‘policy network/community’ framework, which combines both elements of pluralism and corporatism.

2.5 Development of Policy Networks

This policy-making process involves a set of actors, both governmental and non-governmental agencies, sharing a common concern and interest regarding particular policy issues, due to fragmentation within the policy area. According to Atkinson and Coleman, ‘policy is seldom completely centralized. Ordinarily, a number of departments and agencies can lay claim to one or another instrument in particular policy area.’⁸⁰ ‘The network approach considers public policy making and governance to take place in

⁷⁷ Grant, W. (2000), p.52

⁷⁸ Groth, T.R. (2002) ‘Theories of Latin American State and Comparative Democratization Studies’, paper presented to the Annual Conference of the Political Science Association of the UK, 2002, p.3

⁷⁹ Rhodes, R.A.W. (1990), p.303

networks consisting of various actors (individuals, coalitions, bureau, organizations) none of which possess the power to determine the strategies of the other actors.’⁸¹ Accordingly, this does not only illustrate the fragmentation within a policy area, but it also indicates the dynamic nature of policy-making itself.

The framework for studying the relationships between interest groups and governments offered by the policy network, has been questioned with regard as to whether it can provide a different framework to those already offered by pluralism and corporatism. Smith argues that the Rhodes and Marsh model ‘appears to drift into traditional pluralism.’⁸² However, Rhodes and Marsh⁸³ have argued that the policy network analysis is an alternative option to the pluralist and corporatist models. Nevertheless, they admit that these models fail to provide a very realistic explanation of relationships between government and interest groups, since ‘government – interest group relations obviously vary in different policy areas.’⁸⁴ This can be perceived to be a result of the dynamic nature of policy-making. Accordingly, ‘different forms of policy network/community approaches have been elaborated over a period of more than two decades.’⁸⁵

2.5.1 Sub-government and the Iron Triangle

‘Sub-government’, ‘subsystems’ and ‘iron triangles’, are the terms to have been most generally used in the American literature to explain the environment of the policy-making.⁸⁶ Ripley and Franklin⁸⁷ suggest that the sub-governmental mechanism consists of small groups of political actors from both governmental and non-governmental agencies. These agencies specialise in particular policy areas. Although, there are vast numbers of sub-governmental mechanisms and they are politically important, they are not dominant

⁸⁰ Atkinson, M.M. and Coleman, W.D. (1989) ‘Strong State and Weak State: Sectoral Policy Networks in Advanced Capitalist Economies’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 19, 47-67, Vol. 1, 1989, p.

⁸¹ Kickert, W.J.M., Klijn, E.-H. and Koppenjan, J.F.M. (1999) ‘Introduction: A Management Perspective on Policy Networks’, in Kickert, W.J.M., Klijn, E.-H. and Koppenjan, J.F.M. (eds) *Managing Complex Networks: Strategies for the Public Sector*, London: SAGE, p.9

⁸² Smith, M.J. (1992), p.28

⁸³ Rhodes, R.A.W. and Marsh, D. (1992), p.3

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Thatcher, M. (1998) ‘The Development of Policy Network Analyses: From Modest Origins to Overarching Frameworks’, *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 10(4), 1998: 389-416, p.410

⁸⁶ Marsh, D. (1998), p.4

in all policy areas. With regards to sub-governmental literature, only a limited number of privileged groups with close links to government were taken into account while the role of other interest groups was ignored. Marsh⁸⁸ therefore, argued that it could not help to explain the entire network since many interactions of excluded interest groups had been ignored.

The concept of 'iron triangles' became a critical political debate in the United State during the 1950s-1960s. It is a structure linking executive bureau, congressional committees and interest clienteles.⁸⁹ Thus, Peters argues that the concept of 'iron triangles' implies 'the existence of three powerful actors...that could control a policy area and limit access by other actors.'⁹⁰ This concept of a limited number of relevant actors in a particular policy area was attacked by academics in this area of study. '...it now appears that...three powerful actors defining the triangles are no longer able to restrict access to the policy process in the way they once could, and many more groups are now playing the game of political influence.'⁹¹ 'Thus it was not possible to give a static and exhaustive listing in a community in the manner of the classic 'iron triangle'.⁹² This is evidenced by the empirical study of Jordan, Maloney, and McLaughlin on British agricultural policymaking. They claim that, 'We present an image of the agricultural policy making which suggests that those involved are not as limited, nor as fixed as the *iron triangle model* suggests.'(Emphasis added)⁹³ Nevertheless the American concept of the 'iron triangle' has contributed some fundamental ideas to the British 'policy community'. According to Jordan,

The British notion of policy community owes something to the iron triangle idea (a degree of stability and predictability over time, fragmentation limited through departmental recognition of participants, effective decisions *within* sectors, closed debate) but it bears some evidence of shifting to the issue network extension in that there is a dramatic increase in the number of participants (many more than suggested by 'iron

⁸⁷ Ripley, R.B. and Franklin, G.A. (1991, Fifth Edition) *Congress, the Bureaucracy, and public Policy*, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, pp.6-8

⁸⁸ Marsh, D. (1998), p.4

⁸⁹ Jordan, G.A. (1981) 'Iron Triangles, Woolly Corporatism and Elastic Nets: Refilling the Old Process', *Journal of Public Policy* 1, 1981: 95-123, p.96

⁹⁰ Peters, G. (1998) 'Policy Networks: Myth, Metaphor, and Reality', in Marsh, D. (ed) *Comparing Policy Networks*, Buckingham: Open University Press, p.27

⁹¹ Peters, G. (1998), p.26

⁹² Jordan, G.A. (1981), p.105

⁹³ Jordan, G., Maloney, W.A. and McLaughlin, A.M. (1992) 'Policy-Making in Agriculture: 'Primary' Policy Communities or Specialist Policy Communities', British Interest Group Project Working Paper No.5, University of Aberdeen, p.25

triangle'), decisions are increasingly difficult to make in overcrowded environments and more and more groups are claiming the right to be heard.⁹⁴

2.5.2 Policy Community as a Specific Type of Policy Network

The idea of policy community is argued to be the origin for the study of policy networks. The empirical research on policy community was largely carried out in the United Kingdom.⁹⁵ Its concept was developed in British political studies from the 1970s onwards.⁹⁶ Initially, 'Richardson & Jordan...used the concepts 'policy community' and 'policy network' interchangeably to refer to closed links to be found between civil servants and favoured interest group organizations... Neither Richardson nor Jordan has attempted to categorize policy networks, policy communities...into formal typologies. They have adopted a relaxed metaphorical usage based on certain characteristics they noted within policy-making arena.'⁹⁷ At present, the attempts to identify policy network and policy community approaches provide 'no agreed definition of either concept, nor...how different types of network might operate under different environmental condition.'⁹⁸

Rhodes and Marsh define policy community as 'networks characterized by stability of relationships, continuity of a high restrictive membership, vertical interdependence based on shared service delivery responsibilities, and insulation from other networks and invariably to the general public (including Parliament). They have high degree of vertical interdependence and limited horizontal articulation. They are highly integrated.'⁹⁹ In conclusion, Marsh¹⁰⁰, Jordan¹⁰¹, Smith¹⁰², Klijn¹⁰³, '...agree that

⁹⁴ Jordan, G.A. (1981), p.107

⁹⁵ Klijn, E.-H. (1999) 'Policy Networks: An Overview', in Kickert, W.J.M., Klijn, E.-H. and Koppenjan, J.F.M. (eds) *Managing Complex Networks: Strategies for the Public Sector*, London: SAGE, p.26

⁹⁶ Jordan, G. (1990) 'Sub-governments, Policy Communities and Networks: Refilling the Old Bottles?', *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 2 (3), 1990:319-338, p.325

⁹⁷ Dowding, K. (1994) 'Policy Networks: Don't Stretch a Good Idea too Far', paper presented to the Annual Conference of the Political Science Association of the UK at the University of University of Wales, Swansea, 1994, pp.59-60

⁹⁸ Mill, M. and Saward, M. (1994) 'All Very Well in Practice, But What About the Theory?: A Critique of the British Idea of Policy Networks', paper presented to the Annual Conference of the Political Science Association of the UK at the University of University of Wales, Swansea, 1994, p.82

⁹⁹ Rhodes, R.A.W. and Marsh, D. (1992) 'Policy Networks in British Politics: A Critique of Existing Approaches', in Marsh, D. and Rhodes, R.A.W. (eds) *Policy Networks in British Government*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.13

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Jordan, G. (1990), p.327

¹⁰² Smith, M.J. (2000), p.40

‘community’ implies a commonality of interest amongst the interacting groups, and that policy communities tend to have stable regularized contact.’¹⁰⁴ This suggests that policy community is a stable and predictable policy network.¹⁰⁵

‘Many of the examples of stable and predictable policy networks are to be found in agriculture.’¹⁰⁶ Smith argues that ‘the agricultural policy is highly integrated. It has very restricted membership with shared interests; it has limited horizontal articulation, being largely isolated from other networks....’¹⁰⁷ He concludes that the British agricultural policy community is a closed one. ‘This community has included MAFF and the NFU, who developed a shared view of the goals of agricultural policy. They have used this consensus and institutions of the policy community to exclude other groups and issues from the policy agenda.’¹⁰⁸

However, in the 1980s, Jordan, Maloney, and McLaughlin¹⁰⁹ witnessed a fundamental change in the British agricultural community, and argued that ‘Any consensus that existed on agricultural policy has been steadily eroded.’¹¹⁰ Thus, ‘Agricultural policy networks are more open than simply MAFF/NFU interactions and include other economically significant interests, who within their own specialist areas are as likely to be influential as the NFU – if not more so.’¹¹¹ As a result, it can be argued that an increase in the number of actors within a policy community can lead to a decline in the stability of the policy community itself, since it produces a more pluralistic environment. Accordingly, the policy community framework appears to be more competitive. Would this affect the application of the framework to the results of the empirical study conducted by Smith? ‘Should ‘policy community’ be restricted to small personalized groups...or based on around commodities...or can it also refer broader categories...? Surely this is an empirical not a definitional matter.’¹¹² From the point of view of Jordan, Maloney, and McLaughlin, ‘The policy community label is a useful starting point and should not be used

¹⁰³ Klijn, E.-H. (1999), p.27

¹⁰⁴ Dowding, K. (1994), p.66

¹⁰⁵ Rhodes, R.A.W. (1990), pp.304-305

¹⁰⁶ Grant, W. (2000), p.49

¹⁰⁷ Smith, M.J. (1992), p.28

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.47

¹⁰⁹ Jordan, G., Maloney, W.A. and McLaughlin, A.M. (1994c) ‘Characterizing Agricultural Policy-making’, in Grant, W.P. and Keeler, J.T.S. (eds) (2000) *Agricultural Policy Volume I*, Glos: Edward Elgar, p.17

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.18

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.36

as an intellectual straight jacket: practice is likely to discredit any model which is too inflexible.’¹¹³

2.5.3 Policy Networks

Klijn summarises the contemporary definition of policy networks that ‘*Policy networks are more or less stable patterns of social relations between interdependent actors, which take shape around policy problem and/or policy programmes.*’¹¹⁴ The three most important characteristics of networks are as follows:

- Networks exist because of interdependencies between actors;
- Networks consist of a variety of actors each with their own goals;
- Networks consist of relations of a more or less lasting nature between actors¹¹⁵

Fundamentally, the key element in the contemporary study of policy networks is based on the resource dependency framework offered by Rhodes. ‘Resource dependencies – the extent to which different actors depend on each other for resources – are crucial in determining which actors dominate different networks and how decision-making proceeds within them.’¹¹⁶ This is a fundamental concept in the study of policy networks in the United Kingdom. According to Rhodes, the policy network represents a cluster of organisations with shared resources. This implies a level of dependency for member organisations within the network. Nevertheless, ‘networks have different structures of dependencies, structures which vary along such dimensions as membership (for example, between levels of government) and resources.’¹¹⁷

Rhodes and Marsh claim that the policy network concept is accepted as a meso-level concept. ‘The meso-level of analysis focuses on the variety of linkages between the centre and the range of sub-central political and governmental organizations.’¹¹⁸ This description of the concept implies a neglect of the analysis on the role of state at the macro level, and of the interaction between individuals at the micro level. Indeed, Rhodes

¹¹² Dowding, K. (1994), p.66

¹¹³ Jordan, G., Maloney, W.A. and McLaughlin, A.M. (1994c), p.37

¹¹⁴ Klijn, E.-H. (1999), p.30

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.31

¹¹⁶ Peterson, J. (1995a) ‘Decision-making in the EU: Towards a Framework for Analysis’, *Journal of European Public Policy*. Vol.2, No. 1, 1995: 69-93, p.76

¹¹⁷ Rhodes, R.A.W. (1990), p.304

¹¹⁸ Rhodes, R.A.W. and Marsh, D. (1992), p.12

emphasises that ‘power-dependence relations between organizations, is essential for understanding the patterns of organizational relationships, *of personal relationships and the changing nature of each.* (Emphasis added),’¹¹⁹ His argument already implies the need for integrating the analysis at the micro-level into the policy network concept.

The isolation of the policy network concept at the meso-level analysis has been attacked by the Western academics themselves. For instance, Dowding¹²⁰ strongly rejects Rhodes and Marsh’s argument, namely that involving micro-level analysis makes it increasingly difficult to generalize about policy networks. He asserts that ‘Whether a community can be maintained at the meso level or only at the micro level is a question worth empirical investigation.’¹²¹ Mill and Saward affirm that the restriction of the study of policy network at the meso level ‘is at least questionable whether, in practice, explanations can be confined to this level. British and other authors have made some attempts to integrate micro, meso and macro levels of analysis (corresponding normally to individual actors and groups, policy sectors and national government respectively)...’¹²²

The concept has been attacked on the account of its imprecise definition, its descriptive nature, its inability to explain political change, its underplaying of the complexity of relationships, its neglect of the external environment and its lack of precision... Whatever criticisms might be addressed against the Rhodes model, the concept of policy networks is still a useful organising tool for mapping out communities of actors in different policy sector.¹²³

Interestingly, Dowding suggests that ‘The concept of policy networks and their sub-types can be used at all levels. Models are just descriptions, which denote the important structural features of a social situation... In one model, the actors may be real people, in another organizations, in a third social groups or classes. This is the social science method.’¹²⁴ Ignoring the emphasis on the restriction of the meso-level analysis then, the thesis can claim legitimacy in fully utilising the policy network framework in this study. It is not reasonable to analyse policy-making in Thailand without taking macro-level and micro-level analysis into account. This is because policy-making in Thailand represents a clear and powerful form of ‘top-down’ strategy. Hewison asserts

¹¹⁹ Rhodes, R.A.W. (1990), p.297

¹²⁰ Dowding, K. (1994a), p.64

¹²¹ Ibid., p.66

¹²² Mill, M. and Saward, M. (1994), p.80

¹²³ Cole, A., and John, P. (1995) ‘Local Policy Networks in France and Britain: Policy Co-ordination in Fragmented Political System’, *Western European Politics*, Vol.18, No 4 (October 1995),p.90

that, 'The state's "bottom up" or grassroots development process is no such thing, and is never really intended to be other than "top-down."' ¹²⁵ Also, personal relationships through the patronage system remain a crucial factor in the Thai political arena. Marsh emphasises that the Rhodes and Marsh 'model is an ideal type. The actual relationship between government and interest in any policy area can be compared to it, but no policy area is likely to conform exactly to it.' ¹²⁶

2.6 Olson's Group Theory

"The Logic of Collective Action" written by Mancur Olson, is one of the most influential of books regarding the study of interest groups in the Western context. There are three main points which have been given attention in this book, namely 'group membership', 'privileged group' and 'by product theory', which show some theoretical relevance in the study of Thai farmers political participation. In order to investigate the applicability of these concepts to the thesis, this section will provide some theoretical analysis on these three topics, which have been argued by Olson himself and in the post-Olson literature.

The question may arise as to why an individual becomes a group member. The pluralist school argues that groups emerge spontaneously when individuals can enjoy shared benefits. This argument emphasises the importance of collective benefits as a prerequisite for collective actions. Olson summarises the pluralist argument by stating that: 'Pluralism tends to create a mood favourable to pressure groups... primarily because it emphasizes the spontaneity, the liberty, and the voluntary quality of the private association....' therefore, 'private organizations spring up voluntarily and spontaneously in response to the needs, beliefs....' ¹²⁷ However, the assumption of pluralism as a catalyst in relation to the importance of collective benefits in group formation is strongly challenged by Olson.

¹²⁴ Dowding, K. (1994a), p.64

¹²⁵ Hewison, K. (1993) 'Nongovernmental Organisations and the Cultural Development Perspective in Thailand: A Comment on Rigg (1991)', *World Development*, Vol.21, No.10, pp.1699-1708, 1993, p.1702

¹²⁶ Marsh, D. (1998) 'The development of the policy network approach' in Marsh, D. (ed) *Comparing Policy Networks*, Buckingham: Open University Press, p.14

¹²⁷ Olson, M. (1974, Fourth Edition) *The Logic of Collective Action*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p.112 and p.130

Olson has categorised the answer to the problem of group formation into two categories, namely 'collective benefit' and 'selective benefit'. To Olson, individuals can only be motivated to join the group by a 'selective incentive', since individuals are regarded as rational decision-makers. Accordingly, rational individuals who join the group expect to be treated advantageously in comparison with those who do not. As emphasised by Olson: 'The incentive must be "selective" so that those who do not join the organization working for the group's interest, can be treated differently from those who do.'¹²⁸ Therefore, rational individuals would choose to participate in any groups that offer a greater than or equal benefit to the costs of membership, because they '*will not act to achieve their common or group interests.*'¹²⁹ Salisbury¹³⁰ argues that Olson assumes an on-going system of group formation, without examining how they are first organised. He points out that some organisations were initially organised to alter public policy, that is, to secure collective benefits. It is accepted that many of the groups like these have tendencies to provide selective incentive benefits in order to retain members. However, 'we must still account for the initial appearance.'¹³¹

Olson introduces the importance of economic selective incentives in mobilising potential members to join a group, in order to strengthen his argument in relation to 'selective incentives'. These incentives had previously been described as 'material incentives' by Clark and Wilson, referring to 'rewards that have a monetary value or can easily be translated into ones that have.'¹³² Olson emphasises that 'there is no presumption that social incentives will lead individuals in the latent group to obtain collective good.... The more important point, however, is that social incentives are important mainly only in the small group, and play a role in the large group only when the large group is a federation of smaller groups.'¹³³ The importance of material selective incentives is explained by Clark and Wilson through a 'cost-accounting system', where a reduction in taxation and the payment of a dividend can act, to effectively reimburse members for the cost of group membership.¹³⁴ The importance of material selective incentives is evidenced in the case studies of the rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups, and accordingly, this awareness

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.51

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.2

¹³⁰ Salisbury, R.H. (1970) 'An Exchange Theory of Interest Groups', in Salisbury, R.H. (ed) *Interest Group Politics in America*, New York: Harper & Row, pp.54-55

¹³¹ Ibid., p.55

¹³² Clark, P.B. and Wilson, J.Q. (1961), p.134

¹³³ Olson, M. (1974, Fourth Edition), pp.62-63

contributes to the understanding of the relevance of material selective incentives in relation to the concept of group formation.

Nevertheless, as Olson asserts: ‘Economic incentives are not, to be sure, the only incentives... The possibility that, in a case where there was no economic incentive for an individual to contribute to the achievement of a group interest, there might be nonetheless be a social incentive for him to make such a contribution, must therefore be considered.’¹³⁵ He explains that social status and social acceptance are not collective goods, but groups provide them as selective incentives in order to mobilise potential members to join the group and to hold the existing members.¹³⁶ The importance of these additional incentives has also been emphasised by Clark and Wilson, who refer to such incentives, which are devoid of monetary value whilst conferring an element of social prestige to potential members, as ‘solidary incentives’.¹³⁷ Regarding this argument, the rational choice of different individuals could be defined on the basis of the individual needs and attitudes. Therefore, individuals who care more about society, may themselves contribute to help providing for the collective benefit, for instance members of environmental groups. To groups in this category, ‘selective incentive’ is a collective one that they choose. This implies that in some particular cases, there is no clear boundary between collective benefits and selective incentives. ‘Organizations can therefore offer varied incentives – and members will join for different reasons – not just to save the world but to satisfy their own personal needs.’¹³⁸

Furthermore, the economic rational choice approach demonstrates that the ‘free-rider problem’ is a main concern for individuals when deciding whether or not to join a group. The term ‘free-rider’ was introduced by post-Olsonian academics, within critiques, which related to Olson’s work on selective and collective incentives, including Dowding¹³⁹, and Esteban and Ray¹⁴⁰. In a similar vein, Olson notes:

¹³⁴ Clark, P.B. and Wilson, J.Q. (1961), p.138

¹³⁵ Olson, M. (1974, Fourth Edition), p.60

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp.60-61

¹³⁷ Clark, P.B. and Wilson, J.Q. (1961) ‘Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations’, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 6: 129-166, pp.134-135

¹³⁸ Jordan, G., Maloney, W.A. and McLaughlin, A.M. (1994b) ‘Collective Action and the Public Interest Problem: Drawing a Line Under Olson’, paper presented to the Annual Conference of the Political Science Association of the UK at the University of University of Wales, Swansea, 1994, p.529

¹³⁹ Dowding, K. (1994b) ‘Rational Mobilisation’, paper presented to the Annual Conference of the Political Science Association of the UK at the University of University of Wales, Swansea, 1994

It is distinguished by the fact that, if one member does or does not help provide the collective good, no other one member will be significantly affected and therefore none has any reason to react... since no one in a group will react if he make no contribution, he has no incentive to contribute. Accordingly, large or “latent” groups have no incentive to act to obtain a collective good because however valuable the collective good might be to the group as a whole, it does not offer the individual any incentive to pay dues to organization working in the latent group’s interest or to bear in any other way of costs of the necessary collective action.¹⁴¹

This not only suggests that ‘free-riders’ reduce the effectiveness of the group but also suggests that small groups can work more effectively than big groups. According to Olson, ‘The greater effectiveness of relatively small groups—the “privileged” and “intermediate” groups—is evident from observation and experience as well as from theory... for example, meetings that involve too many people... cannot make decisions promptly and carefully.’¹⁴² This is due to effective communication and co-operation between group members, since ‘the members can have face-to-face contact with one another.’¹⁴³ As a consequence, ‘smaller groups could act more decisively and use their resources more effectively than large group.’¹⁴⁴ Therefore, the privileged and intermediate groups have the capacity to solve the problems of co-operation effectively, which leads these groups to enjoying a stronger position in negotiations.

With regard to privileged and intermediate groups, the study of the political participation of Thai farmers will examine the contribution of the Thai political culture. Accordingly, vertical and horizontal communication will be examined through the study of Thai farmers groups, in order to examine the impact of these factors in relation to the formation, consensus and sustainability of the groups. This theoretical examination will also consider the impact of the patronage system within the Thai political arena, which allows sugarcane farmers groups to gain privileged access to the sugarcane policy-making process, whilst rice and potato farmers groups remain outside the policy-making processes in relation to rice and potatoes.

In addition, the examination of the privileged position of interest groups within the Thai political arena will examine the importance of the roles of both *phu mi itthiphon* and

¹⁴⁰ Esteban, J. and Ray, D. (2001) ‘Collective Action and Group Size Paradox’, *American Political Science Review*, Vol.95, No.3 September 2001: 663-672

¹⁴¹ Olson, M. (1974, Fourth Edition), p.50

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.53

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.62

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.54

jao pho. Salisbury argues that ‘it has been useful to examine...the individuals who played the key entrepreneurial roles in establishing the groups.’¹⁴⁵ Following Salisbury, the research has established that the existence of *phu mi itthiphon* and *jao pho* as both the most active and influential actors within the sugarcane farmers groups has been a significant contributing factor in promoting the connections between the government and sugarcane farmers. Accordingly, this has resulted in the establishment of politically influential sugarcane farmers groups.

The introduction of the term ‘selective incentive’ into his literature, allows Olson to develop the ‘by-product’ theory, that is, ‘If the individuals in a large group have no incentive to organize a lobby to obtain a collective benefit....’¹⁴⁶ Then only an organisation with ‘a joint offering or “tied sale” of a collective and a noncollective good that could stimulate a rational individual in a large group to bear part of the cost of obtaining a collective good.’¹⁴⁷ Selective incentive emerges as a significant factor, which has impacted on the joining decisions of potential members. In some particular cases, it has been found that selective incentives are as significant as collective benefits for potential members to take into account when making their decisions.

2.7 Development of British Farmers Interest Groups

With regard to government intervention within the agricultural sector in Western societies, this has actually enhanced farmers’ political influence, which has enabled Western farmers groups to become politically active. In general, the active political participation of interest groups in Western society is undeniably linked to the Western democratic model. ‘Freedom of association is a fundamental principle of democracy. Democracy permits the existence of groups, but it could also be argued that groups contribute to the quality of the decision-making process.’¹⁴⁸

The debate in this section will focus mainly on studies of British agricultural interest groups, because of the level of expertise within this area of study. Richardson claims that ‘Britain has perhaps the longest established interest group system... Policies

¹⁴⁵ Salisbury, R.H. (1970), p.63

¹⁴⁶ Olson, M. (1974, Fourth Edition), p.133

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.134

are normally formulated by governments only after the so-called 'affected' interests have been consulted.'¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Harrop asserts, 'close consultation between the bureaucracy and organised interests is a characteristic of the policy process in Britain... Pressure groups in Britain are generally strong.'¹⁵⁰

This government practice enables interest groups to more fully play their parts in having an influence in the British political arena. In certain policy areas, British interest groups can use their power to negotiate influentially with policy-makers. For instance, in the agricultural policy-making process, the National Farmers' Union (NFU) represents farmers' interests effectively. In contemporary British politics, the NFU is one of the most effective interest groups.¹⁵¹ The 1947 Agriculture Act created a legal obligation on the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) 'to consult with such persons as appear to represent the interest of the producer.'¹⁵² Accordingly, the connection between farmers and government is integrated into the country's legal framework. 'When the government increasingly began to intervene in agriculture, it was to the NFU that it looked for advice and support.'¹⁵³ This form of co-operation between government and the main farmers' group in the British case provides some explanation for the failures of Thai farmers' political participation. In general, the Thai bureaucrats, technocrats and leading academics play the central roles in the agricultural policy network. Chapters 3 and 5 will expand this discussion further.

The NFU and the British Conservative Party had rather close links to each other, prior to the NFU claiming political neutrality sometime after the Second World War. This was a result of its working experience with the British Labour Party immediately after the Second World War, which allowed them to enjoy the benefit of expanded food production. Accordingly, the NFU was convinced that it could work with either of the two major political parties.¹⁵⁴ This suggests a flexibility of the political strategy of the NFU in

¹⁴⁸ Grant, W. (2000), p.35

¹⁴⁹ Richardson, J.J. (1994) 'Interest Group Behaviour in Britain: Continuity and Change', in Richardson, J.J. (ed) *Pressure Groups*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.86

¹⁵⁰ Harrop, M. (1995) 'The United Kingdom', in Harrop, M. (ed) *Power and Policy in Liberal Democracies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.83

¹⁵¹ Overell, S. (2002) 'Goodbye Confrontation, Hello Consensus', *Financial Times*, 6 August 2002, p.12

¹⁵² Grant, W. (1989), p.136

¹⁵³ Smith, M.J. (1992), p.37

¹⁵⁴ Jordan, A.G and Richardson, J.J. (1987) *Government and Pressure Groups in Britain*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.237

order to maximise its members' interests. Indeed, the NFU was formed on the basis of improving the position of farmers, by developing their marketing power. In 1970, the NFU urged its members to refrain from marketing their stock in order to press the Government to raise farm subsidies.¹⁵⁵ At certain periods during its history, the NFU has been able to exert its influential power on taxation policy, when it appears to be affecting farmers' interests.¹⁵⁶

The effectiveness of the NFU does not only imply an effective negotiation strategy, but the NFU's effectiveness also implies an effective management system within the NFU.¹⁵⁷ Accordingly, the NFU is able to effectively balance the range of interests and needs of its members, which helps to reduce conflicts between subgroups existing within the NFU. However, Grant¹⁵⁸ has acknowledged that since the 1970s, the NFU has become less able to prevent its own members from taking their own courses of political action, despite the complex committee structures within the NFU, which aim to reduce conflict.

The NFU is not only able to protect its farmer members' interests effectively at the domestic level, but it also plays a part at the international level. In the case of British farmers, the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) has a direct impact on their incomes. Grant claims that 'the Common Agriculture Policy is the most highly developed policy of the European Community and it has clearly had an impact on the way in which British farmers seek to defend their interests.'¹⁵⁹ As the NFU President, Ben Gill argues that the outline of the current reform proposals of the CAP are complex and will have the biggest impact in the European Union on British farmers. The main concern of the British Government is about the limitation of government support to larger farms, of which there are more in the United Kingdom than across the rest of the European Union. Lately, the NFU has announced in clear terms that 'the NFU will fight for the interests of this country's farmers in Europe and we expect our government to do the same.'¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Wilson, G. K. (1981) *Interest Groups in the United States*, New York: Oxford University Press, p.29

¹⁵⁶ Grant, W. (1983) 'The National Farmers Union: The Classic Case of Incorporation?', in Marsh, D. (ed) *Pressure politics: Interest Groups in Britain*, London: Junction Books, p.131

¹⁵⁷ Overell, S. (2002), p.12

¹⁵⁸ Grant, W. (1983), p.131

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.135

¹⁶⁰ NFU Press Releases (17 July 2002) 'NFU Meets with Agricultural Commission Over CAP Reforms' at www.NFU.org.uk/pr/4027402/Fischermeet.html Retrieved on 6 August 2002

In order to maximise their bargaining power to influence the CAP, the NFU is well aware that it must be adequately informed about the CAP policy. The NFU has its own small office in Brussels that provides this information. Accordingly, the NFU is able to receive full information about policy developments in Brussels and the possible impacts on UK agriculture.¹⁶¹ In both international and domestic political scenarios, the NFU has played an influential role. The NFU is effective at persuading the British Government to work to its agenda when negotiating CAP with the Council of Agricultural Ministers. Grant argues that the most effective political strategy of the NFU, which is used to apply pressure over the development of the CAP, is to pursue the British government to adopt the NFU's policy as the official agricultural policy of the British government.¹⁶² This suggests that the British farmers are very aware as well as responsive to the external impact on their interests of the CAP. This helps to demonstrate that access to information is an important factor in enhancing a group's effectiveness. This factor is notably lacking in the case of Thai farmers and the Thai farmers groups.

The British NFU demonstrates an advanced form of farmer interest group. The NFU would not be able to develop any political influence if it was not well organised and financially secure. Grant¹⁶³ concludes that the NFU has delivered a successful symbiotic relationship development between British farmers and the State, even though farmers' political weight is limited. There are no farmers groups in Thailand with a comparable level of political influence. The level of co-operation between farmers groups and the government has not been as advanced in Thailand. The industrial boom of the early 1980's coincided with the fall in agricultural prices.¹⁶⁴ Consequently, governments delayed in taking action to manage this problem for farmers. Successive governments emphasised industrialisation at the expense of the agricultural sector, in an attempt to be the next 'Tiger economy' in Asia, after recognising the successes of Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea.

¹⁶¹ Grant, W. (1983), p.135-136

¹⁶² Ibid., p.136

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp.140-141

2.8 Development of Japanese Farmers Interest Groups

Most studies on rice politics in Japan describe the *Nokyo* as a powerful interest group. Neary, argues that ‘the influence of Nōkyō (the Federation of Agricultural Co-operatives) within the MAFF is great... At regional and national levels the federations push for legislative and bureaucratic decisions favourable to agricultural interest and particularly to rice farming.’¹⁶⁵ Because of the nature of the Japanese political structure, most rural Members of Parliament (MPs) rely heavily on farmer constituencies. As a result, most MPs are very responsive to farmers’ demands voiced through the *Nokyo*.

During every election, the *Nokyo* appears as an unusually powerful interest group, which is influential enough to determine whether farmer constituencies either vote or do not vote for any particular electoral candidate. Cheng¹⁶⁶ claims that the electoral organisers of the *Nokyo* can ensure the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) its position as the natural party of government, for as long as the LDP maintains its support for the interests of the *Nokyo* in the area of agricultural policy-making. This allows the *Nokyo* to integrate its vested interests into the political strategies of the LDP. Since the LDP cannot afford to ignore rural farmer constituencies, it therefore experiences difficulty in reforming agricultural policy.¹⁶⁷ The strong protectionist policy towards the rice market has proved that the LDP is very well aware of maintaining their vested support to rural farmers in order to ensure their hold on power and expand their influence.

The influence of the agricultural community over policy-making within the Ministry of Agriculture (MAFF) has been a major feature post-war politics as the LDP has depended on the voters from rural communities almost as much as cash contributions from urban-based big business.¹⁶⁸

Aware of this, the *Nokyo* is in fact not only politically stronger than farmers, but it is right to say that the *Nokyo* is politically stronger than the LDP regarding the formation of agricultural policy, particularly relating to rice policy. Interestingly, the *Nokyo* do not

¹⁶⁴ Nipon Paopongsakorn, Rushs, M. and Sumana Tangjitwisuth (1998) ‘Problems and Outlook of Agriculture in Thailand’, *TDR Quarterly Review*, Vol.13 No.2, June 1998 Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], pp.8-9

¹⁶⁵ Neary, I. (1995) ‘Japan’, in Harrop, M. (ed) *Power and Policy in Liberal Democracies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.56

¹⁶⁶ Cheng, P. P. (1990), p.256

¹⁶⁷ Moore, R. H.(1990), p.156

¹⁶⁸ Neary, I. (1995), p.56

have to provide any financial support to politicians like other electoral support groups. For instance, large Japanese enterprises have been declared as significant financial sources for the governing conservative party.¹⁶⁹ This is an unusual political phenomenon, where an interest group can exercise its power influentially towards a government without providing any financial support to that government. Rather, the government is the financial source for the *Nokyo*. 'As part of its activities as government agent in the agricultural sector, the *Nokyo* receives direct financial compensation in the form of commissions and subsidies.'¹⁷⁰

The relationship between the *Nokyo* and the rural rice farmers can be described as a reciprocal relationship, since the *Nokyo* acts as a middleman between rice farmers and the government in the Japanese rice market. Rice farmers need to work with the *Nokyo* in order to transfer the rice to the relevant government agencies. The *Nokyo* gains from this as it makes profits from charging rice market, inspection, and warehousing fees, and oversees the flow of subsidies from the government to its member farmers.¹⁷¹ Nevertheless, a reciprocal relationship in this context does not imply equality between farmers and the *Nokyo*, since the relationship between the *Nokyo* and the Government allows the *Nokyo* to maintain its position over member farmers. Rothacher¹⁷² argues that the influential campaigning power of the *Nokyo* has proved a reliable benefit to farmers, as a result farmers continue to rely on the *Nokyo*.

On behalf of co-operative members, Nokyo deals directly with the government Bureau of Food Supply, which administers the government buying and selling rice... Nokyo provides banking services and a line of credit to the farmers when they contract with the government for the seifumai¹⁷³ rice. The farmers receive a down payment that is automatically deposited into a Nokyo saving account.¹⁷⁴

This does not only imply strong connections between the *Nokyo* and government, but it also implies how the *Nokyo* asserts its role in the Japanese rice market. The *Nokyo* is responsible for many agricultural co-operative activities, which are listed by it and monitored by government officials. Although, the *Nokyo* is not a formal government

¹⁶⁹ Cheng, P. P. (1990), p.254

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p.259

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p.149

¹⁷² Rothacher, A. (1989), p.129

¹⁷³ *Seifumai* is a government controlled rice in accordance with the 1942 Food Control Act, where the government bought and sold rice in order to subsidise Japanese rice against the cheaper Taiwanese colonial rice which was flooding the domestic markets. [Moore, R. H. (1990), p. 149]

agency, the government financially supports the *Nokyo* for working on its behalf.¹⁷⁵ This suggests that the *Nokyo* is informally integrated as a government agency in effect. The *Nokyo* does not qualify as an interest group in the Western perspective, since it is deeply involved in government administration and acts as a part of government to some extent. Rather, the policy community framework can explain this relationship between government and the *Nokyo* better, since it describes a stable and predictable relationship. In addition, the *Nokyo* can effectively prevent new actors from entering into this policy community.

The effectiveness of the *Nokyo* is made possible not only by its own strength, but the need for self-sufficiency in food has contributed to its position to a significant degree. 'Food security' has been one of most important national security issues in Japan since the end of the Second World War. This is because the Japanese experienced considerable rice shortages at the time.¹⁷⁶ Although Japan was able to manage this problem, the country's subsequent industrialisation led to a significant decline in its farming families and agricultural production. 'As the nation's self-sufficiency rate in food has declined, many people argue it is a matter of urgent necessity to support existing genuine farm families.'¹⁷⁷

Demands for a stable supply of rice when full-time farmers are becoming so rare in Japan, has necessarily brought about a substantial increase in government subsidies to existing farmers. The Japanese government adopts various protectionist policies, in order to secure its rice production. This illustrates that rice policy is made on the basis of the agricultural protectionist attitude of policy-makers.¹⁷⁸ It is arguable that the consensus on this issue between government, consumers, and farmers, creates favourable political conditions for an agricultural interest group to operate effectively. According to Cheng¹⁷⁹, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery's protectionist attitude ensures farmers

¹⁷⁴ Moore, R. H.(1990), p.152

¹⁷⁵ Cheng, P. P. (1990) 'Japanese Interest Group Politics', *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXX, No.3, March 1990, p.259

¹⁷⁶ Ohnuki-Tierney, E. (1993) *Rice as Self: Japanese Identities Through Time*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.40

¹⁷⁷ Zhao, Q. (1995) *Japanese policy making: The politics Behind Politics, Informal Mechanisms and the making of China Policy*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, p.35

¹⁷⁸ Kawagoe, T. (1995) 'East Asian Agricultural Trade and Protectionism', in Kawagoe, T. and Sekiguchi, S. (1995) *East Asian Economies: Transformation and Challenges*, Institution of Southeast Asian Studies [ISEAS], p.220

that tariff and other trade barriers are maintained in order to protect key agricultural commodities. The government generously implements these protectionist policies, and this area of policy makes the job of the *Nokyo* significantly easier.

Domestic factors appear to be an enhancing element for the operation of the *Nokyo* in Japanese rice politics. However, as Japan is the world's second largest economy, its agricultural policy-making is not secure from external influences such as the United States, and the WTO. Within the United States, rice farmers lobby enthusiastically, placing pressure on their own government to demand that Japan and South Korea liberalise their rice markets.¹⁸⁰ After the conclusion of the Uruguay round of the GATT talks formally ratified on 15 April 1994¹⁸¹, the Japanese Government was under pressure to revise its rice policy in order to comply with the new WTO rules.

Indeed, Japan accepted tariffication in the Agriculture Agreement in the Uruguay Round, under the provisions of the 'rice clause'¹⁸² in Annex 5. Japan's 'rice clause' allows a delay in the impact of the agreement in its effects on the domestic rice market. During the transitional period, the GATT Codes allow the Japanese government to use 'special safeguards', allowing the use of an emergency tariff program, in order to protect their domestic rice markets. This measure would be permitted, if for example, there is either a rice import surge or the domestic rice price falls below the average price, scenarios, which would harm the domestic rice markets.¹⁸³ Approximately six months after the signing of the GATT Final Act, on 24 October 1994, the Japanese began to use the exemption from applying the use of tariffication in Article 4 by announcing a plan to spend ¥ 6,010 billion (£37.79 billion) to help its protected farmers adjust to foreign competition. This announcement of the Japanese government indicated a victory for the politicians from the rural constituencies who relied on the powerful rural voters.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Cheng, P. P. (1990), p.263

¹⁸⁰ Toshihiko Kawagoe (1995), p.217

¹⁸¹ Jackson, J.H. (1998) *The World Trade Organisation Constitution and Jurisprudence*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, p.2

¹⁸² 'The rice clause'— Japan must comply with the tariffication requirement at the end of these periods. Japan would establish a minimum access quota equal to 4 per cent of its domestic rice consumption, rising to 8 per cent by the year 2000 as a result. (Schott, J.J., assisted by Buurman, J.W. (1994) *The Uruguay Round: An Assessment*, Institute for International Economics, p.51)

¹⁸³ Wolfe, R. (1998) *Farm Wars: The Political Economy of Agriculture and the International Trade Regime*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, p.125 and p. 195

¹⁸⁴ Emiko Terazono and Willam Dawkins (1994) 'Japan Farm Plan Paves Way For Trade Deal', *Financial Times*, 24 October 1994, p.24

Japans application of the GATT Article 4 exemption, which delays tariffication, is not only a good indicator for illustrating the influential power of Japanese farmers on their government, but also illustrates the victory of such domestic pressure over the external pressure from the GATT/WTO. It is arguable that the unity of the farmer constituency, which can be traced back to the influence of Confucianism on Japanese society and will be examined in Chapter 4, and in addition, the well-organised and effective representatives like the *Nokyo*, allows Japanese farmers groups to exercise their power effectively within the Japanese political arena. As a result, the Japanese government continues its high level of domestic support for farmers. According to a report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), between 2002-2003, in Japan the Producer Support Estimate (PSE) averaged US\$ 44,740 million.¹⁸⁵ Such a high figure suggests that the Japanese case is exceptional even amongst developed countries.

This in fact is the reality of domestic politics in most countries, where national interests are the priority in most cases. Governments would do whatever they can justify in order to maintain their popularity among their constituencies. On this basis, domestic factors seem to be more influential than external factors. The cases of Japanese farm protectionist policies imply that the political influence of farmers rises in parallel to domestic political concerns when government pays less attention to external factors. This is another important fact, which allows farmers groups to successfully develop as active political actors within domestic political arena. Thai farmers' political participation is quite similar to this. Thus, this political phenomenon will be used to help conceptualise Thai farmers' group formation and development.

However, with a smaller and less developed economy, the Thai government does not have the economic resources to provide a high level of domestic support to its farmers, as observed in Japan and other developed countries. Therefore, utilising the pattern of political influence experienced by the *Nokyo* and Japanese rice farmers, in order to explain the case studies regarding the political participation of Thai farmers groups, cannot be successful without considering the similarities and differences in the cultural

¹⁸⁵ *Agra Europe*, 11 June 2004

factors between the Thai and Japanese societies. These factors will be discussed in Chapter 4.

2.9 Applicability of Theoretical Frameworks to Thai Farmers Groups

The objective of this thesis is to analyse how domestic and global factors can affect the political participation of Thai farmers. The research highlights two main aspects to the political participation of Thai farmers, namely, group formation, and their interaction with government. The research has found that the three chosen cases for study which are rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups, represent themselves differently. As a result, a number of frameworks have shown some theoretical relevance. However, there are only three theoretical frameworks, specifically, 'interest group', 'civil society' and 'policy network/community' which are capable of providing insight and clear explanation. The other frameworks that have been discussed in this chapter will not simply be rejected however, because they can help to explain certain additional factors and enhance the main theoretical framework.

Thai political studies have placed an emphasis on the role of civil society for at least two decades. And it is the stagnation of democratisation over this period, which has been a catalyst in the development of civil society. Prawase Wasi¹⁸⁶ points out the importance of the relationship between the development of organisations within civil society and the Thai democratisation. In addition, the more powerful that civil society in Thailand becomes, then the sooner democratisation will be established. The more democratic the political arena becomes, then the more pluralistic it will be, and therefore, the political opportunity for farmers is increased. The research has observed a significant role for civil society in helping farmer group formation. Accordingly, the impact of civil society with regard to creating a democratic political arena, which can enhance the political opportunity for farmers is examined in order to provide a fundamental understanding of farmers groups.

The literature on 'interest groups' and 'policy network/community' has not been well developed in the study of Thai politics. In the study of Western politics, the literature

has steadily advanced, and there is strong evidence regarding existing groups and their influence with government. Therefore, the western literature can be usefully consulted, in order to isolate and develop an appropriate model, which can help to provide an adequate explanation with regard to the case studies.

In order to examine the formation of Thai farmers groups, and the domestic and global impact on them, Olson's group theory can be usefully adopted. One of the most controversial discussions regarding group formation, and provided by Olson, is the argument on 'collective benefit' and 'selective incentive'. Olson argues that 'selective incentive' emerges as the most influential factor regarding the decision making of potential members. This argument is not normally accepted by Western academics with reference to the study of interest groups in the West. For instance disagreeing with Olson's 'selective incentive' theory also led March¹⁸⁷ to disagree with Olson's 'by-product' theory. They argue that 'For public interest groups the by-product explanation is unconvincing.'¹⁸⁸ However, this argument is based mainly on Western empirical studies, and is not valid for the chosen Thai case studies. This is largely due to the different cultural backgrounds of Thailand and the West.

The societal structure of Thailand is generally described as a 'loosely structured' one. This concept has helped both Thai and Western academics to perceive a stereotype of Thai people as self-seeking individualists. Therefore, at the interpersonal level, personal wishes and norms influentially affect personal decision-making. This suggests that the Thai people have a characteristic, which can lead to unpredictable outcomes in decision-making.¹⁸⁹ Being highly individualistic implies that there is less of a sense of obligation to the society, and less of a tendency for group formation. Furthermore, this suggests the Olson theory can be applied to the Thai case, since 'collective benefit' may not be effective in attracting potential members to join the group. This can be observed in the rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups. Only the sugarcane farmers groups apply in Olson's argument, because he emphasises the relevance of 'selective incentive' with

¹⁸⁶ *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 30 July 1998, at www.bangkokpost.net Retrieved on 19 November 2001

¹⁸⁷ Marsh, D. (1976) 'On Joining Interest Groups: An Empirical Consideration of the Work of Mancur Olson', *British Journal of Political Science*, 6, 257-271

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.79

¹⁸⁹ Mulder, N. (2000) *Inside Thai Society: Religion Everyday Life Change*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, pp.43-44

regard to large groups.¹⁹⁰ However, the thesis will not ignore the impact of ‘selective incentive’ on rice and potato farmers groups, and in addition will examine them further.

According to Mulder, ‘‘loose structure’ interpretations inevitably fail to explain the undeniable institutional continuity of Thai society through centuries to the present....’¹⁹¹ Consequently, understanding group formation in Thailand requires more than Olson’s explanation. The Thai political culture, namely the ‘patronage system’, ‘social hierarchy’, *bunghun* (a deep sense of obligation based on the Buddhist belief system), and vote-buying, all have to be taken into account in order to inform Olson’s framework. These factors will be used to help examine various impacts on farmers’ group formation and their relationship with the government.

In order to study the interactions between interest groups and the government, the policy network/community framework is best employed. Rhodes and Marsh conclude that ‘the American literature has concentrated upon the micro-level, dealing with personal relations between key actors rather than structural relations between institutions.’¹⁹² The focus of the American policy network literature on the sub-governmental level implies a relevance to the political participation of Thai farmers, due to its emphasis on personal relationships at the micro-level. But the limit on the number of actors involved in the policy network framework in the American literature is a problem when applying the framework to the Thai case.

The British framework for the policy network/community provided by Rhodes and Marsh is more flexible than the American equivalent. However, its emphasis on the meso-level of analysis fails to provide a complete explanation with regard to the Thai case. This is because it is not reasonable to analyse policy-making in Thailand without taking macro-level and micro-level analysis into account. In Thailand, popular political participation is profoundly affected by the patronage system, where personal connections are essential. Moreover, the concentration of decision making within the government requires analysis at the macro-level, in order to clarify its relationship with farmers groups. However, Dowding argues that ‘There is no reason to restrict policy networks to the micro-level and

¹⁹⁰ Olson, M. (1974, Fourth Edition), p.134

¹⁹¹ Mulder, N. (2000), p.43

¹⁹² Rhodes, R.A.W. and Marsh, D. (1992), p.7

there may be wider and more interesting generalizations to be found at the meso- or macro-levels. Let empirical research decide this rather than make definition demands at the 'theory' stage.¹⁹³ This understanding helps to illustrate that the policy network/community can be adapted as an analytical instrument to apply with regard to the thesis case studies.

In order to help provide a clear explanation with regard to the case studies, the research has consulted the literature on Japanese and British agricultural interest groups. These prove to be useful sources of evidence, as both countries have established and powerful agricultural interest groups. Winter notes that 'the NFU played a crucial role in the policy formulation process and in facilitating a relatively smooth implementation of policy.'¹⁹⁴ With regard to Japanese politics, Neary notes that 'The influence of Nōkyō (the Federation of Agricultural Co-operatives) within the MAFF is great... At regional and national levels the federations push for legislative and bureaucratic decisions favourable to agricultural interest and particularly to rice farming.'¹⁹⁵ An understanding of the success of these two farmer interest groups would benefit the conceptualisation of the study as a contrast to the relative weakness of farmer interest groups in Thailand.

¹⁹³ Dowding, K. (1994), p.64

¹⁹⁴ Winter, M. (1996) *Rural Politics: Policies for Agriculture, Forestry and the Environment*, London: Routledge, p.127

¹⁹⁵ Neary, I. (1995), p.56

Chapter 3 Thai Political Context

Introduction

Every political system is embedded in a particular pattern of orientation to political action... it is useful to refer to this as the *political culture*.¹

The idea of the political system in every country is unique, and this is because the political development in each individual country is distinct. For instance the Western democratic framework that has been adopted by most Asian countries is applied differently, and each country has experienced variations on this model, in terms of degree and characteristics. Never does this reflect an identical pattern of democracy, because every country has differences in political background, societal structure, belief systems, and culture. These differences contribute a great deal to the development of their political systems. Accordingly, the political analytical frameworks adopted in any one country cannot perfectly explain the political system of another country.

The Western political framework has to be adapted, in order to be applicable, with reference to the unique condition of the Thai political arena. Specifically, this is because the relationship between the Thai farmers and government has been established in a different political and cultural environment to that of the West. In order to solve this problem, with regard to the theoretical framework, a cultural adaptation is applied, in order to implement the analysis of the case studies under the Western political frameworks.

Almond and Powell state that, 'Political culture is the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations toward politics among members of a political system.'² Accordingly, Harrison argues that the political obligation, and constitutional roles of actors within the political system are a result of the political culture, whereas 'society's

¹ Almond, G.A. (1956) 'Comparative Political Systems', *Journal of Politics*, Vol.18, August 1956, 391-409, p.396

² Almond, G.A. and Powell, G.B. (1966) *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, p.50

history, common values, social structure and norms, and commonly recognised symbols, are all factors which may be linked with predisposition in a society towards various kinds of political beliefs.’³

In order to study how the political culture has established within the Thai political arena, this chapter will begin the discussion regarding the Thai political history, because this will provide fundamental background understanding, with regard to Thai politics and its contribution, with respect to the contemporary Thai political culture. The discussion regarding Thai political culture is concerned with three main elements, namely, ‘the concentration of political power’, ‘money politics’, and ‘social hierarchy and the patronage system’.

The discussion regarding the concentration of power will focus on the examination of the Riggs ‘bureaucratic polity’ model. This is because the bureaucracy has been at the centre of Thai political power since the bureaucratic reforms of King Chulalongkorn in the late 1880s. Although, the decline of the bureaucratic polity has been observed since the 1970s, it has contributed a great deal to the Thai political culture. The power of the bureaucracy in the Thai political history, has had a direct connection to the existence of ‘money politics’ and ‘social hierarchy and the patronage system’, and this connection still exists today. This is because the concept of the bureaucratic polity model implies a closed policy network, where bureaucrats and military officials have almost absolute power in policy-making. Therefore, actors outside the network must establish connections with those already inside the network, in order to gain admission to the channels of political access. One of the most common and effective tools in Thai politics is money, hence ‘money politics’. In the Thai political context, money has been a crucial element in sustaining the negative influence of corruption and patronage system. These two factors will be used to explain the political behaviour of the political actors within the Thai political arena, specifically, the ‘military’, ‘businessmen’, ‘technocrats’ and ‘Thai farmers’.

³ Harrison, R.J. (1980) *Pluralism and Corporatism: The Political Evolution of Modern Democracies*, London: George Allen & Unwin, p.16

In order to explain the distribution of power amongst the actors, this chapter will introduce the concept of the 'policy community' framework. With reference to this, the analysis will focus on the co-operation between government and business groups in contemporary Thai politics. This is important because the power of businessmen emerged as an influential factor, in respect of the Thai political changes of the 1980s. With reference to this, this chapter will examine the applicability of the framework, as to whether this can provide a full explanation for the relationships between the government and businessmen. This will also include an analysis of the impact of this network, on the exclusion of Thai farmers from the policy-making process.

The final section of this chapter will examine the role of the Assembly of the Poor as an organisation within Thai civil society. A primary consideration will be to investigate as to whether the Assembly of the Poor is a real alternative to the *status quo*, in terms of helping Thai rural farmers to improve their political opportunities. Accordingly, the applicability of the policy community model in terms of the relationship between the Assembly of the Poor and the Thai government will be considered. When the Assembly of the Poor emerged in 1995, the role of civil society was the main area of political debate in Thai society. The Assembly of the Poor portrays itself to be the true representative of the rural poor people, but are they truly representative? Indeed, the Thai government has occasionally accused the Assembly of the Poor of being paid by those who oppose the government, in order to protest against the government.

3.1 Thai Political History

Historically, Thailand has not been colonised by any other country, which is in contrast to all other countries in the southeast Asian region. However, Thailand has not always been able to resist unwelcome Western attention. In 1855, King Mongkut, the Fourth Rama was compelled to sign the 'Bowring Treaty' in order to avoid a full-scale colonisation by the British Empire. The Bowring Treaty contained many unfair elements, such as the fixing of import duties at 3 per cent for all commodities, which Britain exported into Thailand. This was the lowest level of import duty of all Asian countries at

that time. However, the Bowring Treaty also helped speed up the integration of Siam into the world trade system.⁴ Pasuk and Baker⁵, argue that sugarcane was the first product to gain from the Bowring Treaty, in respect to Thailand's exports. The treaty was instrumental over this period, when considering the dramatic fifteen years of growth in the export of sugarcane.

In 1885, a group of Western-educated princes and officials submitted a lengthy petition to King Chulalongkorn outlining the immediate problems facing Siam⁶ and suggesting that a constitutional monarchy be instituted to help solve these problems. This document criticized the excessive centralization of political authority.... It recommended that a more broadly-based political structure be established as the only way to save Siam from being colonised by the imperialist West. Among other recommendations, the petitioners proposed the establishment of an elected parliament although they agreed that parliamentary government was not yet an issue of immediate priority. These princes and lesser officials argued that the ordinary Siamese people had to be involved in public affairs so that 'happiness, progress and justice could be equally enjoyed'.⁷

This understanding helps to reveal how there was an established hierarchy in Thai society, which excluded the ordinary people and only began to be addressed during this period. In the late 1880s, Thailand began to reform the bureaucracy, beginning with partial, gradual modernisation strategies rather than full-scale political reforms. These reforms introduced a centralised bureaucratic system, which significantly increased the power of government agencies.⁸ It is inarguable that the form of power structure, which was established at this time, allowed bureaucrats to abuse the state power with ease, and to emphasise their own patronage networks. Indeed, Pasuk and Sungsidh assert that King Chulalongkorn's bureaucratic reforms can hardly be accepted as a complete replacement of the traditional *sakdina* system, or feudal system. This is because 'the apex of the governmental pyramid was still the king. This ensured that relationships within the bureaucracy were still very largely tinged by the pre-existing royal and feudal culture.'⁹

⁴ Akira, S. (1996) *Capital Accumulation in Thailand 1855-1985*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, pp.16-21

⁵ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1999) *Thailand: Economy and Politics*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, p.15

⁶ Thailand was known as Siam until 1939.

⁷ Chai-Anan Samudavanija (1987a) 'Political History', in Somsakdi Xuto (ed) *Government and Politics in Thailand*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, p.26

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.26-27

Full-scale political reforms were delayed until the bloodless revolution, which ended the *Somburanayasithirath* system, or absolute monarchy, during the reign of King Prajadhipok, the Seventh Rama in June 1932, and was led by a self-styled representative group, the *Khana Rasadorn*, or People's Party. The *Khana Rasadorn* was established by a select group of elite, western educated government officials and military officers, supported by a military unit in the Bangkok area. Subsequently, this group led the country into adopting a new political system where the King was no longer to have absolute power and everybody would be subject to the same laws.¹⁰ By 10 December 1932, a permanent constitution was promulgated by the King. However, the King and the Thai monarchy still have an informal ability to influence Thai politics up to the present day. Hewison argues that the contemporary monarchy is now an important and central institution, and political actor. He asserts that King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the Ninth Rama, 'has the ability to intervene in the nation's political affairs in a manner which has altered the course of events considerably.'¹¹

Between 1932 and 1973, was the longest period in which the military dominated the Thai political arena. Over this period, either a military government, or an improperly elected or quasi-democratic government was relying mainly on the support of the military. Moreover, the majority of the prime ministers and cabinet ministers in these governments were active or retired civilian bureaucrats and military officers.¹² Funston, asserts that 'Various military-dominated governments then prevailed most of the time through to the 1970s, aided by the ideology of the Cold War and the accompanying US military assistance.'¹³ It has been estimated that Thailand received an enormous amount of military aid from the United States during 1970-1972, averaging over US\$100 million

⁹ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Sungsidh Piriyarangsarn (1994) *Corruption & Democracy in Thailand*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, p.8

¹⁰ Nual-La-Or, Manit (1997) *Karn Maung Thai Yook Sunyalak Rat-Thai (The Thai Politics: The Era of identity of the Thai State)*, Bangkok: Rung Raung Rat Printing [in Thai], p. 31-33

¹¹ Hewison, K. (1997) 'The Monarchy and Democratisation', in Hewison, K. (ed) *Political Change in Thailand: Democracy and Participation*, London: Routledge, p.58

¹² Anek Laothamatas (1988) 'Business and Politics in Thailand: New Pattern of Influence', *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXVIII, No.4 April, 1988: 451-470, p.451

¹³ Funston, J. (2000) 'Political Reform in Thailand: Real or Imagined?', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, Volume 8, Number 2, December 2000: 89-108, p.90

per year.¹⁴ The enforcement of the military's political power severely damaged the process of Thai democratisation. When challenged, the military would suppress attempts to further this process.

The confrontation between the university students and the military regime in October 1973 was a defining moment in the struggle for democracy in Thailand. In the two decades after this confrontation, the Thai political system would become more stable, and the excessive influence of Thai bureaucrats declined steadily, in accordance with the increasing role of civil society over this period. However, the support of the military would still be needed by governments in order to endorse their power, until the May unrest of 1992.

The Thai political system was known as a 'semi-democracy' in the decade after the democratic movements of 1973-1977. Under this system, the Thai political structure changed significantly. The roles of the urban businessmen became more and more important with regard to the country's political system, both directly and indirectly.¹⁵ Particularly during the period 1986-1996, Thai businessmen undertook an active political role in order to ensure that their interests were represented in the policy-making process. Several Thai business associations emerged as powerful pressure groups. Consequently, the influence of the Thai bureaucratic polity was weakened.¹⁶ Callahan and McCargo argue that 'a bureaucratic polity characterized by limited popular participation has been challenged in recent years by the manifest rise of civil society. At the same time business interests have assumed growing political importance, challenging the traditional pre-eminence of government officials and military officers.'¹⁷

¹⁴ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1999), p.324

¹⁵ Ibid., pp.451-452

¹⁶ Bello, W., Cunningham, S. and Li Kheng Poh (1998) *A Siamese Tragedy Development and Disintegration in Modern Thailand*, London: Zed Books Ltd, p.13

¹⁷ Callahan, W.A. and McCargo, D. (1996) 'Vote-Buying in Thailand's Northeast: The July 1995 General Election', *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXVI, No.4, April 1996: 376-392, p.376

However, Sukhumbhand¹⁸ argues that the increasingly pluralistic political arena in addition to rapid economic growth in Thailand directly benefits the major political parties, since these factors enable these parties to develop connections with extra-bureaucratic groups and business in particular, at the national, provincial and local levels. This creates a favourable political arena for urban businessmen to extend and strengthen their connections with government, whereas benefits of the increasingly pluralistic political arena going to rural people and farmers in particular is rarely observed. Therefore, Gohlert argues that, 'Pluralism, a major element in Western political democracy, remains a surface phenomenon in Thailand.'¹⁹ Power was and is still limited to the elites. Farmers and other rural people have noticed that it is very hard for them to approach government, because bribery is always needed and they cannot afford to offer bribes in order to develop personal connections with those who are in positions of power.

Today, Thai people are very concerned with the idea of decentralisation of power. They are hoping that the application of the new constitution, promulgated on 11 October 1997²⁰, can bring the Thai society into a new political era, with equality for all. The origins of this process, which resulted in the 1997 Constitution, were the events of the May unrest of 1992, where the urban middle-class challenged the military regime, under Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon. This experience had a substantial impact on contemporary political reforms in Thailand. The event helped to increase popular political awareness, not only in urban areas but in rural areas too. Since this occasion, the people have demanded more decentralisation of political power, and Thai academics such as Prawase Wasi²¹, have strongly suggested an increasing role for Thai civil society in order to balance the state power. The concentration of political power has an established history, with respect to Thailand, throughout the history of the country. The democratisation of Thailand, which began in 1932, has not to date effectively changed the structures within the political arena, and how it is distributed between the involved actors.

¹⁸ Sukhumbhand Paribatra (1993) 'State and Society in Thailand: How Fragile the Democracy?', *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 9, September 1993: 879-893, pp.882-883

¹⁹ Gohlert, E. W. (1991) *Power and Culture: The Struggle Against Poverty in Thailand*, Bangkok: White Lotus, p.16

²⁰ Parichart Siwaraksa, Chaowana Traimas and Ratha Vayagool (1997) *Thai Constitutions in Brief*, Bangkok: Institute of Public Policy Studies, p.I

That this process has not yet achieved a fully realised democratisation within Thailand has enabled bureaucrats to maintain their influence over the Thai political arena. This can be explained through the particular historical background of Thailand specifically, the way in which political power was concentrated at the centre. As a consequence, the formation of policy communities between the government and interest groups are limited to those interest groups, which have closed connections with elite bureaucrats and politicians, through the patronage system.

3.2 Concentration of Thai Political Power

It is 71 years since Thailand adopted the Western democratic framework, in order to help to redistribute political power amongst its people. Since then, Thai people might have experienced more freedom and political opportunity, as the main concern of the Western democratic framework is of ‘a variety of individual rights – of free speech, association, the suffrage and so on...’²² However, there is no strong evidence to support the argument that the Thai people are more able to enjoy a substantial improvement in their freedom and political opportunity than before the reforms took place in 1932, and this is a result of the enduring high concentration of political power. Indeed, the political power was never truly redistributed. Instead, it has only been transferred indirectly, from the Thai monarchy to the Thai political elite. In Riggs’ opinion, ‘The absolute monarchy was overthrown, and the center of power moved from the throne into the hands of a ruling circle of commoners.’²³ With reference to this, a small number within the political elite, namely bureaucrats and military officials, find it easy to abuse power for their own interests.

The concentration of political power in Thailand has been described as a unique case. Accordingly, Riggs offers a specific analytical model of ‘bureaucratic polity’ to

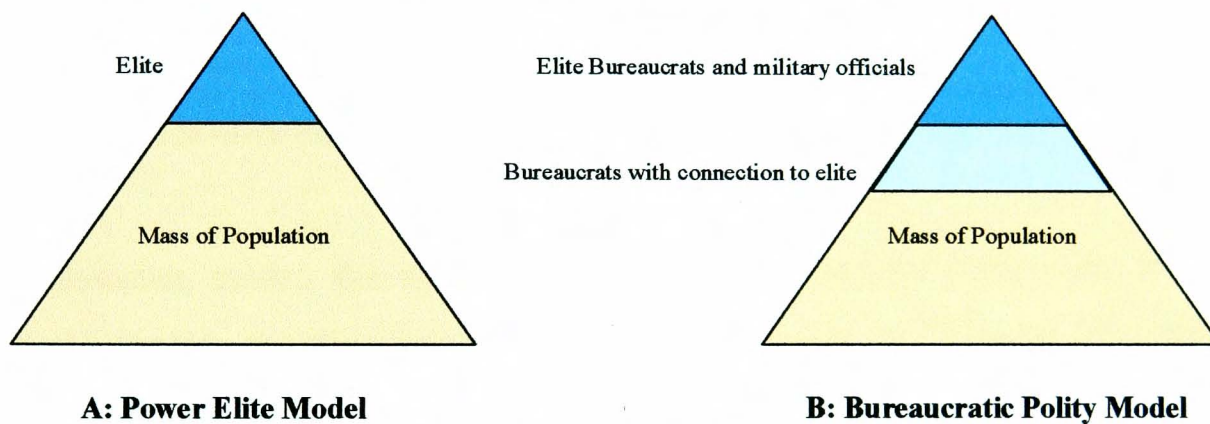
²¹ *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 30 July 1998, at www.bangkokpost.net Retrieved on 19 November 2001

²² Beetham, D. (1996) ‘Theorising Democracy and Local Government’, in King, D. and Stoker, G. (eds) *Rethinking Local Democracy*, London: Macmillan, p.29

²³ Riggs, F. W. (1966) ‘The Bureaucratic Polity as a Working System in Thailand’, in Ravenhill, J. (ed) *Political Economy of East Asia 3: Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines and Thailand, Volume II*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar publishing Limited, p.303

explain it. This model was most accepted with regard to explaining the nature of the Thai policy-making process from the 1960s to the early 1970s. If the ‘bureaucratic polity’ model assumes that ‘power rests fundamentally, in the Thai polity, in the bureaucracy, then it is not surprising that development project should arise within the ministries, nor is it surprising that they should not reflect any ground swell of popular demand from the provinces.’²⁴ According to Riggs, ‘Of 237 men who served in Thai cabinets between 1932 and 1958, a total of 184 may be classified as career officials, compared with 38 who were not nonofficials. An additional 15 men cannot be classified at present in either category because adequate information is not available. *Of the career officials, 100 were civil servants and 84 were military officers.* (Emphasis added)’²⁵

Figure 3-1: Distribution of Power in Power Elite and Bureaucratic Polity Models



Source: Developed from the figure illustrating elitist and pluralist views of power in Hague, R., Harrop, M. and Breslin, S. (1992, Third Edition), p.15

Theoretically, the notion of ‘bureaucratic polity’ implies some shared elements with the notion of ‘power elite’. Fundamentally, these two theories place an emphasis on the analysis of the concentration of the political power with reference to a small number of elite. The elitist theorists argue that the abuse of political power by the elite groups can be regarded as an obstacle of real democracy, ‘in the full sense of government by (and not just for) the people.’²⁶ Similarly, the bureaucratic polity model exists to explain the power of the Thai bureaucrats and military officials who adversely affect Thai democratisation.

²⁴ Ibid., p.312

²⁵ Ibid., p.295

²⁶ Hague, R., Harrop, M. and Breslin, S. (1992, Third Edition) *Comparative Government and Politics: An Introduction*, London: Macmillan, p.13

The distribution of political power is illustrated through a pyramid model, in the perspective of the elitist theorist, with a small group of key military, economic and political leaders located at the top of the pyramid as illustrated in figure 3-1A. These groups control all major decision making in most policy areas, in order to secure their own interests.²⁷ The explanation can also describe the distribution of power within the bureaucratic polity model in figure 3-1B. In addition to the power elite model explanation, the bureaucratic polity model also suggests the existence of lower rank bureaucrats with strong connections to the elite as a result of the hierarchical system. As Riggs explains:

The bureaucracy as a ruling group, therefore, constituted, but a tiny fraction of the total population. At its core were the dozen or two who, at any given time, were cabinet members. The next larger circle consisted of perhaps a thousand special-grade and high military officers, followed by another two or three thousand men holding key administrative posts, being drawn gradually closer to the inner circle. Outside this circle one found more than 25,000 career men with good prospects, the rank-and-file administrators, all of whom expected to move up gradually in term of salary and status, and some of whom expected, in due time to join the more influential and rewarding inner circle.²⁸

However, neither the bureaucratic polity model nor the power elite model can adequately explain the distribution of the political power in Thailand from the early 1980s onwards. This is because of the major political uprising by approximately ten thousand students in 1973. This event changed the nature of Thai politics forever, and was described as a great challenge to the military regime and was indeed acknowledged as the beginning of the Thai political transition.²⁹ This led the increase in the role of 'extra-bureaucratic groups, such as business groups and technocrats. According to Hewison, 'By the 1980s, however, analysts came to regard 'bureaucratic polity' as an inappropriate description of a society experiencing rapid growth and massive social change. The rise of a powerful and increasingly independent business class and the decline of the military contradicted the model.... Analysts saw the bureaucratic polity

²⁷ Greenwald, C. S. (1977) *Group Power: Lobbying & Public Policy*, New York: Praeger Publishers, p. 300

²⁸ Riggs, F. W. (1966), p.311

²⁹ Doner, R.F. and Anek Laothamatas (1994) 'Thailand: Economic and Political Gradualism', in Haggard, S. and Webb, S.B. (eds) *Voting for Reform: Democracy, Political Liberalisation, and Economic Adjustment*, Oxford : Published for the World Bank by Oxford University Press, pp.416-416

being replaced by a system where business had far more autonomy.’³⁰ Chai-Anan³¹ argues that Riggs had already observed a direct relationship between the military and businessmen, but Riggs did not emphasise this relationship in his study in relation to bureaucratic polity.

However, to completely ignore the examination of this relationship would be to misunderstand the situation, since the role of Chinese-Thai businessmen has been explicit throughout Thai history. Akira³² notes that those businessmen had already asserted their economic power over government policymaking through personal connections. Military officials and other bureaucrats were invited to become board members and shareholders of Chinese-Thai owned firms in the 1950s. This is normal business practice in Thailand. This practice has become a pattern for elite politicians and bureaucrats to establish their wealth, and continues today. This process in turn allows businessmen to establish channels of influence within the policy-making process. It can be argued that the network of the policy-making process of the 1950s did leave some space for interest groups to participate. Nevertheless, farmers groups were not included, since they were politically and economically weak.

Although the decline of the bureaucratic polity has been viewed as a positive sign with regard to the Thailand’s democratisation, the distribution of political power is still concentrated amongst the political elite and their business partners. This is because of the lack of democracy at the provincial and local levels. However, in 1994 the administrative structure at the local government level began the process of decentralisation, and this offered hope to farmers groups in their attempts to increase their level of political participation. In accordance with the Tambon Administrative Organisation Act of 1994, the existing sub-district councils (*sapha tambon*) were upgraded nation-wide to *Ongkan borihan suan tambon* (*Or Bor Tor*), or Tambon (Sub-district) Administrative

³⁰ Hewison, K. (2001b) ‘Thailand: Class Matters’, Working Papers Series No. 8, May 2001, South East Asia Research Centre, City University of Hong Kong, p.4

³¹ Chai-Anan Samudavanija (1987b), p.97

³² Akira, S. (1996), p.137

Organisations (TAO) between 1994-1997.³³ The main aim of initiating TAOs is to decentralise administrative power from Bangkok to the local level, and to enable the local people to solve their own problems with the expectation that they can more effectively serve themselves. Indeed, it is believed that problems should be solved by local people, rather than those from the centralised bureaucracy who have a limited understanding of local issues.

However, after almost a decade of TAOs, there has not been a significant change in the quality of living for people in rural areas, because the TAO committees have lacked absolute administrative authority, and final decisions are still made by the central government. According to a study of TAOs by the World Bank, with respect to rural development in Thailand, 'they remain extremely weak, lack transparency in decision making, and require significant capacity building before becoming meaningful agents of rural development and community participation.'³⁴ As was reported, a survey by the Ministry of the Interior, in relation to the operation of all 6,745 TAOs in 75 provinces, stated that 3,423 TAOs (50.75 per cent) failed to meet the government standards, due to a severe level of corruption. In the report, it was also claimed that politicians at the grassroots level operate in the most corrupt manner.³⁵

Similarly, Kowit³⁶ also sees the lack of transparency and the level of corruption as the main obstacles, with regard to the development of the TAO structure and of democracy at the local level. He argues that the operation of the TAO structure is on the basis of a bureaucratic system, which is a disrupting influence. Although the TAO structure was established with respect to concept of civil society, the government exhibits a dominant control over its operational function. Accordingly, it is arguable that the TAOs perform like any another government agency, rather than being an organisation,

³³ Nelson, M.H. (2000) *Local Government Reform in Thailand with Some Comparative Perspectives*, Bangkok: Center for the Study of Thai Politics and Democracy [CSTPD], King Prajadhipok's Institute, p.5

³⁴ Rural Development and Natural Resource Sector Unit of the World Bank (2000) *Beyond the Crisis: A Strategy for Renewing Rural Development in Thailand*, Bangkok: World Bank, p.9

³⁵ *Prachachart Business* (Internet Edition), 3 April 2002, at www.matichon.co.th [in Thai] Retrieved on 6 April 2002

³⁶ Kowit Pong-ngam (2001) 'Naewnome Or Bor Tor nai anakot (Tendency of the TAO in the Future)', *Siam Rath Weekly Review*, 23-29 March 2001 [in Thai], p.40

operated by and for the people. 'As dominant rural groups are becoming state functionaries, their position is increasingly determined by more powerful agents of the state.'³⁷

The results achieved by TAOs have improved little since the upgrading of the *sapha tambon* to the TAO structure, where these locally-based organisations only act in response to the central government influence, rather than the needs of the rural people. Turton argues, 'At times, in previous years, sub district projects were required to correspond with province level development plans. In some cases the *sapha tambon* had as little as one week to respond to official directives. Yet the council still has no independent source of revenue or independence as a district legal entity.'³⁸ Tanet³⁹ suggests that the government should offer more opportunity for the people to work with the TAOs and decrease the state's power over the TAOs, otherwise a real decentralisation of political power will not be seen in Thailand.

3.3 Money Politics: Corruption and Vote-buying

Thai politics is characterized by a vicious cycle spawned by the need for money. Because political positions are acquired largely through vote-buying, candidates are expected to accumulate fund from campaign donations. To be able to buy votes effectively, candidates need to be generous and maintain strong connections with local and provincial canvassers. Once elected, that individual has to protect the interests of his or her voting power base, and so must raise money to pay for future campaign cost.⁴⁰

In Thailand, people recognise that corruption and vote-buying are embedded at the root of Thai politics. Corruption and vote buying are intrinsically linked. Several studies have revealed that vote buying is one of the main causes of the severe problem of corruption in the country's political system. These studies have also demonstrated that corruption and bribery are deeply embedded at every level of the bureaucracy and of the

³⁷ Hart, G. (1989) 'Agrarian Change in the Context of the State Patronage', in Turton, A., Hart, G., and White, B. (eds) *Agrarian Transformations, Local Processes and the State in Southeast Asia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p.36

³⁸ Turton, A. (1987) *Production, Power and Participation in Rural Thailand: Experiences of Poor Farmers' Groups*, Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, p.84

³⁹ Interview with Dr Tanet Charoenmuang

political system. 'Corruption in Thai politics is nothing new. Corruption charges and corruption cases have been an intermittent feature of Thai politics scene for many years,' say Pasuk and Sungsidh.⁴¹

It is difficult to say whether it is vote buying, which causes corruption, or whether it is corruption, that causes vote buying. These problems are linked in a downward spiral. Corruption and vote buying are not unique problems to Thailand, since they have and do occur in most developed and developing countries. However, in developing countries, it is generally more of a problem than in developed countries. Nevertheless the nature of the Thai culture may make these problems to some extent, more difficult to resolve than in other countries. The formation of the patronage system, which is a factor in many personal relationships, has worsened the problem, since it reinforces the patronage network. Undoubtedly, rural people are exploited as a result.

Although, it is believed that there is a level of corruption in every government of Thailand, according to the data represented in table 3-1 and table 3-2, the most obvious case was the corruption of the administration of Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan, in the period of August 1988 – February 1991. According to Kulick and Wilson, 'Prime Minister Chatichai, who was a regular target for allegations of corruption, would sometimes reply: "Where is the evidence? Where are the receipts?" These transactions are, by their very nature almost impossible to prove....'⁴² In the media the Chatichai administration became known as the 'Buffet Cabinet' government. The heavy corruption in the Chatichai government led to the coup of February 1991, by the military regime (which later called itself the National Peace Keeping Council, or NPKC). The NPKC used the level of government corruption as the justification for the coup, by citing this corruption in the Chatichai government as an obstacle to economic development.

⁴⁰ Bidhya Bowornwathana (2000a) 'Thailand in 1999: A Royal Jubilee, Economic Recovery, and Political Reform', *Asian Survey*, Vol. XL, No. 1, January/February 2000: 87-97, p.94

⁴¹ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Sungsidh Piriyaarangsarn (1994), p.1

⁴² Kulick, E. and Wilson, D. (1992) *Thailand's Turn: Profile of a New Dragon*, London: Macmillan, p.37

Table 3-1 Estimated Value of Corruption by Bureaucrats (million baht/year)

Ministry	Sarit Government 1960-63	Thanom Government 1964-73	Sanya- Kriangsak Government 1974-81	Prem Government 1981-88	Chatichai Government 1988-90
Interior	20	68	232	430	1148
Agriculture	44	20	720	1566	2194
Education	28	92	352	1102	1072
Communication	68	366	960	1596	2512
Public health	8	32	144	280	364
Others	108	420	1584	2144	4388
Total	272	1180	3996	7120	11676
As % of budget	2.77	5.34	4.93	3.59	4.05
As % of GDP	0.44	0.90	0.84	0.70	0.66

Note: The corruption amount is estimated as 20 per cent of the ministry budget for capital items and purchase of materials and equipment.

Source: Pasuk Phongpaichit and Sungsidh Piriyarangsana (1994), p.38

Table 3-2 Assets Seized from Leading Politicians on Grounds of Corruption (million baht)

	Sarit 1957-63	Thanom Prapat 1964-73	Chatichai +ministers 1988-90	Chatichai Alone 1988-90
1. Seized assets	604	600	1900	284
2. Average per year	86.3	60.0	633.3	94.8
3. (1) as % of capital expenditure in budget	6.3	1.0	1.1	0.2
4. (1) as % of annual government budget	0.9	0.3	0.2	0.03
5. (1) as % of GDP	0.14	0.05	0.04	0.01

Source: Pasuk Phongpaichit and Sungsidh Piriyarangsana (1994), p.40

Indeed, during the Chatichai government, the Thai economy had a very high profile. In fact, the average growth rate of the economy was over 10 per cent per year.⁴³ The GDP grew by as much as 13.2 per cent in 1988, falling only marginally to 12.0 per cent in 1989, and to 10.0 per cent in 1990, although the rate had fallen back to 7.9 per cent by 1991.⁴⁴ The fast growing nature of the economy over this period is another explanation for the high rate of corruption in the Thai economy at that time. The government initiated many projects involving high levels of expenditure, which allowed elite bureaucrats and politicians to exploit these projects with the use of bribery. Several projects were distributed amongst the businessmen who had close personal connections with those particular elite politicians and bureaucrats. Virat Watthanasiri⁴⁵ of the committee of the National Counter Corruption Commission (NCCC) views the particular social structure of Thai society as an explanatory factor in the relatively high level of corruption. He has stated that various forms of relationship, notably family relationships or personal relationships, or even *krengchai* (mindfulness and reserve) in Thai society, tend to promote corruption, particularly in the bureaucratic system.

There is an open awareness within Thai society that many elite bureaucrats and politicians generate their assets through bribery. This form of corruption does not take place at the stage of policy implementation. Rather, it starts at the stage of policy formation. It is argued that 'almost all projects with budget set aside were "occupied" by cronies of state officials... Newcomers would find it hard to win a project as official would make every effort to block their entry.'⁴⁶ This helps to illustrate how corruption can operate effectively in Thai society as a result of the patronage system, since many government officials tend to abuse state power for personal gain.

⁴³ Far Eastern Economic Review (1992) *Asia 1992 Yearbook*, Far Eastern Economic Review, p.209

⁴⁴ Bank of Thailand (1990) Annual Economic Report 1990, Bangkok: Bank of Thailand, Bank of Thailand (1991) Annual Economic Report 1991, Bangkok: Bank of Thailand, Bank of Thailand (1997) Annual Economic Report 1997, Bangkok: Bank of Thailand, Bank of Thailand (1998) Annual Economic Report 1998, Bangkok: Bank of Thailand

⁴⁵ *Matichon Weekly* (Internet Edition), 28 August 2000, at

<http://202.183.211.5/weekly/weekly.asp?selectdate=2000/08/28&stid=674> Retrieved on 1 January 2001

⁴⁶ Amornrat Mahitthirook, Onnucha Hutasingh and Anjira Assavanonda (2000) 'Graft Rots Fabric of the Nation: Everyone Takes a Slice, From Ministers to Junior-Level Staff', *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 14 September 2000, at www.bangkokpost.net/today/140900_News01.html Retrieved on 14 September 2000

As was reported in relation to a Thai Chamber of Commerce University survey, approximately 79 per cent of the businessmen surveyed said that it was not uncommon to bribe bureaucrats. About 57 per cent of the total engaged in *kha nam ron nam cha* or 'tea money' or bribes, in order to ensure that they would be awarded contracts. The level of bribery varied depending on the value of the project. The businessmen surveyed said that they included the bribes within their investment costs. The survey also revealed that the businessmen would be willing to pay an additional 12.5 per cent in tax if it would eradicate the problem of corruption.⁴⁷ They believed that some of the bribes received were meant for vote-buying in the following elections, or were compensation for the costs of the previous elections.

You have to pay for votes... That's the way it is here. If you don't it could be very hard to get elected.⁴⁸

- Samuen Janmanee, a *kamnan*, in the province of Udon Ratchathani, the *Isan region* -

The political implication is a severe level of vote-buying in Thailand. The fundamental explanations for vote buying are poverty, a low level of education, and an lack of political awareness. Particularly with regard to the problem of poverty, during the general election of 1995, it was reported that in the *Isan* region (the northeastern region of Thailand), many people considered vote-buying to be a way of earning a little extra income from the organisers. Supporters of some MP candidates were offering to pay as much as 3,000 baht for a household of several eligible voters, with payments to individual voters ranging from 200 to 700 baht. Indeed, between 100,000 and 200,000 baht could buy a whole village. Vote-buying was concentrated in the period 2 days before the election.⁴⁹ In the northern region, candidates paid between 50 baht and 500 baht per head. In the province of Chiang Mai, some voters received payments of up to 1,000 baht

⁴⁷ *The Nation* (Internet Edition), 29 August 2000, at <http://electricasia.com/backissue/Tuesday/headline.shtml?Tuesday&29082000&hd5.txt> Retrieved on 29 August 2000

⁴⁸ Fairclough, G. (1995a) 'Town and Country: New Political Party Aims to Bridge Rural-Urban Gap', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 2 February 1995, p.20

⁴⁹ Murray, D. (1996) 'The 1995 National Elections in Thailand: A Step Backward for Democracy?', *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 4, April 1996: 361-375, p.368

for their votes. It is estimated that more than US\$ 1billion was spent on vote-buying in the 1995 elections alone.⁵⁰

Vote-buying can take other, more subtle forms than buying directly from voters. Electoral candidates may, instead, make donations to local temples or village groups. For instance, during the election campaign in 1995, Amnuay Virawan, the Nam Thai Party's leader, spent heavily on his campaign in the *Isan* region. It is reported that he made many large donations to Buddhist temples and offered food and clothing for free. In one instance he donated 140,000 baht to build living quarters for monks at a temple in the province of Khon Kaen. *Kamnan* Samuen Janmanee says 'I think Mr Amnuay has a bright future in politics... He's very generous.'⁵¹ This explicitly demonstrates how Thai politicians can attempt to legitimise their vote-buying schemes to make them more acceptable to local people, and also how local people can be very receptive to this form of vote-buying. With reference to the general election in January 2001, money remained the crucial element in the winning of elections by candidates. As was reported, there was a suggestion that 'candidates handed out so much money... Gifts of food and clothing were so abundant that poor laborers could assemble new wardrobes and stock their pantries for months.'⁵²

Many academics have argued that poor education is at the root of every structural problem in Thai society. Poor levels of education have been an obstacle against political development for many years, because it creates the opportunity for vote-buying. Politicians find that vote-buying practices easily mobilised in rural areas, where people's education is generally inferior to those living in urban areas. Since, 'those with higher educational attainment seem to have a greater sense of political efficacy.'⁵³ Callahan and McCargo note that 'rural voters with limited education often feel obligated to candidates

⁵⁰ Vatikiotis, M. and Fairclough, G. (1996) 'Mission Impossible', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 28 November 1996, p.16

⁵¹ Fairclough, G. (1995a), pp.19-20

⁵² Rajive Chandrasekaran (2001) 'Stopping Traditional Gifts, Thailand Tries to Halt Custom of Vote-buying', *International Herald Tribune*, 3 January 2001, p.3

⁵³ Jordan, G. and Maloney, W. (1997) *The Protest Business? Mobilizing Campaign Groups*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.111

who have made payments to them and are inclined to support them at the ballot box.⁵⁴ Furthermore, uneducated or poorly educated people generally take lower income jobs. People earning less than they need to pay for essential items are soon in debt, and debt is a serious problem for Thai farmers. It is estimated that by 1998/1999, 55.32 per cent of agricultural households were indebted as shown in table 3-3. Many political parties have attempted to show their concern, with regard to farmers' debts. Debt relief programs have become a policy of many political parties, in order to gain popularity amongst the rural vote. Although, many people still believe that debt relief programs are difficult to implement, they took the Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT: Thai Loves Thai) to victory in the elections of January 2001.

Table 3-3 Percentage of Agricultural Households in Debt as a Proportion of the Total Number of Agricultural Households Between 1970/1971-1998/1999

Item	1970/71	1971/72	1976/77	1978/79	1980/81	1982/83	1986/87	1988/89	1990/91	1991/92	1995/96	1998/99	Increasing rate %
Households	3,645,000	3,787,000	3,974,000	4,378,000	4,468,000	4,689,000	5,030,000	5,040,132	5,073,471	5,130,531	5,502,782	5,513,855	1.53
Indebted-Households	1,662,000	1,038,000	1,550,000	1,914,265	1,131,702	1,176,137	1,129,091	1,279,000	1,408,000	1,729,831	2,857,993	3,050,412	2.21
Indebted-Household (per cent)	45.60	27.41	39.00	43.72	25.33	25.08	22.45	25.38	27.75	33.72	51.94	55.32	0.67

Source: Agricultural Economics Association of Thailand under the Royal Patronage in associate with The Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operatives (2000) 'Neesin kasetakorn krai dolae (Who is responsible for farmers' debts?)', unpublished document for the seminar on farmers' debt, 7 September 2000, Central Grand Plaza Hotel, Bangkok [in Thai]

Local wealthy people provide many of the loans in the rural areas. Sometimes, these people are called *jao pho* (the godfather) or *phu mi itthiphon* (men of influence). Hundreds *jao pho* and *phu mi itthiphon* actively participate within the Thai political arena by developing their personal relationships with politicians. *Jao pho*, who are not themselves politicians, can nevertheless help to secure an MPs' seat in the House of Representatives by determining the voting behaviour within their area of influence. *Jao pho* and the MPs have a reciprocal relationship, and the connections between *jao pho* and the politicians, who include some elite military officials and bureaucrats, allow *jao pho* to

⁵⁴ Callahan, W. A. and McCargo, D. (1996), p.379

‘maintain their status above the law in order to further their business interests, both legal and illegal.’⁵⁵ Sombat also agrees, with regard to this point. He asserts that ‘Elected Politicians became another source of protection for the *chao pho*⁵⁶, while the *chao pho* supplied finances and organization for the campaign efforts of the elected politicians.’⁵⁷ With regard to the patronage system, the relationships between *jao pho*, politicians, and rural people, is a mainstream characteristic in Thai society. Rural people are powerless to prevent their own exploitation under the patronage of *jao pho* and elite politicians.

Thai political studies suggest that electoral candidates cannot simply approach a village in order to buy up the votes from the villagers. Vatikiotis and Fairclough argue that ‘To be successful, MPs...must enlist the help of influential locals who, because of their position in the community, are able to deliver votes. Known as *hua khanaen*, or heads of voters...’⁵⁸ Similarly, Sombat claims that in order to secure their victory in the election, those electoral candidates must build up their own election network. ‘This network is made up of those *hua khanaen*, or ‘voting chiefs’ able to influence the votes of the villagers... the *hua khanaen* system has long been a part of local elections....’⁵⁹

Additionally, Anek⁶⁰ asserts that local patronage networks within small parliamentary constituencies implement the operation of vote-buying in rural areas. Thus, personal connections with either *jao pho* or *kamnan* are needed. Many *jao pho* began as *kamnan*, and in many cases, *kamnan* were involved in the electoral system as *hua khanaen* because of their large financial resources and personal connections with the local villagers. The political participation of *kamnan* is illegal because they are government officials, yet this is nevertheless widespread.⁶¹ This is the case because most of *hua khanaen* have strong connections with politicians, and they believe that the

⁵⁵ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Sungsidh Piriyaarangsana (1994), pp.58-59

⁵⁶ The term *chao pho* is equivalent to the term *jao pho*. It is a preference of the author of the original work to spell it that way. However, through out the thesis the term *jao pho* is used in order to maintain the consistency.

⁵⁷ Sombat Chantornvong (2000) ‘Local Godfathers in Thai Politics’, in McVey, R. (ed) *Money & Power in Provincial Thailand*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies [ISEAS] and Silkworm Books, p.83

⁵⁸ Vatikiotis, M. and Fairclough, G. (1996), pp.16-17

⁵⁹ Sombat Chantornvong (2000), p.83

⁶⁰ Fairclough, G. (1995a), p.20

⁶¹ Vatikiotis, M. and Fairclough, G. (1996), p.17

political patronage of politicians can secure their interests. Accordingly, they can ignore the fact that their political participation is in breach of the law.

The notorious *jao pho* of the province of Chonburi, ‘*Kamnan Bo*’ or Somchai Khunpluem, has a strong political connection to the Chart Thai Party. He has been strongly backing his son’s political career, and his son, Sontaya Khunpluem is a Chat Thai Party MP, who is a Minister of Science in the Thaksin Government. This is evidence in support of the argument of Pasuk, Sungsidh, and Sombat, with regard to the influential role of *jao pho* in the Thai political arena. Additionally, *hua khanaen* do not have to be *kamnan*. *Hua khanaen*, could in fact be anyone with *itthiphon* (influence) and *barami* (charisma) or those who hold a respectable position in society. However, in most cases *hua khanaen* are people with *itthiphon*, since *itthiphon* enables *hua khanaen* to work effectively in controlling votes for specific electoral candidates.

With regard to the dictation of local voting behaviour by *jao pho*, they introduce the notion of *bunghun* to remind local people of their generosity when they were lent money. Indeed, it could be argued that what *jao pho* used, was more like *itthiphon* or influence, rather than the idea of *bunghun*. According to Callahan and McCargo⁶² *bunghun* refers to indebtedness, with respect to the benevolence of others. Indeed *bunghun* implies a deep sense of obligation between the two parties, on the basis of a reciprocal relationship. Moreover, they argue that *bunghun* can be considered to be the predominant factor, with respect to vote-buying. This is because *bunghun* ‘implies the presence or absence of a moral element in the relationship.’⁶³

Callahan and McCargo also relate their argument with respect to this issue, to the influence of Buddhism in Thai society. This factor is important because 90 per cent of people in Thailand are adherents to Buddhism. Thus, it can be argued that ‘Many devout Buddhists, especially older people, believe that failing to vote for a candidate who had

⁶² Callahan, W. A. and McCargo, D. (1996), p.379

⁶³ Mulder, N. (2000) *Inside Thai Society: Religion Everyday Life Change*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, p.45

paid them must be a *bab*—an act of demerit.’⁶⁴ However, observations on contemporary Thai politics suggest little relevance to the concept of *bab* with regard to the increasing phenomenon of vote-buying. *Itthiphon* seems to play a more significant role in this matter, since *itthiphon* of *jao pho* and *hua khanaen* refers to their illegal power. Accordingly, once voters have received money from them, they will not risk their own lives challenging these powers. Moreover, rural poverty appears more relevant when explaining the enduring nature of vote-buying in Thailand. Murray argues that *Isan* people perceive it as another source of household income during the election.⁶⁵ With regard to this matter, it can be argued that they vote for the candidate, who pays them, in order to show their loyalty, because they may hope for more money in the next election. Accordingly, in this context, concerns regarding *bab* are of little importance.

The structural and cultural factors in Thai society are perceived as crucial elements when analysing the problems, with respect to corruption and vote-buying in Thailand. These problems are very complicated, and the government believed that the solution should come from those at the grassroots of the societal structure. There were serious attempts to improve rural people’s lives through education and economic development in the rural areas. The government believes that improving the quality of people’s lives would lead to a reduction in corruption and vote-buying.

MacDonald is right to argue that the operation of money politics in Thailand is a result of its ineffective legal system and its informal networks.⁶⁶ However, after the introduction of the 1997 Constitution, the government launched many anti corruption and anti vote-buying schemes, including the NCCC, in an attempt to cleanse Thai politics of these problems. These schemes have been partially effective, for instance, in dealing with the case of the powerful politician Major-General Sanan Kachornprasart, the secretary-general of the Democratic Party and the Minister of Interior in the Chuan government of November 1997 – February 2001. In an investigation, he was found to have fabricated a

⁶⁴ Callahan, W. A. and McCargo, D. (1996), p.379

⁶⁵ Murray, D. (1996), pp.368-369

⁶⁶ MacDonald, S.B. (1998) ‘Transparency in Thailand’s 1997 Economic Crisis’, *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 7, July 1998: 688-702, p.692

45-million-baht loan in his ministerial declaration of assets and liabilities, by the Constitution Court working with the Election Commission and the NCCC. As a result of this investigation, on 10 August 2000 the Constitution Court reached a unanimous guilty verdict against Major-General Sanan, and forced him to suspend his political career for five years from 2000-2005, in accordance with the new election laws of the 1997 Constitution.⁶⁷ ‘This was the first time a minister had been forced out by legal process. And this is not any minister, but the second most powerful post in the cabinet, and the political manager of the ruling coalition. One Thai paper headlined the event as a “revolution”.’⁶⁸

Thai people are not without hope when contemplating the state of their country’s politics. They believe that that MPs are more likely than before to be the representatives of the people. However there are still politicians with vested interests due to embedded money politics and cronyism. Correspondingly, Montesano argues that the appointments to the cabinet in the Thaksin government, ‘signalled a continued reliance on the money politics of the recent past.’⁶⁹ The survival of money politics is undeniably a result of the hierarchical characteristic in Thai society, which enables the patronage system to operate effectively. According to Rose-Ackerman, the realm of vote-buying in money politics occurs when politicians accept illegal campaign contributions from supporters then use these contributions in order to pay off voters on an individual basis. ‘These systems are nominally democratic, but they have much in common with older traditions of patronage.’⁷⁰ Thus, social hierarchy and patronage are to be discussed in more detail in order to clarify their connections to corruption and vote-buying, which would help to explain the political weakness of Thai farmers considered in the thesis.

⁶⁷ *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 11 August 2000, at http://www.bangkokpost.net/110800/110800_News01.html Retrieved on 11 August 2000

⁶⁸ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (2000) *Thailand's Crisis*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, p.131

⁶⁹ Montesano, M.J. (2002) ‘Thailand in 2001: Learning to Live With Thaksin?’, *Asian Survey*, Vol. XLII, No. 1, January/February 2002: 90-99, p.91

3.4 Social Hierarchy and the Patronage System

In Thai political culture, socialization processes seem to instil faith in people. Thais have been taught to respect, obey, or trust persons according to their birth, age, and merit. Within the family, unquestionable deference is due in terms of relative age; outside, it is due in terms of age, nobility, wealth, power, knowledge, and religious or governmental position.⁷¹

This explanation typically reflects the interactions amongst individuals throughout everyday life in Thai society, in which the social hierarchy is clearly defined. The hierarchical characteristic is one of the main elements in Thai society, and its strong influence on the development of the Thai political culture is undeniable. Thinapan⁷² claims that traditional beliefs are extremely influential in contemporary Thai political life. An obedient society with clearly defined hierarchical relationships, generations of Thai people have been taught to respect those in a position of seniority, in terms of age, socio-economic status, social class and education. Therefore, electoral candidates who are supported by local leaders or *kamnan*, the schoolteacher, or the abbot of the local temple, are able to gain support from villagers.⁷³ This system is having an adverse impact on the development of the Thai political culture.

Historically, the intense social hierarchy is a result of the *sakdina* system in Thailand, which allow aristocrats and elite bureaucrats to maintain their superior status over ordinary Thais. Mark, notes that ‘The Sakdina system in Thailand was a system of social hierarchy in place officially until this century, with remnants still existing in different parts of contemporary Thai society.’⁷⁴ Although, the *sakdina* system does not formally exist in contemporary Thai politics, the patronage system can be perceived as a modern form of the traditional *sakdina* system. The patronage system reflects the vertical relationship of the Thai hierarchical structure, and in addition reflects the implication of

⁷⁰ Rose-Ackerman, S. (1999) *Corruption and Government: Causes, Consequences, and Reform*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.137

⁷¹ Thinapan Nakata (1987) ‘Political Culture: Problem of Development of Democracy’, in Somsakdi Xuto (ed) *Government and Politics in Thailand*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, p.181

⁷² Ibid., p.168

⁷³ Callahan, W. A. and McCargo, D. (1996), p.379

⁷⁴ Mark Tamthai (2001) ‘Thailand: Sakdina System and Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy’ at www.ahrchk.net/hrsolid/mainfile.php/1999vol09no6/1018/ Retrieved on 27 August 2002

inequality between actors in the patronage system, as experienced in the hierarchical structure.

Thailand has integrated itself into the world political and economic arenas, however social hierarchy still remains a crucial element. This enables the Thai political elite to maintain their political and economic privilege effectively. As Thinapan suggests, 'In the Thai system, the value of personal equality or egalitarianism tends to be absent and there is no institutionalized concept of individual rights.'⁷⁵ The concept of the Western democratic model offers human rights, which have not yet been incorporated in to the Thai case. Accordingly, this helps to explain the continuing adverse treatment of the rural farmers by government.

Prior to the student uprising of 1976, popular resistance against the state power was rarely seen. 'Thais react to leadership problems not with open resistance, but with passive evasion.'⁷⁶ This is the Thai cultural value of non-involvement. 'If, therefore, one finds the actions of officials oppressive, unjust, or lacking in legitimacy, would it not be better to sit back and ignore the problem than to become personally involved in a situation which could not help but be frustrating, humiliating, or costly?'⁷⁷

The traditional value of non-involvement combined with a politically unaware population continues to enhance the development of state-patronage. Rural people tend to oblige to the superiority of the elite, due to the difference in status. 'In the Thai bureaucracy, hierarchical relationships reach their climax in the form of authoritarian rule: 'A superior was entitled to defence and obedience; a subordinate was expected to defer and obey'.⁷⁸ Within the Thai bureaucratic system, Riggs affirms that 'Seniority, it is true, does provide a fundamental criterion for promotion.'⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Thinapan Nakata (1987), p.181

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.182

⁷⁷ Riggs, F. W. (1966), p.326

⁷⁸ Thinapan Nakata (1987), p.180

⁷⁹ Riggs, F. W. (1966),p.327

When seniority in status is considered to be such an important element in the bureaucratic system of promotion, the effectiveness of the Thai bureaucratic system is diminished. Since many bureaucrats judge by this criterion, a meritocracy for hard working people is discouraged. In the contemporary bureaucratic system seniority remains a significant factor in many government agencies. Seniority endorses all levels of patronage system, since senior and junior government officials seems can share reciprocal benefits. As patrons, senior officials are responsible for their junior clients, whilst junior clients tend to serve their patrons in order to gain favours. The patronage system not only exists within the bureaucratic system, as in addition it exists within most societal sectors.

The term ‘patronage system’ refers to the vertical reciprocal relationships between members of society, where patrons supervise clients under their patronage. The discussions, with regard to the patronage system in this section, will focus mainly on its connection to Thai politics. This is because ‘Thai politicians depend heavily on business support. Patronage politics, particularly in the countryside, boosts both political spending and cronyism mentality of asking favour from the powerful.’⁸⁰ Accordingly, Laird⁸¹ simply defines the patronage system as the formation of a network of influence, where money is utilised in order to gain business and political opportunity and in addition, to gain protection from unwelcome government intrusion.

Accordingly, the patronage system can be perceived as a main factor, with regard to the expanding money politics and level of corruption in Thailand. Money is not only used in order to gain admission to the channels of political access, as MPs spend large sums of money, with respect to their *hua khanaen* within the patronage networks, in order to obtain votes. More than 90 per cent of MPs would be voted into office by voters in the provinces, thus rural patronage networks were able to dominate the 1995 election.⁸² This suggests a strong connection between the patronage system and vote-buying in the Thai

⁸⁰ *Asiaweek*, 3 November 2000, p.49

⁸¹ Laird, J. (2000) *Money Politics, Globalisation, and Crisis: The Case of Thailand*, Singapore: Graham Brash, p.242

political culture, where politics is perceived to be a profitable investment by the involved actors, notably, politicians and their clients such as *hua khanaen*, businessmen and *jao pho*.

The existence of social hierarchy and patronage within the Thai political culture impacts adversely on the progress of the process of democratisation in Thailand. According to Laird, 'Patronage is anti-democratic. It distorts the development process. Decisions based on patronage often overlook better, more rational courses of action—and often result in more harm than good to the country and people.'⁸³ For this reason, it can be argued that the existences of both social hierarchy and the patronage system are largely responsible for the political weakness of Thai farmers. Accordingly, the study on farmers' political participation will not ignore these crucial features, in respect of the Thai political culture because they can provide some explanation, with regard to domestic impacts on Thai farmers' political participation.

3.5 Political Actors within the Thai Political Arena

As the role of the bureaucrats in Thai politics declined in the early 1980s, the power of successive Thai governments became stronger. The country's economic policy-making was firmly in the hands of government agencies, with advice and implementation from technocrats and businessmen. However the network of policy-making is not only confined to government agencies and their advisors. There are many other involved actors within the network of the policy-making process, including politicians and technocrats, academics, urban businessmen, military officials, trade unions, pressure groups, and foreign interests. These actors participate in economic policy-making through lobbying or exerting their influence either through the parliamentary system or through personal contacts.⁸⁴ This participation implies the distribution of power from the state to

⁸² Fairclough, G. (1995b) 'Rural Reality: Politicians Secure Votes With Money, Favours', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 29 June 1995, p.16

⁸³ Laird, J. (2000), p.241

⁸⁴ Pasuk Phongpaichit (1992), pp.422-423

other involved actors, through the development of a policy community for business interests.

3.5.1 The Military

The dominance of the military in Thai politics has been acknowledged by the Thai people since the military coup in 1932. Many studies of the Thai military power by academics such as Elliott⁸⁵, Suchit⁸⁶, and Pasuk and Baker⁸⁷, suggest that the substantial military assistance from the United States to Thailand during the Vietnam War, contributed to the complete dominance of the Thai military from the 1950s until the 1970s. Elliott portrays a clear picture of the political environment in Thailand at that time, that ‘the 1960’s and 1970’s, was characterized by the consolidation of the ruling class under military hegemony... and its connection with finance capital in the world capitalist. These developments emerged alongside the United States of America’s Military occupation of Thailand...’⁸⁸

As is represented in table 3-4, between 1950-1963 the U.S. military assistance to Thailand totalled US\$ 414,992,000, an average of US\$ 29,642,285 per year. The data in table 3-4 shows the contribution of the U.S. military to the labour market in rural areas of Thailand, particularly in the *Isan* region, where most U.S. troops were based. The income earned working for the U.S forces was of a different scale, when compared to those working in other sectors of Thai economy. Elliott notes that ‘a painter or truck driver could expect to earn up to 24,700 baht per year... Local wages in Korat⁸⁹ at that time were as low as 1,500 baht for six months.’⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Elliott, D. (1978) *Thailand: Origins of Military Rule*, London: Zed

⁸⁶ Suchit Bunbongkarn (1998) ‘The Military and Democracy in Thailand’, in May, R.J. and Selochan, V. (eds) *The Military and Democracy in Asia and the Pacific*, Bathurst: Crawford Housing Publishing

⁸⁷ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1999)

⁸⁸ Elliott, D. (1978), p.114

⁸⁹ Korat is the informal name of the province of Nakhon Ratchasima in *Isan* region

⁹⁰ Elliott, D. (1978), p.132

Table 3-4 U.S. Military Involvement in Thailand, 1950-1976

Year*	Number of Thai Nationals Employed by U.S. Forces	Number of U.S. Troops in Thailand	U.S. Foreign Military Sales to Thailand (thousands of dollars)	U.S. Military Assistance Programme to Thailand (thousands of dollars)
1	2	3	4	5
1950-63	n.a.	n.a.	1,215	414,992
1964	n.a.	n.a.	4	52,734
1965	n.a.	n.a.	2	35,224
1966	28,500	6,500	3	40,765
1967	30,300	34,400	12	43,077
1968	43,750	44,400	15	-
1969	37,100	47,600	-	-
1970	35,800	44,100	5	-
1971	32,300	36,100	13,724	-
1972	27,200	30,200	3,307	-
1973	31,000	43,500	5,981	10,364
1974	32,700	35,000	n.a.	n.a.
1975	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1976	[United States' military occupation of Thailand officially ended]			

*Refers to calendar year in columns 2 and 3; and fiscal year in columns 4 and 5
Source: Elliott, D. (1978), p.131

The U.S. military assistance made a considerable impact on both Thai society and military development, but benefited the military elite the most, due to the strengthened political power of the military elite through the military development of the armed forces. As Suchit argues that 'During the 1950s and 1960s civilian political forces were unorganized, fragile and unable to challenge the military... The modernization and strengthening of the armed forces has led only to an increase in the political power of the military elite, strengthening their advantage in the struggle for state power.'⁹¹ Indeed, this helps to explain how the military elite was able to abuse the state power effectively, which allowed them to thrive in the Thai political arena throughout the 1950s and until the 1970s.

During the administration of Prime Minister, General Kriangsak Chomanan during the period of November 1977 – February 1980 was in power, he was also the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Ramsay argues that 'One of his major tasks

⁹¹ Suchit Bunbongkarn (1998), p.51

during 1978 was to develop a stronger base of support in the armed forces... Kriangsak approved a 15.8% increase in military spending in 1979 and emphasized that government would give first priority to military security.' In fact, he did not only strengthen his power within the military, as he also extended his political connections with businessmen and the bureaucracy.⁹² This can be argued as being the origin of the intense involvement of businessmen entrepreneurs and technocrats in the Thai political arena from the 1980s onwards.

High-ranking military officials have always tried to play an important role in the network of the policy-making process, in order to defend the interests of the military. It is widely believed that the secret military budget has been accessed to contribute to the assets of many high-ranking military officials. According to Pasuk and Baker, 'the military's main source of funds for enrichment and political investments came from the secret fund and from commission on arms purchases.'⁹³ Previously, in the early 1980s the Thai military had challenged the network of the policy-making process in order to defend the size of the military budget and to defend specific military interests. This was most evident after the United States' military reduced financial support to the Thai army in the mid 1970s, and the Thai military forces experienced in their opinion, insufficient financial support as a result.⁹⁴

The most recently experienced explicit military sanction of the Thai political system was the coup d'état of 13 February 1991, led by the NPKC with accusations of massive levels of government corruption.⁹⁵ The people were reluctant to accept the coup d'état regardless of the massive corruption of the Chatichai government, because they wanted the democratic process to be allowed to resolve such problems. Subsequently, the leaders of the coup d'état invited a well-known businessman and former civil servant Anand Panyarachun, to form an interim government, formed on 2 March 1991, and a

⁹² Ramsay, A. (1979) 'Thailand 1978: Kriangsak—The Thai Who Binds', *Asian Survey*, Vol. XIX, No. 2, February 1979: 104-114, p 104 and p.106

⁹³ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1999), p.350

⁹⁴ Pasuk Phongpaichit (1992), p.422

⁹⁵ Khien Theeravit (1997) *Thailand in Crisis: A Study of the Political Turmoil of May 1992*, Bangkok: Thailand Research Found and Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, p.6

general election was arranged for 22 March 1992, later won by the Samakkitham Party, who were pro-military. They then invited General Suchinda Kraprayoon, one of the coup d'état's leaders, to be Prime Minister. This provoked many people, especially university students and the urban middle-class, and then developed into a violent confrontation between the military and the people. The Thai economy itself was affected, when a military crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators left at least fifty people dead on the streets of Bangkok and hundreds more missing.⁹⁶

More violence was averted when the King intervened and Prime Minister Suchinda resigned. Afterwards, many high-ranking military officers came out to announce that the military should withdraw from the political arena to allow the elected politicians to deal with the country's political and economic problems.⁹⁷ The subsequent lower profile of the military allowed the country's process of democratisation continue more smoothly. Suchit Bunbongkarn⁹⁸ argues that in contemporary Thai politics, the military is more responsive to the democratic norms, and evidence suggests that they are leaving behind their corrupt practices and involvement in business. Troop numbers and military expenditure have been reduced significantly.

However, this could be too optimistic a view, with regard to the political role of the military at the present day. The connections between the Thaksin government and the military elite fails to support Suchit's argument. In the Thaksin government, General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, the Minister of Defence, is in the cabinet in order to represent the military's interests. He approved three big budget military projects worth a total of 1,037,760,519 baht, (US\$ 25,944,013, at 40 baht per US\$ 1) suspiciously perhaps, whilst the Prime Minister was on a working trip aboard. The media questioned the transparency of these projects at the time.⁹⁹ This scenario can be viewed as a normal phenomenon in Thai politics, where the elite can further their own interests.

⁹⁶ Webb, J. (1992) *Country in Brief: Thailand September 1992*, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Canberra, ACT, 2600, p.8

⁹⁷ Murray, D. (1996), pp.361-362

⁹⁸ Tasker, R. (1999) 'Military Make-Over', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 November 1999, p.28

⁹⁹ *Matichon* (Internet Edition), 21 November 2001 at

www.matichon.co.th/mc_news.asp?nfile=p0103211144&sele.. Retrieved on 21 November 2001

3.5.2 The Businessmen

The economic downturn resulting from the May unrest of 1992 led to a considerable increase in the role of businessmen and the urban middle-class within Thai politics. These groups have promoted themselves, both directly and indirectly, in order to more fully participate within the network of the policy-making process. Almost all of the leading political parties have persuaded well-educated businessmen to join them. The elections of July 1995 were notable, with many wealthy businessmen running as candidates, for instance Amnuay Viravan, who formed his own party, the Nam Thai (Thai Leadership) Party, or NTP. Notably, Thaksin Shinawatra, the telecommunications tycoon, was invited to be the leader of the Palang Dharma Party, in place of its founder Chamlong Srimuang in order to promote the party's image more effectively.¹⁰⁰

Thaksin first ran for election as an MP in 1995, becoming the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of Bangkok's traffic and transportation¹⁰¹, in the Banharn Government of July 1995 – September 1996. He promised to solve Bangkok's traffic problems within six months or resign his position. However, he did not solve these problems and neither did he resign. Although Thaksin was initially unsuccessful in terms of his political career, this was not something that he would abandon. In July 1998 he founded his own party, Thai Rak Thai (TRT). It is true that Thaksin is a very successful entrepreneur, but nevertheless, many academics still have doubts as to whether he can successfully apply his manifest business talent to the country's administration.

Regardless, Thaksin has had a very high profile in Thai politics since 1998. This high profile was reinforced by the landslide victory of his TRT party in the general election of 6 January 2001. The TRT gained 248 out of 500 seats in the House of Representatives.¹⁰² The success of the TRT in this election owes much to the TRT's agricultural policy, namely the 'one village one million baht', or village fund project; the

¹⁰⁰ Murray, D. (1996), p.365

¹⁰¹ Thai Government Official Website, at www.thaigov.go.th/general/cabin/thaksin-e.htm Retrieved on 7 February 2003

moratorium of farmers' debt for three years; and 'thirty baht for all medical treatment'. 'Mr. Thaksin knows he has to keep the countryside happy' emphasise Pasuk and Baker.¹⁰³ Rural farmers see the TRT as a new hope in terms of Thai agricultural development. This hope and expectation is based on an only limited knowledge of Thaksin's business successfulness. It is accepted that as successful businessman of a new generation, Thaksin became a hero to many Thai people.

When considering the role of businessmen in the economic policy-making process, it is important to examine the significant role of the Chinese-Thai, since they have already proved themselves to be frequently successful, with reference to their business interests. Dixon suggests that 'The Chinese community in Thailand was well established in the early nineteenth century and exercised a considerable measure of control over trade and non-agricultural production.'¹⁰⁴ According to Akira¹⁰⁵, in the early 1950s Chinese-Thai families formed the most substantial business empires in Thailand. With reference to this, the political patronage of the elite military officials contributed substantially to the success of the Chinese-Thai. This understanding helps to reveal a long history, with regard to the development of the patronage system within the Thai political arena, a form of relationship, which allowed involved actors to abuse the state power for their own interests. The protection provided by the military elite has been a persuasive factor, with regard to the political participation of Chinese-Thai businessmen, in order to protect and ensure their interests. However, there is no evidence to suggest that a form of policy community was established between Chinese-Thai businessmen and government. Rather, the relationship only amounted to a loosely based network, which was bonded by the patronage system without the involvement of representative organisations. From 1970s until the economic crisis of 1997, it was estimated that 50 Chinese-Thai families dominantly controlled most of Thailand's wealth. After the crisis, a number of Chinese-

¹⁰² Divjak, C. and Symonds, P. (2001) 'New Thai Cabinet Loaded with Businessmen, Bureaucrats and Ex-generals', at www.wsws.org/articles/2001/feb2001/thai-f20.shtml Retrieved on 16 May 2002

¹⁰³ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (2001) 'To Understand Thaksin's Rise, Consider How Thais See Him', *International Herald Tribune*, 20-21 January 2001, p.10

¹⁰⁴ Dixon, C. (1999a) *The Thai Economy: Uneven Development and Industrialisation*, London: Routledge, p.65

¹⁰⁵ Akira, S. (1996), p.138

Thai families have dramatically dropped to four or five families, which are still able to control the big business.¹⁰⁶

Table 3-5 Businessmen in Thai cabinets, 1963-1986

Prime Minister	Beginning Date of Cabinet	Number of Businessmen	Per cent	Total
Sarit	Feb. 1963*	0	0.0	14
Thanom I	Dec. 1968*	1	5.6	18
Thanom II	Mar. 1969	1	4.0	25
Sanya I	Oct. 1973	4	14.3	28
Sanya II	May. 1974	3	9.7	31
Seni	Feb. 1975	8	16.7	30
Kukrit	Mar. 1975	16	59.3	27
Seni	Apr. 1976	11	35.5	31
Thanin	Oct. 1976	1	5.0	17
Kriangsak I	Nov. 1977	2	6.1	33
Kriangsak II	May. 1979	9	20.9	43
Kriangsak III	Feb. 1980	5	13.2	38
Prem I	Mar. 1980	17	45.9	37
Prem II	Jan. 1981	12	30.0	40
Prem III	Dec. 1981	17	41.5	41
Prem IV	May. 1983	21	47.7	44
Prem V	Aug. 1986	21	47.7	44

Source: Anek Laothamatas (1988), p.454

* The dates for the first two entries in table 3-5 appear to contradict the data provided on the official Thai Government website, www.thaigov.go.th/general/prime/preprime_e.htm Retrieved on 23 August 2002

As the data represented in table 3-5 shows, businessmen's participation within the Thai political arena has grown at a fluctuating rate, since the beginning of the first government of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn. The role of the businessmen has been regarded as a positive contribution by successive Thai governments. The business groups did not emerge as interest groups, attempting only to influence government, but moreover they behaved as an equal partner, which the government must take into account. Accordingly, they were able to participate more effectively within the Thai political arena. With reference to the data in table 3-5, by the time of the Prem IV and

¹⁰⁶ Crispin, S.W. (2000b) 'Election Trade-off', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 28 December 2000-4 January 2001, p.18

Prem V governments, almost half of the ministers in the cabinets were well-known businessmen.

More recent data is not currently available, however information from the Thai parliament provides a brief personal background of individual Thai ministers. This data indicates that the profiles indicating towards the involvement of businessmen have not greatly changed in these intervening years. In summary, during the periods of Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan (April 1988 – May 1991), Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun (February 1991 – April 1992), Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon (April 1992 – May 1992), Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai (September 1992 – July 1995, and November 1997 – November 2000), Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-archa (July 1995 – November 1996), Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh (November 1996 – November 1997), and Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (February 2001 – present) the number of businessmen in the cabinets varied between 30-45 per cent.¹⁰⁷

During the first government of Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanond between March 1980 – March 1983, a policy alliance between government and businessmen was established. According to Pasuk and Baker, many well-known Bangkok businessmen were elected in the general election of 1980 and became major actors in the Prem government, such as Boonchu Rojanasathien, the third president of Bangkok Bank between 1977-1980, from the Social Action Party. ‘Boonchu proclaimed that ‘we should co-operate between private and government to become one’.’¹⁰⁸ This resulted in more effective and efficient co-operation between policy-makers and businessmen. The organisation that represents the interests of businessmen is the Joint Public Private Consultative Committee (JPPCC). The JPPCC was launched on 30 June 1981, and aimed to solve the economic problems resulting from the oil crisis and economic recession of 1979-1980.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Office of the Prime Minister (2001) *Prawat nayokrattamontri (The Biography of the Thai Prime Ministers)*, Bangkok: Office of the Prime Minister

¹⁰⁸ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1999), pp.149-150

¹⁰⁹ Manoot Watanakomen (1989) *Joint Public and Private Consultative Committee: The Study of its Management*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI] [in Thai], p.1

According to Manoot¹¹⁰, during the initiation of the JPPCC, Thailand was facing both domestic and external problems, notably the increase in competition from the world market, problems with regard to agricultural productivity, and bureaucratic procedures which were incompatible with the country's business development. These factors pressed the government to initiate the JPPCC, in order to enhance economic development through its programme of industrialisation. Moreover, it can be argued that the JPPCC was initiated because of a reciprocal relationship, which involved the resource dependency of government and access to the businessmen.

Box 3-1 The Joint Public Private Consultative Committee

Administrative Structure	
1.	National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB)-Secretariat department of the JPPCC
2.	Ministry of Interior- taking care of the JPPCC at the Provincial Level.
3.	The Thai Chamber of Commerce
4.	The Association of Thai Industries
5.	The Thai Banker Association
Committees	
1.	Prime Minister (Chair)
2.	Ministers of Finance
3.	Minister of Agriculture and Co-operative
4.	Minister of Commerce
5.	Minister of Industry
6.	Minister of Communications
7.	Minister to the Prime Minister's Office
8.	Deputy Minister of Communications
9.	Representative from the Secretariat of the Prime Minister
10.	Representative from The Thai Chamber of Commerce
11.	Representative from The Association of Thai Industries
12.	Representative from The Thai Banker Association
Source: Summarised from Manoot Watanakomen (1989), pp.55-60, and Appendix 1	

According to the data represented in Box 3-1, there are no representatives of farmers in the JPPCC, and there have never been, since its inception. This neglect of farmers' representation is a result of the emphasis placed on the policy of industrialisation in the 1980s. As a direct result, the policy community has been limited to those involved in the business sector. The relationship between the government and businessmen was

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.10

directly consolidated through the function of the JPPCC. During monthly meetings of the JPPCC chaired by the Prime Minister, business groups were able to share their views with the most senior of officials. At this point, Muscat notes, 'It was understood that the JPPCC was not to be used for lobbying related to the interests of any individual company. Only matters of general public or business interest would be discussed.'¹¹¹ However, evidence suggests that the JPPCC acted as a conduit for business demands on the government. The businessmen then enjoyed the opportunity to lobby for favourable policy outcomes through the JPPCC. However, the JPPCC also helped the Prem governments to gain fundamental support, with regard to both political liberalisation and economic reform during the 1981-1984 period.¹¹² The JPPCC has been effective, with regard to providing useful and welcome advice to successive governments. Moreover, much of the advice of the JPPCC has been enacted into law.¹¹³

Anek views an attempt to institutionalise the relationship between government and businessmen by the initiation of the JPPCC as a corporatist arrangement. He argues that 'Rather than playing a minimal role, the government has been active in the creation of the JPPCCs and the promotion of peak business organizations and provincial chamber of commerce.'¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, Anek accepts that the JPPCC cannot represent the ideal model for corporatism.¹¹⁵ As he identifies, that,

However, unlike the extreme case of state corporatism, business persons and firms are not required by law to join any trade association, and associations in turn are not required to join any higher-level or apex organization. There is not limitation the number of trade associations as there is for chambers of commerce, and a particular trade or industry is allowed to have more than one representative association.¹¹⁶

Also intriguing—as the national JPPCC has been accepted by the government as the most important and most regularized top-level channel of communication with the business sector—is in fact that the government has in effect accorded the most important peak status to the three associations represented on the JPPCC instead of to the Board of

¹¹¹ Muscat, R.J. (1994) *The Fifth Tiger: A Study of Thai Development Policy*, New York: M.E. Shape and United Nations University Press, p.183

¹¹² Haggard, S.M. (1998), p.91

¹¹³ Pasuk Phongpaichit (1992), p.423

¹¹⁴ Anek Laothamatas (1992) *Business Associations and the New Political Economy of Thailand From bureaucratic Polity to Liberal Corporatism*, Boulder: Westview Press, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies [ISEAS], p.154

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.92

¹¹⁶ Anek Laothamatas (1988), pp.463-464

Trade. This is so even through two of these peak organizations—the Thai Bankers and the Association of Thai Industries—are no more than normal trade associations, enjoying not statutory status as peak bodies at all. The crucial point here is that the government has allowed the emergence of unofficial peak bodies and a relatively free competition among several peaks.¹¹⁷

This evidence suggests that the notion of policy community can provide a better explanation than that of the corporatist model in this case, because it provides a more flexible framework to explain the relationship between the government and interest group. This is because there is free competition between actors within the framework. In addition, Thai businessmen do not only assert their political power at the ministerial level. Some of them have shown an interest in direct political participation at all levels of the government bureaucracy, and this in turn has enabled them to develop several policy communities.

A study by Anusorn, with reference to political business cycles in Thailand, shows that a significant number of businessmen contested for seats in the House of Representatives between 1986-1992 and since then, the numbers have increased steadily. According to table 3-6 in the general elections of July 1986, 630 or 16.50 per cent of electoral candidates from a total of 3,813, were businessmen. By the general elections of March 1992, the number of candidates who were businessmen had almost doubled since 1986. This figure of 1,149 from a total of 2,851 candidates, equated to 40.30 per cent. They were the largest group in these elections, with 165 seats. Since 1986, businessmen have gained the most representation in parliament of all occupational groups. A significant number of businessmen MPs affirm strong links with business groups, within the economic policy network. Accordingly, business interests are secured by their political strength. Thus, Anusorn's comment on the relationship between businessmen and vote-buying, with reference to the elections of September 1996 is justified. 'As the biggest and usually richest group of candidates, businessmen were likely to spend more than any other groups on vote buying'.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.464

¹¹⁸ Anusorn Limmanee (1999) *Political Business Cycles in Thailand, 1979-1992: General Election and Currency in Circulation*, Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, p.81

**Table 3-6 Electoral Candidates and MPs by Occupation,
1986-1992 Dates of General Elections**

Occupation	July 27, 1986		July 24, 1988		March 22, 1992		September 13, 1992	
	Candidates	MPs	Candidates	MPs	Candidates	MPs	Candidates	MPs
Businessmen	630	86	661	132	1149	165	1006	129
Govt. officials	277	24	238	42	282	40	186	27
Lawyers	436	32	527	43	281	37	261	34
Politicians	96	41	167	72	179	70	267	133
Farmers	288	12	380	23	335	10	239	11
Private Employees	588	8	660	4	411	10	370	6
Others	1041	103	891	35	214	28	88	20
No Information	438	41	88	6	-	--	-	--
Total	3813	347	3612	357	2851	360	2417	360

Source: Anusorn Limmanee (1999), p.80

In the early 1990s, the role of the JPPCC in government policy-making was diminished.¹¹⁹ However the fading influence of the JPPCC does not suggest a decline in the strength of the relationship between government and businessmen. This is because the patronage system in Thailand provided a favourable political environment, in which businessmen developed a new policy community. As experienced, with regard to the Thaksin government, the absence of the JPPCC has not affected the relative political power of urban businessmen. Crispin claims that ‘Plenty of people with their big-business interests have queued up behind Thaksin.’¹²⁰ Indeed, the Thaksin cabinet features many leading businessmen. For instance, the Minister of Industry Suriya Jungrungreangkit is a millionaire car parts dealer, and a Minister of Transport and Communications Pracha Maleenont is a senior executive of media group BEC World. In addition, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Labour and Social Welfare Dej Boon-Long is a textile tycoon, and the Minister of Commerce Adisai Bodharamik is heavily involved in the telecommunications business.¹²¹ In addition to Thaksin, these men have been major financial contributors to the TRT election campaign. As Greenwald argues, ‘Large

¹¹⁹ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1997) ‘Power in Transition: Thailand in the 1990s’, in Hewison, K. (ed) *Political Change in Thailand: Democracy and Participation*, London: Routledge, p.28

¹²⁰ Crispin, S.W. (2001) ‘Old Boys’ Reunion’, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 18 January 2001, p.20

¹²¹ *Daily News*, 18 February 2001 [in Thai]

business often see campaign financing as a buffer to protect themselves against government action. “It is not so much that we want something done *for* us, as that we want to avoid having something done *to* us.”...¹²²

The significant number of businessmen within the Thaksin government confirms the continued development of businessmen’s political participation, through the patronage system. The Thai government has been very supportive of businessmen’s participation within Thai politics. But conversely, a supportive state role, with respect to the political participation of rural people, is seldom evidenced in Thailand. Although Prapat Panyachatiraksa, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives in the Thaksin government, has described himself as a farmer, he should be categorised differently to the majority of small-scale farmers in Thailand. Instead, he should be defined as an agri-businessman.

The deficiency of active political participation by Thai farmers and Thai farmers groups has only resulted in unfavourable treatment by successive governments. Most policies issued by businessmen-ministers favour the industrial sector, in order to advance their own interests, whilst ignoring the agricultural sector. This is evidenced in a statement by Jayasankar Shivakumar of the Bangkok office of the World Bank, who claimed that ‘cabinet posts were used to served the vested interest of politicians to repay favours and feed patronage network instead of national development.’¹²³ Indeed, while the development of the agricultural sector has been addressed through the NESD plans, which were established in 1961, this has not been translated in practice. This is in part, because Thai farmers have insufficient power to influence the Thai government in order to issue policies in their interest, especially when compared to the power of the businessmen to influence industrial policy.

¹²² Greenwald, C. S. (1977), p.144

¹²³ Crispin, S.W. and Vatikiotis, M. (2000) ‘A Moment of Truth For Democracy’, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 November 2000, p.19

3.5.3 The Technocrats

The role of the Thai technocrats has developed alongside the institutions of modern economic management, namely, the establishment of the Bank of Thailand in the early 1940s, and the formation of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) in 1959. In the early years after the formation of these two important economic development institutions, the technocrats' roles were only typical of technicians and supporting experts. Nevertheless, during the 1970s, the Thai technocrats began to develop their roles. The emergence of a new generation of technocrats, who were educated and trained overseas, particularly in the United States and Japan, provided a wider perspective, with regard to the economy and its potential.¹²⁴ With the decline of the power of the bureaucrats, the technocrats were then better able to play a more important role within the economic policy-making process of Thailand.

Bowie and Unger note that 'under Prime Minister Prem, technocrats were able to increase their control over macroeconomic policymaking.'¹²⁵ The role of Thai technocrats had been reinforced during the Prem governments of the 1980s. This happened because Prem recognised the benefits in utilising the technocrats and businessmen to participate within the economic policy-making process, with the Thai government's recognition of the successes of the four 'Asian Tigers' of South-Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Pasuk and Baker¹²⁶ assert that the dramatic economic transition of the 1980s, led to the strengthening of the relationship between the technocrats and urban businessmen. They acted together to accelerate the change of economic strategy towards the model of the 'Asian Tigers'. This development greatly boosted the role of the technocrats, whose skills were needed in order to supervise the changing direction of Thai economic development. This in turn led to the hiring of technocrats by many large firms, in order to strengthen their relationships with the government and to gain access to the channels of

¹²⁴ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1997), pp.26-27

¹²⁵ Bowie, A. and Unger, D. (1997) *The Politics of Open Economies: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.143

¹²⁶ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1997), p.27

political power. It can be argued that the role of technocrats during the Prem era was hugely influential on economic policy-making outcomes.

Although the role of technocrats and businessmen fluctuated in the 1990s, they are still a crucial element in terms of Thai economic development. Ammar¹²⁷ notes that the power of the high profile technocrats in the Bangkok of Thailand was terminated in 1997. Interestingly, businessmen appear to cope with the changing nature of Thai politics better than most technocrats do. This could be perceived to be a result of the reciprocal interests of elite politicians and businessmen. Consequently, they have to maintain their connections in order to secure their interests. The World Bank argues that having only a small number of technocrats within the network of the policy-making process enables corruption to operate. Accordingly, the World Bank has suggested that the Thai government should hire more technocrats from outside the bureaucracy, in order to improve strategic planning at cabinet-level.¹²⁸ Similarly, Ammar¹²⁹ urges Thai technocrats to increase their political role today, in order to balance the state's power.

The Thaksin government explicitly argues for a limited role for technocrats. Prime Minister Thaksin is easily irritated by academic critiques on his economic and social developmental policies. Thaksin defines such critiques from Ammar Siamwalla, a prominent economist of the TDRI and other academics as unconstructive criticism, which has a negative psychological impact on the Thai people and foreign investors alike.¹³⁰ In addition, Thaksin has also attacked both the domestic and international media for their negative criticisms of his policy strategies. Indeed, the Nation Multimedia Groups had its army-owned radio frequency license withdrawn, after it criticised Thaksin and his government.¹³¹ Shawn Crispin and Rodney Tasker, of the "Far Eastern Economic

¹²⁷ *Matichon* (Internet Edition), 28 July 2002, at www.matichon.co.th Retrieved on 28 July 2002

¹²⁸ Crispin, S.W. and Vatikiotis, M. (2000), p.19

¹²⁹ *Matichon* (Internet Edition), 28 July 2002

¹³⁰ Sukanya Lim (2001) 'Economic Debate: Ammar Takes Vow of Silence', in *The Nation* (Internet Edition), 19 November 2001, at www.nationmultimedia.com/page.news.php3?clid=2&theme=A&usrsess= Retrieved on 19 November 2001

¹³¹ www.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/03/06/thailand.media/index.html Retrieved on 10 March 2002

Review”, had their Thai visas revoked, as a result of publishing articles on businesses run by Thaksin’s family and other articles concerning the Thai royal family.¹³²

When Thai governments have acted with excessive power over society, and have limited the active participation of other involved actors within the democratic process, the development of civil society and consequently that of democracy has been threatened, and the introduction of the 1997 Constitution did not prevent this from happening. Civil society must be able to operate freely without government interference, in order to balance the power of the government. Although the civil society framework recognises technocrats and farmers groups as a part of civil society, these two groups are in fact, politically and economically unequal. Technocrats are academic and well-educated people, while most Thai farmers have had little opportunity, with respect to their education. Yet, the government is able to challenge the political participation of the technocrats whose position is stronger than that of the farmers. Due to their lack of political influence, it may be argued as to whether there can be any chance for farmers to challenge the state power.

3.5.4 The Thai Farmers

One common explanation to why Thai farmer-organisations, such as agricultural co-operatives and farmer-groups, often fail is that the internal structure of the organisations has not been working effectively. Farmers have lacked a sense of belonging to the organisation, there has been no element of control on the part of the members, and consequently it has been possible for corrupt leaders to remain in charge. A contributing explanation is that the state has been too authoritarian in its attempt to promote and support the organisations.¹³³

This experience is a result of highly individualistic character of Thais and their cultural attitude of non-involvement. As a result, there are not many examples of farmers groups that operate continuously, over time. In Thailand, Thinapan claims that ‘Group action occurs mainly in the form of informal, spontaneous, and cooperative associations

¹³²www.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/02/26/thailand.journos/index.html Retrieved on 10 March 2002

and it disappears as soon as the immediate objective has been achieved.’¹³⁴ However, the lack of a sense of belonging is not the main reason to explain the failure of the Thai farmers groups, as the role of the state must also be taken into account.

In this regard the state is seen as the main obstacle, with respect to farmer group formation. Historical evidence reveals the existence of the Farmers’ Federation of Thailand (FFT). The FFT played a crucial role in accelerating the political participation of farmers. It was the first organised farmers representative group in Thailand, and was established after the first gathering of Thai farmers at Sanam-Luang in Bangkok, on 19 November 1974. 1,200 farmers from the midland, northern, and *Isan* regions were present, and the demonstration aimed to pressure the Sanya government to take serious action, with respect to farmers’ problems, including issues regarding rice prices, land and debt.¹³⁵

The FFT emerged at a time when communism was developing across Asia. In Thailand, the government attempted to suppress the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) through the Anti-Communist Act, during the late 1950s and early 1960s.¹³⁶ The United States also supported the anti-Communist campaign in Thailand, by providing financial support to the Thai military. The government was suspicious of the FFT, believing that they were influenced and supported by communist groups, from both inside and outside of Thailand. They specifically accused members of the FFT of being communists, or of supporting the movement of the CPT. For instance, Sithon Yotkantha, a Vice President of the FFT, was accused of being a communist and was assassinated.¹³⁷ The FFT existed for

¹³³ Örnberg, L. (1999) ‘Potato Farmers’ Organisation in Thailand: A discussion on the prerequisites of the formation and survival of farmer-organisations’, paper presented to the 7th International Conference on Thai Studies (4-8 July 1999), University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, p.2

¹³⁴ Thinapan Nakata (1987), p.185

¹³⁵ Nitirat Sapsomboon (1999) ‘Kwampenma lea prawat phunum sahaphan chaorai chaona heang prathet Thai (The Legacy and Biography of Leaders of the Farmers’ Federation of Thailand)’, in Naruemon Thabchumpon and Nitirat Sapsomboon (eds) *Senthang Chaona Thai Rumlueg 25 Pee Sahaphan Chaona Chaorai Haeng Prathet Thai (The Road of Thai Farmers: Memorable 25 Years of the Farmers’ Federation of Thailand)*, Bangkok: Sumnugpim Mulanithi Deg (Children Foundation Printing) and Sumnugpim Mulanithi Komolkeemthong (Komolkeemthong Foundation Printing), pp.139-140

¹³⁶ Morell, D. and Chai-Anan Samudavanija (1979) ‘Thailand’s Revolutionary Insurgency: Changes in Leadership Potential’, *Asian Survey*, Vol. XIX, No. 4, April 1979: 315-332, p.316

¹³⁷ Morell, D. and Chai-Anan Samudavanija (1979), pp.323-324

only five years, and the end of the federation's activities came with the murder of their last leader, Jamras Muangyarm. Forty-eight FFT leaders were assassination targets. A total of 33 leaders were reported killed, five disappeared and all of the remainder were injured in assassination attempts.¹³⁸ This episode has had a significant impact on the organisation of Thai farmers since then, and many have feared joining farmers groups because of the potential threat of state oppression.

**Table 3-7 Occupational Distribution in the House of Representatives
During the Period of 1933-1992 (per cent)**

Date of Election	Business	Bureaucrats & Retired Bureaucrats	Lawyers	Farmers	Other
Nov. 15, 1933	19.2	34.6	26.9	10.3	9.0
Nov. 7, 1937	19.8	51.7	16.5	5.5	6.5
Nov. 12, 1938	22.0	39.6	16.5	7.7	14.2
Jan. 6, 1946	20.8	44.8	17.7	7.3	9.4
Aug. 5, 1946	11.0	61.0	18.3	4.9	4.8
Jan. 29, 1948	22.2	34.4	28.3	6.1	9.0
Jun. 5, 1949	33.3	19.1	28.6	4.8	14.2
Feb. 26, 1952	20.3	27.7	35.8	3.3	12.9
Feb. 25, 1957	26.3	28.8	27.5	6.9	10.5
Dec. 15, 1957	27.5	26.3	23.1	8.1	14.0
Feb. 10, 1969	45.7	20.6	16.0	5.5	12.2
Jan. 26, 1975	34.6	12.3	17.5	8.6	27.0
Apr. 4, 1976	29.4	22.2	11.8	5.7	32.9
Apr. 22, 1979	37.2	18.4	13.6	8.6	22.2
Apr. 18, 1983	38.3	10.2	10.2	4.3	37.0
Jul. 27, 1986	24.8	6.9	9.2	3.5	55.6
July 24, 1988*	37.0	11.8	12.0	6.4	32.8
March 22, 1992*	45.8	11.1	10.3	2.8	30.0
September 13, 1992*	35.8	7.5	9.4	3.1	44.2

Source: Anek Laothamatas (1988), p.454

* Updated information from Anusorn Limmanee (1999), p.80

According to the statistical data of table 3-7, farmers have always been under-represented in the country's policy-making process. From 1933 and 1992, farmers' representatives in the House of Representatives fluctuated between 10.3 and 2.8 per cent, a figure which has steadily declined. These figures are low when compared to the contribution of farmers, with respect to the country's labour force, an average of more

¹³⁸ *The Nation* (Internet Edition), 16 August, 1999,
<http://202.44.251.4/nationnews/1999/199908/19990816/48161.html> Retrieved on 16 August, 1999

than 50 per cent between 1981-1995.¹³⁹ With the result of the election of March 1992, after the coup d'état in 1991 by the NPKC, farmers only accounted for 2.8 per cent of seats, while businessmen won a substantial 45.8 per cent of seats. The contribution of farmers to the country's labour force was as high as 59.88 per cent over this period, and many had expected a move towards a greater representation for farmers, in the wake of the military coup. Moreover, the May Unrest of 1992, which academics have perceived to be a catalyst for the development of civil society at that time, did not have a substantial impact on the voting behaviour of the Thai people. The overall result was almost a repeat pattern, with only a slight change in the overall numbers. Farmer representatives gained only 11 of the 360 seats in the House of Representatives,¹⁴⁰ or only 3.1 per cent. At the same time, businessmen gained 35.8 per cent. With only a small share of the vote, farmer representatives were therefore not able to defend farmer's interests through the policy-making process. Furthermore, the limited number of the farmer representatives in the House of Representatives can also be blamed on the Thai legal system, which makes the condition that MP candidates must at least hold a university degree.

The political participation of Thai farmers had been declining since the assassinations of the leaders of the FFT, when in 1992, a group of small-scale farmers in the provinces of the *Isan* region organised themselves as the Isan Assembly of Small-scale Farmers, and other farmers' organisations were formed subsequently.¹⁴¹ In 1995 the Assembly of the Poor was formed, in order to fight against the suffering of the poor, and specifically to fight against the negative effects of the dam projects in the *Isan* region. The emergence of the Assembly of the Poor illustrates an impressive example of group formation for poor rural people. Nevertheless, it cannot be perceived to be representative of farmers across Thailand, because most of the Assembly of the Poor's members are *Isan* people who have suffered the most from government action and inaction. Consequently, they were therefore motivated to establish their own assembly, in order to improve their collective power, since the founders of the Assembly of the Poor came to

¹³⁹ See Table 5-1 in Chapter 5

¹⁴⁰ Anusorn Limmanee (1999), p.80

¹⁴¹ *The Nation* (Internet Edition), 16 August, 1999, at

<http://202.44.251.4/nationnews/1999/199908/19990816/48161.html> Retrieved on 16 August, 1999

believe that collective action would achieve more than individual action. As Olson¹⁴² has argued, a number of individuals with a common interest or sharing a single purpose or objective can only advance that interest effectively, through collective action. Unorganised action will not enable them to advance their common interest, as only collective action through organisation, will allow individuals to advance their collective or common interest.

The emergence of the Assembly of the Poor has brought Thai Politics into a new era. It has helped to promote the level of political awareness, with respect to the poor, and has encouraged them to participate in the Thai political system more enthusiastically than in the past. It is clear that the Assembly of the Poor will fight for the rights of farmers and rural people, and increase the benefits to them. In order to help to achieve this goal, the assembly has been convincing both its members and potential members to join together, in order to increase their collective bargaining power. They now realise that otherwise, the government will not respond to their demands, and their problems will never be addressed satisfactorily.¹⁴³

The existence of the Assembly of the Poor within the Thai political arena and its achievement in improving the general awareness of the needs of rural communities has not yet been translated into effective change, significantly changing rural people's lives. Whilst rural people's demands are now starting to be heard, a positive effect from the government is rare. The demands of the Assembly of the Poor range from social welfare for farmers and the wider public, to compensation for those displaced by government projects and establishment of village development funds.¹⁴⁴ The ineffectiveness of the Assembly of the Poor is in part, a consequence of the negative way in which the government continues to view them. Crispin has argued that 'Many government officials continue to view rural protests with suspicion, either as politically motivated or as

¹⁴² Olson, M. (1971), p.1-7

¹⁴³ *The Nation* (Internet Edition), 10 December 1997 at <http://202.44.251.4/nationnews/1997/199712/19971210/19744.html> Retrieved on 18 March 1998

¹⁴⁴ Asiaweek, at www.cnn.com/ASIANOW/asiaweek/07/1128/cs4.html Retrieved on 15 July 1999

opportunistic attempts to wrest funds from state coffers.’¹⁴⁵ Correspondingly, the government remains reluctant to respond positively to the demands the Assembly of the Poor, and farmers more generally.

Many protests by farmers, which take place in Bangkok, appear to achieve government promises to intervene, with regard to specific problems, in order to help the farmers. However, these promises are nearly always broken. Indeed, the Assembly of the Poor tends to presume that every agreement that has been made by the government, or its representative, or even with the Prime Minister, is not necessarily trustworthy. The Assembly of the Poor has stated publicly, that the government has been insincere, with regard to helping them. At one of the largest protests ever held in Bangkok in 1997, the Assembly of the Poor submitted a list of 121 problems to the government. The government negotiated a settlement with respect to 18 cases or 15 per cent of these problems. The Assembly of the Poor accused Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh of lying to the public, when he claimed that the government had solved approximately 90 per cent of the problems.¹⁴⁶

However, the Assembly of the Poor does not work alone. In addition, a number of NGOs also support them with technical support and advice. Moreover the Assembly of the Poor has received substantial financial support from the middle class, and believes that middle class political support is crucial to its long-term success. In the year to mid-March of 1997, the Assembly of the Poor had received donations of about 700,000 baht from the middle class, in cash and in kind.¹⁴⁷ The financial support from the middle class clearly implies that the social gap in Thai society is not as large as the income gap, which exists.

The financial support of the middle class reduces the financial constraints on the Assembly of the Poor, since otherwise it would be hard for the Assembly of the Poor to

¹⁴⁵ Crispin, S.W. (2000), p.21

¹⁴⁶ *The Nation* (Internet Edition), 24 February 1997, at <http://202.44.251.4/nationnews/1997/199702/1997224/1993.html> Retrieved on 18 March 1999

raise funds from its members. Nevertheless, external support and advice alone cannot make the Assembly of the Poor work effectively. The existing structure of the Assembly of the Poor is only loosely based and requires a re-evaluation of its system of administration and of its structure in order to strengthen its collective power. A reorganisation would strengthen its position to influence the government more effectively.

3.5 Conclusion

Numerous studies of political development in Thailand have particularly emphasised the roles of the military, businessmen and technocrats, due to their central roles within Thai political arena. Most studies have adopted the traditional Thai culture as a foundation, in order to help to conceptualise a framework to explain the various interactions within Thai society and the political environment. The culture of Thai society has had a significant impact on the development of the contemporary Thai political culture, since politics is an important aspect to the society.

Prior to the 1980s, military officials along with their bureaucratic colleagues dominated Thai politics. Their monopolistic political power severely damaged the process of democratisation in Thailand, and only produced yet more political instability. However in the 1980s, the Thai political system stabilised and the influence of the military and bureaucrats declined steadily when Thai businessmen undertook an active political role, in order to ensure that their interests were represented within the network of the policy-making process. Callahan and McCargo have recognised the increasing role of businessmen as an aspect to the increasingly pluralistic political arena within Thailand.¹⁴⁸

Nevertheless, this does not imply that political power is evenly distributed across every group within Thai society. In the 1980s power was preserved by and for privileged groups, which were namely the military, bureaucrats and businessmen. Handley claims

¹⁴⁷ *The Nation* (Internet Edition), 15 March 1997, at <http://202.44.251.4/nationnews/1997/199703/19970315/2989.html> Retrieved on 5 February 1998

that 'Big business also retained a centre of political, with firm alliances to the military and bureaucracy.'¹⁴⁹ In 1992, the confrontation between the military and civilian groups led to a decline in political power of the military. Military power has been replaced by the financial power of the business groups, with the patronage system forming the basis for this transfer of power, which excluded farmers' representation. The influence of such financial power was observed in the landslide victory of Thaksin, the telecommunication tycoon's TRT party, in the general elections of 6 January 2001. Thaksin's cabinet consists of between 30-45 per cent elite businessmen, which strongly implies the existence of cronyism as another aspect to the patronage system, where horizontal relationships and close connections between businessmen allow them to exploit the state power at the expense of the people.

Therefore, it can be argued that the Thai political arena has tended towards the bipolar, rather than the pluralistic. Within the bipolar arena, state power is distributed between government and business groups. Unprivileged Thais, including farmers in particular, have never been able to share in the state power, because money is required, in order to gain political access. 'Because money now plays a crucial role in elections, the electoral process has effectively excluded many people who may have the potential to become effective politicians, but who lack the financial means to contest elections.'¹⁵⁰

Laid, Pasuk, Baker and Sungsidh recognise money politics to be one of the main characteristics of Thai politics. The network of money politics is operated with the assistance of the social hierarchy and patronage systems within Thai political culture. In order to buy the votes of constituencies, politicians need to develop their own networks, which consist mostly of *hua khanaen* and *jao pho*. A huge amount of money is spent not only on vote-buying but is, in addition, also spent on maintaining extensive patronage networks. This environment only encourages further corruption, which continues to

¹⁴⁸ Callahan, W.A. and McCargo, D. (1996), p.376

¹⁴⁹ Handley, P. (1997) 'More of the Same?: Politics and Business, 1987-1996', in Hewison, K. (ed) *Political Change in Thailand: Democracy and Participation*, London: Routledge, p.98

¹⁵⁰ Surin Maisrikrod and McCargo, D. (1997) 'Electoral Politics: Commercialisation and Exclusion' in Hewison, K. (ed) *Political Change in Thailand: Democracy and Participation*, London: Routledge, p.140

damage the political development of Thailand towards the Western democratic framework.

The contemporary debate on Thai political development focuses on the high level of corruption and, in addition, the inactive role of civil society. Thai academics and those who are familiar with the Thai political culture, tend to believe that an active role for civil society could help to balance the state power more effectively, because the Thai legal system has failed to solve these problems. Even in the case of murder, Thais often believe that the rich and well-connected can avoid justice.¹⁵¹ 'Real change will require a fundamental overhaul of the way Thailand is governed, clearing corruption and giving people more say in local administration.'¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ *The Economist*, 2-8 March 2002, *A Survey of Thailand*, p.3

¹⁵² Vatikiotis, M. and Fairclough, G. (1996), p.16

Chapter 4 Group Formation of Rice, Sugarcane and Potato Farmers

Introduction

Before one can properly examine both the political power and participation of Thai farmers groups, one has to understand the specific process of group formation, and in addition, the key contributing factors, with respect to their sustainability within the Thai political arena. With reference to this, Olson's group theory will be employed as a main theoretical framework, in order to examine both the membership and mobilisation of Thai farmers groups. Olson's book, "The Logic of Collective Action" has dominated this area of discussion since publication in 1965, and has subsequently brought Western academics into the debate regarding collective incentives and selective incentives. Olson's emphasis on the effectiveness of selective incentives over collective incentives in mobilising collective action has been strongly challenged in the post-Olsonian literature.

However, with reference to the case studies of rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups in Thailand, Olson's argument corresponds with the research findings. Accordingly, this chapter will challenge the claims of inapplicability of selective incentives, with respect to group formation and their sustainability in the post-Olsonian literature, by utilising the empirical evidence obtained from the case studies of rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups. In addition, the examination of Thai farmers group formation utilising Olson's group theory will include factors, with reference to both Thai society and Thai political culture.

This chapter will begin in section 4.1 by examining the general case of Thai farmers group formations and the degree of tendency for individuals to join, with regard to the historical and cultural impacts. In this respect, the examination will introduce the case of Japanese farmers' interest groups, in order to provide some comparison to the Thai case. Thailand and Japan have shared elements, with regard to both their social hierarchy and patronage systems. However, this section will examine why these very same social elements have impacted differently on farmers group formations in both

Thailand and Japan, introducing the contributions of Confucianism and Buddhism. Nevertheless, this section will not fully examine the political power of Japanese farmers groups, as a further analysis with reference to this issue is to be discussed in Chapter 6.

In section 4.2, both the National Economic and Social Development Plans and their impacts on the development of the agricultural sector of the economy will be considered. This will help to explain the impact of a specific Western development framework on the livelihoods of the Thai farmers in the case studies. However, because general international arguments in relation to agricultural exceptionalism have yet to be applied within Thailand, as to whether these arguments have begun to impact on the political participation of Thai farmers groups will also be examined. Furthermore, the consideration of agricultural exceptionalism in this respect will incorporate into the analysis, the specifics of the Thai political culture. As previously examined in Chapter 3, the political culture, which manifests within the Thai political arena has been considered to be the main contributing factor in relation to vote-buying, which has led to the continuing political weakness of Thai farmers groups in general. Section 4.3 will examine the contributing factors, with regard to rice, sugarcane and potato farmers group formations, in accordance with the data from the field research in Thailand, and this section will facilitate a comparative study of these three groups in section 4.3.

4.1 Historical and Cultural Impacts on the Group Formation of Farmers in Thailand and Japan

The agricultural sector of the Thai economy remains heavily reliant on its labour force. There is only a minority of rural families with an adequate supply of labour, needed, in order to achieve their potential levels of agricultural production. The market has begun to demand an increase in the labour force, particularly since the Thai economy was integrated into the world agricultural market, which resulted in a dramatic expansion in Thai agricultural production. Rice production for instance, was already labour intensive when it was grown domestically for family consumption. Its transformation into

a more heavily marketed product increased the demand for labour in the production of rice, which led to interdependence between Thai farmers, in respect of their labour force.

This interdependence within the agricultural sector of the economy is not a unique case to Thailand. Indeed, this is a normal characteristic of rural villages across Asia. Hayami and Kikuchi¹, illustrate that the families of farmers in rural Asian villages were historically, too small to deal with the varying uncertainty of external problems, with regard to agricultural production. These problems included flooding in nearby crop fields, water shortages, and inadequate warehousing, and accordingly, collective actions where needed. This has resulted in the development of reciprocal relationships because of this interdependence of the agricultural labour force.

In Thai society, *long khaek keaw khao* was one of the most established of rural cultures, and refers to the reciprocal exchange of labour and interdependence between rice farmers in rural areas. This culture has traditionally strengthened the relationship between rural people, and in addition, has promoted unity within rural villages. Perhaps surprisingly, this reinforced interdependence of the labour force did not lead to a high level of tendency for farmers to develop these connections and to establish farmers groups. In this respect, Shigetomi² and Prudhisan³ argue that social organisations and other established groups are virtually absent from the Thai political arena, because of the loosely structured nature of the Thai society. Most group formations are based on reciprocal relationships, and as a result they are both unstable and impermanent, because these reciprocal relationships are formed with the notion of the Buddhist concept of *bunghun*. As such, 'These relationships rely heavily on emotional factors, therefore people's relations can easily change, and constant patterns of behavior in social relationships are difficult to form.'⁴

¹ Hayami, Y. and Kikuchi, M. (1986) *Asian Village Economy at the Crossroads: An Economic Approach to Institutional Change*, Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, p.12

² Shigetomi, S. (1998) *Cooperation and Community in Rural Thailand: An Organizational Analysis of Participatory Rural Development*, Tokyo: Institute Of Developing Economies, p.27

³ Prudhisan Jumbala (1987) 'Interest and Pressure Groups', in Somsakdi Xuto (ed) *Government and Politics in Thailand*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, p.112

A Thai develops mutual obligations and relationships with the persons he encounters in life, but is not driven as members of many other societies are to bundle them into groups, which can then be labeled for ease of deciding how to treat them—and the labels may then become inflexible. There is vertical hierarchy, but not horizontal groupings.⁵

With reference to this, the vertical reciprocal relationships help to both establish, and in addition to reinforce the patronage system in the Thai society. However, this form of hierarchical, superior-inferior reciprocal relationship does not only exist in Thailand, as it is observed in most other Asian countries. Neher⁶ and Hood⁷ have accepted this to be a part of the Asian political culture, which developed from Confucianism, and helps to explain the Asian style of democracy or ‘soft authoritarianism’ and the formation of the patronage system. Neher highlights that ‘Throughout Asia, “exchange bonds” determine power, status, authority relations, and the citizen’s role in society. These exchanges constitute rewards and values, which one person provides for another in exchange for like benefit. A person who has command over resources attains power over others who need those resources but have only limited access to them.’⁸ In this respect, Hood describes the structure of power as hierarchically intense. ‘Leaders provide goods and services, and loyal clients provide political and economic support.’⁹ This form of relationship was still observed in Japan from the post-war years until the second half of the 1980s, where the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) relied heavily on the rural vote. This enabled Japanese farmers groups and their representative, *Nokyo*, to exercise their power and carry influence within the network of the agricultural policy-making process.¹⁰ However with the decline of the LDP in 1993, the relationship between the LDP and Japanese farmers groups including *Nokyo* has also declined. This decline is largely a result of three main factors, namely, an increase in the awareness of consumers of unreasonable prices for domestic agricultural products in the mid 1980s, the end of the 38 year monopoly power

⁴ Shigetomi, S. (1998), p.8

⁵ Kulick, E. and Wilson, D. (1992) *Thailand's Turn: Profile of a New Dragon*, London: Macmillan, p.67

⁶ Neher, C.D. (1994) ‘Asian Style Democracy’, *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXIV, No.11 November, 1994: 949-961

⁷ Hood, S.J. (1998) ‘The Myth of Asian-Style Democracy’, *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXVIII, No.9 September, 1998: 853-866

⁸ Neher, C.D. (1994), p.950

⁹ Hood, S.J. (1998), p.856

¹⁰ Iwai, T. (1997) ‘Japan’s Agricultural Politics at a Turning Point’, in Jain, P. and Inoguchi, T. (eds) *Japanses Politics Today: Beyond Karaoke Democracy?*, Hong Kong: Macmillan, p.186

of the LDP government in 1993¹¹, and in addition, the impact of the conclusion of the GATT Uruguay Round on the liberalisation of the Japanese rice market. Further discussions in this regard will be developed in Chapter 6.

The relationship between the government and farmers groups in Japan can be explained by the inspiration of Confucianism on both Japanese society and political culture. Confucianism emphasises the value of the group over the individual, which starts within the family, and this creates inferiors who are obliged to superiors.¹² According to Neher, ‘Obligations to superiors were the cement of the Confucian order. These obligations were translated into differential and unquestioning toward those in authority.’¹³ Consequently, obligations and hierarchical structures can smooth interactions between members of society, and this leads to a harmonisation of society. Accordingly, Confucianism can help to generate and enhance co-operation within society. Ishida¹⁴ observes that this tendency for individuals to join groups has been a fundamental factor, with respect to the societal structure in the rural communities of Japan, since the Meiji Restoration in 1868. This is because agricultural production was concentrated in rice, which is labour intensive in production. ‘Villagers had to work together very closely during specific periods when a large work force was needed—such as for the gathering of grass for fertilizing and feeding livestock, the securing of irrigation water, the transplanting of rice, and of course harvesting.’¹⁵

The production of rice in Japan by its very nature requires more interdependence of labour than in Thailand, since ‘rice farming in Japan initially developed in fan-shaped terraces in the valley bottoms and intermountain basin. Such topography renders local cooperation effective in controlling a water supply based on small streams.’¹⁶ By contrast, rice production in Thailand spread through the Chaophraya Delta in the central

¹¹ Itoh, M. (1994) ‘Kome Kaikoku and Japanese Internationalization’, *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXIV, No.11 November, 1994: 991-1001, p.994

¹² ‘Confucianism and Japanese Growth’, at www.cyberesays.com/History/33.htm Retrieved on 22 February 2003

¹³ Neher, C.D. (1994), p. 954

¹⁴ Ishida, T (1989) *Japanese Political Culture*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, p.9

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.7-8

¹⁶ Hayami, Y. and Kikuchi, M. (1986), p.22

region, and the river valleys of the northern region and along the Mekong River in the lower *Isan* region.¹⁷ Therefore, there is a generous water supply easily available to Thai farmers, in contrast to the experience of Japanese farmers who over time have through necessity developed to be an interdependent labour force.

This interdependence in Japan has over time, helped towards the development of a distinctive form of social cohesion between the people in rural areas, where rights and obligations within local groups are crucial elements. Hayami and Kikuchi¹⁸ perceive this to be a main factor in allowing rural societies in Japan to exist in a close societal structure, in distinct comparison to the loose societal structure of Thailand. Accordingly, the level of tendency for individuals to join groups is higher in Japan than in Thailand. Confucianist academics often perceive the difference in the societal structures in Thailand and Japan to be a direct result of the adherence to Confucianism in Japan, and its absence in Thailand. However, the emphasis on harmonious co-operation and a highly structured social hierarchy in Confucianism does not imply anything that does not already exist in the rural societies of Thailand. This is because of the notion of *bun* and *bab* in Buddhism, which teaches adherents the importance of being generous to others and to avoid negative actions has also resulted in a harmonious co-operation within Thai society. Buddhism is different from Confucianism in the sense that hierarchical relationships within society are not emphasised. However, the influence of social hierarchy in Thailand is already intense, as a result of the *sakdina* system. Accordingly, neither the existence nor absence of Confucianism can adequately explain a level of tendency for individuals to both form and join groups, in Thailand and Japan.

Nevertheless, the different roots to both Thai and Japanese social hierarchy have impacted differently, with regard to the political participation of rural farmers in both countries. Confucianism places an emphasis on social hierarchy, where the inferior must be obedient to the superior, and in addition, the superior must take care of the inferior. Simone and Feraru emphasise that ‘all the Confucian-influenced countries subscribed to a

¹⁷ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1999) *Thailand: Economy and Politics*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, p.3

hierarchical model of a benevolent father-figure monarch, assisted by meritorious officials, ruling over loyal and obedient subjects, setting an example for them of virtue and upholding the moral order so fundamental to a civil society.’¹⁹ Accordingly, Neher concludes that ‘With its stress on hierarchy and reverence for those in power, Confucian favors authoritarian rule but its emphasis on harmony, stability, and consensus, it fosters democracy.’²⁰ Therefore, it can be argued that Confucianism enables the creation of a favourable political environment, in which Japanese farmers can establish interest groups.

The influence of Confucianism on Japanese rural society declined as a result of the significant changes, which took place across Japanese society after World War II, with Japanese farmers becoming more profit-oriented and with the increasing importance of non-agricultural incomes to the rural population. However, the notion of individualism rather than society failed to fully manifest itself, and it can be argued that the influence of Confucianism within Japanese rural society persists to a certain extent. As outlined by Mulgan, who summarised Fukutake’s study of Japanese rural society in the early 1970s, ‘...the farmers’ self-centred character did not develop into fully fledged individualism because the patriarchal system remained to some extent and agricultural communities did not disappear entirely. Critically farmers did not sufficient production capacity to operate completely independently of traditional agricultural communities. To this extent, farmers retained their essential community character developed in the past, and hence agricultural communities still strove to uphold their principles, existence and identity. As a result, agricultural organisation like Nokyo remained as organisations for all farmers although they only served the interests of some.’²¹ With reference to this, it is important to consider the influence of Confucianism both in terms of the unity of Japanese farmers and the degree of political influence of *Nokyo* when examining Japanese farmers groups. Mulgan confirms that ‘Nokyo’s political standing has rested very much on the loyalty of

¹⁸ Hayami, Y. and Kikuchi, M. (1986), p.20

¹⁹ Simone, V. and Feraru, A. T. (1995) *The Asian Pacific Political and Economic Development in a Global Context*, Longman, p.223

²⁰ Neher, C.D. (1994), p.953

²¹ Mulgan, A.G. (2000) *The Politics of Agriculture in Japan*, London: Routledge, p.311

its farming members based on cooperatives customs and social ties in rural communities as well as on its corporatised status as an administrative arm of the government.’²²

With regard to Thailand, the form of social hierarchy that manifests has limited the political opportunity for farmers groups. This is because the social hierarchy takes its root from the *somburanayasidhirath* (absolute monarchy or god-king), and the *sakdina* system. Within this system, authoritarian groups were able to exercise power freely, for their own interests. As a result, superiors can exploit inferiors with ease. Therefore, social hierarchy has emerged as a negative factor, with respect to the formation of Thai farmers groups. Moreover, it has implied the concentration of the structure of power, which obstructs the process of Thai democratisation.

In both Thailand and Japan, social hierarchy has been a contributing factor, with regard to the patronage system, and this has led to the high level of money politics in the political arenas of both countries. The form of money politics in Japan is different from that of the Thai case. Most political scandals in Japan are with reference to the connections between elite politicians, for instance the case of Muneo Suzuki, a senior member of the LDP. Suzuki was arrested on 19 June 2002 on the allegation of accepting ¥ 5 million (US\$ 40,000) in bribes from a lumber company in his constituency, on the northern island of Hokkaido.²³

The connection between businessmen and elite politicians, which promotes corruption, exists also in Thailand. In addition to the form of money politics found in Japan, in Thailand this also includes vote-buying in rural areas. The absence of vote-buying within the Japanese political arena, strengthens the political influence of Japanese farmers groups and increases the level of tendency for farmers to join these groups. Their influence is strengthened because these farmers have experienced the situation where their collective action has allowed them to negotiate effectively and constructively with rurally based MPs from the LDP, through the *Nokyo*. Negotiations referred to the policy

²² Mulgan, A.G. (2000), pp.648-649

of protectionism, with regard to the market for rice, in addition to other policies of agricultural development. This reveals a high level of political awareness, with respect to Japanese farmers groups, and it can be argued that the patronage system in Japan does not have a significant adverse impact on Japanese farmers groups.

By contrast, rurally based MPs in Thailand do not play an active role in protecting the interests of rural farmers, as instead, they choose to represent the interests of rural *jao pho* who are their *hua khanaen* in general elections. According to Hewison and Maniemai, 'The pattern of seeking financial support from business has meant that the *chao pho* are finding their positions and wealth legitimized, even when gained through illegal activities. This is happening through their support of legal parties and the linking of representative politics and democracy. Arguably more significant than money, the *chao pho* and business people provide the organization and network required for electoral politics.'²⁴ The reciprocal relationship between MPs and businessmen has helped MPs to secure their seats in the House of Representatives through vote-buying.

In this respect, Ammar affirms that 'It is now widely expected that politicians will bring projects into their constituencies. *It is widely expected that such projects will generate side benefits to the rural elite, who are quite active in the construction business. It is therefore widely expected that when the politicians and the rural elites are up for election, money will flow and votes will be bought.* (Emphasis added)'²⁵ This situation adversely affects the political participation of Thai farmers groups, and it is observed that the level of tendency for Thai farmers to form groups is low, because farmers experience that their groups are not as well acknowledged as business groups are by the government. This is because of the very closed network of the patronage system between government

²³ *The Economist* (Internet Edition), 20 June 2002, at www.economist.com/PrinterFriendly.cfm?Story_ID=1194776 Retrieved on 22 July 2002

²⁴ Hewison, K. and Maniemai Thongyou (2000) 'Developing Provincial Capitalism: A Profile of the Economic and Political Roles of a New Generation in Khon Kaen, Thailand', in McVey, R. (ed) *Money & Power in Provincial Thailand*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies [ISEAS] and Silkworm Books, p.201

²⁵ Ammar Siamwalla (1997c) 'Can a Developing Democracy Manage its Macroeconomy? The Case of Thailand', in Thailand Development Research Institute (ed) *Thailand's Boom and Bust*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.72

and businessmen in the Thai political arena, which has never offered Thai farmers the political opportunity offered to farmers within the Japanese political arena.

4.2 Economic and Social Developmental Policies in Thailand, and Their Impacts on the Development of the Agricultural Sector

In 1950, the Thai government established the National Economic Council (NEC). The NEC worked on behalf of the government in conducting research, with regard to economic development, in order to help to establish an overall framework for the government to adopt within the decision making process of its policy of economic and social development. However, the economic development plans established by the NEC lacked clear and comprehensive national objectives, and this led to problems, with regard to implementation in practice. Consequently, westernised technocrats within the NEC argued the case for the government to request assistance from the World Bank. In 1957, a mission from the World Bank arrived in Bangkok, in order to assess the Thai economy and to provide the government with recommendations, with reference to its 'national economic planning system'.²⁶

In 1959, and in accordance with the recommendations of the World Bank, the Thai government established the National Economic Development Board (NEDB). Before long, the NEDB would place more emphasis on the challenge of social development, and consequently in 1972, its name was changed to the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB). The NESDB was responsible for developing policy frameworks, which manifested as the five-year National Economic and Social Development Plans, although the first of these plans actually lasted for six years. The latest NESD plan is the ninth of these, and commenced in 2002.²⁷ It is important to summarise the NESD plans, in order to illustrate how they have impacted on Thai farmers groups. With reference to this, the examination of the first and second National Economic Development Plans will be emphasised, because they established the

²⁶ National Economic and Social Development Board [NESDB], at www.nesdb.go.th/history/history_e.html Retrieved on 5 August 1999

framework for economic and social development inspired by Western economics. This strategy has resulted in both positive and negative outcomes, with respect to the development of Thai farmer group formations.

The First National Economic Development Plan (NED) between 1961-1966 emphasised the policy of import-substitution in an attempt to develop the economy and its basic infrastructure, which included ‘transport, communications, power, social and public services, and agriculture.’²⁸ In accordance, government expenditure in the infrastructure and construction sectors increased significantly at the rates of 22.3 per cent and 17.8 per cent respectively.²⁹ During the Second NED Plan, between 1967-1971, the government remained committed to the development of basic infrastructure.³⁰ The main source of financial support in the development of basic infrastructure was from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).³¹ In addition, it is also clear that in the 1960s, government expenditure, with regard to the development of basic infrastructure gained substantially, when the United States based their military across the *Isan* region and the central region of Thailand during the Vietnam War.

The improvement to the basic infrastructure in the 1960s had positively promoted the development of the agricultural sector. Somporn and Nipon³² argue that the improvements made to the irrigation system, enabled rice farmers to produce rice twice a year and in addition, the improvements to the road network nation-wide provided farmers with better access to their markets. At that time, ‘if one asks villagers, rich or poor, whether they would like to have their villages have better access to roads—the central

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Warr, P.G. (1993) ‘The Thai Economy’, in Warr, P.G. (ed) *The Thai Economy in Transition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.30

²⁹ Ibid., p.30

³⁰ National Economic and Social Development Board (2001) *Sarup wiwattanakarn khong phan phatthana setthakij lae sangkom hang chat (The Summary of the Development of the National Economic and Social Development Plan)*, [in Thai] at www.nesdb.go.th/Interesting_menu/plan1_8/bottombar.html Retrieved on 22 November 2001

³¹ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1999), p.128

³² Somporn Isvilanonda and Nipon Poapongsakorn (1995) *Rice Supply and Demand in Thailand: The Future Outlook*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.6

conduit for the market—they will almost to a man answer “yes”.³³ With the improvements to transportation, the costs of production within the agricultural sector reduced considerably, and farmers began to participate more fully within their markets. Over this period, the contribution of the agricultural sector to the Thai economy was 40 per cent of GDP, with 80 per cent of the labour force employed within this sector. The agricultural sector enabled the Thai economy to maintain its high growth rates throughout the 1960s.³⁴ Specifically, in 1961, the export value of agricultural products contributed 84.37 per cent to the foreign exchange earnings of Thailand. In addition, rice contributed 36 per cent to the total foreign exchange earnings in the same year.³⁵

However, accelerating the economic growth rate in the agricultural sector was not the primary intention with the development of the basic infrastructure. This was actually intended in order to safeguard the country against the communist insurgency, which was then permeating Asia, and in addition to facilitate the transfer of resources from the agricultural sector into industrial sector. According to Christensen, Ammar and Pakorn³⁶, the development of both the roads and the railroads in the 1960s and 1970s was not a government response to the existing demands of the rural people. Rather, they were built in order to introduce this potential to the rural people, in accordance with the recommendations of the World Bank.

The high levels of government expenditure, with regard to the development of basic infrastructure provided the opportunity for corruption in several projects. A newly elected group of MPs from the general election of 1969, presented ‘evidence of large-scale corruption in contracts under the Highways and Irrigation Departments, including the alleged embezzlement of US\$1 million from cement contracts for dam

³³ Ammar Siamwalla (1992) ‘Myths, Demons and the Future of Thai Agriculture’ in Poonsin Wongkolthoot (ed) (1999) *Krobrob 60 Pee Arjarn Ammar (60 Years Professor Ammar)*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.246

³⁴ Akira, S. (1996) *Capital Accumulation in Thailand 1855-1985*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, pp.1-2

³⁵ Somporn Isvilanonda and Nipon Poapongsakorn (1995), p.4

³⁶ Christensen, S.R., Ammar Siamwalla and Pakorn Vichyanond (1997) ‘Institutional and Political Bases of Growth-Inducing Policies in Thailand’, in Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI](ed) *Thailand's Boom and Bust*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.47

construction.³⁷ This type of corruption became a normal phenomenon in Thailand, and persists to the present day, significantly affecting the development of the basic infrastructure. These effects have been felt in the development of the agricultural sector, and have been observed within the province of Ratchaburi, where the sugarcane farmers group in the research is located. The discussion regarding this issue will be developed at a later point within this chapter.

The average rate of economic growth between 1958-1973 was 7.2 per cent.³⁸ This enabled the government to significantly increase its expenditure, with regard to the development of the educational system. Pasuk and Baker³⁹ argue that the government policy of development within the primary educational system of 1920, was only properly implemented after the 1932 revolution by the *Khana Rasadorn*, whose core members were a Western educated elite. Nevertheless, primary education was still only available in the main provincial towns, such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Khon Kaen. The much-needed expansion of the primary educational system beyond the provincial towns and out into the rural villages, actually only began to take place in the 1960s as a result of the increasing government revenues. By the 1970's, the government had also extended the period of compulsory primary education from four to six years. 'The consequent rise in the quality of the labor force played a major role in the increased productivity of agriculture in the 1960s and the 1970s.'⁴⁰

However the development of the educational system in the 1960s was not the main government priority. Government expenditure in most sectors concentrated on the improvements to basic infrastructure. This was evidenced by the budget allocations of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MOAC), where there was less provision made available for technological transfer in agricultural production, than that made available for agricultural infrastructure. Throughout the 1960s, the government allocated between

³⁷ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1999), p.300

³⁸ Ammar Siamwalla (1997b) 'The Thai Economy: Fifty Years of Expansion', in Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI](ed) *Thailand's Boom and Bust*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.9

³⁹ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1999), pp.368-369

⁴⁰ Christensen, S.R., Ammar Siamwalla and Pakorn Vichyanond (1997), p.47

40-60 per cent of the agricultural budget for the development of agricultural infrastructure. Of the remainder of this budget, only '12 to more than 16 % to extension and technological transfer, 6% to 8% to research and development, more than 8% to 14% for resources procurement, and the remainder to general administration'.⁴¹ Both insufficient and inadequate research, with regard to the formation of the agricultural policy of the MOAC resulted in delays to the further development of the agricultural sector. This is evidenced by 'a growing awareness amongst NESDB planners of the increasing problems of regional disparity and poverty in the rural areas.'⁴²

The unavailability of lending credit from the formal sector, accessible to farmers in rural areas, through either government credit or bank loans, is another explanation, with regard to the ineffectiveness of the agricultural sector in improving its productivity. This can help to explain the persistent level of rural poverty experienced throughout the 1960's. The problems traditionally experienced by farmers, with regard to rural credit had often provided the opportunity for those in the informal lending sector, such as *kamnan*, *phuyaiban* and *jao pho* to exploit farmers with loans of excessively high interest rates. During the period of the First NED Plan, the government became more aware of this specific problem. There was an increased effort to restructure the rural credit system, in order to help farmers to improve their financing and consequently increase their productivity, through opening up the formal lending sector. With regard to this, at the end of the First NED Plan in 1966 the government initiated the Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC).⁴³ Throughout the implementation of the Second NED Plan, 'the BAAC grew at the moderate speed and succeeded in establishing branches in fifty-eight out of Thailand's seventy-one provinces.'⁴⁴

⁴¹ Yamada, J. (1998) 'Capital Outflow from the Agriculture Sector in Thailand', paper from the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund, Tokyo, Japan, p.6

⁴² Warr, P.G. (1993), pp.30-31

⁴³ Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives, Thailand, at www.baac.or.th/about/history/history.htm Retrieve on 20 March 2003

⁴⁴ Ammar Siamwalla, Chirmsak Pinthong, Nipon Poapongsakorn, Ploenpit Satsanguan, Prayong Nettayarak, Wanrak Mingmaneeakin and Yuavares Tubpun (1993) 'The Thai Rural Credit System and Elements of a Theory: Public Subsidies, Private Information, and Segmented Markets', in Poonsin Wongkolthoot (ed) (1999) *Krobrob 60 Pee Arjarn Ammar (60 Years Professor Ammar)*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], pp.129-130

During the Third National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESD) between 1972-1976 and the Fourth NESD Plan between 1977-1981, more emphasis was placed on improving the provision of rural credit, in order to solve the problems regarding income disparity, social services in rural areas, and in addition to promote economic development. Accordingly, in 1975, the government ordered the BAAC to increase its agricultural loans to 3.5 billion baht from the level of 2.65 billion baht in 1974.⁴⁵ The BAAC dominated agricultural credit, by becoming one of the main sources to farmers. According to the ADB, by 1996, a total of 85 per cent of farmers borrowed from the BAAC, or about 82 per cent of all agricultural households.⁴⁶

In 1975, the government passed a regulation obliging commercial banks to divert at least 5 per cent of their lending to agricultural enterprises. This ratio was raised to 13 per cent in 1979, of which 2 per cent could be loans to agribusiness. In 1987, the proportion was raised to 20 per cent, with coverage widened to include agriculture, agribusiness, and rural industries. As most commercial banks found it is difficult to administer loans to small and medium peasants, they preferred to lend to big agribusinesses or to make deposits with BAAC, which in turn lent mainly to agribusinesses or big cultivators.⁴⁷

However the formal lending system for most small-scale farmers, either through the BAAC or commercial banks, has remained difficult to access since the inception of the BAAC. Most loan proposals by these farmers are disapproved by both the BAAC and commercial banks, because they cannot provide proof of their debt repaying capacity, with the only asset very often being their land titles. With reference to this, Ammar *et al.* argue that, with regard to long-term loans, many farmers prefer to borrow from the informal lending sector at higher rates of interest, because 'if the creditor forecloses on the loan, the borrowing farmer stand a better chance to lease his land back from the creditor than if he had borrowed from the formal sector.'⁴⁸ Nevertheless, it appears that there are not many farmers who have the capacity to lease back their land.

⁴⁵ Ammar Siamwalla, Chirmsak Pinthong, Nipon Poapongsakorn, Ploenpit Satsanguan, Prayong Nettayarak, Wanrak Mingmaneeakin and Yuavares Tubpun (1993), p. 130

⁴⁶ Asian Development Bank (1997) *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors on a Proposed Loan to the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives for the Rural Enterprise Credit Project in the Kingdom of Thailand*, Asian Development Bank [ADB], p.19

⁴⁷ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1999), p.60

In the wake of the economic crisis of 1997, access to the formal lending sector became more difficult for farmers because every Thai bank experienced problems, in terms of their liquidity within the financial market, even including the Bangkok Bank the largest bank in Thailand. As a result, the informal lending sector is the only option now open to small-scale farmers even though the interest rates are very high. In the crop year of 1998, often stricken farmers were compelled to borrow money from the informal lending sector at interest rates such as 12 per cent per month.⁴⁹ According to the research, the informal lending sector is more intensively involved with sugarcane farmers than either rice or potato farmers, and this is observed with the role of quota men in quota groups of sugarcane farmers. With reference to this, the informal lending sector can be regarded as a contributing factor, with respect to the formation and expansion of the patronage system in rural areas.

Although during the Third NESD Plan, the government strongly supported the policy of agricultural development,⁵⁰ at the stage of implementation, this policy gained less attention from the government than did the policy of industrialisation. This was indicated by a dramatic increase in the level of co-operation between successive governments and businessmen, who were active in all areas of manufacturing and agribusiness,⁵¹ whereas such co-operation⁵¹ between these same governments and Thai farmers was rare. The lack of Thai farmers' representatives can help to explain both the failure of the policy of agricultural development, and the political weakness of Thai farmers groups. As seen by Ramsay's examination of the Kriangsak government in 1979:

Despite Kriangsak's stated commitment to help farmers, they received little benefit from his government. Only half of 1,600 million baht (\$78,816,000)⁵² allocated for drought relief early in the year was actually spent, and did little to offset income losses to farmers estimated at 6,800 million baht (\$334, 968,000). A program to have the Bank for

⁴⁸ Ammar Siamwalla, Chirmsak Pinthong, Nipon Poapongsakorn, Ploenpit Satsanguan, Prayong Nettayarak, Wanrak Mingmaneeakin and Yuavares Tubpun (1993), p. 135

⁴⁹ Jeremiah Paknawin-Mock (1998) 'Shattering the Rice Bowl', *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 25 June 1998, at www.bkkpost.samart.co.th/news/Bpachive/BP19980626/250698_News23.html Retrieved 22 July 2000

⁵⁰ National Economic and Social Development Board (2001)

⁵¹ Christensen, S.R., Ammar Siamwalla and Pakorn Vichyanond (1997), p.30

⁵² Ramsay calculated this by using the exchange rate of 20.30 baht per US\$ 1, before the devaluation of the baht in 1984 and again in 1997

Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC) take over farmers' debts from private lenders at low rates of interest helped only a small minority of farmers. While 68,000 farmers had registered debts of 2,010 million baht (\$99,012,600) the BAAC could assume only 406 million baht (\$19,999,560) of the debts. In September the government announced plans to buy rice at 2,400 to 2,700 baht (\$119 to \$134) per metric ton to stabilize rice prices and store buffer stocks to eliminate extreme price fluctuations. Similar attempts in the past have had little success and have benefited mainly larger farmers who could afford to transport their rice to government purchasing centers.⁵³

Throughout the period of the Fifth NESD Plan between 1982-1986 and the Sixth NESD Plan between 1987-1991, successive governments continued to emphasise the policy of industrialisation. However they did begin to decentralise political power to the local level, in order to improve the self-reliant status of people in rural areas.⁵⁴ During the Sixth NESD Plan the government began to place more emphasis on the development of agribusiness, in an attempt to reduce the problem of income disparity between the rural and urban areas.⁵⁵ However, the high growth rate of the Thai economy throughout the 1980s encouraged the government to prioritise the policy of industrialisation.

The Seventh NESD Plan between 1992-1996 and the Eighth NESD Plan between 1997-2001 were more concerned, with regard to the level of popular participation within the Thai political arena, and in addition with the sustainable growth of the Thai economy. Over the period, the role of civil society was heavily considered, in order to more fully integrate the Seventh and Eighth NESD Plans. However, Day-cha Siripat argues that 'the government did not really seek public opinion about the policy changes and return to the same development direction of rapid economic growth.'⁵⁶

The emphasis placed on the policy of industrialisation since the Fourth NESD Plan onwards, has been a catalyst for governments to provide more training, in order to increase the skilled labour force available to the industrial sector. In the 1980s, more than

⁵³ Ramsay, A. (1979) 'Thailand 1978: Kriangsak—The Thai who Binds', *Asian Survey*, Vol. XIX, No. 2, February 1979: 104-114, p.109

⁵⁴ Rigg, J. (1991) 'Grass-Roots Development in Rural Thailand: A Lost Cause?', *World Development*, Vol.19, No.2/3, 1991:199-211, p.200

⁵⁵ Christensen, S.R. (1992) *The 1992 Year-End Conference: Between the Farmer and the State: Towards a Policy Analysis of the Role of Agribusiness in Thai Agriculture*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.6

⁵⁶ Watershed Vol.5, No.3 March-June 2000, p.13

80 per cent of the labour force had only a primary education or less.⁵⁷ The government perceived this to be an obstacle, with regard to its policy of industrialisation, whereas the low level of education in the agricultural sector has rarely been addressed. Accordingly, government has encouraged students to study engineering and science, because the policy of industrialisation has expanded the construction and manufacturing sectors. In response to the shortage of engineers and scientists, the government increased the number of scholarships for students to study abroad for a higher degree, because of inadequacies, in terms of laboratories, teaching staff and equipment, available in Thailand.⁵⁸ With reference to these problems, the government proposed the Universities Science and Engineering Education Project to the World Bank, in order to seek loans to finance this project, and received US\$ 143.3 million. The World Bank approved this loan on 13 May 1997.⁵⁹

The general direction taken by the eight NESD Plans help to indicate why a low priority is given to the agricultural sector within Thailand. Significantly, insufficient consideration has been given to the general international arguments relating to agricultural exceptionalism. This has to a great extent, limited the political influence of Thai farmers, where vote-buying and money politics are evident as the dominant characteristics within the Thai political arena. As argued in Chapter 3, politicians continue to depend on vote-buying, in order to succeed electorally, thereby impacting on the voting strength of a range of groups within civil society. In the context of Thai farmers groups, that this arrangement continues to persist, has suppressed their ability to utilise effective strategies, in order to achieve positive outcomes through their negotiations with the government.

⁵⁷ World Bank (1996) 'Investing in Future: Education reform in Thailand', *Press Release No:96/45/EAP*, at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:20014822~menuPK:34466~p> Retrieved on 4 April 2003

⁵⁸ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1998) *Thailand's Boom and Bust*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, p.147

⁵⁹ World Bank (1997) 'World Bank Provides US\$143.3 Million for Thailand's Education Sector', *News Release No.97/1348/EAP*, at www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/extme/1348.htm Retrieved on 4 March 2003

According to Skogstad⁶⁰, there are two fundamental elements, which can ensure that the agriculture sectors of countries receive exceptional treatment by their respective governments. Primarily, government intervention within the agricultural sector, in order to maintain a safe and secure food supply for the country has strategic geo-political relevance, promoting the enduring nature of organisations such as *Nokyo* and the NFU. Secondly, the government must be fully aware of the special interests and requirements of farmers, because the agricultural sectors of national economies are subject to unique and uncontrollable factors, which result from unpredictable weather conditions and imperfect markets. Accordingly, government intervention can be justified, in order to help farmers who are disadvantaged by incomes, which are both more unstable and lower than those outside of the agricultural sector.

With regard to these elements, the absence of agricultural exceptionalism in Thailand can be considered to be a contributing factor in relation to the decision-making of rural voters. With reference to the interviews with the rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups, there is a general awareness that the government does not prioritise the country's agricultural sector. Accordingly, farmers do not normally vote on the basis of considerations that relate in some way to their agricultural production activities. Instead, the ubiquitous presence of vote-buying has a significant influence on the decision-making of the agricultural voters, which has significantly reduced the potential for Thai farmers to develop political influence. There exists a significant imbalance in the Thai electoral system, which negates the opportunity for farmers groups to improve their political opportunity and to take advantage of their collective demographic, in order to maximise their political representation. Rather, vote-buying of the poor, rural, farming population determines the way in which this section of the electorate is represented, something, which may have little to do with the interests of farmers or their priorities. Accordingly, the immediate financial implication of the personal windfall, which is available to individual farmers through vote-buying, sacrifices the potential future benefit of mobilising and consolidating a unified and representative independent political voice.

⁶⁰ Skogstad, G. (1998) 'Ideas, Paradigms and Institutions: Agricultural Exceptionalism in the European Union and the United States', *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration*, Vol.11,

On balance, the contribution of the NESD Plans since its inception in 1961, has been one of a more negative than positive impact, in terms of the development of the agricultural sector and the political participation of farmers. Firstly, this is partly a result of the failure at the implementation stage of the policy framework, where the policy of agricultural development remains a theoretical framework, which the government has been reluctant to implement. Secondly, this is also a result of the structure of the Thai political culture, with respect to money politics and the patronage system, which have both significantly influenced the orientation of government policy. It has been observed that between the 1980s-1990s, the policy of economic development exposed the reciprocal benefits between elite businessmen and politicians. Rigg has affirmed that:

The reasons why development plans in Thailand are rarely implemented in any systematic fashion are numerous. Of great importance are the nature and functioning of the Thai bureaucracy and Thai society. After being produced by the NESDB, a national development plan has to run an obstacle course of influential interest groups – among them the army, politicians and civil servants.... Ministers can ignore planing objectives presented by the NESDB and pursue policy of their own. It is significant in this regard that the national development plans lack statutory enforcement and are not binding in terms of budget allocation. This “provides much leeway to the line ministries to interpret and exploit the plan as a useful reference only when they find it beneficial to do so.”⁶¹

This characteristic of the Thai bureaucracy has been one of the main obstacles to the political participation of Thai farmers, because this has allowed elite bureaucrats and politicians to abuse state power for their own interests.

4.3 Characteristics of Rice, Sugarcane and Potato Farmers Groups

In general, the emergence of interest groups has been argued to be an indication of the need for collective action, in order to achieve collective positive outcomes. Olson⁶² notes that the majority of interest groups have one shared economic objective, which furthers the interests of their members. Individuals look to the benefits of collective action, when they cannot protect and advance their collective interests. Accordingly,

No.4, October 1998: 463-490, p.468

⁶¹ Rigg, J. (1991), p.201

⁶² Olson, M. (1974, Fourth Edition) *The Logic of Collective Action*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp.5-7

group action is needed, in order to perform this function on their behalf. By contrast, whenever individuals can secure and advance their interests without depending on a group, they tend to find that groups are unnecessary.

A case in point is the example of farmers' interest groups, which can establish in response to low prices of agricultural products. In this context, temporary groups are formed spontaneously, and will cease to exist when the price demands are achieved. The achievement of higher prices not only benefits the group members, as in addition this benefits non-members as well. The equality in individuals enjoying the benefits of public goods leads to the problem of the 'free-rider' when mobilising collective action. 'There is a general agreement that, because of the free-rider problem, individuals will tend to contribute lower level of "action" (money, effort, time and so on) the larger the group to which they belong.'⁶³ Accordingly, Olson⁶⁴ argues that collective incentives cannot always attract potential members to join the group. Consequently, groups tend to offer selective incentives, in order to attract potential members, members, which he describes as rational individuals.

However, Marsh⁶⁵ offers a critique of Olson's argument. He illustrates the inapplicability of this concept through empirical evidence, which exists in Western studies. Marsh opposes Olson's emphasis on the importance of selective incentives, by using evidence from his empirical study of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI). He argues that, 'It is clear that, while Olson's model would predict that individuals or firms would join economic interest groups almost exclusively for the services the groups offer, my analysis would suggest that in the case of the CBI this is an over-simplification. Certainly many large and medium-sized firms seem to join the organization to obtain the collective good. How can one explain the inconsistency between Olson's prediction and my evidence?'⁶⁶

⁶³ Esteban, J. and Ray, D. (2001) 'Collective Action and Group Size Paradox', *American Political Science Review*, Vol.95, No.3 September 2001: 663-672, p.663


⁶⁴ Olson, M. (1974, Fourth Edition), pp.50-51

⁶⁵ Marsh, D. (1976) 'On Joining Interest Groups: An Empirical Consideration of the Work of Mancur Olson', *British Journal of Political Science*, 6, 257-271

⁶⁶ Marsh, D. (1976), p.265

Figure 4-1 Characteristics of Rice, Sugarcane and Potato Farmers Groups

Group Characteristics	Rice Farmers	Sugarcane Farmers	Potato Farmers
Internal Factors			
1. Collective incentives	Medium	Medium	Weak
2. Selective incentives	Strong	Strong	Strong
3. Finance	Medium	Strong	Medium
4. Secretariat office	Medium	Strong	Medium
5. Education	Medium	Medium	Weak
6. Horizontal relationship	Strong	Medium	Strong
7. Vertical relationship	Medium	Strong	Weak
8. Internal democracy	Strong	Weak	Strong
External Factors			
1. Connections with influentials	Medium	Strong	Weak
2. Formal access to policy network	Medium	Strong	Weak
3. Political power	Medium	Strong	Weak
4. Political awareness	Medium	Medium	Weak



Source: Data from field research

- Rice farmers refer to members of the *Krueakhai Khon Ploog Khao Lum Maenam Kong* (NRGM-Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River) in the Province of Ubon Ratchathani
- Sugarcane Farmers refer to members of the Sugar Cane Planters Association of Zone 7 in Province of Kanchanaburi
- Potato farmers refer to members of the Chiang Mai Potato Grower Co-operative Ltd. In Province of Chiang Mai

The issue of the mobilisation of potential members to join groups, has been a controversial area, with respect to the study of interest groups. To understand this area, is a fundamental step towards more comprehensively understanding the nature of both, the actions of and the powers of these groups. Accordingly, the examination of Thai farmers' group formation, and the level of tendency for Thai farmers to join groups will emphasise the issues of both collective incentive and selective incentive. However, the examination of other contributing factors specified in figure 4-1, will not be ignored. The explanations given in accordance with figure 4-1 will focus individually to consider each group of farmers, and not each group characteristic, because the group characteristics are not always perfectly discrete.

4.3.1 Rice Farmers

“In the past, rice cultivation was an activity for the whole community, now it is a matter of each individual. The sense of sharing is rarely found in modern farming. Farmers tend to think of their own benefit before lending a hand to the others.”

- Mrs Thob Soison, Rice Farmers in the Province of Phetchaburi⁶⁷

Traditionally, rice farmers in Thailand would establish a reciprocal exchange of labour based on a moral obligation, stemming from their Buddhist beliefs. However, this relationship has been gradually transformed into a commercially driven reciprocal relationship, resulting from the new adherence to capitalism and consumerism, impacting adversely on the livelihoods of rice farmers. Agricultural labour is no longer freely and fairly exchanged, as instead, money has become the primary means of exchange for the agricultural labour force amongst farmers. This transformation of the rural economy in Thailand has been recognised to be an example of the impact of global capitalism by the Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River (NRGMR). The NRGMR argue that capitalism has not brought about real development to their villages.⁶⁸ Most rural farmers in the areas of the NRGMR are still very poor like other rural farmers in the *Isan* region. According to the World Bank, 44 per cent of the rural population of Thailand live in the *Isan* region. This is the poorest region of Thailand, with almost 20 per cent of the population living below the poverty line.⁶⁹

The NRGMR argue that the policy of economic and social development during the administration of Prime Minister Sarit Dhanarajata between February 1959 – December 1963 has continued to have significant adverse impacts on rural farmers. The Sarit government governed the country through two mottoes. Firstly, *namlai firesawang hontangsadoug*, which closely translates as ‘abundant water supplies, reliable electricity supplies and an efficient road network’. And secondly, *ngan-kue-ngern ngern-kue-ngan*

⁶⁷ Chompoo Trakullertsathien (1998) ‘Rice and Rituals’, *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 16 December 1998 at www.bangkokpost.net/161298/161298_Outlook01.html Retrieved on 18 January 1999

⁶⁸ Interview with Mr Thongsuan Sodapakdi

⁶⁹ Rural Development and Natural Resource Sector Unit East Asia and Pacific Region, World Bank (2000) *Beyond the Crisis: A Strategy for Renewing Rural Development in Thailand*, Bangkok: World Bank, p.xi

bandansuk, which closely translates as ‘work provides money, which brings happiness’.⁷⁰ The policies of economic development of the Sarit government were virtually reflected in these two mottoes and in the First NED Plan, in terms of the development of infrastructure as previously mentioned in section 4.1. The NRGMR assert that the capitalist mottoes of the Sarit government have changed the self-sufficient rural economy into a capitalist economy, and as a result, their capacity for self-reliance was reduced. The capitalist economy induces rice farmers to over spend on unnecessary consumer products, and this has resulted in a dramatic increase in rice farmers’ debts.⁷¹ With reference to this, Ammar asserts that:

At its most extreme, the silent penetration of the market is supposed to be an insidious conspiracy on the part of the “Bangkok Establishment”, or the World Bank or, more generally, world capitalism... farmers do not have any free choice as to whether they wish to participate in the market. They are, it would be claimed, sucked into the market and trapped in it by indebtedness and by material attractions such as television sets and refrigerators.... The argument that farmers are fooled into market participation by material attraction exemplifies the kind of gross paternalism which used to be the prerogative of Bangkok middle-class when discussing rural matter...⁷²

Chairat asserts, that the Sarit capitalist mottoes have contributed profoundly to ‘the rapid change in the attitude of Thai people from the previous emphasis on merit (*bun*) making and accumulating according to the teaching of the Buddha to the ‘modern’ emphasis on money and profit-making,... materialism and consumerism, which are against the Buddhist ideal of simplicity and basic subsistence way of life, have become much valued under the name of ‘development,’ ‘modernisation,’ ‘Westernization,’ and ‘Americanization.’⁷³ This would intrude on the rural culture of interdependence and reciprocal relationships, which in turn has affected the level of tendency for rice farmers to participate in the process of group formation.

⁷⁰ Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River (2001) *Panpheenphu cheewit kasetakorn sukarnphungpaton-eng tamnawtang praratchadumri (Life Reform Plan for Farmers in Order to Achieve Self-reliant Status, Following the King’s Speech)*, Ubon Ratchathani: Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River [in Thai], pp.1-2

⁷¹ Interview with Mr Thongsuan Sodapakdi

⁷² Ammar Siamwalla (1992), pp.246-247

⁷³ Chairat Charoensin-o-larn (1988) *Understanding Postwar Reformism in Thailand: A Reinterpretation of Rural Development*, Bangkok: Duangkamol, p.181

The failure of the policy of economic and social development has resulted in the accumulation of many problems, with respect to rice farmers. Out of frustration for the position they found themselves in, which primarily involved persistently low rice prices, during the early 1990s, involved rice farmers who would later establish the NRGMR, joined several protests of thousands of rice farmers, which were held in Bangkok. In 1992, these same involved rice farmers participated in the protest, which took place in the province of Khon Kaen, of approximately 5,000 farmers from the *Isan* region, and was an attempt to focus attention in relation to the problem of land titles.⁷⁴ However, such *ad hoc* protests, deprived of both formal and informal access to the channels of political power of the elite politicians, failed to deliver the rice farmers their claim for government assistance. This failure only confirmed to individual rice farmers, various rice farmers groups, and the involved rice farmers who would later establish the NRGMR in particular, of their outsider status. Their assertive political strategy, which manifested in the form of the protests, did not deliver them the access to the network of the rice policy-making process, as a result of their political weakness, and more specifically, their absence of connections within the patronage system. This was the catalyst in the formation of the NRGMR on 1 April 2001. Thongsuan⁷⁵ argues that the members of the NRGMR believe that this rice farmers group will promote their self-reliant status, which will help to establish some degree of political influence within the network of the rice policy-making process and beyond.

Accordingly, in the early stages after the formation of the NRGMR, the primary objective of successfully establishing a self-reliant group, emerged as a collective benefit, in order to mobilise farmers in the sub-district of Khampom, where the NRGMR is located, and farmers in sub-districts nearby, to become members. However, farmers in sub-districts outside of Khampom have shown a low level of tendency to join the NRGMR, because they continue to believe that this group would not bring about a significant improvement to their livelihoods.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Interview with Mr Juntee Phonjun

⁷⁵ Interview with Mr Thongsuan Sodapakdi

Moreover, the livelihoods of rural farmers in Thailand, which are dependant on labour intensive agricultural production techniques, leave these farmers with very little spare time to commit elsewhere, because they cannot afford to pay for the costs of either labour or machinery. In addition to their work, rural farmers as parents, have to take care of their families and children. With reference to these factors, joining a rice farmers group involves a variety of social opportunity costs, even if membership is free.⁷⁷ These are the principal obstacles to the development of collective action through the NRGMR.

In an attempt to compensate for these obstacles, the NRGMR has begun to introduce projects involving producing their own organic fertilisers, organic rice production, and in addition, community shop schemes, in order to mobilise potential members and to retain their memberships. These projects are helping to reduce the rice farmers costs of production and therefore the standard of living. Both the organic fertiliser and organic rice production projects, aim to reduce the application of chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

When the research was conducted, this project was helping to phase in organic production and to phase out the chemicals involved in current agricultural production techniques simultaneously. The motivation for this was initially to reduce the costs of production, and the result is that the rice is not yet certifiable for organic markets. However, one of the future aims of the NRGMR is to achieve organic status, in order to produce rice, which can command a higher price in the rice market. The primary motivation ultimately, is to effectively buy their own autonomy from the Thai government, rice mill middlemen, and the cycle of debt of the informal lending sector, through the success of the NRGMR. The community shop uses its purchasing power, in order to buy basic goods at wholesale prices, which can then be sold at less than the market price, such as food, soap, *kreung sangkatan* (packaged Buddhist temple offerings) and fuel. The availability of cheap fuel is important to the farmers, because

⁷⁶ Interview with Mr Boonsarn Promdhama

⁷⁷ Interview with Mr Juntee Phonjun

mechanisation has replaced animal labour in rice production, and this requires a significant amount of fuel to operate.⁷⁸

Overall, the NRGMR perceives that these activities will help to promote the group's overall objective of achieving self-reliant status. In this respect, the organic fertilisers, organic rice production, and community shop projects of the group are selective incentives, which the group provides, in order to promote the collective benefit of achieving self-reliant status.

The research has shown that rice farmers, who joined the NRGMR because of the attractions of its selective incentives, have contributed less overall to its activities and many of these members have tended to free-ride the group as a result.⁷⁹ The benefits of the selective incentives in this context are not the primary motives, when considering why active members remain in the group, contributing both time and effort. Rather, the Buddhist teaching, in respect of generosity towards other people, has been understood to encourage members to contribute to the group. Thongsuan⁸⁰ argues that Buddhist teachings have helped significantly, with regard to creating harmony within the group, and this has helped to reduce the concerns of active members, in terms of the problem of the free-rider amongst members generally. This is in contrast to Olson's perspective, with respect to collective benefit and selective incentive, as he argues that 'Only a *separate* and "*selective incentive*" will stimulate a rational individual...to act in a group-oriented way.'⁸¹

The very high degree of horizontal relationships and very low degree of vertical relationships between members, within the NRGMR, significantly contributes towards the group's harmony. This is because most members of the NRGMR are just like other rice farmers in rural areas across Thailand, whose education and finances are poor, and therefore there is generally an equal level of status amongst them. The average level of

⁷⁸ Interview with Mr Samarn Bumpen

⁷⁹ Interview with Mr Thongsuan Sodapakdi

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Olson, M. (1974, Fourth Edition), p.51

education of the members of the NRGMR is 4 years of compulsory primary education. The problem of poor education, with respect to members of the NRGMR can be explained by the inadequate provision of compulsory education in rural areas of Thailand generally, and in addition the high cost of education beyond the compulsory level.

The government policy of industrialisation has since the 1970s, taken skilled labour out of the agricultural sector, and is another explanation for the low level of education of members of the NRGMR, and the agricultural sector more generally. More recent generations with higher levels of education now tend to leave their provinces, in order to work for better pay in the factories of the more industrialised provinces, surrounding Bangkok and Bangkok itself. At the time of the research, the majority of the members of the NRGMR were over 40 years old, and included many elderly villagers. They are of the generations that experienced problems, with regard to a lack of access to education. According to the World Bank, 'In 1965 the participation rates in Thailand were 78 percent in primary school, 14 percent in secondary school, and 2 percent in a higher level education.'⁸²

Furthermore, as rice production in Thailand continues to be labour intensive, the primary source of labour for rural farmers are their family members. Accordingly, the cost-benefit analysis within rice farmers' families, has led farmers to decide that their children achieving a higher level of education is less important, than ensuring that their children work for them. This was because there has traditionally been little advanced technology applied within rice production. Farmers have only tended to follow a technique of production, which has been passed through the generations. The low level of education within the rice farmers' families generally, has prevented farmers from adopting new technology in the production of rice.

At the national level, a poorly educated rural population is perceived to be an obstacle to the development of the Thai democracy, and the government and the media

⁸² Warr, P.G. and Bhanuphong Nidhiprabha (1996) *Thailand's Macroeconomic Miracle: Stable Adjustment and Sustained Growth*, Kuala Lumpur: World Bank/ Oxford University Press, p.31

tend to link this issue with a high level of vote-buying in the rural areas. However, this belief oversimplifies the true situation, as the research has found that a poorly educated rural population is not the only explanation, with regard to the problem of vote-buying. In addition, the constitution of the internal democracy within the NRGMR reveals how a low level of education is not the complete explanation, with regard to the failure of democracy within the Thai political arena.

Within the constitution of the NRGMR, all members of the committee are appointed through a free and fair system of one vote per member, and no *jao pho* exist within its administrative system, in order to exploit the members for their personal advantage. The NRGMR employs a small administrative office of 5 staff, namely, one manager, one accountant, one salesman, and two security staff. The group has its own co-operative, which acts as its main source of financial revenue, namely, the *Sahakorn kankaset palang samaggi satree lumnum Khong*, which closely translates as the 'Women's United Agricultural Co-operative of the Mekong'. The co-operative set the fixed price of 10 baht per share, which generated 5,539,200 baht through the sale of its shares to its members in 2002. In addition, the NRGMR has received a significant amount of financial support from the government. According to the 5-year operational report of the NRGMR in 2002, the group received a total of 2,500,000 baht from the government between 2001-2002, in order to help to finance their Rice Market Project. This project included the expense of building a rice silo, a drying area for the harvested rice, a lorry for rice transportation and other basic factors in rice trading.⁸³ The financial support from the government maintained the liquidity of the group over this period, and without this help the project would have both been delayed, and dependant on the informal lending sector and the problems associated with this form of indebtedness.

The structure of the administrative system of the NRGMR has significantly benefited from the help of local schoolteachers, led by Thongsuan Sodapakdi.⁸⁴ They

⁸³ Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River (2001), p.5 and p.7

⁸⁴ Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River (2000) *Prawati kwampenma of Krueakhai khon ploog khao lum maenam khong (The Legacy of the Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River)*, Ubon Ratchathani: Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River [Leaflet in Thai]

have not only played a significant role, with respect to the early stages of the group formation of the NRGMR, but have in addition, contributed to the establishment of connections, which the NRGMR now has with both university academics and bureaucrats at the local level. The university academics have provided technical assistance to the group, and as technocrats have provided the group with access to elite bureaucrats and the higher levels of government. Accordingly, on 1 May 2001 Thongsuan and his wife Benjaporn Sodapakdi as representatives of the NRGMR were able to arrange a meeting with Prapat Panyachatiraksa, a Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives from 2001-2002, in order to discuss the specific problems encountered by the group.⁸⁵

Although this evidence suggests that the political influence of the NRGMR has improved, it is not sufficient evidence when arguing that the NRGMR has become a truly influential farmer's interest group. The NRGMR remains politically weak, because as a farmers' interest group, it has not yet established formal access to the network of the policy-making process. The NRGMR remains a potential pressure participant, with the opportunity to progress to become an interest group. Through the establishment of connections with *phu mi itthiphon*, *jao pho* and/or local businessmen, the NRGMR would be able to develop their restricted relationship, with respect to elite politicians. Nevertheless, the meeting between the representatives of the NRGMR and the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Co-operatives was a positive step, with regard to establishing channels of political access to the network of the policy-making process. This helps to suggest that the NRGMR can gradually develop its position as that of outsider to be that of insider, through its approach of asking for technical and financial assistance, when combined with its autonomous status and clear organisational framework. In this respect, the government granted them financial support, not because of their political pressure, but because the government wanted to implement its existing policy of supporting rural development, through well organised groups at the local level.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Interview with Miss Benjaporn Sodapakdi

⁸⁶ Interview with Mr Thongsuan Sodapakdi

4.3.2 Sugarcane Farmers

In the past, the sugar mill would limit sugarcane prices. Purchases by each mill were different without standards or specific requirements.... The growers had no opportunity to negotiate the price unless there was an increase in some seasons of sugarcane demand to produce sugar and the world market prices. The price of sugarcane would increase depending on the conditions of business competition among the sugar mills.

Sugar mills have always taken advantage of the sugar prices. This resulted in cane growers joining together to create negotiating power over purchase prices, fair treatment, and enable them to survive.⁸⁷

This conflict between the sugarcane farmers and the sugarcane mills acted as a catalyst for the advantages of collective benefit, in the formation of the first sugarcane farmers groups in the late 1950s. This initial attempt to begin to establish their negotiating power began with the formation of small groups of farmers in the province of Chonburi, where Thailand's sugarcane cultivation was concentrated. By 1964, the first sugarcane farmers group in Thailand was established, and the Sugar Cane Planters Association of Zone 7 (SCPA) was formed, which consisted of sugarcane farmers from the provinces of Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Suphanburi and Nakhon Pathom.⁸⁸ These four provinces are in juxtaposition, and therefore the geographical concentration of the sugarcane farmers was regarded as a contributing factor in enabling the SCPA to both establish and then to develop successfully. These 4 provinces remain the centres of sugarcane production in Thailand today. As illustrated in table 4-1, the average production of sugarcane within the members of the SCPA was 13.27 million tonnes, between 1995-2000.

By late 1960s, the SCPA were in a position to negotiate successfully with the sugarcane mills, in order to raise the price for their sugarcane.⁸⁹ This success in the collective action of the SCPA was a significant mobilising factor, with respect to the level of tendency for sugarcane farmers to join the SCPA, at this relatively early stage in its existence. When the price of sugarcane fell, the SCPA would take instant action

⁸⁷ Office of the Cane and Sugar Board (1999b) *Cane and Sugar Directory 1998-99*, Bangkok: Office of the Cane and Sugar Board, Ministry of Industry, p.38

⁸⁸ Interview with Mr Bancha Nakasakdisevi

through the utilisation of both their insider and outsider strategies. In such a circumstance, initially the SCPA would mobilise its insider strategy of negotiation with the sugarcane mills. With the failure of its insider strategy, the SCPA would then mobilise its outsider strategy of protesting at the sugarcane mills.⁹⁰ The SCPA was limited in effectiveness as a farmer's interest group, because if these limited options failed, then there was no other strategy available for them to adopt.

Table 4-1 Members, Production, and Revenue of the Sugar Cane Planters Association of Zone 7 (SCPA), Between 1995-2000

Year	Number of members	Sugarcane Production (million tonnes)	Contribution to SCPA per tonne (baht)	Total SCPA Revenue (million baht)
1995	80,000-83,000*	14.02	2	28.04
1996	80,000-83,000*	14.57	2	29.14
1997	80,000-83,000*	15.81	2	31.62
1998	80,000-83,000*	9.59	2	19.18
1999	80,000-83,000*	13.12	2	26.24
2000	80,000-83,000*	13.11	2	26.22
2001	80,000-83,000*	12.34	2	24.68
2002	83,200	13.61	2	27.22

*Precise figures for the pre-2002 SCPA membership is not known, however this figure is estimated to have varied between 80,000-83,000 members.

Source: From Information Provided by the Sugar Cane Planters Association of Zone 7 and the Rajburi Sugar Co., Ltd.

However, problems in terms of the price of sugarcane were significantly reduced after the introduction of the '70:30 revenue-sharing system' in 1982, which is outlined in box 4-1. This system resulted in a significant reduction in the conflict between sugarcane farmers and sugarcane mills, with regard to the problem of the price of the sugarcane, but did however, transfer much of the remaining pressure from the sugarcane farmers from

⁸⁹ Ramsay, A. (1987) 'The Political Economy of Sugar in Thailand', *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.60, No.2, 1987: 248-270, p.252

⁹⁰ Interview with Mr Vithet Yamprayoon

the sugarcane mills and onto government. Nevertheless, sugarcane farmers protests were significantly reduced overall.⁹¹

Box 4-1 70:30 Revenue-Sharing System

In 1980, the price of sugarcane in the world market was as high as US\$ 0.40 per pound (approximately US\$ 0.80 per kilogram), which led to a very significant difference between the domestic and export prices. The domestic price of sugar was as low as 8 baht per kilogram, whereas the export price was 20 baht per kilogram. Consequently, most sugarcane mills tried to export as much as possible of both their raw and refined sugar, which exhausted the domestic production of sugarcane. The high price allowed sugarcane mills to buy from sugarcane farmers at apparently high prices of between 650 to 750 baht per tonne. However, sugarcane farmers only later found out that the prices that they received were not high when compared to the export prices, which sugarcane mills achieved. The inadequate information obtained by sugarcane farmers, with regard to the changes in the world market, enabled sugarcane mills to take advantage at the sugarcane farmers' expense.

The dramatic increase in the price of sugarcane in the 1980/1981-crop year, brought about the problem of excess supply in the following crop year, because many farmers transferred to the production of sugarcane. As a result, the supply of sugarcane increased by 12 million tons in the 1981/1982-crop year, as did the level of world production, attracted by the new high price. However, due to the consequence of over supply the price crashed to only 250 baht per tonne that year. The price failed to recover for a number of years, and soon sugarcane farmers groups protested heavily, in order to pressure the Thai government to solve this problem. This became a critical point in the transformation of the Thai sugarcane industry. In order to address the problem of the price of sugarcane, in 1982, the Deputy Minister of Industry Jirayu Isarangkul na Ayudhaya, who himself was educated in Australia, suggested that the management of the sugarcane industry in Australia may be applicable to Thailand. This led to the introduction of the 70:30 revenue-sharing system in the sugarcane industry.

The formula for the 70:30 revenue-sharing system is as follows:

$$P_c = \frac{0.7 (R_1 + R_2)}{Q_c}$$

Where

- P_c = price of sugarcane per metric tonne
- R_1 = net proceeds from domestic sale
- R_2 = net proceeds from export sale
- Q_c = total sugarcane quantity crushed in each season
- Net proceeds = Gross proceeds minus sale expense and taxes

Under the 70:30 revenue-sharing system, 70 per cent of revenues go to sugarcane farmers and 30 per cent go to sugarcane mills. As a result, this system significantly reduces the problem of price conflicts between the two groups. With reference to the 70:30 revenue-sharing system, the determination of the price of sugarcane is divided into two stages:

1. Preliminary price of sugarcane: At the beginning of the season, forecasts of revenues from domestic sales and exports, and of sugarcane quantity will be made. Calculation of preliminary, from forecasted figures will be made accordingly. The provisional sugarcane price is to be announced in early December each year.
2. Final price of sugarcane: At the end of the following September, when proceeds from domestic sales and exports, and of sugarcane quantity crushed in the season become known, calculation of final cane price will be made accordingly. The final price of sugarcane will be announced in October each year.

Source: Interview with Mr Rachai Chusilpkul and Office of the Cane and Sugar Board (1999a), p.22

17 years after of the introduction of the 70:30 revenue-sharing system, a large scale protest of over 10,000 sugarcane farmers was only once observed, in February

⁹¹ Ibid.

1998.⁹² Between 1995-2000, there were only three protests by the SCPA against the government, with regard to the price of sugarcane, and furthermore, there were no significant conflicts observed between sugarcane farmers and sugarcane mills.⁹³ In this significant respect, collective action has been required less since 1982, than in the 1960s and 1970s. Since the late 1980s, members have observed a significant decline in the role for the SCPA, which has raised the question amongst sugarcane farmers, as to whether they should either join or remain within the SCPA.⁹⁴

Over time, the SCPA has offered its members a series of selective incentives in addition to the collective benefit of achieving a higher price for sugarcane. This is because the SCPA has become aware of the problem of the free rider; in that achieving increased sugarcane prices for its members will also benefit non-members. However, the problem of the free rider evidently does not have much impact on the decisions of the existing sugarcane farmers, as to whether they should remain with, or leave the SCPA. There are only a limited number of sugarcane farmers who are not members in the provinces of Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Suphanburi and Nakhon Pathom, the provinces of the SCPA. With reference to this, the legal system has played a significant role in producing the level of tendency sugarcane farmers have in joining the SCPA, because the production of sugarcane is strictly control by the government.

After the introduction of the 70:30 revenue-sharing system, the government further modernised the sugarcane industry by introducing the Sugarcane and Sugar Act B.E. 2527 (1984), which superseded the Sugar Act B.E. 2511 (1968).⁹⁵ The Sugarcane and Sugar Act B.E. 2527 introduced a more systematic management system to the sugarcane industry. As a result, today the production of both sugarcane, and sugarcane into sugar, are strictly controlled by the government. Nevertheless, this government

⁹² Yuthana Priwan and Woranuj Maneerungsee (1998) 'Sugarcane Planters to Demonstrate in Bangkok', *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 30 January 1998, at www.bkkpost.samart.co.th/news/BParchive/BP19980130/300198_News02.html Retrieved on 22 July 2000

⁹³ Interview with Mr Naradhip Anantasuk

⁹⁴ Interview with Mr Lek

⁹⁵ Office of the Cane and Sugar Board (1984) *Sugarcane and Sugar Act B.E. 2527*, Bangkok: Office of the Cane and Sugar Board, Ministry of Industry, p.1

control appears to be a positive contributing factor, with regard to the sugarcane farmers group formation.

Box 4-2 provides extracts from the act, and includes Section 11 of the act, which states that a sugarcane farmer can only become a member of a committee at the Office of the Cane and Sugar Board if they join an officially registered sugarcane farmer's organisation of the government registration scheme. Accordingly, the act became an instrument for the SCPA and other officially registered sugarcane farmers groups to use as a selective incentive to sugarcane farmers.

Box 4-2 Sugarcane and Sugar Act B.E. 2527: Sections Related to Sugarcane Farmers

Section 11	The representatives of sugarcane planters and representative of sugar factories shall meet the following qualifications: (1) Thai nationality; ... (5) not being a political official or not having held a position in politics; (6) not being a member of a political party or official of a political party. The representative of sugarcane planters must be a sugarcane planter who is proposed by the institution of sugarcane planters in consideration of the proportion of supplies of sugarcane of the members of each institution, and must not be a committee member, manager, official or employee of sugar factory.
Section 35.	Anyone growing sugarcane for supply to sugar factories must be registered as the sugarcane planter. The registration per paragraph one shall follow the rules prescribed by the Committee.
Section 36.	The Sugarcane planters shall: (1) act in compliance with the rules and announcements made by the Committee; (2) report on the quantity of sugarcane to be delivered to the leaders of sugarcane planters group or sugarcane factory on the form and following the procedures and period of time as will be prescribed by the Sugarcane Committee.
Section 37.	The sugarcane planters must grow sugarcane in the quantity as fixed by the Committee. In case of the production of sugarcane being higher or lower than that fixed by the Committee, or non-production of same as has been reported, necessary action will be taken under the regulations prescribed by the Committee.
Section 38.	The leaders of sugarcane planters group must register as the leader of sugarcane planters group. The registration per paragraph one and the revocation of the registration must follow the regulations prescribed by the Committee.
Source: Office of the Cane and Sugar Board (1984), pp.18-19 and pp.21-22	

Being a member of a committee at the Office of the Cane and Sugar Board does not only allow a sugarcane farmer to represent the interests of all sugarcane farmers. In addition, it is an opportunity to further their own personal interests and social position, through recognition as a member of such a committee. Therefore, this selective incentive is a social incentive to sugarcane farmers, because 'people are sometimes also motivated by a desire to win prestige, respect, friendship, and other social and physical

objectives.’⁹⁶ According to Olson, ‘The possibility that, in a case where there was no economic incentive for an individual to contribute to the achievement of a group interest, there might nonetheless be a social incentive for him to make such a contribution, must therefore be considered.’⁹⁷

The evidence of this selective incentive as a form of social incentive can be more commonly observed amongst quota men than amongst ordinary sugarcane members of the SCPA. This is because most quota men are either wealthy or *phu mi itthiphon* (men of influence), who are aware that being recognised at the national level within the Thai political arena, can promote their connections with elite politicians. This is possible because of the patronage system within the Thai political culture.

Throughout the whole period of the 1970s and 1980s, one of the most significant of selective incentives was the improvement made to the roads in the areas of SCPA members. Although it has been argued, that during the First and Second NED Plans, the government emphasised improvements to basic infrastructure, corruption and the patronage system led to the uneven development of infrastructure in rural areas. Road transportation is essential to sugarcane farmers. Between 1968-1983, the SCPA spent 43,486,788 baht in improving sugarcane transportation routes in the provinces of Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Suphanburi and Nakhon Pathom.⁹⁸ These improvements significantly lowered the time of transportation between sugarcane farmers and the sugarcane mills, which helps to preserve the freshness of sugarcane, a crucial factor in obtaining the best price for sugarcane. The fresh delivery of sugarcane after harvest maintains the level of CCS (Commercial Cane Sugar)⁹⁹, which in sugarcane will steadily decline.

⁹⁶ Olson, M. (1974, Fourth Edition), p.60

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Montol Kongkeaw (1986) *Settakij numtalsai nai changwat Kanchanaburi (The Sugarcane Economy in the Province of Kanchanaburi)*, research report submitted to the Department of Teacher Education, Ministry of Education [in Thai], p.151

⁹⁹ CCS means sucrose in the cane which can be refined into a form of pure white sugar (pure white sugar 100 net litre) if milling and purification method are used according to standards. From Office of Cane and Sugar Board (1999a), *Cane and Sugar Industry in Thailand: 1998-99*, Bangkok: Office of Cane and Sugar Board, Ministry of Industry, p.44

Most sugarcane is both harvested and transported to the sugarcane mills through the quota men, who each control a 'quota group'. The quota men obtain licenses to supply sugarcane by arrangement of the sugarcane mills, and normally only large-scale sugarcane farmers can obtain these licenses as registered as 'the leader of sugarcane planters group' (Section 38 of the Sugarcane and Sugar Act B.E. 2527). This arrangement helps sugarcane mills to ensure the supply of sugarcane throughout the sugarcane-milling season.¹⁰⁰ Quota men normally have between 20-30 small-scale sugarcane farmers within their quota groups, in order to enable them to meet their obligation to the sugarcane mills of at least 3000 tonnes.¹⁰¹

However, the research has found that large-scale production of sugarcane is not the only main factor, with regard to obtaining licenses with the sugarcane mills. In addition, quota men tend to be either wealthy and *phu mi itthiphon*, or those with strong connections to *phu mi itthiphon*. These quota men are usually powerful and capable of using their power to manipulate small-scale sugarcane farmers into joining their quota group, which then allows them to supply more sugarcane to the sugarcane mills. During the research, it was stated that some quota men can even supply in excess of 100,000 tonnes of sugarcane, and this capacity significantly enhances the power of these quota men within the sugarcane industry.¹⁰²

Some of these most powerful of quota men have used this opportunity, in order to establish their own political careers. In his study of sugarcane farmers groups in Thailand, Ramsay¹⁰³ has revealed that several of the most powerful sugarcane farmers were members of the House of Representatives. Both powerful sugarcane farmers and sugarcane mills were financial contributors to political parties. Specifically, in 1983, three of the four MPs representing the constituencies of the province of Kanchanaburi were these powerful sugarcane farmers themselves.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Mr Vithet Yamprayoon

¹⁰¹ Interview with Mr Sumeth Leelasuwannaket

¹⁰² Interview with Mr Bancha Nakasakdisevi

¹⁰³ Ramsay, A. (1987), p. 256

Financial influence is an essential factor in the ability of quota men to operate, because they must be able to provide facilities to the sugarcane farmers, both in terms of credit and in transportation of the sugarcane. Each year quota men need to be capable of investing at least 600,000-700,000 baht in the production of the sugarcane of their members.¹⁰⁴ In addition, quota men are also responsible for administrating the '*ngern-kyeo*' or pre-planting finance, which is credit supplied by sugarcane mills to sugarcane farmers, to be used for working capital in the production of sugarcane. This finance is normally paid in the form of post-dated cheques, which sugarcane farmers short of liquidity, cash at less than face value at the commercial banks.¹⁰⁵

The sugarcane milling season normally takes place between November and April, and the local labour force needs to be supplemented by labour brought in from *Isan* region. This is necessary because each quota man needs to both harvest and transport to the sugarcane mills at least 3,000 tonnes in a carefully co-ordinated operation. The transportation of sugarcane generates a significant amount of income to the quota men over this period. The standard price for transportation is 120 baht per tonne, which includes the labour cost involved in the harvesting of sugarcane. It is normal to see the illegal overloading of sugarcane on lorries, in order to speed up the process of transportation. Being *phu mi itthiphon* or having strong connections with *phu mi itthiphon*, significantly benefits the quota men, because this can help in reducing the costs incurred through fines and bribes.¹⁰⁶

Delays in the harvesting of sugarcane will effect the level of CCS in sugarcane, and this can be very costly to quota men. If they cannot harvest the sugarcane of the sugarcane farmers in their quota groups, the sugarcane farmers may decide to join other quota groups. The departure of sugarcane farmers from a quota group will affect the capacity of quota men to maintain their licenses with the sugarcane mills.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Mr Sa-ngiam Pookpusa

¹⁰⁵ Office of Cane and Sugar Board (1999a) *Cane and Sugar Industry in Thailand: 1998-99*, Bangkok: Office of Cane and Sugar Board, Ministry of Industry, p.68

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Mr Sa-ngiam Pookpusa

Some quota men have attempted to solve the problem, with regard to the inadequate labour supply over the period of harvest, and have bought sugarcane-harvesting machines. However, these machines cannot work in all weather conditions. Particularly after rain, these machines cannot operate effectively in muddy fields, and so quota men find them a poor investment. As a result, the quota men remain highly reliant on labour.

The transportation of labour force from the *Isan* region to the central region normally costs approximately 30,000 baht per quota man. The SCPA provides the quota men with licenses to transport labour, which lorry drivers have to present to highway police checkpoints. This became an effective selective incentive for quota men to become members of the SCPA.¹⁰⁷ However, quota men have revealed that a 20 baht note is needed in addition to the license, because of the corruption of highway policemen along the roads between *Isan* and the central region. This is because they cannot afford the time involved in stopping at every highway police checkpoint in declaring their licenses, which would only delay the harvesting of the sugarcane. Nevertheless, they still find that the license is needed in the rare case of encountering a highway policeman who does not accept bribes.¹⁰⁸

The SCPA also provides its members with a healthcare service as a selective incentive. Between 1972 to 1977, the SCPA built the Magaraksa Hospital in the district of Tamaga, in the province of Kanchanaburi, with a budget of 40 million baht.¹⁰⁹ Government provisions of healthcare services are often inadequate. Sugarcane farmers can receive cheaper healthcare services than would otherwise only be available within the private system, through private hospitals, which have agreements with the SCPA. This service would not normally be provided to the members of other farmers groups in Thailand, because most farmers groups are neither as financially secure nor as well organised as the SCPA.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Mr Sa-ngiam Pookpusa, Mrs Yupin Meetrong and Mr Lek

Although the SCPA has been able to provide a variety of both collective and selective incentives to its members since it was established, one negative selective incentive has emerged from the excessive influence, which *phu mi itthiphon* carry within the SCPA. This problem namely involves the attempts made by the SCPA to force sugarcane farmers outside of the SCPA, inside the group. Both quota men and sugarcane farmers can be targeted, however quota men are usually targeted first because within this hierarchical system, control over the quota men will result in effective control over the sugarcane farmers. Quota men in the province of Ratchaburi have observed non-members of the SCPA experiencing various strategies of coercion. One such strategy involves the deliberate puncturing of lorry tyres during the harvesting season. Although sugarcane farmers outside of the SCPA very often do not normally believe in the benefits of joining, and perceive the involvement of *phu mi itthiphon* negatively within the SCPA, the potential of the threat to them is far more damaging than these perceived costs of joining the SCPA.¹¹⁰

An influential group of quota men established the SCPA. The first president was, in 1964, Mongkol Keepanich a wealthy, respectable and locally powerful quota man. Sompop and Kanoksak¹¹¹ argue that his economic and political power at the local level, in addition to his family background and political connections have to be considered, in order to explain his status within the SCPA. Mongkol's cousin was General Boonchu Juntarubegkha, the then head of the Royal Thai Air Force. His brother was Kamchad Keepanich, a high-ranking bureaucrat within the Department of Public Relations of the Office of the Prime Minister. In addition, Mongkol was a close friend of General Pong Punnaka, the Minister of Industry. Sompop and Kanoksak assert that Mongkol's political connections explain the survival of the SCPA throughout the periods of military government in the 1960's and 1970's, when farmers group formations would not normally survive. For instance, with the example of the FFT, which was also a farmers group, the expansion of the government's anti-Communist campaign of the 1960s and

¹⁰⁹ Montol Kongkeaw (1986), p.151

¹¹⁰ Interview with Mr Lek

¹¹¹ Sompop Manarungsan and Kanoksak Kaewthep (1987) *Utsahakam numtal nai prathet Thai (Sugarcane Industry in Thailand)*, Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, p.101

1970s led to the assassinations of many of the leaders of the FFT, and its consequential collapse soon after.

The SCPA is structured with a high concentration of vertical relationships. Many committees of the SCPA are of *phu mi itthiphon*, who are not sugarcane farmers themselves, and some committees only cover a few areas of sugarcane production.¹¹² The members of the SCPA can be categorised into three main levels, namely the level of the executive committee, the level of the quota men, and the level of the sugarcane farmers. The level of the executive committee is the most powerful, with most of the financial and political power within the SCPA. The level of the quota men is less powerful, with some financial, but less political power, and some quota men, whilst wealthy are politically inactive. The level of the sugarcane farmers is the least powerful, with little financial or political power. Whilst their influence is limited within the SCPA, the research has found that they remain in a considerably stronger position than both rice and potato farmers.

This relatively good financial status as SCPA members provides these sugarcane farmers with an improved access to education for them and their children. Most quota men have at least completed a high school education, with some quota men with a university degree¹¹³, which is already above the national average for farmers. The average level of education for sugarcane farmers within the SCPA is 4 years of compulsory education.¹¹⁴ With respect to the transferring of labour forces with a good level of education to work in factories, this is less of a problem in terms of sugarcane farmers than with either rice or potato farmers. This is because of the higher incomes earned by sugarcane farmers. Many quota men believe that they can earn more within the sugarcane farming industry of the agricultural sector, than within the industrial sector.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Interview with Mrs Araya Arunanondchai, Mr Atichat Wipadapisut and Mr Vithet Yamprayoon

¹¹³ Interview with Mrs Yupin Meetrong

¹¹⁴ Interview with Mr Naradhip Anantasuk

¹¹⁵ Interview with Mr Sumeth Leelasuwannaket

The high levels of education of the quota men have enabled the SCPA to establish a well administered system. At its head office in the province of Kanchanaburi, there is a fully equipped office suite with modern office technology and a computer network. There is a SPCA legal department, which supports its co-operation with the government and other related legal issues impacting on sugarcane farmers. In order to strengthen its relationship with its members, the SCPA has 24 branches in 4 provinces. The members within each branch's administration directly vote for the president of their branch.¹¹⁶

At the head office of the SCPA is based the overall president, who is voted for by all members of the SCPA. The president works with 48 committees, which are headed by the 24 branch presidents, in addition to 8 elected, and 16 appointed by the president of the SCPA.¹¹⁷ This system is evidence of an undemocratic internal democracy, because the 16 committee heads appointed by the president, are frequently *phu mi itthiphon* with strong connections to the president. The patronage system is an important factor within the administrative system of the SCPA, and this reduces the effectiveness of the overall administrative system in terms of the progress of the SCPA. Accordingly, it can be argued that the internal democracy of the SCPA reflects the Thai political arena at the micro level.

The *phu mi itthiphon* are involved within the sugarcane industry, due to its profitable status as an industry, and in addition their involvement is encouraged within SCPA specifically, because of the generous financial resources of the SCPA itself. With reference to table 4-1, the main source of revenue for the SCPA is through the commission from the sale of sugarcane at 2 baht per tonne, for all of the sugarcane sold by sugarcane farmer members. This has enabled the SCPA to generate a large amount of money, peaking at 31.62 million baht in 1997. The average revenue of the SCPA over the period between 1995-2002 was 26.54 million baht.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Mr Naradhip Anantasuk

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

In the 1990s, sugarcane farmers found clear evidence of corruption within the SCPA. A source, who asked not to be named confirmed: 'I don't know where the money has gone, since I haven't seen any development of the roads in the area I live. Also, most of the improvements of the roads are seen in the areas where the executive committees of the SCPA live.' This perception is both discouraging farmers from remaining within the SCPA and new farmers from joining. Over time, this factor could weaken the strength of the SCPA.

Box 4-3 Thailand Sugarcane Planters Federation

The desire for an increase in the bargaining power amongst various sugarcane farmers groups, brought about the establishment of the Thailand Sugarcane Planters Federation in 1975.

Objectives

1. To be a co-operative center for cane growers, sugarcane institutions, sugar mills and the government. To provide representation for associations, institutes, and Thai cane growers to negotiate sugarcane prices, and also to provide representation in co-operation with the government, sugar mills, etc.
2. To promote production and sale of sugarcane and sugarcane products, both domestically and abroad.
3. The promotion of technology, development of sugarcane planting, trade and research, regarding the production of sugarcane.
4. To act on behalf of the federation of members under the laws and traditions of Thailand.
5. Promotion of charity, public morals, culture, sports, health, and entertainment under democratic principles.

Past Activities

The Thailand Sugarcane Planters Federation played a significant role in the 1981/1982 push for the government to address the problems of sugarcane farmers. This led to the creation of the 70:30 Revenue-Sharing System.

Members

1. Sugar Cane Planters Association of Zone 7 (SCPA)
2. Chonburi Agricultural Career Group Association
3. Prachaub-Petchburi Cane Planters Association
4. Kampangeth Cane Planters Association
5. Burirum Cane Planters Association
6. Eastern Agricultural Association
7. Suphanburi Agricultural Support Career Association
8. North Eastern Cane Planter Association
9. Nakornsawan Agricultural Promotion Association
10. Lopburi (Ta Luang) Cane Planters Association

Source: Office of Cane and Sugar Board (1999b), pp.38-39

Nevertheless, the research has found that sugarcane farmers agree overall, that the existence of *phu mi itthiphon* within the SCPA enables it to establish channels of political access to the network of the policy-making process, more effectively than would otherwise be possible. The SCPA is a member of the *Sahaphan chaorai oi haeng prathet Thai* or Thailand Sugarcane Planters Federation, and therefore, the SCPA does not play an isolated role in pressuring the government to respond to the sugarcane farmers'

demands. With the establishment of this coalition at the national level, as outlined in box 4-3, their negotiating power has been significantly advanced.

In promoting their negotiating power, the SCPA is aware that the assertive political action that it has adopted as a main actor within the Thailand Sugarcane Planters Federation has not pressured the government as effectively as it desired. This is in part because there are many other interest groups within the network of the policy-making process, with regard to sugarcane. Many of these other interest groups, including sugarcane mills, food and drink manufacturers, have conflicts of interest with sugarcane farmers' interest groups, including the SCPA.¹¹⁸

The SCPA acknowledges that within the Thai political arena, groups with powerful backers are always better off. Accordingly, the group has an allocated annual budget, with regard to the advancement of their connections with elite bureaucrats and politicians, which is promoted as a positive strategy contrasting with the patronage system. When there is some kind of transfer of power, for instance after a general election or with the promotion of an elite bureaucrat, the SCPA will, when strategically relevant, present a gift or organise a party, in order to celebrate these appointments.¹¹⁹

The SCPA argues that such involvement is only what is customary within the Thai political culture, and in addition that they do not support any particular party or any specific bureaucrats, and that they are politically uninvolved.¹²⁰ However a truer reflection of this position would be to suggest that the unstable nature of the Thai political arena would make such a strategy impractical in any case, so therefore, the position that the SCPA takes is purely one of pragmatism and expediency.

The SCPA amongst others within Thailand Sugarcane Planters Federation, constitute the most powerful farmers interest group coalition in Thailand. With reference to this, the SCPA can argue that its political strategies are well planned. They have

¹¹⁸ Interview with Mr Rachai Chusilpkul and Mr Naradhip Anantasuk,

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

achieved respect amongst from within the network of the policy-making process, through applying its insider strategies before attempting to apply its outsider strategies. However, through its relatively strong position as a farmers group, it can afford this courtesy to some extent. When the price of sugarcane is low, the SCPA and the coalition of the Thailand Sugarcane Planters Federation will seek to negotiate with the government first. Only when they are sure that the negotiations have not produced the government response, with respect to their demands, will they then resort to the cruder mechanism of protesting.¹²¹

4.3.3 Potato Farmers

As a result of the controls placed on the import of potato seedlings in 1980, by the government agency, the Public Warehouse Organisation, there was an immediate shortage of potato seedlings. In 1981, potato farmers formed the *Klum Thammachart* (Group of Nature), which was officially registered in 1982 as the first potato farmers group in Thailand. There were a total of 15 members of the *Klum Thammachart*, based in the district of Sansai, in the province of Chiang Mai, who attempted to pressure the government into importing more potato seedlings from abroad. However, the formation of this, the first potato farmers group did not initially result in any improvements to their negotiating power, with respect to the government.¹²²

However, the group continued to gain support, and expanded into mostly neighbouring districts in the years that followed. Under the guidance of the Department of Co-operatives Promotion and the Department of Agricultural Extension of the MOAC, members of the *Klum Thammachart* in the districts of Sansai, Maetang, Maerim and Fang were encouraged to officially register, in order to qualify for an allocation of potato seedlings. Registration as the Potato Growers Co-operative, was completed on 7 April 1987, with a total membership of 4,665.¹²³

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Interview with Mr Naradhip Anantasuk

¹²² Interview with Mr In-orn Pothacharoen

¹²³ Ibid.

The location of the Potato Growers Co-operative based in the district of Sansai created problems, with regard to the administration of the district of Fang and the sub-district of Chaiprakarn, because these districts were located at a travelling distance of approximately 150 kilometres away from the district of Sansai. Eventually, in order to solve this problem, on 6 October 1997, the Potato Growers Co-operative decided to separate into two co-operatives, namely the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd in the district of Sansai, with 3,617 members, and the Chaiprakarn-Fang Co-operative in the district of Fang, with 1,033 members.¹²⁴

The examination, with respect to the group formation of potato farmers groups will focus on the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, from its 1997 inception onwards, because it is the most significant potato farmers group in Thailand. The Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd and the Chaiprakarn-Fang Co-operative have successfully arranged to share the potato seedlings among their districts across the province of Chiang Mai, avoiding any conflict between the two co-operatives.¹²⁵

With reference to the establishment of the Potato Growers Co-operative, the objective of an adequate supply of potato seedlings was a successful collective benefit, which mobilised the level of tendency for potato farmers to join. However, the significance of this collective benefit has declined since the expansion of the contract farming system throughout the 1990s. This system works because potato chip companies provide a valuable amount of potato seedlings to the potato farmers who hold contracts with them, and this largely reduces the problem of inadequate potato seedlings.¹²⁶

Between 1994-1995 Örnberg¹²⁷, found that in the province of Chiang Mai, seven potato chip companies held contracts with farmers. According to Örnberg, these companies had strongly competed, in order to expand the number of potato farmers

¹²⁴ Chiang Mai Potato Co-operative Ltd. (1998), p.1

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.2

¹²⁶ Interview with Mr Plean Chuansuk

¹²⁷ Örnberg, L. (1999) 'Potato Farmers' Organisation in Thailand: A discussion on the prerequisites of the formation and survival of farmer-organisations', paper presented to the 7th International Conference on Thai Studies (4-8 July, 1999), University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, p.7

holding contracts with them in the district of Sansai, due both the production skill and experience of potato farmers in this district. As a part of the contract, these companies provide potato seedlings, technical assistance, and a guaranteed market for the potato farmers.

Örnberg argues that ‘In the 1994-95 season it was possible for farmers in San Sai district to bargain for a higher prices of potatoes and the companies tried to outbid each other in offering different types of advantages to the farmers.’¹²⁸ However, this argument fails to consider the significance of the monopoly power the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co., the U.S-based multinational company, which is the snack-food division of Pepsi Cola (Thailand) Trading Co., holds within the local economy of the district of Sansai.

Sunan affirms that ‘we have never been able to bargain with Frito-Lay, because we are not the only suppliers of potato to them. If we refuse to supply them potatoes, they don’t care, because they can just buy from potato farmers in the other provinces in this region. Also, the number of potato farmers is increasing every year, because it is better than growing garlic and onion.’¹²⁹ Moreover, the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. is further developing its share of the potato chip market, passing 50 per cent in 2001¹³⁰, and is already further targeting its operation across southeast Asia.

The research found that in the district of Sansai, most members and non-members of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd hold contracts with the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co., and therefore the company is in a strong position to negotiate with farmers. In addition, the contract offered by the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. is favourable, because its offers for potato seedlings, technical assistance, pre-credit and price of potatoes, are overall, more favourable than all other companies.¹³¹ Furthermore, the competitiveness of the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co., with regard to the contract farming

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.7

¹²⁹ Interview with Mr Sunan Mornlert

¹³⁰ Sukanya Jitpleecheep (2001) ‘Potato Shortage Caps Chip Sales’, *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 16 March 2001, at <http://scoopbangkokpost.co.th/bkkpost/2001/march2001/bp20010316/160301...> Retrieved on 11 September 2001

¹³¹ Interview with Mr Wanchai Lai

system, significantly reduces the political power of all potato farmers. In 2000, the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. held contracts with 6,000 farmers in the provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun and Tak, in the northern region of Thailand.¹³² With this understanding, potato farmers in the district of Sansai cannot develop their negotiating power, because the company no longer only bases its supply from within the district of Sansai.

With the improvement to the problem of inadequate potato seedlings, a problem that began with the controls introduced by the Public Warehouse Organisation in 1980, by the mid-1990s, the level of tendency for potato farmers to join the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd had, as a result, declined. This improvement was due to two main factors, both through the success of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, and in addition through the involvement of potato chip companies, especially the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co.

However, although the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. has contributed towards solving the problem of inadequate potato seedlings, this is not to argue that they have always treated the potato farmers fairly. The potato farmers in the district of Sansai have argued that they should have received better prices for their potatoes from the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. With reference to the problem of the price of potatoes, the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd is not powerful enough to effectively negotiate for a fairer price with the Frito-Lay Thailand Co. Instead, the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd has only been a channel of communication between the Frito-Lay Thailand Co. and potato farmers, for instance in helping to arrange the farming contract system. Accordingly, it can be argued that the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd cannot effectively provide collective benefits to mobilise potato farmers in the district of Sansai to join the group.

¹³² Phusadee Arunmas (2000) 'Hot Chips Boost New Crop', *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 21 February 2000, at [http://scoopbangkokpost.co.th/bkkpost/2000/bp2000_feb/bp20000221/21020\(...](http://scoopbangkokpost.co.th/bkkpost/2000/bp2000_feb/bp20000221/21020(...) Retrieved on 11 September 2001

In order to compensate for this failure, the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd has introduced a series of selective incentives. Although, it has been argued that the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. provides potato seedlings to potato farmers, they must still pay for the cost of these imported potato seedlings, which normally costs farmers approximately 3,000 baht per year. Moreover, the quality of potato seedlings provided by the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. and other companies are poor. To reduce the cost of potato seedlings, to compensate for the poor quality of potato seedlings, and in addition, to help with the problem of the inadequate supply of potato seedlings, in 2000, the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd built a cool-room. The provision of the cool-room has enabled potato farmers to produce more potato seedlings by themselves, because by storing potato seedlings in the cool-room, they can prevent the potatoes from rotting, which results from Thailand's hot climate.¹³³

The period of production for potatoes in the district of Sansai is between October and March, which is winter in the northern region of Thailand. Therefore, between April and September, farmers produce other crops, in order to increase their income, such as corn, rice and broccoli. Rice is normally grown for family consumption, while corn and broccoli are the other main cash crops for potato farmers. Accordingly, the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd provides cheap corn seedlings to potato farmers. However, this is not a significant selective incentive that the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd can successfully use, in order to mobilise the level of tendency for potato farmers to both remain in and join the group.

Within the research, the most successful selective incentive offered by the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, was the provision of loans charging a low interest rate. This selective incentive was successful, because the credit provided to potato farmers who held contracts with the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. were tied specifically to the production of potato, whereas potato farmers also need money for other purposes. Many potato farmers within the district of Sansai are already burdened with large loans from the BAAC, and are not eligible to ask for more loans. Therefore, the provision of credit from

¹³³ Interview with Mr In-orn Pothacharoen

the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd is their best option, with regard to sustaining their liquidity, and they must join, in order to qualify for the loans.¹³⁴ During its budget in the fiscal year of 1999/2000, the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd provided 5,408,694.65 baht in loans to its members.¹³⁵

Additional significant selective incentives offered by the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd include the provision of cheap fertiliser and pesticide in helping to mobilise the level of tendency for potato farmers to join the group. The selective incentives of cheap loans, fertilisers, and pesticides, actually generate valuable revenues to the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd.

The largest source of revenue to the group is the initial membership fee of 50 baht, and in addition, the selling of shares to its members at the price of 10 baht per share, with all members holding at least 50 shares.¹³⁶ In 2000, this revenue totalled 7,167,420 baht. The same year, the group made a profit on its loans to its members of 205,873 baht, and its total profit including profits from the sale of cheap fertiliser and pesticide, was 1,367,051.74 baht. These profits are used, in order to finance the administration of the group, and in addition to subsidise other projects such as the building of the cool-room. The remaining profits are returned back to the shareholders of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, in the form of a dividend.¹³⁷ This evidence suggests that the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd is a financially secure farmers group.

The profits of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd help to illustrate its success, in terms of its administrative system. This success owes much to its internal democracy working with the guidance from the local government officials at the Department of Agricultural Extension and the Department of Co-operatives Promotion in the district of Sansai. The members freely elect the president and 14 committee members.

¹³⁴ Interview with Mr Sawasdi Boonterm

¹³⁵ Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd (2000) *Rai-ngan kitjakan prachumpee (Annual Report)*, Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd [in Thai], p.28

¹³⁶ Interview with Mr In-orn Pothacharoen

¹³⁷ Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd (2000), p.12 and p.33

The term of each presidency and committee is two years, with a maximum of two terms. After the first year, lots will be drawn and half of the committee members will leave.¹³⁸

The Chiang Mai office of the Department of Co-operatives Auditing of the MOAC, controls the finances of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd.¹³⁹ This was felt to be necessary, because the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd experienced the problem of corruption, when previous to 1997, it existed as the Potato Growers Co-operative.¹⁴⁰

The Department of Agricultural Extension and the Department of Co-operatives Promotion in the district of Sansai are able to provide further assistance to the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, with respect to the low level of education of the group's of potato farmers. In 2000, whilst 80 per cent of potato farmers had received a compulsory level of education, only 20 per cent had received a higher level than the compulsory level of education. With reference to this issue, the problem of the transfer of the labour force from the agricultural sector to manufacturing sector, which is observed in the NRGMR, is also observed in the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd. Potato farmers generally, argue that only the older generations want to work in the potato fields. However, the younger generations of villagers who have high school qualifications, are in a position to work in the factories, and are less likely to work in the potato fields. Working in the factories is better, both in terms of income and working environment, when compared to working outside in the hot climate of Thailand.¹⁴¹

With a comparable level of education and financial status, the relationship between potato farmers within the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd is horizontally formed. The assistance, which the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd received from local government officials, does not suggest that the group can effectively establish channels of political access to the network of the policy-making

¹³⁸ Ibid, p.6

¹³⁹ Ibid, p.15

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Mr Pramual Jai-ngern

¹⁴¹ Interview with Mr Prabhand Boontorm

process at the national level, in relation to the issue of the import of potato seedlings. This is because of the nature of the hierarchy within the Thai bureaucratic system, and as a result, ‘the “bottom-up” process that the decision-making tree sets out a minimum of 20 steps from village to Cabinet and back, a process taking at least 18 months.’¹⁴²

In 1998, potato farmers experienced problems, with respect to both pests and diseases attacking their crops. Accordingly, they reported to the Department of Agricultural Extension in the district of Sansai, in order to seek financial and technical assistance from the government. The response arrived almost a year later, when they received instructions to deal with their problems in the form of an official letter.¹⁴³ The delay to the response from the government can be seen to be a result of the high level of concentration of political power, and in addition, the lack of personal connections between potato farmers and elite bureaucrats and politicians.

Potato farmers are not normally politically active. In the 1990s, potato farmers in the district of Sansai only protested twice in front of the Department of the Agricultural Extension in the district of Sansai, even though they had experienced many problems, with regard to both the potato price and the inadequate supply of potato seedlings.¹⁴⁴ These potato farmers have shown a reduced tendency to adopt assertive political strategies, because they perceive this to be economically unwise, and in addition, they argue that they have observed very few successful cases of farmer protests.

For potato farmers in the district of Sansai, in the province of Chiang Mai, which is 697 kilometres distance from Bangkok, to protest in front of the House of Parliament like, for example, the Assembly of the Poor, would be very costly in terms of transportation. Furthermore, they also argue that organising to protest means leaving their fields whilst their crops need attention. They realised that protesting will significantly

¹⁴² Hewison, K. (1993) ‘Nongovernmental Organisations and the Cultural Development Perspective in Thailand: A Comment on Rigg (1991)’, *World Development*, Vol.21, No.10, pp.1699-1708, 1993, p.1702

¹⁴³ Interview with Mr Vicharn Kumtheu

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Miss Nongnush Puranapun

affect their production, which will in turn affect their income, and consequently, they will increase their indebtedness.¹⁴⁵

Accordingly, the analysis of potato farmers reflects the traditional value of non-involvement and the political ignorance of the Thai people, which adversely affects both the political levels of participation and influence of potato farmers. Consequently, they remain a 'potential pressure participant' within the Thai political arena, because the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd is a non-political farmers group, which can on occasion, be mobilised into political action through a change to their position.

Although the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd has remained politically inactive, an increase, with regard to its self-reliant status can be observed. This is the case, specifically with reference to the issue of adequate potato seedlings, and in addition, the expansion of the potato chip industry in Thailand. These can be considered to be contributing factors, with respect to mobilising the political involvement and negotiating influence of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd. This is because many members have argued that the negotiating influence of their co-operative, with respect to potato chip companies is relatively weak. With reference to this, the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd has discovered that it needs to improve its negotiating influence, and for this to be used as another collective benefit, in order to both retain and expand its memberships. Accordingly, collective action within the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd is a by-product of selective incentives.

4.4 Conclusion

In Thailand, that people from a young age are brought up to respect older people, and in addition, people of a lower social rank are taught to respect people of a higher social rank, is one characteristic Thai society shares with adherents to Confucianism.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Mr Sunan Mornlert

Mulder¹⁴⁶ claims that this form of order within society steadies social interactions, and furthermore, that it reduces the innate overt nature of conflict between individuals. Accordingly, social hierarchy appears to be a contributing factor, with regard to the good behavioural conduct within Thai society. However, this form of good behavioural conduct does not promote the human rights of all individuals within the society, because it has been established with the premise of inequality between individuals. Rural farmers have suffered under this system, existing with a submissive level of status within the Thai political arena, a position where government and other influential actors can easily exploit them. Accordingly, this can be considered to be a contributing factor, with regard to the scarcity of influential farmers interest groups in Thailand.

The case studies on the group formation of rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups in Thailand illustrate the importance of the selective incentives over collective benefits in general terms. In joining the rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups, which were observed within the research, farmers do not have to bear undue and unaffordable costs. With reference to both the Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River (NRGMR), and the Sugar Cane Planters Association of Zone 7 (SCPA), there is no membership joining fee. Within the NRGMR there are no costs for the farmers to bear at all. Within the SCPA, the membership joining fee is effectively included within the commission from the sale of sugarcane at 2 baht per tonne for all of the sugarcane sold for normally between 400-600 baht per tonne, by the sugarcane farmer members. With respect to the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, there is a 50 baht membership-joining fee, however, this fee provides such real benefits to the farmers as to make it more than worthwhile to them.

With respect to joining farmers groups, the opportunity cost is the main concern in terms of rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers. This is because their contribution to the groups' activities will mean forfeiting time, which would otherwise be used in agricultural production. However, the provisions of cheap credit, and cheap fertiliser and pesticide, have emerged as attractive selective incentives to both the members of the

¹⁴⁶ Mulder, N. (2000) *Inside Thai Society: Religion Everyday Life Change*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, p.46

NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, because these selective incentives are so necessary for these farmers in their production.

With the government already providing farmers in general with cheap fertilisers, the provision of cheap fertiliser by both the NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd should not significantly mobilise the level of tendency for rice and potato farmers to join these groups. However, the government provision of cheap fertiliser to farmers in rural area appears to be ineffective at the stage of implementation, as is commonly experienced in many other areas within the government policy of agricultural development.

The crucial explanation in this regard is the severe problem of corruption within the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MOAC). In October 2002, a government programme of fertiliser distribution began in the *Isan* region, for farmers affected by flooding in late 2001. In November 2000, a large-scale fertiliser scandal emerged. 'Farmers have filed a police complaint against the Department of Agricultural Extension and the Co-operative Community of Thailand for distributing fake compost under a 367-million-baht flood relief aid scheme.'¹⁴⁷ Moreover, there exists a large network of corruption within the MOAC, involving bureaucrats and politicians, across junior and senior staff. This *Isan* fertiliser scandal is nothing when compared to other corruption, of which the public is as of yet unaware.¹⁴⁸

The high level of corruption within the MOAC adversely affects the political participation of farmers groups, because large-scale agribusiness groups can establish channels of political access far better than can farmers groups. This has allowed the MOAC to establish a powerful patronage system with large-scale agribusiness groups, which exploits the traditional value of non-involvement and the political ignorance of farmers. The research has determined that the establishment of farmers groups has been

¹⁴⁷ *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 6 November 2002, at www.bangkokpost.net/News/06Nov2002_news05.html Retrieved on 6 November 2002

¹⁴⁸ *Phuchatkan* (Internet Edition), 15 November 2002, [in Thai] at www.manager.co.th/asp-bin/printnews.asp?newsid=2000000010339 Retrieved on 16 November 2002

an attempt to challenge this imbalance. The challenges of the problems of corruption and the patronage system within the Thai political arena have revealed the range of ways, in which the rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups have responded. A useful explanation is the balance between their members, in terms of horizontal and vertical relationships between members.

The research has established that farmers groups, which have not sought either political connections or influence, specifically the NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, believe that they can better promote their own interests, than rely on the government. Accordingly, they have emerged as non-political farmers groups with the objective of promoting their own self-reliant status, in preference to attempting to influence the government. Therefore, they do not qualify in terms of the Western concept of interest group, and for this reason, they are classified within the category of 'potential pressure participants.'

In contrast, the SCPA was specifically formed, in order to improve the negotiating power of sugarcane farmers, with regard to sugarcane mills, and in addition, to gain more support from the government. The SCPA has successfully influenced the Thai government into enacting laws that would benefit them, and accordingly, the SCPA qualifies, with regard to the Western concept of an interest group.

Within the NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, the relationships between their individual members are established horizontally, because of their equable status, in terms of their shared low levels of education and poor financial position. With reference to this, they cannot effectively participate within the Thai political arena, because financial resource is a crucial factor in the establishment of channels of political access, within the patronage system. This is the main contributing factor, with regard to the political weakness of both the NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd. For this reason, they have formed non-political farmers groups and remain outside of the Thai political arena, as potential pressure participants.

In terms of the SCPA, the involvement of various sub-groups of sugarcane farmers have significantly contributed to its political power. With reference to this, the wealthy and *phu mi itthiphon* have played particularly significant roles in helping the SCPA to establish its channels of political access, though their personal and already established connections to elite bureaucrats and politicians. Both the wealthy and *phu mi itthiphon* do not perceive corruption and the patronage system to be problems, with respect to sugarcane farmers promoting both their and the group's political influence, and both their own and their group's interests. Moreover, these are individuals who can exploit the plight of the Thai political culture.

In addition, the importance of selective incentives over collective incentives in Thai farmers groups formation, implies that the absence of agricultural exceptionalism impacts on the group formation and political weakness of Thai farmers. Firstly, the Thai agricultural sector has not been a priority for the government, for a country, which is a leading exporter of agricultural products. With a productive agricultural sector, which makes Thailand both self-sufficient and a net exporter in terms of its agricultural sector, the Thai government has tended to direct its focus away from agriculture, and towards emerging sectors of the economy in search of the higher growth rates, which can be achieved within the industrial sector of the economy. Secondly, the existence of agricultural exceptionalism within Western societies suggests high levels of domestic subsidies within their agricultural sectors. As domestic subsidies in Thailand are very low in comparison with both Western countries and Japan, selective incentives, which can be provided by farmers groups, more significantly impact on the decision-making process of farmers in joining farmers groups, than do collective incentives.

Accordingly, it is a combination of both the absence of agricultural exceptionalism, which farmers would otherwise benefit from, as evidenced by the examples found in Western countries and Japan, in addition to the existing political weakness that farmers continually experience. This weakness can be attributed to the nature of the Thai political culture, specifically the phenomenon of vote-buying. If farmers groups became sufficiently mobilised to successfully challenge the ubiquitous

problem of vote-buying, then the farming demographic could demand a more involved relationship with both government and the political establishment more generally.

Consequently, the group mobilisation, which farmers have developed largely autonomously, in order to further their political cause of more recognition by government, has for the most part, been found to be ineffectual. Both additional financial and human resources are usually required by farmers groups, in order to promote group mobilisation and positive outcomes for their members. Civil society has begun to take on this role, in the absence of a convincing measure of government commitment. The promotion of group mobilisation through the contribution of civil society has been evidenced in the experience of the NRGMR, which has, in collaboration with local schoolteachers achieved significant, tangible benefits.

Through the consideration of the successes of the NRGMR, SCPA, and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, in terms of their organisational structures and through the activities, which tangibly benefit their members, it has been evidenced that selective incentives play a highly significant role within all three farmers groups. In this regard, the selective incentives have been utilised, in order to solve the problems of mobilisation, which all three farmers groups have been challenged with resolving. This understanding and realisation is a significant finding and contribution towards the further understanding of the development of the political participation of Thai farmers, in order to better predict future trends in this regard. The directions being taken by the three farmers groups do suggest that Thai farmers groups more generally, can both develop the ability, and possess the motivation to mobilise group formation, in order to further their own interests.

Chapter 5 Domestic Impacts on the Role of Thai Farmers

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the contribution of the agricultural labour force towards the country's overall labour force averaged 59 per cent between 1981-2000.¹ Generally, this figure ought to be high enough for individuals to join to form interest groups, in order to challenge the government over issues of agricultural policy. However, this is not the case within the Thai agricultural sector. Influential interest groups are rare within the Thai agricultural sector, since most farmers groups are politically inactive. Consequently, with regard to agricultural development, the farmers representative groups do not normally have a chance to participate within the network of the policy-making process. In this respect, the examination of the political participation of farmers groups in this chapter will focus on the impact of domestic factors.

The examination of domestic impacts, with regard to the political participation of Thai farmers groups will, in this chapter, be illustrated through the discrete vertical relationships each of the rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups have with the Thai government. The examination regarding the domestic factors will consider the Thai political culture, because this will help to more fully understand the roles of the actors within the Thai political arena. In this respect, the Western concept of policy network/community and an understanding of interest groups will be introduced to accompany this examination. However, the emphasis on the meso-level analysis in the Western model of policy network/community cannot be perfectly applied as a framework, with respect to the Thai case. This is because the patronage system with other forms of personal connections, are significant factors, with regard to the establishment of relationships between interest groups and government, in the Thai political context. Consequently, if the framework is applied without any adaptation, it cannot transfer appropriately, in the study of the political participation of Thai farmers groups. Accordingly, the Western concept of policy network/community will be adapted, by

placing more emphasis on the micro-level analysis. With respect to the Rhodes model of policy network/community, this chapter ‘distinguishes between networks and communities according to the closeness of the relationships involved.’²

This chapter will begin in section 5.1, by discussing the impact on Thai farmers groups of the imbalances in the government policies on economic and social development, which led to the economic crisis of 1997. In section 5.2, the role of the government, with regard to both its policies on agricultural development and in addition, the problem of corruption will be addressed. A comparative study will consider how the policy-making process has evolved, from earlier government administrations, to the most recent government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. In section 5.3, the government’s role will be examined, with specific attention to the three case studies of farmers groups, and their political participation. This discussion will help to classify the status of rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups, with respect to their strategies and negotiating powers.

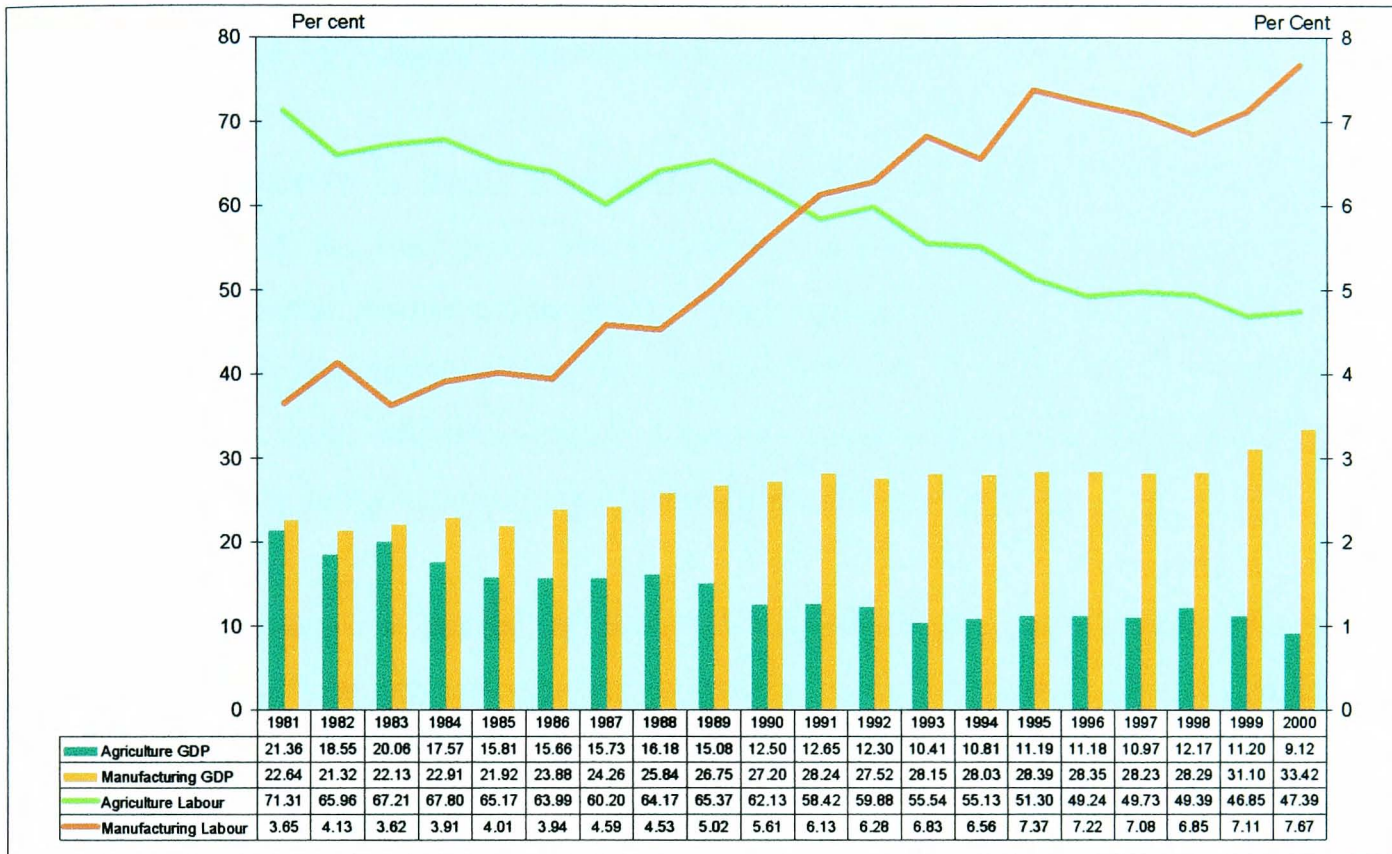
5.1 Economic Fallout and Localism

The result of the increased emphasis placed on the policy of industrialisation since the early 1980s did not produce substantive, lasting economic and social developmental benefits. This became clear within Thai society, after the economic crisis of 1997. Throughout the 1980s, Thailand enjoyed high rates of economic growth, accelerated by the rapid expansion of its industrial sector. According to figure 5-1, during the period between 1981-2000, the contribution of the agricultural sector to GDP steadily decreased, from 21.36 per cent in 1981 to 9.12 per cent in 2000. Over the same period, in the industrial sector, the figures were 22.64 per cent and 33.42 per cent respectively, showing therefore, a steady increase.

¹ See figure 5-1

² Rhodes, R.A.W. and Marsh, D. (1992) ‘Policy Networks in British Politics: A Critique of Existing Approaches’, in Marsh, D. and Rhodes, R.A.W. (eds) *Policy Networks in British Government*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.18

Figure 5-1 Labour Forces and Contribution of GDP in Agricultural and Industrial Sector From 1981-2000



Source: calculated and created from statistic data from Asian Development Bank (1999), p.333 and www.ADB.ogr retrieved on 30 February 2003

Over this period, the increase in incomes for workers within the industrial sector over those within the agricultural sector resulted in an overall fall in the number of workers within agriculture and an overall rise within industry, as represented in figure 5-1. Narongchai, Dapice and Flatters argue that ‘an increase of about a half-million jobs directly associated with manufactured export growth in the 1985-89 period. Because this was not large relative to total labor force growth, there was little problem in finding the workers.... It will become necessary to “pull” workers from agriculture, with possibly important effects on wages and the distribution of income.’³

This decrease in the contribution of the agricultural sector to GDP, resulted in a general decrease in farmer’s incomes. Between 1981-1986 the mean per capita income of

agricultural households fell by 4.4 per cent,⁴ which increased the number of Thai people living in poverty from 23 per cent in 1980, to 29.5 per cent by 1985-1986.⁵ The decline in the prices of agricultural products on the world markets during the 1980s, was a significant factor, with regard to decreasing farmer's incomes.⁶

The decrease in farmer's incomes increased both rural poverty and income disparity between the rural and urban populations, which continues to the present day. Between 1992-1996, the per capita income within agriculture was as low as 13,925 baht, compared to the per capita income in non-agriculture of 127,102 baht.⁷ Accordingly, within the rural areas, where two-thirds of the total population live and more than 90 per cent of which are farmers, remain the poorest areas of the country.⁸

The decrease in income of the rural population not only impacts adversely economically, but also impacts adversely on farmers groups, both politically and socially. This occurs largely because the decrease in the household income forces farmers into debt, in order to sustain their families' liquidity, and consequently education and healthcare are less affordable to farmers. These issues, with respect to the rural population, help to explain why the TRT became so popular in the general election of 6 January 2001.

The falling significance of the agricultural sector, with regard to its decreased contribution to the GDP, is another explanation for the low level of government attention, with respect to the development of this sector. The agricultural sector generated less government revenue during the economic boom of the 1980s, which directly reduced the

³ Narongchai Akrasanee, Dapice, D. and Flatters, F. (1991) *Thailand's Export-Led Growth: Retrospect and Prospects*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.27

⁴ Dixon, C. (1999a) *The Thai Economy: Uneven Development and Industrialisation*, London: Routledge, p.220

⁵ Narongchai Akrasanee, Dapice, D. and Flatters, F. (1991), p.28

⁶ Ammar Siamwalla (1996) 'Thai Agriculture: From Engine of Growth to Sunset Status', *TDRI Quarterly Review*, Vol.11 No.4 4 December 1996, at www.info.tdri.or.th/library/quarterly/text/d96_1.htm Retrieved on 12 February 2001

⁷ Thai Rak Thai Party (2001) *Agricultural Policy in Brief*,

at [www.trtp.org/National_policy/การเกษตร%20p2%20\(eng\).htm](http://www.trtp.org/National_policy/การเกษตร%20p2%20(eng).htm) Retrieved on 2 May 2001

government's already decreased level of acknowledgement of Thai farmers groups. Accordingly, this weakened the political participation of Thai farmers groups.

However, after the economic crisis of 1997, the agricultural sector received increased attention from the government, because the depreciation of the Thai currency at this time made Thai agricultural products more competitive on the world market. According to the Bank of Thailand⁹, during the second half of 1997 the export of agricultural products overall, dramatically increased by 47.1 per cent when compared to the growth rate in the equivalent period of 1996. Specifically, the export of rice and sugarcane increased by 66.4 per cent and 115.5 per cent respectively. 'This makes the rice... suddenly more important to the national economy.'¹⁰

In the aftermath of the crisis, the government announced that the agricultural sector could save the country, because the significant fall in the baht over this period gave Thailand a comparative advantage in this sector. However, in the 1998 fiscal year, the government decreased its expenditure within the agricultural sector by 25.6 per cent, whereas its expenditure within the industrial sector decreased by only 0.5 per cent. Consequently, government expenditure within the agricultural sector reduced from 83,964.3 million baht in the 1997 fiscal year, to 62,475.7 million baht in the 1998 fiscal year.¹¹

Nevertheless, the 1997 birthday speech of King Bhumibol, a speech, which regarded a self-sufficient economy as a solution to the Thai economic crisis, pressured the government into placing more emphasis on the agricultural sector. The King stated that 'I have often said that a self-sufficient economy does not mean that each family must

⁸ Rural Development and Natural Resource Sector Unit of the World Bank (2000) *Beyond the Crisis: A Strategy for Renewing Rural Development in Thailand*, Bangkok: World Bank, p.xi and p.3

⁹ Bank of Thailand (1997) *Annual Economic Report 1997*, Bangkok: Bank of Thailand, p.20

¹⁰ Vatikiotis, M. (1997a) 'The Good Earth: Rural Economy Shows Strengths Despite Financial Crisis', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 October 1997, p.20

¹¹ Sauwalak Kittiprapas and Chedtha Intaravitak (2000) 'Social Responses to Economic Crisis in Thailand: Some Evidence During 1997-99', in Thailand Development Research Institute (ed) *Social Impacts of the Asian Economic Crisis in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.80

produce its own food, weave or sew its own cloths. This is going too far, but I mean each village or each district must have relative self-sufficiency. Things that are produced in surplus can be sold, but should be sold in the same region, not too far so that the transportation cost is minimized.’¹² Consequently, both the government and Thai academics worked to change their approach to the agricultural sector, using the King’s speech as a guideline. Pasuk and Baker highlight that:

Quotations appeared on billboards outside government offices. The whole speech was quickly printed and distributed.... Even more striking was the reception, especially in rural Thailand. Anyone visiting villages in early 1998 could not avoid being stuck by the frequency with which key words and phrases from the speech would appear in conversations with farmers—particularly *pho yu pho kin* (enough to eat and live—self-sufficiency) and *thritsadi mai* or “new theory,” which became the shorthand reference to the king’s idea. Partly of course this reflects the great respect for the king and the success of the official effort at dissemination.¹³

According to the research, there was evidence to show that the Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River (NRGMR) worked, in order to harmonise themselves with the aims of the King’s speech, in terms of the trend towards a self-sufficient Thai economy. This was less observed within both the Sugar Cane Planters Association of Zone 7 (SCPA), and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd. The NRGMR produced mottoes, adapted from aspects of the King’s speech with their own objectives. These were displayed in front of their office as seen in pictures 5-1 and 5-2.

¹² King Bhumibol Adulyadej (1997) *Royal Speech Given to the Audience of Well-wishers on the Occasion of the Royal Birthday Anniversary at the Dusidalai Hall, Chitralada Villa, Dusit Palace, 4 December 1997*, at www.kanchanapisek.or.th/speeches/1997/1204.en.html Retrieved on 7 December 2000

¹³ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (2000) *Thailand’s Crisis*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, p.194



Picture 5-1 Example of an NRGMR motto. This motto (pictured in blue script) asks Thai farmers to believe in the King's long term economic vision for self-sufficiency.



Picture 5-2 Example of an NRGMR motto. This motto asks people to use Thai products, in order to promote the King's economic vision for self-sufficiency.

Source: Pictures 5-1 and 5-2 were taken at the time of the interviews with members of the Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River, the district of Khemmarat, the province of Ubon Ratchathani, 2 May 2001.

The moves towards the concept of the self-sufficient economy within Thai society, aims to improve the agricultural sector through the utilisation of *watthanatham chumchon* (local culture) and *phumpanya thongthin* (local wisdom), and this has led to the political debate regarding 'localism'. These two terms were widely used throughout the early 1980s and 1990s.¹⁴ The ideology of *watthanatham chumchon* emphasises culture and local history, which integrates non-economic issues into the ideas of localism, specifically, the idea of rural village development. In rural villages the beliefs in superstition and ritual are contributing factors, with respect to the establishment of *watthanatham chumchon*. This is most clearly observed within the production of rice, because rice production has developed as a part of Thai history, over thousands of years, whereas the production of both sugarcane and potato have little historical background within Thailand, and both only began to be produced in the twentieth century. This can explain the deficiency of *watthanatham chumchon* within sugarcane and potato farmers groups.

Historically, Thai people have been taught to 'respect every single grain of rice'. In some rural families, children were punished for not eating all of the rice on their plates. This resulted from the belief that to do so would upset *Mae pho sop*, the goddess of rice. Rice farmers believe that *Mae pho sop* is very fragile and easily scared. Therefore, they perform *phitee tham kwan khao* or a rice offering ceremony, in order to both calm *Mae pho sop* and to invite her to stay in their paddy fields.¹⁵ This is only one of many rituals within the superstition and ritual culture of rice production. According to the study by Ngampit¹⁶ regarding rice culture within Thailand, there are 27 stages in the production of rice within rural villages, and 16 of these stages are cultural ceremonies, which aim to both show respect for and ask for help from the supernatural, in the production of rice.

¹⁴ Pasuk Phongpaichit (1999) *Cultural Factors that Shape Governance in South-East Asia*, Essay written for UNESCO, p.6

¹⁵ Chompoo Trakullertsathien (1998) 'Rice and Rituals', *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 16 December 1998 at www.bangkokpost.net/161298/161298_Outlook01.html Retrieved on 18 January 1999

¹⁶ Ngampit Satsaguan (1998) 'Watthanatham khao nai sangkom Thai: Sugsakorane Banna Chungwat Pranakorn Sri Ayutthaya (The Rice Culture in Thai Society: The Case Study of Banna, the Province of Ayutthaya', in Ngampit Satsaguan (ed) *Watthanatham khao nai sangkom Thai lae nana chat (The Rice Culture in Thai Society and Other Countries)*, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University [in Thai], p.31

Whilst *watthanatham chumchon* can indirectly help villagers to contribute towards the process of development and in addition, promote self-reliance, *phumpanya thongthin* can directly contribute as an instrument in village development.¹⁷ This can be observed within the NRGMR, who began through the creation of their own group culture, the *boon kumkhaoyai*, which has at its heart, the objective of collecting rice from its members to sell, in order to finance the group.¹⁸ The *boon kumkhaoyai* is an annual group event, which reinforces group co-operation. The NRGMR group culture of the *boon kumkhaoyai* was created from the integration of *watthanatham chumchon* into their process of development, and this has benefited the NRGMR, in terms of its group formation.

According to Hewison¹⁹, *watthanatham chumchon* is a consequence of a system of beliefs, production, and social living. *Watthanatham chumchon* is established in terms of the gentle nature of the rural people in Thailand, which is strongly influenced by their adherence to Buddhism. Therefore, *watthanatham chumchon* works to smooth the interactions between members, to reduce conflicts, and to promote farmers' obligations to the NRGMR.

Within the case studies of farmers groups in the research, in terms of group formation, only the NRGMR have fully applied *watthanatham chumchon*. There was little clear evidence to suggest that *watthanatham chumchon* exists as a contributing factor, in terms of group formation and sustainability, within the SCPA and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd. Both of these groups have experienced different societal, cultural, and political environments, and as a result they perceive the value of *watthanatham chumchon* differently.

With respect to the case of the SCPA, which is a particularly successful farmer's interest group in Thailand, the *watthanatham chumchon* is not a contributing factor in its

¹⁷ Hewison, K. (1993) 'Nongovernmental Organisations and the Cultural Development Perspective in Thailand: A Comment on Rigg (1991)', *World Development*, Vol.21, No.10, 1993, p.1703

¹⁸ Interview with Mr Samarn Bumpen

¹⁹ Hewison, K. (1993), p.1703

success. The SCPA is located in the central region of Thailand, close to Bangkok, where capitalism and consumerism are concentrated. It can be argued that in terms of the SCPA, *watthanatham chumchon* has been exchanged with this new culture. However, this is not to argue that the NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, at a distance from Bangkok are not affected by the capitalist and consumerist cultures. Indeed, they have experienced the negative impacts of capitalism and consumerism, but to a lesser degree than those less distant from Bangkok.

The group formation of the SCPA was driven by economic interest rather than *watthanatham chumchon*, whereas the idea of local culture acts as a connection between members of the NRGMR, reinforcing the relationship between their members. The NRGMR enjoy the annual cultural event the *boon kumkhaoyai*, which is traditionally Thai, with Buddhist monks reciting religious mantras for a good harvest, and everyone contributes food to share. With regard to the SCPA, there is an annual festival, where there is a concert and prize draw, with food provided by the organisers. This event is not derived out of any cultural background of the local people, however, this lack of *watthanatham chumchon* does not weaken the group and its effectiveness, in the case of the SCPA.

The Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd was formed with a high level of technical assistance from local offices of the MOAC, without utilising *watthanatham chumchon*. However, the research discovered through comparing the attitudes of members of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, that when compared with the NRGMR, the failure to utilise *watthanatham chumchon* has resulted in a reduced sense of both belonging and obligation to the group. Accordingly, many members of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd have become less willing to contribute to group activities.

5.2 Thai Agricultural Policy-making and Political Participation of Farmers

In common with most countries, Thai agricultural policy emphasises intensive farming production techniques, in an attempt to increase the overall level of production within the agricultural sector. This fact strongly implies that the economic arguments of the state, rather than arguments in terms of the welfare of the rural population drive the network of the policy-making process, which informs government decision making. Most agricultural policy decision making is based on the assumption that an increase in agricultural production would lead to an increase in farmers' incomes.

However, there is no proper framework in place, in order to ensure the interests of farmers within the agricultural market, and this has been the catalyst for the development of farmers groups. Once farmers become dependent on the market system, they can no longer avoid its risks. It is broadly perceived that the market system has failed to cope with the excess supply of many agricultural products, particularly with regard to rice, which remains the key agricultural product of Thailand. The government did decide to attempt to control the price of rice within the domestic market, instead of controlling its level of production²⁰, but this policy failed to deal with the excess supply. Government policy-makers have acknowledged the failures of government policies in solving the problems of farmers. To date, policies, which have been implemented, have failed to work effectively, since policy-makers within central government developed most of their policies with a limited knowledge of the problems of rural people. The policy-makers only learnt about the problems experienced by farmers through documents provided by government agencies.

In general, the policy-making of the Thai government must comply with the framework of the NESD Plan. Each plan is conceptualised, controlled and assessed by the NESDB. However, Pasuk argues that 'Formally it has no role in either decision-making or implementation, but exists to formulate indicative five-year plans to guide

²⁰ Waraporn Suravadi (Editor), and Udom Kerdpibul (Translator) (1993) *Kusarobai Kai Khao*, Kobfai Publishing, [in Thai] [Translated from Panayotou, T.(ed) *Reader on Food and Agriculture*], p.11

economic strategy.’²¹ This means that government agencies and elite bureaucrats are key actors within the network of the policy-making process. There are 4 core agencies, with regard to the development of economic policy, namely the NESDB, the Fiscal Policy Office of the Ministry of Finance, the Bank of Thailand, and the Bureau of the Budget. The directors of these core agencies sit permanently in the Council of Economic Ministers. These core agencies are reliable sources of both information and analyses for the government. Warr²² argues that at the ministerial level, either a minister makes policy decisions individually, or minister’s act collectively, relying mainly on the information and analyses provided by these 4 core agencies.

All macroeconomic policy decisions are made by the Thai government, whilst complying with the framework of the NESD Plan. Theoretically, ministers are responsible for macroeconomic policy-making, however, in practice the four core agencies are the key actors, with regard to macroeconomic policy decision making. Neher asserts that, ‘These agencies, all crucial to the kingdom’s economic development, have been able to act autonomously, apart from the patron-client relations that pervade Thai officialdom and society.’²³

As illustrated in figure 5-2, the cabinet is the centre of government. The cabinet is responsible for co-ordinating the work of the ministries and government departments. The work of both local government and state enterprises are within the responsibility of central government. Local government is under the control of the Ministry of the Interior, with the exception of Bangkok and Pattaya, where governors are elected. In all other provinces, the Ministry of the Interior appoints provincial governors directly from senior bureaucrats. ‘With this direct line of command, the central government is able to control

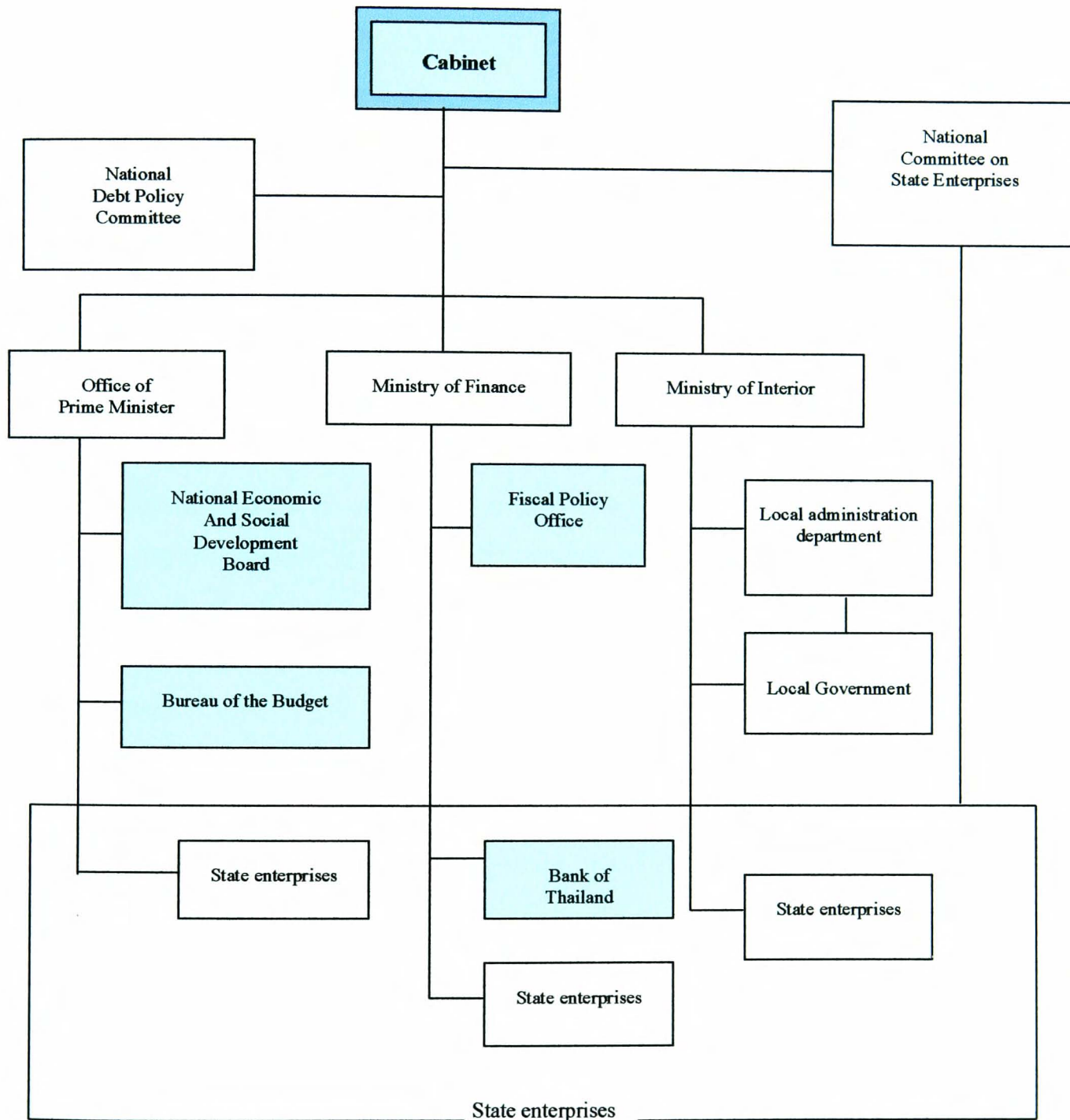
²¹ Pasuk Phongpaichit (1992) ‘Technocrats, Businessmen, and Generals: Democracy and Economic Policy-making in Thailand’, in Ravenhill, J. (ed) *Political Economy of East Asia 3: Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines and Thailand, Volume II*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, p.421

²² Warr, P.G. (1993) ‘The Thai Economy’, in Warr, P.G. (ed) *The Thai Economy in Transition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.28-29

²³ Neher, C.D. (1994, Second edition) *Southeast Asia in the New International Era*, Oxford: Westview Press, p.57

local government administration. Clearly, the Thai system of government is highly centralised.²⁴

Figure 5-2 Structure of Policy-making Process



Source: Warr, P. and Bhanupong Nidhiprabha (1996), p.70

²⁴ Warr, P.G., and Nidhiprabha, Bhanupong (1996) *Thailand's Macroeconomic Miracle: Stable Adjustment and Sustained Growth*, Kuala Lumpur: World Bank/ Oxford University Press, pp. 68-70

Although, the benefits of decentralisation are wildly acknowledged within Thai society, the initiation of the *Tambon* Administration Organisation (TAO) by the government in 1997, which aimed to decentralise power from central to local government was a poor example of this idea. The TAO was intended to both help with the problems of rural people, and in addition report back to central government. However, the existence of a number of appointed bureaucrats from central government within the TAO, has significantly reduced the effectiveness of the operation of the TAO. Accordingly, the TAO has operated in the manner of a government agency, rather than representing the people at the local level as was intended. This is because the nature of the bureaucracy of the TAO facilitated the operation of both the patronage system and corruption within it.

With regard to the development of agricultural policy, there are 5 core agencies, the MOAC, the NESDB, the Fiscal Policy Office of the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Commerce, and the Ministry of Industry, which also complies with the NESD Plan. Two of these agencies, namely the NESDB, the Fiscal Policy Office of the Ministry of Finance, are in addition, core agencies within the development of economic policy. The NESDB does not have autonomous executive powers with respect to the NESD Plan, and must consult with all core agencies before launching each NESD plan.²⁵ Consequently, this procedure enables government agencies to launch policies within the framework of the NESD Plan.

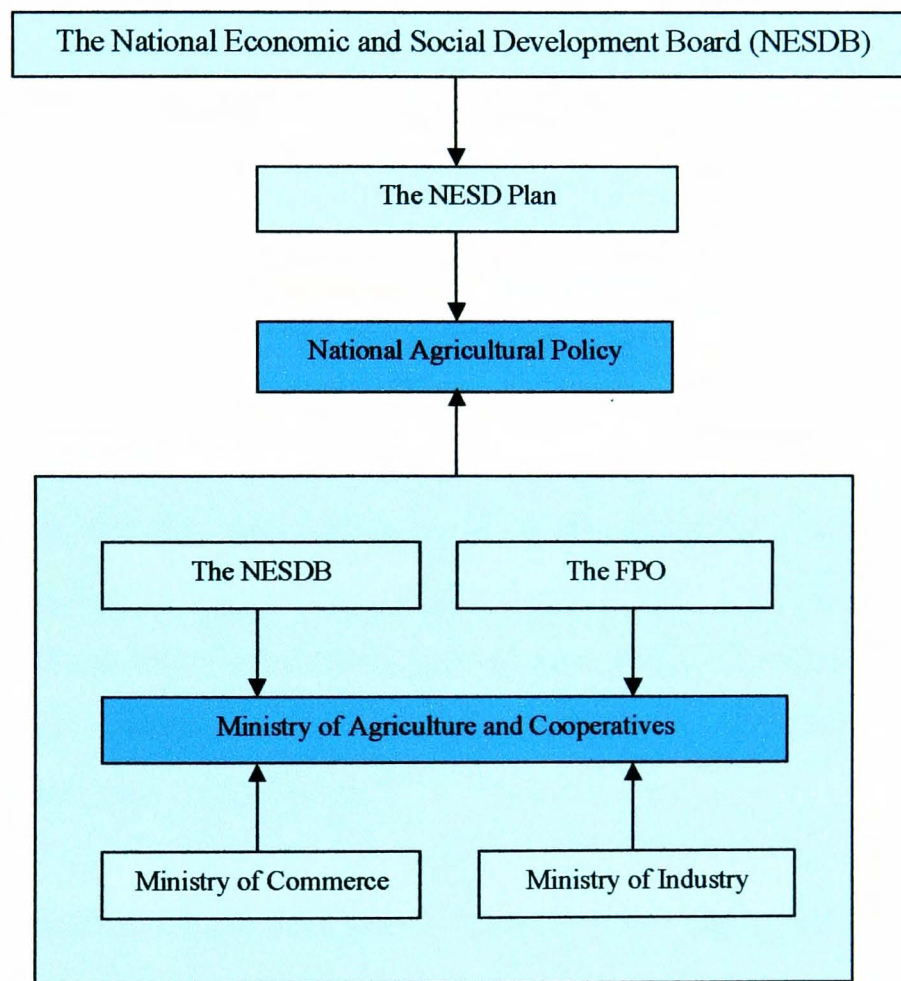
Figure 5-3 illustrates the agricultural policy-making process, showing that farmers are not involved at the executive level of this process, because ‘The Thai society has a negative attitude towards the poor. They condemn the poor of being lazy, of gambling, drinking and overspending.’²⁶ This attitude towards the poor in Thailand has been a main factor, adversely influencing government decision making, with regard to agricultural policy. In addition, the poor level of education is another obstacle, which diminishes the political opportunities of farmers. The government uses this fact to justify the exclusion

²⁵ Email interview with Miss Thunyaros Sanguanhong

²⁶ Nipon Poapongsakorn, Viroj NaRanong and Adis Israngkul Na Ayudhaya (2002) *Final Report: The Process of Formulating Poverty Reduction Strategies in Thailand*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.48

of farmers from the network of the policy-making process. Consequently, government actors are unaware of the real problems that farmers face, and this is unfair because it is the government, which has failed to provide them with an adequate level of education. Academics tend to oppose government arguments, which punish farmers for not being educated by limiting their political opportunity. Tanet²⁷ argues that poor rural farmers could learn if given the opportunity to do so.

Figure 5-3 Agricultural Policy-making Process



Source: Created from provided information and interviews

An examination of the interactions between these five core agencies is not a main concern. Instead, the discussion of the agricultural policy-making process will move towards the agricultural policy of the TRT party, because this is an example of the interaction between farmers and government, since the TRT party formed the government

²⁷ Interview with Dr Narong Petprasoet, and Email interview with Dr Tanet Charoenmuang

in February 2001. The TRT party argues that farmers were invited to participate throughout the development of the TRT party's agricultural policy, and in addition, claimed that the participation of farmers enabled the party to introduce policy that would meet farmers' demands.²⁸

The political agenda of the TRT party has meant promoting the case for the rural population. The TRT party has publicised the need to address issues, with respect to the problems of the rural farmers, which has helped farmers to feel more included within the Thai political arena than ever before. The TRT also invited many leading academics from well-known universities in Thailand, notably Chiang Mai University, in addition to senior and junior bureaucrats, businessmen, and people involved within the agricultural sector including NGOs.

The TRT party argued that previous government agricultural policies were based on the Western concepts of agricultural development, where chemical fertilisers, pesticides and other chemical products were used heavily within the agricultural sector. Within Thailand, this did not only result in an increase in the cost of agricultural production, but in addition, this also impacted adversely on the environment.²⁹ According to Nipon, Ruhs and Sumana, 'Pesticide-related environmental degradation includes the contamination of groundwater, a reduction of biodiversity, and the destruction of beneficial insects which help control pests.'³⁰

Research conducted for the TRT party, resulted in two important promises made, in order to attract the rural vote during the general election campaign of 2001, which the TRT party went on to win. These were the 'village fund project' or 'one village one million baht', and the moratorium on farmers' debts for three years. The TRT party argues that the village fund project would stimulate the economy at the micro level,

²⁸ Interview with Mr Prapat Panyachatiraksa

²⁹ Centre for the Study of Problems and Agricultural Policy, Thai Rak Thai Party (2001) *Papraum nayobai kaset khong pak Thai Rak Thai (Agricultural Policy of the Thai Rak Thai Party)*, Bangkok: Thai Rak Thai Party [Unpublished Material in Thai], p.1-6

which in turn would benefit the economy at the macro level. The TRT party expects the village fund project to be more effective than the Miyazawa plan of 1999, introduced by Chuan Government of November 1997 – February 2001.

Farmers are very receptive to the agricultural policy of the TRT party as a route to improving their livelihoods. As a result, their agricultural policy enhanced the popularity of the TRT party among rural farmers, even though farmers could not know if the promises would be kept.³¹ Moreover, it was generally unclear as to whether these policies could be implemented, and notably, these doubts were present within the academic community.

In terms of the TRT party election promise of ‘one village one million baht’, a policy, which began to be implemented in 2001, there is a warning lesson to be learnt from the experiences of the Miyazawa Plan, which aimed to stimulate domestic demand through job creation. In 1999, Thailand received a share of US\$ 1.45 billion from the total fund of US\$30 billion, which Japan established, in order to help to stabilise the economic position across eastern Asia, in the wake of the economic crisis of 1997.³²

Through the Miyazawa Plan, the Chuan government allocated 7,400 million baht to the Department of Local Administration, in the Ministry of the Interior, with 100,000 baht to be distributed to most sub-districts nation-wide.³³ However, this money was not spent effectively and corruption was endemic. Within the sub-district of Pou, in the province of Nan, most of the 100,000 baht distributed was spent on road improvements, which allowed *kamnan* and local bureaucrats to gain *kha nam ron nam cha* or bribes from projects.³⁴ The NRGMR fear that the ‘one village one million baht’ project promised by the TRT party, could be victim to the same corruption, which undermined the Miyazawa

³⁰Nipon Poapongsakorn, Ruhs, M. and Sumana Tangjitwisuth (1998) ‘Problems and Outlook of Agriculture in Thailand’, *TDRI Quarterly Review*, Vol.13 No.2, June 1998, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.6

³¹ Interview with Mr Wanchai Lai

³² Sauwalak Kittiprapas and Chedtha Intaravitak (2000), p.83

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Interview with Mr Suban Charapok

Plan, where the money was channelled away from the villages, and to *kamnan* and local bureaucrats.³⁵

Tanet³⁶ argues that whilst the TRT party's agricultural policies will not dramatically advance the development of the agricultural sector, it is a positive step. He believes that the village fund project of the TRT party would enhance the political participation of farmers within the Thai political arena, because each village is given a one million baht loan from the government. Each village must establish a committee to manage this fund, and rural farmers can therefore participate in the programme of village development. Tanet believes that either success or failure, with regard to village fund management would be good for rural farmers, since this is a 'learning by doing scheme'. Such a learning curve would enable them to evolve and to strengthen, to emerge to be more influential within the Thai political arena.

In order to implement the village fund project, the TRT party introduced the 'one village one product' project. The TRT party adopted this policy of development from ideas, which initially became established in Japan. The success of this policy in Japan was achievable because of the contribution of the production capacity of small enterprises, married to a high level of domestic demand for local products.³⁷

The development of the 'one village one product' project began in Japan in the late 1970s, and was based on the theory of comparative advantage, because 'the most striking feature of the "one village-one product" movement is its totemistic quality, which serves to distinguish one group from another....'³⁸ However, only 58 villages produced a single product, as most produced two or more products. With regard to Japan, a major problem in relation to the development of the one village one product strategy is the marketing of products, because there are not many products, which can be

³⁵ Interview with Mrs Benjaporn Sodapakdi

³⁶ Email interview with Dr Tanet Charoenmuang

³⁷ Waranee Kunawasen (2001) 'Critics Slam Thaksin's Reforms', *The Nikkei Weekly*, 29 January 2001, p.20

³⁸ Knight, J. (1994) 'Rural Revitalization in Japan: Spirit of the Village and Taste of the Country', *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 7, July 1994: 634-646, p.638

successfully marketed. As a result, Japanese villagers 'became increasingly tempted to abandon their own special product in favor of the more successful product line of their neighbors.'³⁹

Indeed, this problem has already been experienced in Thailand, in for example, the province of Phayao, where in one sub-district, some villagers changed production from containers woven out of bamboo and grass reeds, to more profitable areas.⁴⁰ With reference to the problems experienced in both countries, to be successful, Thailand should pay more attention, with respect to the promotion and marketing of the village products. The policy of the Thaksin government has only provided financial support to the 'one village one product' project, neglecting to ensure that village products have secure markets. 'Thailand's domestic market is small and local industry would be forced to rely on exports competing against countries such as China or Vietnam. If Thai products are not competitive, the policy will be a huge waste of the budget...'⁴¹

Box 5-1 The Thaksin Verdict

In December 2000, Mr Thaksin Shinawatra was indicted for intentionally concealing assets worth more than US\$232 million by the National Counter Corruption Commission. The case was due to the transferring of his stock to his maids and driver, when he was a minister in a previous government. If he were found guilty by the Constitutional Court, he would be forced to leave office and his political career would be suspended for 5 years according to the 1997 constitution. The available evidence indicated that he would be found guilty. Strangely, he won the case with the slimmest of margins (8-7). It is undeniable that his victory was helped by the popular support of pressure campaigns against the Constitutional Court. Although the verdict has disappointed many people, particularly academics, it did not surprise many people. Everyone recognises the power of 'money politics' and 'men of influence' in Thailand.

Source: International Herald Tribune, Sat-Sun 13-14 January 2001, p.4 and www.time.com/Asia/news/collumn/0,9754,170511,00.html

After taking office on 9 February 2001, the Thaksin government implemented most of the campaign promises of the general election of 2001, before the conclusion to the trial for corruption. As is illustrated in box 5-1, this approach was criticised as a cynical political strategy of the Prime Minister Thaksin and his TRT party, in order to maintain his popularity, at a time that he was facing corruption charges.

³⁹ Knight, J. (1994), p.639

⁴⁰ *Manager* (Internet Edition), 18 April 2003, at

www.manager.co.th/politics/PoliticsView.asp?NewsID=4697548348306 Retrieved on 19 April 2003

With regard to the TRT party's agricultural policy, Sungsidh⁴² argues that it is very unclear as to whether this government policy can develop both a strong agricultural sector and a self-reliant status for farmers, in the long term. He argues that the programmes to accelerate economic development through either the village fund project or 'one village one product', would not strengthen the fundamentals of agricultural production. Introducing farmers to the market system means exposing them to the uncertainty of the market system, and the government therefore has to be aware of the adverse impacts, which markets can have on farmers. He believes that if farmers enter markets when unprepared to compete with others, they would easily lose out. Indeed, he believes that within a self-reliant economy, farmers do not have to attach their fortunes to either markets or government assistance.

Nevertheless, farmers have been fully integrated into the agricultural market, since the government opened up the agricultural market, by improving roads in rural areas in the 1960s and 1970s, a situation, which is difficult for them to be extricated from. 'Before roads arrived at the villages, the cost of their participation in the market would be inordinately high, and that is why they have stayed out. When the road came, the cost fell considerably, and they began to participate in the market.'⁴³ The importance of the market for agricultural products therefore, cannot be denied. Even though, the market system results in much uncertainty for weak competitors like farmers, they must still rely on the market, in order to sell their products. Consequently, to isolate farmers from the market system is not a realistic solution, because 'the fact remains that roads are there, and the markets are there... are we to ask farmers to turn their backs on them? As long as these facilities are available, farmers have found it worthwhile to produce crops which they never intended to consume and sell them in exchange for food and they will continue to do so.'⁴⁴ Accordingly, the active political participation of rural farmers within the network of agricultural policy-making process is needed, in order to achieve the

⁴¹ Waranee Kunawasen (2001), p.20

⁴² *Matichon Weekly* (Internet Edition), 27 September 2001, at www.matichon.co.th/weekly/ Retrieved on 27 September 2001

⁴³ Ammar Siamwalla (1992) 'Myths, Demons and the Future of Thai Agriculture' in Poonsin Wongkolthoot (ed) (1999) *Krobrob 60 Pee Arjarn Ammar (60 Years Professor Ammar)*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.246

policy of agricultural development, which will meet with farmers' demands, because 'the farmers' choice—and their capacity to make a reasoned choice—should be respected.'⁴⁵

With reference to this, the failures in the development of the agricultural sector, which adversely affect the economic position and political participation of Thai farmers, are consequences of government policy failures, which interfere with the market system. The Thailand Development Research Institute argues that the failure of the government to adequately invest, with regard to agricultural research, has significantly adversely impacted, with respect to the development of Thai agricultural sector. 'In Thailand, there is a functioning agricultural research system. More could of course be spent on it... the example of new crops, animals and varieties being recommended to farmers which ended up disastrously suggest that not enough trials were conducted to test out the recommendations before they are actually administered to the farmers.'⁴⁶

For instance in 1989, the MOAC launched three new projects, namely the plastic cow project⁴⁷, the silkworms project, and the *Paitong* (bamboo shoots) project⁴⁸, in order to convince farmers to switch products, which they traditionally produced, to these three products. It became clear that these projects had failed to increase the incomes of the farmers. Furthermore, it was reported that farmers in 30 provinces engaging in the *Paitong* project were forced into severe indebtedness.⁴⁹ These failures were due to lack of research into the information, which would be required by the farmers, in order to be able to be successful in terms of agricultural production and to make informed decisions, with

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., p.247

⁴⁶Thailand Development Research Institute (1995) *Agricultural Diversification/Restructuring of Agricultural Production Systems in Thailand*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.185

⁴⁷The MOAC introduced a project, where farmers mated their Thai cows with Australian cows. However, the farmers were unable to support the voracious appetites of the imported animals. The underfed heifers could not then reproduce, earning the nickname of 'plastic cows'. (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 16 February 1995, p.16)

⁴⁸The MAOC convinced many farmers that they would be better off by producing *Paitong*, since this was highly demanded by the market. However, farmers experienced technical problems in production and the *Paitong* died before the harvest season, leaving the farmers with nothing to sell. (*Phuchatkan Raisapda (Manager Weekly)*, 9-15 April 2001)

⁴⁹*Phuchatkan Raisapda (Manager Weekly)*, 9-15 April 2001, [in Thai], p.4

regard to risk assessment. Ammar⁵⁰ criticises the role of the MOAC, believing that the ministry forces its own agenda, without providing alternatives. He asserts that the government always assumes that it is right, and that the farmers must be wrong, which creates the problems associated with these projects.

According to the study of Nipon, Ruhs and Sumana⁵¹, the 'Restructuring Agricultural Production Systems' (RAPS) introduced in late 1993 is another case of policy failure for the government and the MOAC. The RAPS aims for the reduction and the replacement of the production of rice, cassava, coffee, and pepper, with the production of higher value agricultural products, such as selected vegetables, flowers, fruit, and in addition, milk cows.

Nipon, Ruhs and Sumana⁵² asserted that this policy failed firstly, because the government was incapable of making correct predictions, with regard to the prices of the agricultural products, which they wanted farmers to grow, in order to replace the four products targeted for the reductions. Indeed, the prices of rice, cassava, coffee, and pepper had in fact, already increased between the introduction of RAPS in 1993 and 1994. Additionally, the introduction of the new replacement crops came with inadequate levels of technical assistance. Finally, with the exception of rice, the domestic prices for all major crops, including the new replacement crops, are determined by the prices of agricultural products in the world market. This is because, as is normal for a country in the world market, Thailand has little influence over the prices of agricultural products.

The MOAC has acknowledged that agricultural policy over the past two decades not only failed to deliver real development to the agricultural sector, but moreover, it also adversely affected farmers' livelihoods. It has been argued by many, including government officials, academics and NGOs, that farmers should be free to make their

⁵⁰ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 16 February 1995, p.16

⁵¹ Nipon Poapongsakorn, Ruhs, M. and Sumana Tangjitwisuth (1998), pp.8-9

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.9

own choices, in terms of agricultural production. The policy of agricultural development should only be regarded as a guideline, and not a regulation for farmers to follow.⁵³

Furthermore, Ammar argues that farmers should be allowed to make autonomous decisions, with regard to their own agricultural production, because 'they alone know best what is good for them. The government could serve farmers' interests best, primarily by opening up the range of options that are available to them, and secondarily, by making more resources available to them, but refraining from interfering in farmers' decision to produce or not to produce something.'⁵⁴ This evidence suggests that supportive policies would benefit farmers more than these such persuasive policies do, since this would enhance farmers' strength, and empower them towards a more self-reliant status.

Corruption, which is an endemic problem within Thai society, notably within the political arena, also permeates the implementation of government policies, with regard to agricultural development, rendering them less effective in terms of achieving their objectives. With regard to the Thaksin government, Prime Minister Thaksin declares a strong will to attack the problem of corruption, but nevertheless, a high level of corruption has been observed within this government. A case in point was the fertiliser scandal, which emerged in November 2002 and two leading TRT party MPs were accused of being involved. Namely, Chuchep Harnsawat, the Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives between February 2001 – October 2002, and Withaya Thienthong, who is the brother of Sanoh Thienthong, the leader of the influential faction within the TRT party, the Wang Nam Yen.⁵⁵

Because of the instability of the Thai political system, where government administrations frequently change and cabinet reshuffles are common, when combined with the endemic level of corruption, which is acknowledged, this adversely affects the implementation of agricultural development. This is manifested with the introduction of

⁵³ Interview with Dr Ampon Kittiampon

⁵⁴ Ammar Siamwalla (1992), p.249

⁵⁵ *The Nation* (Internet Edition), 12 November 2002, at

www.nationmultimedia.com/page.print.php3?usrss=1&id=4038&clid=1 Retrieved on 12 November 2002

short-term, poorly realised projects of a questionable motivation by elite bureaucrats and politicians, where the opportunity is taken to abuse the initiation of projects, for individual purposes and gain. At the first available opportunity, when in executive authority, elite bureaucrats and politicians will at once initiate projects with large budgets and force them through. This is because they recognise the instability of the political system, and the transitory nature of their own positions. This situation can only persist whilst farmers are excluded from the network of the policy-making process, where the process would be more open to scrutiny by the farmers themselves.

Properly conducted agricultural research can be considered to be an obstacle to corruption, because of the time frame, which research needs, in order to be fully completed. As a consequence of this endemic corruption, the importance of this step within the policy of agricultural development, is largely ignored by the government. Overall, it can be argued that the level of government corruption, with regard to agricultural development programmes, is similar to that of economic development programmes within other government ministries and agencies.

5.3 Interactions between the Policy-makers and Thai Farmers

This section will examine how rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups can participate within the network of the policy-making process. With regard to the Thai political culture, the patronage system is an important contributing factor, with respect to the formation of personal connections between interest groups and government. Therefore, this section will highlight the impact of the patronage system, with respect to the political participation of Thai farmers groups and the formation of the policy community between farmers groups and government.

5.3.1 Interactions between the Policy-makers and Rice Farmers

The 1930s were a period of transition, in terms of the rice industry. Chinese businessmen began to take an active part in the Thai rice market, and so the market system became more important to rice farmers in Thailand. These Chinese businessmen were divided into the 'Big Five' families, namely, Wanglee, Lamsam, Bulasuk, Bulakun (Mahboonkrong) and Iamsuri, who would come to dominate the rice trade in Thailand.⁵⁶ The expansion of Chinese influence into the Thai economy at that time, was a catalyst for state intervention, with regard to economic activity and furthermore, the promotion of the policy of 'economic nationalism'.⁵⁷ However, in November 1938, the Phibun government organised the 'Borisat Khao Thai Chamkat' or Thai Rice Co., Ltd. (TRC), which was involved with the 'Big Five' families,⁵⁸ and this co-operation was strongly established.

Pridi Panomyong was the Minister of Finance, who recommended that the Phibun government establish the TRC. According to Pasuk and Baker,⁵⁹ the Pridi group, consisting of various associates of Pridi, was not reluctant to co-operate with Wanglee, Lamsam, and Bulasuk, the big rice-trading families actively. Ma Bulakun, a member of the Bulakun family became the managing director of the TRC. The business interests of the 'Big Five' rice trading families were enhanced and secured under the political patronage of the Pridi group, while the position of rice farmers' interests remained unclear.

This high level of influence, with regard to the position of the TRC enhanced its economic status as a rice exporter, attributable to the protection provided by the government combined with its monopolistic position, with respect to rice exports. Since the 1930s government interventions, with regard to the rice industry have steadily increased,⁶⁰ and the interests of Chinese businessmen through the patronage system have

⁵⁶ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1999), p.111

⁵⁷ Akira, S. (1989), pp.106-109

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.125

⁵⁹ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker, C. (1999), pp.120-121

⁶⁰ Akira, S. (1989), pp.126-127

been advanced, with second, third and fourth generation Chinese-Thai businessmen, the descendants of the immigrant Chinese.

The historical development of the Thai rice trade, during which time the policy community between the government and the Chinese-Thai businessmen was established, can help to inform an understanding, with regard to the negative impact on rice farmers, which resulted from the lack of a policy community between the government and rice farmers. Apichai⁶¹ argues that the rice farmers' lack of political participation within the Thai political arena has reinforced policies, which are more responsive to the demands of government than those of rice farmers. For instance, the policy of an export tax on rice or 'rice premium', was introduced in 1950, to become one of the main sources of government revenue.⁶² Between 1955-1965, the rice premium contributed 12.3 per cent to the total revenue of the government.⁶³ In 1974, the government received 3,275 million baht from the rice premium, which was the highest figure since the rice premium had been introduced. After 1981, the contribution of the rice premium progressively decreased because of the decline in the price of rice on the world market, between 1982-1986. The Prem government acknowledged the adverse impact of the rice premium on rice farmers, and began the process to remove the rice premium on low quality rice, in January 1986. By 1 February 1986, the government had removed the entire rice premium.⁶⁴

The revenue generated by the rice premium, was one of the main sources of government expenditure, with respect to the inception of the policy of industrialisation in the early 1960s. It is notable that most government revenue was generated by the

⁶¹ Apichai Puntasen (1996) *Pattana chonnabot Thai: Samutai lae mug, nawkid tidsadee laepab ruam khong kan pattana (Thai Rural Development: Theory and Perspective on Development)*, Bangkok: Mulanithi Poompanya, [in Thai], pp.113-115

⁶² Bertrand, T. (1980) *Thailand: Case Study of Agricultural Input and Output Pricing*, World Bank Staff Working Paper No.85, World Bank, p.40

⁶³ Ammar Siamwalla (1975) 'A History of Rice Policies in Thailand', in Poonsin Wongkolthoot (ed) (1999) *Krobob 60 Pee Arjarn Ammar (60 Years Professor Ammar)*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.15

⁶⁴ Kietchai Wesadabandhu (1987) 'Nayobai khao (Rice Policy)', in Rosrin Kuknang (ed) *Kumue butra kasetakorn 'Khao' (Handbook for Farmers' Son 'Rice')* Bangkok: Kasetsart University [in Thai], pp.142-143

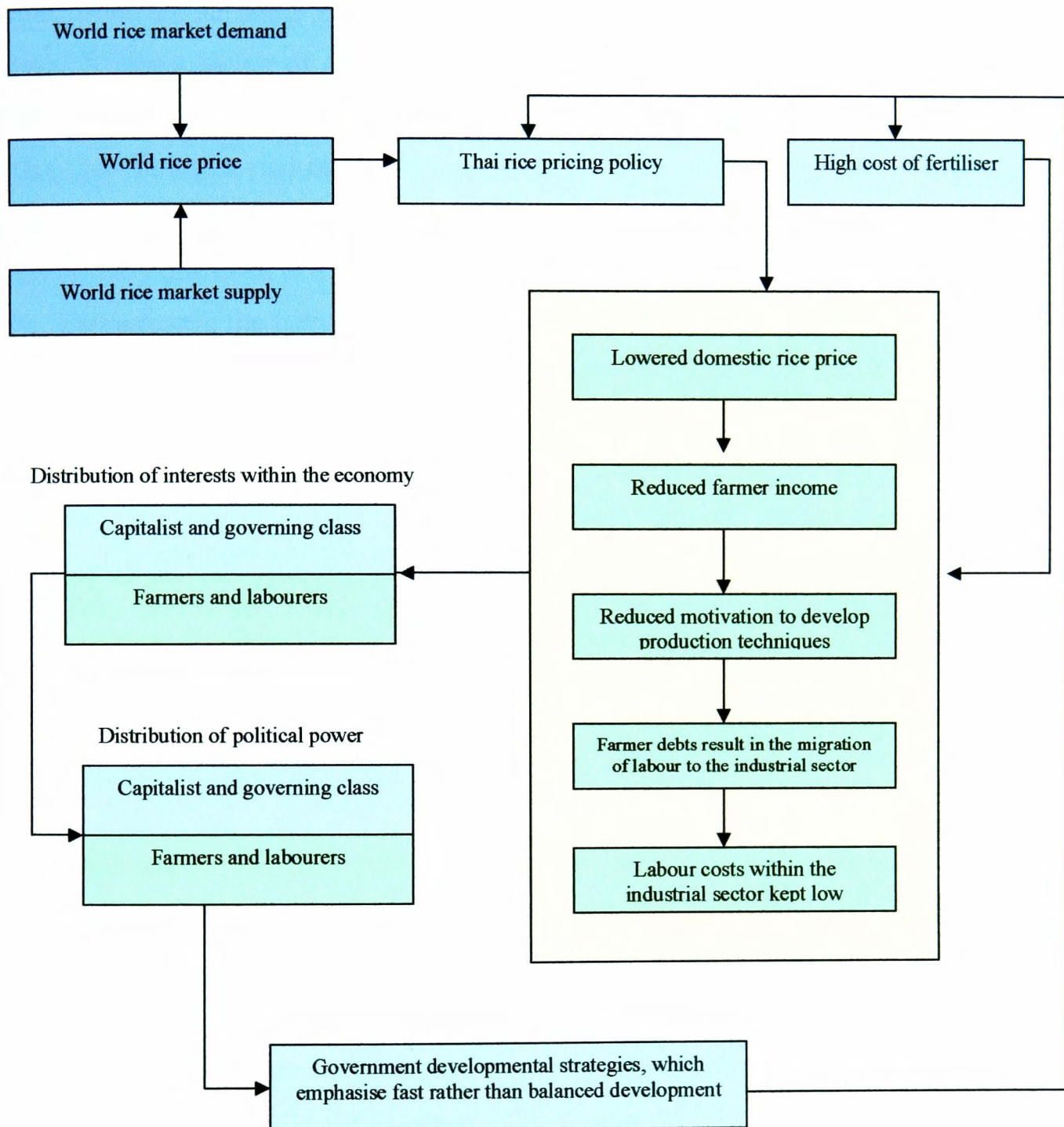
agricultural sector throughout the 1960s and 1970s, when government expenditure, with regard to the development of the agricultural sector was relatively low. Overall, during this period, there was a capital outflow from the agricultural sector generally, and this provided the funds for the capital inflow into the industrial sector.

According to Apichai⁶⁵, it was the Department of International Trade, Ministry of Commerce, which collected the rice premium throughout its duration. Revenue generated by the rice premium was not included within the annual government budget, because it was considered to be supplementary government revenue outside of the annual budget, and consequently, the government could appropriate this revenue, and its usage. This use of government revenue, without the proper controls offered by the annual government budget, could easily lead to corruption. In this regard, he draws attention to the corruption, which was evidenced among bureaucrats and politicians within the MAOC and the Ministry of Commerce. He noted that there were influential groups within the MAOC, which benefited from the rice premium at the rice farmers' expense, through the misappropriation of these funds.

As illustrated in figure 5-4, the structure of the political economy of rice in Thailand, appears to be an obstacle to the development of the political participation of rice farmers, because of the unequal distribution of economic and political resources. Maintaining the domestic price of rice at a level, which is artificially lower than the world price, benefits the government's policy of industrialisation because this transfers labour out of the agricultural sector, and into the industrial sector. The consequent increase in the supply of labour within industrial sector enables factories to maintain the cost of labour at an artificially low level also. Furthermore, in terms of the case study of the NRGMR, this has disrupted the development of agricultural production directly, in addition to the problem also experienced, with a better-educated supply of labour transferring to the industrial sector.

⁶⁵ Apichai Puntasen (1996), pp.115-117

Figure 5-4 Structure of the Political Economy of Rice



Source: Translated From Apichai Puntasen (1996), p.114

In addition, the government's attempts to maintain a low price for rice within the domestic market, an undertaking, which began in the 1950s, has been a useful resource in gaining popularity amongst many ordinary voters. In this respect, the large number of rice farmers in Thailand, were considered to be less important than the consumers of rice,

in the perception of the government. This is in contrast to the case of Japan, where rice farmers who are only a low proportion of the population, have received a high level of attention from the Japanese government. That the domestic price of rice in Japan is generally 10 times higher of than the world price does not significantly impact on the popularity of the Japanese government among the consumers of rice. In addition, it was reported that ‘In Japan rice sold for as much as 120 baht per kilogramme... compared with as little as 15 baht in Thailand’⁶⁶. The Japanese are willing to pay such a high price for domestically produced rice, because they want to maintain the country’s food security policy. ‘Furthermore, the total amount of money spent on rice by the Japanese today is too small to be of concern. Yet even urbanites, who otherwise resent their taxes being used for rice farm subsidies, are opposed to rice importation.’⁶⁷ Furthermore, Zhao has affirmed that:

Farmers have conducted intensive campaigns against liberalisation of agricultural trade by not only lobbying politicians and bureaucrats, but also by generating public support. For example, *Nōkyō* has mounted a series of successful campaigns to forge a “community of interests” between city consumers and rural producers, playing on fear of fear of presence of food additives and agricultural chemical in imported foods. As a result, farmers received support from a broad range of social circles including consumer organizations, such as the Housewives’ Association with its four million members. The community support added more strength to the farmers’ social network aimed at protecting agricultural interests.⁶⁸

In this respect, the unity between the Japanese and their nationalist belief, which is a result of the influence of Confucianism, is a contributing factor, with regard to the development of the political power of Japanese rice farmers and the *Nōkyō* at the national level. This factor is combined with the understanding that the Japanese have, with regard to the importance of maintaining the supply of rice. This is because of the inadequate supply of rice experienced by the Japanese after the Second World War, and in addition, the decline in the number of rice farmers, after the successful redevelopment of Japan after the war. Many rice farmers in Japan, stay within the agricultural sector because of

⁶⁶ Suphaphan Plengmaneeapun (1999) ‘Rice Desserts Among Ways to Boost Prices’, *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 4 January 1999, at www.bangkokpost.net/040199/040199_Business03.html Retrieved on 18 January 1999

⁶⁷ Ohnuki-Tierney, E. (1993) *Rice as Self: Japanese Identities Through Time*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.9

⁶⁸ Zhao, Q. (1995) *Japanese Policymaking: The Politics Behind Politics, Informal Mechanisms and the Making of China Policy*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, p.35

the government's incentive policy. In 2001, the Japanese government paid '¥ 21,000 per 1,000 sq. meters of rice paddy on condition that farming continues for five years.'⁶⁹

In contrast, Thai people have never experienced the problem of inadequate supply, with regard to rice, and accordingly, both the Thai people and the their government do not need to consider this problem, regardless of whether the economic and social welfare of rice farmers are considered or not. Between 1961-1991, rice occupied 59.72 per cent of the cultivable land, and contributed to 52.93 per cent to crop revenues.⁷⁰ Between 1961-1991, 48.04 per cent of rice was produced the *Isan* region, 23.61 per cent of rice was produced in the central region, 22.70 per cent of rice was produced in the northern region, and 5.65 per cent of rice was produced in the southern region.⁷¹ Between 1994-1997, rice production averaged 14,128,000 tonnes, of which 8,522,000 tonnes were for domestic consumption, and 5,572,000 tonnes were exported.⁷² This does not only suggest that rice farmers can help the country to maintain an adequate supply of rice, as moreover, Thailand is a leading exporter of rice in the world market.

Although the contribution of rice to the Thai economy is significant, this has not been converted into empowering rice farmers to fully participate within the Thai political arena, and this is because as a group, they are scattered across the country. Therefore, the geographical dislocation of the rice farmers could contribute to the explanation of why there is an absence of rice farmers' interest groups at the national level, in Thailand. However, this factor becomes less relevant, when the success of the rice farmers' group formation at the national level, in Japan is considered, because rice farmers in Japan, like in Thailand, are not concentrated within any particular region of the country. In Japan, of the estimated 3.64 million farms, approximately 2.83 million or 80 per cent, are rice

⁶⁹ *The Nikkei Weekly*, 29 January 2001

⁷⁰ Somporn Isvilanonda and Nipon Poapongsakorn (1995) *Rice Supply and Demand in Thailand: The Future Outlook*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.33

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.36

⁷² Economic Research Service, USDA (1999) *International Agricultural Baseline Projections to 2007/AER-767*, Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], p.64

farms, which are scattered throughout the country.⁷³ In this respect, the role of powerful farmers' interest groups, like the *Nokyo*, and in addition, the advanced communication systems available in Japan, can provide some explanation as to the irrelevance of geographical factors, with regard to the political influence of Japanese farmers.

Godwin argues that, 'When it come to mobilizing citizens for grassroots lobbying, the telephone becomes important.'⁷⁴ The degree of access to technology for rice farmers in Thailand is very low, when compared to farmers generally within Japan and the United Kingdom. With regard to the United Kingdom, the NFU has its own website. Japanese and Western farmers can access telephones, computers and the Internet, in order to advance both their group formation and group sustainability. In Thailand only the middle class and well-educated people within the urban areas use such advanced communication technology commonly. Being unable to utilise such technology is the obstacle to the co-operation of rice farmers at the national level.

The argument concerning the relationship between the geographical concentration of farmers and their political participation is supported by the protests of rice farmers from the central region, between 1985-1986, which were in relation to the price of rice. According to Apichai and Montri⁷⁵, the protest involving 1,500 rice farmers against the rice policy of the Prem government, began on 9 December 1985, and was held in front of the Provincial Hall in the province of Suphanburi.

The Chart Thai Party, an opposition party, had played a significant role in mobilising this action. The Chart Thai Party announced to its farming constituency on 24 December 1985 that the party would pressure Koson Krairiksh, the Minister of Commerce, to resign as a result of his failure to solve problems, with regard to the price of rice. On 29 December 1985, more than 1,000 rice farmers from the provinces of

⁷³ Minagawa, Y. (1996) 'Price Policy on Rice, Wheat and Barley', in Asian Productivity Organization (ed) (1998) *Agricultural Price Policy in Asia and the Pacific: Report of an APO Seminar 22 October-1 November 1996, Tokyo, Japan*, Tokyo: Asian Productivity Organization, p.68

⁷⁴ Godwin, R.K. (1992) 'Money, Technology, and Political Interests: The Direct Marketing of Politics' in Petracca, M.P. (ed) *The Politics of Interests: Interest Groups Transformed*, Boulder: Westview Press, p.309

Kamphangphet, Chai Nat, Phitsanulok, Singburi, Ang Thong, and Suphanburi, gathered outside the house of Prapat Pothasuthon, a Chart Thai MP of Suphanburi, in order to debate their political strategy. They agreed to take their protest to Bangkok, and consequently, on 6 January 1986, 3,000 farmers protested in the capital. As a result, Kosol resigned on 16 January 1986, and furthermore, this was also a contributing factor, with regard to the removal of the rice premium in February 1986⁷⁶. This protest would significantly damage both the stability and the popularity of the Prem government.

The success of this protest benefited rice farmers across Thailand. Those rice farmers from both the central and all other regions, which did not participate in the protest, can be classified as free riders in accordance with Olson's group theory. However, what might be considered in technical economic terms to be 'free riding', is manifested in the Thai case, through a lack of information and resources that would allow rice farmers across the regions of the country to participate. Even though there are other factors prompting group protest, in this case rice farmers are free-riding by default rather than desire.

The involvement of the MP Prapat Pothasuthon and the Chart Thai Party, illustrates that the political influence of the rice farmers in the central region, was not only a result of their geographical concentration, but in addition, that the role of politicians is also important. This example does not only reveal the political influence of rice farmers, as moreover, this also reveals how the Chart Thai Party could mobilise the collective action of rice farmers for the mutual benefit of both the rice farmers and themselves. A significant contributing factor, with regard to the success of the Chart Thai Party in mobilising the collective action of rice farmers, is the involvement of and its strong connections with *phu mi itthiphon* and *jao pho*. However, in 1991, the Police Department blacklisted 6 Chart Thai Party MPs, because of their status as *jao pho*.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Apichai Puntasen and Montri Jenwitthayakan (1988) *Kanmuang ruangkhao: nayobai, praden, lae kwamkadyang (Rice Politics: Policies, Issues and Conflicts)*, Bangkok [in Thai], pp.53-55

⁷⁶ Ibid.

It is questionable whether the interests of the rice farmer constituencies were a priority for the Chart Thai Party, because Thai people generally recognise that for its success, this party is mainly reliant on vote-buying, and is known to be corrupt. According to the research of Pasuk and Sungsidh⁷⁸, with regard to public attitudes towards corruption, 53.5 per cent answered by naming the Chart Thai Party, when asked the question: ‘Thinking of corruption what political party do you think of?’ In the general elections of 24 July 1988, the Chart Thai Party won the most seats, with 87 of the 357 seats in the House of Representatives, and formed a coalition government under Prime Minister Chatichai between August 1988 – February 1991.⁷⁹ It became evident that the Chart Thai Party had abused the collective power of the rice farmers in the central region, in order to form a government, as Thai politicians recognise that being an opposition party can only damage both their patronage networks and their potential for corruption. According to Apichai⁸⁰, the Chatichai government did not promote any policies that would benefit rice farmers or any other farmers groups, because the government had to primarily consider the many business interest groups, which were involved, since they were the financial backers of the Chart Thai Party.

In June 2000, the media questioned the allocation of 11.60 billion baht on the paddy silos project, because more than half of the proposed sites of the project were in the central region of Thailand, within the constituencies of the Chart Thai Party. The Minister of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives, Prapat Pothasuthon, the Chart Thai Party MP from the province of Suphanburi, had played a significant role in pushing this project forward. The MOAC had planned to build 66 paddy silos in 24 provinces. ‘Of these, 31 costing 5.5 billion baht will be allocated in 20 provincial strongholds of the

⁷⁷ Sombat Chantornvong (2000) ‘Local Godfathers in Thai Politics’, in McVey, R. (ed) *Money & Power in Provincial Thailand*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies [ISEAS] and Silkworm Books, p.63

⁷⁸ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Sungsidh Piriyarangsarn (1994) *Corruption & Democracy in Thailand*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, p.157

⁷⁹ Chart Thai Party, at www.chartthai.or.th/history/hist7-6.html [in Thai] Retrieved on 28 March 2003

⁸⁰ Apichai Puntasen (1996), p.128

Chart Thai Party. Suphan Buri, in particular, will have eight silos the most of any province, costing 1.3 billion baht.⁸¹

The Chart Thai Party claimed that this project would benefit rice farmers, because they could then store their rice when the price goes down, in order to sell when the price goes up. However, not many rice farmers can afford to delay the sale of their rice, because of the problem of liquidity. They must normally sell their rice at the best current market price, immediately after the rice has been harvested.⁸² Accordingly, the Chuan Government rejected this project on 11 July 2000, with Prime Minister Chuan arguing that the project was unnecessary and that its cost was too high.⁸³ During this period, it was estimated that Thailand was utilising only 50-60 per cent of its existing silo storage capacity, and accordingly, there was no shortage of storage space for rice.⁸⁴

Furthermore, this project had by-passed the regular approval procedures. The MOAC pushed ahead with the project without consulting relevant agencies, including the Rice Committee, the Ministry of Finance, the Budget Bureau and the NESDB. Regulation demands that every government investment project costing more than 500 million baht must be first examined by the NESDB.⁸⁵ With reference to this situation, if the project had started, construction companies with strong links to the Chart Thai Party would benefit more than the intended beneficiaries, the rice farmers would.

If there existed a well-organised and politically motivated rice farmers group, they would have the opportunity to benefit from the support of the Chart Thai Party. As is observed in the case study of the SCPA and in addition, its links with the Thailand Sugarcane Planter Federation, sugarcane farmers can utilise their connections with *phu*

⁸¹ Phusadee Arunmas and Wichit Sirithaveeporn (2000) 'Silo Sites Fuel Suspicion of Political Bias', *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 22 July 2000, at www.bangkokpost.net/220600/220600_Business01.html Retrieved on 11 July 2000

⁸² Phusadee Arunmas and Wichit Sirithaveeporn (2000)

⁸³ Chatrudee Theparat, Phusadee Arunmas, and Pradit Ruangdit (2000) 'Chart Thai Silo Scheme Lies in Ruins', *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 11 July 2000, at www.bangkokpost.net/today/110700_News01.html Retrieved on 11 July 2000

⁸⁴ Kazmin, A.L. (2000) 'Thailand Rice Silo Plan Under Fire', *Financial Time*, 22 June 2000, p.42

⁸⁵ Chatrudee Theparat, Phusadee Arunmas, and Pradit Ruangdit (2000)

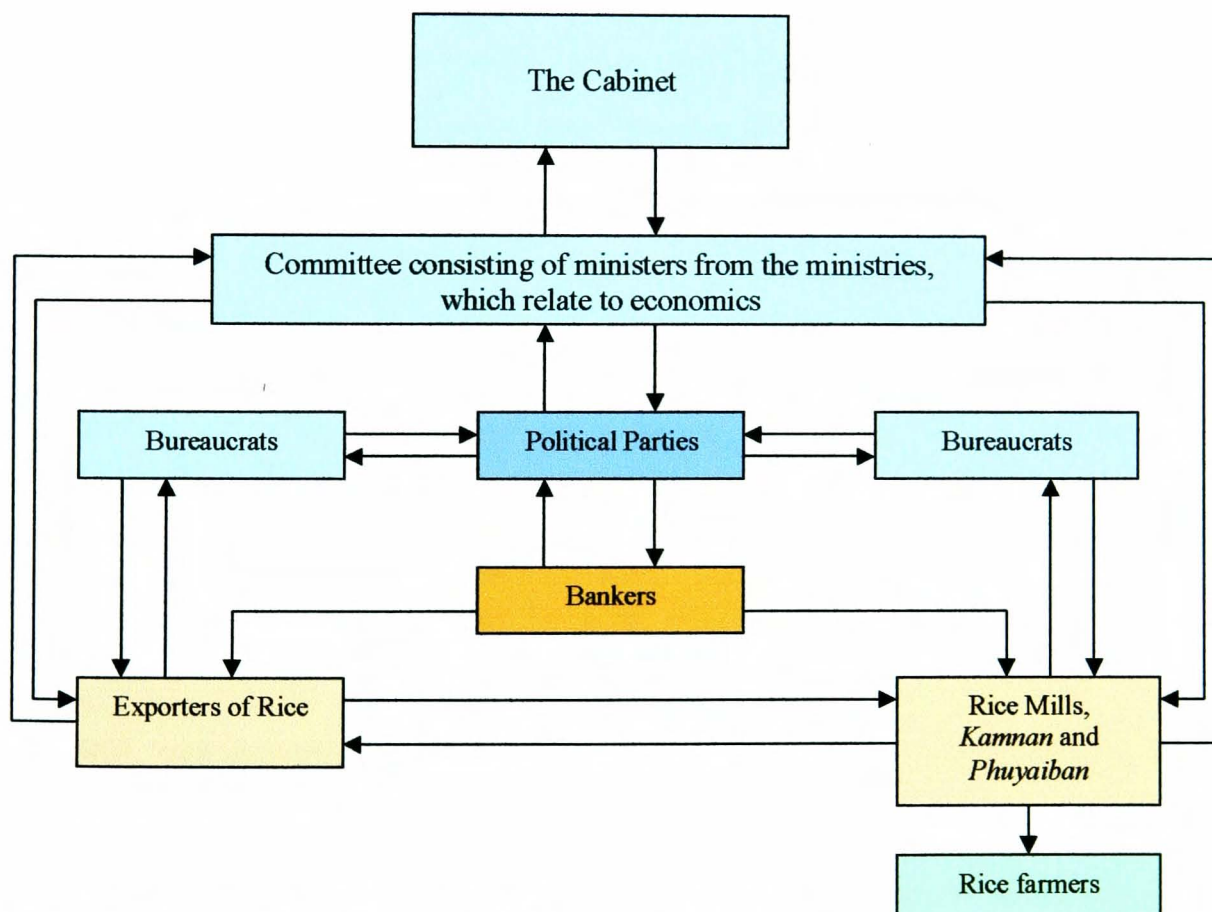
mi itthiphon and *jao pho* and in addition, elite bureaucrats and politicians, in order to further their own objectives. The rice farmers protest in 1985-1986 was an example of a temporary rice farmers group, formed on an *ad hoc* basis, without the continuing development associated with the formation of a more influential farmers' interest group, and this because of their political weakness. In this respect, if the MP of the constituency of the NRGMR were more supportive, with regard to their political participation, then this would significantly advance the political participation of the NRGMR at the national level. Consequently, their status of potential pressure participant could progress to that of interest group, which would allow them to develop their own policy community between themselves and elite bureaucrats and politicians, and this was experienced in the case of the SCPA and with other sugarcane farmers groups. Furthermore, the meeting between the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives and the representatives of the NRGMR, which was outlined in Chapter 4, implies the existence of a loose policy network between the NRGMR and the government. However, progression to the development of a closed and stable policy community, which could produce tangible benefits through influencing government would be the next stage, with regard to the advancing political status of the NRGMR.

The research has confirmed that at the sub-governmental level of the Rice Policy Committee or Kor Nor Khor (*Kana kammakan nayobai khao*), no rice farmers interest groups are involved. The Rice Policy Committee is responsible for all policies relating to rice, and their remit includes authority, with regard to price guarantees and price subsidies, and assistance to rice farmers, with regard to the production of rice. The Rice Policy Committee is under the direct supervision of the Department of Internal Trade, within the Ministry of Commerce. During the Chuan government between September 1992 – May 1995, the policy of agricultural development was very much concerned about price stability, with regard to agricultural products. The government acknowledged that the problems, with regard to price fluctuations and marketing are the most significant for farmers.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Department of Internal Trade (2000) *Khana kammakan nayobai khao (The Rice Committees)*, Department of Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce, Bangkok [Pamphlet in Thai], pp.3-4

According to the report from the Rice Policy Committee of 14 December 1999, committee members consisted entirely of elite bureaucrats and politicians, in addition to other government officials. The main actors include one of the Deputy Prime Ministers, who acts as chairman of the committee, also the Minister of Agriculture and Co-operatives, and in addition the Minister of Commerce who acts as an assistant to the chairman.⁸⁷ Within this system, there is the potential for the elite bureaucrats and politicians to overtly influence the Rice Policy Committee, in order to benefit rice exporters who are within their patronage network, whilst the interests of farmers are forgotten. This implies the adverse impact of concentrated political power within the Thai political arena.

Figure 5-5 Structure of Involved Actors in Rice Related Policy



Source: Adapted and Translated From Apichai Puntasen (1996), p.120

⁸⁷ Secretariat Department of Rice Committee (1999) *Akasarn prakorb Karn Prachum Khana Kummakarn Nayobai Khao Krungtee 1/2543: Document for Rice Committee's meeting 1/1999, 22 March 1999, at the Ministry of Commerce*, Secretariat Bangkok: Department of Rice Committee [Unpublished Document in Thai], p.2-1 and p.2-2

It has been argued that the involved actors within the Rice Policy Committee are elite bureaucrats and politicians, and other government officials, which implies a limited access to the committee for extra-bureaucratic groups. However, the patronage network specifically between the involved actors within the Rice Policy Committee with rice exporters and rice millers, is a form of policy community, enabling access to the policy-makers, and this is a requirement for being able to significantly influence the decision making process of the government.

Figure 5-5 illustrates that with the exception of rice farmers, every actor within the policy community of rice enjoys a reciprocal relationship, with two-way communications between actors. Indeed, with the example, which has been established, the policy community between rice exporters and government, specifically the Ministry of Commerce in particular, since the 1930s. This actual relationship has continued to develop, because rice exporters recognise that the Ministry of Commerce has played an important role in manipulating the price of rice, information, which they hope to obtain, and additionally, in terms of the government, rice exporters have information, which they need. Ammar and Suthad argue that:

At the very least, this ministry is the most important source of information concerning future price movements. Exporters on the inside track can obtain this information, and stand to gain very substantial rewards. On the other hand, bureaucrats in the ministry needed information from traders, because most government measures were directed at the export point and because in its G-to-G⁸⁸ business the government had to keep tabs on what was going on in the private trade. Given this mutual need for information, the only choice the Ministry faced was whether the consultations should be formal--with the Rice Exporters' Association--or informal--with a favoured subset of exporters. Regardless of the choice, the result was that the decision-making process enabled export traders to have a disproportionate say in the formulating of policies.⁸⁹

In 1995, rice exporters rather than rice farmers felt the benefits of the government policy of preventing the second paddy price from falling. The government agreed to award US\$ 10 per tonne as compensation to exporters of medium and low quality rice,

⁸⁸ G-to-G refers to Government to Government

⁸⁹ Ammar Siamwalla and Suthad Setboonsarng (1989), pp. 57-58

whilst there was no compensation paid at all to rice farmers.⁹⁰ The compensation scheme was used as an incentive for rice exporters to buy medium and low quality rice, in order to increase the domestic price of the rice.

Indeed, the exporters had already gained from the increases in the export volumes of medium and low quality rice from Thailand to many countries in Asia, including the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, especially after the economic crisis in Asia, which began in Thailand in July 1997. Consequently, '25 per cent broken rice', costing US\$ 250 per tonne, became more popular in these countries. Demand for fragrant rice, which cost US\$ 500 per tonne declined, because the purchasing power of these export destinations significantly declined in the aftermath of the crisis. In the first eight months of 1998, Thailand exported 1.168 million tonnes of '25 per cent broken rice' to Indonesia and 142,792 tonnes to the Philippines. Before the financial crisis, the Philippines was mostly importing the higher-grade '5 per cent broken rice' from Thailand.⁹¹ The percentage of rice, which has been damaged during the milling process, refers to the grade of the rice.

With regard to the study of Apichai, in figure 5-5, he includes the role of *kamnan* and *phuyaiban* between rice millers and rice farmers. However, the research has found that many rice mills are own by *kamnan* and *phuyaiban*, and accordingly the research has classified them under the same category. Moreover, rice farmers have established a higher level of direct contact with rice millers than previously experienced. Therefore, rice trading at the local level suggests the diminishing role for *kamnan* and *phuyaiban*. According to the case study, the NRGMR have recognised that the rice millers have been acting as middlemen within the rice market. This does still adversely affect them, because rice mills continue to minimise their purchase price.

It has been observed that rice mills, which are owned by *kamnan* or *jao pho*, are as politically powerful as rice exporters, within the policy community of rice. This is

⁹⁰ Somporn Thapanachai (1995) 'Farmers' Group Proposes System of Benefit Sharing', *Bangkok Post*, 23 March 1995, p.20

because certain large rice mills owned by *kamnan* or *jao pho* can indicate the price of rice in the domestic market, for example, *Borisat Chaophraya ta reu kamnan trong chumkad* or *Ta khao kamnan Trong*, owned by *kamnan* Trong Ongchaiwattana, in the province of Nakhon Sawan. The Department of Internal Trade, which is responsible for regulating the price of all agricultural products, including rice, applies the price of rice at the *Ta khao kamnan Trong* as one of the standard prices for domestic rice trading, because this mill is one of the main centres for the domestic rice market.⁹²

In general, rice farmers are individually too weak to bargain for higher prices from the rice mills. This is not only because they are politically weak and without well-organised interest groups, but also because of their shortage of knowledge, with regard to the quality of their rice, with prices dependent on both quality and moisture content. Accordingly, there is a high level of opportunity for rice mills to suppress the prices of rice at the expense of rice farmers.⁹³

The evidence shows that powerful rice mills, owned by *kamnan* or *jao pho* can obtain government subsidies for domestic rice prices more than rice farmers can. These subsidies are not only obtained through the low purchase prices procured from farmers and the subsequent sale to the government at the higher guaranteed prices, as furthermore, this includes advantages obtained through corruption, as a result of the reciprocal relationship between the rice mills and elite bureaucrats and politicians. The government launched an investigation, in relation to rice subsidies, after it was discovered that rice reported to be in storage by some mills did not exist, because the rice mills had not actually bought this rice from the farmers. Another incidence was the under reporting of excess rice, which occurred because the rice millers had bought rice from

⁹¹ Achara Pongvutitham (1998) 'Low-grade Rice Becomes Popular', *The nation* (Internet Edition), 28 August 1998, at <http://203.146.51.4/nationnews/1998/199809/19980928/32362.html> Retrieved on 22 November 1998

⁹² Department of Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce, at www.dit.go.th/highlight/center_market.htm [in Thai] Retrieved on 10 March 2003

⁹³ Interview with Mr Roon Arnaga

farmers at low prices and placed the rice in hidden storage. The rice millers had been expecting higher subsidies from the government in the future.⁹⁴

The NRGMR is fully aware of the power of both the rice exporters and the rice mills. Accordingly, they have built their own rice mill, in order to solve the problem of having to deal with the middlemen in the rice market. However, it is not only the middlemen, which generate problems, with regard to rice. In order to improve their economic and political status, the NRGMR, in addition to other rice farmers have to more fully participate within the network of the rice policy-making process. This will not only allow them to better represent their interests more directly, with respect to the country's policy-makers, but in addition, it will also allow them to watch for corruption within the government policy relating to rice.

5.3.2 Interactions between the Policy-makers and Sugarcane Farmers

The sugarcane production performed poorly as an industry, when it began in the 1920s, so perhaps surprisingly, it would later become one of the country's leading export products. Nevertheless, its contribution to the Thai economy remains less significant than rice. However, as a result of the government assistance programmes to establish sugarcane production during the 1920s and 1930s, resource allocation within the sugarcane industry is better now than within the rice industry, and this is due to its sustainable development. During its early development, the government acknowledged the importance of the sugarcane industry. As a result in 1937, the government established Thailand's first sugarcane mill, in the province of Lampang.⁹⁵

In 1942, the government established a second mill, which was in the province of Uttaradit, and in addition, the Thai Export Promotion Co., Ltd was established. This company was firstly under responsibility of both the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Finance, when in 1947 it was transferred to the direct supervision of the Thai

⁹⁴ *Bangkok Post*, 3 April 2001, p. 1

⁹⁵ Bertrand, T. (1980), p.53

Sugar Organisation, within the Ministry of Industry. The Thai Sugar Organisation was responsible for the co-operation between the public and private sectors, with regard to sugarcane production, and in 1953, the Thai Sugar Industry Co., Ltd was established, with responsibility for the import and export of sugar.⁹⁶

A considerable increase in the number of sugarcane mills in the late 1950s, led to the excess supply of sugarcane within the domestic market. Accordingly, the Office of Sugar Industry Support Fund was established through the Sugar Industry Act B.E. 2504 (1961), in order to manage the problem of excess supply. The Sugar Act B.E. 2511 (1968), enabled the Ministry of Industry to establish the Office of Cane and Sugar with responsibilities for administering the production of sugarcane by the farmers, processing by the mills, and in addition, the general marketing of sugar.⁹⁷ However, the Sugar Act B.E. 2511 (1968) did not benefit the sugarcane farmers, because the sugarcane industry was already monopolised by the sugarcane mills.

The policy community, which had been established between sugarcane mills and the government, had existed since the 1960s. Ammar and Suthad argue, that ‘From 1961 to 1968, the government’s major interest was to protect the sugar industry--which meant, essentially, sugar mills. Cane growers were supposed to reap benefits indirectly by selling to the mills.’⁹⁸ The sugarcane mills rather than the price in the world market controlled the domestic prices for sugarcane and this meant that the conflict over price between the sugarcane farmers and mills remained unresolved. This was because the Sugar Industry Act B.E. 2504 (1961) and the Sugar Act B.E. 2511 (1968), were drafted before the policy community between sugarcane farmers groups and the government was established. In order to resolve conflicts between the sugarcane farmers and mills, the government introduced the 70:30 revenue-sharing system in 1982 (see box 4-1, in Chapter 4), and promulgated the Sugarcane and Sugar Act B.E. 2527 (1984). The act was established, in order to legitimise the operation of all of the involved actors within the sugarcane

⁹⁶ Office of the Cane and Sugar Board (1999a), *Cane and Sugar Industry in Thailand: 1998-99*, Bangkok: Office of the Cane and Sugar Board, Ministry of Industry, pp.7-8

⁹⁷ Office of the Cane and Sugar Board (1999a), pp.7-8

⁹⁸ Ammar Siamwalla and Suthad Setboonsarng (1989), p.87

industry. This brought about substantial restructuring and strict controls to the sugarcane industry of Thailand, and led to it becoming one of Thailand's most efficiently and well organised industries.⁹⁹

The development of the sugarcane industry in Thailand was achieved through highly involved government intervention, which is not a unique case within southeast Asia, because, with respect to two other major producers of sugarcane, namely Indonesia and the Philippines, government intervention is also highly involved.¹⁰⁰ Substantial government intervention has contributed to the successful development of the industry across Thailand, which is now in the top five of the worlds leading exporters of sugarcane.¹⁰¹ Within the sugarcane industry, government intervention has not suppressed the role of sugarcane farmers groups, as has been experienced in other industries within the agricultural sector of Thailand. Rather, the 70:30 revenue sharing system and the Sugarcane and Sugar Act B.E. 2527 (1984), have positively impacted, with regard to the political participation and influence of sugarcane farmers, as it is illustrated in figure 5-5.

Unlike other farmers in Thailand, sugar cane farmers are extremely well organized... they have pressured governments to maintain the price of sugarcane well above the price it would receive from world markets. They have even forced organizational changes upon government ministers in order to accommodate their needs.¹⁰²

In this respect, Ramsay¹⁰³ uses the political influence of sugarcane farmers groups to challenge the dominant idea of 'bureaucratic polity', which was introduced by Riggs, in order to explain the Thai political environment of the 1960s. This is because the bureaucratic polity suggests the absence of the role for interest groups within the network of policy-making process, whereas sugarcane farmers groups have played a significant role in this regard. Ramsay concludes that the bureaucratic polity has failed to adequately explain this scenario, because sugarcane farmers groups have emerged as powerful insiders within the network of sugarcane policy-making process. He highlights that the

⁹⁹ Interview with Mr Rachai Chusilpkul

¹⁰⁰ Acosta, L. (1998) *The Impact of ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) on Selected Agricultural Products in ASEAN Countries*, Frankfurt: Pete Lang, p.41

¹⁰¹ Interview with Mr Vithet Yamprayoon

¹⁰² Ramsay, A. (1987), p.248

emergence of sugarcane farmer groups has contributed to a more pluralistic Thai political arena. Sugarcane farmers have been able to share in the power, which has historically been concentrated amongst the elite bureaucrats and politicians.

Rachai Chusilpkul¹⁰⁴, the Secretary-General of the Thailand Sugarcane Planters Federation, was invited to participate in the drafting process of the Sugarcane and Sugar Act B.E. 2527, when nominated by one of the political parties, in order to represent sugarcane farmers in providing information, with regard to the sugarcane industry. There were other sugarcane farmers' representatives in the drafting process of the Act, because the government invited sugarcane farmers from various groups to participate. The expectation of the government for representatives of sugarcane farmers groups to take a consultative role, enables sugarcane farmer groups to establish their insider status within the network of the sugarcane policy-making process, because 'governmental policy makers need groups to facilitate the formulation of a workable and effective policy.'¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, the policy community between sugarcane farmers groups and the government is established.

In this regard, the formation of the policy communities between government and sugarcane farmers groups in Thailand reflects what Smith has observed in relation to the formation of the policy community between the NFU and the British government. 'When the government increasingly began to intervene in agriculture, it was the NFU that it looked for advice and support. The relationship between the farmers and the MAF became increasingly institutionalized.'¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, in Thailand, the patronage system appears to be an important element, which facilitates interest groups to be able to form an effective policy community, as was observed in the relationship between Rachai and one of the political parties. This effect has significantly improved both the political

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp.248-267

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Mr Rachai Chusilpkul

¹⁰⁵ Maloney, W.A., Jordan, G. and McLaughlin, A.M. (1994), p.36

¹⁰⁶ Smith, M.J. (1992) 'The Agricultural Policy Community: Maintaining a Closed Relationship', in Marsh, D. and Rhodes, R.A.W. (eds) *Policy Networks in British Government*, New York: Oxford University Press, p.37

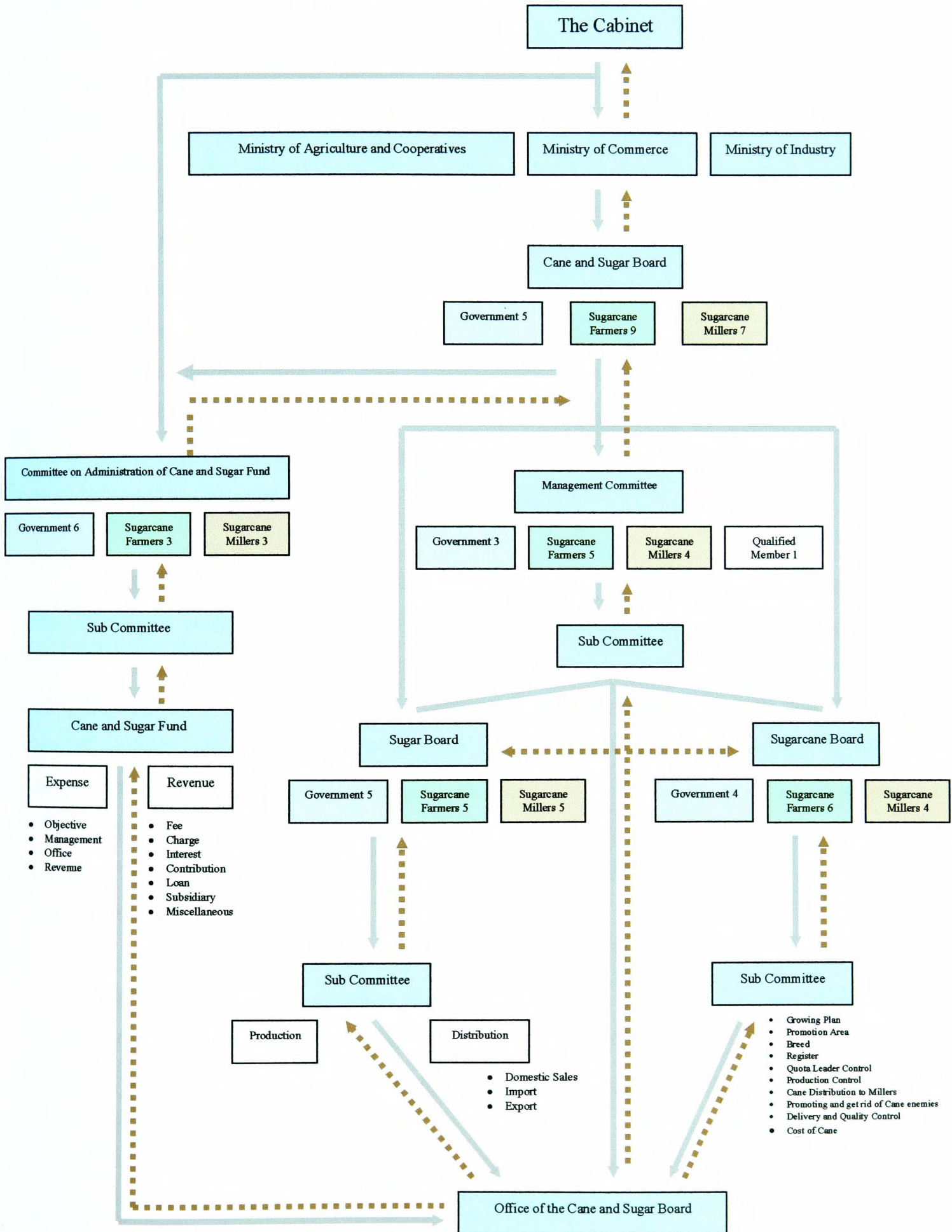
participation and influence of both the Thailand Sugarcane Planters Federation and the SCPA.

During the drafting process of the Sugarcane and Sugar Act B.E. 2527, problems, with regard to the experiences of the sugarcane farmers were presented to the government, in order to appeal for a more favourable policy. The representatives of the sugarcane farmers' groups argued that the Act should provide elements ensuring that sugarcane farmers would not be exploited. Sugarcane farmers agree that the Act provided considerable improvements in the benefits available to sugarcane farmers, and the political participation of sugarcane farmers at the national level has been significantly enhanced, as is illustrated in figure 5-6.

Figure 5-6 outlines the network of the sugarcane policy-making process, with five sugarcane policy communities. In each sugarcane policy community, there are a number of involved sugarcane farmers representatives, which enables sugarcane farmers to develop their insider status as an interest group within the network of the sugarcane policy-making process. In the 'Cane and Sugar Board', which is the highest ranked board within the network, there are 9 representatives of sugarcane farmers, 5 government officials and 4 representatives from the sugarcane mills. Sugarcane farmers have gained this privileged representation from the government, because of their successful appeal to the government, which argued that as they are not as well-educated as the representatives of the sugarcane mills, they need more representation, in order to help in the negotiations.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Mr Rachai Chusilpkul

Figure 5-6 Structure of Sugarcane Industry Policy-making Process



Source: Office of Cane and Sugar Board (1999a), p.16

However, the government bureaucracy presents challenges to the successful operation of network of the sugarcane policy-making process. As is represented in figure 5-6, the Cane and Sugar Board is responsible to three ministries, namely the MOAC, the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Industry. Often these three ministries disagree with the direction of the policy, which is recommended by the Cane and Sugar Board.¹⁰⁸ In the wake of the economic crisis of 1997, the Cane and Sugar Board submitted proposals for a price increase in domestic sugar, which would in turn bring about an increase in the price of sugarcane. In response to this proposal, the Minister of Commerce, Supachai Panichapakdi of the Democraticrat Party disagreed with this proposal, arguing that the price of domestic sugar would not be increased, because this would make consumers unhappy. The Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Pongpol Adireksarn of the Chart Thai Party would neither agree nor disagree with this proposal, whereas the Minister of Industry, Somsak Thepsuthin of the Social Action Party agreed to the proposal to increase the price of domestic sugar.¹⁰⁹

With reference to this issue, the power of elite politicians within the network of the sugarcane policy-making process remains substantial. Accordingly, sugarcane farmers groups find that personal connections are still an important element in their political strategy of enhancing their insider status, as is observed within the SCPA. Formal negotiations do not always bring about agreements between sugarcane farmers groups and sugarcane mills, particularly, with regard to the negotiations, in respect of the sugarcane prices. The SCPA argues that in many cases the personal connections, which they have with elite bureaucrats and politicians enables them to achieve their objectives more effectively.¹¹⁰

On occasion, actors outside the sugarcane policy community can use their personal connections, in order to successfully influence elite politicians, involved in the sugarcane policy community. This includes, for instance, the business groups who have

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Mr Vithet Yamprayoon

¹⁰⁹ Supara Janchitfah (1998) 'Sweet Business Turns Sour', *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 22 February 1998, at www.bkkpost.samart.co.th/news/Bparchive/BP19980222/220298_Perspective01.html Retrieved on 22 July 2000

been playing a significant role within the Thai political arena. Sugarcane farmers have argued that the government has fixed the price of domestic sugar at a low level, in order to benefit the soft drink and condensed milk businesses rather than the ordinary consumers, because some elite politicians have strong connections with these business groups.¹¹¹ Every year, the soft drink industry uses approximately 120,000 tonnes or 43 per cent of the total consumption of sugarcane used in industrial production.¹¹² If the price of sugar was higher, this would generate an increase in income for sugarcane farmers.¹¹³ This implies the power of elite bureaucrats and politicians over the sugarcane policy community as a result of the patronage system. Accordingly, the idea of bureaucratic polity is not totally invalid.

Ramsay¹¹⁴ acknowledges the existence of political patronage within the sugarcane industry in Thailand. His study highlights that many MPs in the House of Representatives are sugarcane planters. Moreover, several large-scale sugarcane farmers and millers are significant financial sources for political parties. In the general elections of January 2001, Pracha Phothipipit or *kamnan* Sia, who had been the president of the SCPA since 1999, was initially elected as a Democrat Party MP. However, he was accused of winning through vote-buying, with the Election Commission 'yellow-carding' him, with regard to his future conduct, and the election for constituency five in the province of Kanchanaburi was re-balloted. However, there were further elections that year, as subsequent and similar claims continued to re-emerge against *kamnan* Sia.¹¹⁵ Accordingly, it can be argued that the political influence of interest groups within the sugarcane industry was enhanced by the existence of bureaucratic polity and the patronage system. The bureaucratic polity thesis is still partially relevant to Thai politics, although it has failed to explain the existence of interest groups within the sugarcane industry.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Mr Naradhip Anantasuk

¹¹¹ Interview with Mr Rachai Chusilpkul

¹¹² Prayong Nettayarak (1992) *Anakot utsahakam oiy lae numtan Thai (The Future of Thai Sugarcane and Sugar Industry)*, Bangkok: Thailand Research Development Institute [TDRI], p.23

¹¹³ Interview with Mr Rachai Chusilpkul

¹¹⁴ Ramsay, A. (1987), p.257-256

¹¹⁵ *Bangkok Post*, (Internet Edition), 8 June 2001, at

www.bangkokpost.net/election2001/june2001/080601c.html Retrieved on 20 June 2003

According to the experiences of sugarcane farmers' groups, the patronage system remains highly relevant, with respect to interest groups operating effectively within the Thai political arena. Sugarcane farmers groups have acknowledged the Thai political culture of both the patronage system and money politics. They are aware of what they need to do, in order to achieve their objectives. Thus, their demands are not out of reach for them.

5.3.3 Interactions between the Policy-makers and Potato Farmers

At national level, potato production is less important to the Thai economy, than both rice and sugarcane. Potato farmers are relatively low in numbers, and are based in only a few provinces in the northern region of Thailand. As a result, their political role is not widely recognised within the Thai political arena, even though many are represented by the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, a well-organised farmers group. Nevertheless, this farmers group was not politically formed, like for example, the SCPA.

The formation of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd was intended to obtain a greater supply of potato seedlings from the government. However, this is not to suggest that this was aimed at improving their negotiating power against the government in terms of the control over the importing of potato seedlings. Rather, this farmers group was established because government regulation requires that the import of potato seedlings must be conducted through a legally registered organisation. As a result, the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd had to register as a co-operative, in accordance with government regulation.¹¹⁶ Although, it has become one of the most successful farmers groups in Thailand, the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd is not as politically influential as the SCPA. Indeed, the characteristics of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd is more similar to that of the NRGMR because they both aim to improve their self-reliant status.

¹¹⁶ Thongchai Thonguthaisri (1993) *Sahakorn phuplug munfarang Chiang Mai jumkad (Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd)*, paper presented at the 12th National Vegetable Conference, 31 March – 3 April 1993, Prince of Songkhla University, the province of Songkhla, Thailand [in Thai], p.4

The interaction between potato farmers and policy-makers is more intense at the local level than at the national level. Because potato production does not have economic importance at the national level, the government is less attentive to their problems. Although the local government agencies offices have contributed to the success of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, these agencies have only played a promotional role, and they never interfere in the management system of the co-operative.¹¹⁷

That there has been no government intervention, with regard to the management system of the group, has actually contributed to the success of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd. This is because since the first farmers' co-operative was established in 1916¹¹⁸, the government has tended to play a significant role in the management systems of farmers' co-operatives. Ammar¹¹⁹ argues that if government intervention had been absent from the beginning of the introduction of co-operatives in Thailand, Thai farmers might already have had the chance to enjoy the benefits, which can be achieved in farmers co-operatives, such as those experienced within the *Nokyo* in Japan.

Although, the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd has emerged as 'the main organisation and all influential potato farmers are members'¹²⁰, it cannot effectively protect the interests of its members in the potato market. The structure of the potato market itself, has played a more significant role in protecting the interests of potato farmers through the 'farming contract system' between factories and potato farmers, and government intervention schemes are rarely evident. As a result, potato factories dominate the potato market.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Miss Nongnush Puranapun

¹¹⁸ O'Reilly, F.D. and McDonald, P.I. (1983) *Thailand's Agriculture*, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, p39

¹¹⁹ Interview with Professor Ammar Siamwalla

¹²⁰ Örnberg, L. (1999) 'Potato Farmers' Organisation in Thailand: A discussion on the prerequisites of the formation and survival of farmer-organisations', paper presented to the 7th International Conference on Thai Studies (4-8 July 1999), University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

However, government intervention is clearly evident within the potato seedling market. In 1981, the government began to control the import of potato seedlings, in order to manage the excess supply of potatoes within the domestic market. Instead of benefiting farmers, this policy adversely affected their production. During the 1980s, potato farmers needed high quality potato seedlings from abroad, due to the sharp growth in the potato market. This immediately increased the demand for potato seedlings, however, with their supply being strictly controlled by the government, this dramatically increased the price of potato seedlings.¹²¹ Through the increased cost of production, farmers were worse off as a result.

Although the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, with other potato farmers representatives are able to place their demands for potato seedlings to the government, and in addition, that some potato farmers representatives are involved within the potato seedling policy-making process¹²², this relationship with the government can at most be described as a form of policy network. This is because this relationship is loosely formed, without a stable and closed connection, which would allow potato farmers to act in a more assertive way. Any demands, which are considered, are in fact accorded with because of the existing requirements of government legislation.

According to figure 5-7, potato farmers are only able to act indirectly through farmers' co-operatives, in order to have their requirement for potato seedlings represented to either the government or potato chips companies. Furthermore, within the network of the potato seedling policy-making process, with regard to importation, farmers are not in the position to communicate directly with the policy-makers¹²³, and therefore, policy-makers do not respond effectively to their demands for potato seedlings. Figure 5-7 illustrates that the policy-makers in central government have absolute power to set the quota for imported potato seedlings¹²⁴, because the policy community between potato

¹²¹ Interview with Mr Pramual Jai-ngern

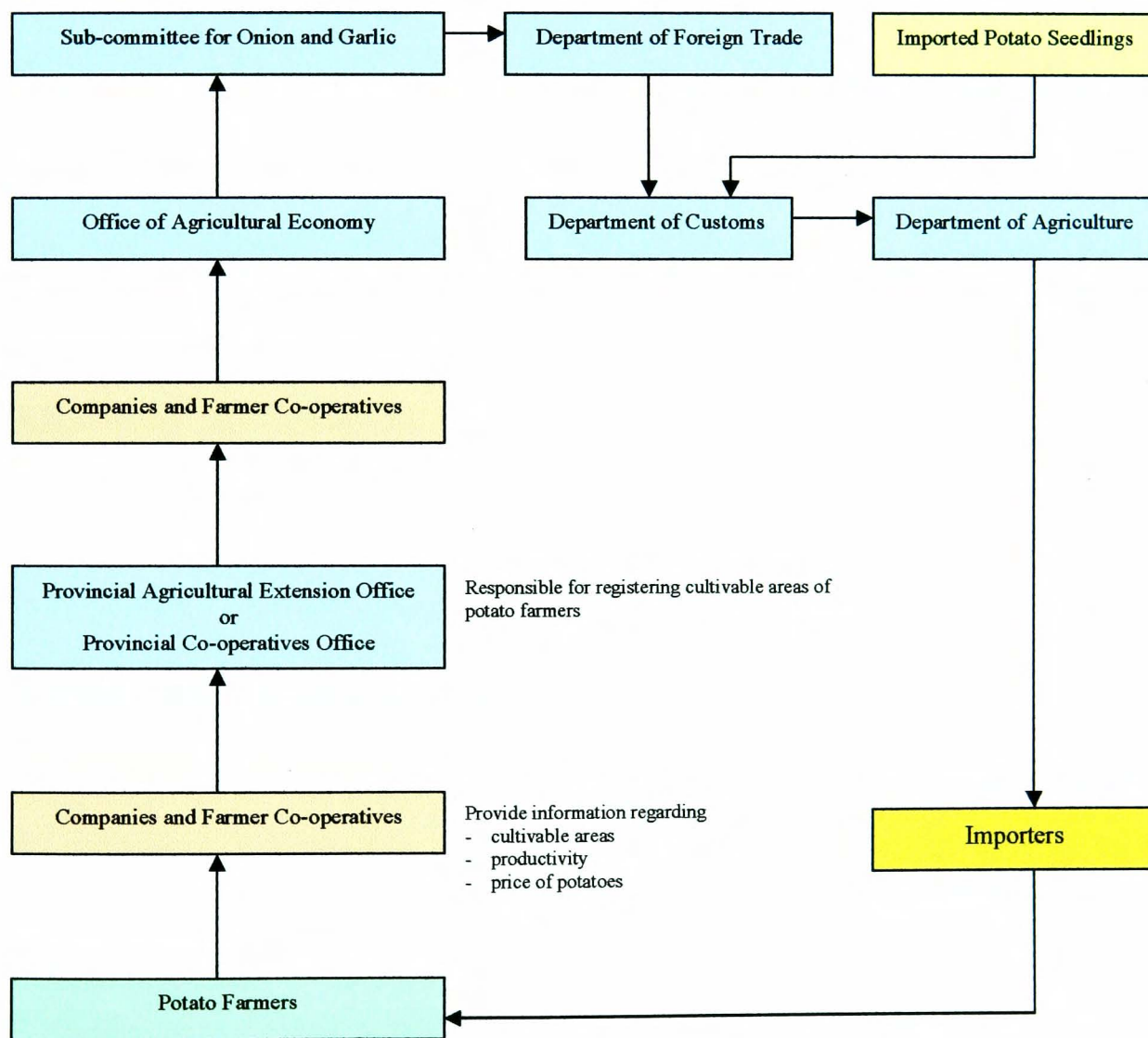
¹²² Interview with Mr In-orn Pothacharoen

¹²³ Department of Agricultural Extension (2001), *Potato Seedlings Importing Process*, Department of Agricultural Extension, the district of Sansai Office, the province of Chiang Mai, [Unpublished Document in Thai]

¹²⁴ Interview with Miss Nongnuch Puranapun

farmers and the government does not exist, in order to protect the interests of potato farmers. Örnberg has argued that the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd is one of the most effectively organised farmers' groups, to a level, which is rarely evidenced in Thai politics. In terms of the implication of the network of the potato seedling policy-making process, with regard to importation, it is clear that executive power and authority are concentrated within the central government and business groups.

Figure 5-7 Structure of Potato Seedling Importation Policy-making Process



Source: Translated from unpublished document, provided by the Department of Agricultural Extension, Office of Sansai District, the province of Chiang Mai

The Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co., with other potato chip companies, has achieved insider status within the network of the potato seedling policy-making process, with regard to importation. On 16 June 1998, the Subcommittee for Onion and Garlic, which is responsible for the importation of potato seedlings approved a further request, which was made by the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co., in order to import an additional 1,200 tonnes of potato seedlings. Previously, the company had requested an additional 3,048 tonnes, which was already an extension to the 1998 import quota of 5,750.50 tonnes. The Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd was approved a total of only 137.5 tonnes of potato seedlings for importation, whereas a total of 5,613 tonnes were shared between the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. and six other potato chip companies.¹²⁵ As a consequence of the allocation of the quota, the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd relied on the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. for extra potato seedlings.

The dramatic expansion of the domestic market for potato chips in the late 1990s, led to the establishment of a policy community between the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. and the government, in the network of the potato seedling policy-making process, with regard to importation. Over this period, the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. has been attempting to monopolise the potato chip market of Thailand. In 1999, the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. bought out Mun Mun, a 20-year-old Thai brand, and spent 100 million baht on an advertising campaign. Consequently, the market share of the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. dramatically increased from 8 per cent in 1992, to over 50 per cent by 1999.¹²⁶

The role of the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. in potato production was enhanced, when the MOAC announced a project to increase the production of potatoes through the reduction of onion and garlic areas under cultivation, which aimed to reduce onion and garlic cultivation by 6,000 *rai* per year for the three years, between 1998-2000. The government agreed to subsidise farmers with 1,500 baht per *rai* in the first year after

¹²⁵ Phusadee Arunmas (1998) 'Additional Potato Import Approved: Area for Onion, Garlic Cultivation Reduced', *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 17 June 1998, at www.scoop.bangkokpost.co.th/1998/june1998/bp19980617/170698_... Retrieved on 9 November 2001

¹²⁶ *The Nation* (Internet Edition), 20 March 1999, at www.nationmultimedia.com/page.arcview.php3?clid=6&id=3770&usrses... Retrieved on 9 November 2001

joining the project.¹²⁷ The Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. along with other potato chip companies co-operated with the project, by providing a market for potato farmers through its farming contract system. In 1998, the government expected 4,369 farmers covering 5,381 *rai* of land under cultivation, to join the project.¹²⁸

The members of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd have argued that they are satisfied with the price of 8 baht per kilogram, which they receive from the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co, through farming contract system, even though they would still hope for a higher price. However, through the farming contract system the farmer's sign a contract, which fixes the price regardless of the demand or supply in the market, during the harvest. Consequently, potato farmers cannot expect a higher price in years when demand exceeds supply.¹²⁹

With reference to the price conflicts between the sugarcane farmers and sugarcane mills, which led to the formation of the SCPA, in contrast, there is no collective action by potato farmers groups, which can be observed against the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. The best explanation for this is that the price, which is offered by the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. is reasonable and in accordance with the market price. This is in clear distinction to the case of the sugarcane farmers, because until the introduction of the 70:30 revenue-sharing system, the price could be determined by sugarcane mills, regardless of the market price.

Problems, with regard to fluctuating potato prices, are not significant enough, in order to mobilise the collective action of farmers against the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. However, in general terms, the farming contract system with the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. is favourable, because potato farmers have argued that 'The company has guaranteed the prices of products and given us support to find credit from the banks.'¹³⁰ In this respect, it

¹²⁷ Department of Agriculture (1999) 'Krongkan lodphuentee plug hom houyai lae kratium pueplug munfarang todtan pee 2542 (The Reduction of Onion and Garlic Cultivated Areas for Increasing the Production of Potatoes Project)', paper for Farmers Training Project, Department of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives [in Thai], p.7

¹²⁸ Phusadee Arunmas (1998)

¹²⁹ Interview with Mr Wanchai Lai

¹³⁰ Suphaphan Plengmaneeapun (1998) 'Potatoes Thrive on Boom in Chips Sales' *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 16 November 1998, at

is worth noting the argument of Ammar¹³¹, with regard to the general conflict over the prices of agricultural products. He maintains that even when the prices of agricultural products are higher than would be the case when the price is artificially suppressed, and the price is in accordance with the market price, farmers remain unsatisfied and continue to demand higher prices.

The monopoly power of the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co. within the domestic market, is not the only contributing factor, with regard to the political weakness of potato farmers. Indeed, it can be argued that this weakness is a consequence of government policy failures in providing technical assistance to farmers. It has been argued that the government has introduced new crops to farmers, without first providing adequate technical assistance to farmers. Accordingly, potato farmers have tended to rely on the technical assistance provided by the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co., and challenging the company would be very risky for them.

There are no *phu mi itthiphon* or *jao pho* involved with the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd protecting the interests of potato farmers, in contrast to observations, with regard to the SCPA. In this respect, the absence of both a patronage network and a role for *phu mi itthiphon* or *jao pho*, can be perceived to be a contributing factor, with regard to the difficulties experienced in forming a policy community between potato farmers and the government.

5.4 Conclusion

The Thai government's emphasis on its policy of industrialisation, whilst the majority of the population are still employed within the agricultural sector, has led to an imbalance in the development of the Thai economy. This has increased the income disparity between people in rural and urban areas. However, this has not only affected farmers in terms of economic status, as in addition, this has also adversely affected the

<http://scoop.bangkokpost.co.th/bkkpost/1998/november1998/bp19981116/161...> Retrieved on 9 November 2001

level of political participation for farmers, preventing them from participating within the network of the policy-making process at the national level, in order to protect their interests. Low household incomes mean that farmers have a restricted access to education, whilst the government considers educational qualifications to be an important factor in justifying the involvement of actors within the network of the policy-making process.

The absence of farmers within the network of the policy-making process suggests that government and business groups can maintain their policy community, which is closed to outside actors, in order to protect their reciprocal interests. With reference to this, the existence of both a corrupt Thai political culture and patronage system has played a significant role, with regard to enhancing the policy community between government and businessmen. Consequently, the government intervention within the agricultural sector tends to impact negatively rather than positively, with regard to its development, as has been observed for instance, in rice subsidy policies.

In the Thai political context, the patronage system is a main factor in both the formation and operation of the policy community, whilst corruption permeates its very existence. This factor, with regard to the Thai case, means that the formation of the policy community differs from the original concept, which was developed in the United Kingdom. In the United Kingdom, the agricultural policy community was established with an interdependence of resources between the NFU and the government. The NFU co-operated with the government in providing specific agricultural information, in order to help to achieve favourable policy outcomes for British farmers. Smith asserts that 'The government in Britain created the agricultural policy community when it wanted an interventionist agricultural policy. In so doing, it made farmers a powerful group.'¹³²

In the Thai political context, the most important resource needed, in order to either establish interest groups or to gain access to the policy community, is economic

¹³¹ Interview with Professor Ammar Siamwalla

¹³² Smith, M.J. (1992), p.49

status. Therefore, an agricultural policy community can be established, when a particular group of elite bureaucrats or politicians and their business clients can achieve reciprocal benefits, with regard to specific policy outcomes, and this can explain the limited formation of influential farmers groups in Thailand. In this respect, any help given to farmers is usually a by-product of the actions of the policy community, as evidenced for example, by the increase in the import of potato seedlings in 1998, which was requested by the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co.

With regard to the political participation of rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups, a policy community between farmers groups and government can only be observed, with reference to sugarcane farmers, who are involved with *phu mi itthiphon* and *jao pho* and their connections with elite bureaucrats and politicians. Nevertheless, the existence of the policy community between sugarcane farmers groups and the government has greatly contributed to the political influence of sugarcane farmers groups in Thailand, and their privileged status. This process has allowed sugarcane farmers to effectively utilise insider strategies, with respect to the government, and this has helped sugarcane farmers groups to avoid the costs incurred in protesting. The evidence has shown that the insider strategies, which the sugarcane farmers have adopted, are both through formal and informal connections with the government.

In terms of the cases of rice and potato farmers groups, the research has not uncovered, with reference to either group, a policy community relationship with the government. However, this is not only because they are politically inactive, as the absence of *phu mi itthiphon* and *jao pho* and their personal connections with elite bureaucrats and politicians, is also regarded as an important factor. Indeed, both the NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, as revealed in the case studies, have shown a greater tendency to self-reliance, rather than of attaching their fortunes to the assistance, which is inconsistently availed by the government. A higher degree of autonomy from government assistance reduces their reliance on the role, which is filled by *phu mi itthiphon* and *jao pho*, and is needed, in order to either establish or access a policy community.

Chapter 6 Global Impacts on Thai Agriculture

Introduction

As Thailand is a member of the WTO and must therefore abide by its rules and obligations, evidently, the Thai government cannot disregard the influence of the WTO in relation to the policy-making process at the national level. In particular, the impact of the WTO on agricultural production is apparent to Thai exporters. With reference to this, the question is raised as to whether Thai farmers acknowledge the influence of the WTO, because as has now been established, there are few politically active and influential farmers groups at the national level, within the Thai political arena. Accordingly, this chapter will examine how the global impact has influenced Thai farmers and their political participation. The discussion will consider the impact on the trade in Thai agricultural products, which has resulted from domestic protectionist policies pursued by developed countries, and in addition, the role of Thailand within the WTO, in defending its interests through these multilateral trade negotiations. Furthermore, consideration will be given to examine how rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups in Thailand have previously responded, and indeed, continue to respond to the influence of the WTO.

However, the research has been unable to establish sufficient evidence to support an argument, which would suggest that the NRGMR, SCPA, or Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd respond politically to the involvement of the WTO. Accordingly, the main question, with respect to the global impact on Thai farmers, is why rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups are not better organised, in order to respond to the impact of the WTO. Accordingly, the thesis will examine the relative weaknesses in the organisational structures of the NRGMR, SCPA, and Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, in order to explain why these three farmers groups, and Thai farmers groups more generally, do not respond more proactively to global pressures. A comparative analysis will attempt to contrast the fortunes of these three farmers groups with those of both the NFU in the UK and the *Nokyo* in Japan. This is intended to reveal the distinctions, which exist between the various scenarios faced by farmers groups in these different countries, in relation to their

differing levels of political participation, helping to inform an investigation into the relative failure of Thai farmers groups in this regard.

6.1 Historical Background of Thailand within the WTO

The Tokyo Round of multilateral trade negotiations in the GATT took place between 1973-1979, and was the first to involve Thailand, initially as an observer, before becoming a temporary member of the GATT in 1978, later becoming a permanent member in 1982. Post 1982, Thailand had a low profile within the GATT, however, its role increased significantly during the Uruguay Round, specifically, with regard to agricultural production negotiations. The profile of Thailand within the GATT was to increase because of the importance of agriculture to the Thai economy, and the more assertive strategies adopted at this time by the Thai government, which understood the significance of the Uruguay Round.¹

The Uruguay Round, which lasted for 8 years, between September 1986 and April 1994, was the first time in which the agricultural sector was a main issue to be considered.² It was intended that developing countries would benefit from negotiations, which would increase market access in relation to both developed and developing countries, primarily through the reduction of export subsidies. Accordingly, ‘the negotiations have resulted in four main portions of the Agreement; the Agreement on Agriculture itself; the concessions and commitments Members are to undertake on market access, domestic support and export subsidies; the Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures; and the Ministerial Decision concerning Least-Developed and Net Food-Importing Developing countries.’³

¹ World Trade Organisation, at www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/gattmem_e.htm Retrieved on 7 August 2004, and Interview with Dr Ampon Kittiampon

² Winham, G.R. (1998) ‘Explanations of Developing Country Behaviour in the GATT Uruguay Round Negotiation’, in Werner, J. (ed) *World Competition: Law and Economics’ Review*, Vol. 21 No. 3, March 1998, Kluwer Law International, p.111

³ World Trade Organisation (2003) *A Summary of the Final Act of the Uruguay Round*, at www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/ursum_e.htm Retrieved on 6 April 2003

During the Uruguay Round, Thailand became a member of the Cairns Group, because the Thai government recognised the advantage of collective power in world trade negotiations. The Cairns Group is a coalition, which consists of agricultural product exporters from both developed and developing countries, namely Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Fiji, Guatemala, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Paraguay, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand and Uruguay. In 1992, these countries represented approximately 10 per cent of total world trade and more than 25 per cent of world agricultural trade. 'In the GATT context, this sort of market weight buys a certain amount of influence. That influence was used first to influence the shape of the agenda for the Uruguay Round, then to advance negotiating proposals, and finally to ensure that a big agricultural package acceptable to the Group could not be pushed off the negotiating table...'.⁴ The Cairns Group had experienced considerable damage resulting from the trade conflicts between the dominant powers, namely, the United States, the EU, and Japan, which led the dominant powers towards adopting highly protectionist policies.

At the WTO multilateral trade negotiations, in relation to agricultural issues, rice has always been the primary concern for Thailand. The Thai government was disappointed with the outcome of the Uruguay Round; expecting that agricultural sector liberalisation would allow Thailand to export more rice to both Japan and South Korea. However, agricultural trade exemptions during many rounds of the GATT, allowed developed countries to utilise trade barriers, in order to block the establishment of formal trading relationships with developing countries. This was because the Agreement on Agriculture 'also addresses many other issues of vital economic and political importance to many Members.'⁵ In this respect, the liberalisation of the domestic rice markets of Japan and South Korea after the Uruguay Round, would not significantly accelerate the rate of growth of the world rice trade. This is because both of these countries still insist on protecting their

⁴ Wolfe, R. (1997) *A Strategy for Thailand's Trade Diplomacy*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], p.16

⁵ World Trade Organisation (2003)

rice markets under the 'rice clause' of the GATT, which allows for a delay to the implementation of the Agreement on Agriculture to open up rice markets.⁶

The trade issue between Thailand and the United States is in contrast to the issue between Thailand and Japan and South Korea, as whilst the former is one of competitive rivalry, the latter is one of market access. The United States has been losing its share to Thailand within the world rice market, since Thailand became the world's largest rice exporter in 1981.⁷ Between 1994-2002, the United States exported on average, 45.50 per cent of its rice production annually.⁸ More than 70 per cent of the total rice production is long grain rice, whilst the remainder is medium and short grain rice. The production of long grain rice is concentrated in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas, whereas the production of medium and short grain rice is concentrated in California and occupies more than 95 per cent of the state's rice producing areas.⁹ Specifically, most of rice produced in California is Japonica rice, which is identical to Japanese rice, and consequently, Japan is the largest export market for Californian rice.¹⁰

In 1985, the United States passed the 'Rice Title of the Food Security Act of 1985', in order to subsidise rice farmers in attempting to regain the world market share, which had been lost to Thailand.¹¹ 'The language of the Act (particularly Section 1165) advocated that the United States should reclaim specifically from Thailand, its share of the world rice market... U.S. rice exporters can compete in world markets only by increasing government

⁶ Wolfe, R. (1998), p.125, and p.195

⁷ Childs, N and Burdett (2000) 'The U.S. Rice Export Market', in Economic Research Service, USDA (ed) *Rice Situation and Outlook/RCS-2000/November2000*, Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], p.48

⁸ Economic Research Service, USDA (1999) *International Agricultural Baseline Projections to 2007/AER-767*, Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], p.56

⁹ Childs, N. (2001) 'World Rice Glut Keeps Lid on U.S. Prices', in Economic Research Service, USDA (ed) *Agricultural Outlook/November 2001*, Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], p.7

¹⁰ Dyck, J., Childs, N., Ackerman, K., Skully, D., Hanson, S., Maginnis, H. and Kotschwar, L. (2000) 'Rice Tariffication in Japan: What Does It Mean for Trade?', in Economic Research Service, USDA (ed) *Agricultural Outlook/April 1999*, Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], p.15

¹¹ Muler, K. (1995) *The Political Economy of Agricultural Trade of the ASEAN Economies*, Witterschlick (Germany): Wehle, pp.120-121

subsidies.¹² These subsidies, since instituted, have been maintained to the present time. Thailand has been hoping for an improvement to its competitiveness and interests within the world rice market, through the removal of both the domestic support and export subsidies within the United States, through the world trade negotiations within the WTO.

6.2 Thai Agricultural Policy in Response to the WTO

The establishment of the WTO was an important outcome of the conclusions to the Uruguay Round, where the WTO replaced the GATT. The WTO was established, in order to act as a forum for negotiating new trade deals, and in addition, to implement the new GATT agreements. Developing countries were heavily involved in the construction of the WTO, through their considerable interest in key areas such as agriculture, tropical products, and textiles and clothing, and pursued self-interest far more openly than in the previous rounds of the GATT.¹³ The first ministerial meeting of the WTO was in December 1996, and most of the agenda covered issues left outstanding from the Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture, relating mainly to market access, domestic support, and export subsidies.¹⁴

Thailand is co-ordinating its own trading regulations with most of the past GATT commitments, so as to advance its own integration into the world free trade system. Thailand has participated in many rounds of multilateral trade negotiations, including those organised by regional institutions, notably, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), in addition to negotiations, which are organised by the GATT/WTO. Thailand now anticipates the multilateral trade negotiation agreements being fully implemented.

¹² Surakiart Sathirathai and Ammar Siamwalla (1987) 'GATT Law, Agricultural Trade, and Developing Countries: Lessons From Two Case Studies', *The World Bank Economic Review*, Vol.1, No.4 (1987):595-618, p.607

¹³ Hoekman, B. and Kostecki, M. (1996) *The Political Economy of World Trading System: From GATT to WTO*, Oxford University Press, pp.240-241

¹⁴ Economic Research Service, USDA (1996) *Agricultural Outlook/December 1996*, Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture [USDA],p.18

Although in theory, each member country must fully implement the rulings of the WTO, in practice they are widely flouted. This is because member countries often find that certain rules are against both their national interest and against the political interest of the incumbent government. Consequently, countries tend to prioritise their national interests over their GATT/WTO commitments. With reference to the Thai agricultural policy-making process, the impact of the WTO is especially significant, because Thailand has modified many of its agricultural trade policies, in order to meet its commitments with the WTO.¹⁵ As characterised by Wolfe:

...the state remains important. Thai trade is influenced by the practices of multilateral enterprises, big international law firms, and consumer in distant market. Thai policy is shaped by interaction with international organisations and constrained by the views of global investors...Thailand will not choose a policy of autarchy in economics or isolate in politics, yet it will wish to retain some policy autonomy in both domains.¹⁶

With regard to world agricultural trade liberalisation through the WTO, whilst Thailand does believe that it is a net beneficiary, with regard to certain products Thailand can be disadvantaged in relation to poorer countries such as Vietnam. The main factors include the improvement to domestic market access, the competitiveness of certain agricultural products produced by other countries, and the higher labour costs of Thailand when compared to certain other countries.

Agricultural products from Thailand can be less competitive within the world market, when compared for instance to Vietnam, which has already become a main competitor in the medium and low quality rice market, and it is additionally moving its emphasis to the high quality rice market. Indeed by 1994, Vietnam had taken over from Thailand as the major importer to South Africa of medium quality rice, which is most popular there.¹⁷ According to figure 6-1, Vietnamese rice exports steadily increased, from 2,308,000 tonnes in 1994 to 3,500,000 tonnes in 1997. The volume of rice exports from Vietnam is projected to increase to 3,986,000 tonnes by 2007, which will maintain

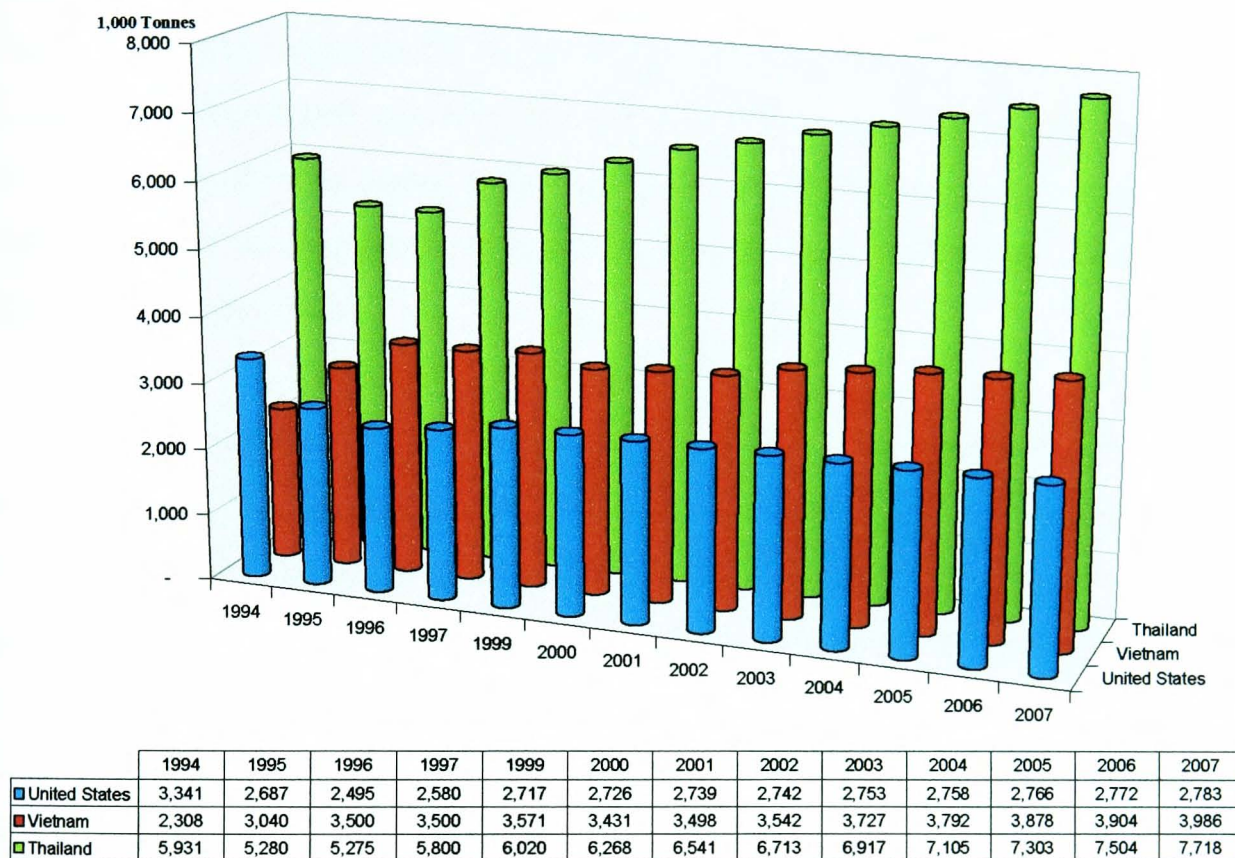
¹⁵ Interview with Dr Ampon Kittiampon

¹⁶ Wolfe, R. (1997), pp.6-7

¹⁷ Barnes, W. (1994) 'Thailand Wants Quality, Not Quantity, From Rice Crop – The Favoured Strategy for Contending With Fiercer Competition in the Export Market', *Financial Times*, 19 May 1994

Vietnam's position as the world's second largest rice exporter, with a market share of 16 per cent.¹⁸

Figure 6-1 Projection of Rice Exports from the World's Three Major Exporters: Thailand, Vietnam, and the United States, Between 1994-2007



Source: Created from Economic Research Service, USDA (1999), p.65

In order to limit the disadvantages resulting from commitments to the WTO, Thailand has modified its agricultural trade policy, chiefly through the mechanism of the MOAC, which has introduced the policy of production adjustment. At its inception, the government provided the elements needed in production, including quality seeds and low interest rate loans to participating farmers in the program. This program primarily aims to improve both the productivity and quality of agricultural products, which will improve the competitiveness of Thai agricultural products within the world market.¹⁹

¹⁸ Economic Research Service, USDA (1999) *International Agricultural Baseline Projections to 2007/AER-767*, Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], p.55

¹⁹ Interview with Dr Ampon Kittiampon

As Thailand lacks the economic influence to challenge developed countries, the Thai government generally concedes to its WTO commitments. Thailand therefore assumes a relatively passive role, with regard to WTO negotiations, in comparison with the more active role taken by developed countries such as the United States, EU countries, and Japan. Wolfe²⁰ suggests that Thailand should use its WTO commitments as the basis for its principal trade agreements with its trading partners. However, Wolfe's suggestion fails to consider that Thai agricultural interests are not guaranteed through the WTO, largely because many developed countries are able to continue to maintain their domestic support and export subsidies, in order to protect their agricultural sectors. It is not possible for Thailand to play an assertive role in influencing developed countries to fully comply with their WTO commitments.

As was evidenced, with regard to the liberalisation of the Japanese rice market, Thailand is not as influential as the United States in influencing the Japanese government. In 1998, when the Japanese government announced that it would impose an over quota tariff of ¥ 350 per kilogram of imported rice above the minimum access quota, which for U.S. rice equated to a tariff of 350 per cent. In response to this, the United States declared that it would invoke the Super 301 provision of the Omnibus Trade Act, which imposes trade barriers on products exported from Japan to the United States.²¹ The Japanese government reconsidered, and on 1 April 1999, imposed an over quota tariff of ¥ 341 per kilogram.²²

The balance of power between the United States and Japan has benefited the U.S. rice industry. Between 1995-2001, as illustrated in figure 6-2, the United States achieved the highest share of imported rice within the Japanese rice market, through the minimum access quota. Although Thailand is the second largest exporter to this market, this share is

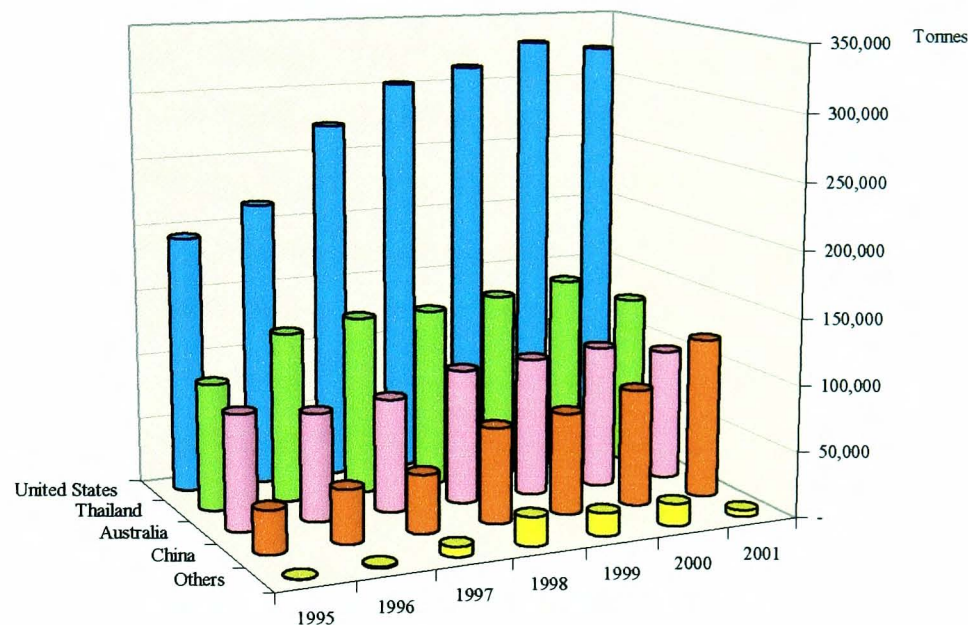
²⁰ Wolfe, R. (1997), p.7

²¹ Morishita, K. (1998) 'Rice Tariffs Obscure Agriculture Reform', *The Nikkei Weekly* (Internet Edition), 14 December 1998, at [wysiwyg//93/http://www.nni.nikkei.co.jp/...ion=TNW&NS-docs-matched=2&NS-doc-number=2](http://www.nni.nikkei.co.jp/...ion=TNW&NS-docs-matched=2&NS-doc-number=2) Retrieved on 14 December 1998

²² Paggi, M.S. and Yamazaki, F. (2001), p.15

disproportionately low, when compared to Thailand's status as the world's leading rice exporter.

Figure 6-2 Market Shares within the Japanese Rice Market Through the Minimum Market Access Quota System



	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Others	412	1,226	7,537	21,703	17,225	16,904	4,875
China	32,412	40,136	43,907	72,017	76,563	88,308	121,284
Australia	86,953	81,178	85,565	101,550	104,599	108,281	100,038
Thailand	95,348	128,012	134,813	135,301	141,956	149,334	129,797
United States	193,768	215,198	272,620	301,928	312,857	330,312	324,075

Source: Created from Fukuda, H., Dyck, J. and Stout, J. (2003), p.14

The Thai government is aware of its political and economic weakness, which, with regard to WTO negotiations, has been exposed on occasion. At the beginning of the Uruguay Round, in their bilateral negotiations Japan demanded that Thailand withdrew from rice negotiations, a demand to which Thai trade representatives conceded.²³ Thailand joined the Cairns Group, anticipating improved negotiating power, with respect to this alliance, and in addition, through its membership of ASEAN. Subsequently, Thailand

²³ Interview with Dr Ampon Kittiampon

submitted its proposals and technical papers, with respect to WTO agricultural trade negotiations, though these two groups.²⁴

Thailand's main concerns within the WTO are the same concerns raised during the Uruguay Round of the GATT, which were market access, domestic support and export subsidies.²⁵ The multilateral trade negotiations within the WTO, conducted through the Cairns Group greatly benefit Thailand, especially since the Cairns Group's increased negotiating power, which resulted after the entry of several Latin American countries. According to Ampon²⁶, the Cairns Group is very concerned, with regard to world trade based on an 'equal playing field', because Cairns Group members are less able to afford agricultural sector budgets allocated towards spending on domestic support, in contrast to the United States, the EU and Japan.

The Bureau of Multilateral Trade Negotiations, within the Ministry of Commerce²⁷ states that at the negotiations within the WTO, Thailand emphasises the areas with which the country has the greatest comparative advantage, for instance, within the area of agriculture, textiles, and within the service sector. In addition, the bureau states that Thailand should hold back, with regard to negotiations at the WTO, which emphasise such issues as both labour and human rights, because international organisations already take care of these issues. Indeed, its refusal to negotiate, with regard to these issues can be perceived to be a result of the low standards of both labour and human rights in Thailand. The government perceives that if the economic and political welfare of labour in Thailand improved in accordance with the country's commitment to human rights, then the cost of labour in Thailand would increase as a consequence. Consequently, Thailand would lose its comparative advantage, notably in relation to labour intensive industries and agriculture.

²⁴ World Trade Organisation, at www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/agric_e/negs_bkgrnd03_groups_e.htm Retrieved on 6 April 2003

²⁵ Bureau of Multilateral Trade Negotiations (2001a) *Kwamtoglong wadouy kankaset paitai ongkarnkalog (Agreement on Agriculture of the WTO)*, Bangkok: Department of Business Economics, Ministry of Commerce [Leaflet in Thai]

²⁶ Interview with Dr Ampon Kittiampon

²⁷ Bureau of Multilateral Trade Negotiations (2001b) *Thailand and the Preparation for the New Round of WTO Trade Negotiations*, Bangkok: Department of Business Economics, Ministry of Commerce [in Thai], p.22

Supachai²⁸ suggests that in relation to specific agricultural products, Thailand would have a comparative advantage, and should therefore, focus on these areas, reducing the level of production where there is no comparative advantage. Supachai asserts that as an agricultural developmental strategy, this would enable Thailand to gain from world agricultural market liberalisation. However, the agricultural diversification programmes, which were introduced by the MOAC, were unsuccessful due to the combined factors of the deficiency of research in relation to production, the insufficiency of technical assistance provided to farmers, and in addition, endemic corruption.

On 1 September 2002, Supachai Panitchpakdi, a Thai national, became the director-general of the WTO.²⁹ The position of director-general would not allow Supachai to benefit Thailand within the WTO. It was observed during the contest for director-general between Supachai and Mike Moore, a former New Zealand Prime Minister, the dominance of developed countries, particularly the United States, within the WTO.

Officially, Washington says it prefers Mr Moore but would not block Mr Supachai if he emerged as strong favourite. Other countries suspect the US of harbouring deeper objections to the Thai candidate than it has admitted and accuse it of scheming to sabotage his campaign.... They claim that it brought pressure behind the scenes to delay a decision on the new WTO chief last month when, by Mr Mchumo's count, Mr Supachai was narrowly ahead. Since then, Mr Moore has edged into the lead, thanks to intensive lobbying by the US and – more surprisingly – by France.³⁰

Eventually, it was decided that Supachai and Moore would share the job of general-director for half of a term each. That Moore began first implies the failure of developing countries to challenge the United States within the WTO, because it could be suggested that for strategic reasons it was preferable for the United States to have a more co-operative director-general at the time that Moore began. Accordingly, it is unlikely that the interests of developing countries within the WTO, including Thailand, will be significantly improved during the Supachai period of office.

²⁸ Supachai Panitchpakdi (2001) *Botbat Thai nai wetee sethakijlok (The Role of Thailand in the World Economy)*, Bangkok: Ministry of Commerce, pp.236-237

²⁹ World Trade Organisation, at www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/dg_e/dg_e.htm Retrieved on 1 April 2003

³⁰ Jonquières, G. and Williams, F. (1999) 'Trading Blows', *Financial Times*, 7 May 1999, p.20

Box 6-1 Bangkok Post Interview with Ampon Kittiampon

- “Now we know that small farmers did not gain from the negotiations. We never strengthened the farm sector. We just helped them by giving, but never let them make any decisions by themselves.”
- “We always introduced them to new things that we did not fully understand. We led them into the Green Revolution. We led them into the WTO. But when they run into debt problems and come to us asking for help, we don’t know how to deal with their problems.”
- “Anyway, before returning to the negotiating table all representatives [of Thailand] have to really understand the sector. Most of all we have to acknowledge the past mistakes we have committed...”

Source: Penapa Hongthong (2000), p.49

Whilst Supachai is very positive towards the impact of world agricultural trade liberalisation, with regard to both Thai agriculture and the farmers, Pasuk³¹ argues that these benefits are concentrated amongst the large-scale farmers and agribusiness. With reference to this position, the conflict between Supachai, when Minister of Commerce between November 1997 – February 2001, and Ampon Kittiampon, a Thai trade representative at the Uruguay Round, was apparent. Ampon³² states that Supachai was unhappy with his critique in relation to the impact of the WTO on Thai agriculture, as seen in box 6-1. Supachai sent a copy of the interview, which Ampon gave to the “Bangkok Post” to the then Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives, with Ampon demanding an explanation for this action. Indeed, although Ampon did not disagree with the free trade ideology held by Supachai, he was criticising the competitiveness of Thai agriculture within the world market, and how the policy of agricultural development has both failed to strengthen the agricultural sector, and improve the standard of living of farmers. This chapter illustrates the conflict, with regard to agricultural trade liberalisation between the Ministry of Commerce and the MOAC, the two main actors in terms of the development of the Thai agricultural sector. This can be considered to be a major contributing factor in relation to the weakness of Thailand within the multilateral trade negotiations of the WTO.

³¹ Interview with Professor Pasuk Phongpaichit

³² Interview with Dr Ampon Kittiampon

6.3 Impact of the WTO on Selected Thai Agricultural Products

In accordance with the WTO Agreement on Agriculture, Thailand must reduce its domestic support by 13 per cent within 10 years, from 21,816.41 million baht in 1995 to 19,028.48 baht by 2004. Furthermore, Thailand is committed to reducing tariffs against 740 agricultural products by 24 per cent within the same period. Initially, the average tariff for a product was 49 per cent, which Thailand must reduce to between 27-40 per cent.³³

Table 6-1 Importation of 23 Agricultural Products Through the Quota Tariff System 1995-1998

Products	In Quota Tariff (Per cent) 1995	Over Quota Tariff (Per cent) 1995	Over Quota Tariff (Per cent) 2004	1995		1996		1997		1998	
				Agreed	Imported	Agreed	Imported	Agreed	Imported	Agreed	Imported
Rice	30.0	57.4	52.0	237,863.00	83.00	239,184.56	154.00	240,506.11	177.44	241,827.67	147.71
Sugar	65.0	103.0	94.0	13,105.00	2.00	13,177.78	9.00	13,250.56	4.00	13,323.33	0.0
Potatoes*	27.0	137.6	125.0	288.00	1,166.00	289.56	3,193.00	291.11	4,690.23	292.67	4,786.95
Milk and Dairy product	20.0	45.0	41.0	2,286.00	0.0	2,298.67	0.0	2,311.33	0.0	2,324.00	0.0
Skimmed milk	20.0	237.6	216.0	45,000.00	53,495.00	46,111.00	67,638.00	47,222.22	55,838.00	48,333.00	44,214.01
Onions	27.0	156.4	142.0	348.00	0.0	349.89	347.00	351.78	344.14	353.67	353.49
Onion seedlings	30.0	239.6	218.0	3.00	3.30	3.02	7.00	3.03	6.40	3.05	6.44
Coconut	20.0	59.4	54.0	2,312.00	62.00	2324.78	82.00	2,337.56	73.48	2350.33	51.257
Dried coconut	20.0	39.6	36.0	694.00	0.0	745.44	0.0	796.89	0.0	848.33	0.0
Coconut oil	20.0	57.4	52.0	382.00	0.0	384.11	0.0	386.22	0.0	388.33	0.0
Coffee beans	30.0	99.0	90.0	5.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	5.06	3.96	5.08	1.56
Instant coffee	40.0	54.4	49.0	128.00	0.0	128.67	46.00	129.33	64.54	130.00	29.54
Tea	30.0	99.0	90.0	596.0	88.00	599.22	178.00	602.44	89.87	605.67	112.64
Pepper	27.0	56.4	51.0	43.00	0.02	43.22	0.02	43.44	0.04	43.67	21.64
Garlic	27.0	62.4	57.0	62.00	0.00	62.33	0.0	62.67	0.0	63.00	0.0
Corn for animal feed**	20.0	80.2	73.0	52,096.00	383,209.00	52,385.33	299,756.00	52,674.67	194,116.00	52,964.00	265,788.66
Soybeans	20.0	88.1	80.0	10,402.00	278,934.00	10,459.78	422,625.00	10,517.56	869,397.00	10,575.33	744,048.78
Soybean meal	20.0	146.5	133.0	219,580.00	648,035.00	220,799.89	799,990.00	222,019.78	1,054,925.00	223,239.67	1,070,827.16
Soybean oil	20.0	160.4	146.0	2,173.00	2,002.00	2185.00	583.00	2,197.00	0.0	2,209.00	0.0
Palm oil ***	20.0	157.4	143.0	4,629.00	15,000.00	4,654.67	24,770.00	4,680.33	17,412.45	4,706.00	6,211.91
Tobacco	60.0	79.2	72.0	6,129.00	6,481.00	6,163.00	8,273.00	6,197.00	8,379.65	6,231.00	7,660.82
Raw silk	30.0	253.9	226.0	460.00	0.0	462.56	0.0	465.11	0.0	467.67	0.0
Dried longan	30.0	58.4	53.0	5.00	0.0	5.33	0.0	5.67	0.0	6.00	0.0

Unit: Tonnes

 Imported lower than committed quota  Imported more than committed quota

* Potatoes in fact relates to potato seedlings.

** Importation of corn for animal feed is subject to an additional charge of 380 baht per tonne

*** Palm oil including crude palm oil

Source: Edited and Translated from Pitak Udomwichaiwatana (2000), p. appendix 1, and Department of Business Economics (2000), pp.18-19

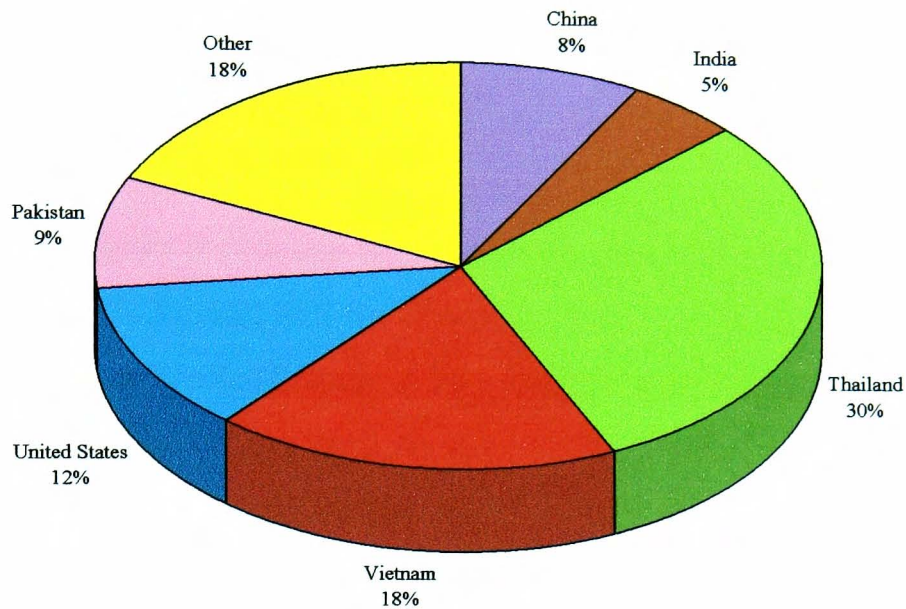
³³ Bureau of Multilateral Trade Negotiations (2000) *Pholkratob chag kan pird seree tangkanka paitai WTO tor sinka kaset Thai (The impact of Free Trade Under WTO on Thai Agricultural Products)*, Bangkok: Department of Business Economics, Ministry of Commerce [in Thai], pp.1-3

However, a very significant aspect to the commitment was the tariffication of 23 agricultural products illustrated in table 6-1, where Thailand must end its non-tariff protectionism schemes on these products and introduce tariffs, as outlined in Article 4 Market Access of the Agreement on Agriculture. This commitment is a concern for the Thai government, since many products under this tariffication scheme are politically sensitive, particularly rice and sugarcane. According to table 6-1, less than half of the products on the tariffication list imported into Thailand, complied with the WTO agreement for minimum access, because the government could not politically afford the adverse consequences, incurred in meeting this target. It is arguable that the Thai government, like other governments, has given priority to their domestic popularity, in order to secure their political power.

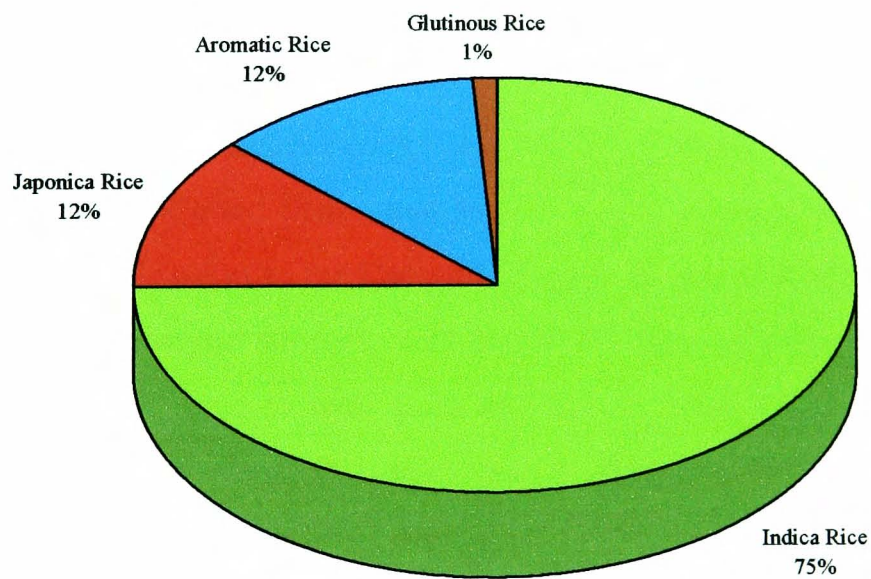
The discussion of the impact of the WTO, with regard to the Thai agricultural sector will focus primarily on rice, sugarcane, and potato production, because these three products are at the centre of this thesis. It has been argued that rice and sugarcane are economically important to the Thai economy in terms of exports, whereas potato is only important in terms of a localised market for it. Therefore, the impact of the WTO, with respect to potato production is weaker than the impact, in terms of rice and sugarcane production.

In 1994, Thailand agreed to comply with a minimum access for rice of 237,863 tonnes, and in addition, agreed to increase the volume of imports every year until reaching 249,757 tonnes by 2000, subject to a 30 per cent in-quota tariff.³⁴ However, as illustrated in table 6-1, between 1994-1998 the imports of rice into Thailand never met their targets, in part, because there was never any excess of demand over supply, in terms of domestic consumption.

³⁴ Chan Ling Yap (1996) 'Implications of the Uruguay Round on the World Rice Economy', *Food Policy*, Vol. 21, No.4/5, pp.377-391, 1996, pp. 382-384

Figure 6-3 National Shares of the World Rice Market

Source: Created from Childs, N. (2001), pp.10-11

Figure 6-4 Shares of the Four Basic Varieties Traded in the World Rice Market

Source: Created from Childs, N. (2001), p.10

Thailand produces approximately 21 million tonnes of paddy rice a year, which equates to 13.7 million tonnes of milled rice. Of this, between 5-6 million tonnes is

exported annually.³⁵ As seen in figure 6-3, in 2001, Thailand's market share within the world rice market was 30 per cent, with Vietnam at 18 per cent and the United States at 12 per cent. This has been possible because long grain, Indica rice dominates the world rice market, and this is the main variety of rice, which is produced in Thailand, and this can be seen in figure 6-4.

Mingsarn³⁶ argues that under the commitment, with regard to the opening up of the domestic rice market, Thailand will only need to import some varieties of rice, which are not produced widely in Thailand, such as Basmati rice from Pakistan and Koshihikari rice from Japan. With respect to this, Thai consumers of these two varieties of rice will have cut-price rice as a result of the Uruguay Round. In Thailand, imported rice is rarely cheaper than domestically supplied rice, which is in sharp contrast to the Japanese rice market, where imported rice is normally far cheaper than domestic rice. Consequently, therefore, the importation of rice would not lead the Thai government to be overly concerned, with regard to this competition.

With regard to the liberalisation of the world rice market, the two major concerns of the Thai government are the level of domestic support and the export subsidies, both given to rice farmers by Thailand's major rivals, especially the United States. The bilateral trade negotiations between the United States and the EU concluded in November 1992, almost two years before the conclusion to the Uruguay Round. This settlement allowed the United States to maintain its domestic support, with regard to grain production, and accordingly, the United States did not have to reduce its domestic support for its rice farmers.³⁷ For instance, in the market year 2000/2001, rice farmers in the United States received almost US\$ 1.5 billion of government domestic support, a figure, which is more than 40 per cent larger than the total market value of rice production within the United States. Moreover, rice farmers within the United States receive additional benefits, which include 'revenue

³⁵ Chan Ling Yap (1997) 'Price Instability in the International Rice Market: Its Impact on Production and Farm Prices', *Development Policy Review*, Vol. 15 (1997): 251-276, p.258

³⁶ Mingsarn Khaosa-ard (1994) *Anakot khao Thai nairaya 10 pee khangna (The Future of Thai Rice in the Next 10 Years)*, Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI] [in Thai], p.64

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.63

insurance as well as from trade promotion programs, food aid, and export credit guarantees.’³⁸

In addition to these factors, the Thai government is also aware of the opportunity, which has been created through the partial liberalisation of the Japanese and South Korean rice markets. Chan Ling Yab³⁹ argues that the opportunity to engage within the Japanese rice market, has led to an increase in rice production in exporting countries, such as Thailand and Vietnam, in order to supply the additional demand for imported rice, which was generated by Japan’s commitment to the Uruguay Round. The Japanese government was concerned that this increase in the volume of imports would lead to the decline of domestic rice production, however, Japan could maintain its massive domestic support for rice, because whilst agricultural domestic support must be reduced overall, this commitment is non-product-specific.

Previous to the commitment finally agreed at the conclusion to the Uruguay Round, the Japanese government had been reluctant to reduce its support for rice production. In 1993, Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa led the non-LDP coalition government, which had on many occasions debated the case in favour of rice market liberalisation. The coalition parties of the government reluctantly supported the Prime Minister, because rice farmers are influential within their support and that of the Social Democratic Party, which formed the basis of the coalition, and evidently, the GATT agreement was potentially politically damaging.⁴⁰

‘As expected, strong opposition came from agricultural interests and LDP politicians, who took advantage of being in the opposition to blame the Hosokawa government for damaging Japan’s agriculture.’⁴¹ Nevertheless, the LDP would themselves have liberalised the Japanese rice market, as a result of external influences, including that

³⁸ Childs, N. (2001) ‘World Rice Glut Keeps Lid on U.S. Prices’, in Economic Research Service, USDA (ed) *Agricultural Outlook/November 2001*, Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], p.9

³⁹ Chan Ling Yap (1996), pp. 377-379

⁴⁰ *Financial Times*, 14 December 1993, p.4

from the GATT and the United States, had they been in power. Iwai asserts that LDP politicians believed that with the non-LDP coalition government taking this step, this would politically benefit the LDP, because 'the LDP could avoid responsibility for problems arising from the decision, problems that their party had been incapable of resolving while in power.'⁴²

The Hosokawa government of 1993-1994 was the first non-LDP government in 38 years.⁴³ The decline of the LDP, which has always relied heavily on the support of rice farmers, and in addition, the external pressures, with regard to the liberalisation of the Japanese rice market, have both significantly affected the interests of rice farmers and the negotiating power of the *Nokyo*. In this respect, it can be argued that the stability of the agricultural policy community between the LDP and the *Zenchu* or central committee of the *Nokyo* at the national level was damaged by the entry of the new actors.

Iwai argues that 'Under the LDP, decisions are often made by the party rather than by a neutral government deliberative council. *Zenchū* could often achieve farmers' objective by using the strength and size of their vote as a political weapon.'⁴⁴ 'Zenchū had limited access to the non-LDP Hosokawa cabinet, since its past lobbying had been focused exclusively on the LDP.'⁴⁵ However, this does not mean that the power of the *Nokyo* was significantly reduced. Indeed, Shinoda confirms that the ability of the *Nokyo* to influence rurally based MPs was still substantial, and reveals that Social Democratic Party MPs, the largest group within the eight party coalition of the Hosokawa government, threatened to leave if the rice market was liberalised.⁴⁶ This can be argued to be one of the contributing factors, with respect to the erosion of the popularity of the Hosokawa government, before the Prime Minister's resignation in April 1994.

⁴¹ Shinoda, T. (1998) 'Japan's Decision Making Under the Coalition Government', *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXVIII, No.7, July 1998: 703-723, p.706

⁴² Iwai, T. (1997) 'Japan's Agricultural Politics at a Turning Point', in Jain, P. and Inoguchi, T. (eds) *Japanses Politics Today: Beyond Karaoke Democracy?*, Hong Kong: Macmillan, p.189

⁴³ McLean, I. (1996) *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.548

⁴⁴ Iwai, T. (1997), p.187

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.189

⁴⁶ Shinoda, T. (1998), p.706

The Japanese government's commitment to rice liberalisation at the Uruguay Round encouraged the Thai government to look towards expanding into this export market. To comply with the minimum access commitment, Japan would open its domestic market to imports of 4 per cent of 1995 base period consumption, a target, which would increase by 0.8 per cent annually, until reaching 8 per cent by 2000. As base period consumption in 1995 was 9,475,000 tonnes, Japan would import 379,000 tonnes of rice until reaching 758,000 tonnes in 2000.⁴⁷ This commitment enabled Japan to delay the tariffication of imported rice.⁴⁸ In 1995, 56,630 tonnes of Thai rice was exported to Japan, reaching 145,509 tonnes by 1999, an increase of 257 per cent.⁴⁹ However, even this figure remains low when compared to the export volume of Thai rice into Japan in 1993, which exceeded 660,000 tonnes, and produced a near doubling in Thailand's domestic rice price. However, this high export volume of Thai rice into Japan, was purely a direct result of Japan's poor harvest, and did not relate to any free trade ideology emerging from Japan at that time.⁵⁰

Overall, the liberalisation of the Japanese and South Korean rice markets did not lead to a significant increase in Thai rice importation, largely because different varieties of rice are consumed in both Japan and South Korea. These consumers favour Japonica, a short grain rice, whilst the production of Japonica rice in Thailand is both limited and relatively expensive. With reference to both the restricted market access and the domestic consumer preferences, Thailand still cannot fully access the Japanese rice market. According to the trade report of 2000, by Thailand's Department of Business Economics⁵¹, focusing on trade between Thailand and Japan, rice was not in the top-ten products exported from Thailand to Japan. Nevertheless, Thailand is attempting to produce more

⁴⁷ Paggi, M.S. and Yamazaki, F. (2001) 'The WTO and International Trade Prospects: Rice', paper presented at Executive Seminar on Agricultural Issues, 10 December 2001, University of California, p14

⁴⁸ Shinmura, T (1996) 'Rice Market Opens Slightly Despite Opposition From Farm Lobby', *Japan Economic Almanac 1996*

⁴⁹ Bureau of Multilateral Trade Negotiations (2000), pp.15-16

⁵⁰ Barnes, W. (1994) 'Thailand Wants Quality, Not Quantity, From Rice Crop – The Favoured Strategy for Contending With Fiercer Competition in the Export Market', *Financial Times*, 19 May 1994, p.34

⁵¹ Department of Business Economics (2000) *Sarup kanka rawang prathet khong yeepun lae tanakankaengkan khong Thai pee 2543 (The Summary of International Trade and Competitiveness Between Japan and Thailand 2000)* Bangkok: Department of Business Economics, Ministry of Commerce [in Thai], pp.4-6

Japonica rice, in order to meet the demand of Japanese consumers.⁵² In addition, 'Thai farmers planting the more expensive Japonica varieties still have production costs 50% lower than those Japanese farmers.'⁵³

With regard to the preferences of Japanese rice consumers, the United States is better placed than Thailand in the competition for market share within the Japanese rice market, because California rice is in every way identical to Japanese rice. This important factor has contributed to the United States gaining a figure approaching 50 per cent of market share within the Japanese rice market, between 1995-2001, as is illustrated in figure 6-4. The importation of California rice is the main concern of the *Nokyo*, because if it were imported into Japan freely, its price would be cheaper than domestically produced rice. With reference to the Regular Minimum Access Import Scheme of January-November 1998, the USDA calculated that the tariff of ¥ 351.17 per kilogram would raise the U.S. wholesale import price of rice into Japan to ¥ 429 per-kilogram, a 449 per cent increase, whilst Uonuma Koshihikari, the Japanese premium rice, sold domestically at the wholesale price of ¥ 519 per kilogram.⁵⁴

'To protect the last citadel—a metaphor for self-identity under threat as the phrase is used to oppose California rice importation, the *pure*, "chemical-free" domestic rice, rice without contamination from foreign influence, and the *pure* white rice *embodied* in the self, both individually and collectively, must be summoned for the self-rejuvenation. Or, the self purges itself by removing and placing it on the internal and external other.'⁵⁵ Although, this campaign by the *Nokyo* helped Japanese rice farmers to gain domestic support, the liberalisation of the Japanese rice market suggested that domestic pressure such as this could not ultimately resist the overwhelming impetus of external pressures.

⁵² Unchalee Ulaikul (1994) 'Nayobai Khong Kratroung Kaset Lea Sahakorn Tee Keaw Kub Khao (Rice Related Policies of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives)', *Rai Ngan Kan Prachum Wichakan Khao Lea Palitphun Khao Hang Charti (The Report from the First National Conference on Rice and Rice Products)*, 29-30 June, 1994, Bangkok: National Research Institute [in Thai], pp. 24-28

⁵³ Busaba Sivasomboon, Chiratas Nivatpumin and Jirajaree Chaimusik (1996) 'World's Top Exporter Faces New Challenges', *Bangkok Post*, 18 November 1996

⁵⁴ Dyck, J., Childs, N., Ackerman, K., Skully, D., Hanson, S., Maginnis, H. and Kotschwar, L. (2000), p.14

⁵⁵ Ohnuki-Tierney, E. (1993) *Rice as Self: Japanese Identities Through Time*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.136

In addition to rice, sugar is another product, which interests developing countries in Asia, who have since the Uruguay Round tariff reductions expected to access the markets of developed countries. Most clearly, as the two leading exporters of sugar in Asia, Thailand and the Philippines, would expect to gain.⁵⁶ Within the provisions of the Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture, market access opportunities are increased and export subsidies are reduced, and this would directly impact on the world sugar market. Governments in developed and developing countries have widely used tariffs, in order to intervene in the world sugar market, and tariff reductions, with regard to sugar importation were agreed by 89 member countries at the Uruguay Round. Nevertheless, the average rates of tariff remain very high, particularly within the EU market. 'On average, the developing and developed countries would reduce tariff rate on raw sugar imports by 22 percent and 16 percent, respectively, by 2004.'⁵⁷ With reference to market access, a total of 20 countries made commitments at the Uruguay Round, including the countries of the EU.⁵⁸

Thailand itself is a country, which employs protectionist policies against the importation of sugar, and in addition provides domestic support to sugarcane production. Consequently, both domestic consumers and exporters pay higher prices than the free market price would be. During the Uruguay Round, Thailand agreed to replace its non-tariff barriers by a tariff quota. According to table 6-1, as part of its commitment, in 1995 Thailand agreed to import 13,105 tonnes of sugar, but the 65 per cent tariff charged on 'in quota tariff' imports within this agreed level, meant that imports were not competitive in comparison to domestically produced sugarcane. Consequently, only 2 tonnes of sugarcane were imported into Thailand in 1995. Whilst Thailand agreed to import 13,323.33 tonnes of sugar in 1998, none was ever imported. Although sugarcane is one of the most highly subsidised agricultural products in Thailand, nevertheless the Thai government has notified

⁵⁶ Interview with Mr Bancha Nakasakdisevi

⁵⁷ www.fao.org/waicent/faoinfo/economic/uround/urnet/ur-net.htm Retrieved on 6 July 1998

⁵⁸ www.fao.org/waicent/faoinfo/economic/uround/urnet/ur-net.htm Retrieved on 6 July 1998

the GATT that sugarcane subsidisation of 5.63 billion baht will be reduced by 13.3 per cent in 10 years.⁵⁹

It was anticipated that sugarcane farmers in Thailand would directly benefit from the Uruguay Round, because of the resulting increase in world-wide sugarcane production projected to be 12 per cent by the year 2000, and between 14-16 per cent by 2005. This would combine with steadily increasing sugar prices, as it was estimated that in 2000 sugarcane prices should increase by 2-5 per cent and by 4-8 per cent in 2005.⁶⁰ Indeed, the agreements of the Uruguay Round allowed Thailand to experience an impressive increase in its sugar exports to the EU market, which in 1999 had increased by 74 per cent, or 21,197 tonnes.⁶¹

After the end of the GATT, sugarcane farmers would gain from the WTO, which is targeting the removal of the special and differential treatment, notably from those, which the United States provides to countries, which have reciprocal benefits with the United States, economically and militarily.⁶² The United States employed a country-specific quota policy for sugar importation between 1934-1974, which benefited U.S. dependencies, namely Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and the Philippines, and in addition Cuba. This policy was reintroduced in 1982, and the shares for export countries in sugar importation to the United States have been reassigned to respect diplomatic consideration. In October 1990, the United States replaced the country-specific quota with a 'tariff-rate quota' or 'tariff quota', in order to comply with GATT rules, which resulted from a formal complaint made by Australia in May 1989.⁶³

⁵⁹ United Nations (1995) *Benefits and Challenges Facing Asia-Pacific Agricultural Trading countries in the Post-Uruguay Round Period: Prepared under the ESCAP/UNDP Regional Trade Programme (RAS/92/035)*, New York: United Nations, p.161

⁶⁰ Jeerawat Na Thalang (1997) 'Synchronised Strategy Needed to Benefit From WTO', *The Nation* (Internet Edition), 4 July 1997, at <http://203.146.51.4/nationnews/1997/199704/19970407/3869.html> Retrieved on 22 November 1998

⁶¹ Bureau of Multilateral Trade Negotiations (2000), pp.15-16

⁶² Interview with Mrs Araya Arunanondchai and Mr Bancha Nakasakdisevi

⁶³ Skully, D.W. (1998) 'Auctioning Tariff Quotas for U.S. Sugar Imports', in Economic Research Service, USDA (ed) *Sugar and Sweetener/SSS-223/May 1998*, Washington D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], pp.17-18

Previously, Thailand had substantially gained from the country-specific quota policy of the United States, which is recognised within the sugarcane industry in Thailand as the 'U.S. Quota'. This is because of Thailand's strong military relationship with the United States between 1950-1976, when the United States utilised areas of Thailand for use as military bases. The U.S. Quota benefited the exporters of sugarcane to the United States because the price available was higher than the world market price.⁶⁴ Between 1992-1994, the price of raw sugarcane in the world market averaged 15 cents per lb., whereas the average price available through the U.S. quota was 21.5 cents per lb.⁶⁵ However, the interest of Thailand within the U.S. quota has declined steadily. In 1999, the United States granted Thailand with only 15,166 tonnes of in-quota tariffs for U.S. sugar importation, whereas the Philippines received 146,243 tonnes. The Office of the United States Trade Representative, Executive Office of the President, announced that 'These allocations are based on the countries' historical trade to the United States.'⁶⁶

Thailand has the capacity to export far in excess of its allocated quota, but would experience the disincentive of the high level over-quota tariff. In compliance with the Agreement on Agriculture of the Uruguay Round, in 1996 the United States set the over-quota tariff for raw sugar at 17.17 cents per lb., which was reduced gradually to 15.36 cents per lb. by 2000.⁶⁷ If the WTO could successfully remove the special and differential treatment, with regard to U.S. sugar importation, Thailand would experience a higher degree of market access to the United States.

Potatoes and potato products are, like many of the agricultural products of Thailand, exported mainly to markets within the local southeast Asian region. However, exports of potato products normally only contribute approximately 6.6 billion baht per year, which is

⁶⁴ Interview with Mrs Araya Arunanondchai, and Mr Bancha Nakasakdisevi

⁶⁵ Business Research Centre (2001) *Sakayapap kankaengkhan khong utsahakam numtan (Capacity in the Competition in Sugarcane Industry)*, Bangkok: Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy, Thammasat University [in Thai], p.399

⁶⁶ Office of the United States Trade Representative (1998) 'USTR Announces Allocation of the Raw Cane Sugar, Refined Sugar and Sugar Containing Products Tariff-Rate Quotas for 1998-999', Washington, D.C.: Office of the United States Trade Representative, Executive Office of the President (press release on 16 September 1998)

⁶⁷ Skully, D.W. (1998), p.18

a small percentage of the Thai economy when compared to the contributions of both rice and sugarcane. The MOAC has attempted to accelerate annual exports of potato products and hoped that exports would reach 10 billion baht by 2001.⁶⁸ Concerning market access, Thai potato products have not normally encountered problems.

Although potato farmers in Thailand are heavily reliant on the importation of potato seedlings, the Thai government applies limited quotas and high tariffs, with respect to these imports, and this has been a serious issue between farmers and government since the early 1980s.⁶⁹ Indeed, the Thai government controls the importation of potato seedlings, both in order to stabilise the production of potatoes, and in addition, because of the high cost of importation. Potato seedlings should be stored at 14 degree Celsius until they are planted, which is expensive for importers and this cost is reflected in their price. In order to solve this problem, the government encourages farmers to produce their own potato seedlings, however, the farmers have found that imported potato seedlings are of a higher quality than those, which are domestically produced.⁷⁰

According to table 6-1, in 1995, the in quota tariff for potatoes was 27 per cent, with the over quota tariff at 137.6 per cent. With regard to WTO rules, Thailand is committed to reducing its over quota tariff to 125 per cent by 2004. In addition, between 1995-1998, Thailand was able to import far in excess of that agreed under the WTO rules. As can be calculated from the figures of table 6-1, in 1995, Thailand already imported 878 tonnes, or 305 per cent above that agreed under the WTO rules. By 1998, this figure had further increased to 4494.28 tonnes, or 1536 per cent. This occurred because of the significant expansion of the potato chip industry in Thailand, which began in the mid-1990s, and led to a large increase in the demand for potato seedlings. Therefore, with regard to the reductions of both import quotas and import tariffs, potato farmers benefited

⁶⁸ *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 7 February 1998, at www.bkkpost.samart.co.th/news/Bpachive/BP199802027/070298_Business08.html Retrieved on 14 June 2000

⁶⁹ Suphaphan Plengmaneeapun (1998) 'Potatoes Thrive on Boom in Chips Sales' *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 16 November 1998, at <http://scoop.bangkokpost.co.th/bkkpost/1998/november1998/bp19981116/161...> Retrieved on 9 November 2001

⁷⁰ Interview with Mr Pramual Jai-ngern

from the lower cost of potato seedlings, which resulted from the WTO rules. This was possible, because potato seedlings was one product, which the Thai government agreed should have its trade barriers lowered, subject to the WTO rules improving market access.

Although Thailand benefited from agricultural trade liberalisation after the conclusion of the Uruguay Round, the Thai government continues to promote the country's interests through the WTO, as many protectionist policies are still applied by the developed countries. For example, with regard to market access commitments, Annex 5 or 'Japan's rice clause', allows Japan to continue to protect its domestic rice market by delaying the impact of its commitment.⁷¹ Through the WTO therefore, appears to be the most effective method for Thailand and other developing countries to achieve real agricultural trade liberalisation, within the world trade system.

Progress in terms of phasing out protectionist practices takes time, because developed countries are reluctant to co-operate, in terms of world trade generally, but also notably within agriculture, which adversely affects developing countries such as Thailand disproportionately. Although the latest GATT rules were applied by the WTO, developed countries would rather liberalise their agricultural markets gradually and retain their substantial level of domestic support, as has been evidenced with the United States. In May 2002, Congress approved the largest farm subsidy package in the history of the United States, where 'federal spending on farm programmes will increase by \$82.8bn over the next 10 years, on top of some \$100bn that Congress was already set to give to farmers... Under what are known as "counter-cyclical payments" growers of wheat, corn, cotton, rice and soyabeans will now be guaranteed a certain price regardless of what the market does. If prices fall further, subsidies will rise accordingly.... The overwhelming support for the farm bill from both parties was testimony to the strength of local political concerns in an election year in which control of Congress is at stake'⁷²

⁷¹ Wolfe, R. (1998), p.124 and pp.193-195

⁷² Alden, E. and McGregor, D. (2002) 'A Crash Crop', *Financial Times*, 10 May 2002, p.18

6.4 The Ineffective Political Participation of Rice, Sugarcane, and Potato Farmers Groups in Relation to the WTO

The research has highlighted that negotiations, which take place between the WTO and Thailand are specifically, the interactions between the WTO, and the Thai government represented by bureaucratic trade representatives. Accordingly, there is no direct involvement at the decision-making stage of negotiations by Thai farmers, in relation to the obligations of Thailand within the WTO. As previously illustrated in Chapter 5, the policy communities with regard to rice, sugarcane, and potato production are closed to elite bureaucrats and politicians, and their clients, with rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups remaining as outsiders. Accordingly, the response of the NRGMR, SCPA, and Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd in terms of the impact of the WTO is weaker than that observed in the cases of both the *Nokyo* and the NFU. With reference to this outcome, the main factors, which have adversely impacted on the political participation of the rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups can accordingly be categorised as either internal or external factors.

6.4.1 The Internal Factors

Interviews with members of the NRGMR, SCPA, and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd revealed that the farmers within these groups have little knowledge about the WTO and how it impacts on Thai agriculture generally and on their interests specifically. The contribution of internal factors in relation to the ineffective political participation of the three farmers groups in terms of the impact of the WTO can be classified into two main categories, namely the ineffective organisational structures of farmers groups and problems, which derive from the farmers themselves.

Neither the NRGMR, SCPA, nor the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd are sufficiently established as farmer groups at the national level, in order to be equipped to properly comprehend the challenge and involvement of the WTO in relation to Thai agriculture. This is in direct contrast to the examples of the NFU and the *Nokyo*. ‘The NFU

is the largest farming organisation in the UK, representing around three quarters of the full time commercial farmers of England and Wales. Through over 300 branch offices, seven regional offices, one office in Wales and its London headquarters, the NFU is able to keep in close contact with its members and serve their needs locally and nationally. *Through its Brussels office the NFU has a voice at the heart of Europe.* [Emphasis added]⁷³ With regard to the WTO, the interests of farmers in the United Kingdom are pursued by the EU. Conversely, the NRGMR, SCPA, and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, do not have a department, which is dedicated to the challenge of world markets for agricultural production. Instead, the three groups are primarily concerned with domestic price issues, and give little consideration to either the impact of world markets or to the WTO.

As highlighted in Chapter 4, the educational levels reached by members of the NRGMR, SCPA, and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd is modest by Thai standards. Indeed, the problem of education is not the only factor, which contributes towards the low level of political participation of the three farmers groups within the domestic political arena. Furthermore, this is a significant contributing factor in relation to the response of the three farmers groups towards the impact of the WTO on their livelihoods. As a specific example, Thai people with a low level of education are very unlikely to be able to speak English, and the understanding of which, would help to inform their appreciation of much the impact of the WTO, which operates its website, www.wto.org primarily in English. Furthermore, access to the internet is prohibitively expensive for the three farmers groups, and remains so more generally across rural Thailand.

Access to information, which relates to the WTO, does not prove problematic for the NFU and the *Nokyo* because they are well established farmers interest groups that are well financed and politically influential. With regard to the NFU, there is clearly no language barrier in relation to the WTO and access to the internet is freely accessible to farmers in the United Kingdom. With regard to the *Nokyo*, the effectiveness of its

⁷³ National Farmers' Union, at www.nfu.org.uk/intradoc-cgi/idc.cgi_isapi.dll?IdcService=GET_DOC_PAGE&Action=GetTemplatePage&Page=NFU_ABOUT_NFU

organisational structure significantly reduces the language problem, because the *Nokyo* is one of the main actors within the network of policy-making process in relation to agriculture, especially with regard to rice. As illustrated in section 6.3, Japanese rice farmers are well informed about the potential negative impacts of WTO commitments on their livelihoods, and the *Nokyo* was politically powerful enough to pressurise the Japanese governments' stance in relation to the liberalisation of the Japanese rice market.

However, notwithstanding the fact that Thai farmers are unable to autonomously obtain much important and relevant information, this should not be considered as a problem, which stems from the farmers themselves. Rather, as the WTO is an international institution, which was established, in order to liberalise the world trading system, it is implied that world trade should be free and fair for all of its members. Accordingly, farmers in non-English speaking countries should have as equal an opportunity to obtain information in relation to the world agricultural market as farmers of English-speaking countries experience. Scholte's study in relation to the accountability of global governance, which includes the WTO, emphasises the importance of both accessible and understandable information from international institutions. 'It is one thing to release information into the public domain; and it is another to make information understandable to all affected people.' Therefore, international institutions should 'make themselves truly visible to laypersons.... documents should be translated into the relevant languages and that hard copies need to be made available for people who lack internet access.'⁷⁴ However, at present, WTO publications, both on its official website and hard copies are only available in three main languages, namely English, French, and Spanish.⁷⁵

The problem of access to WTO information, which can be easily accessed and understood by Thai farmers remains as a form of trade barrier imposed on groups such as the NRGMR, SCPA, and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, whilst the WTO itself is intended to remove trade barriers. If information in relation to agricultural

PAGE Retrieved on 4 September 2004

⁷⁴ Scholte, J.A. (2004) 'Civil Society and Democratically Accountable Global Governance', *Government and Opposition*, Volume 39 Number 2 Spring 2004, Oxford: Blackwell, 211-233, pp.218-219

⁷⁵ World Trade Organisation (2004) at www.wto.org/index.htm

trade issues and the WTO Agreement on Agriculture was provided free of charge by the WTO in translated hard copies to groups such as the NRGMR, SCPA, and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, this would remove the otherwise prohibitive cost and difficulty of accessing such information. This would be intended to increase the political participation of Thai farmers, whose response to the global impact would be accelerated accordingly.

However, in relation to the NRGMR, SCPA, and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, the educational levels and political awareness of farmers, which contrive to make farmers victims of the patronage system of Thailand, help to prevent these farmers groups from using their potential voting strength as a political weapon. Accordingly, in terms of the global impact, the question arises as to whether better access to information can significantly contribute towards an improving level of political participation for the three farmers groups. With reference to political observation in Thailand, farmers may not be able to maximise the benefits of accessing information in relation to the WTO, which has been translated. This can be perceived to be a result of their low education level, as evidenced in relation to domestic political issues, where information is already provided in Thai and is accessible for most Thai people. In addition, the better educated middle class of Bangkok are more sensitive to issues that would affect their livelihoods than are the rural population. 'Political analysts saying voting behaviour in rural areas—home to about 80% of voters—is still more influence by patronage than by policies. Thaksin has travelled to all 76 provinces in Thailand in recent months, and along the way has approved plans for 35 billion baht (\$840 million) in new public-works projects for rural areas.'⁷⁶

However, as previously established by the research, which was developed as an argument in Chapter 4, the NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd are classified as 'potential pressure participants'. Accordingly, they might be able to utilise WTO related information more effectively than Thai farmers in general, if such information were in fact, available to them. Of the three farmers groups, the SCPA, as an 'interest group', is best positioned in terms of an ability to positively utilise such

⁷⁶ Crispin, S. W. (2004) 'Blow to Thaksin' *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 September 2004, p.21

information for the benefit of its members, which is largely due to both their financial status and their organisational structure. The SCPA commissions the TRDI, an independent research institution, to analyse the sugarcane industry of Thailand,⁷⁷ which counters the problem of the low level of education of its members, and promotes the ability of the group to utilise WTO related information. The NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd also have close links with promotional groups, which include local schoolteachers, bureaucrats, and certain NGOs that are able to provide them certain assistance.

6.4.2 The External Factors

The consideration of the impact of external factors in relation to the level of political participation of the NRGMR, SCPA and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, will primarily focus on the roles of both the Thai government and of political activists and NGOs within Thailand. The NRGMR, as a potential pressure participant, is unable to perform such an effective political role as that, which is observed in the example of the *Nokyo*. As has been established in Chapter 4 and in Section 6.3, the *Nokyo* has long been an influential insider within the network of the policy-making process, and especially in relation to rice. With reference to this, the exchange of information between the Japanese government and the *Nokyo* within the rice policy community of Japan can be argued to be one of the main sources of information for the *Nokyo* in relation to the WTO. In addition to this, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries of Japan, provides most of the information, which is relevant to farmers in relation to the WTO, in both Japanese and English on its official website www.maff.go.jp. This is a resource, which greatly benefits the *Nokyo* and its members. Consequently, the political strategies of the *Nokyo* respond very effectively to the potential threat of global pressures in relation to the decision-making process of the Japanese government. Moreover, in considering the high level of political influence of the *Nokyo*, which is detailed in Chapter 2, the effectiveness of its

⁷⁷ Interview with Mr Bancha Nakasakdisevi, manager at the office of the Thailand Sugarcane Planters Federation, Payatai Plaza Building, Bangkok, 11 May 2001

organisational structure should be emphasised, with academic consensus holding that the *Nokyo* is one of the most influential interest groups in Japan.

Whilst the status of the SCPA as an influential interest group within Thailand can be related to its close links to government through the patronage system, this does not however, provide the group with full access to WTO related information, which is otherwise withheld from groups within civil society by the government. However, the nature of sugar policy in the United Kingdom can be a closed consultation between the government and the NFU, with for example, the review of the EU Sugar Sector. The NFU is well informed regarding the impact from the focus, which took place at the WTO Sugar Panel at the Doha Round, with the intention to improve access to the EU market for developing countries exports. Such information is published on the NFU website, and is fully available to its members.⁷⁸

According to Mr Bancha Nakasakdisevi, ‘the government is not very supportive in terms of releasing information about the WTO. We receive this information from the newspapers and the television news more than from the government, and so sugarcane farmers groups are unlikely to be aware of the impact of the WTO on the domestic sugarcane industry.’⁷⁹ With reference to the research, as previously outlined in Chapter 4, the political strategy of the SCPA corresponds highly with the particular state of the domestic political arena. Whilst farmers are aware that the price of sugarcane is affected by world prices, they are not normally aware that the commitment of the Thai government to the WTO has contributed towards limiting domestic support, and in addition, towards higher importation of sugarcane, as illustrated in table 6.1. Support to this argument was in evidence during the conducting of the research, as the protests of the SCPA and other sugarcane farmers groups were only related to price issues, and issues in relation to the WTO did not feature.

⁷⁸ National Farmers’ Union (2004) ‘DEFRA Consultation: Review of the EU Sugar Sector’, at www.nfu.org.uk/stellentdev/groups/public/documents/policypositions/reviewoftheeusuga_ia415045b2-1.hcsp Retrieved on 4 August 2004

⁷⁹ Interview with Mr Bancha Nakasakdisevi

The research has found that most information, which is distributed in relation to the WTO, is available to farmers with connections to political activists and NGOs. These groups include the Assembly of the Poor, the *Sahaphan Kasettakorn Park Neu (Sor Kor Nor)* or the Northern Farmers Association, and Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association. It became apparent throughout the conduct of the research that political activists and NGOs are frequently opposed to the ideologies of free trade and globalisation. Consequently, most of the information, which is available to farmers, is less positive than if information available to farmers was provided by the WTO, who promotes the ideologies of free trade and globalisation. This effect was in evidence through the protest against the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) at the Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre, in Bangkok, in February 2000. Then in May 2000, 38 groups of political activists and NGOs, including the Assembly of the Poor and the Isan Assembly of Small-Scale Farmers, mobilised and supported the protest at the ADB Annual Conference in the province of Chiang Mai.⁸⁰

Whilst Thai political activists are not necessarily absolutely against free trade, they do commonly believe that free trade within the WTO context is only free for the few developed countries. Prayong⁸¹ argues that the agricultural trade liberalisation through the WTO, only benefits agribusiness, whilst small-scale farmers are excluded from these benefits. This position concurs with Ampon's analysis, which argues that the 40 per cent increase in rice exports, which resulted from the Uruguay Round did not benefit to small-scale farmers, as the majority of the benefits were directed to the small group of rice exporters.⁸² In this regard, Ammar⁸³ takes the third way position, arguing that although agricultural trade liberalisation would benefit Thailand as a whole, largely benefiting the large-scale farmers and agribusiness, with the increase in export volumes, small-scale farmers would also benefit.

⁸⁰ *Anonymous handout*, provided at the protest against the ADB in the province of Chiang Mai in May 2000 [in Thai]

⁸¹ Interview with Mr Prayong Doklamyai

⁸² Bangkok Post, 2 September, 2000

⁸³ Interview with Professor Ammar Siamwalla

Adul,⁸⁴ the president of the Northern Farmers Association, argues that ‘Thai rice will not gain from the liberalisation of the world rice market and Thailand will only lose its competitiveness within the world rice market. The importation of rice into Thailand will damage the interests of rice farmers. Also, Thailand will not gain from the liberalisation of the Japanese rice market.’ Furthermore, Adul demands that the government withdraw the 23 agricultural products on the WTO tariffication list, as detailed in table 6-1. However, in accordance with the evidence of figure 6-1, it is projected by the USDA that Thailand will continue to be the world’s leading exporter of rice until 2007, and beyond. With reference to this projection, Thailand will not easily lose its competitiveness in relation to its major competitors, notably Vietnam and the United States, within the world market. The research of the TDRI, which was conducted by Mingsarn⁸⁵, maintains that for as long as Thailand remains the world’s leading exporter of rice, Thai rice will by definition be cheaper than imported rice, because otherwise Thailand would not be able to maintain its export capacity. As illustrated in figure 6-2, since the liberalisation of the Japanese rice market, between 1995 and 2001, Thailand had been the second largest exporter of rice through the minimum access quota, with an average share of 130,650 tonnes per year, or 23 per cent.

When the interviews with the members of the SCPA were conducted in May 2001, they were unaware that NGOs such as the Thai Cane and Sugar Corp. Ltd were to participate at the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference, in Doha, Qatar 9 – 13 November 2001.⁸⁶ Moreover, they were unaware about the existence of any NGOs, which explains their complete reliance on the SCPA for assistance, as detailed in Chapter 4. Significantly, at the Fifth Ministerial Meeting of the WTO in 2003, there were 10 Thai NGOs in attendance; with 4 of these NGOs involved specifically with matters relating to the sugarcane industry, namely the Sugar Industry Trade Association, the Thai Cane and Sugar Corp. Ltd, the Thai Sugar Manufacturing Association (TSMA), and the Thai Sugar Millers Corporation Ltd.⁸⁷ Of these NGOs, none have direct connections with Thai

⁸⁴ Interview with Mr Adul Yogkamju

⁸⁵ Mingsarn Khaosa-ard (1994), p. iii

⁸⁶ World Trade Organisation, at www.wto.org/english/forums_e/ngo_e/doha_attend_e.doc Retrieved on 3 September 2004

⁸⁷ World Trade Organisation, at www.wto.org/english/forums_e/ngo_e/ngo_e.htm Retrieved on 3 September 2004

sugarcane farmers groups such as the SCPA. Accordingly, it can be argued that such NGOs represent the interests of agribusiness rather than the interests of sugarcane farmers.

The Northern Farmers Association, the Assembly of the Poor, and in addition, other NGOs strongly support the campaign to withdraw the 23 agricultural products from the WTO tariffication list, by mobilising a farmers movement against both the government and the WTO.⁸⁸ On 29 March 2001, a total of 200 farmers, NGO representatives, and students protested by dumping potatoes, garlic and onions in front of the lobby of the hotel where a WTO seminar was being held, in the province of Chiang Mai. Thailand had been the host for four days of meetings between 29 March – 1 April 2001, regarding the Agreement on Agriculture, which was attended by the senior officials responsible for agriculture, commerce and foreign affairs, of 19 WTO members from the east, south-east, and south of Asia. The protesters were arguing that the WTO had induced a fall in the prices of potatoes, garlic, soybeans and onions.⁸⁹

The nature of this protest against the WTO in relation to potato prices raises the question as to whether these protesters truly represented potato farmers. The research conducted interviews between 4-5 April 2001 with potato farmers in the district of Sansai, in the province of Chiang Mai, and no connection was found between the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd and the protesters. Moreover, they were unaware that this protest had actually taken place, just one week previously, and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd members themselves, have never protested in such a manner.

Furthermore, the research established that the Northern Farmers Association, which was a main actor within the protest, was uninformed about the existence of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, despite the fact that they are the most prominent potato farmers group in Thailand.⁹⁰ Similarly, the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd was uninformed about the existence of the Northern Farmers Association. Significantly, interviews and field research revealed that the Chiang Mai Potato Growers

⁸⁸ Interview with Mr Nitirat Sapsomboon and Mr Prayong Doklamyai

⁸⁹ Nantiya Tangwisutit (2001) 'Protest at Chiang Mai WTO Forum', *Bangkok Post*, 30 March 2001, p.A6

Co-operative Ltd believed that if the import restrictions on potato seedlings were removed, then they would benefit from lower prices. Therefore, they believe that the removal of potato seedlings from the tariffication list would not benefit potato farmers, a position, which is diametrically opposed to the position of the Northern Farmers Association. It is clear that the protest lacked any overall mandate to represent either the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd or potato farmers generally in Thailand.

It can be argued here that the promotional role of political activists and NGOs, acting from an uninformed position without properly realised arguments or detailed and correct information, can adversely affect the interests of farmers. Frequently, the political role played by political activists and NGO members within the Thai political arena is utilised, in order to advantage the personal interests of individual political activists and NGO members, without regard to whether or not the interests of farmers would be furthered. The research has indicated that frequently, political activists and NGO members have been encountered placing personal interests above the public interest. With reference to this, it can be argued that the political influence of farmers has instead been suppressed by certain groups of political activists and NGOs, when it would normally be anticipated that these groups would instead be acting in such a way that would actually be helping farmers.

6.5 Conclusion

The integration of Thailand into the world economy has meant that it has become necessary for global institutions, notably the WTO, to assist in managing the negative affects of the consequent interdependence, with regard to economic and social development within Thailand. This has focused the concern of the research in relation to the impact of the WTO, with respect to farmers, because this institution has significantly influenced the policy-making process within Thailand. However, the NRGMR, SCPA, Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, and farmers in general, remain largely uninformed about the

⁹⁰ Interview with Mr Adul Yogkamju

impact of the WTO, and this continues because of the continued existence of internal and external factors, which affect the function of these groups.

The internal factors emerge from the ineffectiveness of the organisational structures of the NRGMR, SCPA, and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, which both combines derives from the farmers themselves, and finds its root cause in the low levels of education and political awareness of the farmers, which manifests within the farmers groups. These internal factors mean that such farmers groups are unable to access the required information in relation to the WTO, which would increase their potential to become involved actors. Of the three farmers groups, the SCPA, through its status as an influential farmers interest group, exhibits those factors, which imply the greatest potential with regard to utilising WTO related information. In terms of the NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, through their statuses as potential pressure participants, they show greater potential to utilise WTO related information than less well organised farmers groups within Thailand.

With reference to external factors, there is little evidence of collaboration between farmers groups and the Thai government in relation to the WTO, and there are no farmers groups as involved actors at this level of the policymaking process, which is in clear contrast to the examples of the NFU and the *Nokyo*. This situation within Thailand shows that there is a political opportunity for political activists and NGOs to play a significant role, in terms of mobilising a counterbalance to the influence of global organisations such as the WTO. In relation to Thailand, the most explicit examples have included the protests against the WTO in the province of Chiang Mai, in 2001, and in both cases, the participating farmers groups received information, with respect to the WTO, from political activists and NGOs. These farmers groups received a negative interpretation, in relation to the impact of the WTO, because these Thai political activists and NGOs are strongly against the ideology of globalisation. In general terms, the limited access to information, which farmers receive, with regard to the WTO, means that it is difficult for them to respond to the impact of globalisation, in a more effective manner.

As Thailand is a leading exporter, with reference to a number of agricultural products, in order to play an active role within the WTO, the Thai government has needed to act through both the Cairns Group and the ASEAN, because politically within the WTO, Thailand is generally not influential. The government's position, with respect to the WTO is formulated in terms of its own specific interests, and the Bureau of Multilateral Trade Negotiations of the Department of Business Economics, within the Ministry of Commerce is the main actor in this regard.

The influence of rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups on the government's position in relation to the multilateral trade negotiations of the WTO was not in evidence at the time of the research. Thai farmers groups are less equipped to resist the negative impacts of the WTO, than farmers groups in Japan and the West. Japanese rice farmers groups are well informed, with regard to the impact of rice market liberalisation, in relation to their interests.

With regard to the case study of sugarcane farmers, the lack of political participation of farmers in general is not an adequate explanation for the lack of influence, which farmers have in relation to the government's relationship with the WTO. As has been established, sugarcane farmers groups have emerged to be influential within the Thai political arena, as they have established a stable policy community between themselves and the government. However, most representatives of the sugarcane farmers in this policy community are not small-scale sugarcane farmers, and nor are they sugarcane farmers at all. These representatives are normally *phu mi itthiphon* or *jao pho*, or those who have close connections with them, reducing the effectiveness of the policy community, and this is because they give priority to their personal interests above the interests of the sugarcane farmers.

Through investigating the problems, which relate to the political participation of the NRGMR, SCPA, and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, their various connections and interrelations have been considered. Particularly revealing were the references made to the responses of the three Thai farmers groups to international

institutions, especially with regard to the WTO, and the comparison reveals that their experiences are in stark contrast to those of the NFU of the UK and the *Nokyo* of Japan. It has been established within this chapter, as evidenced through the experiences of the three Thai farmers groups that although the global impact on their lives can be significant, their responses have usually been inadequate, and moreover, differ greatly when compared to the responses of both the NFU and the *Nokyo*. The failure of their organisational structures to conceptualise the potential impact of institutions such as the WTO, has meant that their members remain generally unaware of the global impact. In order for farmers to meet the challenge of the global impact, the three farmers groups need to look to the examples of the NFU and the *Nokyo*, notably in terms of their organisational structures.

It would be anticipated that through the successful application of certain aspects of the organisational structures of the NFU and the *Nokyo*, that the three farmers groups would take the opportunity to formulate political strategies, in order to protect their interests more effectively. With reference to this, it can be anticipated that through increasing political participation in relation to the global impact within the NRGMR, SCPA, Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, and Thai farmers more generally, that Thai farmers groups can begin to reach the status of professional interest groups.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

This study into the political participation of rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups in Thailand has revealed strong evidence to support the importance of selective incentives in solving the problem of mobilisation. This contribution towards the understanding of the group formation of Thai farmers, informs the suggestion that there is now the political opportunity for farmers groups to emerge as potential pressure participants within the Thai political arena. Upon successfully developing into an influential interest group, Thai farmers groups would then become more involved within the network of the policy-making process in relation to agricultural issues.

Accordingly, the new conceptual lens of policy network/community is introduced, in order to inform the study examining the exchange of information between Thai farmers and the government, through providing a useful analytical framework. This theoretical contribution to the study of the political participation of Thai farmers groups therefore, facilitates evaluations in relation to the level of political participation of Thai farmers.

Through the utilisation of this framework, the thesis has established that Thai farmers are excluded from the network of the policy making process, because the policy community in Thailand remains closed to farmers, which is a consequence of the restrictions imposed by the patronage system. With reference to this, the policy network/community framework has been modified, in order to accommodate specific considerations in relation to the Thai political culture, and notably, of the patronage system, where the consideration at the micro level is all-important. This modification makes the framework more applicable to Thailand, whilst avoiding an over-stretching of the original concept, because a consideration of the informal relationships, which exist between actors, has already been included.

The thesis has established that Thai farmers groups cannot normally intervene within the network of the policy-making process, in order to influence the

government's position, in relation to their specific interests. A qualification to this assertion has emerged through the research, with reference to the case studies of rice, sugarcane, and potato farmers groups. Rice and potato farmers groups represent the general case of political weakness of Thai farmers, but sugarcane farmers groups represent the exceptional case of an influential farmers group within the Thai political arena. In light of Western policy concepts, the rice and potato farmers groups are defined as 'potential pressure participants', and sugarcane farmers groups as 'interest groups'.

The research regarding the political participation of Thai farmers groups, with reference to the case studies has examined the impacts of both domestic and global factors. It has been established that overall, the domestic impact is greater than the global impact, and consequently farmers are more informed and involved, with regard to the nature of domestic politics than the influence of global institutions. Accordingly, it is the domestic impacts on Thai farmers, which have acted as the main catalysts, in relation to the political participation of Thai farmers groups.

With reference to the case studies, the different experiences of the rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups in relation to government involvement exposes the disparate levels of government intervention experienced by the various farmers groups. This can largely be explained through the existence of the patronage system. With reference to the example of the case study of the SCPA, it has been established that sugarcane farmers have received more favourable treatment from the government than either rice or potato farmers groups. This outcome can be directly linked to the high level of involvement of the patronage system, with regard to the interactions between the government and sugarcane farmers groups.

Nevertheless, in relation to potato farmers the research has revealed the significant degree of interaction, which exists between the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd and the Frito-Lay (Thailand) Co., a Multinational Corporation (MNC). Accordingly, an area for further research is the globalisation of the potato farming industry, and furthermore, the role, which MNCs play in relation to the political participation of Thai potato farmers.

The Thaksin government has introduced many policies, in order to promote the welfare of farmers and the rural population. These have included for example, the promotion of 'the war on dark influences' campaign in late May 2003, which is attempting to purge the Thai political arena of *phu mi itthiphon* and *jao pho*. A question for future research would be to consider if such policies improve the political participation of Thai farmers.

It has been argued that the domestic impacts rather than the global impacts have more significantly influenced the political participation of Thai farmers. Specifically in relation to the existence of the patronage system and corruption within the Thai political arena, these have been major contributing factors in the formation of policy communities in the Thai political context. Moreover, these factors have reinforced a reality that farmers remain as potential policy participants outside of the network of the policy-making process.

Significantly, the thesis has established that *phu mi itthiphon* and *jao pho* have acted as catalysts in the formation of numerous policy communities within the Thai political arena, as was highlighted in the case study of the SCPA. If these actors were absent, then the existing policy communities would become fragmented. In such a scenario, would the absence of these actors affect the potential for farmers to develop new policy communities? Although certain farmers groups would evolve their status from that of potential policy participants to that of influential interest groups, the nature of the Thai political arena would tend to continue to favour certain farmers groups in relation to the formation of policy communities. The nature of the Thai political culture does not easily accommodate a pluralistic approach to the formation of policy communities, and within the Thai political arena, the formation of policy communities tends to develop in line with the patronage network. The main explanation for this scenario is the existence of the patronage system within the Thai political arena.

7.1 Thai Farmers Groups Formations

At their establishment, farmers groups formed because of the interdependence of localised labour forces, although there was a low level of tendency regarding the formation of influential interest groups. This pattern became established because of the hierarchical structure of Thai society, where the aspirations of farmers and accordingly of farmers groups, were restricted to a limited number of objectives. Therefore, because Thai farmers have perceived that the government is in a position of superiority over them, this perspective has inhibited them from challenging state power. Accordingly, the government has been in a position to exploit farmers and this has contributed towards the imbalance between the agricultural and industrial sectors, with regard to government policies, which seek to promote economic development.

The continuing failure of the Thai government, with regard to the development of the agricultural sector, has acted as a catalyst in mobilising the group formation of farmers, as has been observed through the formation of the NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd. Both of these farmers groups have perceived the merits of collective action, in order to both establish and further their self-reliant status. In this regard, to aspire towards this self-reliant status without attempting to seek political influence, is a collective incentive in relation to group formation. The effect is for these groups to achieve 'outsider status' and to qualify as 'potential policy participants', because the achievement of self-reliance has enabled them to become successfully established as farmers groups. In the future, this success may accord them the opportunity to participate more actively within the Thai political arena, as in Olsonian theory their political influence is a by-product of their non-political activities.¹ Further research into this area could consider case studies on rice and potato farmers groups, and as to whether their non-political activities acted as catalysts, in terms of their future political influence.

In the case studies of the NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, the research has established that collective benefits alone cannot successfully mobilise farmers to both join and remain within farmers groups. In order to achieve this objective, selective incentives are required, in addition to collective

incentives. As detailed in Chapter 4, in terms of these two case studies, the determining selective incentives were the provision of low cost fertilisers and credit, which were needed because the government had failed to provide such support.

Regarding sugarcane farmers groups, the research was conducted through the case study of the SCPA, which attested to the notion that political influence is a collective benefit for most sugarcane farmers groups. This is because these farmers groups assert the furthering of their negotiating powers. With this clear objective, they are the most politically active of farmers groups within the Thai political arena, and have emerged as successful interest groups in terms of the Western concept. However, this collective benefit alone cannot provide the complete explanation for the success of the SCPA, because in addition, this farmers group has offered a series of selective incentives to both its members and potential members, in order for them to remain within or to join the group.

Selective incentives became more significant after the introduction of the 70:30 revenue-sharing system in 1982, and in addition, with the introduction of the Sugarcane and Sugar Act B.E. 2527 (1984), in order for the government to more closely regulate the sugarcane industry. This government intervention significantly reduced conflicts in relation to sugarcane prices, between the sugarcane farmers and the sugarcane mills. Consequently, the importance of collective incentive, with regard to improving the negotiating powers of sugarcane farmers, became less effective at mobilising the membership of the SCPA. As detailed in Chapter 4, a series of selective incentives emerged, because of the government's failure to provide such support to the development of the agricultural sector, which was a similar experience to those of the NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd.

Olsonian theory emphasises the importance of selective incentives over collective benefits, and corresponds with the case studies of rice, sugarcane and potato farmers groups. In this respect, the post-Olsonian arguments of Western academics,

¹ Olson, M. (1974, Fourth Edition) *The Logic of Collective Action*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p.137

such as those of Marsh² are challenged, which consider collective incentives to be more important than selective incentives, with regard to group formation and sustainability. Olsonian theory accommodates the universal economic truth that the rational individual will always choose selective incentives over collective incentives, as detailed in Chapter 2. However, the arguments of Marsh, which were also established in the context of the Western culture, only consider empirical evidence from the Western culture, and therefore, do not so easily accommodate a different political culture, such as that found in the Thai case.

As established in Chapter 2, Olson's group theory argues that individuals are rational individuals who respond to the benefits of selective incentives, which are offered, in order to avoid the problems of the 'free-rider' experienced with collective incentives. With reference to the case studies, it was evidenced that although the problem of the 'free-rider' cannot be disregarded, the primary motivation for groups to provide selective incentives, in addition to collective incentives, is the knowledge that benefits such as access to finance, fertilisers, health care and other forms of selective incentives can effectively mobilise individuals to join the group. In considering the progress of group formation in Thailand, the benefit in utilising selective incentives such as these is clear, where there is often inadequate government provision for such services, which are not normally available to the general population. This is especially relevant when considering the poor, rural farmers and their families, as was highlighted in Chapter 4.

In terms of the NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, these farmers groups illustrate the example of farmers group formation, which whilst effective with respect to their primary objective of achieving self-reliance, have limited their status to that of potential pressure participant. They are politically inactive and uninformed, with regard to the possibility of advancing their status to that of influential interest group. Furthermore, as the research established in Chapter 4, the relatively unassertive political strategy, which has been more lately employed by the NRGMR, was informed by the failure of the strategy of political assertiveness previously employed by the core members of the NRGMR, before the NRGMR's

² Marsh, D. (1976) 'On Joining Interest Groups: An Empirical Consideration of the Work of Mancur

actual inception. Utilising the insider-outsider typology, the NRGMR is an outsider group by necessity, whilst aspiring to achieve insider group status. However, because these farmers are not politically sophisticated and lack personal connections with government, they are unable to achieve this.

There are a number of factors in Thailand that limit the extent to which groups are likely to develop politically assertive actions. These factors, when related to the case studies of the NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, help to further explain why both groups have chosen to adopt relatively unassertive political strategies. The importance of political culture and traditions within Thailand must be considered in relation to the shaping of political actions. As outlined in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, the main factors, which need consideration in this regard, are the notions of reciprocal relationships, social hierarchy and in addition, the concept of *bunghun*, and Thai people's adherence to Buddhism.

These factors may indicate that farmers would resist the opportunity to act assertively in relation to the various elements, which impact upon them. Nevertheless, there has been observed within the Thai political arena, an increase in assertive actions, as farmers have learnt to escape both the social and cultural conditioning, which have always existed within Thai society. This transition can be explained through the emergence of a number of important factors. Significantly, the expansion of the Western democratic model into Thailand has produced a paradigm shift in terms of how informed the population has now become. This is especially relevant when considering the notion of human rights, a concept, which had traditionally been under-emphasised within Thai society. Furthermore, the opportunity, which this now offers many Thai farmers and the population in general has been reinforced through the extensive improvements to the transport system, improving the link between the rural and urban populations, both in terms of the physical link, and in addition, the cultural link which now exists, with a network of information from the urban centres informing the rural regions.

Importantly, the physical link, in terms of the improvement to the transport system, has enabled a once isolated rural population to access the centre of government in Bangkok, in order to protest, a phenomenon, which had very little real possibility before these improvements were made. The cultural link in its element includes the influence of an informed urban middle class, involving groups, which are attempting to expand the Western democratic model throughout Thailand. As evidenced in Chapter 3, actors within the urban middle class, including academics and political activists within NGOs have shown this commitment to the rural population, with reference to the example of their support both in terms of finance and information, which has been provided to the Assembly of the Poor.

However, when considering the example of the SCPA and the political assertiveness observed in relation to its political strategies, these positive contributions are less relevant. *Phu mi itthiphon* and *jao pho* are by definition, involved in the patronage system, where personal advantage is the primary objective through assertive actions. The research has established that the actions of the SCPA are largely driven by the involvement of *phu mi itthiphon* and *jao pho*, who through the patronage system have appropriated the SCPA, in order to satisfy their personal motivations.

7.2 Nature of Bureaucratic Polity and the Involvement of Businessmen

As a consequence of the linkages of the *sakdina* system, the highly hierarchical characteristic of Thai society, and in addition, the concentration of political power, elite bureaucrats and politicians have been able to both reinforce and misappropriate their political positions. Following Rigg, the highly concentrated political power amongst elite bureaucrats and politicians was described as the 'bureaucratic polity', until the late 1970s. Bureaucratic polity has been a major contributing factor, with reference to both the high levels of corruption and the patronage system within the Thai political arena, because most extra-bureaucratic groups were excluded.

In order to exploit the operation of government projects and policies to work in their favour, businessmen have established reciprocal relationships with elite

bureaucrats and politicians through the establishment of policy communities. Accordingly, both corruption and the patronage system are the main contributing factors when considering the formation of the multiple policy communities, which exist between elite bureaucrats, politicians, and businessmen.

With the increasing involvement of businessmen within the Thai political arena, from the late 1970s onwards, academics within Thai studies have argued that the bureaucratic polity has declined, and that the Thai political arena has become more pluralistic. This is because many businessmen, through becoming politicians, have been able to directly participate within the Thai political arena. In relation to the accession of businessmen to becoming more directly involved within the Thai political arena as MPs and cabinet ministers, the argument in terms of the decline of the bureaucratic polity appears to be convincing. However, when such businessmen abuse their political positions, it remains the state power, which is being misappropriated. Although theoretically, their primary identity as businessmen has changed to be that of politicians, in truth their real identities have not changed, as their business interests remain their primary concern. Whilst this has clearly strengthened the policy community between the government and businessmen, this has nevertheless confirmed the outsider status of farmers, in relation to the network of the policy-making process. Furthermore, the nature of the bureaucratic polity within Thailand has revealed that policy communities are established through the direct connections between the macro level of the government and the micro level of powerful individuals and interests groups, through the patronage system.

Accordingly, studies in relation to the Thai political arena, which consider the policy network/community framework, should not only limit their considerations to the meso level. Furthermore, although it has been observed within the Western society that the patronage system is not a crucial element within political arenas, the main concern of the policy network/community framework is the consideration of closed and stable relationships between actors. Therefore, a greater degree of attention should be placed in relation to the direct connections, which exist between the macro level and the micro level, in order to develop the framework so as to be more applicable to the dynamic nature of political science.

7.3 Domestic Impacts on the Political Participation of Thai Farmers

The destruction of the FFT by the government can be perceived to have been an indirect consequence of the absence of connections between the FFT and the military government and elite bureaucrats of the late 1970s. During the same period, the SCPA, which was not destroyed, was mobilising assertive outsider strategies in terms of its political participation. As outlined in Chapter 4, the strong relationship, which existed between the government and the SCPA had been established at the inception of the SCPA, and for this reason, the political participation of this interest group was not disrupted by the government, unlike the case of the FFT. Notably, in 1978 the SCPA protested four times, including for instance May 1978, when 5,000 members protested in the province of Kanchanaburi, in order to influence the government to intervene in relation to the price of sugarcane.³

Praphat⁴ notes that academics have perceived the high level of geographical concentration in terms of sugarcane production, and the high level of government intervention within the sugarcane industry to be the main contributing factors in explaining the political influence of sugarcane farmers groups. However, if both geographical concentration and government intervention were the main contributing factors, then this would have enabled both the NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd like the SCPA, to emerge as influential farmers' interest groups within the Thai political arena. Accordingly, the research has established that the political motivations of the SCPA, allied to the patronage system and the roles of *phu mi itthiphon* and *jao pho* are actually the most important contributing factors, in relation to the success of the SCPA as an influential farmers' interest group. These are the main contributing factors, which have enabled the SCPA to establish a closed and stable policy community with the government.

Subsequent to the launch of the Thaksin government campaign, 'the war on dark influences', on 4 July 2003 police searched properties owned by Pracha Pothipipit or *kamnan* Sia, the president of the SCPA, who had been classified by the

³ Praphat Pintobtaeng (1998), p.25

⁴ Ibid.

government as *jao pho*.⁵ With the involvement of *phu mi itthiphon* and *jao pho* within sugarcane farmers groups such as the SCPA, sugarcane farmers have been able to both establish and maintain closed and stable policy communities with the government. However, the question arises as to whether sugarcane farmers would be able to maintain their political influence with the removal of *phu mi itthiphon* and *jao pho* from the Thai political arena. This government campaign has the potential to result in the decline of the political influence of the SCPA, which has been enhanced through the involvement of *phu mi itthiphon* and *jao pho*. If the operation of the patronage system and vote-buying is challenged, then the policy community between the sugarcane farmers groups and the government will also be adversely affected. The nature of the policy community, which exists in Thailand, will be changed forever with the successful implementation of the Thaksin government's policy, as this policy community was established through the contribution of personal connections within the patronage system.

The suggestion might be that in consideration of the nature of the Thai political arena, this transition would not be realised for many years. Amongst both academics and Thai people, there is much suspicion about the actual intention of this policy and as to whether this is a cynical attempt by Thaksin and the TRT party to dominate the Thai political arena. The first attack in line with this policy was on *kamnan* Sia and other members of the Democrat Party, although clear connections between the TRT party and *phu mi itthiphon* and *jao pho* are also visible. Furthermore, Thaksin has stated his intention to work towards the creation of a Thai political arena with a limited number of larger political parties, inspired by the systems, which operate within the United States and the United Kingdom.

Some decline in the operation of the patronage system and vote-buying might lead to the promotion of both the political participation and political awareness of Thai farmers, which would strengthen their political influence within the Thai political arena. Therefore, the future development of interest groups and policy communities in the Thai political context would tend to adopt more of the patterns, which exist in relation to the contemporary Western political framework.

⁵ *Bangkok Post* (Internet Edition), 5 July 2003, at www.bangkokpost.net/Nets/05Jul2003_news09.html

Rice and potato farmers groups have established themselves without the benefits of the patronage system, through utilising the success of their self-reliance. However, will they be capable of evolving their status as potential pressure participants to that of influential interest groups? If such groups as the NRGMR and the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd can evolve their statuses through this process, then they will be setting an example for the evolution of this process within Thailand. Accordingly, the understanding of the process of group formation and of the relationships of these groups with the government will be the primary point of reference, which can be objectively compared to and linked with the Western political framework established by Jordan and Halpin, classifying groups into either 'potential pressure participant' or 'interest group'.

As outlined in Chapter 2, with regard to the Western political context of establishing policy communities in specific policy areas, governments and involved actors establish their interactions through reciprocal relationships, which are based on the requirement for data needed by both parties. As has been illustrated through the case studies, the patronage system plays a significant role in relation to this matter. Accordingly, the removal of the personal interactions, which operate within the patronage system, would create the potential for the development of more formal procedures between government and involved actors within specific policy areas. The expected consequence of such a paradigm shift would be to change the nature of the policy community towards the direction of the Western policy community framework. However, a successful transition would require the established interest groups to successfully occupy the void, which would be left by the departure of the patronage system from the landscape of the Thai political arena. Moreover, such a change would require that the established interest groups did not develop the same problems that were for instance, previously experienced within the SCPA, in order to achieve this successful transition.

There is an implication that Thailand should move towards the Western policy community framework. However, is this the right path when considering the nature of group formation and political participation in relation to Thai farmers? As observed

within the Western society, a democratic political arena operating without the existence of a patronage system has offered a greater opportunity for individuals to participate within the political arena more actively. When considering the opportunities, which could potentially be offered to Thai farmers under a reformed Thai political arena, this would indicate an improvement to their political opportunities and status. Accordingly, the improved status achieved by various actors within the Thai political arena would provide a catalyst to the democratisation of Thailand.

7.4 Political Participation of Thai Farmers and the Resistance Movement in Relation to Globalisation

The relationships between the Thai government and the WTO, the ADB, and other international institutions including the World Bank and the IMF, are not normally acknowledged by Thai farmers. This is primarily because Thai farmers do not normally engage in direct relationships with these international institutions. Furthermore, the involvement of these institutions normally manifests through the bureaucratic processes of the Thai government. As a result, the channels of access to information, in relation to the impacts of the WTO on their livelihoods, are very limited. As Thai farmers do not directly interact with the WTO, and in addition, as farmers remain outside the network of the policy-making process, this compounds the problems inherent when responding to the impacts of such institutions. In relation to other countries, this contrasts with the experiences of farmers groups in Japan and the United Kingdom, as outlined in Chapter 2.

In the research, the low levels of education achieved by Thai farmers emerged as a main obstacle, with regard to their political participation. Other obstacles included a lack of access to information, and finance. There were two main consequences in relation to the obstacle of educational opportunity. Significantly, the ability of farmers to mobilise their political participation has been reduced, largely because it has been generally beyond the ability of farmers to be able to organise effective actions. Jordan and Maloney emphasise the importance of education as 'probably the most important individual resource of those who tend to participate in

political activities.’⁶ Furthermore, the government’s perception of an undereducated rural population has contributed towards a culture where the government tends not to seriously consider the merits of the arguments, which are made by farmers groups attempting to become more involved within the network of the policy-making process. It was established in Chapter 4 and again in Chapter 5 that educational attainment is a main criterion, which the government considers, in order to select extra-bureaucratic groups to participate within the network of the policy-making process. This consideration continues to prevent farmers from receiving important information about the WTO.

With regard to the information, which is obtained by farmers and farmers groups about the impacts of the WTO, and other international institutions, it is political activists, NGOs, local schoolteachers and the media that provide most of the information in this respect. Accordingly, political activists and NGOs have assumed the position of intermediary, in terms of providing a link between farmers and farmers groups, and these international institutions.

As outlined in Chapter 6, the information farmers have received from Thai political activists and Thai NGOs concerning international institutions, has frequently overemphasised their negative impacts, in order to mobilise the resistance of farmers and the rural population, in relation to the threat of globalisation. Political activists and NGOs have seized the opportunity to fill the void, which has been left by government failure to sufficiently consider the position of the rural population and their frustrations. These groups have acknowledged the frustrations of these people and have attempted to utilise this problem, in order to further their own agenda, which is one of anti globalisation. They are usually opposed to the ideology of globalisation, as evidenced by their mobilisation of the farmers’ protests against both the WTO and the ADB, in 2002. The success of political activists and NGOs as promotional groups, is partially a result of the hierarchical structure within Thai society, in that the rural population tends to respect the more highly educated.

⁶ Jordan, G. and Maloney, W.A. (1997) *The Protest Business? Mobilizing campaign Groups*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.111

The reliance on information, which is provided by political activists and NGOs, with reference to impact of these international institutions, has not always benefited farmers. This is detailed in Chapter 6, and was evidenced by the demands of political activists and the NGOs that the government should withdraw 23 agricultural products on the WTO tariffication list. As it was illustrated, Thailand does not benefit in relation to every product through this WTO commitment. However, the arguments, which were made by the political activists and NGOs has revealed that their promotional role of political action is frequently uninformed. This was made clear through their argument, which predicted a decline in competitiveness of domestically produced rice with the opening up of the Thai rice market to imported rice. This was further evidenced, in the opinion of political activists and NGOs that Thai rice exports would be unable to access the Japanese rice market through the process of liberalisation, which is taking place through the GATT/WTO commitments.

The decline in competitiveness of Thai agricultural production was primarily caused by two main factors. Significantly, the policy of industrialisation was restricting the availability of resources in relation to the agricultural sector, and consequently productivity was falling behind Thailand's competitors, in terms of agricultural production. A further effect of the policy of industrialisation was to increase the cost of labour within the agricultural sector, largely through the transfer of labour from the agricultural sector and into the industrial sector.

Although the Thai government has introduced agricultural developmental programmes, in order to restore Thailand's competitiveness through increasing productivity, as illustrated in Chapter 5, most programmes were relatively unsuccessful. This was primarily because of inadequate research into improving productivity, and in addition, because of the ever-present adverse effects of both the patronage system and corruption.

The combination of the existing political weakness of farmers, and in addition, the failure of the Thai government to implement policies, which can improve their economic position, has meant that some farmers have come to rely on the involvement of MNCs, in order to support them in their agricultural production. This was evidenced in relation to potato production. However, their political weakness

continues to mean that it is not possible for them to challenge their treatment by the MNCs, which because of their clear dependency on the MNCs is often unfavourable. Accordingly, it is not only international institutions such as the WTO, which has adversely impacted on the political participation of Thai farmers.

As Thailand is now integrating into the world economic system and is now relying on expanding world markets, it cannot withdraw its involvement, in respect of international institutions such as the WTO. If Thailand withdrew its membership of the WTO as has been argued by certain political activists and NGOs, then the political pressure exerted by its trading partners would soon force the Thai government to reconsider its course of action. Accordingly, the position held by such political activists and anti-globalisation NGOs is unrealistic. Neither the withdrawal of agricultural products, nor the withdrawal of Thailand from the WTO would benefit Thai farmers.

In order to promote the interests of Thai farmers, and in addition, to protect them from the negative impacts of the WTO, the political participation of Thai farmers groups needs to be improved at the local and national levels. Their lack of political participation continues to be a significant obstacle to accessing important information, which would inform their decision making, in relation to factors, which affect their livelihoods. In order to promote the welfare of farmers, the government should provide more opportunities for farmers to access information in relation to the WTO. To achieve this target, the educational level of farmers needs to be improved, because this will help farmers to better understand this information. After the Thaksin government took office in 2001, the process of reforming the Thai educational system was further promoted. If successful, these reforms would contribute towards improving the political awareness of Thai farmers, which would help them to access more information in relation to the WTO. Further research into this area could consider how these educational reforms are improving the political participation of Thai people and Thai farmers specifically.

List of Interviews

Academics

1. Professor Ammar Siamwalla, Distinguished Scholar at the Office of the President, the Thailand Development Research Institute Foundation (TDRI), 20 April 2001
2. Professor Pasuk Phongpaichit, Director of the Centre of Political Economy, Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, 10 April 2001
3. Dr Tanet Charoenmuang, politics lecturer at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Science, Chiang Mai University, 20 April 2000 and 10 October 2001
4. Dr Narong Petprasoet, economics lecturer at the Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, 20 April 2001
5. Professor Prudhisan Jumbala, politics lecturer at the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, 16 May 2001

Politicians and Bureaucrats

1. Mr Prapat Panyachatiraksa, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives, at the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, 10 May 2001
2. Dr Ampon Kittiampon, Assistant Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, at the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives. A representative on behalf of the Thai government at the Uruguay Round at the WTO, and in relation to the ADB, 14 May 2001
3. Miss Thunyaros Sa-Nguanhong, Policy and Plan Analyst at the Natural Resource and Biodiversity Institute of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, 15 October 2001
4. Miss Nongnush Puranapun, senior official at the Office of Agricultural Extension, district of Sansai, province of Chiang Mai, 5 April 2001
5. Mr Suban Charapok, Assistant Sub-district Organisation Officer, sub-district of Pou, province of Nan, 28 April 2000

NGOs and Political Activists

1. Mr Nitirat Sapsomboon, activist within the NGO the Friend of the People, and an advisor to the Assembly of the Poor, 24 April 2001
2. Miss Anchalee Phonklieng, activist within the NGO the Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPCT), 2 April 2001
3. Mr Adul Yogkamju, president of the *Sor Kor Nor: Sahaphan Kasettakorn Park Nuea* (Northern Farmers Association), 5 April 2001
4. Mr Prayong Doklamyai, staff member at the secretary's office of the *Sor Kor Nor: Sahaphan Kasettakorn Park Nuea* (The Northern Farmers Association), 5 April 2001

Rice Farmers

1. Mr Thongsuan Sodapakdi, adviser to the *Krueakhai khon ploog khao lum maenam khong* (Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River), local activist and primary schoolteacher. His family has been engaged within the agricultural sector for many generations, and agriculture remains an important source of his family's income. District of Khemmarat, province of Ubon Ratchathani, 2 May 2001
2. Miss Benjaporn Sodapakdi, president of the *Krueakhai satree lummaenum kong* (Women Network of the Mekong River), district of Khemmarat, province of Ubon Ratchathani, 2 May 2001
3. Mr Surasak Tentaisong, treasurer of the Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River, district of Khemmarat, province of Ubon Ratchathani, 2 May 2001
4. Mr Wantai Nambutra, member of the Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River, district of Khemmarat, province of Ubon Ratchathani, 2 May 2001
5. Mr Yingyong Kumpa-ngam, member of the Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River, district of Khemmarat, province of Ubon Ratchathani, 2 May 2001
6. Mr Juntree Phonjun, member of the Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River, Khemmarat district, province of Ubon Ratchathani, 2 May 2001
7. Mr Thongdee Siriphala, member of the Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River, district of Khemmarat, province of Ubon Ratchathani, 2 May 2001

8. Mr Roon Arnaga, member of the Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River, district of Khemmarat, province of Ubon Ratchathani, 2 May 2001
9. Mr Samarn Bumpen, member of the Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River, district of Khemmarat, province of Ubon Ratchathani, 2 May 2001
10. Mr Boonsarn Promdhama, member of the Network of Rice Growers of the Mekong River, district of Khemmarat, province of Ubon Ratchathani, 2 May 2001

Sugarcane Farmers, Sugarcane Farmers Groups Staff, and Sugarcane Mill Staff

1. Mrs Araya Arunanondchai, President of Rajburi Sugar Co., Ltd, province of Ratchaburi, 16 May 2001
2. Mr Rachai Chusilpkul, Secretary-General of the Thailand Sugarcane Planters Federation, 9 May 2001
3. Mr Bancha Nakasakdisevi, manager at the office of the Thailand Sugarcane Planters Federation, Payatai Plaza Building, Bangkok, 11 May 2001
4. Mr Naradhip Anantasuk, manager of the Sugar Cane Planters Association of Zone 7, province of Kanchanaburi, 9 May 2001
5. Mr Atichat Wipadapisut, Managing Director of the Bangkok office of the Rajburi Sugar Co., Ltd, 10 May 2001
6. Mr Vithet Yamprayoon, factory manager of Rajburi Sugar Co., Ltd, province of Ratchaburi, 10 May 2001
7. Mr Sumeth Leelasuwannaket, a quota man, province of Nakhon Pathom, 8 May 2001
8. Mr Sa-ngiam Pookpusa, a quota man, province of Ratchaburi, 7 May 2001
9. Mr Lek, a quota man, province of Ratchaburi, 8 May 2001
10. Mrs Yupin Meetrong, a quota man, province of Ratchaburi, 7 May 2001

Potato Farmers

1. Mr Wanchai Lai, member of the committee of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, district of Sansai, province of Chiang Mai, 4 April 2001
2. Mr Pramual Jai-ngern, member of the committee of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, district of Sansai, province of Chiang Mai, 4 April 2001

3. Mr In-orn Pothacharoen, member of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, district of Sansai, province of Chiang Mai, 4 April 2001
4. Mr Vicharn Kumtheu, Chairman of the *Klum kasetakorn tumna Maefag* (Rice Farmers' Group in the sub-district of Maefag), and member of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, district of Sansai, province of Chiang Mai, 5 April 2001
5. Mr Sawasdi Boonterm, member of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, district of Sansai, province of Chiang Mai, 5 April 2001
6. Mr Prabhand Boontorm, member of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, district of Sansai, province of Chiang Mai, 5 April 2001
7. Mr Plean Chuansuk, member of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, district of Sansai, province of Chiang Mai, 5 April 2001
8. Mr Sunan Mornlert, member of the Chiang Mai Potato Growers Co-operative Ltd, district of Sansai, province of Chiang Mai, 5 April 2001

Interview Questions

1. How long have you engaged in agriculture?
2. Have you received any government assistance in your production?
3. Where did you get your farming knowledge from?
4. Do you think if education is important in improving your production?
5. When you have a problem with your production, who is the first person that you think of?
6. How informed do you feel about the agricultural policies of the government?
7. What do you think about the political participation of Thai farmers in general?
8. Have you ever participated in political protests in order to appeal for government assistance?
9. Were you happy with the result(s) of the protest(s) that you participated in?
10. Why did you participate in the protest(s)?
11. Did you have any other alternatives to solving your problems instead of protesting?
12. Do you think that being a member of a farmers group can enhance your bargaining power?
13. Overall, what are the benefits of being a member of a farmers group?
14. Are you aware of the problem of vote-buying in your area?
15. Are you aware of the nature of the patronage system in Thai politics?
16. What are the main obstacles for farmers groups in establishing political access to achieve favourable policies from the government?
17. Do you know about the WTO?
18. Do you understand about the impact of the WTO on the agricultural policy-making process of Thailand?
19. Do you know about any NGOs or local activists?
20. Have you ever received any help from NGOs or local activists?
21. Do you think that it is necessary to either establish and/or maintain connections with NGOs or local activists?
22. Do you think that Thai farmers groups are able to improve their political influence?

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