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SUBJECT : Request for Review and Comments: _____
"Attitudes in Northeast Thailand" ... by Dr. Somporn Sangchai

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Attitudes in Northeast Thailand

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Attitudes in Northeast Thailand

This paper is a synthesis of three attitude surveys conducted in the Northeast during September-October 1965,^{1/} October 1966-February 1967,^{2/} and November-December 1968.^{3/} The readers must bear in mind the shortcomings of an attempt to synthesize three different studies. Some items of their incompatibilities are as follows:

1. Unfortunately, there are not many questions in all three surveys that are worded correspondingly or similarly to each others, especially in the Thai versions which are used in this paper.

2. The instruments were designed by different researchers. Even though some questions are similar, their language and the interpretation do not occasionally fall into the same pattern. Furthermore, one researcher may prefer open-ended questions, while others select close-ended questions. To compare open-ended questions to close-ended questions is as undesirable as field researchers asking leading questions. Besides, some questions in the interview instrument do not reflect the researchers' understanding of Thai culture and behaviors.

3. Beyond the wordings and interpretations of questions, the techniques of asking questions and of recording answers depend on the field staff. It appeared that some changes were made in research personnel and techniques of conducting studies.

^{1/} National Statistical Office, Attitude Survey of People in the Accelerated Rural Development Area, Bangkok, 1966.

^{2/} USOM Research Division, Impact of USOM Supported Programs in Changwad Sakon Nakhorn, Bangkok, 1967.

^{3/} USOM, Research Division and Public Administration Division, Attitude Survey of Rural Northeast Thailand, Bangkok, 1969.

4. Methodologically, the instruments were designed differently.

First, 1965 survey categorized villages into 3 types: type A with ARD road running through, type B situated not beyond 5 km. from ARD road, and type C beyond 5 km.; 1966-7 and 1968 surveys based the studies on three different types of villages: type A situated not beyond 5 km. from ARD road, type B at least 5 km. beyond the road, and type C not in ARD amphoes at all. Second, 1965 survey covered 30 villages within 6 ARD changwats (Ubon, Udorn, Nongkhai, Loie, Nakorn Phanom, and Sakon Nakorn); 1966-7 survey concentrated in Sakon Nakorn (4 amphoes) and one amphoe each from Mahasarakam and Surat Thani; 1968 survey purported to cover 10 ARD changwats in the Northeast, but sample came from 96 villages in Udorn, Ubon, Sakon Nakorn, Nakorn Phanom, Roi-Et and Sisaket. Third, sample was divided 60% male and 40% female in 1965 survey, 98% male and only 2% female in 1966-7, and 68.7% male and 31.07% female in 1968. Over-all, 1758 interviews were taken in 1965, 1199 in 1966-7, and 924 in 1968. Fourth, the sample's minimum age in 1965 was 20 years, 18 in 1966-7 and unknown in 1968. Nevertheless, the majority of sample in 1965 was between 20-40 years of age, while most of the sample in 1966-7 study was between 20 and 50, and in 1968 between 25 and 50.

With these cautions of incompatibility between the three surveys in mind, the readers must not take this paper as the definitive attempt to interpret attitudes in Northeast Thailand, for to interpret the results of these surveys as indicative of trends might be disastrous and misleading. The author wishes only to synthesize the surveys for the benefit of those who are interested in attitudes prevailing in the Northeast. This synthesis may or may not provide certain clues to attitudes as affected by development inputs.

Socio-economic backgrounds of samples of all surveys are very similar. Most of the respondents are married, have received primary school education, and were born in the village of interview. Their major occupation is rice farming. They have some travelling experiences; but they normally maintain contacts with the outside world through radio. No need to say, they live in rural area of the Northeast.

During the past four years, the villagers' needs have not been satisfied by the intense efforts of the Thai Government. Their needs remain the same:^{4/} roads, drinking water and irrigation projects, with school and greater government support for farming occupation as secondary priorities. They want greater communication facility with the outside world, and water for domestic consumption and for rice paddy more than funds or police protection as suggested in 1965 survey (see Table I). In short, Thai Government effort through ARD and other agencies have barely scratched the surface or missed the priorities. In order to satisfy the pressing needs of Northeast villagers, ARD and the Thai Government must either increase their effort in rural development or concentrate more on roads, drinking water and irrigation projects. Because of insufficient budget, the latter course seems more appropriate. If need-gratification is one of the ways to win villagers' loyalty toward the Government, there is no point spending so much money in other projects, i.e., community meeting halls, privies, tambol police stations, etc. This does not mean, however, that the Thai Government should not invest in anything else in rural development but roads, drinking water and irrigation

^{4/} The answers might be loaded, since the respondents knew that these surveys deal somehow with ARD whose primary activities had been road construction.

Table I

Pressing Needs

	<u>1965*</u>	<u>1966-7</u>	<u>1968</u>
Funds	93.7%	-	-
Road	90.2	64%	60%
Protection	75.4	7	4
Health and medicine	72.1	14	11
Drinking water	63.7	45	56
Farming (fertilizer and yields)	50.4	30	19
School and education	37.1	12	20
Wat	35.4	-	13
Electricity	25.9	8	7
Clothing materials	16.0	-	-
Irrigation projects	38.7	36	36
Support for animal raising	10.1	-	-
Handicraft	6.5	-	-

* Close-ended and leading question through checklist.

5/
projects.

The data of 1965 survey on pressing needs lacks, perhaps, reliability. Beyond the technique of asking leading questions, common-sense and hard reality make impossible the conclusion that the Government has provided funds, protection and health facilities to Northeast villagers in the past few years to the point of satisfying their needs for funds, security and health facilities. Nevertheless, it is possible that terrorist activities have decreased drastically in the Northeast or the villagers are used to CT activities and that they now feel more secure and need no protection as they did in 1965. Despite a lack of comparable data in 1965 survey on this subject, the result of the Sakon Nakorn study indicated that 59.4% of villagers felt more secure from communist, while 79% of villagers felt likewise in 1960 survey. Unfortunately, the data available from the last two surveys prohibit anyone to jump to the conclusion that Northeast villagers feel more secure now than before.^{6/}

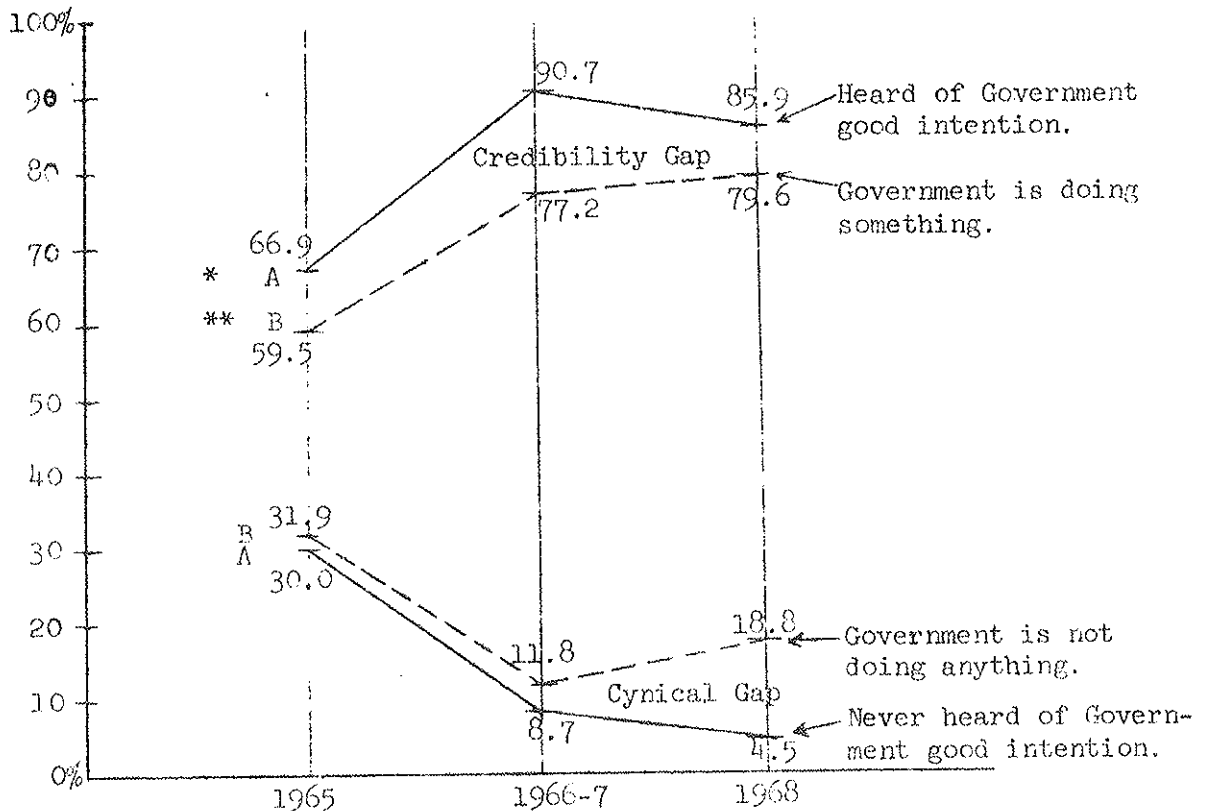
Although data in Table I suggests that the Government has not done enough to satisfy villagers' pressing needs, more and more villagers in general believe that the Government is genuinely concerned with their welfare and has attempted to do something toward such end. In 1965, 66.9% of

5/ Obviously, there are other variables impeding the transformation of development projects into favorable attitudes toward the Government. For more detail of such variables, see Somporn Sangchai, "The Dilemma of Development in Northeast Thailand", Thai Journal of Development Administration, 3,4: October, 1963.

6/ The reason one cannot jump to the conclusion is that Sakon Nakorn has been an exceptionally sensitive changwat. Therefore, the low percentage might be due to this characteristic of the changwat.

Graph I

Thai Government Credibility



* Questions A

- 1965 ---- Have you ever heard that the Government is presently concerned with people's welfare and is determined to uplift their standard of living?
- 1966-7 -- Have you ever heard of Government projects/programs to raise the standard of living of the rural people in this tambol/amphoe?
- 1968 --- Do you believe the Government is really taking an interest in people's needs, problems and ideas or not?

** Questions B

- 1965 ---- Does the Government do what she said she would?
- 1966-7 -- There are some people saying that the Government did not do what they said -- that it only makes the villagers feel good, what do you think about it?
- 1968 ---- Within the last 3 years have you heard of any Government projects in this or nearby villages?

Other answers for questions A and B, "Don't Know" and "No Answer":

	<u>1965</u>	<u>1966-7</u>	<u>1968</u>
A.	3.1	0.6	9.6
B.	8.6	11.0	1.6

respondents heard of the Government's concern about their well-being and 59.5% thought that the Government was doing something about it; in 1968, the percentages of respondents increased to 85.9% for the former and 79.6% for the latter. Since the credibility gap has been relative small and constant and since the Government credibility has been in an up-swing, it can be concluded that the Government has generally maintained its credibility among the villagers and has even won some good-will from them. (See Graph I).

Unfortunately, while there are more people having heard of Government good intention, the percentages of respondents who are skeptical of the Government do not decrease as rapidly -- only from 31.9% in 1965 to 18.8% in 1968. The fact that a gap between those who have never heard of Government good intention and those who do not believe that the Government has been doing something for villagers in the Northeast has widened -- from 1.9% in 1965 to 14.3% in 1968 -- should not be ignored. This gap may indicate either that the Government has not done enough and thus antagonized some villagers or that too much publicity on Government good intention has boomeranged. More and more villagers have become cynical of the Government performances in relation to the Government intentions. At any rate, this cynicle gap may represent a symptom of the "Revolution of Rising Expectation".

The survey results indicate that increasing proportions of villagers are confident that living conditions of Northeast villagers have improved somewhat in the past few years. In 1965, only 23.1% of the respondents believed that their living conditions had improved; in 1968, however, the percentage of such believers had doubled (see Table II). Nevertheless, they still constituted only a minority. It should be noted also that the percentage of those who thought that their living conditions had remained about the

Table II
Living Conditions

<u>Answers*</u>	<u>1965</u>	<u>1966-7</u>	<u>1968</u>
Improving	23.1%	39.0%	45.1%
Remaining the same	53.7	33.5	31.0
Deteriorating	21.2	26.8	22.2
Don't know and no answer	<u>2.0</u>	<u>0.7</u>	<u>1.7</u>
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

* The differences in structuring of questions should be noted.

1965 --- Between last year and year before last, which year is better for your occupation?
(Last year - Improving;
Year before last - Deteriorating.)

1966-7 --- How would you describe your and village living conditions during the past 2 years?

1968 --- In comparison to the condition existed five years ago, how do you think of your and your family's present living condition?

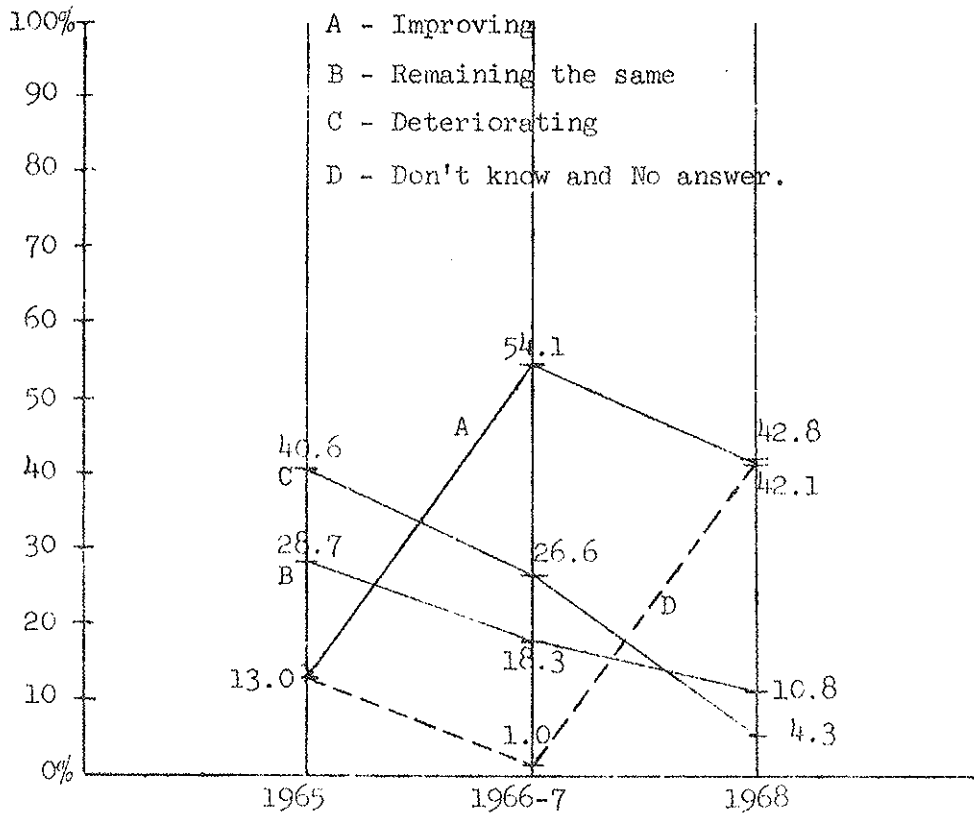
same during these few years decreased from 53.7% to 31%. At the same time, the percentage of those who considered their living conditions had deteriorated remained on the same relatively high level. Only about 20% of the respondents - mostly a shift from "remaining the same" to "improving" category - have benefited from the improvement of living conditions, while the other 20% remain poor. Living conditions, therefore, have improved only for a minority of Northeast villagers in the last few years, in spite of heavy inputs from the Thai Government into this region.

The conditions in the Northeast as far as development is concerned do not appear to be hopeless, however. From 1965 to 1968 there was an increase of almost 30% of respondents who were optimistic about their future--from 13% to 42.1%. Simultaneously, the percentages of people who foresaw a stagnant or worsen future declined rapidly. Unfortunately, those who were uncertain of their futures also increased in number, from 13% in 1965 to 42.8% in 1968. (See Graph II).

The graph also shows a peculiar relationship between optimism and uncertainty among the respondents. In 1965 and 1968, the numbers of individuals in these two categories paralleled each other. Yet in the Sakon Nakorn study of 1966-7, the number of optimists shot up to over 54% and the number of uncertain individuals amounted to only 1%. The fact that Sakon Nakorn has been a very high-input changwat might have explained the phenomenon. The presence of Thai Government and her high degree of development efforts within the changwat have given rise to optimism in, and at the same time eliminated uncertainty from, the minds of the villagers. If this argument is accepted, it would imply that optimism could be acquired and uncertainty could be reduced through the Government higher and visible

Graph II

Expectation of Future*



* The differences in structuring of questions should be noted.

1965 --- Do you think that this year will be better for making a living?

(This year is better - Improving;
last year is better - Deteriorating)

1966-7 --- Talking about how to make a living, do you think it is better this year or last year?

1968 --- Within the next 5 years, how do you think living conditions for you and your family will be?

inputs into a particular area. Consequently, the phenomenon in 1968 might suggest that (1) optimism expressed in 1963 was not the result of the government development activities, but perhaps a high degree of uncertainty was generated by non-development factors, or (2) optimism was the result of the Government presence and inputs, but insufficient inputs have fostered uncertainty and doubt of Government sincerity in the minds of the villagers. The latter interpretation seems to be in accord with data on previous pages.

On the other hand, optimism and uncertainty may have no relationship whatsoever. The villagers might have simply hoped for better crops -- and, thus, better future -- while they were not certain about natural conditions in general and rainfall in particular.

With reservations stemming from the methodological changes in the three surveys, it is possible to conclude that:

- (1) That Government development inputs in the past few years into the Northeast have some effects on villagers' attitudes in the region. Although such inputs have not satisfied villagers' pressing needs, more villagers believe that the Government is concerned about their well-being.
- (2) Living conditions have slightly improved in the Northeast and close to half of rural Northeast population are optimistic about their future.
- (3) Government activities have perhaps created a minor "Revolution of Rising Expectation" in the Northeast, in which case -- if not ameliorated in time -- the Government may have created more dissatisfaction than satisfaction in the long run.