

ISAN: REGIONALISM IN NORTHEASTERN THAILAND

by Charles F. Keyes



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ISAN:

REGIONALISM IN NORTHEASTERN THAILAND

THE CORNELL UNIVERSITY SOUTHEAST ASIA PROGRAM

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FOREWORD

In the erratic chaos of mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand appears to stand today as a tower of reasonable and predictable strength. Its enormous neighbor to the north is convulsed and at odds with its ideological colleagues while its radios fulminate against the imperialisms that threaten Thailand, whether the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations or the American government. To the west, Burma is experiencing a paroxysm of neutrality and xenophobia, admitting strangers for only one day visits and expelling foreign residents, including scholars and missionaries who have devoted years to useful work in the Union. Cambodia, too, treads a neutralist path in the footsteps of its Prince-Prime Minister who refuses to recognize two of his three neighbors. Southern Vietnam is described by such terms as "quagmire, nightmare, turmoil, torment, and tragedy", while for the north, "l'enfer" seems to suffice. While it is asked whether Laos is "a nation or a notion", the land quietly stumbles on, led by an American supported royalty, a Communist supported royalty, with a "neutral" faction between, and with all parties ignoring international settlements designed to stabilize the country.

Is Thailand indeed immune to this surrounding chaos? The northeastern bulge of the Kingdom, a region containing three times as many Lao as does Laos, is being infiltrated by Communist elements from across the Mekong River, according to worried reports from Bangkok. Whatever the extent of insurgency in Thailand's Northeast, massive counter-insurgency measures are being mounted by both Thai and American armed forces and civil agencies. This region of Isan has long been a "difficult" one from the viewpoint of the central government, an area of lambag and the source of dissident complaining voices. Now every effort will be made to maintain order in this outlying region and to knit it more firmly into the national social structure and sentiment system.

In this study of the Northeast, Dr. Keyes provides us with some basis for judging what effective actions governments can take to influence the course of events in this region, and how effective such actions may actually be once they are initiated. Having studied anthropology at the University of Nebraska and having done advanced work in that

field and in Southeast Asian studies at Cornell, Dr. Keyes spent the better part of 1962-1964 doing his dissertation research in Isan, ably aided by his wife, a specialist in Vietnamese affairs. The focus of their work was a village near the provincial center of Mahasarakham; his task was to trace the cultural connections of this village outward through the region to the national society and polity of Thailand. The results of that analytical study are incorporated in Dr. Keyes' doctoral thesis. His situation in the field permitted him to gather a substantial amount of material on Isan history, including data on the cao myang system, and it is this material which he presents in this Data Paper. The Cornell Southeast Asia Program and the Thailand Project are grateful to Professor Keyes for the time he has spared from a busy schedule as a member of the anthropology faculty at the University of Washington to prepare this paper for publication.

Lauriston Sharp
Director
Cornell Thailand Project

Cornell University
Ithaca, New York

March, 1967

PREFACE

Thailand's problems with ethnic minorities seem relatively unimportant when compared with those of some of her neighbors such as Burma, Malaysia, and Indonesia, or with those of many other plural societies. Of the ethnic minorities in Thailand, only the overseas Chinese are numerous enough to warrant any major concern. Towards them, however, the Thai government has evolved a policy of simultaneous toleration and assimilation which is to be envied by any other country with a large Chinese minority. Thai-Malay in the South and the tribal groups in the North also represent potential irritants in the Thai body politic. However, for the moment at least, good relationships between Thailand and Malaysia and the isolation of the tribal groups, to say nothing of their smallness, make possible the relative lack of concern which the Thai government displays towards these groups.

None of this is meant to define away the problems which the Thai government faces or could face in dealing with ethnic minorities for indeed problems do or could exist. Rather, I only wish to suggest that it appears possible for these problems to be kept within manageable proportions during the period when Thailand is making the transition from traditional to modern state. There does exist, however, another people within the Kingdom of Thailand, in some senses ethnically defined, in others regionally, who appears to present the Thai government with a far graver threat to national integration than do the more easily identifiable ethnic minorities. Today, imminent or potential problems of the Thai northeastern region dominate the thoughts of those most concerned with building and preserving a unified national system.

The features of "the northeastern problem" are not susceptible to simple generalizations. Rather than ascribing the causes of the "problem" to economic depression or cultural similarities between the Lao of Laos and Northerners, it is more relevant to examine over time the inter-group interactions between Northerners and Central Thai or Siamese. Ethnic and regional identities and special interests manifest themselves only when "we-they" dichotomies are perceived by the groups themselves. Only after the development of such perceptions will other characteristics, such as economic features, the historical or mythical past, and cultural differences, be exploited for the purposes of attempting to advance the interests of one ethnic or regional group.

The case of northeastern Thailand presents yet a further complication, for the "we-they" contrast is not an absolute. As I have shown in another place (Keyes 1966b), Northeasterners identify with their local communities on some occasions, with their regional compatriots on other occasions, with the people of Laos on yet others, and with the Central Thai on still others. What do these alternative identities imply for the political objectives of Northeasterners? This is the crucial question which must be answered in order both to understand and to cope with "the northeastern problem." Towards this end I have attempted to bring together in this monograph some information and ideas which I hope will help to clarify how the people of northeastern Thailand fit within the context of a Thai state.

The transliteration of Thai words in this study is based upon the "General System of Phonetic Transcription of Thai Characters into Roman" as devised by the Royal Institute in Bangkok (published in Phya Anuman Rajadhon 1961: 32-5) with the following exceptions: instead of "ch" I write "c" and for "u?" I employ "y." Transcription of Lao and northeastern Thai words conforms as nearly as possible to the same orthography. Common spelling of place names, when at considerable variance with the transliterations used here, will appear in parentheses when the word is first introduced. The only words to appear in conventional anglicized form will be "baht," the basic unit of Thai currency, and some Lao proper names which are so well-known as to make the introduction of transliterations more confusing than helpful.

I should like to thank the Foreign Area Training Fellowship Program of the Ford Foundation and the Foreign Area Fellowship Program for supporting my field research in Thailand from August 1962 through August 1964. I should also like to thank Professors Lauriston Sharp, G. William Skinner, and George McT. Kahin for the valuable comments on various drafts of this study. To my wife, Jane, I am especially indebted for her critical reading of the manuscript. Finally, I should like to thank Mrs. Susan Rapa-
port and Mrs. Linda Klages for their assistance in typing various versions of this study.

Charles F. Keyes

Seattle, Washington
March, 1967

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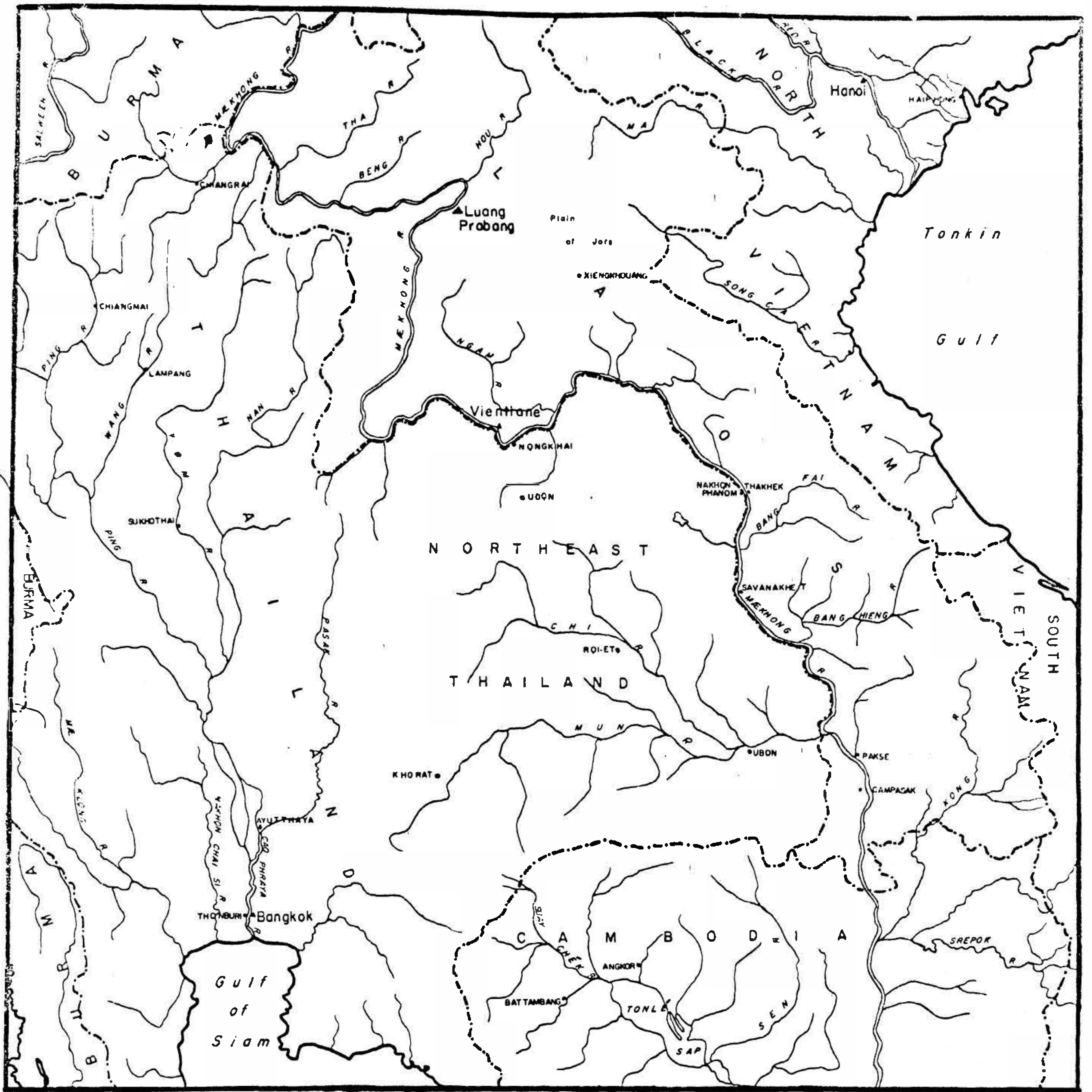
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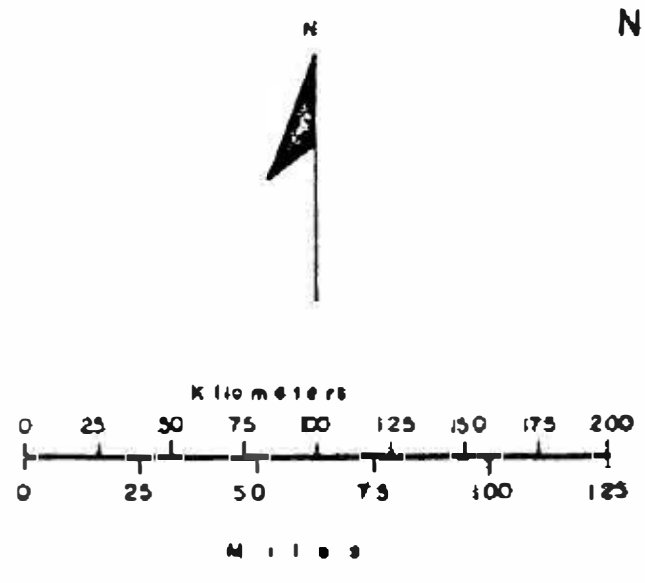
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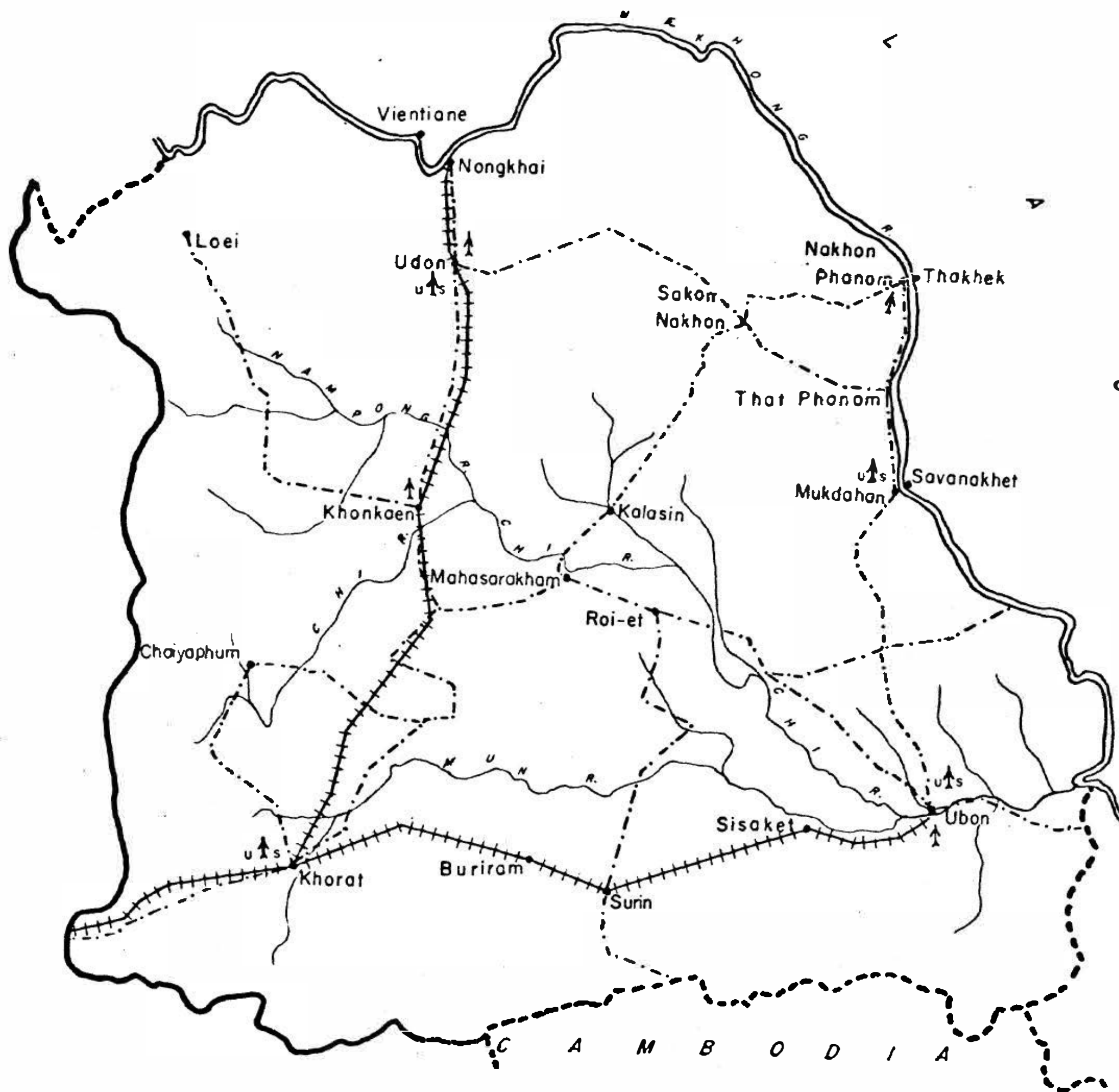
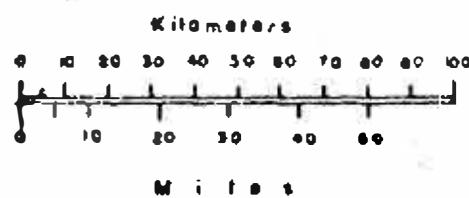
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MAP I

N O R T H E A S T
T H A I L A N D

-  Main Roads and Highways
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I. INTRODUCTION

Northeastern Thailand, which on a map of Southeast Asia appears to jut out into what was formerly French Indochina (see Map I), lies for the most part between latitude 14° and 18° north and between longitude 101° and 105° east. The Khorat Plateau, as the region is also called, is set off from the rest of Thailand by the Phetchabun range and by the smaller ranges of the Dong Phrayayen and Samkampaeng, and from Cambodia by the Phanom Dong Rak.

The whole plateau is drained by the Maekhong and its tributaries, most notably the Mun and Chi Rivers, which flow towards the Maekhong. The geographical attraction towards the Maekhong is shared by the lowland areas of Laos. Consequently, the Khorat Plateau and the Maekhong Valley and tributary valleys of Laos form a natural geographical area, an area which is unified rather than divided by the Maekhong (see Map I). The Annamite cordillera forms the eastern boundary of this area, running down the center of middle and southern Laos.

Topographically the Northeast contrasts sharply with the Central Plains of Thailand. Whereas the latter area is a low flood plain which receives fresh accretions of rich top soil from the North each year, the Northeast is a plateau which tilts gently from the northwestern sector where it is about 700 feet above sea level to the southeast where the altitude is only about 200 feet. Except for a few hills in the northeastern corner, the region is primarily an area of gently undulating land, most of it varying in altitude from 300 to 600 feet. In soil types and flood patterns, the Northeast also differs markedly from the Central Plain.

The topography is largely one of low relief, and vast expanses are covered with slow growing forests of hardwood, on soils usually too infertile and insufficiently watered to be worth clearing for agricultural uses. Most of the lowlands and the lower valley slopes, on which suitable depths of rain water can be held during the summer, are laid out in small diked fields planted to paddy. Here and there are open

grassy plains...with thorny bamboo along the creeks. These remain uncultivated, because in the wet season they are flooded too suddenly and deeply to make their use for paddy practical and in the dry season they are too dry. (Pendleton 1943:21)

Climatically the Northeast also differs from the Central Plains. The areas of the Northeast lying in the rain shadow of the mountain ranges dividing the Northeast from the rest of Thailand are the driest areas of all Thailand (Pendleton 1962:118). Since these mountains stand as a barrier to the southwesterly monsoon, the Northeast as a whole is more dependent for its rainfall on the cyclonic storms that originate over the South China Sea. In general there is much more variation in rainfall from section to section and variability in specific localities in the Northeast than there is in the Central Region (Ibid., pp. 117-8; Platenius 1963:9).

The Northeast forms the largest region in Thailand, covering 170,226 square kilometers (about 66,250 square miles) or comprising nearly one-third of the total land area of the Kingdom. Similarly, the population of the region accounts for about one-third of its inhabitants, the Northeast having nearly 9 million people out of a total of 26.3 million for the whole of Thailand in 1960. This population ratio has held constant at least since the early part of this century when the first modern censuses were taken.

Because of the classifications used in all censuses, it is difficult to estimate the exact ethnic composition of the Northeast. However, other than the bilingual Thai-Khmer who live in the southern provinces of the region,¹ the Northeast contains no sizeable non-T'ai² minority. By even the most conservative estimates, at least eight million of the 1960 population of the Northeast must be native speakers of various T'ai dialects; the greatest majority of these (probably at least 95 per cent) possess linguistic and cultural traits which differentiate them from the Central Thai and relate them more closely to the Lao who live across the Maekhong beyond the boundaries of Thailand. There are indeed slight cultural and linguistic differences among the people occupying the geographical region dominated by the Middle Maekhong, particularly if comparisons are made between communities around Luang Prabang in the north and Pakse or Ubon in the south. But the people of northeastern Thailand and the Lao show a much higher degree of cultural similarity to each other than either do to such other neighboring groups as the "tribal" T'ai, the Thai-Khmer, the Meo-Yao and Mon-Khmer upland peoples, or the Siamese.

The most common designation used by all the peoples of Thailand for the northeastern region of the kingdom is isan.³ Moreover, this same word is used to identify the people and specifically the dominant populace of the northeastern region. In this usage, Isan, a Pali-Sanskrit derived term, differs from the terms used to refer to the people and regions of northern, central, or southern Thailand.⁴ Also, whereas the other regions are in some ways identified by a major political-cultural center to the extent that Bangkok is equated with the Central Plains, Chiangmai with the North, and Nakhon Sithammarat with the T'ai-speaking South, the Northeast remains as a larger conception, Isan.⁵

The people of the Northeast sometimes refer to themselves as khon phunmyang ('natives') or as Lao. However, within recent years the term Isan, already used by people of other regions to indicate the people of the Northeast, has been taken up by a growing segment of the northeastern population to indicate their own ethnic identity. Northerners have begun to speak of themselves as being khon isan or phu isan ('Isan people'), as using phasa isan (lit., 'Isan language')⁶ and as living in phak isan ('Isan region'). The increasing usage of "Isan" by Northerners bespeaks their growing sense of regional/ethnic identity.

Yet it must be stressed that this sense of Isan identity is of very recent origin. Before we can attempt to assess what common interests the Isan people share and what common objectives they wish to pursue, we need first to understand how a distinctive region of northeastern Thailand evolved.

II. THE FORMATION OF ISAN¹

For several centuries prior to the end of the 13th century the Khorat Plateau had been within the Angkor Empire and its population was probably predominately Khmer.² When T'ai-speaking people began to arrive in the area has yet to be discovered. The Thai and Lao chronicles, for example, bury the emergence of T'ai-speaking people in the middle Maekhong region in legend (Maha Sila Viravong 1964:ã3-16, 25-26). Whatever the actual reasons may be, the appearance of T'ai-speaking peoples in the areas which comprise present-day Thailand and Laos was probably not a sudden massive "inundation" stimulated by political events in the southern Chinese homeland of these people, as has sometimes been suggested. Rather, the process, as Coedès has so well described it, was probably one "of gradual infiltration of immigrants who began by holding positions of command over communities of sedentary agriculturalists, and ended by gaining control over the native peoples among whom they had settled and whose culture they had assimilated" (Coedès 1966:102).

The first evidence of the presence of T'ai-speaking peoples in the territories dominated by the Khmer appears on one of the bas reliefs of Angkor Wat of the 12th century (Briggs 195ã:200-201), although they had already established themselves in principalities on the northwestern periphery of the Angkor Empire by the 11th century. In the 13th century a T'ai chieftain overthrew a Khmer provincial governor or commandant in an outpost of the Angkor Empire located at Sukhothai in north central Thailand, and established the first important autonomous T'ai state in an area formerly dominated by the Mons and Khmers. The second king of Sukhothai, Ram Khamhaeng (1270-1316), a great warrior, was able to extend the control of Sukhothai over most of north central and western Thailand, part of the peninsula, and the northern part of what is now northeastern Thailand. However, there is no evidence to suggest that there was any sizeable T'ai-speaking population in the parts of northeastern Thailand controlled by Sukhothai at this time.

Sukhothai, shortly after its florescence, yielded to two other T'ai kingdoms in the competition between the T'ai-speaking people and Khmer over the Khorat Plateau. At

almost the same moment in time in the mid-14th century, the Lao kingdom of Lan Chang (or Lan Xang) and the Siamese (Central Thai) kingdom of Ayutthaya were founded. Both remained important foci for political alignments in mainland Southeast Asia until the 18th century.

Although Ayutthaya lies in what is today the heart of central Thailand, at that time it lay at the edge of T'ai influence.³ In its expansion Ayutthaya was primarily interested in consolidating control over central and eastern Thailand and in reducing the power of the Khmer and only secondarily, if at all, in extending its influence over what is today northeastern Thailand. Although theoretically successor to Sukhothai's control over the northern part of northeastern Thailand, Ayutthaya abandoned this claim at the outset in face of a stronger claim exerted by the new Lao kingdom of Lan Chang.

Lan Chang originated in the small Lao principalities which had appeared sometime before the 14th century in northern Laos. Fa Ngum, the son of the ruler of one of these principalities based on the capital of Muang Swa (later to become Luang Prabang), was the first significant Lao political figure of whom we have historical record. According to one version of the Lao chronicles (Maha Sila Viravong 1964:26-38), Fa Ngum was forced to leave his homeland, was raised in exile at Angkor in a manner befitting a Khmer prince, converted to Theravada Buddhism, married the daughter of the Khmer emperor, and was given troops to effect his return to the throne of Lan Chang and the uniting of the Lao peoples in a single kingdom. In addition to establishing the Lao kingdom of Lan Chang, he is credited also with introducing Buddhism to the Lao people. There is much in this legend (and it is not the only version) which requires further research in order to separate history from myth; but it does seem apparent that Khmer approval and/or support for Fa Ngum was necessary for his success in creating a unified Lao kingdom, for within this kingdom were included peoples who had heretofore been subjects of Angkor. Maha Sila Viravong, in his interpretation of the Lao Annals, suggests that the Khmer had given their support to Fa Ngum because of their desire to see the expansion of the Siamese stopped.

The Khmers had gradually fallen down to the point where they were unable to defend themselves [against T'ai expansion]...The Khmer king had a strong desire to retaliate against the Thais [Siamese], or, at least, to check their advance. Hence the Khmer king's kindness to Prince Fah-Ngum so that

he could use him to stop the Thai expansion. (Maha Sila Viravong 1964:27)

The traditional date of the beginning of Fa Ngum's expedition to unify the Lao, A.D. 1349, is sufficiently close to the dates given for the founding of Ayutthaya and the initiation of the first Ayutthayan attacks against Angkor (Wolters 1966:96-7) to lend credence to the hypothesis that the founding of the Lao kingdom was a consequence of the Khmer's own inability to prevent the emergence of powerful T'ai kingdoms.

Fa Ngum started his expedition of conquest at the Khone Falls at the point which today divides Laos and Cambodia, moved up the Maekhong, bringing the peoples and lands on both shores under his sway, thence on to the Plain of Jars where he subjugated the principality of Xieng Khouang, and on to Luang Prabang, where he was crowned king. He spent some time conquering the peoples of northern Laos upstream on the Maekhong before moving down to take the area which lies around Vientiane. Until this point, only those areas of northeastern Thailand lying along the Maekhong, had been brought into the new kingdom of Lan Chang. However, once Fa Ngum reached Vientiane he decided to move on to take lands on the Khorat Plateau which belonged, in theory, to Ayutthaya as the successor to Sukhothai. An expedition in the 1350s was successful in deposing Ayutthayan officials at Rqi-Et and in convincing the Ayutthayan king that the Lao were powerful enough to meet any military challenge which Ayutthaya might mount in order to protect its interests in the Northeast. In consequence of his conquests, Fa Ngum was able to bring into the kingdom of Lan Chang all of the parts of the Khorat Plateau except the area around Nakhon Ratchasima which remained in Khmer hands.⁴

In some remarks which Maha Sila Viravong has made in connection with Fa Ngum's conquest lie perhaps the first clue to the migration of a sizeable number of Lao into northeastern Thailand. Fa Ngum ordered the resettlement of some 20,000 Lao families around Vientiane and the northern part of the Khorat Plateau. "That was the reason," Maha Sila Viravong claims, "why a great number of Lao people established themselves in the Khmer territories" (Maha Sila Viravong 1964:34).

Lao, Siamese, and indigenous provincial histories make little mention of what took place in the Khorat Plateau between the middle of the 14th century and the early part of the 17th century. However, what information exists does provide certain crucial clues which make

possible some conclusions about the relationship of the region to nearby kingdoms and about cultural developments within the region.

First, the interest of the Lao kingdom of Lan Chang in the Khorat Plateau before and after the capital was transferred from Luang Prabang to Vientiane in 1563 had contracted after the expansion of Fa Ngum and was restricted primarily to areas lying along the shores of the Maekhong in what are today Loei, Nongkhai, and Nakhon Phanom provinces. In these areas, which were integral parts of the Lan Chang kingdom, there was but one important cultural/political center - namely, the shrine at That Phanom which lies between the present northeastern towns of Nakhon Phanom and Mukdhan. The unimportance of the right bank of the Maekhong to the Lao kingdom is corroborated in a 17th century account of a Jesuit missionary who had lived in Laos (Lévy 1959:61). In short, the Lao kingdom, to the extent that it was integrated at all, included only a narrow strip of the fertile lands lying on both shores of the Maekhong.

Prior to the 17th century, the Siamese kingdom of Ayutthaya had even less interest than Lan Chang in the Khorat Plateau as a territory which might be brought within its metropolitan domains. The first Siamese foothold in the Northeast appears to have been established during the reign of King Narai (1656-1688) when the two old Khmer towns of Myang Sema and Myang Khorakhabura were combined into a single fortified outpost of Ayutthaya with the name of Nakhon Ratchasima (cf. Manit Vallibhotama 1962:47).⁵

Lan Chang and Ayutthaya, however, shared a common interest in maintaining the Khorat Plateau as a wide border area between their two kingdoms. In wars between the Lao and Siamese kingdoms, first under Fa Ngum in the mid-1500's (Maha Sila Viravong 1964:50-51) and later at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, the Khorat Plateau, by virtue of its intermediate location, formed a major battleground. To prevent such confrontations between the Lao and Siamese kingdoms, there was some effort exerted at various times by both sides to recognize the Khorat Plateau as a boundary region. For example, sometime between the late 15th and late 16th centuries, Dan Sai in Loei province was officially named once and perhaps twice as the demarcation point between the two kingdoms.⁶

Although little of the Northeast was fully incorporated into the Lao kingdom (and none into the Siamese kingdom) prior to the beginning of the 17th century, culturally the region was becoming increasingly Lao as we define that ethnic tradition today. The migratory patterns

of Lao into the region first mentioned in connection with the rule of Fa Ngum in the mid-14th century continued during the subsequent period. In addition to what must have been a constant flow of a few Lao at a time into the region, the Khorat Plateau seems to have been a haven for the politically dispossessed of Laos. Maha Sila Viravong reports that in the last decades of the 16th century, large numbers of Lao around Vientiane migrated to areas extending from Rqi-Et to Campasak in order to escape the rule of a usurper who had come to the throne of Lan Chang (Maha Sila Viravong 1964:69-70). A history of Kalasin province reports a steady migration of Lao people into the area between 1050 and 1750 and a large migration of political dissidents from Vientiane in the latter part of the 18th century (Cangwat Kalasin...1957:4-5). Campasak was settled in a similar fashion in the early 18th century while portions of the population of Rqi-Et came from Campasak shortly after the founding of that kingdom (Cangwat Rqi-Et...1957:4).

These migrations did not result merely in the supplanting of a pre-existent Khmer culture with a Lao culture. From the time of Fa Ngum on, the Lao had been borrowing many of the important elements of the Khmer "great tradition" as it existed during the period of contact. The migrants took with them some form of this "new" Lao culture to the Khorat Plateau and once there they continued to borrow from Khmer culture. However, in a linguistic sense if no other, the Lao have shown a greater ability to absorb the Khmer with whom they have come into contact than have the Khmer the Lao. In consequence, the number of Khmer-speaking people remaining in the Northeast has slowly diminished to its present-day (1960) size of not more than a half million out of a total population of nine million. Even the remaining Khmer are bilingual and one would predict that their distinctiveness will also disappear in time.

At the beginning of the 17th century, thus, only a few parts of the Northeast were fully incorporated within the Lao kingdom of Lan Chang and no part of the area lay within the kingdom of Ayutthaya. The definition by these two kingdoms of the rest of the region as a wide border zone made possible the autonomy of whatever socio-political units - villages and/or principalities - may have existed in the region. Culturally, the region was becoming increasingly Lao, but without a court center to look to, local variations developed perhaps to a greater extent than within Laos itself. Political autonomy and localism in the region were to become threatened only after the shift in the relative power of the Lao and Siamese kingdoms which began to take place early in the 17th century.

During the latter half of the 16th century both Lan Chang and Ayutthaya had been drawn together in the attempt to protect themselves against attacks by the Burmese. When the Burmese were finally routed at the end of the 16th century, both kingdoms had been weakened, although Ayutthaya had suffered more. According to the Thai annals, in 1610 Lan Chang attempted to take advantage of what it considered to be the greater weakness of Ayutthaya and staged an attack against the Siamese capital (Wood 1924:61-2). However, the Siamese had recovered faster than the Lao thought, for the Siamese armies quickly rebuffed the Lao attacks and scattered the Lao forces. This event can be noted as the turning point in Lao-Siamese relations for after this time the Siamese kingdom began to wax, albeit with temporary setbacks, while the Lao kingdom slowly began to disintegrate.

Although in 1670, when the stele at Dan Sai in Loei province demarcating the boundaries between Ayutthaya and Lan Chang was erected, much was made of the "equality" of Lan Chang and Ayutthaya (Maha Sila Viravong 1964:76-77), the real indicator of the relative relations of these two kingdoms in regard to the Northeast was the establishment of a Siamese outpost at Nakhon Ratchasima during the reign of King Narai (1656-1688). In fact, the king of Lan Chang ruling during the time of these two events, King Surayawongsa (1633-1690 or 1695), was the last important king of a unified Lan Chang. On his death, the kingdom fell into a period of anarchy, climaxed by the split of Lan Chang into the three kingdoms of Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Campasak early in the 18th century.⁷

The division of Lan Chang and the growing power of Ayutthaya brought the Khorat Plateau into focus much more than had ever been the case in the past. The weakened condition of the Lao states, although not the only factor, was undoubtedly one of the main reasons for the intensification of Siamese expansion towards the Northeast which was to continue, with only temporary abatements, until the end of the 19th century. In addition to the Siamese interest in the area, the division of Lan Chang also stimulated Lao political interest in the interior of the Khorat Plateau. Although the evidence is scanty, it would appear that Vientiane inherited from Lan Chang territories lying on the right bank of the Maekhong in present-day Loei, Nongkhai, and Nakhon Phanom provinces. Campasak, itself located on the right bank, absorbed into its kingdom territories upstream on the Mun and Chi rivers which lie today in Ubon and Roi-Et provinces (Archambault 1961:562-563; Cangwat Roi-Et...1957:4).

The stage was set, thus, for northeastern Thailand to become a meeting place for the interests of at least three states - Vientiane, Campasak, and Ayutthaya. However, before such a confrontation could occur, Burma, in 1767, again attacked and laid siege to Ayutthaya. In consequence the kingdom of Ayutthaya disintegrated into five parts, one of which emerged at Khorat or Nakhon Ratchasima (Wood 1924:254).⁸ This division was short-lived as a Thai of Chinese descent, Taksin, was able to rally a sizeable military force and to piece the kingdom back together with a new capital at Thonburi, across the river from Bangkok.

At the time of the Burmese attack, Vientiane was theoretically an ally of the Siamese, but following the fall of Ayutthaya, Vientiane was forced to support Burma or suffer attack itself. The kingdom chose to support Burma. Vientiane's offense to the Siamese was exacerbated by allowing the self-proclaimed ruler of Khorat to find asylum in Vientiane after Khorat fell to Taksin in 1768 (Wood 1924:256). As punishment for disloyalty, Taksin ordered the invasion of Vientiane. During the punitive expedition, lead by General Cakkri, who was later to found the Bangkok dynasty, Luang Prabang aligned itself with Bangkok, and as the Lao historian Maha Sila Viravong puts it "was forced to accept the suzerainty of Siam" (Maha Sila Viravong 1964:103). Vientiane, after being sacked and almost completely destroyed, was placed under a Thai military commander.⁹

Campasak suffered the same fate. In 1777 Taksin ordered Cakkri to attack Campasak for having attempted to expand its territories on the Khorat Plateau at the expense of the Siamese during the unsettled period following the fall of Ayutthaya. The expedition was successful and the ruler of Campasak was removed from his throne and sent to the Siamese capital. From this point on, although the king of Campasak was allowed to return home in 1780, Campasak became and remained a vassal of Bangkok¹⁰ (cf. Archaimbault 1961:560-564; Wyatt 1963:19-20, 28-29).

In consequence of these Siamese defeats of the Lao the kingdoms of Vientiane and Campasak became vassals of Bangkok. More importantly for our considerations, the parts of the Khorat Plateau not included within the territories of these vassals were incorporated as "outer provinces" within the Siamese kingdom.

In 1804 a new king, Cao Anu, was placed on the throne of Vientiane by Bangkok. For the first part of his reign, which lasted until 1827, he proved to be a model vassal to Thailand and seemed to be personally close to King Rama II.¹¹

After the ascension to the throne of Rama III, however, Cao Anu decided that he would try to restore the independence of the kingdom of Vientiane. In 1827 he moved troops towards Bangkok, pretending to come to the aid of the Siamese court, reportedly threatened by British gunboats. He also obtained the support of Campasak in his expedition. Earlier, the Siamese king had been persuaded by Cao Anu to install one of his own sons on the throne of Campasak and this son came to the aid of his father when the latter launched his attack on Bangkok. Together, the forces of the combined vassals presented a formidable challenge to the Siamese. Cao Anu was able to lead his troops as far as Saraburi in the Central Plains of Thailand. The Siamese king was taken completely by surprise, but quickly organized his troops and sent them against the Lao. During the year and a half it took the Siamese to rout the Lao armies, there was considerable fighting on the Khorat Plateau. The people of that region were involved in the war by being conscripted to serve in the forces of one or another of the armies or by having to supply the troops with foodstuffs.¹²

When the Lao were finally defeated, Rama III ordered the complete destruction of the city of Vientiane, the deportation of its population to the Central Plains, and the public ridiculing of Cao Anu and his family in Bangkok. The kingdom of Vientiane was thus eliminated and the territories under both Vientiane and Campasak were reduced to the same status as those of the Khorat Plateau - namely, that of being provinces responsible to Bangkok rather than being vassals. Among the Lao vassals, only Luang Prabang was able to retain a semblance of autonomy.¹³

In contrast to the demise of independent Lao political power, the Cakkri dynasty of Bangkok proved to be one of the most stable and effective in Thailand's history. The strength of the dynasty, although due in no small part to the personal abilities of several of the kings, was enhanced, ironically, by the arrival of European colonialists in mainland Southeast Asia. The British, while stopping Siamese expansion to the south and west, eliminated the Burmese kingdom which had for so long threatened Siam.

Even more significant was the Siamese ability to evolve a "response to the West" which made possible the preservation of independence when all Bangkok's neighbors fell under colonial rule. Still, Bangkok did not entirely escape the territorial ambitions of the colonial powers, and it was in the newly incorporated Lao territories that Siam suffered the greatest territorial losses.¹⁴ French colonization in Southeast Asia had the effect of halting Siamese expansion eastward and northeastward and of

establishing the present boundaries of the Thai Northeast. Such internationally recognized boundaries were an innovation in an area where control had been based on population rather than territory.

In 1862 France established itself in Cochin-China and continued to advance in Indochina until 1907. In 1867 Thailand ceded, under protest, its authority over Cambodia (excepting the provinces of Battambang, Siemreap, Sisophon, and Melouprey). In 1888 Bangkok renounced any claim to the Sipsong Chao Thai area in northern Vietnam. However, the Franco-Siamese Treaty of 1893, signed by the Siamese under threat from a French military ultimatum, resulted in Thailand's first major territorial concessions to France. By this treaty all of the Lao areas on the left bank of the Maekhong were ceded to France. Two areas on the right bank of the Maekhong, Sayaboury province opposite Luang Prabang and the province of Campasak (called Bassac by the French), passed to French control in consequence of the treaty of 1904.¹⁵

Many French officials agreed with the Siamese, albeit for different reasons, about the essential absurdity of the division of the Lao areas on ethnic grounds. Several of these officials argued strongly for French expansion into the Khorat Plateau since the people of this area were also "Lao" (cf. Lunet de Lajonquière 1907). But the period of French colonial expansion was over and, with the exception of a brief interlude in the Second World War, the boundaries dividing Laos and Thailand have remained unchanged since 1904.

Although the Thai Northeast did not emerge as having distinct geo-political identity until the beginning of the 20th century, a large portion of the population of the region do share a common historical heritage which has significance for the development of northeastern regionalism. In consequence of migrations and assimilation, the vast majority of the northeastern populace is today closely related culturally to the Lao on the opposite bank of the Maekhong. Although there are slight cultural variations in the region due to a long period of local autonomy and the greater impact of Khmer culture upon the people of the Northeast as compared with the Lao of Laos,¹⁶ in the main the people of the Northeast can be grouped ethnically with the Lao as differentiated from the Siamese or Central Thai. Politically, however, the region has had a history of division. The areas lying along the Maekhong were integral, but secondary, parts of the Lao kingdom for most of the period between the mid-14th and the early 19th centuries, while much of the interior of the Khorat Plateau

was politically autonomous. Inclusion of the region as a whole into one or another kingdom has occurred only in the pre-14th century period under Angkor (when the populace was itself Khmer) and since 1827 under the Siamese. Still these very factors of division and autonomy can be seen to have some relation to the subsequent Isan search for a distinctive identity. One of the present-day manifestations of Isan regionalism is an attempt to foster a sense of ethnic identity in the face of Central Thai pressures without necessarily equating such a quest with the weak "national" destiny, both historically and currently, of the Lao. But such political objectives could emerge only after the people of the Northeast became aware of their common heritage and identity. This awareness appeared in consequence of the intensified interactions between Northeasterners and Central Thai which began with the consolidation of Siamese control over the North.

III. CONSOLIDATION OF THAI CONTROL

The Ayutthayan period can be characterized politically by the attempt of Siamese rulers to consolidate and maintain control over the people living within the Central Plains of present-day Thailand. In the four centuries when Ayutthaya was the capital of Siam, there were continual threats to this political objective, mainly from the Burmese but also from the Khmer and neighboring T'ai kingdoms. However, the collapse of the Burmese empire at the beginning of the 19th century, the continued weakness of Cambodia, and the dissolution of the Kingdom of Lan Chang, all occurring at a time when Siam had acquired a dynamic new dynasty, radically changed the traditional political equation. Siamese policy towards the T'ai-speaking peoples living to the northeast and to the north shifted from one of seeking vassals or alliances to one of attempting to incorporate these people into Siam proper. The Siamese defeat of the Lao in the war of 1827-8 marked the end of the vassal states of Vientiane and Campasak and led to increasing Siamese control of all the territories of the Khorat Plateau and the middle Maekhong region. Towards the end of the 19th century, the old kingdom of Lanna or Chiangmai was also brought within the Siamese domains. Only Luang Prabang of all the T'ai-speaking kingdoms who were the northern and northeastern neighbors of Siam remained independent, albeit as a vassal.

The imposition of Siamese control over these areas was brought about gradually. At the beginning of the 19th century the Siamese instituted practices of indirect control which were characterized by the dispersal of power among a large number of semi-autonomous principalities. For the populace of the northeastern region of Thailand, these methods of administration had the initial effect of perpetuating local autonomy. A return to this period of localism and autonomy can be noted in some of the political expressions of Northerners at a later period.

However, more crucial in the formation of Isan regionalism were the events at the end of the century. Under the pressure and stimulus of Western colonialism, King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) introduced a number of reforms, partially based upon Western ideas and technology,

which aimed at more direct Siamese control over these areas. With these reforms and the demarcation of the boundary between Laos and Thailand established in the Franco-Siamese treaties of 1893 and 1904, the destiny of Northerners was cast with Thailand. After these events, any search for common identity among Northerners would be carried out within the context of the Thai state.

Beginning with the reign of King Taksin (1767-1782), central Thai administration of the Lao areas, including present-day northeastern Thailand, was based on a semi-feudal principle whereby villagers were subject to indigenous elites and the elites in turn subject to Thonburi and, after 1782, Bangkok. Together, elites and peasantry were grouped in a large number of small principalities termed huamyang.¹ Although there is some evidence to suggest that the structure of the huamyang in Laos and northeastern Thailand was based on the Lao monarchical system (cf. "Toem Singhatthit" 1956:vol. 1:489; Bunchua Atthakon 1962:4) and although four huamyang had been established on the Khorat Plateau during the Ayutthayan period,² the creation of a huamyang system was a part of the Thai kingdom's system of control over its "outer provinces" during the Thonburi period and for the first four and a half reigns of the Chakri dynasty. Between 1767 and 1882, 145 huamyang were created in the Lao areas, of which about 95-100 were located on the Khorat Plateau.³ These huamyang were divided into two basic types: major huamyang (huamyang yai) which were directly responsible to Bangkok, and minor huamyang (huamyang noi or huamyang lek) which were subordinate to the major huamyang. By the 1880's, when the system was changed, there were 42 major huamyang in the Lao areas of which 27 were located in the Northeast. At the head of each huamyang was a "lord" (cao) who together with the three other highest local officials formed a ruling group known as the achayasi. Below the achayasi was a group of officials charged with specific functions such as handling of the budget, management of the cao myang's horses, etc.⁴

Huamyang were lower in status and smaller in size than vassal states, but were not of the same order as the "inner provinces" which surrounded the capital in the central plains of Thailand. They were similar to vassals in that their rulers belonged to local aristocracies and possessed considerable autonomy. They were like the "inner provinces,"⁵ however, in that the rulers (the members of the achayasi) had to be "appointed" (in practice, confirmed) by the Thai throne. Vella states that they were also "subject to the more important obligations of ordinary provinces: the payment of taxes in local products and the

supplying of men (or a money substitute) for the corvée (Vella 1957:87).⁵ In addition, the Thai crown reserved the right of mediating disputes between rulers of the various huamyang, decision in cases involving capital punishment, and the direction or initiation of war within the area. Finally, Bangkok required each cao myang or his representative to come to Bangkok annually to drink the oath of allegiance to the king and to appear at court at the time of a king's coronation or funeral. Yet despite these formal restrictions, the absence of permanent representatives of the Thai government in the Lao areas and the difficulties in communication and transportation meant that the cao myang and the achayasi could rule their huamyang without too much regard for Bangkok.

This situation in which local autonomy was circumscribed only minimally by Thai control continued until the Thai court began to fear that the expansion of British and French colonialism might endanger their hold over the huamyang. After successfully installing a central Thai royal commissioner at Chiangmai in north Thailand in 1874, the Thai government instituted a system of royal commissioners for all of the Lao areas as well (Vella 1955:344). In 1882 a royal commissioner in charge of the Lao huamyang was stationed at Campasak ("Toem Singhatthit" 1956:vol. 1: 464) and in 1890 Lao huamyang were grouped into four divisions, each with its own royal commissioner (Bunchuai Atthakon 1962:69).⁶

The Franco-Siamese treaty of 1893, which resulted in the cession of territories on the left bank of the Mae-khong to the French, provided an important reason for the broadening of the administrative reforms which King Culalongkon had begun in the previous decade. In the first of a series of major governmental reform laws proclaimed in 1893 the administration of all huamyang which had formerly been under the jurisdiction of several quasi-ministries was centralized in a Ministry of Interior. The same proclamation created the new administrative unit of monthon or "circles" of which there were 18 for the whole country. These were designed to bridge the gap between the central government and the huamyang. Monthon were administered by Ministry of Interior officials appointed by Bangkok. This administrative reform carried the Thai government a step closer to direct control over the "outer provinces" including those in northeastern Thailand.

Direct control was further extended in several other reforms instituted by King Culalongkon before his death in 1910. Major huamyang became "districts" (amphoe) on a par with the provinces and districts of the Central

Region of the kingdom. The cao myang became "governors" and, together with the other provincial and district officials, were incorporated into the Thai civil service. Their salaries came from the central government rather than from a portion of tribute money as had heretofore been the case. Although the changes were initially terminological, the groundwork was laid for the reduction of the autonomy of the huamyang and their rulers and the dissolution of the differences between inner and outer provinces.

The transformation of the kingdom from a partially centralized, partially decentralized system into a unified system was not completed in the reign of Culalongkōn. However, he had established the formal structure of the new system which his successors used as a basis for their governing of the country. As a cao myang passed away in one of the northeastern or other "outer provinces," he was replaced not in accordance with the traditional method whereby provincial officials chose the new ruler (usually from among the close relatives of the old ruler), but instead through an appointment made by the Ministry of Interior (Bunchuai Atthakōn 1962:75). By 1932, when Thailand became a constitutional monarchy, the imposition of a centralized administrative system on the whole country and the incorporation of all provincial and district officials into a national bureaucracy had been nearly completed.

For the northeastern region of Thailand the reforms leading to the centralization of the bureaucracy and administration had an impact which was relevant to the later development of northeastern regionalism. Although there is little evidence, it seems highly likely that many of the traditional cao myang rulers with their local roots and local bases of power were replaced by Central Thai officials with more ties to Bangkok than to the provinces and districts to which they were posted.⁸ To the extent that this practice was followed, Northeasterners experienced for the first time the subordination of local political interests to Central Thai objectives. The fact that some of the dispossessed members of the traditional northeastern aristocracies later sought to re-establish their power positions through election as provincial representatives in the parliamentary period (see below) indicates that at least some manifestations of political discontent can be traced to the thwarting of the political ambitions of local Isan leaders as a consequence of the extension of Thai control.

Whatever the magnitude of the displacement of traditional rulers in the Northeast may have been, the administrative reforms did result in a shift of the locus of all important political powers from the huamyang to Bangkok.

Provincial and district officials, no matter whether Central Thai or Northeastern in origin, were now subject to a bureaucratic code which had been developed in Bangkok. As civil servants, their responsibility was to Bangkok rather than to the local populace and their careers depended upon their conforming to the demands and pressures of the Thai rather than the local system. The centralizing of the bureaucracy, thus, had the effect of endowing the separation between the rulers and ruled with an ethnic overtone. Northeasterners began to feel that political power was the prerogative of the "Thai" rather than of themselves.

The extension of Thai political control over the Northeast was inexorably connected with the creation of modern communication and transportation networks which was also begun in the last decades of the 19th century. Without more rapid means of communication and transportation between Bangkok and outlying regions, the political reforms of King Culalongkṇ could never have been so effective in breaking down the autonomy and isolation of the northeastern huamyang. Traditionally, messages between the government and provincial outposts had been carried by relay runners on horseback or by fast boat. During the reign of King Culalongkṇ the Ministry of Interior maintained a schedule which specified that messages between Bangkok and Nṅngkhai took 12 days, between Bangkok and Ubon, 12 days, and between Bangkok and Luang Prabang, 17 days going and 13 days in returning (Damrong 1960:58). The normal movement of people and goods was far slower. According to one report in 1895 it took about three weeks to travel by ox cart from Nṅngkhai to Khorat and another eight or nine days to travel from Khorat to Bangkok (Smyth 1895:83 and 93). Travel by water, which was important in connecting the north with the Central Plains, served in the Northeast only to connect internal points on the Mun, Chi, or Maekhong or to connect northeastern communities with other communities on the left bank of the Maekhong.

Trading patterns between the Central Plains, and, in particular, Bangkok, and the Northeast were altered radically with the completion of the first rail line to Khorat in 1900. Whereas the shipment of goods had formerly taken at least eight or nine days to go from Khorat to Bangkok, it could now be accomplished in a day. The traditional routes within the Isan region were, of course, unmodified by the rail connection between Bangkok and Khorat, but the speed with which goods could reach Khorat from Bangkok facilitated the introduction into the Isan region of items previously too expensive or too perishable to transport. By 1928 one section of the northeastern rail line had been extended to Ubon and by 1933 the other section had reached

Khonkaen (Thailand, Ministry of Communication 1947:11-13).⁹ Automobile transport made its first appearance in the Northeast sometime in the 1920's but did not expand rapidly until after the Second World War.

Modern communication connections between the Northeast and Bangkok were inaugurated at about the same time as the beginning of railway construction. The Post and Telegraph Office was first established in 1883. According to a French official, there were two major northeastern telegraph lines in 1907, each branching out from Khorat, the terminus of the Bangkok-Khorat line. The first went north to Nongkhai and the second went east to Ubon, with a section going from Buriram to Campasak (Lunet de Lajonquière 1907: 283). Since then, telegraph services have been extended to every district in the Northeast.

Both the extension of Thai political control and the expansion of communication and transportation networks helped to bring Northeasterners into more intimate contact with the Central Thai and to make them aware of Bangkok as an economic and political focus. However, neither set of innovations were as important as the educational reforms, also begun by King Chulalongkorn, for making Northeasterners aware of their inclusion within a Thai nation-state. Traditionally, village education throughout Thailand had been in the hands of Buddhist monks attached to the local temples. Education was, thus, locally circumscribed and dependent upon the training and knowledge of the monk-teachers.¹⁰ King Chulalongkorn felt that to modernize Thailand and to inculcate in the populace of the kingdom an awareness of their national heritage, the educational system, like administration, must be centralized. In 1871 he established the "Palace System" in which princes were given Western-type education. After his success in this endeavor, he decided, in 1885, that the government should extend "modern" education to the whole country. In 1889 a Ministry of Education was founded with the extremely able Prince Damrong as its first head. Just before King Chulalongkorn died in 1910 a conference was held in which it was decided that primary education should be made compulsory throughout the country. This idea was actually put into law in the Primary Education Act of 1921, by which all children in the country were required to spend five (later reduced to four) years studying in a national program of education.

Although the tasks of training secular teachers to replace the traditional monk-teachers, of establishing schools which would be within walking distance of every child, and of enforcing the teaching of all parts of the

government-determined curriculum have yet to be fully completed, by 1934 the dream of Culaalongkōn had nearly become a fact. For the northeastern peasantry the required participation in four years of government education resulted in every Northerner learning about Thai geography, Thai history, and Thai language. Interspersed throughout their educational experience, these same children are taught to respect and honor country, king, and religion. An anthropologist who worked in a remote Thai-Lue village in the extreme north of Thailand has suggested the importance of education in bringing traditionally isolated people into a Thai frame of reference.

It is our strong impression that in areas like Chiengkham where officials are estranged, the draft widely scattered, official radio broadcasts largely irrelevant to village life, and government services almost nonexistent, the local elementary school is overwhelmingly the main source of national consciousness and loyalty. Lessons in the national language, in Thai history, religion, and geography--however superficial and imperfectly remembered--have a profound effect on village life (Moerman 1961:80).

In another context, I reached similar conclusions with regard to a village in the central part of northeastern Thailand (Keyes 1966a:140-191). The identification of Northerners with the Thai king, a most critical and crucial element in a sense of Thai citizenship, has been brought about more through the impact of national education than through the impact of any other type of national program.

The educational reforms, like the administrative reforms and the expansion of communication and transportation networks, served to bring Northerners into much closer contact with Central Thai culture and society and to make the Northerners aware that their future would be affected by decisions in Bangkok. At the same time, these innovations also began to make Northerners realize that their local culture and patterns of living were considered inferior to those of Central Thai. Such was apparent in the attitudes of the new government officials and in the content of the educational curriculum. As the impact of direct Thai control increased, Northerners began to develop ambivalent attitudes towards Central Thai culture. On the one hand, they resented its threat to their own local ways; on the other hand, they admired it for its association with higher status and with the newly accepted "sacred" focus of their universe, the Thai king.

Such peasant ambivalences towards their own local culture and elite culture are characteristic of most peasant societies. What was to make northeastern Thailand different was the recognition by Northeasterners that their "local" culture and values were shared by a large proportion of the Isan populace. This recognition did not follow immediately upon the consolidation of Thai control in the area. Rather, the first hints of the merging of local interests in larger regional interests appeared in consequence of the activities of northeastern representatives during the period of parliamentary experiment in 1932-47.

IV. SEARCH FOR POLITICAL IDENTITY

The most crucial date in recent Thai political history is undoubtedly 1932, for in that year a group of civil servants and disaffected military elements in Bangkok led a successful coup d'état against the Thai throne and established a constitutional monarchy. The most important consequence of the change in government insofar as the development of political identity in the Northeast was concerned was the creation of a parliament. For the first time provincial leaders were given an opportunity to express themselves in a national forum on issues affecting the future of both their home areas and the nation as a whole. Within this context representatives from the Northeast were to assume particularly significant roles. Even before the experiment in parliamentary democracy was begun, however, the coup against the throne ushered in a brief period of uncertainty about the political future of Thailand which affected Northeasteners as well as the other peoples of the kingdom. Some events in the Northeast during this period suggest, although not very strongly, the first stirrings of regional dissent.

In 1933 a royalist military leader, Prince Bowgradet, led troops under his command from the Khorat garrison into rebellion against the government of the coup leaders. A few indigenous leaders in the Northeast supported this rebellion (Wilson 1962:223). However, for the most part, northeastern officials were loyal to the new government and even provided police and boy scouts to help the government round up the ragtag remnants of Bowgradet's troops who had been dispersed in the Isan countryside (Wilson 1962:222-3; Bunchuai Atthakon 1962:96).

In the aftermath of the coup and the unsuccessful Bowgradet rebellion, the new government in Bangkok made a large number of arrests of people suspected of being involved in anti-government activities. Some of those arrested in the Northeast were accused, somewhat paradoxically, of being "Communists." One individual so charged, Yuang Iamsila, later to be an MP from Udon, maintained that he did not even know at the time what Communism was (Wilson 1962:222-3). Whatever the reason for the "Communist" charges, they do reflect the first occurrence of

suppression of northeastern political leaders by the central government for alleged left-wing activities.^{1a}

One source has advanced the not very plausible hypothesis that governmental fears of "Communist" activity among Northeasterners at this time had arisen because of the involvement of some Northeasterners in the embryonic revolutionary activities of Vietnamese refugees in northeastern Thailand. This linkage was made by Thompson and Adloff in their book on The Left-Wing in Southeast Asia:

By early May 1934 leaflet distribution on the part of a group calling its members the "Committee of Young Siam" began to be concentrated in the northeast provinces. It was there that political refugees from Indochina were grouped, and the cells formed in Sakol Nakon and Bichitr were supposed to be closely allied to similar Cantonese and Tonkinese groups. Fear of this tie-up undoubtedly accounted for the severity of the prison sentences imposed at this time by the Thai courts on a number of Annamite revolutionaries. (Thompson and Adloff 1950:56)

That Vietnamese refugees in the Northeast at this time were being wooed to an anti-colonial revolutionary cause is certainly true. That this cause was then also "Communist" is more questionable. Political cadres had followed the Vietnamese refugees into the Northeast and had joined them in their centers at Udorn, Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, Nongkhai, Mukdhan, and That Phanom (cf. Le Manh Trinh 1962: 118). Ho Chi Minh himself, under the alias of Thau Chin,² had spent from 1928 to 1930 working among these people, particularly in Udorn and Sakon Nakhon where he established cells and Vietnamese schools (Le Manh Trinh 1962). Ho is reported to have told Vietnamese in Udorn:

Viet Nam is a colony, Thailand is a semi-colony. Viet Nam is oppressed by the French. Thailand has been bullied by the French into signing several unequal treaties. We detest the French, the Thai do not like them either. Moreover, Thailand and Viet Nam are neighboring countries. It's certain that the Thais have sympathy for the anti-French movement of the Vietnamese. (Le Manh Trinh 1962:121-2)

Yet, despite such words of encouragement, it is doubtful that the Vietnamese proselytized very much among their northeastern neighbors. For the most part the Vietnamese community in the Northeast has retained the characteristics of a ghetto or caste group and Vietnamese have restricted their interactions with Northerners to the market.³

The few sporadic manifestations of real or apparent political dissent that appeared in the Northeast following the coup of 1932 probably reflected more the instability in the country as a whole than they did an emerging regionalism. This instability was short-lived as the government in Bangkok quickly restored order throughout the kingdom and moved on to define the new directions which the state would take under their aegis.

The government of the "Promoters," as the members of the coup group were called, continued the trend towards bureaucratic and administrative centralization which had been begun by King Culalongkorn. In 1932 the eighteen monthons of the country were reduced to ten and in 1933 the monthon system was abolished (Landon 1939:45). The latter move signified that the government now considered the provinces and districts of the country to be sufficiently integrated within a national administrative system to obviate the need for an intermediary level of government between nation and province. For the Northeast, the last vestiges of huamyang political autonomy had been eliminated.

The most important innovation of the new government was the creation of a national parliament with elected representatives from every province. This institution provided the first mechanism in Thai history whereby local and regional interests of the country could be represented at the political center of the kingdom. The Thai parliament has had somewhat of a chequered history since its founding in 1933. It has been disbanded and reorganized, used and abused by successive prime ministers. However, when extant it has assumed a special significance for the representatives from the Northeast.

The first general election in Thailand occurred in November-December of 1933 and successive elections were held in the pre-war years in 1937 and 1938. Political parties were illegal for all these elections and only half of the members were elected, while the other half were appointed. Consequently, the Promoters were in little danger of a threat by parliamentary opposition to their hold on the reins of government. However, the period between 1932 and the war was marked by competition among the leaders of the 1932 coup, and the political allegiances of all elected

representatives tended to coalesce around one or the other of these leaders. Although Phraya Phanon became Prime Minister in 1933 and remained so until 1937, Pridi Phanomyong (Luang Pradit Manutham) and Phibun Songkhram became the most important figures around whom the majority of MP's grouped themselves.^a

Pridi, a son of a peasant family in Ayutthaya, was the main intellectual force among the Promoters. In his law training in France he apparently had found the source of his ideas about the construction of a new Thailand. Although some of his ideas appeared in the permanent constitution of 1932, they were most apparent in an Economic Plan proposed in 1933 which envisaged the nationalizing of both industry and farms thereby making all farmers employees of the state.⁴ The plan was subsequently branded as "Communist" and Pridi was forced to leave the country for a short time. Although he was later exonerated and returned to a position of power within the government, Pridi's plan was thoroughly discredited and was never proposed formally again. Nonetheless, some of the ideas which sought to introduce a radical method for economic development were later to reappear in the solutions proposed by post-war Isan representatives as solutions to the economic difficulties of the region.

Pridi's political ambitions suffered an apparent major setback with the rejection of his economic plan, but by 1934 he had not only returned from abroad, but he also held the important post of Minister of Interior. His strength was among the "liberal" group in the Promoters, a faction made up in large part of young civilians who had studied abroad as Pridi himself had done. His influence spread not only among a large number of elected representatives in the National Assembly but also to others of the emerging elite who had attended Thammasat University (the University of Moral and Political Sciences) of which he was the founder and first rector.

Pridi's major adversary in the competition for political power was the young military officer, Phibun Songkhram. Phibun, also of Central Thai peasant background, had studied military science in France. His strength lay in his popularity among military officers who had been impressed by his leadership of the forces which suppressed the Bowgradet rebellion. His military orientation and his own political ambitions were the main basis for the approach he adopted towards the type of government which he felt Thailand should have. People rallied around him not because of his ideological position but because of the belief that he would be a powerful ruler of the country.

The political struggle between Pridi and Phibun was projected against the backdrop of the National Assembly. Many of the appointed Assemblymen were military officers who sided with Phibun. But it is the elected representatives in whom we are most interested since among them were the few Northerners who had become involved in national politics. One type of Isan MP included the descendants of old cao myang families who sought election as a means of perpetuating their influence in their home areas and for seeking access to power which had been denied them after the administrative reforms were implemented. How many Isan representatives of this type there were is difficult to determine. I have been able to identify two definitely - Thongmuan Attakon from Mahasarakham and Thongdi na Kalasin (Kwang Thongthawi) from Kalasin - and the names cum titles of at least three others suggest that they too may have been of this type. Associated with these MP's were a few local provincial and district officials who left their positions in the civil service to seek national office. Phraya Sarakham Khanaphiban (Anong Phayakham), an ex-governor of the province of Mahasarakham who was elected to the National Assembly in 1933 (Bunchuai Atthakon 1962:90-2, 96), exemplifies this type of representative.⁵ These deputies attached themselves to another representative of similar background who was later to become one of the most important figures in national politics - Khuang Aphaiwong. Nai Khuang himself was a descendant of the traditional ruling family of Battambang which had been ceded to the French by the treaty of 1907 and is today a part of Cambodia. These representatives, and others of like mind, tended to be conservative since their own way of life was rooted in the traditional past.

The most vocal type of Isan MP was the Northerner who through education had risen from a relatively humble background and whose ties were still strong in the countryside of his constituency. Among the most prominent parliamentary supporters of Pridi, men such as Thawin Udon (Roi-Et), Thong-In Phuriphat (Ubon), Tiang Sirikhan (Sakon Nakhon), and Camlong Daoryang (Mahasarakham), were Northerners of this variety. I would suggest that one of the reasons why such men committed themselves to the "liberal" faction stemmed from the fact that these men had less of an investment in the traditional Thai social system than did MP's from the Central Plains or representatives who belonged to the old provincial or national aristocracies. On the contrary, they had much to gain by the greater democratization of the system. Their political strength did not lie with whom they knew in Bangkok, at least not initially, but with the peasantry who had elected them. To enhance their positions they needed to espouse,

dramatically if possible, programs and policies which would both increase their popularity in the countryside and bring them to the attention of the national leadership.

During the 1933-38 period Thong-In Phuriphat (Ubon) established himself as the most persistent critic of the government. In 1935 he and two other members filed a vote of no-confidence in the State Council over a combination of issues including increased military involvement in civil government, an opium scandal, and the alleged inefficiency of the Ministry of Economic Affairs (Thompson 1941:90; Bangkok Times, October 16, 1935). In 1937 he led a parliamentary protest over the inadequacy of funds allocated for education and public works as compared with the defense budget (Thompson 1941:93). In the same year he also demanded an explanation from the government of a speech by a young military officer who had demeaned the elected MP's (Landon 1939:50). Shortly thereafter he requested permission to found a political party which would have branches throughout the country (Landon 1939:50). However, the Council of Ministers rejected the request on the basis that the time was not yet suitable for such (Landon 1939:50; Siam Chronicle, May 20, 1941).

In 1938 Phibun became Prime Minister after the retirement of Phraya Phanon. Although Pridi and some of the other liberal "Promoters" were not excluded from Phibun's first government, they began to become dismayed at his tendency towards military dictatorship and ultra-nationalism. In keeping with these themes, in 1941 Phibun led the country into a brief war with the French in Indochina for the purpose of regaining some of the territories which had been lost to France. The war was ended inconclusively due to intervention by the Japanese who foisted mediation on the two belligerents. Indochina, which was in the hands of the Vichy French and nominally an ally of the Axis powers, had no alternative but to accept Japanese efforts. As a result of the negotiations, the lands on the right bank of the Maekhong (Sayaboury province and the area around Campasak), as well as certain portions of Cambodia ceded to the French in the treaties of 1904 and 1907, were restored to Thailand.⁶

The war, and the irredentist atmosphere in which it was fought, had an impact on the people of the Northeast. The theme was struck by officials in Bangkok that "racially" the peoples in the territories claimed by Thailand belonged within the Thai kingdom.⁷

Northeasterners who heard such proclamations were thus made aware that Bangkok considered that Isan and Lao were ethnically inseparable. Since the battles took place along

the Lao-Northeast Thailand border, the Thai troops who fought the war were stationed in large numbers in the Northeast. Moreover, large numbers of Central Thai officials went to the Northeast, some perhaps for the first time, to inspect the war preparations and defenses. Through these actions even peasants along the Maekhong were made aware of the tenuous nature of the border drawn between them and the people of Laos. The Thai prosecution of the war underscored the fact that decisions about the future of the Northeast lay with the Bangkok government.

Shortly after the conclusion of this war the Japanese began their military advance into Southeast Asia. After offering token resistance the Phibun government agreed to become an ally of the Japanese. This decision led Pridi to resign from the government and to take up the post as Regent for the young King Ananda who was studying in Switzerland. With Pridi's departure the military under Phibun assumed almost total control of the government, although the Parliament was permitted to continue. Opposition to the government, although small at the outset, was now unified since Pridi had broken with Phibun. In Parliament followers of both Pridi and the more conservative Khuang under the leadership of several northeastern MP's joined in opposition to the military.

As the war progressed Pridi became the leader within Thailand of a secret Free Thai Movement which opposed both the alliance with Japan and Phibun's military government. This movement included many prominent Isan MP's. One important facet of the Free Thai activities was its connection with the anti-Japanese underground in Indochina. Although it is difficult to document, the events which transpired after the war suggest that certain of these Isan members of the Free Thai Movement must have established their close ties with the followers of Ho Chi Minh and Prince Suphanuwong during the war.

In July 1944 Phibun's government fell on the issue of transferring the capital from Bangkok to the hinterland province of Petchabun. Early in 1944 Phibun had begun to conscript labor to build a road to Petchabun with disastrous results. Coast has provided a good summary of the situation and the consequent parliamentary defeat of Phibun's government:

After a couple of months there was serious trouble with the labor force. Men were dying fast of Malaria, which was of a vicious variety in this unwholesome area. By July, it became

necessary to take strong measures and Phibun drafted a bill for the compulsory conscription of workers on this national project. He presented the bill personally to the Assembly, only to find that the overwhelming majority of the members were against him. This reverse came about largely because he had filled the Assembly with military members [as appointed members of Parliament] who had always supported him, and at this time of national emergency most of them were outside Bangkok. Led mainly by Nai Thong-Indr Buripat [Thong-In Phuriphath, MP from Ubon] and Nai Tieng Sirikhand [Tiang Sirikhan, MP from Sakon Nakhon], two staunch Pridi men, the Opposition blocked the Premier's scheme. (Coast 1953:26)

In August, Khuang Aphaiwong, who was later to become the main leader of the Democrat Party independent of both Phibun's and Pridi's factions, became Premier and immediately appointed a committee to investigate the "Phetchabun Scheme." The chairman of this committee, Fong Sitthitham (Ubon), was joined by several other Northerners including Camlong Daoryang (Mahasarakham), Liang Chaiyakan (Ubon) and Tiang Sirikhan (Sakon Nakhon).¹⁰

In the period between July 1944 and the coup d'état of November 8, 1947, although various people were in name Prime Minister,¹¹ Pridi held the real power. An opposition to Pridi did begin to appear among some of his former associates in the Free Thai Movement, however, after the 1946 elections many of the former Free Thai men who remained loyal to Pridi, including such prominent northeastern MP's as Camlong Daoryang, Thawin Udon, Thong-In Phuriphath, and Tiang Sirikhan, helped organize the Sahachip (Cooperative) Party.¹² Those who broke with Pridi, including Fong Sitthitham, Liang Chaiyakan, and Kwang Thongthawi among the northeastern representatives, joined with Nai Khuang Aphaiwong, Seni Pramot and his brother Khukrit in forming the Democrat Party. Although it is misleading to suggest for these two factions ideological labels which have currency in the West, there was definitely a difference in political philosophy between them. Pridi and his followers were anxious to have Thailand associate with, and perhaps even lead, the national forces which were beginning to appear in Indonesia, Burma, and Indochinae. They were also willing to consider introducing new, perhaps even radical, ideas, particularly in the economic sphere, to the unfinished task of modernizing the kingdom. The Democrats, on the other hand, tended to be more concerned with preserving the cultural continuity and

many traditional institutions of the kingdom. In consequence, the Democrats were less concerned with relationships with neighboring peoples and more cautious regarding plans for modernization. These two positions, in their various subsequent guises, have both held attractions for the populace of the Northeast as well as for the rest of the country. Both factions have, at least publicly, remained committed to parliamentary rule. Unfortunately, however, neither have been permitted sufficient time in office to develop effective means for implementing their ideas, for the military, with its alternative commitment to dictatorial or oligarchical rule, has repeatedly exerted itself to eliminate the progress made by the other two factions towards parliamentary rule.

However, for the brief three-year period just preceding and following the end of the Second World War, the members of the anti-military groups did rule the country. During this period, a number of northeastern representatives in the National Assembly rose to positions of major importance in the government. Camlong Daoryang (Mahasarakham) was made a cabinet member, acting for the Minister of Commerce and Industry, in the first Aphaiwong cabinet (1944-5), a Minister without Portfolio, and later Assistant Minister of Commerce in the Thamrong cabinet (1946-7). Liang Chaiyakan (Ubon) was a Minister without Portfolio in the second Aphaiwong cabinet (January-March 1946). Thong-In Phuriphat (Ubon) was first a Minister with Portfolio and then Deputy Minister of the Interior in the first Aphaiwong cabinet and a Minister of Industry and Minister of Communication under Thamrong. Tiang Sirikhan (Sakon Nakhon) was in the cabinet of Seni Pramot (September 1945-January 1946) and a Minister without Portfolio and later Assistant Minister of the Interior in the Thamrong government. Thawin Udon (Roi-Et) was made a Senator and in April 1947 was appointed Manager of the government-owned Thai Industrial Development Corporation.

The theme which dominated the first years of the postwar period was the attempt by the Thai government, under Pridi's guiding hand, to regain international acceptability in lieu of the low esteem in which Thailand had been held during the war for its alliance with Japan. In addition Pridi was also interested in seeing Thailand play a crucial role in the drama of resurgent nationalism which spread across Southeast Asia in the immediate postwar period.

Pridi had very definite ideas about the role that Thailand should play in Southeast Asian affairs. While maintaining

good official relations with the victorious Allies, particularly with the United States, Pridi also was ambitious for Thailand to become the leader of independent nations in this strategic area of Asia. He foresaw that nationalist forces in Burma, Indonesia, and Indochina would one day force the weakened colonial powers to recognize the futility of trying to rule these areas in the pre-war manner, and that it was only a matter of time until the powers were forced to grant them independence. Pridi believed that Thailand's long history of independence and political stability and its success in dealing with European powers made it a natural leader among these emergent nations. It was an ambitious vision, but Pridi was an extraordinary person who seemed to have unlimited faith in his ability to lead Thailand and Southeast Asia in the new postwar erae (Nuechterlein 1965:94)

To advance this objective Pridi allowed Bangkok to become a place in which representatives of the Indochinese independence movements could contact armament supplies and present their cases to the outside world.¹³ In May 1947 he also tried, with little success, to mediate the dispute between the French and the Viet Minh. While in Paris on this mission, he hit upon the idea of a Southeast Asian Union which would include Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam (cf. Coast 1953:38; Nuechterlein 1965:94-5). Although the French were unsympathetic to such an idea, Pridi persisted, and in September 1947 an organization designed to promote this end, the Southeast Asia League, was founded. The list of officers of the League is extremely interesting in that it reveals the connections between several of the important northeastern politicians and leaders of the independence movements in Indochina. The President (Tiang Sirikhan, MP from Sakon Nakhon) and the Public Relations Officer (Sen. Thawin Udorn, a former MP from Roi-Et) were both well-known Isan political leaders, while the Vice President (Tran Van Giau) and Treasurer (Le Hi) were important figures in the Viet Minh, and the General Secretary (Princee Suphanuwong) was to become the leader of the Pathet Lao.¹⁴

What the Southeast Asia League might have accomplished is purely speculative, however, for it only survived two months. While Pridi was pursuing his desires to make Thailand a significant force outside its borders, events within

the kingdom had greatly undermined his position. In June 1946 the young King Ananda died of a gunshot wound under mysterious circumstances. Rumors abounded that the King had been assassinated and that Pridi was in some way responsible.¹⁵ The inability of an investigating group to come up with definite conclusions as to the cause of death coupled with widespread corruption in the Thamrong government helped to discredit Pridi and to make possible the military coup of November 1947. Pridi, Thamrong, and some of their supporters (although, apparently no Northerners) fled the country and many of those who remained were arrested or went into hiding. Although the coup had been managed by the military with Phibun as at least its nominal sponsor, Khuang Aphaiwong was allowed to become Prime Minister once again. However, his actions were subject to the strict surveillance of the military authorities.

For the time being, thus, the semblance of parliamentary democracy was preserved. On January 29, 1948 new elections were held. However, few of Pridi's supporters stood for election since they had been dispersed or arrested after the coup. The election gave a resounding victory to the Democrats. This same pattern also appeared in the Northeast; among the 29 out of 34 representatives from the Northeast whose party identification I have been able to discover, fifteen were Democrats. Of the remaining fourteen, four were members of the pro-Pridi, Sahathai Party, seven were members of Liang Chaiyakan's nominally pro-Pridi Prachachon Party,¹⁶ two were independents, and only one was a member of the pro-Phibun Thammaphiphat Party. These results indicated that the Northeast, despite the re-emergence of military power within the central government, remained heavily committed to political leaders who supported parliamentary rule.

Although the Democrats had won a decisive majority, Khuang Aphaiwong was not allowed to consolidate his parliamentary gains. In April 1948 the military staged a coup de main against Khuang, and Phibun again returned to power.

The Democrat interlude had merely postponed temporarily the consolidation of power by Phibun. Even before he actually assumed power, however, the military and police under his control began to move against the major northeastern MP's and ex-cabinet officials who had supported Pridi. The charges and the ultimate actions taken against these men were extremely critical in shaping subsequent political attitudes in the Northeast. Initially, Pridi and all of his followers, including those from the Northeast, were charged with having conspired to subordinate Thai

national identity within a larger Communist-dominated South-east Asian union.

In order to justify the coup, the military produced stories of communist and republican plots, or the intended murder of the king, and of an armed rebellion that had been planned for November 30 [1947]. The purveyor of the more fantastic stories was Luang Kach, who claimed that Pridi had been about to establish a Siamese Republic as a cornerstone for a South East Asia Union; that radio orders had been intercepted and documents found bearing out these contentions; that agents were on their way to Switzerland to murder King Bhumipon; and that an arms cache, including many Russian weapons had been discovered at the house of Thong-Indr [Thong-In Phuriphat, MP from Ubon], one of Tamrong's Ministers--arms indubitably intended for the communist revolution. (Coast 1953:42)

However, as the possibility of arresting Pridi was thwarted by his exile abroad, the charges began to be focused more specifically on the Northeasterners. The main northeastern leaders of Pridi had been in hiding in Thailand, but they reappeared in middle and late 1948, and were almost immediately arrested. Tiang Sirikhan (Sakon Nakhon), Camlong Daoryang (Mahasarakham), Thong-In Phuriphat and his brother Thim (Ubon), and Thawin Udon (Roi-Et) along with another Pridi Minister from the Central Plains, Thongplao Chonlaphum (Nakhon Nayok) were charged with plotting a separatist movement in which the Northeast would be joined to Indochina in a Communist dominated Southeast Asian Union.¹⁷

[Tiang Sirikhan], himself a Laotian and a person of great prestige in the northeast, denied the pro-Communist charge while quite openly admitting his sympathy with the aim of forming some sort of South-East Asian Union, though not one that would infringe upon Siam's sovereignty. Many Laotians, while not wishing to cut themselves loose from Siam, felt that the administration of the northeast was too feebly controlled from Bangkok, and that greater local autonomy was essential for proper administration. (Coast 1953:50)

Phibun's government was spurred to action by an attempted counter-coup by Pridi-led forces in February 1949. In an aftermath to this attempt a number of "Free Thai" leaders were found dead of gunshot wounds in their homes. In March 1949 Thong-In, Camlong, and Thawin, along with Thongplaeo Chonlaphum, were re-arrested although they had just been released a short time before. Shortly after their arrest they were shot to death by the police "while attempting to escape."

The official story was that the four men were being transferred by bus to another prison, when suddenly a rescuing party of their friends fired on the bus, killing the prisoners and missing the escorting policemen. (Coast 1953:53)

This incident, known as the "kilo 11" incident because the four were shot at the road marker north of Bangkok, received widespread publicity at that time.¹⁸ In March through May, two other northeastern leaders, Thim Phuriphat and Tiang Sirikhan, were brought to trial on charges of separatism.¹⁹ However, the outcome of the trial was inconclusive, perhaps in consequence of the public outrage over the "kilo 11" incident, and both men were released. For Tiang Sirikhan, the respite was temporary. He stood in a by-election in Sakon Nakhon in April 1949, although he was under indictment at the time, won his seat back, and was again re-elected in 1952. In December of 1952, however, Bangkok newspapers reported that he had escaped to Burma to evade arrest in conjunction with a new plot by Communist conspirators (Bangkok Post, December 16 and 17, 1952; January 13, 1953). He never again appeared, and the popular belief, later corroborated in a court trial, was that he too had been assassinated under the direction of Phibun's lieutenant, Police-General Phao.

The elimination of these men had lasting repercussions in the Isan region. Northeasterners had taken pride in the accomplishments of local men who had risen to cabinet level. This pride was severely injured when these men were killed. Moreover they were killed not only because they had been followers of Pridi, but, more damaging, because they had been Northeasterners. The main charge against Camlong, Thong-In, Thawin, and Tiang was that they were involved in a plot to separate the Northeast from the rest of the Kingdom. The Northeast was thus accorded a political identity which heretofore it had not had.

In the subsequent period these four men became symbols of the growing sentiments shared by a large part of the northeastern populace that they were discriminated against as a whole by the Central Thai and the central government. The death of these prominent northeastern leaders was a major catalyst in the development of Isan regional political identity and purpose for it demonstrated most dramatically the attitudes of the central government towards those who were identified with Isan political aspirations. In addition, however, Northeasterners also began to feel that Central Thai political discrimination was but a symptom of more basic economic and cultural discrimination. In the next decade these feelings of economic, political and cultural discrimination were fired even more as a larger number of Northeasterners had increased contact with Central Thai.

V. EMERGENCE OF ISAN REGIONALISM

Although the "kilo 11" incident captured the attention of the northeastern public in the period just following the reappearance of military rule, the impact of the postwar expansion of the Thai economy, although less dramatic, was beginning to stimulate the development of northeastern regionalism in other ways. While Bangkok became a boom town and the Central Plains in general began to shift to a commercial economy, the Northeast remained tied to a subsistence economy. Difficulties restricting the enlargement of the cash sector of the rural economy motivated an increasing number of Northeasterners to seek temporary work in Bangkok and elsewhere outside the Isan region. Out of the inter-related phenomena of economic underdevelopment in the Northeast and temporary migration of Northeasterners to Bangkok grew a more widely held sense of Isan regional identity.

The inability of the northeastern region to respond as well as the Central Region to the new economic forces which appeared after the war stemmed primarily from the poor natural endowment of the region. Soil fertility, rainfall patterns, flooding, and population pressures on cultivatable land in the Northeast all compare unfavorably with the same features in the Central Region. For example, production figures for paddy show that whereas the average yield in the Central Plains was 227 kilograms per rai in 1950-51, the comparable figure for the Northeast was 145 kilograms per rai for the same years (Thailand, Ministry of Agriculture 1961:39).² However, such a comparison signified little to the average northeastern peasant so long as the country as a whole was geared primarily to subsistence agriculture and so long as he produced sufficient quantities of rice for the needs of his family.

In the immediate postwar period commercial rice production in the Central Plains expanded rapidly in order to meet the demands of neighboring countries whose economies had been severely damaged by the war and by subsequent revolution. In contrast little surplus rice could be produced in the Northeast and what was produced was not easily saleable since it was of the glutinous or "sticky" variety, the staple of the region, rather than white rice.

Poor resources and inadequate transportation connections inhibited entrance of many northeastern farmers into other forms of commercial farm production.³ By the early 1950's a marked discrepancy in cash income between the Northeast and the Central Plains was apparent not only to the outside observer but also to the Northeasterners themselves. In 1954, for example, average annual cash income per farm family in the Northeast was only 954 baht⁴ as compared with 2,888 baht in the Central Plains. Moreover, the cash income of the northeastern farm family was less than that of farm families in any other part of Thailand (Thailand, Ministry of Agriculture 1955:26).

While the Northeast remained relatively untouched by the new economic expansion, Bangkok was developing rapidly. In previous periods of expansion in Bangkok immigrant Chinese had comprised most of the unskilled labor force and as one group of immigrants rose in status, a new group of immigrants arrived to take the positions at the lowest socio-economic rung of the urban ladder. However, after 1949 mass immigration of Chinese into Thailand ended following the imposition of quotas of 200 immigrants from any one country per year (Skinner 1957:117-8). The demands of a rapidly expanding Bangkok coming at a time when a major source of labor was shut off created a vacuum in the urban labor force. This vacuum was filled by the in-migration of people indigenous to Thailand into Bangkok at a minimum rate of 37,800 persons annually between 1947 and 1954.⁵

Among those who poured into Bangkok were large numbers of northeastern peasants in quest of wage-labor in order to supplement the subsistence endeavors of their families (cf. Textor 1961:15-16). Although Northeasterners were by no means the only immigrants to Bangkok, the place of the Isan peasants in the Thai capital was unique. For one thing, most of the migration of Isan villagers to Bangkok was (and is) "temporary." That is, migrants come to Bangkok only seasonally, between harvest and planting times, or, at most, spend only a few years in Bangkok before returning to settle permanently in their home villages (Textor 1961:11; Keyes 1966a:12 *et passim*). Secondly, most rural migrants are young, unattached (or temporarily separated) males between the ages of 20 and 29.⁶ Finally, most of the peasant migrants enter the unskilled labor force as pedicab drivers (until a ban on pedicabs was promulgated in 1960), construction workers, or workers in various Chinese-operated mills and factories.

How many northeastern villagers have participated in this practice of temporary migration to Bangkok is unknown.

However, enough evidence exists to suggest that a sizeable percentage of the men from all parts of the region who came of age in the postwar period have been involved. In the village of Ban Nong Tun in Mahasarakham, in which I carried out field work, for example, 49 per cent of the men twenty years of age and over or 67 per cent of the men between 30 and 39 had worked in Bangkok (only one woman had ever worked in the Thai capital).^d

In Bangkok the northeastern migrants found themselves considered inferior by urban Thai. Not only were they employed in lowly occupations, but they also discovered that Bangkok Thai thought of them as unsophisticated and uncultured provincials (cf. Textor 1961:17, 24-5). Faced with such attitudes Northeasterners tended to congregate in Bangkok, "drawn...by a common sub-culture, dialect, taste for food and music, etc."^e (Textor 1961:22). In Bangkok the northeastern sector of the labor force emerged as a relatively distinctive lower-class whose organization and desires were utilized to advantage by Isan MP's.

There is, in fact, considerable evidence that a Thai lower class is emerging [in Bangkok] with common interests and some class consciousness. Low in possession of most values important in Bangkok society, the class is primarily concerned with basic well-being, i.e., the health and safety of the organism. Some elements within the class, pedicab drivers, for instance, are formally organized for the attainment of group interests, while others--domestic servants and market gardeners for example--are informally organized. The class has been wooed by some Thai politicians in hopes of support at the polls. The fact that a large proportion of this class consists of recent immigrants from up-country, especially Northeast Siam, provides a natural basis for some working arrangement with Assemblymen representing the [provinces] in question. (Skinner 1957:309)

Textor has suggested that the northeastern pedicab drivers, one of the most important groups among the Isan migrants in Bangkok, were more politically aware than non-northeastern laborers:

The great majority of [northeastern] drivers have cast ballots for members of

Parliament in their native province; perhaps well over half of the drivers can accurately supply the name of one or more of their home province's representatives in Parliament....The degree of interest in parliamentary politics is probably greater than that found among other working people, in Bangkok or elsewhere in Thailand. (Textor 1961:44)

From his experiences in Bangkok the returned migrant carried home with him feelings of class and ethnic discrimination directed towards him as a Northerner by Central Thai inhabitants of Bangkok and an enhanced awareness of the common culture and problems which all Northerners share. In brief, the pattern of increasing temporary migration of northeastern villagers to Bangkok beginning in the postwar period greatly spurred the development of "we-they" attitudes among Northerners. Moreover, the "we" was beginning to assume a more regional character.

During Phibun's second period in power between 1947 and 1957, many representatives from the Isan area played upon a growing sense of regionalism to put pressure on the central government to direct more attention towards the Northeast. The objective which these MP's promoted on behalf of their regional constituency was the reduction or elimination of alleged discrimination of the national government towards the Northeast. These representatives claimed that there was ample evidence that the central government ignored, and even suppressed (e.g., the "kilo 11" incident and the disappearance of Tiang Sirikhan) Isan political leadership and over-emphasized bureaucratic centralization to the detriment of the northeastern region. They also claimed that the government was not doing enough to stimulate development in the Northeast so that the region could attain the same economic level as the rest of the country. Finally, they maintained that the central government, and the Central Thai in general, treated Northerners as cultural or class inferiors. If ever the Isan MP's in Bangkok needed to "prove" their points, they could call public meetings of the Northerners working in the city who were very responsive to "exposing" the discrimination of the central government towards the Isan people.⁸

In the parliamentary debates of the first years after Phibun's return to power a number of northeastern MP's continually raised the charge of economic discrimination of the government against the Northeast. In July 1949, for example, Bunpheng Phrommankhun, a Prachachon deputy from Sisaket, attacked the government for its economic neglect of the

Northeast. In the same month several Isan MP's raised an issue which had found its way into earlier debates - namely, government discrimination against northeastern rice millers in the international marketing of rice.⁹ In December 1950 Liang Chaiyakan (Ubon) organized a rally of Northeasterners in Bangkok at which he planned to announce government appropriations for irrigation works in northeastern provinces. However, several other northeastern representatives, including Lieutenant Charabut Ryangsuwan (Independent, Khonkaen), and Bunkhum Chamsisuriyawong (Independent, Udorn), took the opportunity of the rally to protest publicly how little the government really was doing for the Northeast.

Although the theme of economic discrimination began to be important at this time, feelings of political discrimination also continued to run high. In the parliamentary debate on a new constitution in January 1949 several northeastern MP's spoke out strongly against the constitution, and one group, led by Chyn Rawiwan (Sahathai, Nongkhai) attacked the "indivisibility of the kingdom" clause on the grounds that it was potentially injurious to the rights of Northeasterners. In December 1949 six MP's (including four from the Northeast) rather quixotically proposed that Thailand be divided into six autonomous regions.¹⁰ Opposition of northeastern MP's to the military government appeared again in November 1950 when a large number of northeastern MP's (including all of the Democrats and several followers of Pridi) supported a Democrat-sponsored petition for a general parliamentary debate on government policy. In December 1950 at the rally of Northeasterners in Bangkok, Nat Ngoenthap (Independent, Mahasarakham) delivered a speech in which he stated that although the three northeastern MP's who had been killed in the "kilo 11" incident were gone, he and others would continue to fight for the cause of the Northeast as they had done (Thompson and Adloff 1945-50).

The public positions of the Isan MP's together with the majority of opposition Democrats in the Parliament were an embarrassment to Phibun. It is somewhat surprising that he did not eliminate the Parliament altogether, particularly after attempted coups in 1949 and 1951 proved that opposition to him was not without its strength. However, his control of the country through the military must have appeared sufficiently sure to convince him that he could permit the window dressing of parliamentary rule.

However, he did call new elections in February 1952 with the expressed hope that they would provide him with a popular mandate. Nationally, the results were favorable for Phibun, for the pro-government Farm Labor (Kasikammakon)

Party led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs won approximately 50 of the 123 seats. To these were added the 27 seats of the Prachachon Party, taken into the Phibun camp by its leader, Liang Chaiyakan (Bangkok Post, May 6, 1952).

Comparison of the 1952 election results (The Siam Directory 1955:4-6) with past and subsequent elections suggests that those elected in 1952 might be grouped as followsa

Pro-Phibun	11
Pro-Pridi or Leftist	11
Democrat	3
Independent	7
Unknown	10

It would appear that the Northeast electorate was still reluctant to give a military-led government a majority even at a time when the military was firmly ensconced in power and had won a parliamentary majority in the rest of the Kingdom. Moreover, the leadership of the non-Democrat opposition of the new parliament seemed to have come from the Northeastern MP's. Most influential, until his "disappearance" later in 1952, was Tiang Sirikhan from Sakon Nakhon. In addition, Thep Chotinuchit from Sisaket, who was to become a major figure in the "new left" revival of 1955-58, emerged as an important opposition leader.¹¹ The strength of the Isan-led opposition was apparent in the 35 votes, out of 241 cast by MP's of both appointed and elected categories, which Thep received in the election for the president of the Assembly (Bangkok Post, March 21, 1952).¹²

Although political parties were banned shortly after the opening of the Assembly, an opposition continued to flourish under the leadership of Thep and another northeastern deputy, Klaeo Noraphat of Khonkaen (Darling 1965:124-126). In addition to the regional objectives which the northeastern component of this opposition advocated during the next three years, it also pressed continually for a loosening of the military's grip on the government. Further, it began to advocate a neutralist foreign policy in contrast to the pro-American policy of the Phibun government. Mainly in reaction to the neutralist position of the opposition, the government accused its leadership of subverting national interests (Bangkok Post, January 23, 1954; Darling 1965:124-126). General Phao, Phibun's head of the police, was more specific. He accused Thep and his followers of being connected with the Viet Minh (Bangkok Post, January 23, 1954). Such accusations attest to the fact that the belief was yet alive among some members of the ruling elite that the opposition leaders from the Isan region were allied with the Viet

Minh, Pathet Lao, and Red Chinese leadership in a Communist conspiracy

Haunted, perhaps, by the ghosts of the earlier northeastern leaders who had been eliminated because of similar fears, Phibun held in check those members of his government who would have liked to remove the more vocal of the present opposition leadership from the Isan region. Moreover, in 1955 Phibun decided to lead the country once again on the road to the development of "democracy." He legalized the establishment of political parties and decreed that an election would be held shortly for a new parliament. Three recognizable political groupings then began to emerge: the pro-government Seri Manangkhasila and associated parties led by Phibun himself; the old Democrat Party led by Khuang Aphaiwong; and a group of small parties which represented various shadings of what Wilson has called Thailand's "new left" (Wilson 1959). The two most important of these "leftist" parties, the Economist (Setthakon) and the Free Democratic (Seri Prachathipatai) were founded by MP's from the Northeast.

The leader of the pro-government Seri Manangkhasila Party in the Northeast was Liang Chaiyakan (Ubon) who had spent more time in the Assembly than any other Northerner and had moved through all political groupings (Democrat, pro-Pridi, and pro-Phibun) at various points in his career. Almost as long-tenured, but politically more consistent, was the northeastern head of the Democrat Party, Nai Fong Sitthitham, also from Ubon. The leaders of the Economist Party, Thep Chotinuchit (Sisaket) and Thim Phuriphat (Ubon) had stirred considerable interest and received much publicity for making a trip to Communist China in 1956 without government sanction. On their return they had been arrested, but were released shortly thereafter. However, although this act had made them well-known in Bangkok circles, both Thep and Thim gave more emphasis to internal economic problems than to foreign policy in their attempt to win support for the Economist Party. The Free Democratic Party, the other major leftist party, was founded by Saing Marangkun from Buriram. A somewhat more colorful (and more doctrinaire) leftist party which, however, was more restricted in appeal, was the Hyde Park Movement led by Thawisak Triphli from Khonkaen.

There were minor leftist parties and some limited support for the northeastern-led leftist groups outside the Isan region, but for the most part the whole leftist movement was predominantly a northeastern product. For example, the Free Democratic Party put up 45 candidates in

the February 1957 elections, of which 29 were from the Northeast (Bangkok Post, January 7, 1957). However, of the eleven seats this party captured, all were from the Northeast. As can be seen from Table I, this pattern was repeated for other leftist parties.

Following the February election the government was accused of rigging election results, students demonstrated against Phibun, Sarit Thanarat, the head of the army, disassociated himself from the government, and the position of Phibun and his lieutenant, Police-General Phao, deteriorated. In September General Sarit Thanarat led a military coup d'état which forced Phibun and Phao into exile. However, Sarit himself did not assume immediate control of the government. Ill health forced him to leave the country and to seek medical treatment in the United States and England. From September 1957 until October 1958, two of Sarit's associates, Phot Sarasin (September 1957-January 1958) and Thanom Kitthikachon (January-October 1958), served as Prime Ministers. During this period considerable political freedom existed in the country.

In December 1957 the kingdom was given the opportunity to express itself once again at the polls, as the caretaker government claimed it was necessary to provide "clean" elections to offset alleged misconduct by Phibun and his cohorts. The December elections indicated, on the surface at least, not only a marked decline in electoral support for followers of Phibun (as might be expected), but also a reduction in the number of leftist MP's (see Table II). However, contrary to the interpretations of some observers (Wilson 1959:98; Darling 1965:183) that the December elections represented a major drop in the popular appeal of the leftists, in fact, in the Northeast where such sentiments were to be found, the new election really did not reveal such a shift. For one thing, three candidates elected as leftists in February, including Thim Phuriphat (Ubon), were elected in December on the pro-Sarit Sahaphum ticket. In addition, at least four other Sahaphum deputies elected from the Northeast (Kiat Nakkhaphong, Mahasarakham; Prathip Sirikhan, Sakon Nakhon; Khroong Chandawong, Sakon Nakhon; and Ora-in Phuriphat, Ubon) also espoused political objectives similar to those of the leftists. This affiliation of leftist-leaning representatives with the Sahaphum or pro-Sarit party reflected the belief held in some circles at the time of the election that the Sahaphum party had Socialist inclinations. To these "disguised leftists" must be added at least three "Independent" MP's (Chun Rawiwan, Nongkhai; Piyang Wansi, Surin; and Suthi Phuwaphan, Surin) who ran on much the same platform as the leftists.¹³ In short, thus, northeastern support for candidates designated loosely as leftist remained relatively

TABLE I: RESULTS OF FEBRUARY 1957 ELECTION FOR
WHOLE KINGDOM AND NORTHEASTERN REGION*

Party Affiliation	No. Seats Nationally	No. Seats Northeast
I. PRO-PHIBUN		
Seri Managkhasila	85	15
Thammathiphat	10	2
Total Pro-Phibun	95	17
II. DEMOCRAT	28	10
III. LEFTIST		
Economist (Setthakon)	8	8
Free Democratic (Seri Prachathipatai)	11	11
Hyde Park Movement	2	1
Total Leftist	21	20
IV. OTHER		
Nationalist	3	0
V. INDEPENDENT	13	6
TOTAL	160	53

* SOURCES: The Siam Directory (1957:1-6) and Darling
(1965:157).

TABLE II: RESULTS OF DECEMBER 1957 ELECTIONS FOR
WHOLE KINGDOM AND NORTHEASTERN REGION*

Party Affiliation	No. Seats Nationally	No. Seats Northeast
I. PRO-PHIBUN		
Seri Manangkhasila	4	0
II. PRO-SARIT		
Sahaphum	45	20
III. DEMOCRAT	39	3
IV. LEFTIST		
Economist (Setthakon)	6	5
Free Democratic (Seri Prachathipatai)	5	5
Hyde Park Movement	1	1
Total Leftist	12	11
V. OTHER		
Nationalist	1	0
Issara	1	1
Total Other	2	1
VI. INDEPENDENT	58	18
TOTAL	160	53

* SOURCES: Bangkok Post, December 17, 18, 19, 1957 and Thailand, Institute of Public Administration, Thammasat University (1958:45-51).

strong in the December elections. Furthermore, in both the 1957 elections, leftist appeal was almost exclusively restricted to the Isan region and in that region at least one-third of the elected representatives could be said to espouse the rather diffuse ideals of the "new left."

What explained the popularity of the leftist candidates in the Northeast as contrasted with the rest of the country? The day before the February 1957 election the Bangkok Post published the following evaluation:

Political circles noted that it is a peculiarity of the northeast to prefer any opposition candidate to a government one, and opposition candidates have stressed in publicity posters that they are in opposition.

The observers also noted that the Seri Manangkhasila Party candidates in the northeast are further handicapped through non-cooperation and through actual dissension...

The Sethakorn (Economist) Party is reportedly leading in many of the northeastern provinces. The party leader, Nai Thep Jotincuchit, is considered at present, the most popular candidate in [Sisaket] while the deputy leader, Nai Tim Buripat, is one of the most popular in [Ubon]. Both went to Communist China last year and were arrested on their return, and both had stirred up some interest regarding trade with Communist China.

However, according to [Sisaket] Governor Kitthi Yothakari and [Ubon] Governor Prasong Issarabhakdi, the people of these provinces are not much interested in international politics, being more concerned with their own living conditions and their own means of livelihood.

Nai Prasong reported that 'Poujadists' have appeared on the scene in [Ubon]. He said that some opposition candidates are promising the people that if they are elected to the government, they would abolish taxes. (Bangkok Post, February 25, 1957)

The governors were undoubtedly correct in their assessment that the international concerns of the leftist politicians probably had very little appeal for the relatively unsophisticated northeastern peasantry. But

pointing to the villagers' preoccupation with their own means of livelihood does not lead us much further in understanding why leftist candidates emerged and succeeded primarily in the Northeast. I would suggest that leftist candidates were generally more successful than many other Isan candidates in exploiting the regional sentiments which had reached a peak in the Northeast in 1957.

In some ways the "leftist" parties could be equated with "regional" parties. Whereas the leftist candidates traced their ideological heritage to the "martyred" northeastern leaders and were associated with a leadership which was almost exclusively from the northeastern region, the non-leftists were much more tied to political leaders who were Central Thai. Wilson has questioned whether the "leftist" identification of some northeastern candidates was not secondary to a more basic regional oppositionism:

Political figures from the northeast seem to stand or fall on the vigor [with] which they oppose the government. Such opposition has often taken the form of more or less radical "leftist" ideology, although it has as often been pure oppositionism. The consistent ingredient has always been opposition, and it may be assumed that such an attitude is necessary for success in politics in the northeast. This situation has earned the region a reputation for a breeding radical politicians. Whether or not such a reputation is deserved is difficult to say. (Wilson 1959:81)

Wilson's analysis notwithstanding, it does appear that the radical solutions to the economic problems of the Northeast proposed by many of the leftist candidates also fell on sympathetic ears. Returned migrants who had seen the contrast between the standard of living in Bangkok and in their home villages and who had developed new expectations would have been especially receptive to promises of candidates to work for the raising of economic standards in the Isan countryside. However, the ability to play upon an emerging regionalism was not associated exclusively with the leftists. Many non-leftist candidates who had already attained some prominence in Bangkok were preferred by the northeastern electorate over leftist candidates who, however appealing their campaign promises might have been, were relatively unknown. Even so important an apologist for the Phibun government as Liang Chaiyakan (Ubon) was re-elected by a large majority in both the February and December 1957 elections.¹⁴ It should be noted that although a member of Phibun's party

(and at one time a member of Phibun's government), Liang had been a major advocate of government action for economic improvement of the Northeast.

The Northeastern populace returned representatives whom they believed would best represent their interests in the national forum. Often the elected MP's were "leftists" who promised to further the regional interests of Isan. But just as often the chosen deputy was seen by the electorate as a man who had some influence in ruling circles in Bangkok and could, thus, act as an advocate for his northeastern constituency. It is significant that 66 per cent of the northeastern representatives elected in December 1957 had been elected in either the 1952 or February 1957 elections.¹⁵

During 1958, although the northeastern MP's of the various parties differed in their views on such non-regional matters as attitudes towards Pridi, the Anti-Communist Act, neutralist versus pro-Western foreign policy, or relations with Communist China, there seemed to be consensus among all in seeking "cooperation to bring about improvements of conditions in the northeast" (Bangkok Post, February 27, 1958). In April 1958 all of the northeastern MP's who were in the pro-government party presented an "ultimatum" to the government. The deputies presented a set of four demands which they asked to be acted upon within fifteen days or else they would leave the party and form a separate Northeast Party, presumably together with leftist Isan representatives who had been making overtures to all northeastern MP's about the possibility of forming an Isan Party. The demands were as follows:

1. An urgent short-term project for improving conditions in the northeast should be started in order to relieve suffering and hunger there as soon as possible.
2. The Government should also draw up a longer term project "like the Yankee Hydro Electric Project, through foreign loans as in the central and southern projects."
3. The Government should establish heavy industries in the northeast "which has plenty of raw materials."
4. The Government should increase educational facilities in the northeast.
(Bangkok Post, April 11, 1958)

The report did not mention how the northeastern deputies thought that these proposals could be met within 15 days, and subsequent reports indicated that no representative resigned from the party. However, the idea of forming a Northeastern Party which would advocate immediate and radical solutions to the economic problems of the Isan region remained. In May twenty-one northeastern MP's from 12 out of the 15 Isan provinces and representing leftist, pro-government, and independent parties, held a meeting in which it was "approved in principle...that 'only through socialism can conditions in the northeast be improved'" (Bangkok Post, May 2, 1958).¹⁶

The growing regional loyalties of a majority of the representatives from the Isan region caused concern among the leadership of the Thai government. But far more worrisome to the government were the attitudes adopted by the leftist MP's from the Northeast on international issues. The leftist parties were opposed to Thailand's membership in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization and the Asian People's Anti-Communist League, to the receiving of American aid which they alleged had "strings" attached, and to a pro-Western foreign policy. Officials in the government close to General Sarit viewed the pressures, exerted primarily by northeastern representatives, for "socialistic" programs to improve the economic position of the Northeast, for greater toleration of leftist political action within the country, and for a neutral foreign policy with grave apprehension. They were beginning to feel that if given free reign the activities of the northeastern MP's could seriously threaten the security of Thailand. There was a growing awareness among these government leaders of the need to deal with what they considered a "northeastern problem."

After Sarit inaugurated a new period of military rule in late 1958 this "problem" and its "solutions" were to become a major preoccupation of the Thai government.

VI. THE "NORTHEAST PROBLEM" AND THAILAND'S QUEST FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

The heady political atmosphere which obtained in Thailand between September 1957 and October 1958, reminiscent in many ways of the 1956-7 period, was made possible by the government's lack of clarity as to the political direction it would take. Although few leading members of the government, such as Thanom Kitthikachon and Police-General Praphat Charusatian, were in sympathy with those who desired to see Thailand move towards the left, Sarit's absence abroad made them cautious about moving against what they must have felt was a growing popular movement. To some extent the Thanom government even attempted to accommodate the interests of the "new left." Thim Phuriphat (Ubon), for example, who had been a major leftist leader before the December 1957 elections was included in the cabinet. In June 1958 Thanom felt it necessary to publicly state that the government was working for "mild socialism" (Bangkok Post, June 18, 1958). But such accommodation did not extend to opening the political scene to all comers, for the National Socialist (the pro-government party) MP's voted in June, 40 to 11, to keep the Anti-Communist Act (Bangkok Post, June 4, 1958).¹

By mid-1958 the government's position was becoming shaky as it ran into serious economic troubles. The opposition, including both Democrats and leftists, began to call for a "General Debate." In addition the government party was faced with insubordination of some of its own members who made or planned trips, along with opposition MP's, to Russia and Communist China.² Such was the state of affairs when Sarit suddenly reappeared on the scene. He only stayed in Bangkok for a short time, but his sentiments soon became known and felt. The two major Isan representatives in the cabinet, Thim Phuriphat and Ari Tanwetchakun (Khorat), were forced to resign because of their occasional outspoken opposition to some government policies. Sarit openly voiced his disapproval of National Socialist members who had gone on visits to Russia or China, and he asked that the name of the party no longer be translated in English as "National Socialist" because it was not socialistic. Then he left for more treatment in England. In October 1958 he suddenly appeared again, and on the

21st the Revolutionary Group, under his direction, took over the government and declared martial law. In the aftermath of this coup many leftwing northeastern MP's as well as pro-government MP's who had travelled to Russia or China were arrested or went into exile.³ It is noteworthy that at least two Isan deputies who went into exile, Thim Phuri-phat (Ubon, National Socialist) and Saing Marangkun (Buriram, Free Democrat), were reported to have found asylum in Pathet Lao territory.

Sarit's coup spelled the return of military dictatorship to Thailand. In fact, with the exception of the brief periods 1944-47 and 1957-58, the control of the military has been a sine qua non for holding the reins of the Thai government since at least 1938. With the shift back to a military dictatorship the National Assembly was no longer an outlet for expressions of Isan regionalism since it no longer existed. The army has itself absorbed many upwardly mobile Northeasterners, although information on the number is unavailable.⁴ The most notable example of an ex-Northeasterner who did well in the army is Sarit himself. Sarit, however, can only be counted as half-Isan. Although his father was a district officer in Nakhon Phanom province and his step-brother, Sanguan Chanthasakha, was an MP (1957-58) from, and later governor of, Nakhon Phanom, Sarit had all of his education in Bangkok and for the most part was Bangkok-oriented. In a sense Sarit's case is typical of ex-Northeasterners who enter the army for, in contrast to the National Assembly, the military at the officer level makes Thai out of those who were not Thai originally. Sarit did occasionally recall his regional past in order to generate some popular support for his government, but Sarit aside, no other high-ranking officers, if they exist, have been conspicuous in emphasizing their Isan ties.

During Sarit's premiership, terminated by his death in December 1963, the "northeastern problem" was redefined in Thai ruling circles from having been one of minor provincial complaints to one of potential danger to the continued existence of the government and of Thailand itself. This shift in definition was closely related to growing official fears concerning the renewed civil war in Vietnam and Laos. The government felt that the Northeast had several characteristics which might make it the Achilles heel in Thailand's attempt to maintain its own security if Communism were to succeed in South Vietnam and Laos. The Thai leadership began to fear that economic underdevelopment in the northeastern region might make it fertile ground in which seeds of insurrection could grow. Moreover, Isan regionalism might develop into an open Isan separatist movement which would look to North Vietnam, Communist China, and the Pathet

Lao for support. Finally, the government felt that there was sufficient evidence to suggest that some of the north-eastern political leadership was already involved in a Communist conspiracy to overthrow the pro-Western government of Thailand.

From the 1954 Geneva Conference onwards Thailand has been fearful that the power obtained by the Viet Minh in North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao or Neo Lao Hak Sat Party in Laos might be difficult to contain. The Pathet Lao had been included in the new government of Laos in 1954, but in 1958 they were excluded when Phoui Sannikhone replaced Souvanna Phoumma as Prime Minister. The shift to the right in the Lao government was viewed with great pleasure by Sarit. However, on August 5, 1960 Colonel (later General) Kong Le staged a coup d'état in Vientiane and called upon Souvanna Phoumma to return to head a government of neutrality. In December 1960 Lao rightist forces attacked Vientiane and put the neutralists to rout. The neutralists then joined with the Pathet Lao forces on the Plain of Jars. From this point on the combined Pathet Lao-neutralist forces began to advance at the expense of the rightists. Although a cease-fire was negotiated in May of 1961, the Pathet Lao did not stop their advance. This advance was viewed with grave concern in both Bangkok and Washington. The fall of Nam Tha in Northern Laos in May of 1962 almost brought Thai and/or American troops into action.

While the Pathet Lao-neutralist forces advanced militarily, representatives of the three factions and members of the Geneva conference were meeting in an attempt to forge some sort of agreement. Finally in July 1962 a Declaration and Protocol on the Neutrality of Laos was signed by all parties in Geneva. This declaration and the concomitant agreement of the three Laotian factions led to the formation of a "troika" government including Souvanna Phoumma as Prime Minister, Prince Souphannuwong of the Pathet Lao and General Phoumi Nosavan, the right-wing leader, as deputy Prime Ministers.

The period from the fall of the rightist government in August 1960 to the emergence of the troika government in July of 1962 was one in which Bangkok seriously considered moving into Laos, either under the SEATO banner or on their own, in order to keep Laos as a buffer state between itself and North Vietnam. Thailand was a reluctant signer of the Geneva Declaration and Protocol regarding Laos and viewed with grave misgivings the inclusion of both neutralists and Communists in the new government. It was felt that given but a few months, the whole of Laos would be under Communist control. As Sarit said:

As for Laos being neutral, it would be fine if it were true. But a country that is able to be neutral must be a country that is not weak. It must be economically strong and capable of helping itself as Switzerland is. As for Laos, it cannot stand on its own feet. (Saphāda San, Bangkok, October 1, 1960; English translation from Wilson 1961:15)

The growing crisis in Southeast Asia was compounded by increased Viet Cong pressure in South Vietnam beginning in the later part of 1960. From 1961 until Diem's death in November 1963 the Viet Cong was able to capitalize on the growing resentment towards the Diem regime which existed in many sectors of the populace and on the attendant deterioration of governmental authority in the Vietnamese countryside. As the Viet Cong received their supplies primarily from North Vietnam, both they and the North Vietnamese became even more eager to have the Pathet Lao control eastern Laos in order to safeguard their paths of communication (the so-called Ho Chi Minh trail) which passed along the Annamite mountains dividing Laos and Vietnam. The stakes in Laos thus increased in direct relation to the increase of the conflict in South Vietnam.

Political opposition which persisted in the Thai Northeast was seen by the Thai government in the context of the growing crises in Vietnam and Laos. It was believed that the success of the Viet Cong and/or Pathet Lao would bring hostile and expansionistic governments to power near the borders of Thailand. If some of the regional opposition in the Isan region was sympathetic to or controlled by these powers, then Thailand itself would be threatened by internal insurrection or external attack supported by a "fifth column" in the exposed Northeast. All northeastern political dissent, since it was not permitted to be channeled within legitimate forums, was viewed by the Thai government as part of a larger Communist-led conspiracy to overthrow the pro-Western government of Thailand. Consequently, such dissent must, in the government's belief, be ferreted out and eliminated.⁵

In 1961 the government twice made raids which resulted in numerous arrests of alleged Communist agents and supporters in several northeastern towns. The biggest of these raids occurred in December of 1961 when over a hundred suspects were arrested in Sakon Nakhon and Udon. The government claimed that those arrested "are recruiters of villagers to the cause of Communist separatists who want to effect secession of the Northeast from the rest of the Kingdom"

(Bangkok Post, December 15, 1961). The government also claimed that these arrests were a follow-up to the arrest of a former pro-government MP from Sakon Nakhon, Krong Chanthawong, who had earlier been executed as a Communist ringleader. Also in the December raid the police engaged in the first "battle" between government forces and indigenous "Communists" in Nakhon Phanom province. Although stressing that those captured were themselves Northeasterners, the government alleged that the suspects had been trained by and were under orders from the Pathet Lao. Fears of a tie-in between a suspected northeastern "liberation" movement and the Pathet Lao were suggested by the formation of a "Thai Exiles Group" comprising some former MP's from the Northeast in Xieng Khouang, Laos. This group was plotting, so one reporter claimed, "to carve the Northeast out of Thailand and join it to Laos" (Theh Chongkhadij, Bangkok Post, March 5, 1962).⁶

The Thai government under Thanom Kitthikachon, who became Prime Minister after Sarit's death in December 1963, has continued to suppress Isan political dissent. Although Thanom has promised a new constitution, a new act which would permit political parties once again, and a new election since 1964, the country remains under military rule. The government feels that the increasing number of "incidents" in the Northeast, the creation of an organization called alternatively the Thailand Independence Movement or the Thailand Patriotic Front (cf. Close 1965) and formed with the support of Peking and Hanoi⁷ and the continued gravity of the war in Vietnam preclude any liberalization of the political system. Instead, the governments of both Sarit and Thanom have offered as solutions to the "northeastern problem" military or police responses to appearance of organized political opposition in the region, accelerated programs in economic development, and intensified "Thai-ification" of the Isan populace.

The Thai government has increased the number of troops it has in the Northeast and has attempted to strengthen its police forces in order to handle any "insurrectionist" activity which might occur. At the same time the build-up of Thai forces in the Northeast is also seen as a protection against a potential external military threat emanating from or through Laos. Concomitant with the Thai build-up has been the opening of several American air bases at Khorat, Udorn, Ubon, and Nakhon Phanom (see Map II). Theoretically these bases exist as part of a joint Thai-U.S. defense effort, but in fact many of the air missions flown over North Vietnam and Laos originate from them. These bases have raised the stakes in the Northeast for Thailand is open to the charge that it is actively involved in the war

effort against the Viet Cong and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In consequence, the North Vietnamese and the Pathet Lao would like to stimulate, if they have not already done so, the increase of "insurrectionist" activity in the Northeast in order to threaten the security of the bases and to cause Thailand to back away from its support of the Vietnamese war. As Peter Braestrup has written recently in the New York Times:

During the past month, clashes between Communist guerrillas and Thai security forces in border areas along the Mekong River have become more frequent and bloodier. The change, United States sources believe, is attributed both to more aggressive counter-measures and to Communist efforts to spread terrorism. North Vietnam and Communist China, it is believed, have ordered the 18-month old Thailand United Patriotic Front to launch a major effort now--for tactical reasons tied to Vietnamese war.

Although opinions vary, some specialists believe that the current terrorist activity is aimed primarily at forcing Bangkok to limit its support for the United States effort in Vietnam. It is also believed Hanoi and Peking want to discourage Thailand from providing bases for any ground thrust aimed at cutting the vital Ho Chi Minh trail through neighboring Laos. United States aircraft are already attacking the trail as well as North Vietnam from Thai bases. (New York Times, June 26, 1966)

The nature and extent of Communist-supported insurrection in the Northeast has yet to be determined, but to date it remains small. However, the Thai government's attitude towards any political opposition in the Northeast has been to treat it as insurrection activity. No provision exists for the expression of legitimate regional grievances, and desires cannot be expressed through any existing group of political representatives sanctioned by the central government.

Despite the lack of political channels for communication from the Isan populace to the central government, the Government has recognized the need to bring about relatively rapid economic development in the Northeast lest the economic aspects of the "northeastern problem" continue to be a major cause of discontent in the Isan countryside. The first major governmental program for the development of the North-

east came in 1961 when the government promulgated a five-year plan for the development of the region with the following objectives:

1. To improve water control and supply.
2. To improve means of transport and communication.
3. To assist villages in increasing production and marketing.
4. To provide power for regional industrial development and (later) rural electrification.
5. To encourage private industrial and commercial development in the region.
6. To promote community development, educational facilities, and public health programs at the local level.

(Thailand, Committee on Development of the Northeast, 1961:1-2).

This plan, although by no means the first effort of the government of Thailand to deal with the problems of the Northeast, was the first government-sponsored plan designed specifically for the improvement of the region not subsumed in some larger national scheme. When the plan was first made public, the government announced that it would be spending about \$300,000,000 on its implementation over the next five years (1962-1966). The money to finance such a large undertaking was to come, in great part, from U.S. aid grants (New York Times, April 14, 1962).

Since the plan was first published in 1961 a Northeastern Committee in the National Economic Development Board, Prime Minister's Office, has been charged with supervising, coordinating, or carrying out research in the Isan region in order to bring the original proposals more in line with the existing realities.⁸ The implementation of the program, however, has been divided between a large number of agencies, departments and ministries with overall coordination supplied theoretically by the Ministry of National Development and the Prime Minister's Office. The United States Operations Mission to Thailand (part of the United States Agency for International Development) has devoted a large share of its resources to assist those Thai governmental bodies working on northeastern development plans.

Among the more striking consequences of aid to the Northeast has been the improvement of the region's economic infrastructure. Completion of the Friendship Highway, which was built at a cost of \$20 million (almost all from American sources), connecting Bangkok with Khorat with

Nongkhai and other less spectacular highway and communication connections have followed quite logically from the desire, expressed first in King Culalongkorn's reign, to reduce the isolation of the region from the Central Plains. By 1962 there were over 65,000 commercial vehicles in Thailand, 50,000 registered in places other than Bangkok. Although no figures are available, the Northeast must account for a sizeable percentage of the commercial vehicles registered up-country since much of the trade of the Central Plains is carried on by vehicles registered in Bangkok. This statistic contrasts sharply with a pre-war (1939) total of 5,100 commercial vehicles which were most likely to have been located almost exclusively in Bangkok.⁹ In 1960 additional communication links were made possible through the inauguration of air service by the Thai Airways Corporation to several northeastern towns. By 1963 there were regular flights between Bangkok and Nakhon Phanom, Ubon, Khonkaen, and Udon. Communication networks have likewise been expanded. For example, radio tele-communications between Bangkok and Ubon were established for the first time in 1963 (Bangkok World, January 21, 1964).

The government, again using American aid funds, has begun the construction of irrigation and multi-purpose dams as part of the large international scheme for the eventual harnessing of the power of the Maekhong and its tributaries. The two most important dams being constructed at the moment are the multi-purpose Nam Pong project in Khonkaen which is expected to provide both water control and electrical power for the central provinces of the region and the Lam Pao project in Kalasin which together with the Nam Pong Dam are designed to provide effective irrigation for most of the Chi River basin.

Although these large projects have brought and will continue to bring increased economic benefits to the populace of the Northeast, such advantages seem rather remote to most villagers. Since it is in the villages that the government feels attempts at subversion will be begun, the government has also initiated a wide variety of programs designed to bring immediate economic help to the Isan countryside. The first program designed primarily with this region in mind was the Community Development program, which came into existence in 1960. By 1964, 1,800 northeastern villages were to be included in the community development program (Platenius 1963:111). With an increase in reported insurrectionist activity in the past few years, the Thai government, and its advisers in the United States Operations Mission, began to fear that the community development program and other development schemes for the rural Isan region might not stimulate development rapidly enough to offset the

possible blandishments of cadres from the Thai Patriotic Front. Recently, most development programs for northeastern villages have been subsumed in a coordinated and centralized "Accelerated Rural Development" program. The military has also been involved in village-level development programs with its "Mobile Development Units" (MDU). These units, composed of military personnel, doctors, government agents, and occasionally, an American observer or participant, go into villages in selected areas and couple medical treatment and economic development advice and examples with information about the government and about the objectives of Communism. These units have usually been located in the most "sensitive" regions of the Northeast.

The MDU program most clearly points out the government's belief that economic development cannot be implemented effectively without the securing of village loyalty. In fact all of the rural development schemes include as an essential part of their program the bringing of information designed to increase villagers's sense of attachment to Thailand and to the Thai government. For similar purposes the government has increased its radio service to the Northeast with stations located in Khonkaen, Ubon, Udorn, Sakon Nakhon, and Khorat. All these methods for making the Isan populace more conscious of its sense of belonging to Thailand add to the traditional methods of education and local administration which in the past contributed to the villagers's sense of belonging to the Thai state.

To what extent can the three-pronged attack on the Thai "northeastern problem," including suppression of political opposition, the rapid expansion of economic development programs, and the accelerated attempts to integrate the Isan populace into the Thai state, succeed in preventing the development of feared widespread and organized militant opposition of Northerners to control by the Central Thai government? This question, which is posed in various guises by numerous Thai government officials, American advisers, and newspaper reporters, begs several questions about the nature of the "northeastern problem" which we have tried to trace here. Most importantly, it fails to take into account that for all the manifestations of northeastern regionalism, few Northerners, including even some of the most radical political leaders, have sought to work out the destiny of the Isan region outside the context of the Thai national social system. To put this in the baldest terms, Isan regionalism has not precluded Thai nationalism among the northeastern population. To understand this we need to examine the types of loyalties, and the interrelationship of these loyalties, which most Northerners hold.

VII. ISAN REGIONALISM AND THAI NATIONALISM

Since the fall of Vientiane in 1827 the whole of Northeast Thailand has been included within the domains of the Siamese kingdom and has been brought increasingly under Siamese control. As Thai power and influence was extended into this region the recognition has grown on the part of the Isan people that they are distinctively different, ethnically, politically, and economically, from the Central Thai. Yet for all the manifestations of northeastern regionalism which have appeared, especially since the Second World War, and despite the belief of many Siamese officials, past and present, there has never been any widely-held sentiment abroad in the region which would favor Isan separatism or union with Laos. Rather, the majority of Northerners see themselves as belonging to a unified society in which both Isan and Siamese culture are legitimate guides for social action, although at different levels.

Isan peasants and townspeople alike subscribe to two "conscious models" of social behavior.¹ For the majority of the northeastern populace there exists an "immediate model" which is the Isan "subgroup's model of its own socio-cultural system as they believe it to be" (Ward 1965:124). This model varies little between Northerners and the Lao of Laos, but differs from the "immediate model" held by Central Thai.²

The Isan distinguish between their "immediate" model which provides a relevant guide to action within the local context and an "ideological" model (Ward 1965:125) or conception of the elite socio-cultural patterns which are relevant in the larger context of national society. Although the "ideological" model varies somewhat from group to group, all Northerners would agree in terming their idea of elite culture "Thai." As the Isan populace conceives of it, elite culture emanates from the Thai kingship and is transmitted by government civil servants, whose generic name in Siamese is "royal servant" (kha ratchakan), and high-ranking members of the Buddhist order, the Sangha.

The importance of the Thai kingship cannot be underestimated in considering the loyalties of the Isan populace. In the recent historical past which the northeastern populace is aware of through oral tradition and legend, the Thai

kings have had more important roles than kings of neighboring territories. The introduction of mass education has further expanded the familiarity of the Isan populace with the symbols and history of the Thai kingship. Today the northeastern people, along with the majority of other peoples in Thailand, see the Thai king as standing at the apex of the socio-cultural universe.

Structurally, the king is the supreme patron of Thai Buddhism; as such he is empowered to appoint the highest clerical official in the kingdom, the Supreme Patriarch of the Buddhist Church. More importantly, perhaps, the king represents to all subjects in Thailand the most "meritorious" layman in the kingdom, for his position, gained through merit acquired in past existences, makes possible his ability to make more merit than any other layman. In the Thai kingship is seen the only temporal power of consequence, namely that of acting as patron of the religion and the Sangha. Furthermore, as the supreme embodiment of other-worldly values, the king is deemed to possess mana-like powers which can be drawn upon through ceremonial contact with royal symbols.³

The civil service, which has preserved a remarkable independence and esprit de corps despite the numerous coups d'état and shifts in the ruling elite, is still conceived of as being legitimized by the kingship. Only if one accepts the Thai king as the ultimate focus of the political system can one also accept the exercise of power by "servants" of the king.

To rise within the socio-cultural system, which is polarized between king and peasants, one must perforce move closer to the king. There are two avenues whereby villagers, from the Northeast or other parts of Thailand, can become socially mobile - through the government bureaucracy (both civil and military) or through the Sangha. Members of both, at least from the district level on up, conform outwardly to "Thai" modes of behavior, no matter what their origin. The association of the civil service and the Sangha with the Thai kingship and the attractions of upward social mobility make understandable the admiration which Isan villagers have for "Thai" elite culture.

It is within the framework provided by these two "conscious models," one Isan, the second "Thai," held by almost all Northerners, that Isan regionalism must be seen. Rather than leading Northerners to seek a separate political destiny, the uses of Isan regionalism have been directed towards improving the status of the Isan people within the national order. It should be noted that,

insofar as I have been able to ascertain, insurrectionist elements do not base their appeal on separatist sentiments but upon the "need" to overthrow the Central Thai government, excluding the king who is rarely, if ever, mentioned in anti-government propaganda.

The success of the current solutions to the "northeastern problem" depends not only upon the degree to which development alleviates the feelings of economic and ethnic discrimination towards the Northeast, but also on the degree to which adherents of Isan regionalism continue to be persuaded to work for their objectives within the existing system. In the latter sense there is a danger that some of the government policies towards the Northeast could engender a "backlash" effect. For one, continued suppression of indigenous political opposition without concomitant mechanisms whereby such opposition can legitimately present its wishes in a national forum could drive more and more northeastern political leaders underground. Political liberalization including the re-establishment of the National Assembly, as promised by Thanom, could reduce this danger. As Wilson has pointed out:

The National Assembly provides a possible pathway for provincial notables to maintain positions of prestige in the capital and to give vent to their regional grievances. To the extent that the assembly performs this function, it is an apparatus which links parts of the country to the center and in large measure siphons off pressures which might lead to the development of more irascible proponents of localism. (Wilson 1962:215-6)

Similarly, the massive intrusion of Central Thai officials, both civilian and military, into the Northeast for development purposes has a possible danger, ironically, of providing fuel to the appeal of the insurrectionists. As one American adviser has noted in connection with government development programs in the Northeast:

Village development requires that an increased number of contacts be made between villagers and government officials who are promoting government-conceived programs. These officials will often have to carry out orders in the face of village apathy and opposition and some friction between the two parties inevitably will occur. (Harmon 1964:2)

An essential point here is that a rapid program of development could bring many Central Thai to the Northeast who might know little or even care little about local culture. The resultant contacts which the Isan people have with Central Thai officials could exacerbate rather than alleviate traditional regional sentiments of distrust of the Central Thai.

Further, economic development rapidly implemented is bound to include many mistakes and partial failures which also could create further questions in the minds of the northeastern populace as to the effectiveness of the Central Government. In the case of the Mobile Development Units, for example, selection of a particular village for the application of development schemes has caused resentment in neighboring villages which were not chosen as sites for development.

Another factor which could bode ill for the government's objectives in the Northeast is the presence of American military bases in the region. Although the impact of these bases on the local economy and upon the attitudes of Northeasterners towards Americans has yet to be assessed, the sheer numbers involved can not but have some impression on the Northeast. If the presence of the Americans causes economic and social dislocation through the immediate, but short-lived, intrusion of money into the Isan economy, government development projects designed to bring more permanent economic improvements to the area could suffer. In another vein the American bases, used as they are for missions over Laos and Vietnam, present a tempting target for supporters of the Viet Cong or Pathet Lao. Consequently, as Peter Braestrup suggested (New York Times, June 26, 1966), the Communists may work even harder at increasing the "insurrectionist" movement in the Northeast.

None of the factors I have mentioned are insurmountable barriers to solving the "northeastern problem." The present Thai government is on record as favoring elections. If held, these could alleviate to some extent the political aspects of the problem. Also, as the government has more experience with its development programs, mistakes can be better avoided. But more important than what the central government might do to alleviate the problems of the region is the existing recognition on the part of the northeastern populace that their destiny lies with Thailand. Loyalty to the Thai king still supersedes regional or ethnic loyalty, and although northeastern regionalism probably will not disappear within the next few years, it need not present the grave danger that is often portrayed.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I

1. No figures are available on how many Thai-Khmer live in the Northeast. However, Mr. Frank Huffman, who has worked with Khmer-speaking people in Thailand, has given me an estimate of about 400,000.
2. The term T'ai is used to indicate any people belonging to the T'ai language family. Such people are found from Assam in the West to Hainan Island in the East, and from Southern China in the North to Malaya in the South (LeBar et al, 1964:187-244). Consequently, T'ai does not simply refer to people who are living within the present-day Kingdom of Thailand. The term Thai shall be used to refer to the people of the Central Region of Thailand, alternatively referred to as the Central Thai or the Siamese.
3. I have sometimes also called the Northeasterners "Thai-Lao." By this term, I mean the Lao who live in Thailand.
4. The Central Thai or Siamese refer to themselves and are called by others in Thailand simply as khon thai ('Thai people') whereas the term for the region is phak klang ('central region'). Northerners usually refer to themselves as khonmyang ('people of the land'), but are also called lanna thai ('Thai of the kingdom of Lanna - i.e. Lanna' - that is Chiangmai) or khon yuan. The term for the northern region is phak nya ('northern region') although in the past a Pali-Sanskrit term for "north," phayap, was also used. Finally, the people of the southern region are sometimes called paktai (lit., 'southern mouth') while their region is called phak tai ('southern region').
5. Although Khorat (Nakhon Ratchasima) is a major center in the Northeast, its geographical and cultural position on the border between the Northeast and the Central Plains precludes its being identified as representing the whole Northeast.

6. Phasa isan has two referents. The first, and most widely recognized, refers to the written language used by publishing houses which print traditional northeastern literature. This language employs Siamese (rather than Lao) script, slightly modified for the different dialects, and northeastern vocabulary. The second is the "standardized" Isan language used on the various radio stations in the Northeast.

Chapter II

1. The following reconstruction of the history of the Khorat Plateau is subject to a number of limitations and must be taken, thus, as a tentative statement of certain historical patterns. The problems of historiography alone, particularly for the period prior to the fall of Ayutthaya to the Burmese in 1767, are immense and lie beyond the competence of this author to deal with in detail in the short time and space allowed here.
2. This is not the place to attempt a reconstruction of the ethnohistory of the Khorat Plateau prior to the arrival of T'ai-speaking people. However, it should be noted that the Khmer element was not the only one present in the proto-historical period. Archaeological evidence suggests that both the Mons and the Chams had also been present to some extent in the region.
3. That Ayutthaya should be the capital of a T'ai-speaking kingdom thus gives rise to some puzzling questions. Professor O.W. Wolters has developed a very intriguing and plausible theory that the founding of Ayutthaya represented the merging of the fortunes and objectives of a Cao Phraya Valley T'ai kingdom lying to the west of Ayutthaya (Suphanburi) with those of the Mon kingdom of Lavo (Wolters 1966).
4. This account of the conquests of Fa Ngum is based on Maha Sila Viravong (1964:26-34). Although the reliability of this source is open to some question, the other main source (Le Boulanger 1931:41-51) provides sufficient collaboration to justify the claim that almost all of northeastern Thailand was brought within the domains of Fa Ngum's kingdom.
5. Several pieces of evidence support the thesis that Ayutthaya did not exercise political control over any part of the Northeast prior to the beginning of the 17th century. In a listing of all known archaeologi-

5. (continued)

cal sites in Thailand (Chin Yu Di 1957), there is not one site which was built by Ayutthaya prior to the founding of Nakhon Ratchasima. In his history of the provinces of Ubon, Sisaket, Surin, Roi-Et, Mahasarakham, and Kalasin, Amorawong Wicit dismisses the pre-17th century history of the Northeast in the following terms: "The lands of Monthon Lao Kao [i.e., the area comprising the above mentioned provinces] before 1638 was a jungle inhabited by forest people who traced their lineage from the Khom [i.e., the Khmer of the Angkorian empire]" (Amorawong Wicit 1963:22). Finally, in my examination of the histories of each northeastern province given in booklets prepared for the 2500 year anniversary of Buddha's enlightenment, I could again find no reference to Siamese control over northeastern areas prior to the founding of Nakhon Ratchasima.
6. The dating of the foundation of the "shrine of two friendships" at Dan Sai is open to some question. In the inscription found at the site (Finot 1915), the date given is 1560 A.D. and the two kings in question are given as Thammikarat of Vientiane and Maha Cakkraphat of Ayutthaya. Maha Sila's version of the Lao Annals claims that this stele was erected in 1670 A.D. during the reign of one Suryawongsa-Thammikarat (Maha Sila Viravong 1964:76-77) and that in 1485 a treaty by Ayutthaya and Lan Chang had been signed at the same place (Ibid., p. 47). The name of the Siamese king or kings is not given in Maha Sila's version. In Wood's History of Siam, no reference is made to this treaty having been concluded during the reign of King Cakkraphat (Wood 1928:112-123).
7. For the detailed history of the events culminating in the founding of the three Lao kingdoms see Maha Sila Viravong (1964:83-5, 106-8); Archaimbault (1961); Le Boulanger (1934:131-5); and "Toem Singhatthit" (1956, vol. 1:352 et passim).
8. Nakhon Ratchasima (Khorat) had already proven itself to be somewhat reluctantly part of the Siamese kingdom. In 1691 and again in 1699 revolts against Ayutthayan rule had broken out at Khorat, although each time the rebellion had been put down (Wood 1924:220,222; Manit Vallibhotama 1962:18-19).
9. For the best description and analysis of the events leading up to and including this invasion of Vientiane see Wyatt (1963:14-21).
10. During the reign of King Taksin (1767-1782) the Siamese capital was on the Cao Phraya river at Thonburi. After

10. (continued)
Taksin was replaced by General Cakkri, the capital was moved to the opposite bank of the river in Bangkok.
11. The kings of the Bangkok dynasty founded by Cakkri are often referred to as Rama I, Rama II, etc. King Cakkri was Rama I and the present king, Phumiphon Adunladet, is Rama IX.
12. More research needs to be carried out on the events that took place in the Northeast during the Siamese-Lao war of 1827-8. It is known that Khorat remained loyal to Bangkok for one of the most popular stories to come out of the conflict concerned the actions of the wife of the assistant-governor of Khorat who rallied the people of Khorat against the Lao (Manit Vallibhotama 1962:25-6). This woman, Thao Suranari (or Thao Mo) is the only "northeasterner" who is given an important place in Thai (Siamese) history (cf. the 3rd grade primary textbook, Thailand, Ministry of Education, Department of Educational Techniques, 1961:57-9). However, little is known who the other rulers of northeastern principalities supported, although it is likely that some of them had to provide food and corvée labor for both the Lao and the Siamese.
13. For a good summary of the events leading immediately up to the Vientiane revolt of 1827 see Wyatt (1962:27-31). For a statement of the Thai version of the revolt see Vella (1957:80-89) and "Toem Singhathit" (1956:vol. 1:149-159). A Lao interpretation of the revolt is given by Maha Sila Viravong (1964:111-135).
14. In a document prepared at the height of a period of Thai irredentism in 1941, the Thai government listed as losses to the French of 87,000 square kilometers in the Sipsong Chao Thai (or Sipsong Cu Thai) region of present-day north Vietnam, 175,000 square kilometers in Cambodia, and 207,500 square kilometers in Laos (Thailand, Department of Publicity, 1941:no page). Of these areas only the Lao areas, less the territory of Luang Prabang, and the provinces of Battambang, Siemrat, Sisophon and Melouprey in Cambodia were fully integrated into the Siamese kingdom at the time of the treaties with the French. The Siamese claim to the Sipsong Chao Thai rested solely on the fact that the region was populated mainly by T'ai speaking people. Cambodia and Luang Prabang were vassals. Bangkok also lost to Britain some vassals in the Malay states, but did not lose any territory which was fully a part of the kingdom at the time.

15. Some northern parts of Cambodia were also ceded to France in the Treaty of 1904. In 1907 the rest of Cambodia, the provinces of Siemreap, Battambang, and Sisophon, were transferred from Siamese to French control.
16. Among other aspects, these variations are evident in the dialect differentiations which Brown found in the Northeast (Brown 1965).

Chapter III

1. The term myang does not have any one English gloss for it may mean country, province, city, or undefined area. However, the term huamyang in which the word hua means 'head,' was applied specifically by the Thai to small principalities comprising a single important center and subordinate villages or other centers.
2. The four Ayutthayan huamyang included, besides Khorat (Nakhon Ratchasima), Surin, Sangkha, and Khukahan in the southern part of the Northeast on the Cambodian border. All three were created at the same time (1760) in consequence of services rendered by the Suai (a Mon-Khmer minority group) leaders of these areas to the king of Ayutthaya (Cangwat Surin...1957:8). In fact, the actual inclusion of these territories within the Siamese kingdom did not come until after the founding of the new dynasty at Thonburi/Bangkok.
3. The listing of the names of the huamyang, their founding dates, and the nature of their tributary position can be found in "Toem Singhatthit" (1956:vol. 1:510-534). The lack of certainty as to how many of these huamyang lay in what is today northeastern Thailand is a consequence of the difficulty in locating about seventeen of the names on maps of the area. At least three of these "Lao" huamyang were situated in what is present-day Cambodia and another one was in the province of Lomsak which today is in northern Thailand.
4. An expanded description of the structure of the huamyang can be found in "Toem Singhatthit" (1956:vol. 1:488-507) and Bunchuai Atthakon (1962).
5. In an interview with a descendant of the hereditary ruling family of the northeastern province of Mahasarakham, I learned that prior to the reign of King Culalongkon (1868-1910) the huamyang comprising much of what is present-day Mahasarakham province sent a supply of wild

5. (continued)
 cardamon as tribute to Bangkok. Following the ascension to the throne of Culalongkōn in 1868 Mahasarakham shifted to tribute in silver. By 1883-4, according to a French official who made an extensive trip throughout the Northeast during these years (Aymonier 1895; 1897), most of the huamyang in the Khorat Plateau were sending tribute in silver, although a few such as Dan Sai, Sangkha, and Buriram were still sending such specialties as sticklac, beeswax, and cardamon. According to the same source, the tribute which varied according to the population size of the huamyang, consisted of head taxes. These taxes apparently sufficed to satisfy the corvee requirement as well since there is no record of corvee being raised in the Northeast after the Lao-Siamese engagement of 1827-28.
6. This fourfold grouping of huamyang was divided as follows: the Northern or LaoPhuan division included 16 major huamyang under a commissioner at Nongkhai. The Eastern or Lao Kao division included 11 huamyang under a commissioner at Campasak. The Northeastern or Lao Isan division included 12 major huamyang under a commissioner at Ubon, and the Central or Lao Kiang division included three major huamyang with a commissioner at Khorat. Each of the first three included territories which today lie in both present-day Laos and northeastern Thailand. These four were on a par, administratively, with three other groupings of huamyang: one in northern Thailand based on Chiangmai, another in the South based on Phuket, and a third in territories today in Cambodia based on Sisophon ("Toem Singhatthit" 1956:vol. 1:508-537; Bunchuai Atthakōn 1962:69; Damrong 1960:81-86).
7. The monthon established in the Lao areas reflected the loss of territories on the left bank of the Maekhong. Whereas there had been four groupings of huamyang prior to 1893, there were only three monthon. Furthermore, because of a provision in the Franco-Siamese treaty of 1893 forbidding the Siamese to have fortified ports or military establishments within 25 kilometers of the Maekhong (Thailand, Department of Publicity, 1941:49), the headquarters of two of the northeastern monthon were transferred to new places. The three northeastern monthon were Khorat centered on Nakhōn Ratchasima; Isan centered on Ubon (rather than Campasak), and Udōn centered on Udōn (rather than Nongkhai).
8. Some evidence for this assertion comes from interviews with the descendants of the cao myang families of Kalasin and Mahasarakham and from Bunchuai Atthakōn's

8. (continued)

history of Mahasarakham (1962). In Mahasarakham the governor from 1912-1916 was a member of the Thai royal family (Bunchuai Atthakon 1962:82) and he was succeeded by another Bangkok Thai (Ibid., p. 86).a However, more research needs to be done on the origins of provincial and district officials in the Northeast for the crucial period of Thai history between the 1890's and 1932 before any conclusive generalization on this subject can be made.

9. However, it took until 1955 for the rail line to reach Nongkhai, the main port of entry for the Lao capital of Vientiane (Bangkok Post, September 23, 1955).
10. For brief descriptions of the traditional system of education for all of Thailand see Wyatt (1966) and for the system in a northeastern village see Keyes (1966a: 140-2).

Chapter IV

1. An incident which occurred in the province of Mahasarakham at this time also reflects the confusion which followed the coup. Attempting to take advantage of the new situation, a travelling folk opera singer, known as Mqlam Nqi ('little folk opera singer') tried to stir up the populace against the government and advocated such policies as non-payment of taxes, non-conformance with regulations requiring children to go to school, and cessation of paying obeissance to the monks because "the Sangha of today is not composed of real priests" (Bunchuai Atthakon 1962:95). Mqlam Nqi planned to resurrect the Kingdom of Vientiane, of which he would become king. The Lao, including Northeasterners, would be divided between this kingdom and another in Khorat under a Mqm Ratchawong Sanit (who was not further identified) also as a king. Both kingdoms, Mqlam Nqi declared, would be independent of Bangkok. Mqlam Nqi attracted a following through his claims to be a phu wiset ('one magically-endowed') who could fly through the air and exercise other supernatural powers. His efforts came to an abrupt halt in 1933 when he was captured and was unable to escape by flying out of jail as his followers expected (Bunchuai Atthakon 1962:96-7). Mqlam Nqi is but a minor example of a type of political leader who has appeared several times in Thai and Lao history at periods of political unrest. Compare, for example, this incident with the Bun Khuang rebellion in Khorat in 1699 (Wood 1924:222) and with the Phra Sa rebellion in Campasak in 1815 (Maha Sila Viravong 1964:144-5).

- 1a. There is some evidence that the Thai government's fear of "Communist" activities in the Northeast at this time may have been connected with knowledge of the establishment of a Thai Communist Party in the early 1930's. In 1935 a Siamese delegate, with the improbable name of "Rashi," represented a Thai Communist Party for the first time at a meeting of the Comintern in Moscow. In a speech which he delivered at the meeting he declared:

We, the Communists of Siam, here at the Seventh Congress of the CI, for the first time have the good fortune to raise our voice and report that in our small and distant country there already exists a CP, and a revolutionary struggle is already developing. We are not yet a section of the CI, we only request our acceptance into the great world union of Communists. (U.S. Department of State, 1950:28)

2. Thau (thao) is a Lao title of respect. Chin might perhaps be the Thai and Lao word for Chinese (cin), but this is only speculative.
3. During the Vietnamese war against the French in the post Second World War period even more Vietnamese refugees poured into northeastern Thailand. These people have tended to be loyal to Ho Chi Minh and have, thus, been a source of worry to the pro-Western government. However, despite the presence of a large number of pro-DRV Vietnamese in the Northeast, I do not believe that the "Vietnamese problem" is a component of the "northeastern problem." There is too much ethnic antipathy between these two peoples for the Vietnamese to have any major political influence upon the Northeasterner.
4. For an English text of this plan see Landon (1939:260-93) and for a discussion of it see Vella (1955:373-8). It should be noted that although the plan seems in Western eyes to be straightforward state socialism, within the Thai context it had different connotations. Bureaucratic membership is aspired to by any Thai who wishes to advance socially in the secular world. Thus, making all people employees of the state would confer this status on all.
5. Information on the origin and activities of pre-war representatives in the National Assembly is extremely difficult to find. What data does exist usually relates only to the most prominent MP's.

6. For a brief description of the war and the subsequent negotiations see Vella (1955:381-4), Landon (1941), and Crosby (1945:117-121). For a Thai nationalist view written shortly after the war see Maha Sivaram (1941).
7. Direck Jayana, then deputy minister of foreign affairs, is quoted in an article by Landon (1941:39) as having given the following justification for Thailand's actions:

As it is evident that the action of the French in compelling Thailand to give up the Thai natural frontier, the Mekong river, renders our frontier devoid of strategic security, the most important object of government must be to secure the return of the Thai original frontiers so that Thailand may be in a position to enjoy peace and happiness and need not fear danger from any other power...If reference is made to...the racial principle, it is clearly evident that the fact that Thailand should have the Mekong river as the frontier conforms in all respects to this racial principle. It is already well known that the people who live in that region are of the same race and blood as the Thais.
8. One illustration of the importance of northeastern politicians in the Free Thai movement can be found in the fact that in 1944 Thawin Udorn (Roi-Et) was sent as representative of the Free Thai to the Chinese Government in Chungking (Smith and Clark 1945-6:193). Among the other northeastern MP's who were involved in the Free Thai Movement were Camlong Daoruyang (Mahasarakham), Tiang and his brother Thiam Sirikhan (Sakon Nakhon), Thong-in and his brother Thim Phuriphat (Ubon), Fong Sitthitham (Ubon), Liang Chaiyakan (Ubon), Kwang Thongthawi (Kalasin). The last three were more followers of Khuang Aphaiwong than Pridi and later joined Khuang in founding the Democrat Party.
9. An informant from Petchabun who had been born in the village in Mahasarakham in which I did research claimed that most of the conscript labor for the Petchabun scheme was from the Northeast. Whether or not this is true, other villagers believed it was so and, in consequence, held Phibun in low esteem.
10. Information on the activities of northeastern politicians just prior to the end of the war and in the immediate post-war period is taken, unless otherwise indicated, primarily from Thompson and Adloff's file on "Who's Who in Southeast Asia" (1945-50). This file, a microfilm of which exists in the Cornell University Library, is in turn based on press reports appearing in Bangkok in the 1945-50 period.

10. (continued)
There are many limitations to using this file, but as it provides the only information on the period (files of Bangkok newspapers being unavailable), I have had no choice but to draw heavily upon it, checking against other reports where possible.
11. The prime ministers in this period were Khuang Aphaiwong (August 1944-August 1945 and again from January 1946-March 1946), Seni Pramot, who had been the Free Thai Movement's leader in the United States during the war (September 1945-January 1946), Pridi himself (March-August 1946), and Pridi's protégé, Thamrong Nawasawat (August 1946-November 1947). Both Khuang and Seni were to break with Pridi after March 1946.
12. Darling has claimed, without citing a source, that "The Cooperative Party [was] composed largely of Free Thai politicians from the poverty-stricken northeastern provinces" (Darling 1965:47). Another political party, the Constitutional Front, also supported Pridi.
13. Shortly after the war the Khmer independence movement, called the Khmer Issarak, received Thai support and "set up a Committee to co-ordinate their activities in Bangkok" (Lancaster, 1961:135). After French forces retook Vientiane on April 24, 1946, thus completing their reconquest of Laos, the leadership of the Lao Independence Movement (Lao Issara) fled to Bangkok and set up a government-in-exile there (Dommen 1965:27). The Viet Minh set up a news agency in Bangkok and a headquarters for the purchase of arms (Tanham 1961:67). Bernard Fall has claimed that most of the arms purchases made by the Viet Minh in Bangkok were from the United States (Fall 1964:70, 465 n14).
14. At the time Le Hi was the editor of the weekly, Vietnam News Bulletin, which was published in Bangkok, and Tran Van Giao was the former head of the Provisional Executive Committee of Cochin-China (Thompson and Adloff 1950:234-5). The other two officers of the League, both Thai, were Manot Watthitya (Assistant Secretary) and Sukhit Nimmanhemmin (Librarian). Although neither of the latter two were themselves Northerners, both had close contacts with Tiang Sirikhan. Representatives of Cambodia, Indonesia, Burma, and Malaya also signed the manifesto proclaiming the objectives of the League (Vietnam Information Service, 1947:7-8).
15. For a recent (pro-Pridi) assessment of Ananda's death and the subsequent political ramifications, see Kruger (1964).

16. On the founding of the Prachachon Party, Coast has given this description:

In mid-1947 a serious split occurred among the Democrats' fifty-nine Assembly members when Nai Liang Jayakal [Liang Chaiyakan, MP from Ubon] formed the Prachachon, or People's Party and took it into the Pridi camp...Liang claimed that his group was not attached to anybody, and that only his convictions had caused him to leave the Democrats; the Democrats, however, charged the split had been bought by Pridi. (Coast 1953:38)

However, whether Liang was still pro-Pridi at the time of the 1948 election is doubtful since he was shortly to organize an opposition in the Assembly which assumed pro-Phibun characteristics. Liang Chaiyakan, one of the most durable of the Isan MP's having been elected in every election from 1933 on, switched party allegiances at very opportune times. After the War, he was an organizer of the Democrat Party. When Pridi was firmly in power, he broke with the Democrats and joined in supporting Pridi. After the 1948 elections he became a supporter of Phibun and subsequently became a cabinet minister in Phibun's government.

17. Another northeastern MP, Fong Sitthitham, one of the main northeastern leaders of the Democrat party, was also arrested at this time. Although he was later released, the inclusion in the arrests of a northeastern MP who was not a follower of Pridi reflects the extent to which the government had come to believe that the Isan region was a haven for sedition.
18. Professor Lauriston Sharp who was engaged in field research in Thailand at the time of the "kilo 11" incident reports:

that in Bangkok and villages near Kilometer 11, there was general shocked disapproval of Phibun and his unpopular police over this "incident." For a time some passerby would salute the marker and for months peasants would express disapproval of a person by saying "Send him to Kilo Eleven." However, while not condoning the "dirty business," peasants in nearby Bang Chan expressed the clear stereotype (probably acquired from government radio broadcasts) that the northeastern leaders were "rebellious," "enemies of democracy," and "spreaders of Communism." (Lauriston Sharp, personal communication, March 1965)

For another contemporary account of the "Kilo 11" incident see Roth (1949).

19. Defense Counsel for these men was Prayot Iamsila, later an MP from the northeastern province of Khonkaen.

Chapter V

1. The rai, a standard unit of land measurement, is equal to approximately 3/5 acres.
2. Although paddy production has increased slightly in both regions since the early 1950's, the same disparity between regions still holds. In 1960-1 the average yield in the Central Plains was 231 kilograms per rai as compared with 153 kilograms per rai for the Northeast (Thailand, Ministry of Agriculture 1961:39).
3. Beginning in about 1957 kenaf production became a major source of cash income in the Northeast. However, although the expansion of kenaf production helped the Isan peasantry narrow the gap between the Northeast and the Central Plains in commercial agricultural production, the northeastern farm family continued to lag far behind the Central Thai peasant family in cash income from farm production.
4. The baht is equal to approximately \$U.S. 0.05.
5. This statistic obtained from Skinner (1957:205) who in turn was quoting from an Economic and Demographic Survey of Bangkok (Thailand, Central Statistical Office, 1955:Table 15-16).
6. This point is somewhat difficult to substantiate statistically although most reports (Textor 1961:6-7, 12; Klausner 1956:II, 2; Long et al 1963:100-1) and my own research in a village in Mahasarakham province indicate that northeastern villagers themselves claim that the migrant group from the rural areas is made up primarily of young men. In the 1960 census there is some indication of this in the lower percentage of males in the age group 20-29 in the Northeast (16.3 per cent) as compared with similar figures from other regions (17.2 per cent in the North, 17.3 per cent in the South, and 17.6 per cent in the East) and the whole country (17.0 per cent).
7. For other information on the phenomena of "temporary migration" of northeastern villagers to Bangkok, see Textor (1961), Kirsch (1966), Klausner (1956:I, 16; II, 1-3), Kickert (1960:2) and Long et al (1963:100-1). It should be noted that Bangkok has not been the only

7. (continued)
place which has attracted Isan peasants in search of wage labor, but only those who have migrated to Bangkok and, to a lesser extent, those who have gone to other places in the Central Plains are of interest here.
8. I have found mention of three different occasions when a rally of Northerners in Bangkok was called by Isan representatives: January 1949, December 1950 (both described in Thompson and Adloff 1945-50) and February 1957 (Bangkok Post, February 7, 1957).
9. In this period the government controlled rice exports through three organizations (two Chinese and one government controlled). The rice millers in the Northeast complained that they were not being allotted sufficient rolling stock to transport their rice and that they were forced to pay a fee ("security money") for quality control performed in Bangkok. These factors, the rice millers claimed, led to a reduction in profit and created conditions of unfair competition with rice firms in other parts of the country. In November 1948 all 69 rice merchants in the Northeast banded together to protest to the government and finally a compromise was ostensibly reached in February 1949 (Bangkok Post, February 14, 1949). However, in July the issue was raised again in the Parliament by several Isan deputies thus suggesting the compromise had not been successful. Sharp has made the following observation on this problem:
- While the entire dispute may be seen in the large as a calculated effort to loosen the grip of Chinese rice merchants on Thailand's economy, such incidents have furnished excellent grist for the local political mills of the Northeast and provide a factual basis for their claims of geographic discrimination by the central government. (Lauriston Sharp, unpublished manuscript, 1951)
10. According to Thompson and Adloff's files (Thompson and Adloff 1945-50) the four were Nat Ngoenthap (Independent, Mahasarakham), Chun Rawiwan (Sathai - that is, a follower of Pridi and Tiang Sirikhan, Nongkhai), Fong Sitthitham (Democrat, Ubon), and Yongyut Phunphop (Sathai, Udon).
11. As a major northeastern political leader Thep Chotinuchit is something of an anomaly. According to a brief biography given by Wilson (1959:314-5), Thep was born a son of a government official in the Central Thai province of

11. (continued)
Nakhon Pathom. He was a graduate of the Law Institute in Bangkok and later received an M.A. from Thammasat University. He was appointed a judge in 1937 and shortly thereafter elected to Parliament from Sisaket. This is the first mention of his connection with Sisaket province which he was to represent, with an interlude between 1938 and 1947, until Sarit abolished the Parliament in 1958. What his connections with Sisaket were to ensure him the popularity which he enjoyed there is not clear. Although born and educated in Central Thailand and although his brother, Pethai, was an important figure in Thonburi politics, Thep has been one of the strongest advocates of northeastern causes.
- 12e It is probable that all of the votes which Thep received were from among the 128 elected MP's since the appointed members of Parliament would undoubtedly have been Phibun supporters.
13. These assertions are based upon knowledge of the past affiliations of the MP's in question, press reports of their campaigns, and subsequent actions which they engaged in after the election. The "leftists" were joined later by a number of other Isan deputies, primarily among those elected as Independents. However, it is impossible to determine if any of these others had run on a leftist platform or whether they had joined the left after being elected.
14. Nai Liang was not so popular, however, with an audience of northeastern pedicab drivers whom he addressed in Bangkok just before the election. He promised that if the government parties won the election, the government would help the northeastern pedicab drivers organize an association and would provide them with welfare housing. One member of the audience asked why the government was only now interested in helping the northeastern pedicab drivers to organize an association as Isan people had been driving pedicabs in Bangkok for more than ten years and furthermore why was it only at election time that the government was proposing a program of welfare housing when the drivers had requested such housing a year ago. "It was said that the crowd did not cheer [Nai Liang Chaiyakan] but cheered the northerner who had questioned him" (Bangkok Post, February 7, 1957).
- 15e The percentage was not so high in the February 1957 election when 40 per cent of those who had been MP's after the 1952 election were re-elected. Of the 53

15. (continued)
representatives chosen in the December 1957 election, 13 had been elected in both 1952 and February 1957, 16 had been elected in February 1957 but not in 1952, and 18 were newly elected in December 1957.
16. Among the twenty-one deputies at this meeting there were six from leftist parties, eight from pro-government parties, and four independents.

Chapter VI

1. The main leadership within the pro-government party for repealing the Anti-Communist Act came from Thim Phuri-phat (Ubon) and Woraphot Wongsangae, a deputy from Udorn.
2. Isan members of the pro-government party were most conspicuous in their participation in these trips. For example, in August 1958 two pro-government MP's (Bancoet Saichya, Roi-Et, and Burana Campaphan, Sisaket) together with three opposition MP's (To Kaeosena, Free Democrat, Buriram, Saing Marangkun, Free Democrat, Buriram, and Thawisak Triphli, Hyde Park Movement, Khonkaen), all from the Northeast, went to Communist China on an unauthorized trip.
3. Among those arrested were Thawisak Triphli (Khonkaen, Hyde Park Movement, Klaeo Noraphat (Khonkaen, Economist), Thep Chotinuchit (Sisaket, Economist), Yuang Iamsila (Udorn, Free Democrat MP elected in February but not December), Piyang Wansi (Surin, Independent), and Phonchai Saengchat (Sisaket, Economist) as well as Bancoet Saichya (Roi-Et, National Socialist) who had visited China.
4. A study of the military as a mechanism for social mobility in Thailand is greatly needed. Among other things, the military is one of the few groups in Thailand which has institutional identity.
5. I have briefly discussed in another place (Keyes 1964) the interrelationships of Thai foreign policy towards Laos and internal policy regarding the Northeast.
6. The only detailed information which I have been able to find on the "Thai Exiles Group" or "Thai Exiles Association" appears, undocumented, in the U.S. Army Area Handbook for Thailand (American University 1963:384-5). This group apparently included several Thai groups living in exile in Communist countries. However, for our interests, the most important was the one in Laos:

6. (continued)

The Association's activities, in the autumn of 1962 seemed to focus on a plan to unite the Northeastern Region with Laos. Thai police were called on in September to investigate reports that the exile group in Laos was sending some of its members into the region to conduct separatists propaganda among the villagers. In November, Minister of the Interior General Praphat Charusathien asserted that the bulk of the exiles do not constitute a serious subversive threat, but that a few of them, like Deputy Minister of Education Tim Buriphat [Thim Phuriphat, former MP from Ubon], do have sufficient prestige in the Northeastern Region to bear watching. (American University 1963:385)

7. There is good reason to question whether or not a Thai "liberation movement" is lead by Northerners or has any existence independent of the Lao Dong Party in North Vietnam or the Pathet Lao in Laos. Noel Battye, in a recent survey of press reports on "insurrectionist" activity in the Northeast between December 9, 1963 (the death of Sarit) and September 13, 1966, has found evidence to support his conclusion that the leadership of the Thai Patriotic Front in China is Central or Southern, rather than Northeastern, Thai in origin (Battye 1966-7:9-12). Although the Thanom government believes that such ex-northeasterner MP's as Thim Phuriphat, Saing Marangkun (Free Democrat, Buriram), and Amphon Suwannabon (Free Democrat, Roi-Et) are leaders of the Thai Patriotic Front/Thailand Independence Movement, the names of these men have appeared rarely in the broadcasts from Radio Hanoi, Radio Peking, or "The Voice of the Thai People" (Battye 1966-7:13-14, 38). The only Northeasterner who has received considerable publicity as a "guerrilla leader" in the Northeast, Yot Tisawot (Ibid., p. 430), is a total unknown as far as northeastern political activities are concerned. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that many of the "insurrectionists" in the Northeast are not Thai citizens, but are Chinese or Vietnamese T'ai or Lao who have been sent as agents provocateurs into the region (Ibid., pp. 37-8, 41-3, 45). Recently a few trained indigenous "cadres" who have been arrested by the Thai police in the Northeast have revealed that they were trained in a school in North Vietnam (Hoa Binh) which they reached through a network of Pathet Lao and Vietnamese agents. These same "cadres" have also stressed that they were not allowed to know the real names of other Thai citizens involved (Bangkok Post, December 2, 1966). Although this latter fact probably reflects an attempt to prevent the arrest of one man leading to the exposure of all the "cadres" working in Thailand, it also reveals the absence of recognized "Thai"

7. (continued)
 leaders in charge of the movement. In short, it would appear from the fragmentary reports which exist that any movement which might blossom into something comparable to the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front does not yet exist or if it exists, it is not led by anyone of prominence. Moreover, it seems likely that "insurrectionist" activity in the Northeast is manipulated by non-Thai powers.
8. One of the most realistic appraisals of the development needs of the Northeast has been made recently by Hans Platenius, the World Bank Adviser to the Northeastern Development Committee (Platenius 1963). However, not all of his suggestions have been concurred in by others who know the region well (see Harmon 1964).
9. Statistics for the 1962 figures were obtained from the Bulletin of Statistics (vol. 11, no. 4, September, 1963), p. 38. The 1939 figure is from the Statistical Yearbook of the United Nations (New York, 1955), p. 325.

Chapter VII

1. The following discussion of "conscious models" is based on a very stimulating article by Barbara Ward (1965). The concept of "Conscious models," taken from Lévi-Strauss (1953), is introduced by Ward in the following terms:

...Lévi-Strauss...draws attention to the distinction between culturally produced models and observers' models. The former, constructs of the people under study themselves, he calls conscious models; the latter, unconscious models. Conscious models, he points out, may or may not exist for any particular phenomenon, may or may not provide useful insight, but, being part of the facts (and probably among the most significant facts) are in any case worthy of study. (Ward 1965:113)
2. For an elaboration on the similarities between Isan and Lao village culture and their difference from Central Thai village culture, see Keyes (1966a:62-76).
3. I witnessed ceremonies in both Isan villages and towns in which the picture of the king was linked by means of a "sacred cord" to a Buddha image and monks in a merit-making ceremony.

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