

THE INTERNATIONALIZATION STAGE OF THE FIRMS: AN EXPORT ACTIVITIES FOR THAI MANUFACTURING FIRMS.

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ABSTRACT

This study was to identify the exporting activities of the firms on the internationalization stages for Thai manufacturing firms. The study examined the export marketing activity difference between internationalization stage group and by management style. It also examined the relationship between internationalization stage, management style, and annual exporting sales volume. The results showed that the government's influence in advertising and communication were more helpful than other factors, such as gathering marketing information, financing, handling documentation, arranging transportation, obtaining financial information, finding distribution partners, packing, obtaining insurance, providing technical advice and providing warehousing in all internationalization stages. Overall, government influence within the Export Promotion Department was seen as having limited helpfulness in all studied areas. There was a significant relationship between internationalization stage and annual export sales volume but there was not a relationship with management style.

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The purpose of this research was to identify the exporting development activities and empirical study of internationalization stages and management styles for Thai's manufacturing firms. Moreover, the study examined the relationship between two groups of exporting activities. The first group was dealing with the internationalization stages and management styles. Another group was dealing with the internationalization stage and firm size. An integrated framework developed by the author, was based on the Warren J. Belkey and George Tesar (1997) which focused on exporting behavior in US manufacturing. More specifically, the answers to the question were as follows:

1. What is the nature of the exporting process within the firm? Can this process be divided into different stages? If so, which stages should be used?

2. Do firms in each of these exporting stages have differing backgrounds that require different types of export activity? Is one general approach for export

activity sufficient or do firms in different stages need different types of activity?

3. Which management styles have an impact on Thai firms exporting perceptions? What type of variables influence exporting firms and encourage international business?

4. Can an Export Promotion Department help facilitate the exporting process? Are Thai firms assisted by the Export Promotion Department?

5. What is the relationship between internationalization stages, management styles, and size of exporting companies in Thailand.

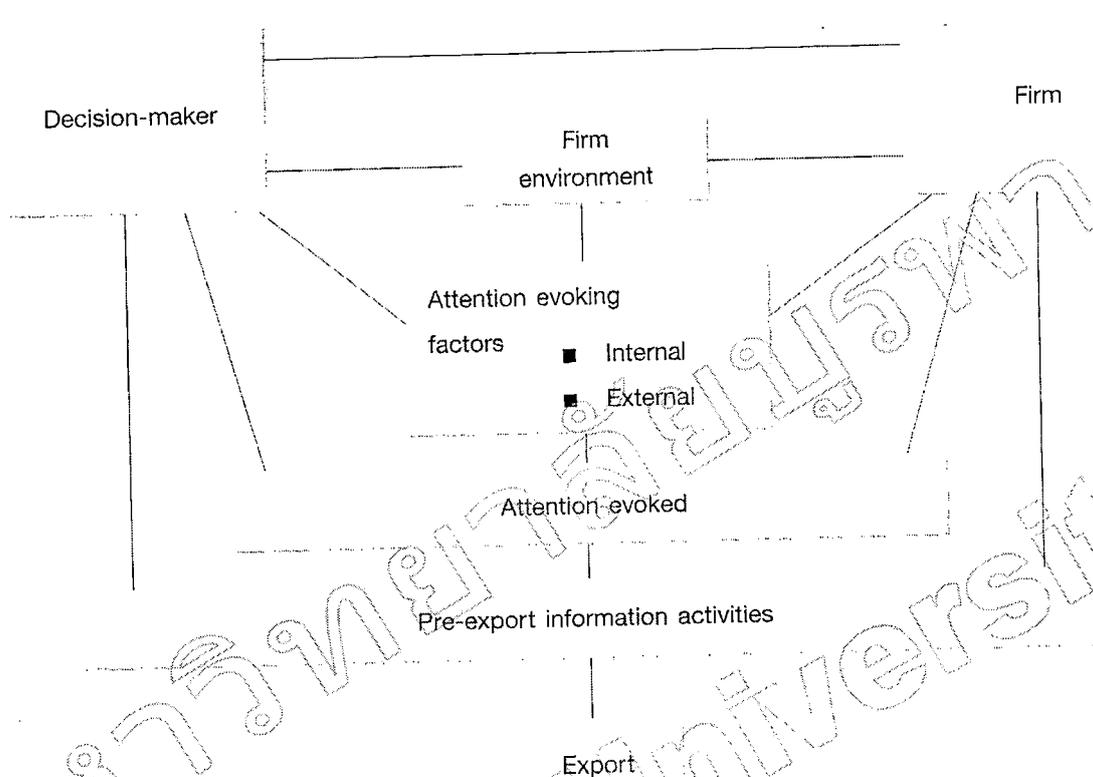
The review of the literature dealt with export development models. The management styles were classified by using the motivation of management for international activities and were grouped into three categories of firms: proactive, situational and reactive.

Johanson and Wiedersheim (1975) proposed a model that emphasized the organizational forms of international business involvement. Their model consists of three export stages and one post-export stage, each representing a successively greater commitment of resources to overseas markets. Initially the firm has no regular export activity; thereafter, it exports via foreign representatives and finally, it sells abroad through a sales subsidiary. The model underscores the critical role of information acquisition to the incremental progression of the firm along the internationalization path, leading to reduced levels of uncertainty regarding foreign markets and operations.

Bilkey (1978) conceptualized the export development process from the perspective of a firm's increasing dependence on psychologically more distant countries. Their model consists of six distinct stages of export development in relation to managerial attitudes, ranging from one of a complete lack of interest in initiating exporting, to one marked by committed interest and involvement in exploiting export opportunities located far from the manufacturer's base. Empirical testing of this model revealed that export activity could be viewed as a learning process, wherein firms gradually became familiar with overseas markets and operations.

Wiedersheim-Paul, Olson and Welch (1978) investigated the pre-engagement phase of the firm's export expansion process (Figure 1). Based on the firm's willingness to initiate exporting and its ability to collect and subsequently transmit information, they identified three types of nonexport: domestic-oriented firms, which did not deliberately plan for or anticipate export sales; passive nonexporters, who might have engaged in exporting if an unsolicited order were received; and active nonexporters, who made deliberate efforts to initiate exporting. Their model suggested that willingness to start exporting, together with the collection and transmission of export-related information, increases as the firm moves from the domestic to the active preexport stage. In examining export development behavior in less and newly industrialized countries, Wortzel and Wortzel (1981) proposed the internationalization stages through which an indigenous manufacturer could progress toward international markets. These steps were distinguished by the degree of control exercised by the exporter in overseas operations, with each successive stage marked by the internalization of production, marketing and other functions previously performed by the firm's foreign customers. The model emphasized the importance of taking a contingency approach in identifying and selecting the optimum strategic involvement in overseas market activities.

Figure 1
Factors affecting the Pre-Export Activities of the Firm Model



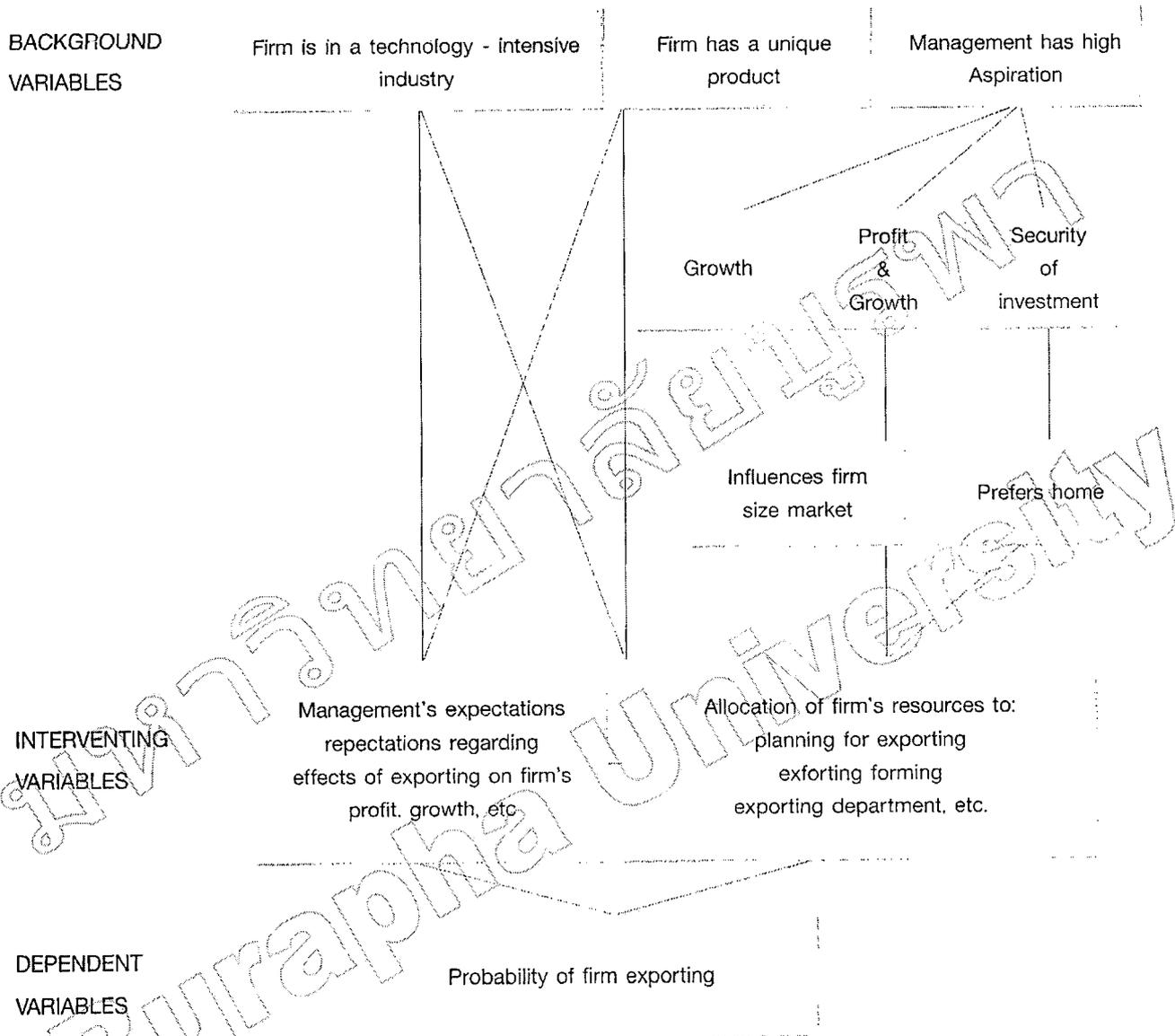
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Source: Wiedersheim-Paul, Olson and Welch, 1978. Pre-export activity: The first step in internationalization. *Journal of International Business Studies*, v9n1, p.47-58.

Czinkota and Wesley (1983) developed a model which investigated the effects on exporting from the following factors: the size of the firm, perceived problems in exporting, and attitudes toward exporting. The primary validation of this model revealed that generalizations concerning the size of companies and exporting appear to be inappropriate. Although there are interesting differences in export attitudes, problems and activities; small and medium-sized firms are similar in their export behavior and do not need to discard exporting as a growth strategy.

Cavusgil (1984) proposed a model that conceptualized export behavior as a process comprising five separate stages: the pre-involvement phase: reactive involvement: limited involvement: active involvement; and committed involvement. The last stage, however, was eliminated from the model after empirical testing revealed that the score for this stage was very low. The export development process was conceived to be a result of successive decisions made by management over a period of time. The model suggested a set of firm-specific and managerial factors that either facilitated or inhibited the firm's progression along the internationalization path.

Figure 2
Export Behavior.



Source: Cavusgil S Tesar, 1984. Differences among exporting firms based on their degree of internationalization. Journal of Business Research, V12. p. 195-208.

Moon and Lee (1990) attempted to explain the dynamics of the export development process by building a model that employed a set of independent variables, identified previously as being significant determinants

of export behavior. Based on an ex-post facto research design, three different stages of export expansion emerged, which were referred to as the lower middle and higher stages. Empirical testing of the model revealed

certain managerial and organizational factors that significantly differentiated these stages. However, many other parameters, particularly those of a structural nature, were found to have no discriminating effect.

Examining the firm's export engagement from an innovation adoption perspective, Lim, Sharkey and Kim (1991) developed a model that distinguished between four stages that they called awareness, interest, intention, and adoption. At the awareness level, the decision-maker recognized exporting as an opportunity. During the second stage, the manager was favorably disposed to the possibility of exporting. Increased interest was assumed to lead to positive intention, which in turn motivated the decision-maker to try and finally adopt exporting as a new business activity.

Similarly, Rao and Naidu (1992) categorized four groups of firms according to their level of export activity: nonexporters, export intenders, sporadic exporters, and regular exporters. Based upon an a-priority assignment of companies to the various export stages, this typology was validated empirically and, according to these researchers, exhibited three distinct advantages: first, the stages were easy to interpret and were broadly indicative of the company's current export status; second, firms could be classified by using secondary data. Finally, extensive primary data was not required regarding managerial attitudes and motivations that are mentioned either explicitly or implicitly in previous studies.

Crick (1995) offered a conceptualization of the internationalization process of exporting firms based on criteria set by Bilkey and Tesar (1977) and Czinkota (1982). His model consisted of six stages, which closely resembled the stages proposed by these researchers, but was tested in a different environmental context. Although no detailed description of the various stages is provided by Crick, he categorized firms as nonexporters, passive exporters, or active exporters. The author concluded that there were significant differences between

firms in the various stages as to foreign customer demands, internal company requirements, export related problems, and type of government support, but no significant variations existed with respect to their background characteristics and export operating issues.

Bilkey and Tesar (1977) worked with such differentiations and determined a score for firms by rating each proactive motivation as +1 and each reactive motivation as -1. However, only one reactive motivation is used by the authors, thus limiting the choices available to the respondents. Pavord and Bogart explored the incentives for the international activities in a similar way but used more forms of reactive motivation.

The proactive and reactive motivations identified through a combination of both of these studies and substantiated by personal interviews with business executives are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Motivations for Management

Type	Motivation	Definition
Proactive	Exclusive information	Knowledge about foreign customers, marketplaces, or market situations that is not widely shared by other firms
	Managerial urge	Desire, drive, enthusiasm of management toward exporting
	Unique products	Product type of one firm that is not widely available from international competitors
	Profit advantage	Higher profitability of international sales when compared to domestic sales
	Marketing advantage	Specialized marketing knowledge distinguishing the firm from its competitors
	Technological advantage	Knowledge of specialized technology that is not widely available internationally
	DISC	Tax benefits obtained through the formation of a Domestic International Sales Corporation
	Other tax advantage	Tax benefits obtained from shelters other than DISC, for example, Western Hemisphere Trading Corporation
Reactive	Competitive pressures	Fear loss of foreign markets resulting from international activities of competing firms
	Overproduction	Existence of inventories that are significantly above desired levels
	Declining domestic sales	Continuous reduction of the firm's U.S. sales or its U.S. market share
	Excess capacity	Underutilization of existing Equipment
	Saturated domestic market	Contraction of total domestic scales volume
	Proximity to ports	Physical closeness to international facilities

Source: Adapted from Michael R. Czinkota and Wesley J. Johnston, 1981. Segmenting U.S. firms for export development. Journal of Business Research, v9n4, p. 55-57

In order to determine the type of management behavior of the firm, the approach used by Bilkey and Tesar (1977) was paralleled for this study. As their study, proactive motivation is scored as +1, reactive motivation is scored as -1.

If the sum of the motivations is greater than 0, the firm's management is classified as being proactive or aggressive. If the sum is smaller than 0, management is classified as being reactive. No clear indication for management's attitudes is available if the sum is 0. It seems, however, if the proactive and reactive behavior balance out, that management has varying attitudes. Such attitudes are then labeled as situational.

For group 1 and group 2, the important variable to link and examine the effect and the relationship between two groups is the firm's characteristic. Firms are grouped according to their sales volume and labeled as small-sized firms, medium-sized firms, and large-sized firms. Firm size is often regarded by export researchers as a critical variable in explaining export behavior and success (Cavusgil and Naor, 1987). The firm's size can be measured by sales volume (Czinkota and Johnston, 1983), the number of employees (Bilkey, 1978), export experience (Czinkota and Ursic, 1991), and management experience.

Bilkey (1978) suggests a possible intercorrelation of firm size with the quality of management. He then proposes that a firm's size could vary directly with a firm's propensity to export. In his study he found that firms that had obtained their own initial export order were much larger than firms whose initial export order was unsolicited. Various deficiencies of these activities were pointed out, mainly in the context of their appropriateness for internationalization stages and management attitudes. Internationalization stages were classified based on the firm's exporting experience; stage 1 (exploring firm), experience in exporting less than 3 years, stage 2 (the experimental firm), experience in

exporting between 3-6 years and stage 3 (the advanced exporting), experience in exporting more than 6 years. The management styles were classified by using the motivation of management for international activities and were grouped into three categories of firms; proactive, situational, and reactive. Three main hypotheses were found that dealt with various ways of differentiating or grouping such firms in order to best meet their needs. The three groups of hypotheses were based on:

1. Different international stages of international activity.
2. Management styles
3. Firm size.

Since each of these hypotheses represents a clear alternative, this research focused on all three groups to permit comparisons of effectiveness.

Data were collected by personal interviews distributed to 300 (12%) exporting firms that were selected from the 2002 EPD list. The total population was 2505 exporting companies in manufacturing product. A 63.33 percent response rate was achieved, and the respondents, 190 firms, were used to analyze the data. The measures used in this research were ANOVA, MANOVA, and Chi-square. The analysis and other data operations, such as data displays and statistical technique were using SPSS program to manipulate the data. ANOVA was used to test the difference among individual group means of variable by using the Bonferoni method. MANOVA was used to test the different multiple group means of variables by using the Wilk's Lambda approach. Then this program was followed-up by testing the difference among individual group mean by Bonferoni method. Chi-square was used to test the relationship between two groups of variables. The differences in the groups of variables in this study were significant at the 0.05 level.

The results of hypotheses testing were as follows:

1. There are differences among any of the annual exporting sale volume's means of the firms in each internationalization stages.
2. There are no differences among any of the government's influence means of the firms in each internationalization stages.
3. There are no differences among exporting perception's means in each internationalization stage.
4. There are no differences in the annual export sale volume's among any management styles groups.
5. There are no differences in the government's influence among any management styles groups.
6. There are no differences in exporting perception's among any management styles groups.
7. There is no significant relationship between each of the internationalization stages and management styles of the firms.
8. There is a significant relationship between each of the internationalization stages and the annual exporting sales (firms size) of the firms.

Conclusions and Recommendations.

There are several important implications arising from the finding of this study. Internationalization stages were more useful in classifying the main exporting activity of the firm than management style of Thai's exporting firms. Therefore, general conclusions of typical firms in each internationalization stage were drawn and various export activity possibility for these firms were described as shown in Table 2.

Stage 1: The Explored Firm.

General conclusions.

Most firms have experienced less than 3 years in exporting. The current average annual exporting sales volume is below 75 million Baht. On average firms felt positively about exporting perception as well as exporting activity in foreign markets. Most of the firms started exporting to ASEAN, US, and Germany but currently Japan has become a more important market than Germany. Management within the firm known that the firm has exportable products and plans on increasing their export market in the future. They tend to believe that exporting may be a desirable activity to make companies grow and prosper. Management does tend to be uncertain about whether to do business locally or internationally. They are uncertain about whether profit from exporting will meet their expectation. The main factors that motivate exporting are management attitude and unique products. The management style for this stage is proactive.

Areas heavily influenced by the government are advertising, communication, and gathering marketing information. Firms have a negative belief that the Export Promotion Department can be of substantial help to their export activity by assisting with financing, handling documentation, arranging transportation, obtaining of financial information, finding distribution partners, packing, obtaining insurance, providing technical advice, and providing warehousing.

Table 2
General Conclusions

Criteria	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
	Exporting	Exporting	Exporting
Exporting Experiences	Less Than 3 Years	Between 3-6 years	More Than 6 Years
Annual Exporting (Million Bath)	Below 75	Below 75	Between 75-200
Started Exporting	ASEAN, US, Japan	ASEAN, US, Japan	ASEAN, US, Japan
Current Exporting	ASEAN, US, Japan	ASEAN, US, Japan	ASEAN, US, Japan
Exporting Perception	Positive	Positive Higher Than Stage 1	Positive Higher Than Stage 2
Management Action	- Firm has exportable product. Plans on increasing their export market.	- Exporting is a desirable task and profitable.	- Exporting is a desirable and firms have exportable products.
Management Uncertainty	To do business locally or internationally	To do business locally or internationally.	To do business locally or internationally.
Motivation Factors	- Management Attitude - Unique Product	- Management Attitude - Profit Advantage	- Management Attitude - Profit Advantage
Management Style	Proactive	Proactive	Proactive
Government Influence	Limited and Negative	Limited and Negative	Limited and Negative

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**Recommendations for Export Promotion
Department.**

Findings through out this study indicated a need to use case studies to demonstrate the benefits that can be derived from exporting, increase advertising and communications to make firms more aware of existing service, and providing these services in a more accurate and timely manner. Firms indicated a need for greater response to export gathering marketing information

requests. This could be done through the use of more active small-volume export information by Export Promotion Department or by establishing a nonprofit facility that provides occasional exporters with small-sized assistance (below 75 million Baht). An alternative could be a government guarantee of small export loans to banks such as Ex-Im Bank using similar methods to current student loan programs. Trained Export Promotion Department field officers could be trained to advise

firms on insurance process and teach them about international business insurance. It may be greatly advantage to hire more multilingual field officers, and encourage universities to include more commercial and international business aspects in their foreign language courses student language banks at universities, especially in Sripatum University, and possibly, for a small fee, they could aid firms in translating foreign documents.

Stage 2: Experimental Exporter.

General conclusions.

This concludes that most Thai firms have experienced between 3-6 years in exporting. The current average annual exporting sale volume is below 75 million Baht. On average, exporting perception of the firms have a positive perception of exporting, higher than stage 1. Firms started exporting to ASEAN, US, and Japan and have continued to export to these established markets. Management in the firm knows that exporting can be a desirable task and profitable plus they have many exportable products. They also have a plan to increased their export markets to ensure firm growth. Management has stated an uncertainty on the difference between local and international business. The main reasons that motivate exporting are management attitude and profit advantage. The management style for this stage is proactive.

The government's influence within the Export Promotion Department is seen as having limited helpfulness in all areas of; communication, advertising, gathering marketing information, financing, handling documentation, arranging transportation, obtaining of financial information, finding distribution partners, packing, obtaining insurance, providing technical advice, and providing warehousing.

Recommendations for Export Promotion Department.

The questionnaires have identified a need to increase the profitability of exports. Most firms have shown a desire for increased government's influence toward this end. The Export Promotion Department could provide foreign purchasing requests for products manufactured by exporting firms to management. Participation of these firms in foreign exhibitions. Search for contacts for these firms and assist them in initial contacts. By functioning as an intermediary placing export orders with firms, an institution like the Export Promotion Department could clearly demonstrate the benefits of exporting without forcing firms to partake in the initial risk. Not only could such a step contribute to the fulfillment of affirmative action goals, but a measure of government effectiveness would also be introduced. Apart from the general assistance, it would be helpfulness if increased information on foreign product standards could be communicated.

Stage 3: Advanced Exporting

General conclusions.

Most of these firms have experienced more than 6 years in exporting. The current average annual exporting sale volume is between 75-200 million Baht. The average of exporting perception of these firms have positive perception to exporting and higher than stage2. Firms started exporting to ASEAN, US, and Japan, and continue to ship their product to export locations. The US, and Japan were the main exporting countries to started in this stage. Management in the firm knows that exporting is a desirable task for their firms and that firms have exportable products. Management tends to believe that export planning is very important. Management clearly understands the difference between doing business in local and international market. The main factors that motivate exporting appears to be management attitude

and profit advantages. The management styles for this stage is proactive. Government's influence by Export Promotion Department is seen as having limited helpfulness in all areas of export for these firms.

Recommendations for Export Promotion Department.

This study identified a need to further encourage the use of Export Promotion Department's special programs such as financial assistance and taxation, etc., to assist exporting firms. Financial assistance is now needed in greater size and for longer periods of time than for firms in lower stages. Rapid responses to financing requests are important. An increase in the cooperation with Ex-Im bank could help satisfy this need. Training seminars on export financing and export marketing strategies would be of value to firms in this stage. Rapid response to requests for financial information would help institute better communication between the firm and Export Promotion Department. Additionally, improvements in the training of commercial officers stationed abroad could help achieve the goal.

Future Research.

As an extension of future research, more investigations into the hypothesis of the internationalization process would be valuable. The effect of the length of exporting experience needs to be studied in more depth, specifically dealing with change on an annual basis or perhaps even smaller units of time. It could also be valuable in future investigations to include more firms with more divided internationalization stages. Three stages of export experience could be increased to more clearly observe the export marketing activity. For such investigations, the case study method may therefore be a more valuable research method than cross-sectional survey. Changes in the export activity of firms could also be investigated based on factors such as the number

of export customers or the amount of export transactions. Different levels of these factors might be more indicative of export experience than time alone and may therefore yield more conclusive results. Similarly, an assessment of the export experience of the individual in charge of exports might be more valuable than the experience of the firm, particularly in a society of relatively high employment availability such as the ASEAN countries.

While a more detailed investigation into the international stage seems valuable, the following three stages warrant particular attention: the exploring firm, the experimental exporter, and the advanced exporting. Carrying out a longitudinal study that investigates the change of firms over time could also be useful in identifying more clearly the progression of firms through the international stages. Such an investigation could reveal more causality between trigger factors and establish time thresholds for alterations in a firm's exporting behavior. These factors could then be incorporated into export activity programs to obtain a more rapid progression of firms through the internationalization stages.

More information could be provided to the Export Promotion Department to refine the areas in which help from the department would yield the greatest payoff. Such a refinement may be achieved by obtaining a combination of issues that are both government and firms influenced where they both make concessions to assist each other for increased export growth. This can be best achieved through greater assistance, trust, and communication. The important input would also be provided to the Export Promotion Department by surveying the needs of foreign firms importing Thai products. As customers, these firms can determine the ultimate success of Thai products abroad. By using information gathered this way, export performance can be improved by helping Thai firms not only to do things right but also to do the right things.

The method of differentiation used for the classifications of firms could also be more refined. It could be remembered that this research parallels past approaches in the determination of groupings and uses established break points. The results of this research are therefore due both to the factors studied and the framework employed. Once the framework is changed, the impact of a factor may be altered.

While the management styles of a firm did not emerge in this research as a major variable differentiating the export behavior and activities of firms, it may be that the discriminatory power of management styles should be further explored.

General government assistance issues do not seem worthwhile for this type of research. The future research should analyze past government actions and their impact on Thai export performance. One area to investigate could be the effect of firm behavior at different stages of their export program. A question to be explored is: Do firms end their activities if a program is terminated or do they shift to an alternative course of action? Another area worthy of research is the loan policy of Ex-Im bank.

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Do loans by the Ex-Im bank generate new export business or simply substitute private financing? An additional question could deal with the return on investment criteria used by Ex-Im bank. A study could concentrate on how the bank has emphasized only the soundness of loans and has therefore possibly become too risk averse.

Future research could investigate the future impact of new export issues. What effect will the export trading company concept have on Thai export performance? Is the Thai business climate currently conducive to this concept that has been successful abroad? What change in current legislation would be needed for such export trading companies to be viable and successful? Finally, the effect of the "economic crisis in Thailand" on export performance seems in need of further exploration.

Many issues have been raised; many research areas have been outlined. Export marketing activities that attempt to tackle these and other export research should be undertaken and encouraged since they will result in knowledge that is vital to the workforce, to firms, the government officials, and to the formulation of long-needed national export activity.

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