CHAPTER 1

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

My Design is therefore to treat first of the Country of Siam, its Extent, Fertility, and the qualities of its Soil and Climate: Secondly I will explain the manners of the Siameses in General, and then their particular Customs according to their various Qualities. Their Government and Religion shall be comprehended in the last part; and I flatter myself that the further the Reader shall advance in the perusal of this work, the more he will find it worthy of curiosity: by reason that the Nature and Genius of the Siameses, which I have everywhere endeavoured to penetrate into, will be discovered more and more.
Simon de la Loubère 1693: 1.

In this thesis I am primarily concerned with an analysis of social institutions in a small rural settlement in north-central Thailand. Some of the conceptual problems associated with the analysis may be of wider interest in that they reflect the increasing involvement of anthropologists in the study of complex social systems and change. Specifically, I am concerned with social boundaries, the structuring of social relations through economic, political, ritual and other activities and the significance of kinship. My intention here is to provide a preliminary discussion of some of these conceptual issues before proceeding with the presentation and analysis of my fieldwork data.

Hua Kok - a Unit in Social Space?

Although Hua Kok is a physically distinct location the extent of its significance as a discrete social unit is initially less apparent. There is no school, temple, or any other public building in Hua Kok, nor is there a bounded area of land associated with the place. Furthermore, Hua Kok is not an administrative unit and there are no statuses occupied by hamlet-members and exercised exclusively in respect of all residents. In short, Hua Kok lacks many of those features normally necessary for it to be considered

a community. This evidence though important is not conclusive, it merely reveals the absence of the positive indices frequently selected by observers as criteria of community and gives no indication of the participants' own criteria.

Mū bān is usually translated as village but I quickly discovered that the boundaries of the *mū bān* differed radically depending upon who was questioned. According to government definition it is the smallest administrative unit in Thai society and it is for a *mū bān* in this sense that I reserve the word village. People outside government service interpret the term far less rigidly and include the units which I call hamlets. Hamlets may be, as is Hua Kok, natural groupings with readily discernible demographic and geographical features, but sometimes these criteria are inapplicable as when one finds continuous settlement along the banks of canals and rivers. In such cases it is particularly apparent that the designation *mū bān* or its components *mū* and *bān* for the whole or part of such a continuously settled area provide an insight into local views of the social universe. These words form part of a system of *local* social categorisation and their use in reference to Hua Kok may be taken as indicative of its importance as a social unit.

The administrative village which includes Hua Kok is made up of about 200 houses in Hua Kok, Wang Phom and the northern part of the dispersed hamlet of Wang Ya Nang. The village is nameless but is identified by a number, *mū thī ĉhet*, Village No.7. Only when in conversation with individuals acting in some official capacity (other than the *kamnan* and *phū yāi bān*) are residents in the village and the surrounding area likely to speak of *mū thī ĉhet* or *mū ĉhet*. Normally they refer to the individual hamlets by name. Asked where they live, the answer is Hua Kok, *bān* Hua Kok or, more rarely, *mū* Hua Kok: the fullest likely reply is *bān* Hua Kok *mū ĉhet*. Similarly, one's social identity is expressed as a *khon* Hua Kok or *khon bān* Hua Kok, a Hua Kok person, but never in my experience as a *khon mū thī ĉhet*, a Village No.7 person.

The southern end of the hamlet is known locally as Dong Yang after the *yāng* trees on the site of a ruined temple. The people living there or those who have fields in the immediate vicinity speak only of it as a place within Hua Kok. There is no evidence that they think of Dong Yang as anything more than a place in geographical space, no reference to *mū bān* or *bān* Dong Yang was ever recorded. The same is true of those living near the pond (*bung yāi* Phian) at the northern edge of the hamlet. In contrast, the evidence for Hua Kok suggests that for those who live in the neighbourhood the hamlet is far more than just a location, it is a social as well as a physical phenomenon. Without imputing any semi-mystical psychic identity or even

any strong common feeling one must therefore conclude that the fact of living in Hua Kok constitutes a social categorisation of some importance to both residents and others in the area.

Alternative Modes of Study

The decision to focus upon the hamlet of Hua Kok was made after considering two other possibilities, the most obvious being the village. Villages have been somewhat neglected by most students of Thai society [1] but problems with their selection as the main focus of analysis arise when we ask the same questions of Village No.7 as have been asked of the hamlet. Villages are frequently artificial divisions imposed by government for administrative convenience without reference to pre-existing patterns of social organisation. The control of relations with the government by the village system results in patterns of interaction which are unique to its inhabitants but the relationships among villagers so engendered are in most circumstances of limited importance. In the present case, where the village is a composite grouping, there would have been additional problems in distinguishing between what pertained to a particular hamlet and what was true of the village as a whole. However, study of Village No.7 was facilitated by residence of its headman in Hua Kok. Even so my perspective is obviously different from what it would have been had the village been the primary object of research.

The second alternative would have been to avoid focusing on any geographically defined area. However, attempts to place a unit like Hua Kok within the context of some wider whole would almost inevitably result in an account of social action from the Hua Kok point of view or what one understood that point of view to be. Where such small spatial foci are avoided in favour of larger units the problems of pursuing a project in adequate depth become considerable. One method of surmounting these difficulties is analysis of social organisation by concentration on particular types of activity and sets of relationships. One could, for example, study the organisation of rice agriculture and trace out spheres of activity and networks over an extensive area. Regrettably this method was impracticable because the adequate and systematic overview of Central Thai society necessary for such a level of specialisation was, in my view, lacking.

Hua Kok and Rural Thai Society

Although each settlement and its population are unique, no reason exists for believing Hua Kok to be atypical or that the relationships linking its inhabitants to each other and to their neighbours are fundamentally different from those elsewhere in north-central Thailand. In so far as one may speak

legitimately of patterns of relationships within Hua Kok one is simultaneously making abstractions and generalisations: provided that the cultural and ecological determinants of behaviour are similar these generalisations can be expected to have a wider validity. Much of social life is a response to widely and commonly experienced stimuli in a manner which is culturally conditioned and the social quality of behaviour presupposes both regularities in response to these stimuli and the expectation of such regularities. Of course, it is necessary to demonstrate that Hua Kok as a social entity does not exhibit any characteristics which appear unusual or unrepresentative and this presents certain difficulties in deciding just what is unusual. In the area around Hua Kok, as in Thailand as a whole, there is a tremendous diversity in the size and spatial concentration/dispersal of hamlet clusters. There is also a wide range of variation in the degree to which hamlet boundaries coincide with the boundaries of administrative villages, temple congregations and so forth. Although there are hamlets which are villages, form single temple congregations and have a discrete hamlet territory, there are many which do not share these features. That Hua Kok is said to be a settlement typical of the area does not therefore imply that it is duplicated by any other. Nevertheless there are many which do exhibit in some degree the same apparent amorphousness which makes establishment of community boundaries, or even the nature of what is to be called a community, so problematical.

Community

Most studies of rural society in Thailand have relied greatly upon the concept of community but save for Moerman's work on a minority group, the Thai Lue, the results have been unfortunate. [2] The analysis of peasant society in terms of community is less illuminating when applied to central Thailand than to many other societies because of the difficulty of identifying a suitably bounded grouping for designation as a community in terms of either geographical spatial or dynamic action criteria. Hua Kok's existence as a unit is marginal in comparison to Ban Ping, the village studied by Moerman, nor may other units in the neighbourhood be selected as defining the setting of the community. The boundaries of all other social aggregates to which residents belong fail to coincide with one another, each includes within itself a different body of people. The value of the Central Thai ethnographies is limited because of similar characteristics; generally speaking all analyse with insufficient clarity the nature of the physical groupings studied or fail to specify fully what does or does not occur within them.

Perhaps the work which epitomises this failing is Kaufman's *Bangkhuad: A Community Study in Thailand.* Bangkhuad consists of three undemarcated administrative villages (nos. 10,11,12), each with its own locally elected headman (1960: 17). Kaufman does not examine the links between these administrative units and the wider grouping called Bangkhuad and so the outline of local social organisation remains indistinct. We are informed that the only unifying factor is the *wat* (temple) (1960: 68) yet people in one part of Bangkhuad are marginal in their social affiliations to the community in that they attend *wat* Bangkhuad and *wat* Bangtoej. Kaufman's conclusion that: "Bangkhuad is in part an isolate within which the members feel and act as a unit, predominantly through family ties and extensions, and secondarily through *wat* affiliations" (1960: 18) may be apt but it leaves the question of the nature of the unit studied wide open. In so far as he concentrates on any large grouping it is on the congregation of *wat* Bangkhuad. However, in no way is it realistic or justifiable on the evidence given to say that this unit of three administrative villages forms a distinct community.

Although he asserts the importance of kinship Kaufman is vague about the extent and way in which family ties and extensions make Bangkhuad a partial isolate. In Hua Kok, and I suspect in Bangkhuad, the ties of kinship and affinity which bind residents together also link them to people elsewhere, so that the distinction between the spread of kin ties within and without these units is essentially quantitative. Within the unit one can trace links to most if not all families whereas outside it one knows of links and enters into relationships with a proportion of the total population that decreases the greater the distance from the home hamlet.

For both Bangkhuad and Hua Kok it is better that any use of 'the community of' is avoided. If Thai communities are defined in terms of one or two characteristics, such as temple attendance and kinship, the concept has little use as a heuristic device. Subsequent comparative analysis of other community studies will be hampered by the different criteria by which each community is defined. In general, then, Kaufman uses the concept of community in a far more geographical and structural sense than can be generally observed in Thailand. A real problem remains, however, of trying to find a descriptive framework for the study of rural society in Thailand which does not impute a false concreteness and significance to the units which do exist. Only if one restricts community to being a classificatory device devoid of the socio-psychological characteristics frequently associated with it does it become an appropriate designation for places like Hua Kok and Bangkhuad.

Social Organisation and Social Structure

The concepts of social structure and social organisation as commonly used by British anthropologists in the past thirty-five years require further evaluation. Certain problems in the structural approach developed by Radcliffe-Brown and his students in the 1940s [3] were highlighted by Firth in various formulations of social organisation as a distinct but complementary adjunct to social structure. [4] In his contribution to the "challenge of a rigid social determinism" (1961: x) Firth emphasised the distinction to be drawn between rules (structure) and actual behaviour, and the need to study the processes by which rules are related to action, [5] thereby adding a new dimension to structural studies. However, Firth's failure to redefine the concept of structure itself meant that it remained unnecessarily rigid and its inadequacies became increasingly apparent as anthropologists turned from simpler to more complex social systems and to the analysis of social change.

These inadequacies derive in part from a number of assumptions about man as a social being and individuals as the occupiers of statuses or social positions. Associated with any status are rules specifying the rights and duties pertaining to that position, and it is implied by Linton's formulation of status and role (1936: 113-4) that the status holder knows the rules. A second assumption is that individual behaviour is determined by the sum of the statuses occupied and that decisions are limited to obeying or disobeying the rules. Little concern was expressed about the problems of choice, of selecting which rules should be given primacy when there is status conflict. Nor was there much interest in the dynamics of change such as, for example, in the possibility that individuals and groups might devise their own rules or reinterpret in a new or highly personal way the rules pertaining to established sets of roles. Briefly, viewed in abstract terms the individual lacked the propensity for individuality, he was little more than the sum total of his statuses.

The simple concepts of status and role [6] appeared satisfactory and productive in a number of circumstances which were frequently associated with one another. Researchers employing a structural method were usually attempting to build systems or even what one might call 'ideal types' out of their observations [7] and closely associated with this was the popularity of what one would now refer to as an 'over-socialised' concept of man. The analytical defects of these approaches are less apparent if one is studying a primitive society where there is a high proportion of ascribed statuses with little institutional differentiation and specialisation and where there is little social change. This situation was in many ways epitomised in the study of traditional African societies where large scale descent groups were presented

as providing the overall framework for the organisation of much of social life and it was in the study of such peoples that the British students of social structure were most successful.

Even in societies such as the African tribes studied before 1950 in which descent is presented as a single dominant principle for the organisation of social relations, structure does not automatically prescribe action in any sphere of life as sometimes appears to be assumed. It is important to note that anthropologists such as Firth and Richards, interested in economic rather than the political or kinship areas of social life, were among the first to recognise the necessity of studying the "individual acting in his own interest as against the importance of Radcliffe-Brown's 'social person' whose actions are fully defined by the rules which pertain to his social situation" (Leach 1968: 484).

In complex societies it is not useful to think of there being any overall, internally consistent structure. The structure of the widest dimension of the social system that one wishes to study may be said to be the various 'principles' upon which people order their behaviour. Such principles, which reflect ideas about the nature of the social universe, are manifest as a series (or sets of series) of statements about what should or should not be done: where sanctioned one may speak of these statements as rules. [8] Though each set of principles may be internally consistent and well integrated with certain other sets, there is no reason for expecting all to complement and be integrated with one another. Should they do so one would have a society in a perfect state of equilibrium.

Social structure has been defined as referring to the principles upon which behaviour is based. These principles are to be derived from the statements (either written or verbal) of the participants in the social system that one is studying. In complex societies, individuals' statements about what is or should be done are likely to reflect their positions in a highly differentiated system and all verbal statements are likely to differ in at least minor respects from the formal rules. However, despite the differences and contradictions all these principles are, in their way, aspects of social structure and all will be used by at least some of the participants in the social system in ordering the world about them. Hence my continued use of the concept of structure, albeit avoiding any assumption that all principles are congruent or distributed equally throughout the system. The tendency of anthropologists to think of society and structure in simple holistic terms has been a major cause of the difficulties encountered in moving from the study of primitive, static, societies to complex, changing ones.

Certain qualifications about the complementary concept of organisation must now be made given my definition of social structure. Organisation, by being used for the study of processes, is far more intimately related to the analysis of observed acts and the study of relationships abstracted from these acts than is structure. The study of social organisation is the study of patterns of social actions and attempt to explain the regularities. These two themes express my general analytic concern with the study of Hua Kok though there is, of course, an important structural dimension in terms of the significance of modes of classification and ideologies in determining an individual's actions.

Social Boundaries

In the absence of major groups and associations [9] the determination of boundaries becomes a major preoccupation because of the need to know the extent to which the various systems of relationship studied do or do not overlap. One way in which boundaries of a kind are ordered is by the 'structural models' of participants which are used by the people of Hua Kok to name themselves (cf. Hua Kok - a Unit in Social Space?), order their social universe and express important ideas about the nature of their relations with the outside world.

The first of these models is that of 'Thainess', the belief that one is Thai and behaves in a Thai way. Informants often describe various actions as *praphēñi thai*, Thai custom. The question of Thainess has some importance in the classification of people and places in the area around Hua Kok. Nearly everyone in the hamlet is considered to be Thai though a number are part-Chinese by descent and many are descended from a couple reputed to have come from Vientiane (cf. Figure 2). The only people viewed as non-Thai are a male Chinese immigrant who settled in Hua Kok thirty years ago and a number of women said to be Lao by virtue of their birth in the neighbouring district of Nakhon Thai. All the native inhabitants of that mountainous and isolated area are termed Lao. They are frequently regarded somewhat patronisingly as backward and ignorant of correct Thai ways though the only disparaging remarks heard about the Nakhon Thai women in Hua Kok concerned their manner of speech. Other significant ethnic groups in the area include the Lao Song and some members of the Meo hill tribe. Probably few people in Hua Kok have any sophisticated appreciation of the state of Thailand but most see themselves as culturally Thai and their respect and reverence for the King symbolise this perceived unity of culture. [10]

The second model reflects, through linguistic usage, the broad distinction between the rural masses and the urban orientated, educated elite.

Villagers often characterise themselves as speaking *lin khaeng*, with a hard tongue, which is contrasted with the speech of townspeople in general and the elite in particular who speak *lin ān*, with a soft tongue. The dichotomy is of some importance in that it is a factor emphasising the social distance between those associated in some way with the government and the governed. Villagers recognise this barrier in communications between themselves and government officials and have sought to surmount it in their choice of headman, as it is through him that most of their contact with the district headquarters is ordered. Informants revealed that one of the richest men in the village, a devout Buddhist and financially trustworthy man, obtained few votes in the last election because of his inability to speak correctly and without embarrassment before officials. The three most successful candidates had all served in the army or police force where they had learnt the polite forms of Thai as well as gaining valuable experience of the outside world.

The third of these categorisations is also linguistic and strengthens the sense of a distinctive identity within individual hamlets or groups of hamlets. It stems from the great variation in spoken Thai found over small areas both in terms of accent and use of certain catch phrases. Informants are able to give examples and mimic the way in which people from a particular hamlet speak. At present those living in Wang Khut, Wang Phom, Wang Ya Nang and Wang Machan are said to speak in the same way. Those from Wang Phikun the next settlement south of Wang Machan are, in contrast, said to speak in a manner resembling the Lao. Formerly the inhabitants of Wang Thong belonged to this cluster of settlements but the development of the market and other urban features have resulted in changes which have affected them and the people of the neighbouring hamlet of Bang Saphan who also used to belong to this grouping. The inhabitants of Wang Thong and Bang Saphan are now sometimes said to speak *phasā talāt*, market language, which is thought of *rīaprāi*, good or polite. It is categorised as being "spoken with a soft tongue" and implies the use of polite terms of address though, in fact, market Thai as spoken by Chinese or Thai-Chinese may be pronounced with a heavy accent and differs markedly from the language of the educated Thai. One may also contrast the villagers' perception of *phasā talât* with that of educated urban Thai to whom market language is distinctly vulgar.

The first of the three enumerated models is particularly interesting in reflecting as it does the ethnic complexity of the area. As Frederick Barth observes, "ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance"(1969: 10). One must also stress that awareness of these distinctions between those who are Thai and those who are not is a

manifestation of *local* differences. This point was brought home forcefully on attending a couple of 'traditional' Thai weddings near Ayuthaya which differed in many details from those observed in Hua Kok and Wang Khut. What was observed in Ayuthaya was certainly not the *praphēnī thai* of Hua Kok, so it worth emphasising that 'Thai custom' is primarily an abstraction of the people studied and to be distinguished from the ethnographer's conception of what is or isn't Thai.

Organisation - Dyads, Networks, and Spheres of Activity

Growing awareness of the importance of non-groups for anthropological analysis has been demonstrated in a number of articles, notably G. M. Foster's 'The Dyadic Contract: a Model for the Social Structure of a Mexican Peasant Village' and Jeremy Boissevain's 'The Place of Non-groups in the Social Sciences'. In the former article published in 1961 Foster developed the idea of the *implicit* dyadic contract to make a "structural-functional analysis" of those areas of social life not structured by the presence of corporate groups.

> Briefly, it is hypothesised that every adult organises his societal contacts outside the nuclear family by means of a special form of contractual relationship. These contracts are informal, or implicit, since they lack ritual or legal basis. They are not based on any idea of law, and they are unenforceable through authority; they exist only at the pleasure of the contractants (1961: 1174).

To support the claim already advanced that Hua Kok is a socially significant and distinctive social entity one must look at far more than groups. There are some formal organisations in the area but their importance is limited and none of the boundaries within which they recruit members coincide with the boundaries of Hua Kok. Other than the village, the formally constituted organisations to which individuals from Hua Kok belong or have belonged are *wat* committees, the army, police and the district farmers' co-operative. Hua Kok may be likened more to a street in an urban setting than to what is often expected of rural peasant settlements though, one must add, a street in a comparatively stable setting in which links and patterns of exchange have developed between households and their occupants. In such circumstances one becomes particularly conscious of the value of examining the type of inter-personal relationships defined by Foster as implicit dyadic contracts and the patterning of social transactions associated with them.

If one moves from the links binding two individuals together to the way in which people are linked indirectly to others through a chain of dyadic relations one enters the realm of network analysis. In recent years there have

been numerous attempts to make network far more than a convenient metaphor for what Nadel described as the "linkage of the links" (1956: 16). However, the value of Mitchell's, Barnes' and other anthropological attempts to develop the concept of network as an analytical tool remains questionable. One could argue that the juxtaposition of morphological (i.e. form) criteria with interactional criteria (i.e. process) in the explication of the concept (Mitchell 1969: 10-30) is both confusing and unnecessary.

When one views networks geographically, Hua Kok appears as a location at which there is a general bunching of links. These must be distinguished from the demographic clustering of points (i.e. persons) into hamlet groupings. It must also be remembered that such signs of linkage provide no measure of the intensity of interaction or the nature of the linkage. In the present analysis the points which are linked are individuals rather than social positions and, though there may be discernible boundaries to networks, by taking a single point as focus I am concerned with ego-centred entities without specified boundaries. The links joining individuals to constitute networks are based on the two forms of dyadic contract distinguished by Foster, the explicit and the implicit. By explicit is meant formal links between the occupants of specified social positions such as headman and villager, or headman and *kamnan*. The nature of implicit dyadic relations which exist by virtue of a continued series of exchanges between partners has already been explained and it is to deal with these that network theory was developed rather than explicit dyadic relations which are amenable to traditional forms of structural analysis. In certain cases, of course, several formal linkages overlap in joining two individuals as well as coinciding with implicit dyadic contracts. It is therefore generally difficult if not impossible in empirical studies, when relationships are multiplex and not single-stranded, to speak qualitatively of networks as economic, recreational, religious, or political. Indeed, it may also be impossible or unproductive in terms of the effort required to indicate accurately the qualitative nature of a relationship or of a network using criteria such as those enumerated by Mitchell (1969: 10-30). On the other hand it is generally far easier to isolate the quality of the reciprocal exchanges which take place and the uses to which the links provided by the network are put. In other words, greater progress may be made by leaving the concept of network as a convenient descriptive metaphor and instead concentrating on the study of such processes as transactions and the situations in which they occur.

Where one may distinguish and categorise certain types of transaction it becomes useful to plot various 'spheres of activity'. By categorising behaviour in this way as economic, religious, recreational, familial and so on, one develops a listing of what may be included in any of these headings.

Proceeding further one may note where certain actions must be categorised in two or more ways. Similarly, one may also take each category of behaviour and attempt to find out over what area the participants from Hua Kok interact both with fellow residents and with those living elsewhere. By these procedures it is possible to establish a picture of what goes on within Hua Kok, the circumstances in which residents are linked to people in other places and the inter-penetration of the various spheres with one another. [11]

Loosely-structured Social Systems

It is almost impossible to conclude any review of the approaches followed by anthropologists in Thai studies without at least brief mention of John Embree's article 'Thailand - A Loosely Structured Social System'. Once mentioned there is little to add at this point; the discussion of loose structure as applied to Thai society belongs more to a study of the history of ideas in anthropology than to preparatory preliminaries to the contemporary analysis of social behaviour in Hua Kok. As noted by Thomas Kirsch in the recent collection of essays about loose structure, Embree's article is so conceptually confused that clarification of the issues raised requires a certain amount of detective work to interpret his statements and discover why he made them (1969: 39-60).

The theme that I consider most usefully drawn out of the morass of conflicting views is that it was inadequacies in the state of social anthropology rather than the oddities of Thai society which led to it being treated as an unusual, even deviant, type of social system. One might argue that Embree was not a social anthropologist but, as documented by Kirsch, he was a student of the University of Chicago, his book *Suye Mura* (1939) contains much on "structural phenomena" and it even has an Introduction written by Radcliffe-Brown. One may therefore argue with justification that among the perspectives Embree brought to the study of Thai society was that of a social anthropologist well-grounded in the structural approach of Radcliffe-Brown. As will now be apparent such a perspective is inadequate for the study of Thai society because Radcliffe-Brown and his students were concerned with formal analysis and not with the study of social processes. A number of alternative procedures have been suggested and so further discussion of Embree's and his successors' views will be curtailed until a more meaningful assessment in the light of the Hua Kok data is possible.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Since 1966 Michael Moerman has discussed the status and role of the headman among the Thai Lue in 'A Minority and its Government: the Thai Lue of Northern Thailand' (1967), and 'A Thai Village Headman as a Synaptic Leader' (1969). There has also been a considerable amount of research sponsored by the United States Operations Mission to Thailand on rural leaders and government in the northeast, but little of this is concerned with village organisation as such.

2. For example, the most anthropologically studied place in Thailand is Bang Chan. "The community of Bang Chan can be defined in terms of the clients of these two institutions", that is, the government school and the temple which is "popularly known as Wat Bang Chan". However, there are borderline cases which include families who attend another *wat* or who send their children to a different school. "The community as defined above coincides roughly with a cluster of seven neighbouring hamlets, the smallest of the rather arbitrarily determined government administrative units" (Sharp et al. 1953: 16-17).

3. For examples see A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1940) 'On Social Structure'; E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1940) *The Nuer*; Meyer Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard (eds.) (1940) *African Political Systems*; and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and Daryll Forde (eds.) (1950) *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*.

4. The following quotation gives a fairly clear indication of Firth's thinking on the subject.

> I do not think that a neat single-sentence definition of the concept of social organisation can be given any more than that such definitions have been successfully produced for social structure. But to begin with, one may think of social organisation in terms of ordered action. It refers to concrete social activity. This activity is not random; it is ordered, arranged in inter-related sequences. Such ordering implies not simply chance patterns, but reference to socially defined ends. By such co-ordinated, orientated activity, a society is kept in being - its members kept in relation with one another. One may describe social organisation, then, as the working arrangements of society. It is the processes of ordering of action and of relations in reference to given social ends, in terms of adjustments resulting from the exercise of choices by members of the society. This is not the same as describing social organisation as the working *rules* of the society, which implies a conformity, an imperative, in the ordering of the activities of the members of the society which

may be only partly true. People often do what rules lay down, but these rules alone are an incomplete account of their organised activities. Again, this ordering of social action may coincide with and support the structural features of the society, the major principles on which its form depends. But it may vary from the structural principles and even bear against them in some particulars. Ultimately, the social structure may have to give way through a concatenation of organisational acts.

It will be clear that these concepts of social structure and social organisation, though complementary, are not parallel. In speaking in this way of social organisation, one is describing not so much an entity as a point of view. There can be no department of social life called social organisation. Nor can it be subsumed, even with distortion, under the head of a few principles of group and status alignment, as social structure often is. The two concepts cross-cut each other, as it were, so that organisation results may become part of the structural scheme, and structural principles must be worked out in organisational ways and decisions. The relation between form and process may be difficult to elucidate; it may be easier for us to make generalisations about form than process. But this does not absolve us from the necessity of studying process (1954: 45-46).

5. Although Radcliffe-Brown formulated social structure in 1940 as the "network of actually existing relations" (1952: 190), it is fair to say that in his view there was little scope for differences between the norm and actual behaviour. Certainly his followers in their studies of social structure displayed those aspects in which they were interested as "a set of rules (jural obligations): they discuss the mutual interdependence of the rules and the fit between the society and its environment" (Leach 1968: 484).

6. Refinements have subsequently been made by R.K. Merton 'The Role Set: Problems in Sociological Theory' (1957); and by Ward H. Goodenough 'Rethinking Status and Role: Toward a General Model of the Cultural Organisation of Social Relationships' (1965).

7. Cf. Leach (1968) for a brief but illuminating account of the influence of Weberian theory on British social anthropology.

8. Cf. Leach (1965: 4): "I hold that social structure in practical situations (as contrasted with the sociologist's abstract model) consists of a set of ideas about the distribution of power between persons and groups of persons".

A major function of traditional Siamese government was the mobilisation of the population in the service of the king, either for the supply of goods or for their labour; all but the Buddhist monks and slaves were subject to these demands. Little is known of the way in which the system worked because of the increasing use made of Chinese wage-labour from the 1820s onwards and substitution of cash payments in lieu of the demand for labour or goods (Vella 1957: 19). From what is known one may conclude that a central feature was the institutionalised patron-client relationship by which each freeman was registered with an official in one of the various departments of government. This bond was effected either directly between the capital and populace or through provincial governments (ibid.: 15).

For those registered for the supply of labour (*corvée*) the period of work demanded was originally six months per year but by the early Bangkok era it had been reduced to three (Quaritch Wales 1965: 54). The labour was utilised on such tasks as building temples and roads and digging canals; a noble-official was also permitted to appropriate a certain amount of clients' labour for his own purposes. Those registered for the supply of goods seem usually to have lived too far away from the capital or other administrative centres for their labour to be used, or in areas noted for particular commodities such as peppers and lac (cf. Vella 1957: 21). Large quantities of such goods were forwarded annually to officials acting on behalf of the king. As with officials in charge of labour, an important administrative problem was the difficulty of controlling personal appropriations.

In return for their services commoners were permitted the privilege of cultivating land and, in practice, exercised considerable rights over the fields they worked. Everyone, including administrative officials, was ranked according to *sakdinā* points which referred specifically to rice fields (*nā*) and indicated the area to which a man might lay claim. In fact the system was not one of land allocation, despite literal translation of *sakdinā* as power over rice fields, but a means of indicating the hierarchical position of every adult male (Siffin 1966: 18).

Whatever the type of provincial jurisdiction, officials always resided in the towns and looked towards the court of the local provincial lord, the *ĉhao mūang*, or to the royal courts in Ayuthaya and Bangkok rather than to the countryside. Not only because of the whole orientation of values towards the monarchy but also because of the limitations of communications and technology, effective rural administration was not exercised by the government. The prime concern with the countryside was that it be orderly and that the supply of goods and services be maintained; otherwise the rural population was left very much alone and was almost completely self-governing. Even

constraints set by difficulties of communication, the administrative structure exhibited a high degree of centralisation of power and specialisation of functions. Land was generally abundant and people were scarce so that markedly greater emphasis was placed on the control of manpower than on land, it usually being unnecessary or impossible to define and maintain precise boundaries in the unpopulated border areas between provincial jurisdictions.

The king was theoretically the owner of his domain and all persons within it (Siffin 1966: 15). The bureaucratic nobility who administered the country did so on his behalf and were dependent on him for his grace and favour. The chief ministers were not so much great nobles as great servants since they were entirely subject to the royal will. As Simon de La Loubère, one of the most perceptive of the visitors to Siam in the seventeenth century, observed, nobility was nothing more than the possession of office. Once this had been lost there was nothing to distinguish former office-holders from the common people (1693: 78-9).

Each titled senior minister swore allegiance to the king and in return was granted the assistance of junior officials and the services of part of the populace to support him in the exercise of his functions. Every commoner in the kingdom was in this way registered with one of the departments of government. Ministers in charge took their titles from the departments in which they served. They and other officials did not receive salaries but were allowed to appropriate some of the goods and services supplied by the commoners registered with their respective departments. [1] The loyalty of senior officials residing far from the court and ruling territory on behalf of the king was supposedly ensured by the same oath as was imposed on those near at hand. All had to visit the capital twice a year in order to take the oath of allegiance and drink magical water prepared by the Court Brahmins which was presumed to have the power of killing the drinker should he act treacherously (Vella 1955: 324).

The ideal picture that emerges is of a highly ritualised absolutist monarchy; in practice absolutism was considerably modified by the physical impossibility of exercising such power. Beyond the immediate neighbourhood of the capital little real control was exercised over day-to-day affairs by the central administration and in outlying towns the rulers were often hereditary and maintained a high degree of local autonomy. Indeed, in the outermost areas the rulers were vassal princelings admitting little more than the nominal overlordship of the courts of Ayuthaya and, later, Bangkok. Government control from the central capital over distant towns and territories was weak and by no means as strong as a cursory examination of the formal structure might suggest (Vella 1955: 327, 330-31).