

CHAPTER 4

MARRIAGE

The Love of free persons is not ignominious, at least amongst the Populace: It is there look'd upon as a Marriage, and Incontinency as a Divorce. Nevertheless the Parents do carefully watch their Daughters, as I have said; and Children are no where permitted to dispose of themselves to the prejudice of the paternal Power, which is the most natural of all Laws.
Simon de la Loubère 1693: 53.

Marriages are negotiated and conducted with little reference to the laws of Thailand, legal statements and sanctions are resorted to only when disputes are insoluble. Paragraphs 2 and 3 of article 1445 of the Civil and Commercial Code proscribe marriage between parent and child, full siblings, half-siblings by the same mother and individuals already married to others. In Hua Kok proscriptions against marriage with kin extend far beyond those legally prohibited, polygynous marriages also continue to be negotiated and receive the same recognition as monogamous unions. Such occurrences reflect the continuing force of local values and customs.

Locality and Marriage

Examination of existing marriage unions in Hua Kok at the end of 1966 reveals that whereas most had been negotiated within a restricted area there was little endogamy within the settlement. Out of the forty-two [1] unions in which at least one spouse was from Hua Kok in twenty-nine it was a wife (69%) and in seventeen the husband (44%) (cf. Table 2: Marriage Patterns of Hua Kok residents). The five marriages where both partners were from Hua Kok were somewhat unusual in being unions of a Hua Kok man with a kinswoman (house 38), with an adopted daughter of a kinsman (house 8), to a woman who had come before marriage to live in Hua Kok with her kin (houses 20 and 47), and with a woman from a poor immigrant family (house

10) (cf. Marriage Residence). While under half the married men in Hua Kok were natives of the place, no less than 70% were from the immediate neighbourhood of Wang Phom, Hua Kok, Wang Khut and Bang Saphan and in all 80% were from Wang Thong District. Another feature of the marriage pattern is its northward bias which reflects the general involvement of people from Hua Kok with the hamlets of Wang Khut and Bang Saphan for economic, family, religious and recreational activities.

Table 2: Marriage patterns of Hua Kok residents

	Pre-marriage residence of spouse in unions in which at least one partner is from Hua Kok						
	Hua Kok	Wang Khut	Bang Saphan	Wang Phom	Other Settlements, Wang Thong District	Other Districts, Phitsanulok Province	Other provinces
Men (41)	17	4	7	1	4	7	1
Women (42)	29	2	1	4	1	3	2
Men & Women (83)	46*	6	8	5	5	10	3

* There were five unions in which both spouses lived in Hua Kok before marriage.

Opportunities for meeting and marrying girls from beyond one's home territory are offered by going *pai thiëo*, a phrase which has many meanings but here indicates wandering off to have a look around and enjoy oneself. Young men in their late teens or early twenties visit kin in far away hamlets where they may remain for several months, joining in the household's activities to earn their keep. Apart from a general desire to extend their experience, a frequent aim is to meet girls and during such extended trips there are occasions, in work groups, at *wat* fairs and so on, where they become acquainted with young women of marriageable age.

Marriage Rules

The small number of marriages in which both partners are from Hua Kok may be as much a reflection of the small size of the hamlet and paucity of potential spouses as an indication of wide-ranging incest taboos. The

incestuous relationship which evokes the strongest response is between fathers and daughters. Questions about brother-sister incest merely elicited the response that it never happened. Several suspected cases of a man's incest with his daughter had given rise to much salacious gossip though nothing had been done to directly restrain the people involved; the sanctions employed are those of gossip and belief in punishment by supernatural agencies. The burden of guilt for such acts falls more heavily on the men rather than upon their daughters who are believed to comply only because they are frightened and forced into such unnatural acts. Incest is thought to be a negation of human status and those who copulate with their offspring are considered to be acting like dogs and spoken of accordingly.

Although it is known that kings and nobles have married their paternal half-sisters, villagers believe that for common people to do likewise or even to marry within the circle of close kin is incestuous. Furthermore, it invites misfortune in the form of an early death to the children of such unions and, less frequently, to the couple themselves. Traditional fears about the consequences of marriage between siblings' children have been reinforced in recent years by events following a breach of the rule in Wang Phom. The child of the cousins died at birth leaving the mother very ill. Kin who arranged a seance to discover the reason for her misfortune were then greatly alarmed by the refusal of the spirit of the dead child to accept the gifts of food and liquor which were proffered and its insistent demand for a human body. The ailing woman subsequently died thereby increasing further the concern of her kin who, because the death was *tāi hōng*, unnatural, were fearful of being troubled by her spirit (*phi*). [2] In this particular case the death of the mother was attributed to a spirit, but normally deaths arising from incest are said to be the result of the gods', *thēwadā*, withdrawal of protection on account of their abhorrence of such behaviour.

Despite these supernatural sanctions the fact that a couple who were first cousins were able to marry and remain in their home settlement provides an insight into processes of social control. A couple who wish to marry can usually successfully flout the wishes of their kin, the only difference from approved unions being that the weddings are never large, public ceremonies. Beyond the boundaries of close kinship the extent to which marriages within the kindred are opposed varies considerably from person to person. In general they are thought of as bad but carry with them little hint of dog-like behaviour. When the link is distant, for a kinsman to voice his or her misgivings is more likely to be due to disapproval of that particular match than to any genuine unease or expectation of calamity. [3]

In the absence of any political or major property interests, marriage in a remote farming area like Hua Kok is a matter for individual choice. A man should delay marriage until he is at least twenty years old and has received the Higher Ordination to become a bikkhu, but may fail to do so. Marriage may be suggested by parents and negotiated with great thoroughness, yet even then no great pressures are brought upon a couple to accept the proposal and unions are more frequently the result of a private understanding without the parents' prior knowledge. Courtship is usually informal but restrained with little physical contact.

Marriage Ceremonies

A wide range of terms exists to describe the various ways in which marriages are brought about. Strictly speaking, the word marriage (*tāengnān*) refers to formally negotiated unions (*khā kan*) but, in practice, the term can be extended to denote anything from a major ceremony involving several hundred people to a couple deciding to live together. Very few have so far bothered to register at the District Office in accordance with Thai family law, article 1449 of which states that a marriage is not valid until registered. Certainly in this area there is no evidence to support the assertion of Harold Smith that "[s]ince the Registration Law in Thailand was enacted, the act of registration at the district office has tended to become part of the wedding ceremony" (1973: 296). Indeed, the whole tendency in Hua Kok would appear quite different in that the type of formal marriage to which Smith refers has become infrequent. Furthermore, the villagers themselves tend to view registration as yet another distinct type of marriage.

Formal marriages, which are now becoming relatively unusual, are referred to locally with the words *khā kan*, asking. They are normally large, elaborate, expensive and public. The process is initiated by the young man or his family requesting an elder to act as go-between (*thaokāe*) [4] and broach the subject with the girl's parents. If they and their daughter are amenable and if the negotiations over the bride-price to be paid by the groom are successful, an astrological manual is consulted (*dū tamlā* [*tamrā*, Haas 1964: 203]) and an auspicious date, [5] sometimes several months in advance, is set for the wedding. A few days before the festivities friends and kin are invited by the bride's family and arrangements are made for bikkhus to come to her house early on the morning of the wedding. The day before that the guests join in helping make the preparations, mainly preparing food and decorating the house. In the evening a record player or musicians are hired for dancing (the *ramwong*) which continues late into the night.

When the bikkhus arrive early the next morning the precepts are given (*hai sin*) and the senior monk consecrates lustral water which he and the other bikkhus pour over the hands of the young couple. The bride and groom jointly offer food to the monks and, while they are eating, the couple's parents and any other kin and guests who wish to do so bless the bride and groom by pouring the lustral water from a conch shell (*hâi sang*) over their hands or heads. [6] When the monks have finished their meal they are presented with small gifts of cakes, incense sticks, soap, etc., after which they leave and the guests sit down to eat. While this is going on the groom and those of his party who have been at the bride's house for the merit-making with the monks, leave and return to his home where final arrangements are made. Two old married women, who must be relatives of the groom, take the *khan mâk man* consisting of four dishes of cakes and betel to the bride's parents. They are followed soon after by the *khan mâk êk* of food, liquor and gifts for the bride's parents which is carried with the bride-price in procession to the bride's home. In contrast to the *khan mâk man* young unmarried women should carry these gifts though nowadays this norm is frequently ignored. The groom then follows a noisy and by now usually drunk group of young men, some of whom will have whitened their faces, who form a 'fake' groom's procession, the *hâe cháo bâu luâng*. They proceed noisily to the bride's house, passing on the way through the symbolic silver and gold gates which are opened after payment of a bottle of liquor. [7]

Accompanied by the go-between and his parents the groom enters an inner part of the bride's house. There then follows the handing over of the marriage payments, the *tham kwan* rite, and finally the tying of white threads about the wrists (*mat mû kan* or less commonly *mat khâen kan* or *thao mû kan*) of the couple. The ceremonies end with the bride and groom proceeding round the house letting all who wish tie threads and make small donations of money which they keep. Major ceremonies like this usually involve almost everyone within the hamlet and many from nearby settlements. Occasionally an abbreviated version occurs in which the wedding takes place within a few days of the settlement being reached. However, with the decline in popularity of this type of marriage it appears that nowadays couples do not normally bother with the *khâ kan* procedure unless they intend it to be a large-scale ceremony.

Before the Second World War a frequent adjunct of the *khâ kan* marriage was a bridal house (*rûan hâ*) built by the groom and his kin at the side of the bride's natal home and furnished by her parents. Even if no *rûan hâ* is built, the groom's presence is required in the days preceding the festivities, for the bride's parents have the right to demand his help with the preparations for the marriage. Another custom now falling into disuse is that the

couple do not sleep together until the third night following the wedding. After being instructed by her grandparents or other elderly kin on her duties as a wife, the bride prepares the mattress for the night and when the groom is sent she invites him to join her.

The most popular type of marriage today is spoken of colloquially as *nī kan*, fleeing; *tām kan*, following; or *phā kan*, taking. Translation of these terms as elopement must be qualified with the proviso that decisions to run away are not necessarily taken in anticipation of parental opposition. Eloping couples usually stay at the groom's house and after a few days [8] send a go-between to the girl's home to find out the size of the marriage payments required. He may go alone or be accompanied by friends and kin of the groom. On the next auspicious day [9] the couple return with the cash marriage payments and a small *khan māk* [10] to ask for forgiveness (*klap mā ao chái*). The parents symbolically accept the marriage and bless it by fastening white threads upon the couple's wrists, as do the groom's parents and the go-between. Those involved in the marriage then join in a small wedding feast. In only one recorded instance did an eloping couple fail to return to *ao chái*, probably because the groom was from so far away.

Parents are, by and large, powerless once their daughter has eloped; the most that they can do is refuse to accept the couple's apologies or perform the *mat mū* rite. At least two relatives of the bride should always recognise the marriage by the tying of the white threads. When the parents of one eloping girl refused to have anything to do with the marriage the bride's maternal grandmother dealt with the go-between, set the sum of the marriage payments and then she and a sister of the bride's mother joined the couple's hands. Participation by the groom's kin is far less important. In several cases the groom's father had not bothered to attend and occasionally neither parent was present, the go-between being the sole representative for the groom.

The variant known as *khun hā*, climbing up (into the house) to find, may be characterised as a shot-gun marriage. Should there be any evidence that a man has spent the night with a girl in her home or he be caught there, he is obliged to take her as wife if she wishes it so. If, however, intercourse has taken place elsewhere, as in the fields, the girl and her parents are unable to insist upon marriage. Occasionally men have been forced into an unwanted union for fear of being imprisoned, but usually being caught in the girl's home merely precipitates the wedding. In four cases involving people from Hua Kok, only one man was said to be *chon chái*, at his wit's end, at the prospect of having to marry the girl. In another, after bringing the affair to the attention of the headman the girl refused to marry the man unless he divorced his first wife which he would not do. [11] Once discovered, the

procedure followed is similar to that when a couple elope; a go-between negotiates the marriage payments and then the parents perform the *mat mū* rite.

It is asserted that in the past abductions leading to marriage were frequent but there is no evidence of this. The only reported instance is recent and occurred when a Hua Kok man supposedly forced at knife-point to his own home the younger sister of a woman who had moved to Hua Kok on marriage. After a few days the couple went to *ao chai* to the parents of the sister's husband, with whom she had been staying, who received the marriage payments and tied white threads about their wrists. Sometimes middle-aged or elderly couples who have been married before decide to live together without any ceremony, a custom known as *yī chōei chōei*. If still young, divorcees are more likely to follow one of the other procedures. One young woman married successively by *tām kan*, *khun hā* and attenuated *khā kan* rites.

Finally, one must mention registration which is seen as yet another way of marrying instead of the required legal procedure that it is. Article 1451 of the family law states that one cannot register a second marriage unless it can be proved that the first has been terminated by death, divorce or annulment but villagers still contract polygynous unions and privately end marriage by agreement. In most circumstances they see no advantages to be gained by registration at the District Office which, on the contrary, is known to be disadvantageous because of the consequent cost and difficulty of obtaining a divorce. For the time being, then, village custom continues to offer an adequate guarantee of marital rights and duties. The only situation in which a village couple is likely to resort to registration is when the girl has reached maturity but her parents oppose the match. [12] Once they have been to the District Office the couple are exempted from necessarily observing any of the traditional marriage procedures though the only pair to elope and register their marriage did afterwards send a go-between to the bride's adoptive father and pay a bride-price (house 8).

To the best of my knowledge, other than that of registration none of the six marriage procedures outlined above are recent innovations. Together they illustrate the variation in customary forms in Thai rural culture even within small, relatively undifferentiated rural settlements like Hua Kok and its neighbours. All choices are not equally valued; some are quite clearly preferable to others although even the less attractive are seen as legitimate. Whenever an alternative to what had already been described as *praphēn thai*, Thai custom, was discovered, queries as to its legitimacy were almost inevitably answered with the reply *khon thai tham lāi yāng*, "Thai people do

(things) in many ways". [13] The existence of six ways of marrying requires an analysis of the factors which make people follow one particular structurally defined mode of behaviour rather than another, but before doing this I shall illustrate some additional variations in marriage practices.

Marriage Payments

The marriage payments forming the bride-price are referred to collectively as *sin sāt*, a term also used exclusively for the amount negotiated by the go-between and bride's parents. [14] The bride-price consists of three major elements, the ritual payments of two salyng (1p.) and forty baht (approximately 80p.) together with an additional sum that the parents have demanded. This latter payment is usually in cash but part of it may be a specified weight of gold in the form of a bracelet or necklace given to the bride which is called the *thāng man*. Strictly speaking, the *thāng man* is a distinct payment which should be handed over before the wedding though in practice it is usually paid with the money during the wedding ceremony. When marriages are *khā kan*, part of the negotiated amount may be for the cost of the feasting or an additional sum, designated as *khā chai chāi*, expenses, may be requested.

The two ritual payments symbolising a daughter's change of status are fixed and standard in all traditional forms of marriage except that of *yū chōei chōei*. The two salyng make up the *khā nam nom* (or *khā nom*), the price of the milk, and belong rightfully to the mother while the forty baht is known to some as the *khā liāng nū*, the price of rearing the child. Not all informants were familiar with this term and considered that the forty baht formed the *sin sāt*. Others said that the forty baht used to constitute the *sin sāt* but that now it could be called *khā liāng nū* instead. The confusion possibly arises from the decline in the baht's value; before the development of the cash economy when it was worth its weight in silver these ritual payments were a considerable expense. Few parents added any additional sum to the bride-price that they required and until the Second World War the bride-price for all except *khā kan* marriages remained forty baht two salyng. Nowadays some extra amount is nearly always given though it is expected to be lower than if the marriage is arranged by a go-between. It was suggested, for example, that a young man who eloped and gave his wife a gold necklace (*thāng man*) weighing one baht and paid five hundred in cash would have been required to give a two baht weight of gold and two thousand five hundred baht if the wedding had been *khā kan*.

The negotiated cash payment, which is increasingly regarded as the true *sin sāt*, should eventually be used in enabling the newlyweds to establish their own household. Ideally it is handed over to the bride's father in trust

but in practice he exercises full rights over it and does as he pleases. The whole sum, or that part of it not spent on the wedding feast, is often returned straight away after the wedding rites or kept until the couple are about to move to their own home when it may be given to them both either as cash or in the form of household and farm equipment. However, a number of couples reported that they had never received any of the *sin sât*. Occasionally the reason for immediately handing back the money is that it has been borrowed for the ceremony. For some the size of the payment is a matter of prestige, a means of *ao nâ*, taking face, even if it must be returned straight away to a creditor but this attitude is by no means universal; others request a nominal sum whatever the wealth of the groom and his family.

At present the normal range of payments for the *sin sât* proper is between two hundred and a thousand baht. In addition, the groom must bear the cost of the *khâ liang nũ*, the *khâ nam nom*, the *khan mâk* and perhaps make a sizeable contribution to the cost of the festivities if the wedding is of the *khâ kan* form. Many young men are able to accumulate the required resources for marriage by elopement either by working as farm labourers or by helping farm their parents' lands, thereby entitling them to a share of the sale proceeds. If the cost is more than they possess their parents usually provide the required cash. When the marriage is *khâ kan* the parents' contributions may be expected to be higher, and other kin often provide cakes for the *khan mâk* and help with an adequate supply of liquor. In all forms of marriage there is no formal commitment by the bride's kin to balance the groom's contributions in any way though her parents do sometimes pay for part of the festivities and young couples frequently receive help from them, especially if they intend to live matri- or uxori-locally. Nevertheless one can readily appreciate the view expressed by one middle-aged informant who hoped that her sons would elope but wished her daughters to marry formally.

Tradition and Change

Before 1940 over fifty per cent of all marriages were formal, *khâ kan*, and in about half of these a bridal house was erected in the bride's natal compound. Since 1950 the number of formal weddings has fallen to thirty per cent and no true bridal houses have been built. [15] Elopement is now the standard way of marrying and no less than sixty per cent of all marriages have been contracted in this way. Although one must look for some general cause for this change there have always been specific reasons why some individuals, such as older people who have been widowed or divorced, should not conform to the traditional ideal. Besides the necessity of obtaining the prior approval of the girl's parents for a *khâ kan* marriage and the fear that parents might not give permission, the cost of such ceremonies has probably always

deterred the poorer villager.

Other than for particular personal reasons parents are less likely to approve of a marriage if the would-be groom is under twenty years of age. A young man becomes *suk*, ripe, and ready for marriage by receiving ordination as a *bikkhu* and spending a Lenten season in the *wat*. Men who have not *bīat phra*, been ordained, are said to be *dip*, raw. Ordination is therefore a major rite of passage for males. It also brings great spiritual and social benefits to their parents. Once married a man may, if his wife is willing, become a *bikkhu* but family commitments prevent him from doing so for many years. Parents may also be expected to object to marriages within the kindred but the reason always given by informants for not marrying kin by the formal *khā kan* rite is the impossibility of finding go-betweens to approach the girl's parents on account of their feeling *āi*, shy, at negotiating such unions. Once a couple has eloped these considerations no longer matter and they have no difficulty in finding a *thaokāe* to arrange for their return.

The factors so far mentioned certainly influence decisions but to explain change in the pattern of marriage choices and the very existence of ranked, legitimate alternatives one must first look at the character of marriage ceremonies and what they signify. Marriages in Hua Kok do not mark the formation or consolidation of alliances between kin groups. There are no political or major economic objectives to be achieved by the control and manipulation of children's marriages and children are allowed a free hand in choosing partners provided that the incest taboos are observed. Parents abide by their daughter's wishes without bringing undue pressure to bear upon her to accept a proposal to which they are favourable. For example, the only child of a prosperous farmer in Bang Saphan refused two suitors offering marriage payments of 10,000 and 12,000 baht respectively. She then persuaded her father to request 5,000 baht from her boy friend, a sum she had previously discussed with him and which he could afford. One must also emphasise that most conceive of marriage by elopement as a fully legitimate and correct mode of marriage which gives no grounds for embarrassment or shame as long as the couple do eventually return to the bride's home.

The model from which the *khā kan* marriage has evolved is an institution well suited to serve a very different social situation to that experienced by past and present inhabitants of Hua Kok. The Thai formal marriage as it was recorded in the nineteenth century and earlier was a carefully negotiated property settlement. Both sets of parents contributed equally to the *thun*, a joint fund which was held in safe-keeping by the bride's father until the first child was born. At this time the *sin sāt* was apparently the sum which the groom's family agreed to spend on building the bridal house (*The Bangkok*

Calendar 1864). However, it is not known to what extent the populace as a whole followed such procedures. Many certainly did not and in the late seventeenth century Simon de la Loubère remarked that couples could live together as man and wife without any ceremony (1693: 53).

In its most developed form the formal wedding was an elite institution, reflecting a social system in which marriages did serve political aims and in which the names and fortune of great families had to be protected and enhanced. Furthermore, the possible existence of many minor wives made it essential that the rights of a woman of good family who had been married formally and of her children were adequately defined and protected. Since the turn of the century the processes of social change have resulted in the abandonment of many traditional aspects of the wedding ceremony in favour of westernised forms amongst the urbanised elite of the country (cf. the writings of Phya Anuman Rajadhon) yet, among some at least, their marriages remain major contracts and continue to be arranged.

In the area around Hua Kok the move over the past thirty years has been away from formal weddings instead of the transformation of cultural traditions within the context of negotiated marriages observable in more urbanised areas. A major factor behind the change in Hua Kok appears to be growth of the cash economy. The opportunities for wage-labour brought by the increasing sophistication of the marketing system have contributed to the growing financial independence of children. The development of cash farming has also been accompanied by greater and increased opportunities for expenditure. In the area studied the hold of traditional, court-inspired Siamese culture has always been weak. Hua Kok is part of a frontier society that evolved in the latter half of the nineteenth century which has remained separated by distance and experience from the main centres and sources of traditional Thai culture. Villagers see little value in retaining practices not immediately relevant to their own experience and social system. Into this context intruded changes in the economy which have led to a decline in self-sufficiency and simultaneously to the ready availability of an expanded range of goods, thereby increasing further the demand for cash. At the same time, however, the level of economic and social differentiation has remained relatively low and there has been little incentive for residents to either retain traditional village customs or adopt new urban forms as a means of validating claims to a superior social status.

One may therefore suggest that a contributory factor to the decline of *khā kan* weddings in favour of marriage by elopement is that for many, who would otherwise have observed the traditional ideal, the expense now outweighs the marginal social value of these rites. Of course, *khā kan*

weddings do not have to be large and expensive but perhaps the major value to be derived by a family from this type of marriage is the large-scale merit-making and social approval that follows from correct and generous management of the celebrations. Without the feasting there is little point in arranging a marriage through a go-between and if the feasting is meagre its reward is a wave of critical gossip likely to deter others if not the miserly family.

Divorce, Polygyny and Illegitimacy

According to article 1498 of the *Civil and Commercial Code: Book V*, divorce can be by mutual consent or the judgement of a court. If the former, the agreement must be in writing and signed by at least two witnesses. The grounds for divorce by judgment cited in article 1500 of the Code include the wife's adultery; injury or defamation of either spouse and his (her) ascendants; abandonment or other acts making continued cohabitation impossible; imprisonment for certain offences or for more than three years; being declared missing; incurable certified mental illness; contagious, dangerous and incurable diseases; genital defects; and breaking a written promise of good conduct.

In the absence of registered marriages the above laws have little direct relevance to the people of Hua Kok and surrounding settlements. According to custom marriages can be ended by private agreement, no third party being required to provide the seal of public recognition. Indeed, there may on occasion be some ambiguity as to whether or not a marriage has been finally terminated or whether or not the couple were married. This is because villagers tend to describe even short periods of cohabitation as marriage or, to phrase it more precisely, they refer to their partners as having been *phūa/mia*. Certainly, when there is no joint property nor any children there is no reason for a formal dissolution of a union which may itself not have been marked by any ceremony.

Should the marriage be registered a divorcing couple must go directly to the district headquarters. In all other cases disputes concerning the settlement of the divorce are discussed before the headman. According to villagers a man can divorce his wife contrary to her wishes but women have no such right. If they insist on ending the union against the husband's wishes they must flee, in which case rights in any jointly owned property are forfeited. Should a husband himself flee (*ni*) he too loses the same rights.

The law decrees that on divorce any prenuptial property (*sin dōem*) is to be restored to each spouse and that if this is impossible then the equivalent amount be substituted from out of the conjugal property (*sin somrot*) accumulated by the couple. Conjugal property should be divided equally unless

only one brought prenuptial property to the union in which case he or she is entitled to two-thirds of all that subsequently accumulated (*Civil and Commercial Code: Book V*, articles 1513 and 1517).

Despite the ease with which it is contracted and terminated, marriage is a fairly stable institution once a couple begin to have children. Out of the eighty-six unions ever negotiated by members of the forty-eight Thai households, forty-eight were still in existence, fourteen had been ended by death and twenty-four by divorce. The high rate of divorce indicated by these figures is caused by three individuals who between them account for fourteen divorces. One man has ended nine unions in this way and two sisters three and two respectively. The figures for marriage and divorce are, of course, only approximate because of ambiguity in certain circumstances of what constitutes a marriage. For example, when collecting data from the divorce-prone man just mentioned he gave me the names of seven of his eleven wives and said that the other five unions had lasted only a month or so. Women tend to be more reluctant to admit to broken marriages but, on the whole, it is easier to find out about their pasts because the majority of couples live in the wife's hamlet.

Table 3: The termination of marriage

	Individuals ever married	No. of Unions	Existing Unions	Unions terminated by Divorce	Death
Men	52	70	48	13	8
Women	54	66	48	12	6

When divorce occurs it is usually fairly soon after marriage, in the great majority of instances within two years. Occasionally marriages are very brief; the union of the only couple to marry with the large scale *khā kan* rite in 1966-67 in Hua Kok lasted for about three weeks. There had been a series of rows between bride and groom and also between the groom and his mother-in-law who found him lazy. The dispute was brought to the headman because he wished to recoup some of the money paid and demanded five hundred of the thousand baht *sīn sāt*. His wife refused on the grounds that the marriage had been consummated. Eventually she offered 100 baht and agreement was finally reached with the payment of two hundred baht. Another short-lived marriage discussed before the headman ended in the payment of 175 baht to the wife because she was pregnant. In this case the husband, a widower, wanted the divorce because his wife was a slut and had found that he could not teach her to keep house as he wished. Most of the argument was between him and his wife's mother who asserted loudly that

she had warned him about her daughter before the marriage. In yet another case discussed before the headman the husband finally decided against divorce. His wife had a reputation for her affairs and so her husband sought a settlement in which all household property would be divided equally. His wife, however, resisted such an arrangement because it was she who had brought most property to the marriage. Faced with this the husband abandoned his plan.

Strictly speaking, polygyny is no longer possible in Thailand; one can only register a second marriage if the first has been terminated by death or divorce. However, in Hua Kok the question of differentiation between the legal rights of wives does not arise because marriages are not registered. As far as villagers are concerned a man can have as many wives as he wishes. While one may be described as *mia lūang*, chief wife, and the others as *mia nāi*, minor wives, the important distinctions that can occur arise from the birth of children and control of rights in property.

During fieldwork there were only two men in Hua Kok practising polygyny though there are two others who at one time have had two wives plus a widow who was once a junior wife. Most monographs stress the rarity in rural areas of what the authors consider to be an essentially elite institution. My own impression is that Hua Kok is not unusual in terms of the number of cases of polygyny and that villagers in no way view it as unusual. Where rural polygyny differs from that formerly practised by the elite is in the lack of hierarchical differentiation between wives and their children of the sort specified in the old legal codes.

Relations between the sexes are usually restrained before marriage though cases of illegitimacy do occasionally occur. [16] Three women have (*lūk thāng*, illegitimate children - literally a child of the path, wayside - but in two cases the alleged fathers were married to their sisters. [17] The elder of these two is a divorcee living with her son, now married, in her parent's house. It was said that the father of her illegitimate children is the husband of a younger sister who lives in an adjoining house. In the other case, the husband of a younger sister is said to have played, *len*, with an unmarried woman who was twenty-one or twenty-two when her daughter was born. This woman married a widower but was subsequently divorced while pregnant for the second time (see above). In the third case the woman, whose daughter has now married, never married and continues to live with her mother. While illegitimate children do not appear to be deliberately discriminated against, illegitimacy as such is viewed with general and considerable disfavour. Some describe it as a sin (*bāp*) but the main sanction would appear to be the disgrace felt by the families of young girls who find

themselves pregnant. One should note, however, that intercourse and impregnation by a brother-in-law does seem to be viewed far more lightly than when the father is unknown. Indeed, another case of a man reputedly having intercourse with an elder sister of his wife, plus sayings to the effect that men sometimes seduce their wives' daughters by former marriages, suggest that adultery with those related by marriage is viewed relatively lightly and without surprise.

Marriage Residence

Despite the changes already noted the ideal norm of initial marriage residence continues to be matrilocal. However, as a significant number of newly-weds do otherwise it is necessary to clarify the circumstances in which the ideal is achieved and factors most likely to result in adoption of alternative modes. The decision of where to live is particularly significant in the Thai system where bilateral descent and imprecise jural roles make claims upon kin conditional upon continuous validation and reinforcement by bonds of sentiment and mutual dependence.

The following discussion of residence types distinguishes variations in practice in order to highlight their significance for social organisation. The terms patrilocal and matrilocal are used only when a couple live as dependents in a household headed by consanguineal kin or their affines, or in an attached bridal-house. Residence is normally in the natal house with parents or, should they be dead, with the elder sibling and spouse who have taken over control. In certain circumstances, though, it may be in the houses of other siblings, kin of the parents' generation or grandparents. When a couple from different settlements establish their own household in one of these places it indicates a decision to associate more closely with one set of kin and is accordingly designated viri- or uxori-local. Residence of a couple from a common settlement in closer association with one set of kin than with the other, usually in a parental compound or on other land owned by them, is expressed in the same manner. Residence is only neolocal if the couple move to a hamlet new to both. Neo-matrilocal is used for two young couples who lived with kin of the wife in households in which she had not resided prior to marriage.

The figures in Table 4 indicate the limitations of the effective range in choice of residence. Of the forty-four couples in the sample about whom details are known, twenty-six (59%) lived with the parents or other kin of the bride. Even so, these figures do not accurately reflect the influence of a matrilocal ideology. In so far as ideological statements refer to what ought to be done in ideal circumstances we may immediately exclude all instances in

which either partner had been married before. If this distinction is drawn two opposing tendencies emerge (Table 5). In 68% of the thirty-four first marriages initial residence was either matrilocal or neo-matrilocal while only three of the ten couples, one or both of whom had been previously married, lived with wife's kin.

Table 4: Initial marriage residence patterns of couples* in Hua Kok

Initial Residence	No.
Matrilocal	24
Neo-matrilocal	2
Uxorilocal	0
Patrilocal	14
Virilocal	4
Neolocal	0
Unknown	4
Total	48

* Couple refers to a union; the two polygynous men are thus counted twice.

Table 5: Initial marriage residence classified according to first or subsequent marriages

Initial Residence	First marriage for:			
	both	husband	wife	neither
Matrilocal	21	1	1	1
Neo-matrilocal	2	0	0	0
Patrilocal	11	3	0	0
Virilocal	0	0	1	3
Unknown	3	0	0	1
Total	37	4	2	5

Remarriage also affects the residence choices of the succeeding generation. Patrilocal residence is more likely if the bride's mother has remarried after being widowed or divorced. The eldest daughter of Khian (cf. Ch.3: Kinship Linkage and the Growth of Hua Kok) moved with her mother and step-father to Hua Kok. On marriage she joined her husband's natal group in Kok Mai Daeng, a settlement a few miles away to the east, in which they eventually

built their own house. Whatever the personal difficulties or otherwise in her relationship with her step-father, Khian's eldest daughter had no claims upon the property of the household in which she was reared because it was he who had cleared forest for the house site and fields. Patrilocal residence is also to be expected if the father has remarried after the mother's death. When this happens children frequently leave the natal home before marriage to live with other kin. Difficulties in the relationship between children and step-parents have also been noted by Kaufman for Bangkhud (1960: 22). They are due in part to the conflicts of interest over property arising from the functions of the household group as an economic unit yet one in which control and ownership of property is vested in individuals and not in the group as a whole.

The effect of such considerations is less important for sons than for daughters because of the norm that they leave the parental home on marriage. A woman who had eloped from her home in Sukhothai province and settled in Hua Kok (house 30) was later followed by two younger sisters who joined her while she was still living with her in-laws. The purported reason was that their widowed father had brought a new wife to the family home. One of the sisters later married and went to live with her husband's mother and grandparents (house 47). Other factors supported the decision to reside patrilocally; the groom's mother had separated from her husband while still living with her parents and had subsequently borne two illegitimate children. The household was therefore highly dependent upon the young man's labour as only he and his mother were capable of working their fields. In another instance (house 31) the wife reported that her father had died when she was a baby and her mother being old had gone as a dependent to the house of an elder daughter and husband. This latter case shares a basic similarity with the others in that the informant's natal family had ceased to exist as an independent household unit by the time she married. Finally, a youngest daughter initially stayed in her husband's natal home though they eventually returned to Hua Kok and built a house in her parents' compound (house 45). One may conjecture that a pertinent factor in her decision to leave home at marriage was the extended presence of a divorced sister with her children and their implied pre-emption of the youngest child's expectations of inheriting the house and its equipment. Although no parallel statements were collected to Kaufman's report (1960: 22) that it is unlucky for two siblings and their spouses to live in the same parental house simultaneously, no cases were recorded in Hua Kok [18] and it was suggested that two couples would not live long in the same parental house because of the inevitability of quarrels.

The most important of the economic interests relevant to any explanation of individual decisions about residence is land. All children ideally and legally have equal rights in inheritance but parents also possess the right to dispose of their property as they wish. Children placing great dependence upon their future inheritance thus frequently find it necessary to act to better and ensure their claims. A decision to cultivate the favour of one pair of parents can therefore be of major personal significance, representing an abandonment of or reduction in reliance upon claims on the other parents. In general, the importance of expectations of property from parents is affected by the amount involved, the stage reached in the development cycle of the household group which determines their ability to make distributions, the potential claims of siblings and the availability of other opportunities for obtaining land. The importance of the claims of the couple's siblings is in turn determined by their number, place of residence and ability to obtain property in other ways including that of inheritance from their respective parents-in-law. Of course, of more immediate concern to a young couple than any hopes of eventual inheritance may be the availability of land to be cultivated jointly with parents. In some instances this may be totally lacking or insufficient to provide adequate support for existing household members.

Women from families much poorer than those of their husbands' are therefore likely to initially live patrilocally and eventually virilocally. Disparities of wealth were associated with the patrilocal residence of at least three couples in Hua Kok (houses 10, 19 and 28). Patrilocal residence is most probable when the groom is an only child and sole heir (house 48) and least likely when the bride is an only child or youngest daughter with both parents alive. If both die before her marriage then the married child and spouse staying in the house will almost certainly assume permanent control and administer division of the remaining lands.

The reasons for the continued existence of a matrilocal ideology are to be found in the sets of supporting institutions with which initial matrilocal residence is combined to form part of a fairly stable and integrated social system. Sons play a minor part in the running of the household and have traditionally been able to leave with comparative equanimity owing to the ease with which land could be found elsewhere. In contrast, girls are useful about the house from an early age and are far steadier workers in the fields than young unmarried men. Retirement from active farming and allocation of lands to their heirs before death reduces the parents' authority in a household that was once their own. In their old age parents become dependents and, because of the way in which work is divided in the household, their needs are mainly served by women. The likelihood of domestic conflict is minimised if this dependency is focussed upon daughters rather than on

daughters-in-law. In the one case where a woman married an only child and remained with his parents, the husband boasted of the relationship between his wife and mother saying that the wife had become the daughter which his mother never bore.

Apart from their value to ageing parents, daughters pose a greater threat to their social standing than sons. Failure to abide by the rules of good moral conduct reflects more harshly upon their parents than do the misdemeanours of sons. Greater efforts are therefore made to keep unmarried daughters subject to the authority of parents even though they still retain considerable personal freedom. Matrilocal residence in the early days of a marriage can thus be interpreted as a means of ensuring a woman's moral and financial welfare as well as of easing the transition to a new social status.

The length of time spent with parents varies considerably. Rarely for under a year, in the majority of cases it ranges from one to three years by which time at least one child has normally been born. Where a couple expect to inherit the parental home it is, of course, prolonged indefinitely. Of those not expecting to succeed to the headship of the household about half claimed to have stayed a year before moving to a separate house which was usually built in the same compound.

Much emphasis has been placed upon the importance of where claims might most profitably be pursued. However, such decisions may be delayed until after a period of matrilocal residence or past ones rescinded. Some couples moved to and fro between parental households and compounds for several years before finally establishing a permanent home. Their reasons were by no means always directly related to relative material advantage. Household 5 had returned to the husband's paternal compound in Hua Kok after eight years of uxorilocal residence in Wang Khut in an attempt to elude the malevolent forces which had brought him frequent illness. Bad health caused by spirits also led to the subsequent departure of household 3 to another village.

The time spent with parents is influenced by both the relative ease with which funds can be accumulated for the move to a separate house and the benefits gained by remaining within the parental home. Children who stay and work as dependents are entitled to a share in what they help produce. Parents should also *hai thun*, give the young couple a capital sum in order to help them build and equip their own house. The "kind of annual bonus locally called *lam pai*" noted in Bangchan by Janlekha (1955: 38-9) does not exist in Hua Kok other than in the form whereby any additional money earned by the young couple is their private property and not put into household funds.

Table 6 lists the residence choices of all Thai couples in Hua Kok at the end of 1966. The distribution between the various categories differs considerably from that given in Table 4 for initial residence though a slight overall tendency towards closer association with wife's kin remains. Other than for the daughters who will eventually inherit their parents' home the explanation for this slight bias is probably that it reflects the preponderance of choices for initial matrilocal residence. For many the erection of a separate house represents no sudden radical change in the life and status of the new family. Rather, it is just one stage in a move towards independence commencing at marriage but which may not end for many years after the new house has been erected and all economic activities are organised independently.

Table 6: Couples and the existing pattern of marriage residence in Hua Kok

Uxorilocal	21
Virilocal	17
Neolocal	5
Patrilocal	3
Neo-matrilocal	1
Patrilocal	1
Total	48

The ideology of initial matrilocal residence does not exist in a social vacuum but is intimately related to the assumption of circumstances which are ideal in the sense of being what should happen and which can be expected to occur all things being equal. It is possible to specify a number of these assumptions: ideally marriages are for life; parents do not die before the maturity and marriage of their children; marriages occur between people of similar economic standing; parents approve of their daughter's choice of husband; and every couple has several children who reach maturity, at least one of whom is a daughter. One might also add *khā kan* marriage to this list since it was almost inevitably followed by at least a brief period of residence in the bride's household.

Conclusion

The evidence that emerges from the three institutional complexes examined in this and the preceding chapter is that kin terminology, the formation and dissolution of marriage, and marriage residence patterns together provide a set of labels and links which join a great number of people in Hua Kok and the surrounding neighbourhood. At the same time one must question their

significance for the social system as a whole because the structural principles manifested by these institutions frequently duplicate and contradict one another. This leads one to doubt the priority and effectiveness of kinship as an organising principle for local social organisation because of the great degree of discretion exercised by individuals in respect to kinship matters. In fact, one should not expect the kinship system to perform the functions it may do in some other societies where descent is unilineal. Even so, the weakness of kinship as an organising principle, allied with its pervasiveness throughout the social system, may well be an unusual and special feature of rural Thai society. Certainly these characteristics are not just limited to the aspects of kinship and marriage discussed so far. The freedom with which marriages are entered upon, the variety of wedding rituals and the extent to which choice of residence is possible suggest, among other things, that the dependence of children upon their parents is slight and that parental authority is weak. In order to explore these themes further I now turn to the nuclear family and household as it is in these small groupings that the norms of kinship are strongest and most effective,

Notes to Chapter 4

1. Among the residents of the forty-nine households in Hua Kok at the end of 1966 were fifty couples, i.e. extant marital unions. The two couples in the single Chinese household are excluded from the statistical surveys on marriage and marriage residence on account of their different cultural and social norms.
2. Rising tone; *phī* with a falling tone designates an elder sibling.
3. In other respects relations between kin of the opposite sex are freer than with non-kin. It was said, for example, that a man will massage a woman only if she is kin (and vice versa) lest people gossip.
4. The literal translation of the term *thaokāe* as old person belies the fact that the very old never undertake the task of arranging a marriage or helping an eloping couple make their peace with the girl's parents. Go-betweens are usually men though women may also be asked. Occasionally a couple of people are requested to undertake negotiations jointly. In most cases the go-between is well known to the bride's family and there is a tendency to ask someone of high standing. For example, a number of people cited the village headman as the best person to act in this capacity. When the marriage is to be informal, parents sometimes approach the girl's parents on their son's behalf. Preliminary soundings may also be taken by parents before they send a *thaokāe*.

5. The fourth lunar month is considered to be an auspicious time for marriage. It also coincides with the slack season before the commencement of a new agricultural cycle when the crops of the previous year have been gathered and resources are at their most plentiful. Other months may be chosen provided they are *khū*, pair, i.e. even months.

6. The use of the *hāi sang* is an innovation which has spread northwards from central Thailand. It has been used in Hua Kok since the mid-nineteen twenties. Interestingly enough, at a wedding just outside Ayutthaya where people were more conscious of Thai traditions, water was sprinkled from leaves dipped into a bowl of water, a method pre-dating the *hāi sang*. The correct precedence for pouring the water is go-between, groom's father, groom's mother, bride's father and mother but this is by no means always observed.

7. Cf. Kaufman (1960: 154) for reference to the "holy gate of Phra-In". None of the villagers knew the type of formula mentioned by Kaufman. All that was done was to demand a bottle of liquor.

8. Villagers claimed that an eloping couple flee for three, seven or fifteen nights, according to whether the man came from the same, a neighbouring, or a distant place. This folk categorisation may have reflected past difficulties in travel but to-day there is no correlation between distance and length of elopement. Most informants stated that they had run away for three nights,

9. Wednesdays in 1967 and Mondays in 1968.

10. For example, in an elopement marriage in 1967 the *khan māk* consisted of eight dishes of cakes (*khanom*), two bottles of liquor (*lao*) and a chicken. No betel nut was sent because the recipients did not eat it.

11. The man had apparently been encouraged to enter and spend the night with the girl who was staying with her elder sister in Wang Phom. The next morning she took the towel which he had left behind to her parents. They then brought the incriminating evidence to the headman and insisted that he marry their daughter. He agreed but she then refused and insisted that he should first divorce his existing wife which he would not do. The case reached a stage of complete impasse and so the headman referred it to the *kamnan*. While her parents were discussing the affair with the *kamnan* in Bang Saphan the girl ran off to her lover in Wang Phom thereby adding to the embarrassment of the parents. They subsequently agreed to accept the couple's apologies but refused to bless them by performing the *mat mū* rite. The marriage did not last long and informants attributed the entire escapade to an attempt by the girl to obtain compensatory damages from her lover rather than to any

genuine desire to make him her husband.

12. After the age of twenty when a daughter *âk chāk pokkhrāng phā māe*, ceases to be under the custody of her parents, she is able to register a marriage without their consent.

13. Cf. Kaufman's (1960: 151) enumeration of the types of marriage. Note that in Hua Kok marriage in the groom's house never occurred and was stated quite specifically to be a Lao, not a Thai custom.

14. According to legal definition the *sin sāt* is the thing given on behalf of the man to the parents or guardian of the woman in return for the woman's consent to the marriage, the man being able to demand the return of the *sin sāt* if the marriage does not take place (article 1436).

15. Four of the forty-eight couples in the hamlet had first resided in a *rūan hā* but in only one of the three cases occurring over twenty years ago was it attached to the wife's parents' home. In another it adjoined the house of the bride's maternal grandmother with whom she had been living, her parents being dead, as was the situation in the third case where an elder married sister and her husband had inherited the household and compound in which the *rūan hā* was built. This particular bridal-house was unusual in having its own kitchen; in normal circumstances the couple would probably have lived in the groom's home but he was from a poor family near Phitsanulok and had migrated to Hua Kok in search of work. The fourth and most recently built *rūan hāe* (about 1955) was not a true bridal-house although so called by the villagers because it was erected after the couple had married following elopement.

16. Though the low rate of illegitimacy probably does reflect pre-marital chastity on the part of women, villagers do practice abortion. This is obtained either by taking excessive doses of a readily available 'hot' patent medicine or by violent massage of the abdomen.

17. If one includes the Thai wife of the Chinese immigrant the figure is four. Her first child was described by informants as *lūk thāng*.

18. In 1975 an interesting situation had evolved in house 32. What was superficially a single structure containing two married siblings with their spouses and children was in fact two totally separate units. In 1966 the household members were a widow, the widower of her dead adopted daughter and his three children. Before his wife's death the son-in-law had added on to the original house. When his eldest son married he and his wife settled in the grandmother's section of the house. When the youngest child, the only granddaughter, married she brought her

husband to live with her father in his part of the house where they immediately established separate eating and farming arrangements.