

## CHAPTER 6

### RURAL ECONOMY

*Rice is the principal Harvest of the Siameses, and their best Nourishment, it refreshes and fattens: And we found our Ship's Crew express some regret, when after a three months allowance thereof, they were return'd to Bisket; and yet the Bisket was very good, and well kept.*

Simon de la Loubère 1693: 17.

It is stating a commonplace to remark that the volume and value of Thai agricultural production has increased tremendously since the signing of the Bowring Treaty in 1855. In contrast, it is perhaps surprising that questions about the social correlates and consequences of this increase have only been considered at all systematically in the past ten years or so, and then by those primarily concerned with the 'non-development' of the Thai economy.

Van Roy rejects conventional wisdom which holds that the Thai peasant is market-oriented and responds rationally to pecuniary inducements. Instead he favours a model in which "the economy is 'embedded' in society and polity, a context within which behaviour can only be abstracted into economic, social and political elements at the cost of distorting its indigenous logic (1970: 22). Consequently the state of well-being sought by Thai peasants is conceived of not just in terms of conventional economic criteria but of the manipulation of "total social relations" which results in "enhancement of rank", rank according to Van Roy being "a synthesis of class, status and power" (1970: 22).

A superficially very different position is taken by Jacobs in *Modernization Without Development* where he asserts that the Thai peasant is an economic man. He then modifies this by noting that "while the Thai peasant is an economic man, he is not an economically developed or developing man", a qualification based on the view that while the motives for development exist the institutional structure does not (Jacobs 1971: 60). Consequently the Thai peasant is institutionally only selectively innovative.

He accepts or rejects innovation according to his conception of comparative advantage. This advantage must be calculated not only in terms of objectively determined potential return on some input-output scale but also in terms of such institutionally grounded, non-objectively determined variables as the unavailability of local labor and other productive village resources and the possibility of disaster which faces all peasants who operate on close margins in economically non-developed societies (Jacobs 1971: 160-161).

In many respects the opposition reflects the substantivist and formalist approaches to the study of non-industrial economies. Both attempt to explain the lack of development and ultimately both blame the social system, Van Roy in terms of rank maximisation and Jacobs in terms of the adjustments made to an "economic environment primarily governed by patrimonial considerations" (1971: 166).

As for the analysis of economic relations within Hua Kok the approach expounded by Jacobs appears, with reservations, to be the more useful. The notion of economising within an institutional framework that restricts and channels choices seems to accord closely with the economic behaviour of farmers in Hua Kok. Jacob's explanations of, for example, the importance of the possibility of disaster, the reasons for the minor contribution to development made by the cooperative movement (*ibid*: 163), and the dependence on money lenders (*ibid*: 165), generally reflect the experience of the farmers studied. On the other hand, Van Roy has replaced a very crude model of economic man with an equally crude one of rank maximisation which bears little relation to either the economic aspect or totality of social organisation in Hua Kok.

Van Roy's approach also seems to carry with it the implication of the Thai peasantry being a survival. According to Polanyi's threefold typology of substantive economic systems - reciprocal, distributive and market - peasant economies are distributional "in the sense that economic resources are distributed among varying statuses in return for services of various kinds necessary for the maintenance of the political unit" (Wijeyewardene 1969: 13), which is essentially the position adopted by Van Roy with his emphasis on the Thai peasant goal of "enhancement of rank" (1970: 22). Yet as Wijeyewardene observes generally of peasant communities, "the impinging of the price-fixing market economy has for the most part wiped out the distributional superstructure". This is certainly true of Thailand. The formalised system of patron-client ties which was the basis of administrative organisation has long since disappeared and the country has also been actively participating in the world market economy for over a hundred years through the

export of agricultural products. To take the substantivist position on rural economic organisation, which is designated as being at the distributional level of development, is to lay too great an emphasis on the past. Too much of the structure of the distributive economy has been abolished for Van Roy's model to be satisfactory for the study of peasant communities like Hua Kok. To argue thus is not to ignore the past, traditional modes do influence contemporary behaviour. However, communities like Hua Kok find their origin not in the traditional pre-market economy but in the post-Bowring, market-oriented era with a political administration based on a British colonial model.

### Economic Pursuits

The people of Hua Kok are primarily agriculturalists and, with the few exceptions already noted, the household is the basic production and consumption unit. All households but that of the Chinese and his family are directly involved in cultivating one or more of the three main crops if only in the capacity of wage labourers. [1] In addition to being an important cash crop non-glutinous rice (*khāo chao*) is also the villagers' staple. The other two crops, red maize and mung beans (which are grown in succession to one another with the beans being sown after the maize is harvested and the fields reploughed), are produced entirely for sale. Maize (*khāo phōi*) is a comparatively recent introduction and the way it is farmed differs markedly from the way rice is treated. It almost goes without saying that rice is an integral part of the rural Thai way of life and its cultivation more subject to the expression of traditional cultural norms and social values than is the growing of maize. Some farmers grow all three crops but the main impact of the introduction of maize is felt by those who grow no rice. They are entirely dependent on a cash income for the purchase of their principal foodstuff.

A little sweet corn is often grown alongside the hard Guatemalan varieties but it is eaten as a snack and never as a main meal. Some glutinous rice (*khāo nīao*) is also cultivated for local consumption though it is of very minor importance unlike in the northeast where it is the staple. It is mainly used in Hua Kok for making rice beer and cakes (*khanom*). The latter are usually ostensibly prepared for holy days (*wan phra*) for presentation to the bikkhus though many are consumed within the household itself.

Most households grow a few vegetables but only the Chinese does so commercially, his livelihood being based on the sale of home-made bean-curd in Wang Thong market supplemented by vegetables and duck eggs. Just a couple of Thai households attempt to rear ducks but most keep at least a few chickens and several make a practice of investing any available money

in a pig which is fattened until ready cash is required or a good offer received. As for the other crops, sesame is occasionally sown though, by and large, it has been supplanted by mung beans. A few farmers with land adjoining the river grow tobacco and derive a valuable income from its sale locally and in nearby villages. Most house sites contain some assorted fruit trees and a few have small orchards: however, most of the fruit is consumed locally and little is sold. The same is true of the juice of the sugar palm which is either fermented to make an illicit wine (toddy, *nam ka chāe*), or boiled down to make blocks of sugar for sale and private consumption. A few households gather kapok from trees on their house sites but rarely in sufficient quantities to be sold. Some also occasionally dig and prepare bamboo shoots for sale in the market at Wang Thong.

The main sources of cash other than by the sale of the commodities already mentioned are also derived from farming. Several households either farm no fields on their own account or so little as to make them primarily dependent on money earned by working as day labourers on other people's farms. A couple of households also receive a major part of their total income from renting out their fields or draft animals. In the case of the latter this has usually been when a farmer is not cultivating his land for a season or when he has an extra beast, but one farmer is in the process of deliberately building up a herd of buffaloes and cattle to provide animals for rent or sale and another has sold his fields with the express intention of buying draft animals to rent out. The rent of 50 *tāng* of rice for a buffalo can be over 25% of the animal's current market value but the real profits are made when one breeds or buys young stock.

There is only one man who practises a remunerative craft. He works as a carpenter while his wife tends their small plot of rented paddy which produces enough to feed the family. [2] Another regularly joins a work team floating logs down river to Nakhon Sawan though others have done it in the past. [3] A couple of households occasionally supplement their income by going to break stones at a quarry several kilometres the other side of Wang Thong on the road to Lomsak. An old couple who did this to support their drunkard son made nine to ten baht a day, though reputedly a young man might make thirty baht. Several men spend a considerable amount of time at certain times of the year fishing while most households supplement their diet fairly regularly with freshly caught fish. Finally, in addition to the headman's shop the carpenter's wife set up a foodstall in the 1967 dry season. For about a year, until late 1966, there was also a second shop in Hua Kok tended by the wife of a pig dealer. Eventually, though, she and her husband moved to be nearer the market in Wang Thong.

## The Agricultural Cycle

### Rice

Non-glutinous rice (*khāo chao*) is the staple food in addition to being commercially important. The same tripartite distinctions in types of rice according to yield and growing time are made in Hua Kok as in Bangkhud (Kaufman 1960: 41). *Khāo nak* is the heaviest yielding and takes five to six lunar months from the time of transplanting to reach maturity, *khāo klāngpī* is the intermediate category and *khāo bao*, which is the lightest yielding, matures in about three months. Water, rather than time itself, is the crucial factor, there are varieties of *khāo nak* which mature more quickly. Nevertheless, the basic association drawn between the speed of maturation and weight of yield noted by Kaufman remains useful, partly because of the poorly developed facilities in the Hua Kok neighbourhood for controlling water. Fields are classified as *nā nāng*, flood fields, and *nā bon*, high fields, and in the latter there is rarely if ever any standing water. Such fields yield one *kwīan* (2,000 litres) per two and a half to three rai, whereas the yield of *khāo nak* growing in well watered paddies is one *kwīan* per one and a half to two rai.

Most farmers continue to use local strains of rice though a few, not necessarily the more prosperous, have turned to the improved varieties sold by government agencies. For example, Phad (household 5) who farms seven and a half rai of paddies bought a sack each of selected *khāo bao* and *khāo nak* prepared at the Phitsanulok rice research station and distributed through the district authorities. The cost was ten baht per sack containing two and a half litres of seed, enough to plant three or four rai. For Phad the advantage sought was not so much an increased yield as an improvement in the quality of his crop which he hoped would bring him a better price from millers able to obtain a higher proportion of unbroken rice from well-formed, regularly shaped grains.

Considered overall, the quality of rice grown in Hua Kok is inferior to that from the main part of the central region. Methods of husbandry and not using insecticides play their part in this but the chief reason is the dryness of the area and the poorly developed use of irrigation. Both quality and yields are far too subject to the vagaries of the monsoon rains. So far no-one has attempted to grow two crops a year although it should be possible to do so in some places by using the small water pumps already owned by the more prosperous villagers. Few attempt to use fertiliser and those who do have experienced difficulties in obtaining supplies through the farmers' cooperative; stocks ordered in 1966 did not arrive.

The first showers of the wet monsoon in May or early June signal the start of the agricultural cycle. Preparations of equipment are completed and

as soon as possible a patch of low-lying land is ploughed and prepared as a seed bed onto which the germinated rice is broadcast. If draft animals are being used the bulk of the ploughing is delayed until mid-June and July, when the main rains have commenced and the soil is thoroughly moistened or even waterlogged, and is not completed until August. Ploughs are usually made by the farmers themselves, ideally out of *māi pratū* (teak) or *māi dāeng* (*xylia kerii*). The simple iron shoe attached to the foot of the plough costs two and a half baht in the local market. Those with a lot of fields to prepare tend to adopt a routine of getting up between four and five o'clock in the morning and working until around eleven when they eat. Ploughing is then re-commenced in mid-afternoon and continued until seven or eight in the evening.

Oxen are preferred to buffaloes as in the northeast and unlike in most of the central region where the latter predominate. Buffaloes are stronger and better able to plough heavy soils but cannot be worked in the heat of the day. Oxen are far handier in this respect and can be used to plough or pull carts at any time of the day. It is also said that to plough with oxen is far less tiring than with a buffalo. On the other hand buffaloes are slightly cheaper to purchase than oxen, especially if purchased when very young, and have the advantage, if female, of eventually producing offspring which can be sold or kept to build up a small herd. [4] It is because of this that one third of those with draft animals have only buffaloes.

If tractors are to be used for ploughing the fields must still be fairly dry. In 1966 few even considered hiring tractors to prepare rice fields though their use in ploughing maize fields was well established. When the rains are punctual there is adequate time available for the preparation of the paddies using traditional methods before transplanting. However, in 1968 considerable use of tractors was being made in the paddies behind Hua Kok and Wang Phom. This was not because of any commitment to innovation or progress. It was due to the late arrival of the monsoon rains though sufficient preliminary showers had fallen for completion of the planting of the maize crop according to the normal schedule. Consequently there were both tractors available and a sufficient time incentive to cause many to pay to have their paddies mechanically ploughed.

The heavy tasks of ploughing (*thai*) and harrowing (*khāt*) with either a buffalo or oxen are only rarely performed by women, usually when there is no man available. The pulling of the young rice shoots (*thān kā*) when they are between twelve and fifteen inches high is done by both sexes. No such sensibilities were expressed in Hua Kok as in Bangkhua where it was considered unbecoming for a woman to lift her leg in order to beat the roots



against her foot to dislodge surplus soil (Kaufman 1960: 39-40). The shoots are then tied in bunches and the top three to six inches cut off prior to being taken to the paddies where they are to be planted out,

Only when forest is freshly cut and the land inadequately prepared, or if the fields are prone to early deep flooding, is rice broadcast where it is to mature. With these exceptions transplanting (*dam nā*) now predominates and is the first really labour intensive phase of the rice cycle. Usually all the economically active household members, often together with other helpers recruited in a variety of ways (cf. Ch. 7), are organised to plant the young shoots as speedily as possible. The fields are then left until harvest. Little or no weeding is done and pests other than land crabs, which are collected by children for food, are also ignored. Attempts to regulate the supply of water are sporadic and on the higher lying land any surface water soon evaporates. When an attempt to irrigate is made it is usually in September and October. Insufficient rain or irrigation at this time is especially serious because the grains do not set well if the fields become too dry.

Harvesting (*kīao khāo*), which starts in November and continues through most of January, is the second labour intensive phase in which additional labour to that available within the farm household is frequently used. Once ripe the rice must be gathered promptly: grain that matures too long dries out and breaks easily when milled. The cut rice is tied into sheaves (*hāp khāo sai fān*) and taken by shoulder pole to the threshing floor where it is stacked and either allowed to dry a little or prepared immediately for threshing. The remaining stubble is then burnt off as soon as it dries out in January or February.

Many now hire a tractor to do the threshing (*nūat*) and when this is done the sheaves are placed in a circle and the bindings cut. The tractor is driven over them for about fifteen minutes after which the stalks are shaken and the process repeated. Finally the straw is removed and stacked until required for the livestock. The grain is heaped prior to winnowing either by hand with a winnowing tray or by a hand-cranked mechanical winnower. Before the tractor became so popular the most common method was to prepare the threshing floor and drive draft animals over the straw for a couple of nights. Not only is this slow but the straw can cut the animals' feet. For those with only a little rice, threshing by hand is an acceptable alternative. A sheaf is gripped between two sticks joined at one end by a wire and then beaten against a board placed on the ground.

### *Maize and Beans*

The requirements for a successful maize crop differ markedly from those for rice. As soon as the first rains have fallen, which is usually in early May, the fields are ploughed and after being soaked for a night the seed is sown. [5] Should the initial rains be too heavy the seedlings rot and if it is insufficient they wither. There is consequently a considerable element of uncertainty in growing maize. The costly, but speedy, adoption of tractor ploughing is one way in which farmers have attempted to prevent crop failure by being prepared to sow the seeds as soon as the weather appears to have broken and the showers are sufficient to support growth. Another response is to employ wage-labour to sow the seeds. One farmer, for example, hired ten people so that his ten rai of fields could be planted in a single day.

Maize also differs from rice in requiring careful cultivation of the young plants which includes weeding (*tham yā khāo phōt*), cleaning out the grass and heaping the soil around the stems to facilitate vigorous and unrestricted growth. The time of planting and intensive care of the plants tends to overlap with the ploughing of the paddies and this is another incentive for those farming both crops to hire a tractor to make sure the maize is planted and established as soon as possible. Speed is also important when the crop matures and farmers with upwards of ten rai to harvest usually employ wage-labour to assist them.

Once the maize has been gathered for drying in late August and early September the mung beans are broadcast and then ploughed in. These mature in the new year after the end of the rice harvest. The bushes are then cut and allowed to dry before threshing which, as with rice, can be by tractor, animals or hand.

### *Conclusion*

By mid-February the main agricultural cycle is complete. Rice is readily available and those who have sold their crops have money to buy clothes and other goods. Little farm work remains to be done other than by those growing tobacco who have the crop to cut, cure, shred and dry. Others stay busy with tasks such as cutting wood, making charcoal and collecting sugar palm sap to make sugar cakes, etc. It is also in this early part of the year that new houses are built and weddings most frequent. Only as the heat builds up in April and early May do serious preparations for the approaching season commence with the repair and replacement of equipment, most of which continues to be made by the farmers themselves.

This cursory survey of economic pursuits and of the main features of the agricultural cycle is sufficient to demonstrate the total predominance of



agriculture in the economy of Hua Kok, a situation that is unlikely to change in the near future. The pattern of agricultural organisation, however, is changing; the new crops and techniques that have been introduced and the increasing economic differentiation that is occurring within the hamlet are but two aspects of this. The changing pattern of land holding is another and, because of its fundamental importance, I intend to outline the traditional system and the changes before proceeding to the actual business of farming and its organisation in the following chapter.

### Land and Land Tenure

Land is classified according to its use; *sīan*, gardens or orchards; *thī yū*, house sites; *nā*, paddy fields; *rai*, dry fields for maize, [6] mung beans and sesame; and finally *pā*, forest. Opportunities to change land-use are restricted. House sites and gardens are concentrated along the sandy, raised banks of the river. The dry fields predominate on the more undulating and drier land east of Hua Kok and in a small area of the west bank immediately south of the settlement where the line of an old water-course is marked by sloping ground.

Table 8: Farming: area\* cultivated per household

Type of cultivation	Area cult. (rai)	No. of households	Mean area per household (rai)
A: <i>tham nā</i>			
<i>nā</i> only	263	18	15.5
<i>nā</i> + <i>rai</i>	181.5	15	12
Total <i>nā</i> farmed	444.5	33	13.5
B: <i>tham rai</i>			
<i>rai</i> only	96	10	9.5
<i>rai</i> + <i>nā</i>	67	15	4.5
Total <i>rai</i> farmed	163	25	6.5
C: <i>tham rai</i> and <i>tham nā</i> together	248.5	15	16.5
D: Total land farmed	607.5	43	14

\* All land area figures in Tables 8-12 are approximated to the nearest *ngān* (0.25 rai).

The figures in Table 8 are based on a survey of forty-three households in Hua Kok. Of the remaining six, four did no farming on their own account in the 1966-7 agricultural season, one was involved in market gardening (the Chinese) and one is excluded for lack of information. The mean area farmed per household is 14 rai, the median 12 rai and the range is from 1 to 51.5 rai. The mean area of dry fields farmed per household is noticeably smaller than the fields used for rice. For the latter it ranges from 3 to 41.5 rai with a median of 11.5 rai while the figures for the dry fields show a range from 1 to 20 rai with a median of 4 rai.

Table 9: Farming: area cultivated per farm

Type of cultivation	Area cult (rai)	No. of farms	Mean area per farm(rai)
A: <i>tham nā</i>			
<i>nā</i> only	270.5	18	15
<i>nā + rai</i>	181.5	12	15
Total <i>nā</i> farmed	452.0	30	15
B: <i>tham rai</i>			
<i>rai</i> only	103	12	8.5
<i>rai + nā</i>	60	12	5
Total <i>rai</i> farmed	163	24	6.75
C: <i>tham rai</i> and <i>tham nā</i> together	241.5	12	20
D: Total land farmed	615	41	15

If one takes the farm instead of the household as the unit of measurement (Table 9) the figures differ because of arrangements for joint production by some household groups. Two pairs of Hua Kok households farm completely in association with one another (nos. 1 and 3, *nā* and *rai*; 11 and 13, *nā*). Two other households (nos. 41 & 42) farm rice fields together while maintaining separate maize farms. [7] Finally, those in house 16 farms *nā* jointly with a household in Bang Saphan.

The system of land tenure practised in Hua Kok and the associated pattern of land holdings existing at the end of 1966 are undergoing important and possibly fundamental change. The details presented in Tables 10 - 12 do not summarise *the* land system of Hua Kok, they merely provide some

insights into the stage reached in the process of accommodation to a cash economy and a shortage of land.

Table 10: Tenure patterns (agricultural land of farming households)

Type of tenure	<i>nā</i>	<i>rai</i>	<i>nā</i> and <i>rai</i> combined
a owned	19	16	23
b rented	5	1	4
c use given	1	6	4
d mixed a/b	7	2	8
e mixed a/c	1	0	1
f mixed b/c	0	0	1
g mixed a/b/c/	0	0	2
Total	33	25	43

Table 11: Tenure and area farmed per household

Land	Owned (rai)	No. of house- holds	Mean area per house- hold (rai)	Rented (rai)	No. of house- holds	Mean area per house- hold (rai)	Used (rai)	No. of house- holds	Mean area per house hold (rai)
<i>nā</i>	280	27	10.25	140	12	11.5	24	2	12
<i>rai</i>	98	18	5.5	23	3	7.75	42	6	7
<i>nā+rai</i>	378	34	11.0	163	15	10.75	66	8	8.25

Table 12: Agricultural land owned per household

Land	Area (rai)	No. of households	mean area per household (rai)
<i>nā</i>	340	27	12.5
<i>rai</i>	149.5	22	6.75
aggregate <i>nā + rai</i>	489.7	36	13.5

### *Ownership*

In villagers' eyes if not those of the government, full rights of ownership in land are established by the traditional practice of clearing and farming a section of forest, the four points of which have been marked by wooden stakes. Such a system lasted as long as it did because of the general abundance of land suitable for agriculture. Local scarcities did develop but those without sufficient land to support themselves and their families found it relatively easy to move on to where unclaimed land was available. It was as the result of such a local scarcity that Hua Kok was founded by families from Bang Saphan and Wang Thong. In this type of situation the loss of rights to a plot of land did not pose a basic threat to one's right to a livelihood, nor were there any significant incentives for dispossessing others of their land. Consequently land has been managed with little reference to government legislation and few bothered to avail themselves of the legal rights granted by various land certificates. It must also be remembered that from the government's point of view the careful regulation of land rights has not had the importance it did, for example, in feudal systems in which tax was levied on fixed productive assets of land.

This state of affairs seems to have prevailed until the combination of a developing market economy and increase in population gave land a new importance. The economic transformation wrought by these changes was delayed in the settlements along the Wang Thong river by the introduction in the 1950s of a crop occupying a vacant ecological niche. At the very time that fresh land for paddies was becoming scarce farmers started to grow maize for which there was plenty of suitable forest for clearing. It was this shortage of land for rice that probably explains the speed with which these important agricultural innovations were accepted. Now that all land worth farming has been claimed and nearly all of it placed under cultivation the situation has reverted to what it was before the development of maize agriculture. Unless one is prepared to leave Hua Kok or at least spend the working season living in a field-hut there are no longer any opportunities for claiming or even buying forest for a nominal sum. It is thus not surprising that the establishment and protection of rights to farm lands is achieving a new significance for villagers.

The ultimate legal rights of land ownership have either been vested in the king in the period of absolute monarchy or in the state unless specifically allocated. [8] The development of a body of modern land legislation, commencing with King Chulalongkorn's introduction of a distinction between factual occupancy and ownership in 1901, has created a very confused and confusing situation. The most recent major piece of legislation, the Land

Code of 1954, is a relatively straightforward document; where the main difficulties arise is in the continued use of a variety of certificates authorised by earlier legislation. There is also considerable variation in the extent to which certificates have been issued and also in the types of certificate used in different parts of the country. Probably in response to this the *Census of Agriculture 1963* defined ownership in general terms irrespective of whether or not full legal rights were possessed. [9] A 1972 newspaper report urging a major overhaul of the Land Code as a necessary preliminary to the proposed implementation of land reform in Thailand presents the following overall picture.

At present, according to the Land Department, the number of settlers on farm lands without title deeds or any proper testimonials for exploitation is overwhelming. For more than 37 million rai out of the total area under cultivation of about 65 million rai, farmers still hold neither title deeds nor 'exploitation testimonials' (noh soh sam). The number of farmers without the proper documents is estimated to be eight million. Out of this lot some are holders of 'reserve licenses' (bai chong), while the majority comprised settlers without any legally recognised status (*Bangkok Post, Weekly Supplement*, Sept.14, 1972).

In the best known article to date on the subject of land tenure, Toro Yano distinguishes five types of certificate issued in compliance with the 1954 Land Code but noted that only one of these, the S.K.1 (*sâ khâ nung*), a certificate of occupancy "not directly related to the acquisition or lapse of land title", was used in the village he studied in southern Thailand (1968: 854-855). However, this certificate had been issued for 89% of the land in Yano's survey area. According to a tax list issued to the headman of Village No.7 in 1966 about a quarter of the certificates held by villagers were of the N.S.3 type (*nâ sâ sām*), described by Yano as confirming the utilization of land (1968: 854). In addition there was a third certificate referred to locally as *trā châng* (correctly *chanôt trā châng*) which approximates to the certificate confirming legal ownership noted by Yano, the *chanôt thī din*. The former is an old form of registration dating back to 1905 which has been retained in Phitsanulok and some of the adjoining provinces despite its formal abolition in the 1954 Land code (Keiwalinsrit 1970, Part i: 29). [10]

The 1966 tax list indicated that out of 2,974 rai of all types of land owned by one hundred and forty-nine persons, only thirty-five per cent was registered. The certificate most frequently held was the S.K.1 (59%), followed by the N.S.3 (26%), and *chanôt trā châng* (15%). These registration figures were a year or so out of date and not all land 'owned' by villagers

had been declared for tax purposes, Nevertheless the information contained does throw some light on village-government relations and villagers' ideas about rights to land. Firstly, the law makes the whole process of obtaining legal documents relating to land both expensive and difficult for the villager. Secondly, villagers are often uncertain of the value or significance of formal documentation. The headman, for example, found that some farmers continue to believe that the receipts given for the payment of the annual land tax are in some way akin to proper land certificates and might be used to support legal claims when this is not so.

The traditional local view is that by marking out and clearing previously unused forest one establishes basically the same rights of ownership as one may possess in cattle or other goods. An owner (*chao khong*) has the right to alienate the property at will and the absence of any formal legal right to do so does not appear to have impinged upon village perceptions of the situation. Most, if not all, land in the area has been claimed and cleared in the traditional manner. Nobody seems to have bothered to obtain written permission (*khong sit*) from the district headquarters for them to clear and commence cultivation. In fact much of the land cleared for maize cultivation was state forest at the time and it was only some years afterwards that it was released for clearance. Indeed, some of the forest was even claimed and sold before clearance for maize cultivation took place. Certificates confirming occupancy but not granting the right of allocation to others (S.K.1) were only obtained after the land was re-classified which was well after it had been cleared and had begun producing crops.

The erosion of the traditional system is attributable to a number of related changes in demographic and economic organisation rather than to any major change in government policy. The most readily observable reason is that land rights are now more important to villagers and need to be protected because of the increasing scarcity and value of land. This is in turn due to both the rapid increase in population and the incorporation of the area into the cash economy which together have had a major effect on the demand for land. As all unused land in the neighbourhood suitable for cultivation has been claimed so the market value of fields has risen markedly. Furthermore, the potential capacity of the individual's demand for land has increased as new opportunities for producing for the market have occurred and as the numbers of landless families or those with small farms who are available for wage-labour have increased. The effect of the greater involvement by government in rural affairs must also be noted. Apart from the improvement in roads and other facilities a government supported cheap credit scheme designed to raise productivity requires that participants wanting individual loans possess full legal rights of ownership (cf. Ch. 7:



Agricultural Credit and Development).

Finally, one must note certain problems arising from the traditional system which does not provide any legal or quasi-legal means of dealing with disputes together with opportunities afforded by government regulations for cheating. As far as government officials are concerned the rights of those whose names appear on land certificates are secure however they obtained these rights. In one neighbouring village there was a case of a woman excluding her siblings from their inheritance by reputedly bribing an official to include only her name on the relevant land documents. In other nearby settlements there have also been instances of individuals registering legal claims to land already partially cleared by another but as yet unregistered. According to informants the only recourse of the victim is to shoot the cheat, something which has apparently happened frequently enough to deter most would-be false claimants.

At this point it is useful to summarise the traditional system to see how it fitted in with local patterns of social organisation. Until the present century the Thai population grew slowly and sporadically. Wars resulted in major reductions as well as increases in numbers because Southeast Asian warfare consisted primarily of population raiding. Despite localised shortages land suitable for cultivation has, generally speaking, not been scarce and the geographical mobility of those experiencing scarcity ameliorated local pressures. This mobility and low value of land is reflected in particular institutions such as devolution and in the general system of social values. The opportunity to clear land has been highly valued and an important factor in explaining social forms and attitudes to land itself.

Rural Thai society has in many ways been a 'frontier' society. This was especially so in the years following the Bowring Treaty (1855) and the abolition of slavery when there was a movement away from the main established centres into the underpopulated parts of the country, large areas of which were rapidly brought under cultivation. [11] In the early part of this century Hua Kok was at the very edge of the expanding frontier. Now, however, as one farmer succinctly put it "people like to claim land but there is no land to claim". The horizons of those living in Hua Kok are, by and large, limited to the area over which kin and friends are distributed because they constitute the principal channels of communication about opportunities elsewhere as well as being possible helpers should one move. Consequently, while there is probably some land which could be claimed in Phitsanulok and the adjoining provinces the opportunity does not, in practice, exist for most people in Hua Kok. For those who are landless the options are wage-labouring, renting or purchasing land, the latter increasingly necessitating the use of credit as

those without land find it impossible to accumulate sufficient cash to buy any outright.

### *Renting*

To date only *rai* and *nā* have been rented. Half the house sites are owned by members of other households but no rent is charged. Orchards have not been rented out and are unlikely to be so in the future. Trees planted by a tenant would remain his personal property thereby effectively permanently alienating the land; consequently renters are not allowed to plant trees in the fields they till. As for fruit trees standing on land subsequently rented out, the crop belongs to the owner; tenants may take some of the fruit but only for their own consumption, none may be sold.

Contracts vary considerably in the manner in which rent is charged, the time they run and the extent to which the contract is formalised. Those entirely dependent on rented land sometimes farm markedly differing areas of land from year to year. To some extent this reflects the absence of a rentier class in the past though one does appear to be developing in certain parts of the country. Instead, in Hua Kok a lot of the fields rented out are owned by those who, for various reasons, find it advantageous to let others farm all or just part of their land for a year or so.

In 1965 Duang (house 14) was able to rent three plots of *nā* totalling twenty-two *rai*. One had been contracted for five years with a kinsman living in Hua Kok (Thong, house 45). The other plots were rented for one year only, the first from an acquaintance for cash and the second from a relative through his mother for a specified weight of rice. The following year Duang was dependent on the six *rai* contracted for five years and his father had to give him rice to help feed his large family. In 1967 he reached the final year of the contract and had borrowed enough money to start paying for a large plot of land consisting of nineteen *rai* of *nā* and eight and a half of uncleared bamboo forest.

Five year contracts are rare, the normal pattern is for a one year commitment which is frequently renewed. With the increase in peasant indebtedness in the area a new type of rent contract is appearing. When a creditor takes possession of land given as security for the debt he usually continues to permit the former owner to farm it in return for a specified quantity of rice. Alternatively, a debtor may sell the land in order to pay the debt and at the same time arrange to rent it from the purchaser. Iang (house 26), who is the richest man in Hua Kok, bought such a plot of ten *rai* of good land from an acquaintance in Wang Thong. He expected to continue the arrangement of renting it to the seller for 150 *tāng* of rice per annum till the time came for

him to divide his fields among his heirs.

The arrangement by which creditors take possession of a debtor's fields is known as *khâi fâk*, redeemable sale. In cases of debt where the sum owed is increasing due to the debtor's inability to cover the interest charges he raises money by selling the land to the creditor on the understanding that he may reestablish his ownership by payment of the original price. He then rents the land, the rent in effect being the interest on what is really a loan. The arrangement is usually specified as being for one year and the purchaser does not normally allow it to continue further though sometimes farmers attempt to repossess their land long after the period legally specified in the sale contract. [12] The rent in the case of the thirty rai mortgaged in this way by the village headman was one third of the total crop, this incidentally being the only instance of share-cropping recorded in Hua Kok.

Rent charges vary with the quality of the land, the supply of water and to whom it is being rented. The great majority of contracts are between people who know each other fairly well and just over half of those recorded were between people considered to be true kinsmen including affines, as opposed to the situation in which some tenants use kin terms in referring to the owners of their farms. When the rent is taken in kind its proportion of the total crop varies according to the year, what was one quarter one year was three eighths the next, but the normal range is between approximately one fifth and one third of the crop. Cash rents vary from twenty to one hundred baht per rai for *nâ*. In real terms rents charged in rice tend to be roughly the same as cash rents. However, there does appear to be some advantage to the landlord taking the rent in rice if he is a dealer or able to store the crop for several months, thereby granting him the benefit of its increase in value by up to twenty-five per cent as the market price of paddy rises. It is not possible to say what the 'price' of kinship is in terms of the rent charged but it does seem that where kinship or even friendship ties are close the rent is sometimes unusually low or flexible in that the amount taken will depend on the size of the crop and may be foregone in lean years.

In practice, the renting of land to kin merges with the custom of parents giving the usufruct of land prior to its formal division in that where the usufruct of *nâ* is granted a gift of part of the crop is given to the parents (cf. Ch. 5: Devolution). The main significance of kin ties for the rental of land seems to be that they are an important channel for information. It also appears likely that the high proportion of intra-kin arrangements reflects traditional modes of tenure and farming, specifically, the absence of a rentier class. It is in situations where a farmer decides not to use a plot of land for the coming year, rather than of the entrepreneur who accumulates land to

rent it out systematically, that one expects to find kin links used most frequently.

Rent contracts should be registered (*sanyā*) before the headman who has a standardised form of contract requiring two witnesses, who are heads of families, which is issued by the district office for the job. Neither the headman nor any district official will have anything to do with disputes arising from verbal contracts. Even so, those who are kin (*lūk phī lūk nāng*) usually neglect to register such contracts as also happens when the renter is well known to and trusted by the owner (*wai chai, chua chai*). According to the headman, in the case of those who are related this is because kin do not cheat (*kong*) one another and so find it unnecessary to make formal agreements.

### Allocation of Usufruct

In the previous chapter the allocation of usufruct was discussed as an aspect of devolution. About half the houses in the hamlet are built on sites not owned by anyone living in them. In all but one instance this situation arises from the custom of young couples building houses in their parents' as yet undivided compounds. The exception was the house of Hoi and his wife Phan (no. 19) which in 1966 was located on a site owned by Phan's mother's youngest sister (house 17). Early in 1967 Hoi and Phan moved about fifty metres to where Hia (house 9) was himself erecting a new house. Hoi's intention was to buy the site when he had the money to do so, Hia being prepared in the meantime to let them use it. However, Hia eventually became reluctant to sell though he was prepared to let Hoi and Phan remain where they were. In a case occurring in early 1966 a newly wed couple erected a second shop-house on land adjoining the track owned by a kinsman of the wife instead of residing initially across the river with her parents with whom relations at the time were very strained. After about nine months, though, they moved in order to be nearer the market.

As shown in Tables 10 and 11, two households possess the usufruct of paddy fields. In the first (no. 44) the head uses twenty rai belonging to his mother and in 1966/7 gave her a gift of fifty *tāng* of paddy out of a total yield of over nine *kwān*. Unless unforeseen circumstances arise he can expect to eventually inherit this land. In the second case (house 32) Na, a widow who had reared her younger siblings when their mother died, uses the four rai inherited by a younger sister now the wife of the richest farmer in Hua Kok. In this instance no gift of paddy is given to the owner.

Four of the six plots of *rai*, of one, two, four, and nine rai, were allocated to junior households in 1966/7. The following year the nine rai were

shared equally with a sister of the woman who had previously been allowed by her mother to farm the entire plot. The four rai were given to a daughter by a woman who in turn farmed sixteen rai belonging to her son who was usually away for part of the agricultural season floating logs downstream. The sixth plot consisted of ten rai given by an elder brother in Bang Saphan on the informal understanding that he would receive an unspecified share of the profits.

While usufruct (*hai chai*) arrangements are usually longer lasting than tenancy agreements they are, by definition, temporary. Land so allocated is either eventually divided (*bāeng kan*) and full rights given to the user or the owner takes back the land to farm it himself or re-allocate to someone else. In addition to house sites and farmland a couple of informants claimed that parents had given them the right to use orchards, but this amounted to nothing more than allowing children no longer in the parental home to help themselves to fruit.

### *Sale of Land*

In keeping with the pragmatic attitude to land already noted, Thai farmers buy and sell land freely and this plays its part in preventing the excessive fragmentation of land holdings. Payment is usually in one block sum though sometimes fifty per cent may be given as a down payment to be followed by the remainder on completion of the harvest. No sentimental attachment or other social value is associated with continued possession of a particular plot and there is no belief that if land is to be sold then it should be to kin rather than outsiders. Prices vary considerably according to location, the type of use to which it can be put and its fertility, under which heading must be included the availability of water as well as the quality of the soil. As was to be expected, prices have risen considerably as land has become scarce owing to the rapidly growing population and the general improvement in communications which has increased demand for the area's agricultural products. The change in value has been particularly marked where forest has been cleared to make *rai*. What this means in social and economic terms is that it is becoming increasingly difficult for those who do not inherit land to make the transition from renting to ownership.

With the information available it is not possible to quantify the importance of kinship in the sale of land. Nevertheless, as with land for renting, information does pass along kin linked networks and appears important to the extent that approximately sixty per cent of recorded transactions were between kin. On the other hand, these figures might also be interpreted as reflecting the containment of this type of transaction within the physical area



in which there are most kin. While it is sometimes said of transactions between close kin that the price is reduced, this occurs only when the relationship between the two parties is in practice a close one. There is no norm that a special price should be charged to kin. Consequently intra-kin transactions are not viewed as disadvantageous or problematic in other respects and to be avoided as is the case with cash loans between all but those very closely related.

However, while the proximity of kin ties may influence the pattern of renting and sale of land it by no means necessarily counters or disguises the underlying commercial nature of intra-kin transactions, Yai (house 38) needed cash so he sold ten rai of maize fields (*khāi fāk*) to his elder brother Riam (house 43) for five thousand baht, though they did not bother to register the change in ownership. Riam rented the land to another younger brother for 800 baht for one year, then cultivated it himself, selling the crop for three thousand baht. After that he rented it back to Yai for two years for 1600 baht and finally Yai returned the five thousand baht because he had found someone willing to purchase the fields for seven thousand baht.

### *Conclusion*

It is already obvious that the changes in the land system in Hua Kok and its neighbourhood are of a fairly fundamental kind. As noted in a number of recent publications, elsewhere in the central region the old assumption that the Thai peasant is an owner-cultivator is no longer valid. In the circumstances of a burgeoning population and a cash economy pressing upon and transforming the traditional, primarily subsistence, rural economic system it would be surprising if in Hua Kok there had not been an increase in the numbers dependent on rented land or wage-labour for their main source of income. However, it is apparent that in Hua Kok these trends were temporarily halted by the introduction of maize and bean agriculture. Now, once more, all land in the neighbourhood suitable for cultivation given present technology and existing cropping patterns has been taken. The overall effect of this requires stressing: it means, among other things, that a whole range of traditional opportunities, modes of action and values either no longer exist or have become anachronistic and increasingly socially irrelevant.

### *Notes*

1. In 1967/8 even this household had become involved in the dominant agricultural pattern. The son of the household head and his wife temporarily left to live in a field shelter in Kok Mai Daeng where they were renting paddy fields.



2. He is not necessarily employed by Hua Kok residents because he is considered somewhat expensive at over twenty baht per day. When the headman wanted a carpenter to extend the gallery on his house he used a kinsman from Wang Khut who did the job cheaply.
3. The journey takes eight days and Chun (house 18) makes two hundred baht on each trip.
4. Female buffalo are slightly cheaper than males because of the greater strength of the latter.
5. When forest is freshly cut and the ground not yet cleared of stumps and debris the seed is dibbled. This was also the method followed when forest was cleared for rice. Farmers would sow one crop of rice, followed possibly by one of sesame. After two or three years the ground was prepared sufficiently well for ploughing and transplanting to commence.
6. The word 'rai' designates a unit of measurement as well as a type of cultivated land. The transliteration for its former usage is not italicised here in order to emphasise the different meaning and because its use in English language publications on Thailand is so well established.
7. Households 41 and 42 are counted as constituting one farm for *nā* (joint), two for *rai* (separate) and two for the overall aggregate.
8. Until this century the king was theoretically the owner of both land and people. Individuals were granted the right to claim the usufruct of an area of land appropriate to their social status as denoted by their *sak-dinā* rank. The grade of twenty five, giving the right to hold up to twenty five rai, was allocated to commoner freemen capable of performing work as foremen, presumably in the organisation of the annual labour service or supply of commodities. Commoners who were heads of families had a grade of twenty, common workers fifteen, and freeman servants ten (Arsa Meksawan 1962: 11).
9. 'Full owner' means a holder who had full legal rights over all the land in his holdings, or who was taking charge of, and carrying out farm operations on a piece of land in the capacity of an owner, either through inheritance pending documentary evidence, or through allocation either unofficially or officially as in the case of holdings of self-help settlements, even though title deeds or other documentary evidence had not yet been issued (*Census of Agriculture, 1963, Whole Kingdom*: 9).
10. In Phitsanulok province, as in most others, the *bai chāng*, the reserve licence, has never been issued and the S.K.1 has become its

functional equivalent.

11. This pattern of movement near Bangkok has recently been described by Lucien Hanks in his historical outline of the foundation and development of Bangchan (Hanks 1972: 74-118). The estimated area planted in paddy in 1850 was 5.8 million rai, for 1930-34 it was 20.1 million. The volume of paddy exports probably increased twenty-five fold over the maximum at the time of the Bowring Treaty while the population roughly doubled itself during this period (Ingram 1971: 37-40, 44).

12. In 1974 there was considerable unrest in Wang Thong district arising from the rapid loss of land in some parts (though not Hua Kok and the surrounding hamlets) to creditors by means of *khâi fāk* and the farmers' desire to regain possession of their land.