

## CHAPTER 7

### THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF PRODUCTION

*The Siameses, like us, do make more than one Crop, but they make only one in a year upon the same Land: not that the Soil was not good enough, in my opinion, to yield two Crops in a year, as some have related concerning some other Cantons of India, if the Inundation did not last so long.*

Simon de la Loubère, 1693: 17.

The primary production unit is the household except for the special cases cited earlier in the discussion of domestic organisation. The individual contribution of household members varies according to age, sex, and to the extent to which their household is also a production and consumption unit. For example, cash earned by a child for a day's labour is his or her personal income and can be spent independently whereas individuals are interchangeable in the fulfillment of reciprocal labour obligations between households. Responsibility for the household's income rests chiefly with the head whose position is closely associated with economic activity. Those old people like Bang (house 13) who have completely retired from active work are displaced by the most senior person of the succeeding generation, in Bang's case by his spinster daughter.

A distinction between crops grown on the husband's or wife's land is made only when marriages are polygynous. In the headman's house the junior wife is in control of the shop which she runs quite independently. The senior wife has always managed funds from the sale of the crops and divides the money according to who has been involved in the process of production. Domestic expenditure on food, cooking fat, etc., is managed in an ad hoc fashion with the greater proportion being spent by the junior wife who is primarily responsible for looking after the house. The financial arrangements of the other polygynous male in Hua Kok are markedly different. Not only did he divide the money obtained by selling his land among the two women

who then bought their own plots (fields for the senior wife and a house site for the junior) but he also shares any cash earned from fishing: three days' takings are given to the senior wife and two to the junior. The usual arrangement with polygynous unions is for each wife to have her own household and, so it seems with the limited evidence available, maintain a high degree of economic separation and independence.

When the production unit is the nuclear family household the pattern of economic transactions between members and with outsiders is quite straightforward. Any cash from the sale of crops and livestock is put into the household budget and sums are drawn from it by husband and wife as needed. When the family is extended by the marriage of a child and addition of the new spouse to the household, or by the inclusion of other adult kin, the arrangements become more complex as also happens when two households farm together. In such circumstances it is who has taken the principal responsibility for managing production rather than who is the owner of the resources used which is the more important. Certainly the decision about how cash from the sale of a crop is to be divided rests with the one who has arranged the transaction. When Lyam and Uai (house 1) farmed a maize field with their son Choi (house 3), Choi managed the operation, sold the crop and gave just under half the proceeds to his father, an arrangement that was repeated with the subsequent crop of beans. In contrast, it was Huad, the head of the senior household who managed the joint production of the rice crop in the case of households 41 and 42. The rice for domestic consumption by both households was stored together, a quarter of the remainder was used to pay off a debt incurred during Huad's wife's fatal illness and one and a half *kwīan* were sold, eight hundred baht being given to his son-in-law while he kept seven hundred for himself. Finally, one must mention the somewhat different type of financial arrangement existing between the members of the joint production unit made up of households 11 and 13. As has already been mentioned, Bang has retired from all economic activities and his spinster daughter Laem takes charge of financial matters. In 1967 the crop of eleven *kwīan* of paddy was divided as follows: three were retained for domestic consumption, two were kept in reserve for future possible sale, and seven were sold for eleven hundred baht per *kwīan*. The money was then apportioned equally to Laem's younger sister, her husband and his two brothers, a nephew of the two sisters (all living in house 11), her father and to Laem herself.

Young children do not help in the fields and contribute little to any economic activity other than minding draft animals or catching crabs and a species of edible water beetle (*mendā*). Girls begin to help with tasks like transplanting when they are about eleven or twelve years old; boys start later

and work less regularly. One informant volunteered the opinion that below the age of seventeen young people do not work effectively but play around too much. The supply of labour within most households is therefore very limited. In most of the nuclear family households (65% of all households) it is restricted to the head of household and his wife whose contribution is at times limited by pregnancy and the demands of her infants. Nor is the supply necessarily any greater in the remaining households some of which contain old, economically inactive parents or children by former marriages, etc. (cf. Chapter 5: Household Membership).

Nevertheless, even with this limited supply of labour a man is able, with some help from his wife, to farm enough paddy fields to feed his family and sell a little for cash requirements without either undue effort or assistance from others. Ten rai, which according to informants are easily farmed by a single individual, even if of mediocre quality may be expected to yield at least three *kwān* of paddy, two of which are sufficient to feed a couple with two or three children. By using reciprocal labour enabling the labour-intensive tasks of transplanting and harvesting to be done speedily, up to twenty rai can be cultivated by a single household. Beyond this it becomes necessary to either have an unusually large household or employ additional labour on a cash basis.

### Work Parties

The existence of working parties recruited on the basis of reciprocal exchange has already been noted. The most frequently used type of work party serves not to increase the total input of labour but to speed up completion of the task in hand and, at the same time, introduce a social, recreational element into the drudgery of transplanting and harvesting. The principle of recruitment is balanced reciprocity, a day's work being returned by a member of the household initiating the exchange when demanded. There are two ways in which this can be arranged; workers either bring their own food with them or they are fed by the work-group organiser. The former, called *khāek yok* is no longer practiced in Hua Kok, the last time it was used reputedly being in the early 1960s. It has since been impossible to get anyone to join a work group unless food is provided, an arrangement described as *long khāek kan*. [1] The terms *yok khāek* and *long khāek kan* are also occasionally used to describe the contract made with wage-labourers, to indicate whether they are to bring their own food, which is by far the more frequent arrangement, or whether they will be fed by their employer for the day.

The villagers themselves normally speak of reciprocal labour as *ao*, taking; *khāo*, entering; and *chai*, using *rāeng*, strength: words which indicate

respectively that one is the initiator of the contract, accepting the request to help, and claiming the labour owed. In practice these terms are sometimes used interchangeably but everyone with whom the subject was discussed specified the obligation incurred precisely. If a day's work is taken from another household it *must* be returned on the day demanded. If neither the debtor nor any other member of his household is able to provide the labour he must pay the prevailing rate for a day's work to someone prepared to do it.

The reply to questions about who might be approached with requests for labour is always that anyone will do. Anybody who is known, whether male or female, kin or friend, neighbour or mere acquaintance, can be approached and no preferences about any of these categories are expressed. As might be expected, within this wide field of choice factors such as residence and the siting of fields do affect who is more likely to be approached. Those invited are often the people one chances to meet when considering the matter and apparently no precise, carefully calculated, decisions are made about how many should be invited and who are the best workers. Nor is there any certainty that either those approached or substitutes from their households will appear on the day. Finally, one must note that while some prefer to organise largish work parties others will ask one or two people each day to come and work with them. [2]

Although invitations may occur fairly spontaneously they are by no means random. The pattern of land holding in the area results in a stream of people from Wang Khut passing through Hua Kok every morning and again in the evening on their way to and from their fields. Similarly, many from Hua Kok walk through Wang Phom to fields which may adjoin those worked by people from other neighbouring hamlets. Fellow residents in Hua Kok are also recruited on a number of occasions such as when the men go down to the river in the evening. Sometimes a prior decision to ask a friend or neighbour is made but it does appear that in most cases the choice largely depends on who one happens to see while doing other things.

The extent to which farmers utilise work groups and whether they be for transplanting, harvesting or both, varies considerably. Those farming less than ten rai usually use exchange or even wage-labour to only a limited extent or not at all unless particularly short of help from within the household. Thus, when Sit (house 12) took charge of farming six rai of rented land because her husband was working as a carpenter she even arranged for five people to plough the fields one morning and break up the soil (*thūak*) in the afternoon. All told she accumulated a debt of forty days' work. When demands for a return from two households occurred simultaneously either

her husband helped or they paid for someone else to do the day's work, usually for seven baht.

At the other end of the spectrum those with twenty or more rai tend to use exchange labour either as a supplement to wage-labour or not at all. The chief problem of those farming relatively large areas of paddy is not how to relieve the drudgery or manage the timing of the crop, it is how to increase basic labour inputs. One informant suggested that with five people doing transplanting it was possible to farm twenty or twenty five rai, thirty at most. With broadcasting this area might be increased to fifty rai though it would then be necessary to employ wage-labour for harvesting. The point to be emphasised, though, is that very few households in the area have five economically active members, one or two is far more common. Thus Hia (house 9) farming twenty rai with his wife claimed to have used about thirty seven days of wage-labour for transplanting though they were able to do all the harvesting themselves, no exchange labour being employed at any time. On the other hand, the production group formed by households 11 and 13 contained six workers and they farmed twenty two and a half rai without any external help other than for one day's labour exchanged with a neighbouring friend.

Even among those most likely to use exchange labour groups the practice appears to be declining in popularity. The increasing use of cash in the village economy and availability of wage-labour are two factors behind the change. Another is indicated by the way farmers express the view that wage-labour is far more efficient and worth paying for. It also has the advantage, from their point of view, of freeing them from inconvenient demands on their time and the trouble of feeding helpers who may well be indifferent workers.

The labour groups described above are used only for rice growing. In this respect they differ from the second type of work group recruited by what is known as *khā rāeng*, asking for strength. To request this type of help does not incur any specific obligation to reciprocate in the way that taking strength (*ao rāeng*) does. It is used by villagers for house building [3]; when used in farming or for other economic purposes those asked are in some way already obligated to the one making the request. In Hua Kok only the headman is really in a position to mobilise such groups. On one occasion the richest farmer in the hamlet was recorded as soliciting the help of a young man in this way to make charcoal, but he only employed wage-labour in farming. In Bangkhuaed where the process of economic differentiation was more advanced, rich 'patrons' were able to request this type of labour from poor 'clients' who were either their debtors or the recipients of other small

services (Kaufman 1960: 65). [4] The headman's reasoning for his being able to exercise this claim on labour is that the villagers should help him in return for the work and expenses incurred by his being their headman, something for which he is paid very little (cf. Ch. 8: The Village Headman; *Headmen and Village*). In April 1966 he recruited a group to clear the undergrowth (*thăng pã*) from a ten rai maize plot. As with house-building parties and exchange labour groups the organiser must work alongside his helpers and provide a meal. On this occasion the food was ready at about ten o'clock by which time the work had been completed, so everyone returned to the headman's house. In addition to those who had gone to the fields four women came to help the headman's wives prepare the meal consisting of rice and four different dishes, one of which was a *kāeng*, curry, a special favourite of the villagers. Home brewed rice beer (*nam khāo nīao*), preparation of which had begun eleven days earlier, was also served. In all twenty-six people consisting of both old and young men and women together with some children came to be fed. The food was placed on the floor and everyone arranged themselves informally around a set of dishes in groups of five or six which tended to reflect their respective ages.

In the course of field work the headman on two occasions called for help in making preparations for ceremonies associated with one of his son's ordination, [5] and he annually asks the village as a whole to help him harvest his rice crop, (*long khāek kiao khāo*). However, when he made these arrangements in January 1967 only fifty-nine people turned up because many villagers were still busy with their own harvesting; apparently this was far fewer than the year before. [6] Ideally, each household should send someone but in fact some of those who did turn up were people from other villages who knew the headman. As for those who did appear, there was a high proportion of young men and women and for most people the day seemed to be an enjoyable social occasion.

The third type of work group co-operation observed between production units growing rice is referred to simply as *chūai kan*, helping. It is restricted to those who are close kin. For example, Duang (house 14) was helped by his sister who lives in Wang Khut to transplant young rice, a day's work which was part of a wider set of transactions between the two households. While given in the expectation of there being some return, the obligation in these exchanges is stated in general terms and not specifically as with *ao rāeng* contracts. By no means all closely related households work together in this way though it does seem that only those with this degree of relationship ever do so. Overall, *chūai kan* co-operation is not quantitatively important in the organisation of labour for agricultural production. Its main interest from the point of view of social organisation is the light it throws on how

close kinship can transform normal patterns of economic relations.

### **Wage-labour and Tractor Hire**

Some paddy farmers employ wage-labour to a considerable extent but it is with maize cultivation that it is most important in terms of the organisation of production if not the number of days worked. To paddy farmers with medium-sized or small farms the option of using exchange labour is open should they wish to complete certain phases in the work cycle more quickly. For them wage-labour has the advantage of being more efficient and free of the burden of having to return a day's work for each taken. To those who cultivate large areas of paddy or who have maize farms too extensive to be worked by the domestic production group, the availability of wage-labour is a necessary condition for efficient cultivation. Given the present demand in Hua Kok and the surrounding hamlets there are plenty of people prepared to accept this type of day employment despite the low percentage of potentially economically active individuals in the area. [7] Young unmarried adults and adolescents make pocket money by working in this way and many poorer households use the opportunity to supplement their incomes though occasional day wage-labour is by no means limited to the less well off. As with the reciprocal labour groups, the would-be contractor usually wanders round the hamlet the night before, speaking to potential workers.

Four households which do no farming at all on their own account and a fifth which farms a single rai of maize are primarily dependent on activities such as day wage-labour for their income. [8] All but one are relatively new household groups and in time may be expected to start renting if not eventually purchasing or inheriting their own fields. However, given changing patterns in economic organisation it seems likely that the percentage of households supporting themselves in this way will increase.

Wages vary according to the season and demand for labour. In Hua Kok they vary from seven to ten baht per day with eight baht being the rate most frequently paid; in certain other parts of the district where there is a relative shortage of labour the usual rate is as high as 10 baht. Should the worker require food as sometimes happens with those from households that are short of rice the rate is accordingly a little lower. In 1966 a rate of 7 baht in June rose to one of 8 baht plus food or 10 baht in August. Occasionally after harvesting payment is in kind, one *tāng* per day. Seasonal contracts are very rare. In Hua Kok the headman was an innovator when he arranged for a kinsman of his senior wife to work the 1967-68 season. The contract was for 1,000 baht in return for help with a forty rai rice farm. During the period when he was working the contractee lived in the headman's field house.

Within Hua Kok wage-labour for other activities is unusual though, as the type of house erected by the more prosperous villagers changes, specialist carpenters are increasingly employed in place of, or to supplement, the *khā rāeng* construction work parties.

The incentives encouraging the use of tractors have already been discussed. The two nearest and most often hired machines are owned by men living in Bang Saphan though other tractors are also occasionally used. Arrangements are made informally with whoever is available at the time. The cost varies according to the number of shares on the plough; for one with five or seven shares the rate is twenty baht per rai or thirty five baht for a double ploughing. The charge for the infrequently used three share plough is fifty baht per rai but some are prepared to pay for the extra nutrients released by deep ploughing maize fields. For rice only the seven share plough is ever used because shallow ploughing is required.

The other job for which farmers hire tractors is threshing. The charge is a standard one of two *tāng* of rice per *kwīan* of paddy treated. This works out at 2% of the crop or approximately 16 baht per *kwīan* at the low prices prevailing as the harvest is completed.

## Marketing

Local marketing arrangements are well developed in the area, prevailing prices are known and information about offers made and deals concluded circulates freely. Indeed, at certain times of the year price levels and stories about particular deals are the prevailing topics of conversation. There is also competition among buyers who may come a considerable distance to make purchases in the area for products like rice and maize. Information about national prices and movements is also readily available via radio announcements and the printed news-sheet posted weekly to village headmen by the Ministry of Agriculture. These are only of use in giving a general picture of what is occurring. The news-sheet lists the prices paid in the Bangkok-Thonburi market, which for commodities like rice are expressed in standardised market grades not used by local farmers or which are measured by weight in kilogrammes when local marketing is by volume, in units of one *tāng*. [9]

Rice buyers begin to tour the villages as soon as the harvest is under way. Payment is made either when the crop is collected or within a few days. The majority of farmers with rice to sell are forced by their need for cash to dispose of at least part of their crop fairly promptly when prices are at their lowest. Those able to wait until April, May, or later, profit considerably by doing so; in 1967 prices rose from about 700 baht per *kwīan* of



paddy (*khào piak*) to around 1,000 baht. For the very few who can wait until the rains commence the price may increase a further couple of hundred baht.

Dealers are referred to as *thaokāe*; those buying rice are usually mill owners or their representatives. Because they cover a wide area in their search for rice they are frequently not known personally to farmers who rarely sell to the same person in any two consecutive years. In Hua Kok at least there are no signs of any development of long-term commercial relationships with particular dealers. The crop is sold to whoever comes and offers a reasonable price at the time a farmer has decided he is ready to sell. What is very noticeable is that although there are rice dealers resident in Wang Thong the greater part of the rice harvest is disposed of via traders from more distant places, Phitsanulok, Taphan Hin, or even Bangkok. [10]

Dealers sometimes attempt to utilise neighbourhood interpersonal networks by appointing a local man or woman, usually someone who has sold them his own crop, to make purchases on their behalf for a small commission. Those doing so are designated *nāi nā hā sū khāo hai thaokāe*, brokers who find rice to buy for the dealer, and are usually referred to as *hūa nā*, a term usually translated as head or leader.

The commission for arranging purchases is small, ten baht per *kwīan* (approximately .75-1.0%) and local people active as *hūa nā* do not make much. In return for this minor supplement to his income the *hūa nā* places himself at considerable risk, for should the dealer default on payment the *hūa nā* is personally responsible for the sum owed. This was exemplified in a case that was financially disastrous for the *hūa nā* and a serious financial loss for the three households which had sold the rice.

In 1967 a dealer purportedly coming from Bangkok appointed Kho, the wife of Sa (house 4) to be *hūa nā* on his behalf. She succeeded in buying rice from three households and was paid 1,500 baht of the 9,500 owing. The rice was collected by a lorry and no more was heard from the dealer. When it was discovered that he had fled the matter was brought to the headman and from him progressed to the court in Phitsanulok. The net result was that Kho was judged responsible for the debt, so she and her husband had to sell their maize fields. Although the plaintiffs obtained the 8,000 baht owed to them, the formal and informal costs incurred were considerable. The lawyer they employed shared his fee of 1,000 baht with the headman who had brought him the case. The headman also received a monetary gift from the plaintiffs for his help in dealing with the affair.

Whereas the riverine transport of rice has ceased with the development of the road system, nearly all the maize marketed in Hua Kok is sold to boat dealers. The main reasons why this should be so are the bulkiness of maize,

even when milled, and the timing of the harvest. The crop is ready for sale when the condition of rural tracks is often poor or even impassible to lorries and the level of the river is sufficiently high to take heavily laden boats without difficulty. [11] As with rice no regular contracts are made with the traders who progress upstream making inquiries in the adjoining settlements about the crop. The usual range of prices in 1966 was between 10.50 and 12.50 baht per *tāng* though rates ranging from 10 baht (for a small quantity sold late in Wang Thong) to 13 baht were recorded. Those who shell the maize themselves instead of having the purchaser mill it receive about 50 *satāng* more per *tāng*.

For beans arrangements are again slightly different. Wang Thong is the marketing centre and farmers either take the crop in to the dealer themselves, have him come and collect it or sell to someone acting as *hūa nā*. In contrast to maize and rice, the volume of the crop is low and value comparatively high. Prices vary considerably according to the variety and how it is sold. The total range in 1966-67 was between 22 and 38 baht per *tāng*; the normal price for the variety most frequently grown, *thūa man fak dam*, was 30-32 baht per *tāng*, and for *thūa khūao*, the second most popular type it was 22-26 baht.

After selling his own crop of *thūa khiao* to a Chinese dealer (who also buys his maize crop every year) Iang (house 26) bought beans on commission from a number of people, mainly living in Wang Phom. If the beans were delivered to him the price was 23 baht while if he went to collect them it fell to 22 baht. In total he handled between three and four hundred *tāng*, which included a small quantity of *thūa man fak dam* bought for 31 baht.

A number of other crops and agricultural products are marketed directly by the producers. Among the more important is tobacco which is shredded and dried before being made-up into packets called *rāi*, hundreds, ten packets making a *phan*, a thousand. The households producing tobacco sell it locally in Hua Kok, in Ban Don a village in the City district, in Tha Myn Lam a village south of Wang Phom and in the market at Wang Thong. What is especially interesting about the trade is the practice of barter. Some producers, including the headman's household, prefer to barter tobacco for rice to be delivered on completion of the following harvest, *lāek ao khāo pī nā*. The rate is one *rāi* of tobacco for six or seven *tāng* of rice worth over forty baht which compares favourably with the cash price of twenty five baht per *rāi*. This type of barter occurs not within Hua Kok but with people from non-tobacco producing villages in which the seller has kin or personally knows many people. In other words, this type of trade occurs where pre-existing social relations provide some guarantee of eventual payment.

Four or five households make sugar every year in the early part of the dry season by boiling sugar palm sap from trees (*ton tăn*) standing in their fields. It is made into blocks and the surplus over domestic requirements sold locally. In 1967 a woman going to visit a sister in a neighbouring district turned the absence of sugar palms in her sister's village to good advantage by buying blocks of sugar at two for a baht to sell them for five salying (1.25 baht).

Meat is usually bought in the market at Wang Thong but animals are also illegally slaughtered and sold directly. For example, when the price in the market was 15 baht a kilo for pork a villager came round selling it for 10 baht. Another arrangement is described as *tok fut kan*. The pig dealer who had formerly lived in Hua Kok invited people to purchase a share in a pig priced at 450 baht which he then slaughtered. The meat was divided into nine shares of four kilos plus insides at a time when the market price was 15 baht per kilo. The arrangement is also used when a villager wishes to slaughter an old buffalo. Dealers from the market occasionally visit Hua Kok looking for pigs or even chickens. In most instances, however, the owner personally takes the latter to market; on one occasion they were taken not to the local market but to Phitsanulok.

### Rice Processing

Unmilled rice is stored in a *yung*, granary, located at the side of a house; those without their own may use that of a close kinsman or have their rice milled immediately and store the sacks in the house. The close and trusting relationship that should typify kin linkages has to be met before this type of sharing arrangement can work. Some close kin did in fact place rice in a common granary, each keeping a record of how much they had put in and removed. When this degree of proximity and trust does not exist transactions tend to be carefully managed to avoid any possible recriminations. For example, when a loan was returned to a distantly related neighbour the great niece living in the house was told by her 'aunt' to stop measuring the rice out and take over more than was necessary so as to do so out in front of the neighbour.

Women sometimes speak nostalgically of the flavour of rice pounded by hand but in the same breath say what hard work it was, especially after a day in the fields. There are two small diesel engined mills in Wang Phom and a somewhat larger one in Bang Saphan. Of the two in Wang Phom, one is run by a rice and maize farmer who also rears pigs on the bran; his Czech-made engine was bought in about 1959. The second mill is rented out to another local man. Both accept small quantities and a frequent sight is a woman or

small child labouring under the weight of two baskets of rice suspended from a carrying pole (*hăp*). The Bang Saphan mill is owned by a man who also has a small bus which he uses for collection and delivery. Twenty litres of paddy yield seven litres of milled rice (*khào san*). The miller makes his profits from the bran which he either sells as pig food or, as is often the case, uses to rear and fatten his own pigs. No-one in Hua Kok now uses the large commercial mill in Wang Thong which has been there since the 1930s. This mill has large store-houses in which some used to keep their paddy free of charge on condition that the miller would eventually buy it. However, one year the manager disappeared and so, it was discovered, had all the paddy.

### Options and Preferences

A major difference between the organisation of rice and maize/beans cultivation is in the extent to which cash is used. A rice farmer may plough, transplant, reap and thresh the crop without any commercial transaction, and in doing so feed his household and generate a cash income. In contrast, those farming maize and beans tend to require cash for ploughing and harvesting, and are dependent on the sale of the crop to provide the wherewithal to obtain rice.

This difference in the two modes of production is well appreciated as is the greater financial risk attached to growing maize. Not only do those who farm only maize and beans have to go through the extra stages of marketing one crop to purchase their staple, the maize itself is highly susceptible to climatic factors. If there are adverse conditions around the time of planting the shoots either rot or dry out so that a farmer can find himself several hundred baht out of pocket with nothing to show. It is these factors rather than any culture-bound conservatism that explains the expressed preference for rice. This will probably remain so despite the high profits made in good years and spreading the risk by growing beans after the maize.

While the traditional cultural milieu does not explain the preference for rice growing it certainly supports it. Comments to the effect that rice is an integral and central feature of Thai culture are frequent in the literature. It is also reflected in the way in which almost every phase of rice cultivation is ideally marked by some ritual or other whereas this is not so with other crops. However, one must also note that many take little care in the observation of these traditions. Although the cultivation of rice is part of a cultural heritage there have been, and are, major changes occurring in the economic system of the area. One aspect of this may be Hua Kok's position on the frontier of Thai society away from the main cultural centres but more important is the development of scarcity, inequalities in ownership and

incorporation of the area into a cash economy.

### **Agricultural Credit and Development**

Indebtedness, while not yet constituting a major problem in Hua Kok, is associated with the growth of a monetary economy in the area. The demand for cash for basic family requirements as well as for new products, together with the use of cash in farming, the variability of crop yields and the decline in self-sufficiency all combine to make farmers very vulnerable. It almost goes without saying that commercial credit is very expensive and many who fall into debt are unable to pay off their creditors. In the long run one might well expect the incidence of tenancy to increase as it has already done in the main part of the central region near Bangkok. In 1968 many were watching their crops with particular anxiety because the previous year rice yields had been so low due to failure of the late monsoon rains as to cause many to borrow. Another crop failure and some would be almost certainly well set on a path culminating in tenancy.

People in Hua Kok do not borrow from one another unless they are very closely related. It is said that kin in general do not charge one another interest and that when a creditor decides that he requires repayment there is likely to be bad feeling. Consequently farmers usually look first to the possibility of borrowing from one of the Chinese in Wang Thong who charge 5% per month for cash or a similar rate in kind when rice is borrowed.

Interest rates are supposedly fixed by law but little is done to try and enforce them. Few farmers ordinarily have direct access to credit from banking institutions. It has also been reported that dealers who are a frequent source of agricultural credit pay between twelve and fifteen per cent to commercial banks plus one to five per cent of the loan to a comprador plus personal compensation of five per cent to bank officials (cf. Hughes et al. 1968: 23). In other words, many of those who provide loans to farmers can themselves be paying more than the legal interest rate of fifteen per cent per annum even when borrowing from commercial banks. In this context it is important to note that, despite the predominance of agriculture both in terms of the livelihood of the population and the value of the product, banks are involved in financing agricultural production in only a relatively small way. In 1970 out of a total credit of 30,000 million baht lent by commercial banks merely 549 million, that is two per cent, went to the agricultural sector (Onchan and Ong 1971: 5).

For five years, until 1968, the more prosperous farmers were able to participate annually in a government backed credit scheme which also had the purpose of improving farming methods. It is managed by the Agricultural

Credit Division of the Bangkok Bank and referred to locally as the *klum thanakān*, the bank group. Farmers request a loan from the local branch of the bank in Phitsanulok and then wait for the administrator to inspect their farm to determine what they have and what is required for improvements. In 1966 the scheme was operating in three districts in the province, incorporating about 1,000 people with plans to increase the numbers to 2,000.

The rate of interest is, by village standards, very low at twelve per cent. Money is borrowed in June and should be returned in April or, at the latest, May. The amount that can be borrowed depends on the size of the farm, the crops grown and the approval by the bank's representative of the purposes for which it is requested. If less than 20 rai, up to 2,000 baht can be advanced while those farming twenty or more rai can borrow up to 4,000 baht; should they require further financing they must be owners with full title deeds and mortgage (*camnāng*) their property to the bank. Applicants should be over twenty years old, in good health, have little debt and show signs of ambition.

The scheme is organised locally so as to establish joint liability groups of between five and twenty members. In Phitsanulok the administrator prefers small groups averaging about seven members. It is the bank which establishes these groups though in practice members are well known to one another even though they may live in different hamlets. Despite its success in previous years and popularity with farmers the low harvest in 1967 resulted in many not repaying their loans. Although credit was extended no fresh loans were made in 1968 to anyone in the area around Hua Kok.

After four years the local administrator was bored with the job and wished to go back to university. His first degree was in agriculture from Kasetsart University so he knew something of the problems besetting farmers in the area. While concerned with the attempt to improve farming methods he did not consider that he had had much success. The questions he is required to ask are of necessity abrupt and he did not avoid showing impatience with the vague answers he was sometimes given. For example: "How many rai?"; "Twenty plus"; "How many plus?"; "Five rai". The information he receives, although it satisfies bank regulations, thus appears insufficient for the development of effective counselling.

Although he is very conscious of the programme being quite separate from government services and of the need to communicate with the farmers, relations between the administrator and his clients are not always smooth. He is not a government official but in some ways behaves as one. He thought, for instance, that it would be better if the farmers came to the bank instead of him having to spend time travelling out to the villagers to discuss

their loans every year, something which would undermine the value of the scheme. On the appointed day in May 1967 the members of local bank groups in the vicinity of Hua Kok assembled promptly at the time arranged in the headman's house. When he did not arrive the headman sent a messenger to Phitsanulok who returned with the reply that the administrator was not free and would come two weeks later. The effort of killing a chicken, preparing food and the time wasted by those who came are symptomatic of relations between villagers and officialdom in general. Needless to say, when he did come two weeks later it was two hours after the time arranged.

The other main government agency for agricultural development in the district is the local cooperative (*klum chāonā*) which has an elected leadership with a two year term of office. Membership costs 10 baht to join and in return farmers are able to purchase improved seed and (in theory) fertiliser. In 1966 there was a shortage of the latter and those in Hua Kok who had placed orders received none. Another example of failure to provide expected services concerned irrigation. A water pump was normally sent from Bangkok towards the end of the rainy season to Wang Thong to irrigate the fields just at the time the rice flowers and sets. Members of the cooperative were able to get their fields irrigated for two baht a rai. In Hua Kok the pump was used for only one day in 1966 because, by the time it had been used in Bang Saphan and Wang Khut, sufficient rains had fallen for a good set. However, in 1967 when the rains did fail the truck was not available. (cf. Ch. 8: Villagers and Officials) Consequently, although small, privately owned pumps are increasingly used, yields for that year were very low.

In conclusion, what perhaps requires further emphasis is the lack of capital by most farmers. For many the occurrence of a hospital bill or irregularities in the year's rainfall, etc., necessitate borrowing from the market. Few have any effective cushion against adversity; wives may have some gold jewellery which can be sold or pawned at the state pawn shop in Phitsanulok, some farmers manage to keep the odd pig and a few chickens, but only one or two have succeeded in building up a herd of buffaloes. What now adds to the problem is the erosion of farmers' traditional autonomy. Participation in the market economy, dependence on commercially produced goods instead of those made within the household or hamlet, all contribute to reducing their ability to maintain an acceptable level of subsistence in the face of adversity that does not transform them from land owning peasants to tenants or even wage-labourers.

### **Economic and Social Change**

The economy of Hua Kok has changed greatly from what it was in the early days when it was a largely self-sufficient settlement with little economic differentiation. These changes are by no means complete. Purchase of water pumps during the first period of fieldwork by some of the richer rice farmers was just the latest factor in the progressive economic differentiation in wealth and productive facilities that has been occurring for some time. Another readily observable change is in housing. Formerly, to build a substantial house required the time and equipment to locate, prepare and transport the raw materials and the ability to mobilise the help of others in erecting it. Today a substantial house is a major cash investment for its owner, parts such as the tin roof have a market value. It is also longer lasting, a trend that will become more pronounced as concrete houseposts, which are already used in and near Phitsanulok, are adopted in the district. One prosperous maize farmer spent 4,500 baht on a medium-sized modern style of house in 1966 and a larger though incomplete house cost 3,700 baht in 1967, even though the main houseposts had been cut by the owner.

One might continue and cite in detail the rapid increase in radio ownership, the purchase of bicycles and so on, but the picture of involvement in the market economy requires no further emphasis. What does need elaboration is the effect on social organisation. Despite the stress on hierarchy in Thai society as a whole, the traditional village was basically egalitarian if only because opportunities for differentiation were limited. Now that land has become scarce and valuable, in itself a response to a rising population and the increased opportunities to market any surplus over local consumption requirements, one must expect the patterning of relationships to change. The more prosperous, with their land, membership of bank groups or co-operatives and greater purchasing power, are the most likely to develop advantageous relationships beyond the confines of the settlement and its immediate neighbours. They also tend to avoid traditional patterns of reciprocal labour organisation in favour of paid labour which they do not perform for others, thereby emphasising their superior position.

Hints about what may well happen in the future are suggested by the experience of three residents who, in various ways, have been at the forefront of innovation. Iang (house 26), although in his late fifties, poorly educated and shy in front of officials, has introduced a number of important changes. He had the first tin-roofed house and more recently (in 1966) was the first to buy a mechanical water-pump, an American-made 0.75 h.p. engine for 2,700 Baht. He is also the only man so far to buy land with the express intention of renting it out [12] or to have established a niche in the



marketing system for agricultural produce. The headman was once the richest man in Hua Kok until he lost a great amount in misconceived investment in a bus. His wives keep the original (and only permanent) shop in the hamlet. Soon after borrowing lang's pump to irrigate the field adjoining his house he too bought one for 2,600 baht. Finally, Riam (house 43), the owner of the most modern and expensive (4,500 baht) house in the hamlet, was the first to grow maize and in 1968 had sold nearly all his land with the intention of buying draft animals which he could rent out.

### Notes to Chapter 7

1. Contrary to the common impression that *long khæk kan* is the generic term for cooperative labour groups the term refers to a specific type of labour group (cf. Amyot 1965: 166).
2. For example, one farmer residing uxorilocally obtained help from two people a day for fifteen days in transplanting his seven rai. Five days' labour were already owed, and he initiated the contract for the other twenty five. All told thirteen households were involved: of these three (11 days' labour) were said to be related, and eight (12 days) were described as *ruçhakkān*, known, and living in the same settlement. The remaining two households (7 days) were from other settlements but farmed fields near those of my informant.
3. On the day of the third night of the waxing moon of the fourth month (13 March) 1967, three *khā rāeng* groups were used to build houses in Hua Kok, it being an auspicious day for such activities. The groups were predominantly recruited from among close kin and neighbours: some households sent members to work in two groups.
4. It was reported by informants that when Tho (house 20), a farmer of no special standing in the hamlet, attempted to *khā rāeng* for help in the fields several people corrected him and agreed to *ao rāengchai rāeng* with him.
5. On both occasions about a dozen men appeared. They were almost entirely from Hua Kok though one of the helpers came from Wang Khut.
6. In 1975 I was told that 1966 had been the last occasion on which the headman had requested such help with his harvesting. The reasons given were that it was too much trouble to feed all the helpers and that wage-labour was far more efficient.
7. Janlekha has written of the unfavourable situation in Saraphi from the point of view of the low availability of labour and the restriction this

imposes on development. The median age was 15 years 6 months and the potential labour force only 49.3% of the population. In fact the position in Hua Kok is slightly worse: the median age is 15 (to the nearest year) while the potential labour force is only 47% of the population. These figures compare with 26 years 2 months and 64.1% for the Central Region (Janlekha 1968: 17). However, this does not necessarily imply the existence of a labour shortage because farms are generally much smaller. In Saraphi the mean is 34 rai with a median of 26 rai but in Hua Kok the mean is only 14 with a median of 12 rai per household (Janlekha 1968: 30).

8. Three of these households (nos. 23, 24, 25) do a lot of fishing to supplement their income. The head of the fourth (no. 18) owns land but temporarily lets his mother use it.

9. One *tāng* of paddy weighs approximately ten kilogrammes though the same volume of good quality rice will reach about eleven kilogrammes.

10. By 1974 this situation had changed with Wang Thong becoming far more important as the marketing centre for Hua Kok.

11. This mode of marketing had also changed by 1974. With the development of roads Wang Thong dealers have been able to reach the farms before the boatmen. According to informants no maize boats had come upriver in the previous two or three years.

12. Nevertheless it was his expressed intention to eventually divide this plot along with all his other property among his children. Riam had also bought land (temporarily as it turned out) from a sibling which he immediately let to others.